

During Pregnancy

Activated charcoal should be taken during pregnancy only if recommended by your health care provider. If you intend to breastfeed, discuss taking activated charcoal with your doctor.

Activated charcoal is used in water filters, medicines that selectively remove toxins, and chemical purification processes. **Activated charcoal** is carbon that has been treated with oxygen. The treatment results in a highly porous charcoal. These tiny holes give the charcoal a surface area of 300-2,000 m²/g, allowing liquids or gases to pass through the charcoal and interact with the exposed carbon. The carbon adsorbs a wide range of impurities and contaminants, including chlorine, odors, and pigments. Other substances, like sodium, fluoride, and nitrates, are not as attracted to the carbon and are not filtered out. Because adsorption works by chemically binding the impurities to the carbon, the active sites in the charcoal eventually become filled. Activated charcoal filters become less effective with use and have to be recharged or replaced.

Several factors influence the effectiveness of **activated charcoal**. The pore size and distribution varies depending on the source of the carbon and the manufacturing process. Large organic molecules are absorbed better than smaller ones. Adsorption tends to increase as pH and temperature decrease. Contaminants are also removed more effectively if they are in contact with the activated charcoal for a longer time, so flow rate through the charcoal affects filtration.

Side Effects

The common side effects with activated charcoal include diarrhea, vomiting, constipation, and darkened stool. If diarrhea or vomiting last more than two days, contact your health care provider.

Severe Side Effects

Though rare, severe side effects can occur such as rashes; hives; breathing difficulty; chest tightness; and swelling involving the tongue, lips, mouth, or face. Other severe side effects can include intestinal tract blockage, dehydration, and regurgitating into the lungs. If any of these occur, seek medical attention immediately.

Medication Considerations

Discuss all medications you are taking, including natural supplements, with your health care provider before taking **activated charcoal**. According to Drugs.com, an online drug information site, there aren't any documented medication interactions, however, it is a safety concern.

Activated charcoal is also called other names, such as activated carbon, vegetable carbon, medicinal charcoal, and animal charcoal. The primary benefit of activated charcoal is trapping or absorbing chemicals in the body. Generally, activated charcoal is considered safe for most adults, however, there are some safety concerns.