

Electric toothbrushes

We reveal three new Best Buy brushes – and how you can save money on pricey replacement brush heads

Many of us will be buying someone an electric toothbrush for Christmas, or have one on our own wishlist. They're popular gifts, and manufacturers launch new versions and special offers on top-of-the-range models at this time of year to encourage sales.

For example, the Best Buy Philips Sonicare HX6731/02 usually costs £120, but at the time of going to press we found it was on sale for £58 at John Lewis.

In our latest tests, the best rechargeable brushes outperformed the models that use ordinary batteries and have fixed heads – one of these, the Oral B Pulsar, had such a low score we have rated it as a Which? Don't Buy.

Rechargeable brushes are more expensive, however, and manufacturers will tell you that you need to replace the head every two to four months. New heads can cost around £6, so costs can mount up, even if the brush seems cheaper initially (see the chart, opposite).

We checked manufacturers' advice with our lab experts. They recommend that you should only replace heads when you see signs of wear.



Don't replace brush heads before you need to – only change them when you see splayed or worn-out bristles.

And always buy replacement brush heads in multi-packs – in some cases you can save up to £1 a head this way.

Philips Sonicare HX6902/02 £146

Which? test score **76%**

PROS Our top-scoring brush is easy to use – the soft-grip handle is comfortable, with anti-slip guards in the right places. Battery life is excellent (more than four weeks of brushing per charge). The brush has good cleaning potential and has three modes (standard, sensitive and massage for gums), an easy-start option, a timer and different brushing routines.

CONS A full charge takes 26 hours. It doesn't have a pressure sensor. You'll feel vibrations through the handle when you brush.

Full review

www.which.co.uk/sonicareHX690202

Brush type Side to side **Weight** 136g
Running time 2h 8min
We found it cheapest at* John Lewis (£97)
Also available at Argos, Boots, Comet

Philips Sonicare HX6731/02 £120

Which? test score **75%**

PROS This Sonicare toothbrush has good cleaning potential. Battery life is good – each charge gives you nearly four weeks of brushing. The brush has three modes (standard, sensitive, and cleaning and white), a comfortable soft-grip handle, a timer and an easy-start option (see p54). It comes with a travel cap and case.

CONS The brush doesn't have a pressure sensor, and it takes 24 hours to charge the battery fully. You'll feel vibrations through the handle when you brush.

Full review

www.which.co.uk/sonicareHX673102

Brush type Side to side **Weight** 149g
Running time 1h 47min
We found it cheapest at* John Lewis (£58)
Also available at* Argos (£59), Boots (£59), Comet (£60)

You'll get nearly five weeks of brushing per charge with the Sonicare HX6711/02

Philips Sonicare HX6711/02 £97

Which? test score **74%**

PROS Like the other two Best Buys, this model has a first-rate battery – you'll get nearly five weeks of brushing from each charge, and charging it is simple. Cleaning potential is good, the brush has a comfortable soft-grip handle, and it's easy to change the head. The brush also has an easy-start option and a timer.

CONS A full charge takes 25 hours, and you'll feel some vibrations through the handle when brushing. The brush doesn't have a pressure sensor.

Full review

www.which.co.uk/sonicareHX671102

Brush type Side to side **Weight** 147g
Running time 2h 18min
We found it cheapest at John Lewis
Also available at Argos, Boots

*Special offers at the time of going to press

THE COST OF USING AN ELECTRIC BRUSH

We compare the cost of two brushes over five years*

You can only use replacement brush heads made by your toothbrush's manufacturer. Philips says its heads (£6.50) aren't equivalent to Oral B's (£3.50) but there's no cheaper option so be aware of long-term costs.

	Cost of brush	Cost of heads over five years	Total cost
Philips HX6711/02	£97	£130	£227
Oral B Triumph 4000	£127	£70	£197

* Replacing the brush heads every three months as recommended by the manufacturers. Real costs may vary

 **Which.co.uk** Health and beauty

For full reviews of all the electric toothbrushes we test, go to www.which.co.uk/healthandbeauty. We also have test results online for electric shavers, men's and women's razors, hairdryers, sunscreens, anti-wrinkle eye creams, fitness gadgets and exercise equipment.



Don't Buy Oral B Pulsar, £6, 35%

The battery-powered Oral B Pulsar is a Don't Buy. It takes a single AAA battery, which is supplied. However, once the battery has run out you can't replace it, effectively making this a disposable brush.

Its battery life is well below average, at less than four hours. This gives you just two months of brushing. In comparison, the best non-rechargeable brush on test lasts for more than 16 hours, or eight months.

The brush has one speed and one mode. It doesn't have a timer or pressure sensor. Cleaning ability is poor, as the bristles don't move very far over your teeth.

Added to this, it's not an easy brush to use. It's comfortable enough – in fact, the soft-grip handle is one of the few things we can praise. However, our experts think that the instructions are poor.



Useful features

What to look out for when you choose a brush



■ **Easy-start option** All our Best Buy toothbrushes have this feature. The brush gently increases the power of the brushing over the first 14 uses to get your teeth used to it.

■ **Pressure sensor** Detects whether you're pressing too hard on your teeth. With the Oral B Triumph 4000 and the Oral B Professional Care 1000 you hear a change in the brush sound when you press too hard.

■ **Timers** These help to ensure you give your teeth the full two minutes of brushing they need.

■ **Soft-grip handles** Make brushes more comfortable to hold and use, and reduce the vibrations you feel.

■ **Travel cap** A cap that you pop over the brush head to protect it when you're travelling.

DO YOU NEED SPECIAL BRUSH HEADS?

We asked our lab experts for their views on different brushes



A whitening head



A flossing head



A dual-cleaning head

■ **Whitening/brightening** Brush heads with a rubber cup in the middle of the bristles. Manufacturers say this polishes your teeth.

■ **Flossing or getting in between teeth** Heads with bristles that can penetrate deep between teeth and mimic a flossing action, according to manufacturers.

■ **Dual-cleaning** Two sections move and clean your teeth in different ways.

■ **Cleaning your tongue** Brushes with roughened rubber on the back. Manufacturers claim that they remove bacteria from your mouth.

Our experts believe there isn't any compelling evidence that these brush heads are necessary. They said regular brushing and a good quality fluoride toothpaste are of the utmost importance.

PHOTOGRAPHY GETTY IMAGES, LLOYD STURDY

TOOTHBRUSH AND BRUSHING FAQs

We answer some common questions about keeping your teeth clean



Q Which kind of toothbrush is best?

A Rotation oscillation brushes have a head that rotates in one direction and then the other. Side-to-side and forward-and-backwards brushes vibrate sideways against your teeth rather than spinning. In terms of cleaning, scientific opinion on the best type varies. Our Best Buy recommendations also take into account ease of use and battery life.

Q What's the best way to keep my teeth healthy?

A Brush twice daily – last thing at night and on one other occasion – with fluoride toothpaste. Spit out excess toothpaste after brushing rather than rinsing, so you continue to get the benefit of the fluoride in the toothpaste. No particular brushing technique is better than another, but try to spend equal time on your upper and lower teeth and brush for two minutes in total.

Q Can children use electric toothbrushes?

A Electric toothbrushes are not recommended for children under three. If you're buying an electric brush for a child, check the packet to make sure it's suitable for their age. Children up to seven years old should be supervised when brushing their teeth.

Q What are interdental brushes and do I need to use them?

A Interdental brushes (such as TePe brushes) are only suitable if you have gaps between your teeth. You insert them into the spaces between your teeth at gum level to remove plaque and debris. They're better than dental floss, but they should be used only on the recommendation of your dentist or hygienist.



MODEL

RECHARGEABLE

PHILIPS Sonicare HX6902/02 Flexcare 900 Series

PHILIPS Sonicare HX6731/02 Healthy White

PHILIPS Sonicare HX6711/02 Healthy White

WISDOM Power Plus

ORAL B Triumph 4000

ORAL B Sonic Complete

ORAL B Professional Care 1000

ORAL B Vitality Sonic

ORAL B Vitality Dual Clean

ORAL B AdvancePower 900

IBP Sonic Plakaway B091

VISIQ Rechargeable Electric Toothbrush

NON-RECHARGEABLE

WISDOM Micropower Whitening ^b

COLGATE 360° Microsonic Power ^b

ORAL B Pulsar ^c

^a Comes with two heads, but replacements aren't available

www.which.co.uk

USING THE TABLE

The more stars the better.

Specification

Price For Best Buys we give the typical high-street price as we went to press, ignoring special offers. Prices for other products are a guide to what you should expect to pay.

Typical cost of standard replacement head

The cost of a replacement head, although many are sold in multi-packs and you can save money by buying this way. **n/a** means that the whole brush needs to be replaced.

Head Whether the brush head is fixed (F) or removable (R).

Brush type The different types of brush available. **RO** Rotation oscillation.

S Side to side. **FB** Forwards and backwards.

Length With brush head attached.

Features

Sonic It's claimed that the bristles on these brushes vibrate at sonic or ultrasonic frequencies against your teeth, to break down plaque. However, our dental experts are

sceptical and believe there is no proof that they remove plaque better than non-sonic brushes.

Timer A timer can help you brush for the right length of time – ideally two minutes.

Pressure sensor A pressure sensor detects when you press too hard on your teeth.

Test performance

Battery Based on total battery running time with new battery or full charge, and where applicable, time taken to charge. All battery-powered toothbrushes take 1x AAA battery.

Frequency of sweeps The number of times the bristles pass over your teeth per second. Higher scoring brushes move over teeth more often, potentially increasing cleaning ability.

Movement How far the brush bristles move over your teeth with each sweep (in theory, the more distance covered the better).

Ease of use Higher scoring brushes have the best instructions, are the easiest to use and charge, and are the most comfortable to hold.

Score

This ignores price and is based on:

Ease of use	35%
Battery performance	30%
Cleaning ability	30%
Brush head quality	5%

Our testing

Our cleaning ability test assesses the area each toothbrush covers when brushing. This gives us an indication of how well the toothbrush can clean without undertaking a full clinical trial. Our testing looks at other aspects of using an electric brush, such as battery life and ease of use, which we feel are also important in deciding which model is best.

Contacts

Colgate
00800 321 321 32
www.colgate.co.uk

IBP
01942 819695
www.ibphealthcare.com

Oral B
0800 731 1792
www.oral-b.com/en-UK

Philips
0845 601 0354
www.sonicare.co.uk

Visiq
0870 600 8784
www.argos.co.uk

Wisdom 01440 714800
www.wisdom-toothbrushes.co.uk

SPECIFICATION							FEATURES			BATTERY		TEST PERFORMANCE				SCORE (%)
PRICE (£)	TYPICAL COST (£) OF STANDARD REPLACEMENT HEAD	HEAD	BRUSH TYPE	LENGTH (cm)	WEIGHT (g)		SONIC	TIMER	PRESSURE SENSOR	RUNNING TIME (HR:MIN)	CHARGING TIME (HOURS)	BATTERY	FREQUENCY OF SWEEPS	MOVEMENT	EASE OF USE	
146	6.50	R	S	25	136		✓	✓		2:08	26	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★	76
120	6.50	R	S	25	149		✓	✓		1:47	24	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	75
97	6.50	R	S	25	147		✓	✓		2:18	25	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★	74
8	1.00	R	RO	21	109					1:33	16	★★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★	61
127	3.50	R	RO	25	177			✓	✓	1:17	10	★★★	★★	★★★	★★★★	60
86	4.00	R	S	25	155		✓	✓		1:07	16	★★★★	★★★★★	★	★★★★	60
59	3.50	R	RO	23	131			✓	✓	1:00	14	★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★	59
29	4.00	R	S	23	100		✓	✓		1:27	16	★★★★	★★★★	★	★★★★	57
29	4.00	R	RO, FB	22	116			✓		0:41	16	★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★	50
15	3.50	R	RO	22	109					1:03	16	★★★★	★	★★	★★★★	47
30	5.00	R	S	27	180		✓			1:23	24	★★★★	★★★★★	★	★★	47
10	See a	R	RO	22	100					1:00	16	★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★	43
5	n/a	F	S	20	37					16:12	n/a	★★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★	62
6	n/a	F	S	19	36		✓			11:52	n/a	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★	56
6	n/a	F	S, FB	20	33					3:46	n/a	★	★★★★	★★	★★★★	35

^b Battery is replaceable ^c Battery is not replaceable