

Hard bristles or soft, electric or manual? We give the bestselling toothbrushes a check-up

Come clean...do you really know how to brush your teeth?

ALAMY / CHRIS BALL



Pink toothbrush? Blue toothbrush? If only it were that simple. Choosing one to clean your teeth involves browsing through an overwhelming choice of dozens of different brands. Do you need a flexible head or vibrating rubber bristles? What about a double-headed electric toothbrush – is that better than a single-headed manual toothbrush? To answer these questions and more, we took DR MONICA MATSEKE, above, a dentist from the SE1 Dental Centre in South London, toothbrush shopping. Here, she gives her professional verdict on ten of the most popular toothbrushes on the market

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BOOTS SMILE 99p for two

The head of this toothbrush is too big. I don't know why manufacturers make them like this – maybe it makes customers feel as if they're cleaning more of the tooth. The ideal head of a toothbrush should be only about a centimetre in diameter. You need to be able to brush one tooth at a time.



ORAL-B TRIUMPH 9500 ELECTRIC £109.99 but currently on offer at £54.99 in select Boots stores.

Nearly every clinical trial shows that electric toothbrushes are more efficient at cleaning teeth. You simply hold the head over each tooth for a few seconds and let it do the work. I'm a big fan. Investing money in a good brand such as this won't be a false economy. This has 8,800 side-to-side movements and 40,000 pulsations per minute. This is good because the surface of the tooth is not flat and you're more likely to reach pits and fissures. Pulsations also work the bristles right between the teeth. It has an indicator that switches off the power if you press too hard, which is important because many people brush too hard, causing irreversible damage to the gums.



COLGATE 360 SENSITIVE SOFT £3.49

If I were to buy a manual toothbrush today, this would be it. It's not too expensive, it has a nice grip and claims its bristles are 48 per cent softer than standard. Plaque is soft, so you don't need hard or even medium bristles to brush it away. The brush's raised cleaning tip provides good access to the back of the mouth. However its soft, rubber polishing cups that supposedly remove stains are a gimmick. Only brushing will get rid of them.



BOOTS CLEAN AND FRESH RECHARGEABLE £12.99

A great introduction to electric toothbrushes. It's not too



By Caroline Bellamy

expensive and has 8,000 revolutions per minute – a perfectly acceptable speed but then, there's no good or bad speed for revolutions. A UK study by the Cochrane Oral Health group found that only rotation oscillation brushes performed any better than manual brushes when used for the same length of time. Electric toothbrushes are great for older people and those with disabilities such as arthritis because they're larger and therefore easier to hold.

ORAL-B VITALITY PRO WHITE ELECTRIC £24.95

This brush is quite gimmicky. It has a 'polishing cup' in the centre of the bristles in which you can put your toothpaste. It claims to help naturally whiten your teeth. If you want your teeth whitened you have to have it done professionally – your brush won't make them whiter. I do like the fact that the head is small and that it is compatible with other brush heads.



PHILLIPS SONICARE STYLE £99.99

A perfectly good electric toothbrush if you can afford it. It has extra-gentle bristles. It automatically shuts off after the 'recommended' two-minute brushing time, but you should brush for longer than that. A good dentist or hygienist should tell you how long to clean for. The brush also signals when to start cleaning each quadrant of your mouth – again, not a good idea. Only your dentist or hygienist can tell you how long you should spend on each part of your mouth and it varies from person to person. A better idea is to use disclosing tablets that show up the plaque remaining in your mouth.



ORAL-B VITALITY DUAL CLEAN £24.95

Quite a few toothbrushes now have dual heads like this one. The manufacturers claim that two moving brushes give twice the cleaning action but I fail to see the benefit. In fact, some people who have a strong reflux action may actually gag using an electric toothbrush such as this. But it's not



too expensive and you can swap the head if you want. Oral B is a good brand for the very reason that there are dozens of heads to choose from.

AQUAFRESH FLEX TOOTH AND TONGUE £2.49

This has a ridged back for brushing your tongue and supposedly freshening your breath. It claims to remove five times as much bacteria as normal brushing. While it's true that some of the bacteria that cause bad breath lurk on the tongue, the effect is temporary. But brushing the tongue can be very helpful for smokers who can develop a 'hairy tongue'. What is also great about this toothbrush is the flexible head. This absorbs excess pressure from brushing, helping to reduce damage to the gum.



WISDOM STEP BY STEP 0-2 YEARS – £1.69

Anything that encourages children to brush their teeth from an early age has to be a good thing. Children should be given toothbrushes before their first tooth comes through. They can practise holding the brush and rub it along their gums to keep them healthy, relieve the itch when a tooth is coming through, and get used to the brushing action. This one has a nice broad grip making it easy for both child and parent to handle. The textured handle has little rubber nodules so the child can chew it and encourage more teeth to come through. It has super-soft bristles that won't damage the gum.



ORAL B STAGES POWER £2.29

A super way to introduce children to electric toothbrushes. And they will love the toy handles, which come in a range of Disney characters. The brush is easy to handle and its bristles are soft. It has a raised centre row of bristles, which clean the chewing surfaces of the teeth. Again however, I'm not sure why manufacturers feel the need to make it a dual-head – a single head would be more appropriate, especially for a child's mouth and milk teeth.

