

Activated charcoal is an emergency decontaminant. It is used after a person swallows a toxic drug or chemical. It is estimated that [activated charcoal](#) will reduce a person's absorption of poisons by up to 60 percent. Activated charcoal is given in the form of a thick, black liquid suspension either orally for conscious victims or through a tube and into the stomach for those who are unconscious or unable to swallow the liquid.

#### Valuable Treatment

[Activated charcoal](#) has many uses. The liquid form is a simple yet valuable treatment for poisoning and overdose victims when dispensed by medical personnel. Activated charcoal tablets are available for over-the-counter for treatment of simple stomach disorders as well as preventative treatments for those who expect to ingest alcohol

#### What It Won't Do

Activated charcoal binds itself to a wide variety of drugs and chemicals. When activated charcoal binds to poisons, they are passed through the digestive system, undigested, with the next bowel movement. While [activated charcoal](#) works well on most poison substances, it does not work well on substances such as lithium, strong acids and bases, metals or minerals like sodium, iron, lead, arsenic, iodine, fluorine or boric acid.

#### What It Will Do

Considerable human testing has been done on activated charcoal's ability to reduce absorption of alcoholic beverages. Tests have shown that ingesting activated carbon prior to consuming ethanol, also known as ethyl alcohol, pure alcohol, grain alcohol or drinking alcohol, has significantly reduced absorption of the alcohol. Tests conducted with subjects taking 5 to 15 mg of activated carbon per kilogram of body weight taken at the same time as the ethanol equivalent to 17 shots showed that activated carbon's significantly reduced potential blood alcohol levels.

#### Medical Usage

In cases of poisoning or accidental overdose, [activated charcoal](#) can be helpful at cleansing the system of toxins. Activated charcoal, when used in cases of poisoning, should only be used under a doctor's guidance. The proper dosage, based upon the amount of poison swallowed, the victim's weight and with special considerations for children can only be dispensed by professional medical personnel. Generally the dosage is 1 gram per kilogram of body weight. Activated charcoal is a powerful emergency decontaminant that can save lives if given in a timely manner at the proper dosage.

#### Over-the-Counter Usage

Several [activated charcoal](#) products are now available at drugstores to be taken prior to a night of drinking. While these products will not absorb all of the alcohol ingested, they will significantly decrease its effect. In the 1800s, charcoal biscuit was used in England as a remedy for flatulence or other stomach problems. Activated charcoal tablets can be found today as over-the-counter treatments for such maladies as diarrhea, indigestion or intestinal gas. Activated charcoal biscuits can also be found for similar treatment of household pets. It is also used to treat irritable bowel syndrome as well as preventing diarrhea in cancer patients who have received irinotecan, a chemotherapy agent.