

Talking with Patients

Mechanical Toothbrush

André V. Ritter, DDS, MS

WHAT IS IT?

The mechanical toothbrush, also known as the *power* or *electric toothbrush*, is powered by an energy source such as rechargeable or disposable batteries. Mechanical toothbrushes have rotating, oscillating, and/or pulsating heads and bristles, making toothbrushing easier.

Some models allow for periodic replacement of the brush “heads,” whereas more inexpensive models do not. Toothbrushing with a mechanical toothbrush is more effective than with a conventional manual toothbrush as it results in better removal of dental plaque and subsequently healthier teeth and gums. Additionally, mechanical toothbrushes, when used regularly, are effective in removing mild surface stains from teeth. Today mechanical toothbrushes are available in a range of models, with some costing little more than a regular toothbrush.

WHEN IS IT NEEDED?

The mechanical toothbrush is indicated particularly for patients who have difficulty using a regular manual toothbrush. Patients with limited dexterity, such as medically compro-

mised and/or senior individuals, benefit most from using a mechanical toothbrush to clean their teeth and gums. Mechanical toothbrushes also appeal to children. Manufacturers today offer units in distinctive colors and designs that make toothbrushing more fun for children.

Patients that smoke and/or drink beverages such as coffee, tea, and red wine benefit from the stain-removing qualities of a mechanical toothbrush, if it is used on a regular basis. Also, at least one clinical study showed that patients who used a mechanical toothbrush following bleaching treatment were better able to maintain the whitening results.

CONCLUSIONS

The mechanical toothbrush is a powered toothbrush whose vibrating, rotating, and/or oscillating heads and bristles facilitate toothbrushing. However, although dental cavities and gum disease are caused primarily by plaque buildup, effective toothbrushing is only one of the necessary steps of maintaining healthy teeth and gums. A balanced diet, flossing, and regular visits to the dentist for professional cleanings and checkups are also important for maintaining optimal oral health. The following photograph illustrates examples of commercially available mechanical toothbrushes.



Figure 1