



# Hair straighteners

## NEED TO KNOW

Hair straighteners are one of the most popular styling appliances around at the moment, as they can help your hair achieve the look favoured by celebrities on the red carpet: shiny, healthy and groomed.

Most straighteners consist of two hot metal or glass plates that you clamp together on sections of dry hair, running them smoothly from root to tip.

You shouldn't hold the hair for more than two or three seconds and you must make sure the plates don't come into contact with your scalp.

Straighteners should never be used in the bathroom, near water or with wet hands. They also work at extremely high temperatures (up to about 200°C), so you have to be careful not to leave the appliance on heat-sensitive surfaces.

### CURLY TO STRAIGHT

Many of the straighteners we tested can help you achieve a fantastically straight look, even if your hair is naturally really curly. But beware – all those models that achieved an immaculate finish will cause a fair bit of damage to your hair with repeated use. So you might prefer to save them for special occasions only.

### STRAIGHT TO CURLY

Most straighteners can also be used to achieve wavy styles – you plait or twist your hair and then press with the hot plates.

### SWIVEL CORD

For maximum flexibility, a straightener with a long, swivelling cord, such as the one on this Vidal Sassoon or Morphy Richards (3), is ideal. The swivel cord will make it less easy to knock the straightener over when it's resting on a flat surface, as the cord will rotate into the right position. The extra cord length will allow you more room to stand up, easily reach round to the back of your head, or move away from a socket to see your reflection in a mirror better. All of our Best Buys have swivel cords.

### BEST BUYS

All three of our Best Buys are safe and easy to use. Two of them will give you a flawless finish but are likely to frazzle your hair if you use them every day. The other one will give you a pretty good finish but is a lot kinder to your locks. The non-Best Buys fall down on either finish or hair damage.

All the Best Buys are available for £35 or less, which is great news, as the most expensive models on test cost twice that or more.

One of the best models is the JML (1) and, if poker-straight hair is what's important to you, then this is a great buy. It has a 'salon'-quality look and gave a perfect finish. It also has good temperature controls so you can finely adjust the setting to whichever suits your hair best, a great feature for those with fine hair. The only niggles are that cord length is rather short and it's easy to knock the on/off switch during use. But it's a bargain at £20 from Woolworths.

Equally good is the Vidal Sassoon (2), £35 from Argos. It'll give you a finish that is just as fabulous and it's really easy to use and comes with a useful holdall. Our expert described this model as having a quality

### SCORE

Ignores price and is based on:

Expert assessment	55%
Performance	20%
Hair damage	20%
Safety	5%

### KEY



feel and a professional look as well as giving top-class results. If you want to achieve an immaculate look once in a while, this is a great purchase.

The Morphy Richards (3) is kind to your hair and gives a pretty good finish, too, making this a great

## Hair straighteners

### MODEL

- 1 JML Titanium
- 2 Vidal Sassoon Pro-elite
- 3 Morphy Richards Head Gear
- 4 Models1 Portfolio
- 5 Nicky Clarke Super Smoothing
- 6 Braun Professional
- 7 BaByliss Professional Slim
- 8 Tresemmé Pro Ceramic
- 9 BaByliss Adee & Paul
- 10 Remington Professional Slim
- 11 Mark Hill Morphy Richards Pro
- 12 Boots Smooth Out
- 13 Nicky Clarke Pro Ceramic
- 14 BaByliss Thermaglass Slim
- 15 Remington Wet 2 Straight
- 16 Vidal Sassoon Classic
- 17 Braun Cordless



## 2 Vidal Sassoon

### ADJUSTABLE HEAT SETTING

Some manufacturers advise that you try the lowest heat setting on the straightener first to find out which is the most suitable for your hair. For example, if your hair is fine, you may find it doesn't need as much heat to straighten it as thick hair does, so a variable heat setting means you can use a lower temperature, lessening the risk of hair damage. This JML has a button that increases the temperature each time you press it, and the Vidal Sassoon (2) has a dial. Some models, however, have only one heat setting.



An adjustable heat setting gives you more control

### USING THE TABLE

We tested 19 straighteners, including as many high-street brands and salon market-leaders as possible. GHD was in the process of updating its best-selling model during our test period so we couldn't include this.

### Specification

**Price** For Best Buys we give the cheapest widely available high-street price as we went to press. Prices for other models are a guide to what you should expect to pay. **On/off switch** If it doesn't have an on/off switch, you'll have to turn your straightener off at the socket. A switch allows you to turn the straightener off if you need to set it down during use. However, you shouldn't leave the appliance plugged in after use as you might accidentally leave it switched on. **Adjustable heat setting** See box, left. **Swivel cord, Cord length** See box, far left. **Extras supplied** The accessories that come with the straighteners. Clips are used to section off strands of hair. **Weight** The straighteners were weighed without their cord or their plug.

### Performance

**Heating and cooling times** How long it took each straightener to reach its maximum temperature on the lowest, middle and highest settings if present. We also tested how long the straightener took to cool down, and how much the temperature fluctuated. The better the rating, the quicker it heated and cooled, and the less the temperature fluctuated. **Temperature controls** The difference between the lowest, middle and highest settings. The greater the difference between the temperatures, the higher the score. **Hair damage** We used each straightener 100 times along strands of hair. Experts used highly magnified photos to assess how much the hair was damaged compared with untreated hair.

### Expert view

**Ease of use** The straighteners lost points if they were too heavy or caused any snagging in the hair, or the cord length was too short. **Finish** Straighteners scored highly if they produced a sleek, straight, glossy look, without frizz or static.

Specification							Performance			Expert view		Score
Price (£)	On/off switch	Adjustable heat setting	Swivel cord	Cord length (cm)	Extras supplied	Weight (g)	Heating and cooling times	Temp controls	Hair damage	Ease of use	Finish	(%)
20	✓	✓	✓	196	none	256	☹	☆	☹	★	★	73
35	✓	✓	✓	303	holdall	202	☹	○	☹	★	★	73
35	✓		✓	277	clips & bag	305	☹	n/a	★	☆	☆	72
20	✓			305	pouch	247	☹	n/a	☆	★	☆	69
30	✓	✓	✓	302	none	325	○	○	★	★	○	69
50	✓	✓	✓	202	none	163	☹	●	●	★	★	67
20	✓		✓	197	none	195	☹	n/a	○	☆	☆	64
70	✓	✓		295	none	378	☆	○	★	☹	○	64
30	✓	✓		309	clips & stand	262	☆	☆	☹	○	☆	63
35	✓	✓		300	bag	291	☆	☹	☹	☆	☆	63
40	✓	✓	✓	302	none	240	☹	○	☹	☆	☆	61
13			✓	192	none	204	☹	n/a	☹	○	☆	57
25			✓	201	clips & heat mat	269	●	n/a	☹	☆	☆	56
50	✓	✓		279	stand	194	☆	○	☆	○	☹	49
80	✓	✓	✓	303	bag	370	☹	○	☹	☹	○	42
15			✓	179	none	217	☹	n/a	○	○	☹	38
28	✓		n/a	n/a	gas cartridges	239	☹	n/a	☆	☹	☹	35

## HAIR STRAIGHTENERS

BEST  
BUY

### 3 Morphy Richards

#### ACCESSORIES

Some straighteners come with extras such as clips, bags, mats, holdalls and stands. This Morphy Richards comes with clips and a bag. Some models, such as the Remingtons (10, 15) have a heat-proof bag in which you can put your straighteners to cool after using them.

A heat-proof bag is a practical storage idea

purchase if you want to straighten your hair regularly with minimal damage. It also comes with handy sectioning clips and a bag. So, if your daughter's nagging you for a set of straighteners for Christmas, this bright-pink model, £35 from independents, should be perfect.

#### OTHER OPTIONS

One of the models we tested, the Remington Wet 2 Straight (15), is specifically for

achieving a straight finish from wet hair while drying it at the same time. However, the finish it achieved just couldn't compete with our Best Buys.

We also tested a cordless model, the Braun (17). This could be handy for touching up your style while you're out and about but we wouldn't recommend it as your regular straightener – the finish just isn't good enough and it's awkward to use compared with many other models.

## Testing



Top stylist Ciona Johnson at work

We asked a specialist laboratory to test the straighteners for heating and cooling times, efficiency of temperature controls, hair damage and safety.

We also asked A-list stylist Ciona Johnson, GMTV's beauty specialist, to help us assess the straighteners for ease of use and finish. Ciona, who's more used to working her magic on the likes of Gwyneth Paltrow and Cameron Diaz, used 16 volunteers with different hair types. She tested each straightener on at least two people. Our Best Buy straighteners produced great results on even the curliest hair.



The straighteners transformed this volunteer's hair



## Hair damage

Barry Stevens, Registrar of the Trichological Society, told us: 'Clamping hair shafts between two hot plates is potentially harmful. Careless or excessive use can result in dehydration and hair breakage.'

To find out whether some products damage your hair more than others, we tested them all on strands of real hair and took a close-up look at the results.

Each straightener was set to its highest setting, then used along the length of the hair 100 times. Hairs were examined and photographed under a scanning electron microscope (which magnifies 750 times) and compared with untreated hairs. The worst offenders inflicted some really nasty



Left: a normal hair. Right: a hair showing damage from use of straighteners

damage to the hair, tearing and breaking parts of the hair shaft.

According to Barry, conditioners and serums won't give you much protection, either. 'They'll cover up the damage – but the only way to maintain lustrous hair is to avoid damaging it in the first place,' he told us. Burning your scalp with a straightener can also cause scar tissue to form, which can stop hair growth in that area.

So if you love your hair straight but don't want to ruin it, it might be best to save the straighteners for weddings and hot dates.

## Safety concerns

The design of hair straighteners makes them too complicated to earth, so it's a legal requirement that they have insulation to prevent live parts, such as the wires that power the heater, coming into contact with touchable metal surfaces such as the hot plates or exposed screws.

We tested all the straighteners for electrical safety at our lab and found that in two models – the Hai Stik Ceramic Pressing Iron and the T3 Tourmaline Wet-to-Dry Iron – the insulation wasn't sufficient. This means that the straighteners could give you an electric shock while you're using them, which could be fatal. We

contacted the manufacturers with our findings and have asked them to recall these models. T3 is taking the issue seriously and is investigating our results. We were pleased to see that Guiltsharp, Hai Stik's UK distributor, has withdrawn this product. It has also made

efforts to contact all Hai Stik users to advise them to cease using it until the safety of the product has been established.

If you already own one of these models, stop using it and contact Guiltsharp for Hai Stik on 01274 533345 and SDL for T3 on 0845 230 9660.



Our electrical-safety tests revealed two models that could be dangerous