

How Activated Charcoal Can Help Animal Rescuers

Like humans, animals have a bad habit of ingesting things that are bad for them. Also like humans, activated charcoal can be a valuable tool in treating these accidental poisonings. However, it should only be administered by a trained veterinary professional. Here's how activated charcoal can help animal rescuers cope with issues caused by ingestion.

Common Toxins

Many household products and human foods are toxic to animals. The list varies according to the animal species, but in general, these foods and products are commonly implicated in accidental animal poisonings:

- Alcohol**
- Chocolate**
- Grapes**
- Nuts**
- Xylitol sweetener**
- Human medications**
- Soaps and body washes**
- Topical ointments and lotions designed for humans**
- Antifreeze**

Activated Charcoal Treatment

Comprised of organic material such as wood, peat, or coconut husk that has undergone physical and/or chemical processing, activated charcoal (also known as activated carbon) has been known to be a powerful purifier since antiquity. Through the process of adsorption, it traps and binds a wide range of contaminants.

As a poisoning treatment for both humans and animals, activated charcoal binds toxins, removing them from the stomach and intestines before they have the opportunity to circulate through the bloodstream. It has largely replaced induced vomiting and stomach pumping as a first line defense against poisonings.

However, though activated charcoal can bond with a stunning array of toxins, it is not universally effective. In addition, the dosage must be carefully controlled by body weight, and there are a few underlying medical conditions that could contraindicate its use. Therefore, it should only be administered under the guidance of a trained medical professional.

How Activated Charcoal Is Administered

Humans are sometimes directed to take activated charcoal by mouth, and your veterinarian may decide to try mixing it with food first. However, some animals are very particular and may refuse the taste or texture. The next step is normally a syringe. Since activated charcoal is black and can easily stain fabrics, this is often a messy proposition. Some veterinarians, especially when dealing with notoriously fickle cats, will skip straight to a nasogastric tube.

Regardless of how it is administered, the animal will be closely monitored for the next several hours. More activated charcoal may be needed, and the animal will likely be ill and lethargic for a day or so. Fortunately, though, if the poisoning is noticed quickly, the amount consumed is not

too high, and activated charcoal treatment is started right away, most animals are able to bounce back within a few days.