

Baking Soda Dos and Don'ts

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Is there really a miracle product sitting in the back of your fridge -- something cheap that can zap bad smells, keep your [teeth](#) sparkly white, and even treat life-threatening diseases?

Yes. That box of [baking soda](#), also known as bicarbonate of soda (or [sodium bicarbonate](#)), can do some major things.

Its superpowers come from a two-letter term: pH. That stands for “power or potential of hydrogen” to make something either an acid or a base (alkaline). Baking soda is an alkaline substance. When it mixes with an acid, it alters the pH level. That’s why it can quickly soothe an [upset stomach](#) or cover a bad smell.

Baking Soda Dos

You can use it to:

- **Calm [indigestion](#):** Add 1/4 teaspoon of baking soda to a glass of water to zap acid in your [stomach](#). But acid doesn’t cause all kinds of [indigestion](#), so if your symptoms don’t improve after 2 weeks, call your doctor.
- **Don’t take baking soda within 2 hours of other [medications](#).** When the baking soda lowers stomach acid, it can slow the rate at which your body absorbs some medicines and change the way others work. Don’t give it to a child under 6 unless your pediatrician tells you to.
- **Treat insect bites and stings:** While it isn’t good for everyday use on your [skin](#), it can soothe the redness, [itching](#), and stinging that are signs of a mild reaction to an [insect bite](#). Many over-the-counter creams contain baking soda. You can also make your own paste of one part baking soda to three parts water. This also works for [poison ivy](#) and [rashes](#).
- **Keep your mouth healthy:** Brushing your [teeth](#) with [toothpaste](#) that has baking soda can hold off [tooth](#) decay and keep your gums and [mouth](#) in good shape. A half-teaspoon of baking soda mixed in a glass of water can also freshen your breath.
- **Control odors:** Most bad smells come from either strong acids (think sour milk) or bases (like spoiled fish). When you add baking soda and change the pH balance, the odors in your fridge or your carpet come into a neutral state. Try it for yourself. Put an open box of baking soda in your fridge. Sprinkle it over the layers of garbage in your trash can or toss it into the bottom of your dishwasher.
- **Help [chemotherapy](#) work:** While no scientific studies have found that baking soda cures [cancer](#), research does show that it can help some [cancer](#) treatments work better. Some [chemotherapy](#) drugs need alkaline conditions. Others become more toxic in an acid environment. That’s why some doctors suggest using some form of sodium bicarbonate for best treatment results. Your oncologist can tell you if your drugs will get a boost from baking soda.
[Mouth](#) and throat changes are common chemo side effects. If this happens to you, rinse your mouth three times daily with a mixture of 1 cup warm water, 1/4 teaspoon baking soda, and 1/8 teaspoon salt, followed by a rinse with plain water.
- **Treat [kidney disease](#):** A daily dose of sodium bicarbonate can help people whose [kidneys](#) can no longer remove enough acid from their [blood](#).

Baking Soda Don'ts

Sometimes you should leave the box on the shelf. Here are some things baking soda won’t do.

- **Soothe your skin:** Your body’s largest organ is slightly acidic. This helps it hang on to moisture and keeps harmful bacteria out of your body. But if you have sensitive skin, you’re likely to find alkaline substances irritating.
- **Style your [hair](#):** Some people skip shampoo and use a mixture of baking soda and [apple cider vinegar](#) on their [hair](#). Over time this will make a bad hair day worse. Like your scalp, your hair is naturally acidic. Baking soda might shine your locks up at first, but over time it’ll cause frizz, tangles, and breaks. Read more about [why you should avoid using a baking soda shampoo](#).
- **Boost athletic performance:** You might hear about runners drinking a large amount of baking soda before a race or meet. This is called soda loading, and it can make you sick if you get too much too often.

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