

Power to the toothbrush



Can you do without one? Here's what you need to know.

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THE ELECTRIC TOOTHBRUSH has been with us for over half a century, and has established itself as something truly useful, unlike some other inventions we can get by without, like electric can openers and self-lowering toilet seats. Most of us brush our teeth on autopilot, using little thought or exertion. But designers and manufacturers of electric toothbrushes have brought high technology, and sometimes prices, to the seemingly simple art of keeping our teeth clean.

Electric toothbrushes can be divided into two basic camps, operated by a disposable or a rechargeable battery. The former, the cheapest, usually use a single AAA or AA battery.

With some models you just throw the whole thing out when the battery or bristles have died, as the brush head may not be replaceable. The ones with a bench or wall-mounted recharging unit are generally more sophisticated, have replaceable brush heads and theoreti-

cally should last for some years. Battery-operated toothbrushes start from around \$8.62 in supermarkets and pharmacies. Colgate's Kids Advanced SpinBrush, for example, with a small rotating head and a choice of handles including a princess, astronaut and ice cream cone, costs \$7.95 through a Bondi Junction, Sydney pharmacy.

The same chemist offers the more adult-oriented, battery-operated Colgate SpinBrush Pro-Clean, described as having dual-action brush-head technology and micro cleaning bristles, for \$9.95. At The Shaver Shop, a national franchise, you can buy Oral B battery-powered toothbrushes for \$12.95 and \$14.95.

Then there are the rechargeable models. The Shaver Shop offers 9 different Oral B electric toothbrushes, ranging in price from \$29.95 through to a financial cavity-inducing \$189.95 for the Oral B Triumph with Smart Guide. That comes with a separate wireless monitor that lets you know not only how long to brush (two minutes is recommended), but whether you are brushing too hard or too softly!

Another cost you need to consider is the replaceable brush heads. Colgate offers a pair of brush heads for around \$7.99, but these can only be used with the more expensive products in their range. A twin pack of Oral-B brush heads can be bought from around \$18.

A key question is whether any of this oral gadgetry is really worth our money, compared with the old-fashioned cheap manual toothbrush, which can be bought in supermarkets

from around \$2. The Australian Dental Association (ADA) says that electric toothbrushes can have their benefits, especially for children and the aged. Consumer group Choice says that up until recently electric toothbrushes were mostly considered no more effective than manual ones.

However, it is now thought that one type of electric toothbrush - a rotating oscillation powered brush, where the brush alternately rotates in each direction, as opposed to simply vibrating - may give you a better clean than a manual brush.

Research quoted by Melbourne dental practice The Smile Team agreed that while (oscillating) electric toothbrushes can do a better job than manual ones, for most people the improvement is "just going to be modest". Using an oscillating head toothbrush instead of a manual one, the amount of extra plaque removed is about 7%, while the amount of gingivitis is reduced by about 17%.

The Smile Team adds that a balanced diet, brushing more thoroughly and flossing daily will make a bigger difference to minimising decay and gum disease than changing to a power toothbrush alone. ☺

ELECTRIC TOOTHBRUSHES

MODEL	POWER SOURCE	PRICE
Colgate 360 microSonic	battery	\$8.62 ¹
Oral-B Pulsar 40	battery	\$9.80 ¹
Oral-B Cross Action Power Max	battery	\$26.94 ¹
Tiffany Electric Toothbrush	rechargeable, wall unit	\$29.95 ²
Sunbeam SensAction Plaque Remover	rechargeable, wall unit	\$39.95 ³

Sources: ¹www.bestpricedirectory.com.au; ²www.shavershop.com.au; ³www.beautyhaven.com.au