

Can Charcoal Toothpaste Whiten Teeth?

Charcoal, a common ingredient in 19th century healthcare products, has recently experienced a resurgence in popularity. Visit any drugstore and you'll see charcoal facial masks, deodorants, soaps and even toothpastes on the shelves. In fact, proponents of charcoal toothpastes and tooth powders claim that the ingredient will whiten teeth naturally and inexpensively. Have you been thinking about adding charcoal toothpaste to your oral care routine? Before you do, take a look at a few facts we've uncovered about the products.

Activated Charcoal Isn't the Same Type of Charcoal Used for Grilling

Applying crumbled charcoal briquettes to your teeth won't have the same effect as using products designed specifically for teeth. Oral care products use activated charcoal, or activated carbon, as it's formally known. Activated carbon is created by burning wood or coal at high temperatures. When oxygen is added, small pores form in the charcoal, allowing it to trap toxins and tiny particles.

Manufacturers Say Activated Charcoal Can Remove Stubborn Surface Stains on Teeth

A duller smile may be an unfortunate consequence of your daily coffee or cola habit. Stains form when the dark pigments that give coffee its color become trapped in small pores in your tooth enamel. Any brightly colored food or drink, such as wine, tea, blueberries or soy sauce, can cause stains.

When you brush with charcoal toothpaste, dark pigments are transferred to the pores in the charcoal, eliminating the stains, according to toothpaste manufacturers. In addition to whitening your teeth, charcoal products may also reduce cavity-causing bacteria and freshen your breath.

More Research Needs to Be Conducted

Dentists recommend caution when using activated charcoal pastes and powders due to concerns about safety and effectiveness. A literature review published in the September 2017 edition of the Journal of the American Dental Association concluded that there is "insufficient clinical and laboratory data to substantiate the safety and efficacy claims of charcoal and charcoal-based dentifrices."

Some dentists are worried that the abrasive nature of charcoal might actually make your teeth look duller. Regular use of the products may wear away your enamel, exposing the yellower dentin layer underneath. Unfortunately, enamel can't be restored once it disappears.

Use of activated charcoal products may also irritate your gums, particularly if you already have receding gums or gum disease. Do you have crowns, bridges, tooth-colored fillings or veneers? Brushing with activated charcoal pastes or powders may darken these restorations or leave an unsightly line at the point where the edge of the restoration meets your gum.

Caution is Important When Using Activated Charcoal Products

If you do decide to try an activated charcoal product, it's important to keep these guidelines in mind:

- **Limit Use.** Because the product is abrasive, you probably won't want to use it more than once a week.
- **Keep Using Fluoridated Toothpaste.** Make sure that the toothpaste you use the rest of the week contains fluoride. The mineral rebuilds weak areas of enamel, lowering your cavity risk.
- **Be Gentle.** Use gentle pressure when brushing your teeth. Vigorous scrubbing may increase the risk of enamel erosion.
- **Examine Your Teeth and Gums Regularly.** If your gums hurt, bleed, or look red and swollen after brushing with activated charcoal, stop using the product and call the dentist. The same advice applies if you experience sensitivity or pain in teeth after using a charcoal paste or powder.

Traditional Teeth Whitening May Be a Better Option

Teeth whitening treatments that use hydrogen peroxide gel may be a better choice if you're concerned about enamel erosion or possible damage to your restorations. The gel safely breaks up pigments that cause stains, leaving your smile brighter and whiter. Over-the-counter whitening kits offer convenience but may take weeks or months to work. In contrast, professional whitening provides impressive results in about an hour.

Are your teeth dull and stained? Professional teeth whitening treatment brightens your smile safely and effectively. Call us today to schedule your whitening appointment.