

How Do Artificial Sweeteners Affect *C. elegans*?

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Obesity increased the occurrence of diabetes in America, leading many to seek “healthier” alternatives and use of sweeteners. This project determined how sugar and different artificial sweeteners affect *C. elegans* and bacteria of the gut microbiome. It was hypothesized nematodes exposed to sweeteners will show signs of metabolic disorders & changes in structure. It was also predicted artificial sweeteners will affect bacterial growth in the gut microbiome. Five sweeteners: aspartame, sucralose, saccharin, stevia, and acesulfame potassium (Ace-K) were used. Each was combined with *C. elegans* on NGM plates, while nematodes were observed daily. In Trial 1, nematodes entered the Dauer phase, resulting in inconclusive data. In Trial 2 and 3, nematodes cultured in artificial sweetener plates became hyperactive and were skinnier. Trial 4 utilized second generation nematodes from Trial 3. Reproduction was not affected since the number of larvae was = previous trials. Nematodes appeared to be affected by sweeteners, L1-L2 larvae were less active compared to controls and many L3-Adults were shaky & hyperactive. In Ace-K, nematodes appeared lethargic. Stevia and Ace-K groups showed a decrease in average body width (eyepiece graticule units) when compared to control (2.28 & 2.44:2.69 control). Confirming: Artificial sweeteners affect nematode movement and metabolic processes. Lactobacillus Cultured: Wells + Inoculum Broth + each Sweetener. Test1 and Test3- No significant difference in bacterial growth. Test2 samples containing sweeteners + bacteria had lower optical density than control, showing artificial sweeteners have some effect on bacterial growth, lower OD than control, partially supporting the hypothesis.

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