

Power Toothbrushes

Parents often ask pediatric dentists if power toothbrushes are better than manual toothbrushes. As with many professional recommendations, the answer is "It all depends" and "Maybe yes, and maybe no".

Most of the popular brands of manual toothbrushes do a commendable job of removing dental plaque from teeth when used properly. Manual toothbrushes vary in head size, handle-grip size, and style of nylon bristles. Some of these variations are important in selecting the most appropriate brush for a child's age, dental condition, and level of dexterity. Practically speaking, the color of the brush and/or the cartoon character or logo imprinted in the handle, may weigh just as heavily in a youngster's motivation to use the brush.

However, since most children are rarely capable of brushing their teeth correctly, possibly due to improper technique or inadequate brushing time, the manual toothbrush is often more effective when an adult does the brushing for the child. These two concerns, technique and time, may make the power brush a better choice for your child.

There are a number of different designs and bristle motions on the market. Some brushes rotate, others oscillate or vibrate. These variations and differences in costs have caused some confusion. What is clear, however, is that most clinical studies have shown power brushing to be more effective in overall plaque removal and reducing gingival inflammation. Additionally, the novelty of using a power brush often encourages children to brush more frequently and for longer periods of time at each brushing session.

There are also reports that confirm a reduction in gingival trauma when power brushes are used. Apparently, the mechanical action reduces the brushing force when compared to manual action, therefore reducing the incidence of gingival bleeding due to soft tissue trauma. Getting the teeth clean while massaging the gums without causing trauma is the mark of good brushing -- whether manually or with a power brush.

Children also benefit from power toothbrushing because the head sizes are usually small, allowing for good access to all parts of the oral cavity and because the repetitive movement of the brush bristles almost guarantee a more thorough cleaning. Children with physical handicaps or low manual dexterity can especially benefit from power brushes. These same advantages apply to orthodontic patients as well. Power toothbrushes are especially helpful in removing food debris and plaque from around brackets, wires, and orthodontic appliances.

In general, power toothbrushes, whether electric or battery-operated, tend to have advantages over manual brushing in most cases. Greater plaque removal, decreased gingivitis, diminished brushing force, easy use and improved patient compliance, make them attractive choices to dentists and patients alike. Your dentist can recommend one that's just right for your child.

Dr. Eric Lebowitz is a pediatric dentist specializing in care for infants, children, and teens. He is in private practice in Kendall at Tooth Fairy-Land, located near Baptist Hospital. Questions about this topic can be directed to Dr. Lebowitz at (305) 279-4313. Dr. Lebowitz has been a resident of Pinecrest for over 20 years.

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