

Is Activated Charcoal Safe To Eat And Drink?

It's suddenly everywhere, from lemonades to lattes. But here's what you should know before dabbling in the dark side.

By: Andrea Stanley



Things have gotten a little dark in the wellness world lately, as the fascination with activated charcoal continues to build. Suddenly, it's popping up all over the place. At stores, there are rows of bottled pitch-black juices and waters, alongside shelves stocked with activated charcoal powders and capsules. Then there are the businesses—hawking the black magic in the form of ice cream and coffee infused with the ink-colored stuff.

Given that it's everywhere, you've probably debated giving it a try (that looks interesting!) or maybe you've already been sucked into its black hole of high and mighty health promises. Either way, here's what health experts have to say on whether the health halo surrounding the manufactured substance is all hype or if there are some bona fide benefits to the craze.

WHY THE SUDDEN HYPE?

The invasion can be pegged to this: Activated charcoal advocates say it can help detox, and anything that promises a good internal cleaning piques interest. “Many things related to detoxification are built up with a lot of hype,” says Gabrielle Francis, N.D., a naturopathic doctor in New York City and author of *The Rockstar Remedy*. Detoxing is buzzy, and since activated charcoal claims to do just that, “it happens to be the star of the season,” Francis adds. (Here are 7 ways to detox your body naturally.)

There are also assertions that it can help with a hangover, lower cholesterol, and prevent gas.

WHAT TO DO BEFORE YOU TRY IT

Before you go to the dark side, the most important thing to remember is to discuss the decision with your doctor. “There is research which shows that activated charcoal may reduce the effectiveness of medicines, like birth control pills and aspirin,” Burke says. It may also interfere with anti-depressants.

Also, it's best to consume activated charcoal in the evenings, so it has the least potential to pull important nutrients from your body, Francis says. And not all activated charcoal is created equal. “For health purposes, the best form of activated charcoal is from coconut—it can be made from coal and other unhealthy sources,” she adds.