

# Activated Charcoal

Real-Deal Detox or Phony Wellness Fad?

BY ERIKA FITZGERALD

I recently found myself in the oral hygiene aisle, comparing my usual Colgate Whitening toothpaste with a natural alternative touting the ability to brighten my pearly whites with inky-colored activated charcoal. A sucker for all-natural remedies, I got to Googling and discovered all kinds of charcoal products promising a variety of “is it too good to be true?” health benefits.

As it turns out, ever since Goop founder Gwyneth Paltrow proclaimed activated charcoal lemonade as one of “the best juice cleanses,” the jet black powder

has been making its way from the Instagram feeds of mega-influencers to the shelves of our local CVS. Last year, San Francisco even hosted the nation’s first-ever activated charcoal food festival (aptly named “50 Shades of Charcoal”). Everything from inky house-cocktails to ash gray ice cream lined the streets, making for a less-than-ordinary culinary experience.

As this pitch-dark additive becomes increasingly inescapable, the question begs: Is charcoal in any form actually healthy? The answer: It depends. >>



ERICA FITZGERALD is a writer and traveler with a healthy addiction to kombucha and kale.



## #1 NOT YOUR EVERYDAY BBQ BRIQUETTE

Before you go rub a briquette all over your face, know that the activated charcoal in Paltrow's choice lemonade is not the same.

In its simplest form, charcoal is the carbon left over when all the water and other defining components are heated out of organic materials such as wood, peat, and coconut shells. At this point, you can use it to grill a mean tri-tip.

To become "activated," charcoal must undergo treatment with high temperatures and oxidizing gases that purify and pulverize it. The result is a highly porous sponge-like powerhouse capable of soaking up toxins and unwanted impurities through an expansive surface area. Well, maybe.

## #2 FROM POISON CONTROL TO PIZZA CRUST

Backed by clever marketing and curiosity-piquing Instagram photos, activated charcoal has made its way into a myriad of beauty and wellness products—from face creams and toothpaste to coconut water and even pizza crust. Retailers sell it as a sort of "body detoxifier" that can cure everything from a nasty hangover to high cholesterol.

This isn't entirely the case, however. Activated charcoal is used as a remedy for poison and drug overdose, adsorbing unwanted pollutants (toxins stick to the surface) before they can enter the bloodstream. The catch? You need to take 50 to 100 grams of activated charcoal within two hours of ingesting a dangerous substance. This is considerably more than the 150 to 500 milligrams found in most over-the-counter supplements and foods.

Although unlikely in such small doses, activated charcoal can also Hoover up the good with the bad, robbing your body of essential vitamins, nutrients, and even prescription meds. This—along with other uncomfortable side effects—is why doctors pump it back out after it finishes poison clean-up.

So, while activated charcoal has won the hearts of yoga mat toting juice lovers and other health-conscious consumers, medical practitioners prescribe skepticism, citing risks that range from "a waste of money" to vomiting and serious constipation.

## #3 MAYBE SHE'S BORN WITH IT. MAYBE IT'S CHARCOAL.

You can eat it, you can brush your teeth with it, and—yes—you can add it to your daily skin care regime, too.

While consuming small amounts of activated charcoal in any of its many forms won't necessarily "detox" your body, rubbing it on your skin may be the golden ticket when it comes to this bizarre health fad.

Dermatologists have found that activated charcoal can help control body odor in the form of deodorant. When it comes to stinky pits, activated charcoal increases the surface area of the skin and gives the odor more space to filter out. Think of it like a Brita filter for your underarms.

Unlike supplements and toothpaste, using activated charcoal on your skin carries little risk of side effects, making it a popular ingredient for facial masks and other topical skin treatments. When applied, charcoal helps clear soiled skin by drawing oil, dirt, and other unwanted particles to the surface. >>



**IT'S TIME TO  
MAKE YOUR  
TRANSFORMATION  
WITH REV SLO FITNESS**



**LOSE WEIGHT . BURN FAT  
GET IN SHAPE**

**MEET NEW PEOPLE**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION EMAIL US  
AT [INFO@REVSLO.COM](mailto:INFO@REVSLO.COM)**



**HAZIE AGE 66**



**KEN AGE 67**

**IN ONLY 6 MONTHS, REAL RESULTS  
AGE IS JUST A NUMBER....  
MAKE IT HAPPEN!**

**755 Alphonso Street . SLO  
[off Broad Street]  
8420 El Camino Real . Atascadero  
805.439.1881  
[revslo.com](http://revslo.com)**



## #4 SQUEAKY-CLEAN OR HYGIENE HAZARD?

Activated charcoal really has squeezed its way into just about everything. Toothpaste is no exception, promising to remove stains and bacteria through a process called adsorption (not to be confused with absorption). In other words, activated charcoal gently exfoliates the teeth to yield a brighter, cleaner smile. Perhaps not gently enough, though.

When it comes to using activated charcoal on your teeth, dentists remain skeptical. While regular kinds of toothpaste have undergone decades of testing to pinpoint just the right amount of abrasion needed to remove stains without damaging enamel, charcoal toothpaste is relatively new and lacks the same tried-and-true testing.

The verdict: Don't let buzzwords like "all-natural" and "eco-friendly" trick you into this dental hygiene trend. A study published by the *Journal of the American Dental Association* found no evidence that activated charcoal toothpaste works, and that using it could actually lead to cavities and tooth decay in the long run.

## #5 LEAVE IT TO THE LIVER

Some restaurants have gone so far as to claim their charcoal infused pizza crusts and burger buns aid in digestion. Hate to break it to you, but adding charcoal to your pepperoni-topped pizza or double cheeseburger doesn't make it any more "healthy." But, what about adding it to an already-healthy food or beverage?

Aside from the aforementioned fact that charcoal may actually adsorb nutrients and vitamins, it has no known nutritional value of its own. Rather than shell out \$8 for an activated charcoal add-on in hopes of Brita-filter-like body purification, remember that the liver has been successfully detoxifying the body... well, forever.

So, is charcoal the magical formula to optimal health and wellness? If we look to seasoned medical professionals, the answer seems to be a firm "no." While an occasional indulgence is unlikely to do any harm, it's equally unlikely to add years to your life expectancy.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Charcoal may look cool on the 'gram, but you can't beat a vitamin-packed green juice from one of SLO's colorful juice bars. **SLO LIFE**