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Moscow Lifehack: What Are Those Weird Black Pills My Russian Boyfriend Tosses Back for an Upset Stomach?

By The Moscow Times

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Ah, the little black pills. You might not know what they are, but your parents or grandparents probably do. And you should know, too, since they are essential part of every medical cabinet.

These are activated charcoal tablets, sold for a few rubles in strips of ten in every drugstore. They are not the same thing as the charcoal you light up and grill on at the dacha. This charcoal has been cleaned and heated to make it more adsorptive.

Yes, that's right: adsorptive. That means that when you gulp the pills down, they attract all kinds of toxins, which become stuck (adsorbed) on the many pores on the surface of the charcoal. Then, the nasty stuff that has been making you feel queasy sails happily out of your system onboard the good ship charcoal.

This is what you grab when you ate something you shouldn't have, like dodgy street food or

market shashlik that had seen better days: Take the whole strip of them with lots of water. It will even work to neutralize an overdose of aspirin or acetaminophen. Swallow a handful of pills — up to 100 grams — with water right away.

Although it does not soak up alcohol, it can adsorb some of the impurities and toxins you imbibe along with it, like some of the chemicals in mixers. Take some before going to bed and another batch in the morning.

It is also very effective for soothing an upset stomach or taking care of the other embarrassing sounds and smells that come from a night of excess.

Another traditional use: as toothpaste. Yes, scrubbing your teeth with black coal dust from a few smashed pills actually cleans them better than the white stuff in the tube. Dip a wet toothbrush into the dust, scrub, rinse and repeat twice a week.

Take it out to the dacha, too. If you get bitten by mosquitoes or stung by a bee, smash a tablet in a teaspoon or so of vegetable oil and slather on the bite or sting, where it will pull out some of the toxins.

The bottom line: Activated charcoal is the best thing you never knew you needed.

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