

Study: How sweet it is -- or is it?

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An Ohio State University study suggests the most important factor in what kind of sweetener people prefer has more to do with sourness than sweetness.

Ohio State food scientists asked 30 college students to rate 13 different sweeteners and sweet substances, including sugar, based on how much bitter, sour and metallic taste they perceived with each substance. Many of the compounds are found in items such as diet soda, gum, and candy and some can be used for baking.

Not surprisingly, sugar was rated highest. Participants found sucralose (brand name Splenda), a sweetener derived from sugar, the most acceptable alternative to sugar. The researchers attribute that to a lack of noticeable sour and bitter tastes in that sweetener.

"So many sugar substitutes also have unpleasant tastes," said Jeannine Delwiche, a study co-author and an assistant professor of food science and technology at Ohio State. "Understanding how people perceive these tastes may help create a sugar substitute that is more palatable. That ultimately means making tastier products with fewer calories."

The study's findings were presented Tuesday in Atlanta during the annual meeting of the American Chemical Society.

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