

Activated charcoal deserves a spot in your first aid kit. This remedy is very versatile in its uses whether it is from a bad case of the stomach flu or a wasp sting.

Activated charcoal is a supplement that is sold over-the-counter to treat several conditions including excess gas, high cholesterol, and preventing hangovers. Medicinal [activated charcoal](#) is also used in emergency medicine to treat certain types of poisoning. Activated charcoal is designed for medicinal use, and is not the same as the charcoal that is used in products that remove pet odors and in fish tank filters. Activated charcoal works to treat poisoning because it binds with some poisonous agents and helps them pass through the body without being absorbed. When activated charcoal is prescribed by a physician in this way it may be taken in several doses. However, as a supplement, activated charcoal has not been shown to be effective in treating other conditions such as excess gas, cholesterol or hangovers. The side effects from activated charcoal include constipation and black stools. Activated charcoal may also prevent some drugs from being absorbed by the body, therefore it should not be taken at the same time as other medications.

Function

Activated charcoal binds itself to ingested poisons in the stomach; it is also effective for gas, indigestion and heartburn. Charcoal is very effective when used as a poultice for bug bites and rashes caused by poison ivy or poison oak.

Types

Activated charcoal comes in many forms: a chewable tablet, powder in a capsule, suspension, liquid and the powder form.

Ingestion of Poisons

The American Academy of Pediatrics on its website no longer recommends using syrup of ipecac when a child ingests poisons. [Activated charcoal](#) connects itself to the poison, thus preventing absorption into the bloodstream. Activated charcoal passes easily through bowel movements.

Dosage

The dosage for adults and teenagers is approximately 25 to 100 g mixed with a fluid such as water. The dosage for children ages 1 to 12 is 25 to 50 g mixed with water or another fluid. More than one dosage may be given.

Facts

Research has found that one cubic inch of charcoal has the surface area the size of a football field; therefore, it can absorb many times its own weight in toxins.

Considerations

[Activated charcoal](#) is most effective when used within 1 hour of poisoning. Activated charcoal may interfere with certain medications and may prevent certain nutrients from being absorbed by the body. Consult your physician before using.