

Where does the sun's energy come from?

National Aeronautics and
Space Administration



Every 1.5 millionths of a second, the sun releases more energy than all humans consume in an entire year. Its heat influences the environments of all the planets, dwarf planets, moons, asteroids, and comets in our solar system.

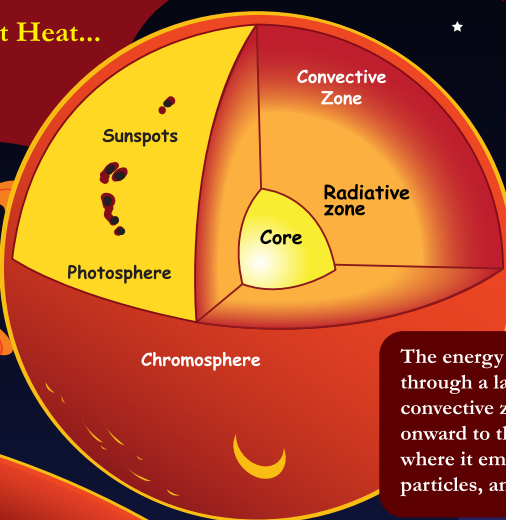
And that light travels far out into the cosmos—just one star among billions and billions.

Create a 'solar wind' that pushes against the fabric of interstellar space billions of miles away.

Allows gases and liquids to exist on many planets and moons, and causes icy comets to form fiery halos.

Powers the chemical reactions that make life possible on Earth.

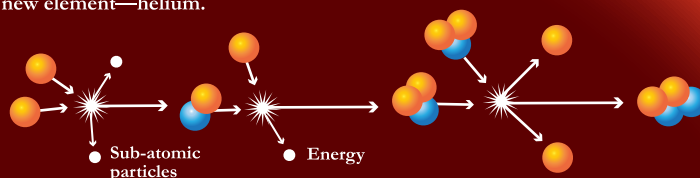
That Heat...



The energy travels outward through a large area called the convective zone. Then it travels onward to the photosphere, where it emits heat, charged particles, and light.

How does a big ball of hydrogen create all that heat? The short answer is that it is big. If it were smaller, it would be just be a sphere of hydrogen, like Jupiter. But the sun is much bigger than Jupiter. It would take almost 1,000 Jupiters to fill it up!

That's a lot of hydrogen. That means it's held together by a whole lot of gravity. And THAT means there is a whole lot of pressure inside of it. There is so much pressure that the hydrogen atoms collide with enough force that they literally meld into a new element—helium.



Nuclear Fusion

This process—called nuclear fusion—releases energy while creating a chain reaction that allows it to occur over and over and over again. That energy builds up. It gets as hot as 27 million degrees Fahrenheit in the sun's core.

Space Place
in a Snap!