

# Brushing Technique More Important Than Type of Brush Used



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**Q: How do I use my new electric toothbrush that I got for Christmas?**

**A:** Ultrasonic toothbrushes, ultrasonic flossers, electric toothbrushes of all kinds, and conventional toothbrushes all make terrific stocking stuffers. However, most people do not actually know how to use them properly. Due to clever marketing strategies, misconceptions abound as to what type

of toothbrush is the most effective for brushing teeth.

The fact of the matter is that there probably is very little difference in effectiveness between one type of toothbrush and another. Most of the research used in marketing toothbrushes is based on isolated experiments funded by the company that is doing the advertising, which is obviously biased. Although the information may be somewhat useful for determining whether a product should be marketed to the public, it is not good for making a professional recommendation of one brand of toothbrush over another. Unbiased research would involve a controlled study that compares all of the types of toothbrushes to an established standard, such as a regular manual toothbrush, and then the information must be reproducible.

Most biased studies end up reporting that the effect of the marketed toothbrushes is the same as toothbrushing and flossing for most of the population. In essence, what they are saying is that electric toothbrushes are just as effective as

conventional toothbrushing.

No matter what type of toothbrush is being used, there is an established method of toothbrushing that is well accepted as the norm among dentists and dental hygienists, called the Modified Bass Brushing Technique. The toothbrush, whether manual or electric, should be angled so that the bristles point into the gumline at a 45 degree angle to the tooth. Starting at the same position in the mouth, usually the outside of the upper back tooth, each tooth should be brushed in tiny circles all the way around from the back to the front. Each tooth should be brushed in the same manner, on both the inside and out. The tops of the teeth, or chewing surfaces, should be scrubbed last. Afterwards, the teeth should be individually flossed.

Although we know that electric toothbrushes are not scientifically "better" than proper manual toothbrushing, there are some legitimate reasons to use an electric toothbrush. Manual dexterity can make brushing properly with a manual toothbrush difficult, and electric toothbrushes can make it

easier. Some electric toothbrushes have timers to conveniently inform the brusher when they have brushed "long enough." Other electric toothbrushes function in a rotary manner to assist those who cannot master this technique. Caution is wise, however, because some electric toothbrushes can damage certain type of dental work, like resin and porcelain.

It is always prudent to discuss any anticipated change in dental hygiene routines with a dental hygienist and dentist. They can help by providing education about the risks and benefits of using an electric toothbrush.

Usually, an electric toothbrush is a welcome adjunct to an effective home hygiene program.

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