



NO DOUBT you don't blink when you see a co-worker with a six-pack of rainbow-colored juices lining her desk every day for a week. It's now normal. But have you spotted anyone downing liquefied charcoal? As strange as it sounds, drinking (or popping capsules of) activated charcoal is the detox du jour. "Charcoal isn't absorbed by the body—it goes in, clings to poisons and toxins, then moves out—that's the beauty of it and why it's in all of our cleanses," says Danielle Charboneau, director of operations at Juice Served Here, the hottest juicery in Los Angeles.

First things first: What is activated charcoal? Essentially it's negatively charged carbon that's treated with oxygen to create a natural magnet for positively charged toxins that may be lining your digestive tract, attracting anything from "pesticides on nonorganic veggies, dioxins on fish from contaminated waters, and even neurotoxins from breathing in mold," explains integrative physician Jeffrey Morrison, founder of the Morrison Center in New York.

Activated carbon is unique (compared to, say, the kind you light up in your barbecue) in that it contains tons of tiny pores that allow it to act like a super sponge as soon as it hits your digestive tract. Your Brita water filter is filled with it. It's also used to line gas masks and as a lifesaver in the ER for patients who've had toxin exposure or who have overdosed on drugs. It has long been a staple as well at health food stores for nausea and bloating. But recently the charcoal craze has started going gangbusters. Juice Served Here has positioned its signature Charcoal Lemonade (alkaline water, charcoal, clay, lemon, and sugarcane juice) as part of every one of its cleanses. And New York's Juice Generation has debuted three charcoal-based juices, including Activated Greens (charcoal with spinach, kale, parsley, celery, romaine, apple, and cucumber). "You're feeding your body two pounds of greens and activating a detox, so it's dual purpose," says Juice Generation founder Eric Helms, who suggests drinking the blend (which contains two teaspoons of activated charcoal) daily.

Chelsea Matthews, 31, says she drinks Juice Served Here's Charcoal

Lemonade twice a week religiously. "It's perfect when I feel sluggish." Anita Gatto, 32, says it's her Sunday ritual post-Spin class and her way of detoxing "without having to commit to a full cleanse." As for the odd black hue? "When I look at it, I feel like I can taste more of the charcoal, but when I close my eyes it's just lemonade," she adds. Another benefit is a flatter belly: "I'm not as bloated."

But it's not only the juicing crew who are committed to the effects of charcoal. Shiva Rose, creator of the all-natural-lifestyle blog [thelocalrose.com](http://thelocalrose.com), swears by pouring the contents of charcoal capsules into a glass of water while traveling, to calm her stomach after an indulgent dinner or to clear away any traces of bacteria in the drinking water. (Her pick: Country Life Activated Charcoal, \$12.99.)

And some women are even opting for charcoal to alleviate the aftermath of a few margaritas. Lauren Wolk-Goldfaden, 31, says that Juice Served Here's Charcoal Lemonade is her "go-to hangover cure" to nix nausea and dehydration. Milissa Sears, 33, pops charcoal pills "whenever

## THE NEW DETOX: CHARCOAL

*Cleansing fans are dropping their go-to green juice for charcoal pills and brews.*

*Nicole Catanese investigates.*

"I've had one cocktail too many." Unfortunately, it will not absorb the alcohol, says Morrison, "but it will help absorb acids and other toxins."

So is this new trend a health game changer? "It's a shotgun approach," says Donald D. Hensrud, an internist at the Mayo Clinic, in Rochester, Minnesota, who notes that there's currently no data that shows charcoal should be used other than therapeutically, for poisoning. And the biggest concern by skeptics: Activated charcoal can't tell the difference between sucking up nutrients and toxins, says Hensrud.

Morrison, however, is pro charcoal—but for a calculated (translation: not every day) digestive tract overhaul. "The best time to take charcoal is anytime you feel 'toxic,'" says Morrison, who recommends 500 milligrams. "After a night of too much food or alcohol or just for general maintenance seasonally." The good news: You can't OD on it.

Fans like Gatto say that they aren't quitting charcoal anytime soon: "Drinking it just feels like a detox." ■