

Charcoal

Coal, carbon, charcoal—whatever label it bears, this porous black matter serves as an extremely effective skin detoxifier.

It may seem counterintuitive to slather your clients' skin in a substance that resembles dirt, but charcoal is quite the pore cleanser. This natural residue has chemical properties that turn its molecules into miniature lures, capable of pulling a wide range of impurities out of a variety of surfaces. Here's the scoop on what exactly charcoal is, and why it's such a hot skincare ingredient right now.

QUICK FACTS:

- Carbon (or charcoal) is a residue of organic matter that's produced from carbonaceous sources such as nutshells, coconut husks, peat, wood and coal when they're burned in the absence of oxygen.
- Activated charcoal is capable of absorbing up to 1,000 times its weight.
- Charcoal pills are often taken orally to help with gas pains, upset stomachs, intestinal infections or indigestion.
- Charcoal can be used to purify beverages and other liquids.



QUICK FACT:

Carbon turns to activated charcoal either through a chemical process, in which chemicals (such as phosphoric acid, potassium hydroxide, calcium chloride or zinc chloride) are added to the raw carbon; or via a physical process, in which the carbon is exposed to gases, oxygen and/or steam at extremely high temperatures. Once charcoal reaches its activated form, it becomes a fine, black, odorless and tasteless powder.

Why it's a skincare all-star:

Activated charcoal doesn't absorb toxins from the skin, it *adsorbs* them—meaning that all of the positively charged oil, dirt and bacteria in your clients' skin will stick to negatively charged charcoal particles. Because the substance is so effective at picking up micro-particles, charcoal cleansers, masks and peels can be used to address skincare issues ranging from clogged pores and acne to excessively oily complexions.

In the treatment room:

At SenSpa in San Francisco, the China Rose Detox (90 min./\$230) begins with a full body exfoliation using Daily Concepts' Konjac Charcoal Sponge. "Konjac serves as a super-absorbent sponge, while charcoal works like a magnet to pull oil and toxins out of the skin—combining them is the perfect way to remove impurities and dead skin cells," explains Daily Concepts founder Emilio Smeke. SenSpa's outreach manager Terri Eaton reports that clients are equally fond of these powerhouse ingredients. "They really feel how charcoal helps exfoliate and prime their skin for the rest of the service," she says.

Charcoal is equally effective on the complexion, according to David Gutierrez, manager at Face Haus in West Hollywood, California, who reaches for the charcoal-based Éminence Balancing Masque Duo in his treatment rooms. "Clients are surprised the formula includes charcoal because it's very creamy and has a really soft, fresh scent," he says. The spa uses the mask in its De-Pimp My Ride Facial (40 min./\$55) and as a \$10 Pore Me enhancement. "After a client experiences the mask, they almost always request it on their next visit!" he reports.

Jennifer Olson, owner and lead esthetician of Chicago-based Spa Soak, particularly likes charcoal as a peel ingredient. "Chemical peels can be harsh on clients' skin, but the Bioelements Glycolic Detox Charcoal Peel provides an incredible exfoliation with almost no downtime," explains the pro. "I know my regular clients' skin well, and often I want to be more aggressive, but I obviously don't want to hurt them or cause irritation. This charcoal peel is the perfect happy medium." 🍷

QUICK FACT:

Activated charcoal has other beauty industry purposes: It's a bleach alternative that whitens teeth, and can be used to rid hair of toxins and relieve scalp conditions.



CHARCOAL SKIN CARE



Dermalogica Charcoal Rescue Masque
dermalogica.com



Éminence Balancing Masque Duo
eminenceorganics.com



Daily Concepts Your Konjac Sponge
dailyconcepts.com



Gena PeditSpa Detox Black Charcoal Foot Soak
genaspaproducts.com



GLAMGLOW SuperMud Clearing Treatment
glamglow.com



Bioelements Glycolic Detox Charcoal Peel
bioelements.com