
SHOWDOWN:

Electric vs. Manual Toothbrushes

There's a breed of person who drives a stick shift, uses a push mower and prefers sailboats to motorboats. When faced with the choice of a toothbrush, that purist will certainly choose the dependable, disposable, do-it-yourself toothbrush. But what about those of us who swear by Blackberries, iPods and TiVo? We want the latest, greatest gadget and we're convinced that an electric toothbrush must be better than its manual counterpart... right?

It turns out there's not much difference. WebMD.com cites "a review of nearly 30 studies" that was unable to determine a significant difference in plaque removal between electric and manual toothbrushes. (Some research did find that electric toothbrushes performed slightly better, but only if the electric toothbrush was of the "rotation-oscillation" variety, in which the bristles both rotate and move side-to-side.)

So if electric and manual toothbrushes are so similar in plaque removal rates, how should you decide which is best for you? Here are a few factors to consider:



Your budget. Electric toothbrushes are pricier. However, while high-end options can cost upwards of \$100, you can find some in the \$10 range. Remember that you may need to add the cost of batteries and replacement brushes to your toothbrush budget.

Your dexterity. People who have limited manual dexterity – including the very young, the elderly, or those suffering from injury or arthritis – may find that an electric toothbrush allows them to reach spots that would otherwise be difficult or impossible.

Your habits. If you have a hard time brushing regularly, and you find you enjoy the sensation of brushing with an electric toothbrush, then by all means use the brush that will encourage you to brush most often.

Your patience. Many people are in too much of a hurry to brush for the full two minutes recommended (or they simply forget to watch the clock). Some electric brushes come with a timer that helps enforce the proper length of brushing.



Regardless of what type of toothbrush you choose, it's important to use it correctly. Brush twice a day, for two minutes each time. Cover the inner, outer and top surfaces of your teeth, and brush all the way down to the gum line. Don't forget the hard-to-reach areas in the back of your mouth.

Don't make the mistake of thinking an electric toothbrush will do the work for you; you still need to guide it around every bit of enamel you possess in order to stave off plaque and bacteria.

And remember that while brushing and flossing daily will help you maintain good oral health, regular professional cleanings are vital to keeping your teeth in tip-top shape.

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