

The Ultimate Guide to Activated Charcoal

The trend, the facts & the products to try.

It's 2017 (practically 2018) and charcoal has gone from being something you used to braai* with or a cure to poisoning to something we now drink, bathe in, brush our teeth with and clean our water with.

It's not just any type of charcoal; it's activated charcoal that's taken over the wellness scene.

Activated charcoal is also known as activated carbon and is made from natural sources like coconut shells, bamboo and oak. It's [made](#) by burning wood or coconut shells at high temperatures to remove all oxygen and activating it with steam-like gases. This process causes the charcoal to develop lots of internal spaces or "pores." These pores help activated charcoal capture, bind and remove heavy metals, chemicals, gasses and poisons.

It then works through a process called adsorption (not to be confused by absorption). This means that it doesn't absorb the chemicals but rather binds them to the porous surface of the activated charcoal like a magnet.

The use of activated charcoal for medicinal purposes dates back to the 1800's; and doctors still use it to treat food, drug and alcohol poisoning.

In the past year, activated charcoal has become a popular ingredient in both food and beauty products. The biggest problem with consuming foods with activated charcoal is that it doesn't discriminate between the good nutrients and bad chemicals which means that it can interfere with nutrient absorption and tax your system. It's something to be used occasionally and not long-term. If you're on medication, you need to be incredibly careful with consuming activated charcoal as [it can inactivate that medication](#) – and this includes birth control. It's recommended not to consume activated charcoal within 2 hours of taking medicine.

Activated charcoal in beauty products is a lot safer, and its ability to bind impurities and unwanted toxins can lead to your best skin; hair and teeth.

To test the trend and see if these products really work, we collected the best activated charcoal products available locally – from foods, to beauty masks, shampoos and even bubble baths. We then tried each one out to see how it worked, made us look and feel, delving deep into the activated charcoal world to give you **The Ultimate Guide to Activated Charcoal Products**.

ACTIVATED CHARCOAL IN FOOD AND DRINK

Theonista Activate Charcoal and Lemon Kombucha



The Theonista Activate Charcoal and Lemon Kombucha is made from activated charcoal from coconut shells, freshly pressed lemon juice and the Theonista organic green tea base. It's more grey in colour than jet black and it's the only Kombucha they tell you to shake before opening.

Word to the wise, after shaking, let it settle a bit before opening. I was too hasty and ended up having a Kombucha shower. They call it Black magic but it's incredibly light on the charcoal taste – almost undetectable and more of a light refreshing drink. It tasted like Kombucha does – fermented tea or as Feige described it “fizzy apple juice”.

What I love

Theonista packages their Kombucha in 100% recyclable, non-BPA plastic bottles. Instead of labels, they print directly on the bottle, which reduces paper and glue usage. In fact everything about the way they source ingredients to the way they package their goods is carefully thought out to be as environmentally friendly as possible.

Best for

Kombucha lovers. Kombucha is an acquired taste, if you like it you'll love the range from Theonista.

Theonista Activated Charcoal and Lemon Kombucha retails for R32. [Get it here](#)

Bliss Juicery Detox Shots



These Bliss Juicery Detox shots consist of coconut water, activated charcoal and ginger. They come in a small glass jar that when shaken resembles a bottle of ink.

There's something a little frightening about downing a dark black drink; so I suggest consuming it as you would a shot. In one gulp, with little thought to fact that what you're gulping down what appears to be a ink. Taste wise, they are potent but not from the charcoal. The overwhelming taste is that of fresh ginger. The charcoal does however give it a bit of a chalky texture.

What I love

The fresh ginger taste which feels like it's cleaning my insides.

Best for

Post indulgence and times when you're feeling a bit blah and want to reset your body or diet.

Bliss shots retail for R20. [Get them here](#)

Naturmade Activated Charcoal Charco Tabs



The Naturmade Activated Charcoal Charco Tabs are a pharmaceutical grade activated charcoal tablet. They have the highest activation (per mg) available in South Africa which means you have to use less of them for them to be effective. It also mitigates against possible side effects of activated charcoal usage like constipation.

They're pending medical registration which means they'll be the first product on the market here to be registered as medicine. That withstanding, they're meant to be use for medicinal purposes i.e. When you need them and not every day. They're used to treat stomach pain caused from excess gas, food intolerances, diarrhoea, bloating and indigestion. As well as poisoning and even hangovers.

They come in two different absorption levels and the dosage is 1-4 pills 3 times daily when needed. They look like tiny charcoal tablets and leave your hands with a bit of a black charcoal dust.

Feige wasn't feeling well the other night and I gave her one to take. It doesn't taste like anything – it's much like taking any other tablet. An hour later she felt better and any bloat feeling was gone. There was a nap involved. She's convinced it was the nap. I'm convinced it was the charcoal.

Naturmade Charco Tabs retail from R95 – R199. [Get them here!](#)