

# Counting constitutional isomers from the molecular formula



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## Keywords

Cheminf, Cdk

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**Update:** check [these two](#) papers.

We all know the combinatorial explosion when calculating the number of possible constitutional isomers (see [wp:structural isomorphism](#)) of a certain molecular formula. For example, C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>6</sub> has only one constitutional isomer (ethane, [InChI=1/C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>6</sub>/c1-2/h1-2H3]{.chem:inchi xmlns:chem="http://www.blueobelisk.org/chemistryblogs/"}), and C<sub>4</sub>H<sub>10</sub> has only two. Especially, breaking symmetry by replacing one carbon by another element, or replacing a single by a double bond, increases the number sharply. For example, C<sub>7</sub>H<sub>16</sub> has only nine constitutional isomers, while replacing two single bonds by two double bonds, creating C<sub>7</sub>H<sub>10</sub>, increases this number to 499! Then, replacing in the last formula, one carbon by an oxygen adds another few, totaling 747 isomers.

Now, C<sub>8</sub>H<sub>8</sub>NBr has at least **649 thousand** constitutional isomers, and I am quite interested in being able to know the number of isomers beforehand, without having to generate the structures itself (for example, using [CDK's GENMDeterministicGenerator](#)). [InChI=1/C<sub>8</sub>H<sub>8</sub>BrN/c9-7-1-2-8-6(5-7)3-4-10-8/h1-2,5,10H,3-4H2]{.chem:inchi xmlns:chem="http://www.blueobelisk.org/chemistryblogs/"} is one of the isomers.

So, my question: is anyone aware of free code (in order of preference: 1. LGPL, 2. BSD/MIT,

1. opensource, 4. free) to calculate or estimate the number of constitutional isomers for a certain molecular formula. An estimate would already be nice. Ideally, I would implement this bit of code into the CDK, but otherwise, just knowing the number of isomers for C<sub>8</sub>H<sub>8</sub>NBr would be nice :)

Additionally, any relevant, recent literature recommendations are most welcomed. I am aware of the use of polynomials, but literature I have seen so far just focuses on molecules of a certain architecture, and it not able to come up with a guess based on the molecular formula alone.