



Black magic

Charcoal is the new black. Try this charred champ in body and beauty care creations for a cleansing and whitening winner.

Words CAROLINE ROBERTSON

Charcoal's history as a healing tool can be traced back to traditional Asian, African and Aboriginal cultures. For thousands of years, Indian sadhus, Native Americans, African tribals and Australian Aborigines have covered themselves in ash and eaten it for purification and protection. Charcoal is India's key component in homemade kajal, toothpowder and dishwashing powder. In Africa, charcoal is used as a body adornment, tooth whitener and soap, while Asians adore it as a pore-purifying face mask.

The oldest record of charcoal consumption was on Egyptian papyri dating to approximately 1500 BCE — for wounds and tummy troubles. In 400 BCE, physicians Pliny and Hippocrates used charcoal to treat illnesses, including poisoning. Animals routinely eat earth and charcoal to remineralise and restore gut health. Africa's red colobus monkeys eat charcoal to clear cyanide-rich leaves they ingest. Similarly, in an experiment, goats eating juniper were protected from its toxic terpenoid by taking charcoal. Other charcoal-eating animals include birds, camels, cats, chicken, deer, dogs and horses.

Charcoal's popularity today is connected to concerns over our polluted world and concomitant health conditions. Modern medicine uses charcoal in cases of poisoning and drug overdoses. Charcoal can clear toxins from the gastrointestinal tract, kidneys and skin — particularly if administered within an hour of ingestion. Charcoal clears many contaminants but won't bind to corrosive toxins such as petroleum, paint thinner and lithium.

Note: In any poisoning emergency, always call the Poisons Information Hotline on 131126 or 000 to seek advice.

A black hole

Chewing charcoal briquettes or biting burnt toast is dangerous and completely different



from consuming activated charcoal. Normal charcoal is potentially carcinogenic, whereas activated charcoal is curative. How is this black magic made? Suppliers superheat carbon-rich coconut shells, bamboo, wood, peat, bone char or olive pits. High heat reduces its pore size and increases its surface area, so it becomes a negatively charged sponge to soak up positively charged toxins 200 times its own weight.

This powdery ash is ideal when organic, steam-activated, washed to clear heavy metals, odourless, tasteless and ground super-fine. Toxins are trapped in charcoal's infinite tiny pores and pollutants are pulled out of the body. This black brew binds to toxins, organic materials and microorganisms. Charcoal also gulps up gas and soaks up excess cholesterol with bile salts.

Pure activated charcoal comes in tablets, capsules or powder. Powder can

irritate the mucus membranes of the nose, throat and lungs if not thoroughly mixed with liquid. It also settles on the bottom of a vessel if not stirred or shaken well for dispersion.

Rise from the ashes

Every day, more applications of charcoal are being discovered. Shelves are chockfull of charcoal inventions, including charcoal dental floss, charcoal armpit detox and charcoal Band-Aids. Choose charcoal if you need to purify water, soothe skin, detox your digestive system, deodorise your body and brighten your teeth. According to empirical evidence and scientific studies, charcoal is considered effective for the following conditions:

Skin conditions Acne, eczema, blackheads, oiliness, pigmentation, psoriasis and bites are all calls to consider charcoal. Mix charcoal powder with pure water or colloidal silver in a ceramic bowl using a wooden spoon. This charcoal paste applied in a thick 0.5cm poultice over the skin draws out impurities and calms inflammation. As

it dries skin it's important to follow with a moisturising product. Apply every day for 15 minutes before washing off gently with warm water. Charcoal can draw out impurities such as pus, splinters, ingrown hairs, chemicals and insect toxins such as ticks. If there are signs of envenomation, apply the charcoal poultice over a bite site, then two compression bandages as per pressure immobilisation technique.

Poisoning from food, heavy metals or drugs Charcoal is the best bodyguard against many poisons, drugs, heavy metals and microorganisms. To prove its potency, French chemist M Bertrand swallowed charcoal along with arsenic in 1813 and French scientist Pierre Fleurus Touery swallowed deadly strychnine with charcoal in 1852 in front of his astounded colleagues. Both survived unscathed. The University of Michigan Health System advises 50–100g

of charcoal in cases of poisoning in adults and 10–25g for children. For diarrhea, adults can take 25g, while the child dose is 10g. The quicker charcoal is taken, the better, as studies show activated charcoal taken within five minutes of drug ingestion can reduce absorption in adults by 74 per cent. Medical professionals apply charcoal to clear NSAIDs, calcium channel blockers, carbamazepine, malaria medications and mild stimulants. Though activated charcoal doesn't absorb alcohol, it helps to remove other toxins from the body that contribute to poisoning.

Body odour Charcoal sucks up smells from the skin and atmosphere like a vacuum cleaner. You can apply a paste over armpits using equal parts bentonite and charcoal, and leave on for 20 minutes before rinsing. Repeat as often as required. Gas masks often contain charcoal for its amazing air-purifying properties. Binchotan charcoal sticks are a modern method to remove dust, odours and noxious gases from the environment and fridge. Insoles with activated charcoal or soaking the feet in charcoal and baking soda stops smelly feet arising from bacteria, sweat, dead skin and other impurities. Charcoal has also been shown to reduce unpleasant odours in those suffering from fish odour syndrome or trimethylaminuria.

High cholesterol Activated charcoal lowers the concentration of total lipids, cholesterol and triglycerides in the blood serum, liver, heart and brain. Studies show charcoal can raise good HDL cholesterol by 8 per cent and lower bad LDL cholesterol by 25 per cent in just four weeks when taken in high doses with fatty meals.

Stained teeth A nice smile creates confidence and attracts others. The trials of terrible teeth or oral health issues can be a painful and expensive problem. Activated charcoal is great mouth medicine as it whitens teeth, removes stains from tea, coffee, wine or cigarettes, banishes bad bacteria, prevents tooth decay, eases oral inflammation or ulcers, reduces bleeding gums and pulls plaque from teeth. Simply dip a moist toothbrush in activated charcoal powder and gently brush your teeth.

Kidney conditions Kidney diseases cause accumulated wastes such as urea, which further damage kidneys. Studies have shown that activated charcoal supplements helped



lower blood levels of urea and other waste products in patients with end-stage kidney disease. A 2014 study showed improved kidney function as well as a reduced rate of kidney inflammation and damage.

Gas and bloat Charcoal is an incredible bloot buster. A study in the *American Journal of Gastroenterology* found that activated charcoal prevents intestinal gas following a gas-producing meal. It works by binding the by-products in foods that feed flatulence. Try two 500mg capsules two hours before or an hour after a gassy meal followed by two glasses of pure water.

Clear mould Mould or candida can be difficult to evict from the body. Charcoal can clear mould or candida effectively, especially when combined with anti-fungal herbs such as horopito and a potent probiotic. An added benefit of brushing teeth or washing your body with charcoal in the shower is that it

clears mould when scrubbed off.

Anti-ageing It's impossible to avoid chemicals from the air, earth, food and body products. Accumulated toxins attack your cells and create oxidative free-radical damage. Since activated charcoal contributes to detoxification, it also promotes cellular longevity. By supporting healthy gastrointestinal and skin tissue, activated charcoal is an anti-ageing agent. Through cleansing the colon, stomach, kidneys, adrenals, liver and spleen, activated charcoal gives glowing health from within. Microscopic tissue examination shows that activated charcoal may prevent many cellular changes associated with ageing, including decreased protein synthesis, lower RNA activity, organ fibrosis and sclerotic changes in the heart and coronary blood vessels. Activated charcoal also reduces brain ageing, apparent through symptoms such as brain fog.

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Skin cleanser Though it may seem counterintuitive to scrub black soot over your skin to clean it, activated charcoal battles bacteria, exfoliates dead cells, absorbs oil, calms inflammation, minimises pores and restores skin's natural pH balance. For acne-prone skin, mix activated charcoal and aloe vera into a paste and apply liberally on spots for 10 minutes minimum. Try a natural activated charcoal peel-off mask to suck the black out of blackheads.

Shampoo Charcoal shampoo is best for brunettes who want to clear chemical residue, reduce dandruff and soothe scalp irritation. Simply add a tablespoon of activated charcoal into your usual shampoo, leave on your scalp for 5 minutes, then rinse and condition as usual. Alternatively, mix 1 teaspoon of charcoal with 1 tablespoon of borax powder, 500mL of apple-cider vinegar and 500mL of pure water. Rinse through hair and wash off after a few minutes for shiny, clean hair.

Mouth purifier Gargling with charcoal is a great way to clear throat inflammation.

Swilling charcoal around the mouth pulls toxins and plaque out, thus freshening breath and optimising oral hygiene. Try mixing 1 teaspoon of activated charcoal powder or 2 capsules with 5 drops of peppermint oil, 50mL of colloidal silver and 50mL of chlorophyll for breath as fresh as a Nordic breeze.

Water purifier Carbon filters from activated charcoal have been used for water purification for centuries. Carbon cartridges purify chemicals, fluoride and heavy metals from water. A 2015 study found that carbon removed as much as 10 per cent of fluoride in 32 unfiltered water samples after six months of installation. However, activated charcoal doesn't appear to trap viruses, bacteria and hard-water minerals. Hydrating with carbon-filtered water gives added health benefits of charcoal residue in the water. 🌱

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Black beauty recipes

- **Ayurvedic eyeliner** Putting chemical eyeliner on your eyes can deteriorate your vision and eye health. Alternatively, activated charcoal kajal is purifying, cooling and cleansing for the eyes. For a long-lasting smudge-proof eyeliner, simply get a small pot of activated charcoal, dip a wet angular brush in it and apply as eyeliner. To make it extra smooth, add a little coconut oil. Remove it easily with coconut, castor or jojoba oil.
- **Mascara** Mascara allergies are common due to ingredients such as methylparaben, aluminium powder, cetareth-20, butylparaben and benzyl alcohol. Try this DIY activated charcoal recipe. Warm 1 teaspoon of coconut oil, 1 teaspoon of castor oil, 4 teaspoons of aloe vera gel and ½–1 teaspoon of beeswax on low heat. Mix in ½ teaspoon of activated charcoal and suck up with an empty syringe or use an icing bag. Inject into a new mascara container and discard after three months.
- **Face mask** Most commercial charcoal peel-off masks contain glue polymer vinyl and acetone, which is not only toxic but can contribute to allergies and inflammation. Make your own natural charcoal collagen alternative with the following recipe. Mix thoroughly and quickly with a wooden skewer or plastic fork ½ teaspoon of activated charcoal, ½ teaspoon of green clay or bentonite, 1 teaspoon of plain gelatine or agar agar, 3 drops of tea-tree oil and 1 tablespoon of hot water. Apply to a clean face while warm. Once dry after about 20 minutes, peel off from the edges and wash off excess with a warm washcloth.
- **Precautions** Charcoal is considered a very safe but messy medicine. As it can stain vessels, use the same spoon and cup to prepare it and preferably cleanse your teeth or body in the shower to avoid staining the sink. Baking soda or borax are effective charcoal cleansers. Because charcoal indiscriminately adsorbs material from the body, it can also attract and eliminate vital nutrients and medication. Hence it's advised to administer charcoal at least two hours from food, supplements or medication. Avoid inhaling charcoal particles as it can irritate mucus membranes. Charcoal can be constipating, so drink at least two cups of water per teaspoon of charcoal. Black bowel motions and temporary nausea are common when taking large doses.