

All About Activated Charcoal **(Published on Hello Charlie)**

You may have heard of the latest fad of using activated charcoal in just about everything. Gwyneth Paltrow recently praised [a juice cleanse using activated charcoal lemonade](#) in her magazine, *Goop*. It is also routinely added to skin and body products, deodorant and even tooth paste.

What is Activated Charcoal?

Activated charcoal is similar to the charcoal you use in your backyard grill, but it's created through a different process. Materials like wood, coal, rye starch or coconut shells are combined with acid and steam to produce a very small particle size and increase the surface area of the charcoal. The result is a fine, black powder that is odorless, tasteless and nontoxic.

What Activated Charcoal Does:

Activated charcoal is most commonly used in the medical field to treat poisoning and drug overdoses. It works by removing toxins through a process called adsorption. Basically, the molecules of the substance attach themselves to the charcoal so that they aren't absorbed into the body. This is why the large surface area of activated charcoal is important. The larger the surface area, the more toxins it can adsorb.

When a person ingests a toxic substance, activated charcoal can adsorb up to 60 percent of the substance from the stomach and intestines. Because charcoal can't be digested, it holds the substance, preventing it from being absorbed into the stomach until it can be expelled in the patient's waste. This method is so effective that, in 1831, [a French professor demonstrated it](#) by drinking a lethal dose of strychnine mixed with activated charcoal and surviving!

What Activated Charcoal Doesn't Do:

The adsorbing properties of activated charcoal have made it all the rage with the "detox" crowd. Many believe that taking activated charcoal supplements daily can help remove everyday toxins from the body and help reduce gastrointestinal issues like gas and bloating.

The problem is that, along with toxins, activated charcoal also removes healthy substances from the body, like nutrients, vitamins and minerals. So, taking it on a regular basis is not a good idea. Also, studies on its gastrointestinal benefits have found conflicting results, so it hasn't been proven to be effective in that way either. In fact, activated charcoal has been found to actually cause gastrointestinal side effects like diarrhea and constipation.

Many skin and body products containing activated charcoal claim that it can remove toxins, dirt and oil from pores. However, [no studies have been conducted to prove these claims](#). Most of these products also contain other skin-friendly ingredients which have actually been proven to work. For example, an activated charcoal acne treatment might also contain salicylic acid. So, it's more likely that these ingredients are helping, while the charcoal isn't doing anything at all.

Fortunately, charcoal is inert, which means that it won't irritate sensitive skin or cause allergic reactions. So, while it probably won't help your skin, it won't hurt it either.

Activated Charcoal Products that Actually Work:

The good news is that one nontraditional use of activated charcoal has been found to be effective: using it on your teeth. Putting charcoal in your mouth may seem a little gross, but [dentists say that it can actually help remove stains](#) and whiten your teeth. Its adsorbent qualities let it bind with staining substances like coffee, tea, wine and plaque, so that they wash away when you spit it out.

However, it's best to use activated charcoal on your teeth carefully, as it's not yet known whether its texture is gritty enough to damage tooth enamel. To whiten your teeth safely with activated charcoal, it's best to dab it on gently, wait about three minutes and then rinse it off. Do not scrub your teeth with activated charcoal or you might damage the enamel, which will cause sensitivity and make your teeth more susceptible to cavities.

Activated Charcoal Products to Try:

Ready to try the latest trend in teeth whitening? Here are a few great activated charcoal products that are available on our website.

[My Magic Mud Tooth Whitening Powder](#): This gentle powder is made with coconut shell activated charcoal and calcium bentonite clay. Unlike traditional tooth whitening products, it's nonacidic and nonbleaching, so it's safe for sensitive teeth.

[My Magic Mud Charcoal Whitening Toothpaste](#): This is basically the tooth whitening powder in a convenient toothpaste formula. It's made with 95% Certified Organic ingredients and comes in two tasty flavors: peppermint and [wintergreen](#).

[Pearlbar Charcoal Toothbrush](#): If you prefer your regular toothpaste, try using it with this activated charcoal infused toothbrush. Its nylon bristles and sustainable bamboo handle are 100% biodegradable. It's available in soft or medium, and there's a [child's size](#) too.

[Pearlbar Biodegradable Dental Floss Picks – Charcoal](#): These convenient picks are infused with activated charcoal, so they'll clean more plaque and staining substances than traditional dental floss. They're also 100% biodegradable.