

# A Closer Look at Diacetyl

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ESTD 1995

**WHITE  
LABS**

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PURE YEAST &  
FERMENTATION

# Outline

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What is VDK?

Where is diacetyl present?

Why does diacetyl occur?

How to avoid it in your brewery

Diacetyl in different products

# Vicinal Diketones (VDK)

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Two major compounds

- 2,3 butanedione (Diacetyl)
- 2,3 pentanedione
  
- Both have similar flavor and aroma descriptions- butterscotch
- Flavor threshold is ten times less for diacetyl
- (i.e- if you can taste 50 ppb of diacetyl, typically you can taste 500 ppb of 2,3 pentanedione)

# Diacetyl will always be present in a fermentation

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Diacetyl is a part of fermentation and will always be there – the residual amount is dependent on the quality of the fermentation

Diacetyl is acceptable in some styles – typically top fermented is most common ( up to 600 ppb)

Also very apparent in wines ( 8000 ppb)

# Diacetyl is produced in 2 ways

## 1) Yeast Metabolism

- During yeast growth in fermentation
- When the yeast has to make a specific amino acid - valine
- An intermediate in this pathway is the pre-cursor of diacetyl
- The precursor leaks out of the cell
- Outside the cell it is CHEMICALLY converted to diacetyl
- The reaction is favored by high temperatures and low pH
- It goes back into the cell as diacetyl
- The yeast changes it into less flavor-active compounds

## 2) Lactobacillus and Pediococcus spp contamination

- For a long time, it was thought that all diacetyl came from the “disease of beer” (Early 1930s)
- Good example of this is Greek yogurt
  - Sour milk aroma is diacetyl in very high concentrations

# YEAST FLAVOR DEVELOPMENT

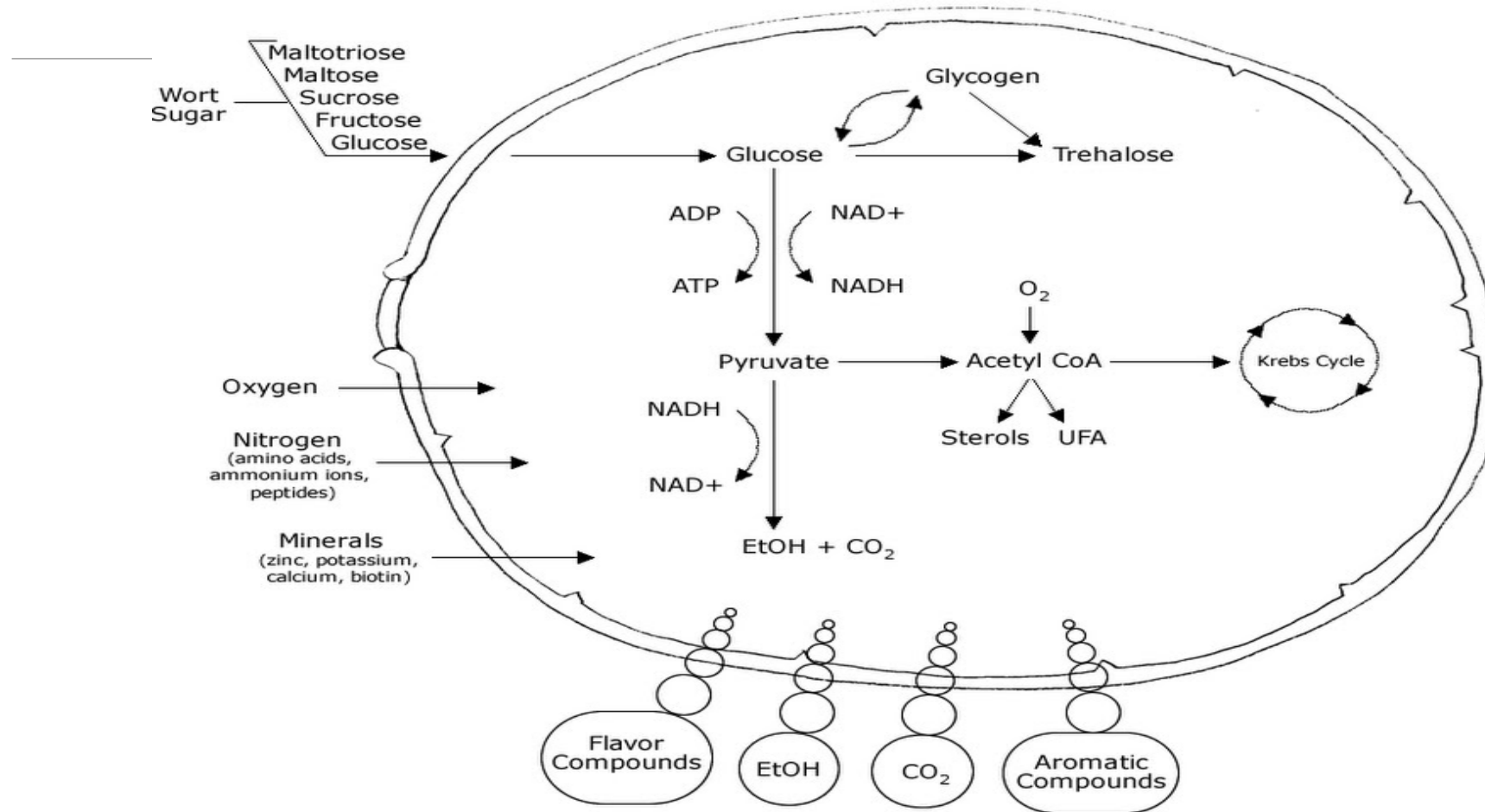
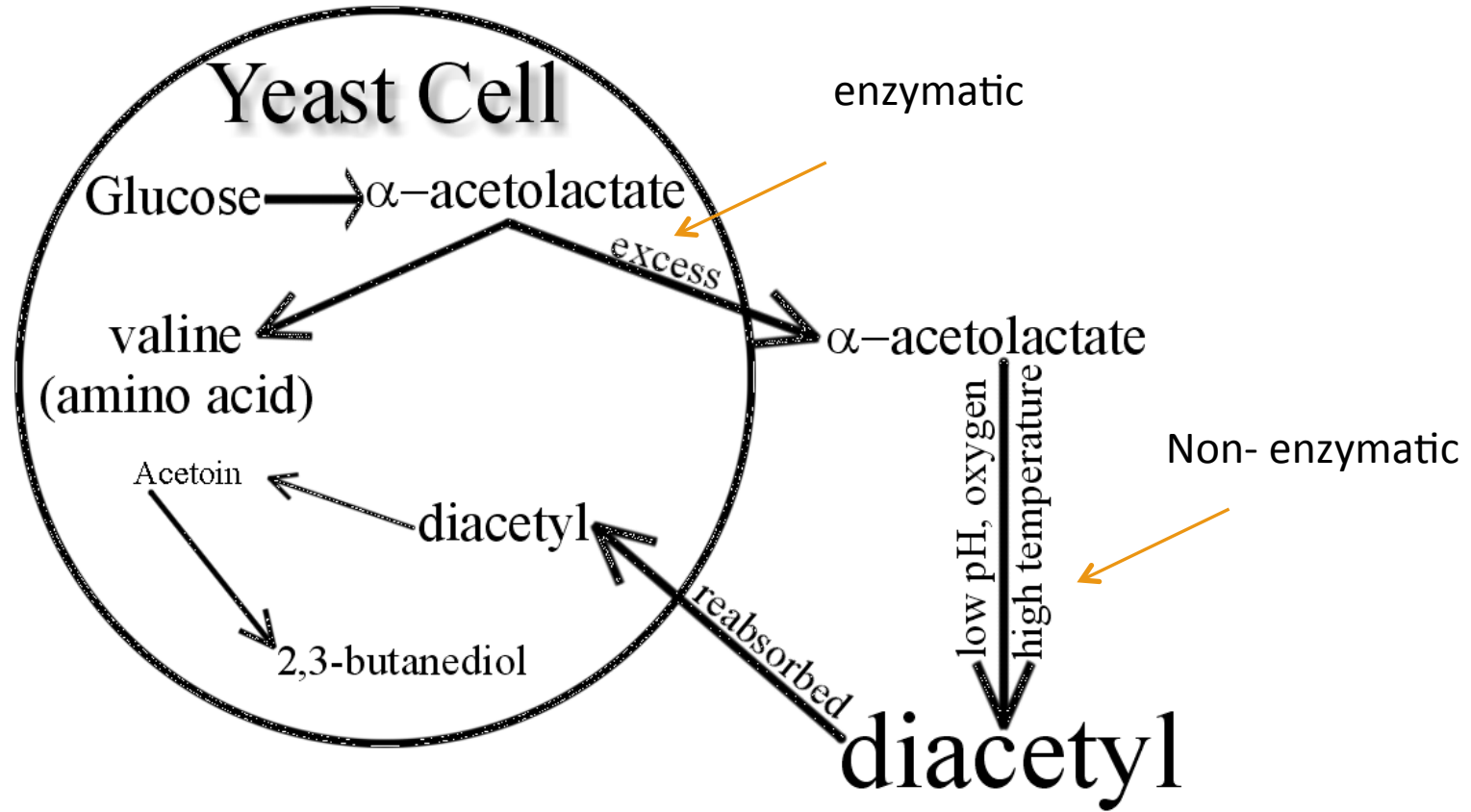


Fig 2.3 Yeast: The Practical Guide to Beer Fermentation, White and Zainasheff 2010

# Yeast Metabolism



# Why does yeast make this compound?

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## First and foremost : Valine synthesis

- Yeast needs amino acids to create proteins
  - These can typically be assimilated from the wort
  - In worts low in FAN, yeast have to make more amino acids like Valine
  - Research shows worts low in FAN, higher levels of Diacetyl are seen (Quain 2006)

If all necessary Valine is produced, there's a excess of alpha acetolactate

Excess alpha acetolactate is re-absorbed by the yeast though multiple processes

Why? Generates NADH needed to make energy



# Enzymatic vs Non Enzymatic?

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Why is this important?

The transition from alpha acetolactate to diacetyl happens outside of the cell – meaning no enzymes available

Therefore the reaction is chemical (oxidative) and temperature is important

When you raise temperature- reactions will happen quicker

I.e- Diacetyl Rest : Increase in temp is necessary to convert

Research shows that yeast will quickly reabsorb Diacetyl

# Diacetyl: Total vs As-is

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Why does a beer develop a butter aroma 6 weeks after shelf life?

- - Alpha acetolactate precursor

Precursor is turned into diacetyl from heat so a keg sitting at 50F for several weeks will slowly develop the off flavor

How to prevent this?

Test every tank for diacetyl before crashing

There's no real cure after the yeast has been taken off of the beer

# Strain Specifics

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What beers do we see this most commonly?

- Lagers – temperature issues
- English Ales – flocculation issues

Some research has show that some strains can produce more precursor than others, but not well categorized (Research mostly done on lager strains)

Recognize that not all strains are created equal- you will have to play around with conditioning times

Don't expect all ales to be one way and lagers another

# Forced Diacetyl Testing

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Forced Diacetyl testing:

Collect two fermentor samples, heat one for 30 mins at 60C. Cool both samples to room temperature and do a side by side comparison

Do not microwave!

Smelling them warm can be difficult because of the amount of ethanol given off

Analytical Methods:

VDK Testing with a spectrophotometer- requires distillation equipment

Gas Chromatography

# Diacetyl Troubleshooting

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If you have high amounts of diacetyl:

Recirc- Pump CO2 to recirculate yeast throughout the beer to increase contact

If you have high amounts of pre-cursor:

Raise the temp

Fermentation specs to analyze if you're having issues:

- Fermentation time
- Yeast strain
- pH
- Health of yeast
- Temperatures
- Time
- FAN

# Sensory

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Admit if you are blind to diacetyl !

You can learn to identify it by practicing

Diacetyl seems to change shape when in different styles of beers

- Ie- caramel, butter, butterscotch
- Reported thresholds at 50 ppb to 200 ppb. Remember that most of this research has been done on light lagers!

# Summary

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Diacetyl is formed by an oxidative reaction and is speed up by acidic pH and warmer temps

Diacetyl is quickly absorbed by yeast but rousing may be necessary to increase surface area

Keep in mind that several aspects are responsible for diacetyl ( Yeast health, strains, sanitation, pH, temperatures) Go through the checklist when you're having issues.

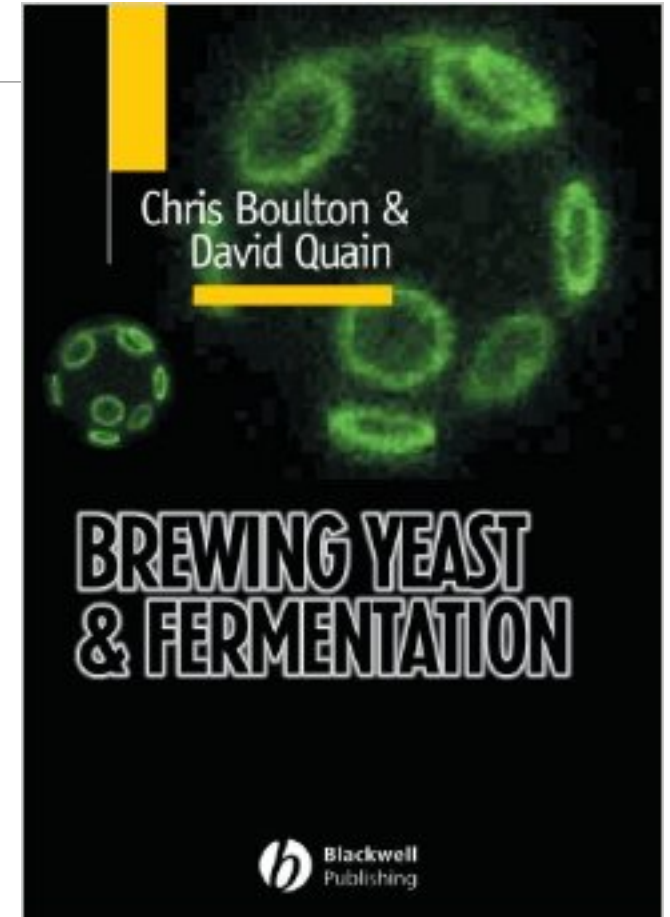
Test your fermentors, it's super easy and fast! Find the person that's really sensitive and use them (or multiples) as a marker.

# Resources

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Brewing Yeast and Fermentation  
(Boulton and Quain, 2006)

Yeast: The Practical Guide to Fermentation  
(Chris White and Jamil Zainisheff, 2010)





Thanks!

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