

Activated charcoal is a natural adsorbent that is used to increase excretion of toxins and to ameliorate diarrhea. It is readily available in over-the-counter forms and is a relatively inexpensive home remedy. It is also used in hospital settings.

Facts

1. **Activated charcoal** is carbon that has been processed to increase its porosity. It functions as an adsorbent; that is, atoms and molecules of certain substances will bind to its surface. Sources of medical-grade activated charcoal include wood and bamboo. It is usually supplied as a fine powder, either in capsules or in suspension.

Treatment for Poisoning

2. **Activated charcoal** is used to treat patients who have taken poison by mouth. The charcoal binds the toxins until they can be excreted, preventing them from being absorbed by the gastrointestinal tract. In most cases, vomiting is induced, and then the charcoal is given to bind toxins remaining in the digestive tract.

Treatment for Diarrhea

3. Activated charcoal slows down gastric motility, so it is useful in reducing the symptoms of diarrhea. It has also been used to reduce flatulence and gastric discomfort. In small doses it is safe for babies and children.

Contraindications

4. Activated charcoal should not be given in cases of poisoning by cyanide, mineral acids, or alkalis. It should not be given to anyone who is unconscious or semiconscious. Anyone who is hypersensitive to charcoal should not take this remedy.

Interactions and Cautions

5. **Activated charcoal** will slow down the absorption of many drugs. In high doses, it will cause constipation. The charcoal will turn stools black. Consult a pediatrician or qualified health practitioner for the appropriate doses for infants and children.

Warnings

6. Always contact emergency services immediately in cases of suspected poisoning. If diarrhea continues for more than 24 hours, or if infants and children are not taking in fluids or appear listless or lethargic, contact the appropriate practitioner immediately.

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.