

A photograph of a modern shower stall. The walls are covered in large, rectangular stone tiles in shades of grey, yellow, and brown. A hand-held shower unit is mounted on the wall, and a shower chair is visible in the background. The title "Singing in the Shower" is overlaid on the image in a large, stylized font.

Singing in the Shower

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A great hand-held shower unit hits the right note in any accessible bathroom.

The shower is something most of us use every day, and it can be a bit challenging when living in a wheelchair. The right handshower can make getting clean an easier and more enjoyable experience.

Ever since my spinal-cord injury (SCI) 13 years ago, I have appreciated the convenience of a handshower. This simple plumbing fixture allows me to shower independently from my shower chair. My husband and I have been shopping for a new handshower for the national demonstration home and garden we're building in Columbus, Ohio, the Universal Design Living Laboratory (udll.com).

I had the opportunity to check out the newest handshower models while speaking at the Decorative Plumbing and Hardware

Association national convention and trade show in Hollywood, Fla. The selection of styles and features on a handshower can be overwhelming. These are a few ideas and models that can help take a little of the guesswork out of selecting which one is right for you.

The Features

Handshowers have plenty of features to select from, but one of the first advantages I noticed in the new models was they felt much lighter in my hand than the nozzle I was currently using. The newer ABS plastic resin nozzles weigh about 3–6 ounces. Solid brass nozzles weigh 10–16 ounces.

Many grip sizes and materials are available to make a handshower easier to hold. Grip



The Levaqua hand-held shower head includes digital controls that provide a personalized experience at the push of a button.

options include indentations for your fingers and ribbed material, while the handle itself can be long, short, square, or round. The angles of the shower head vary between products, with an average of 45°.

Some shower faces are made of silicone or rubber, which make it easier to clean off calcium lime deposits from hard water. There are even handshowers that include a feature to help resist hard-water stains.

Shower heads come in a variety of sizes and shapes including round, square, and rectangular. A bigger shower head will provide a

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wider spray pattern, but a smaller one may not be ergonomic in your hand.

You can purchase a multifunction handshower with wide coverage, medium coverage, fine mist, forceful spray, and pulsating massage. As you shop, try switching the spray mode to see how easy it is. Most require you turn a dial by hand on the shower head. Look for those with a tab to help when turning the dial when your hands are wet and soapy.

A variety of designs are available from traditional to transitional to contemporary. Handshowers are available at a variety of price points from \$20 to \$1,900.

Save Money

A nice benefit to getting a new handshower is it could save you a few bucks in the long run.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (epa.gov) created the WaterSense

label used to identify water-efficient shower heads. The specification is that the maximum flow rate value of the shower head must be equal to or less than two gallons per minute. In addition to the water-efficiency criteria, WaterSense-labeled shower heads must meet three key performance attributes: flow rate across a range of pressures, spray force, and spray coverage.

By installing high-efficiency handshowers, the average household could save more than 2,300 gallons of water per year. Since these water savings will reduce demands on water heaters, households will also save on energy costs. These low-flow shower nozzles still have the power to get shampoo out of your hair.

The Hardware

When selecting a handshower, make sure the hose is insulated so it will not burn anyone using hot water. Also see how flexible it is to maneuver. The hose should be a minimum of 59 inches long to give enough room to maneuver the shower head. You can purchase shower hoses in 80- and 96-inch lengths, too.

It's a real advantage on the handshower I use to have a button that can pause the stream of water. This pause button can be purchased at a hardware store. If you prefer, you can buy a lever handle instead of a button. I also purchased a bracket to mount on the horizontal grab bar in my shower, as well as a bracket that mounts on the wall, so I could place the handshower in it while I was applying soap to my hair.

Check the ease of sliding the handshower on the vertical wall bar and locking it in place. Many slider options are available, including lever handles, push buttons, and knobs. Some slider bars have no knob or button; they simply are able to slide by moving the mounting unit up and down the vertical bar.

The Models

Jaclo (jaclo.com) has handshower models with a rubber ring by the shower face to turn the knob with your hand or you can rub the ring on your thigh. They also bring safety into the shower with their combination ADA-compliant adjustable-height handshower system

and grab bars. Be aware few vertical wall bars are sturdy enough to serve as a grab bar. Additional horizontal grab bars may be needed in the shower for safety.

Levaqua (levaqua.com) offers a digital hand-held shower head that is ergonomically designed and provides a personalized experience at the touch of a button. It offers complete flexibility and functionality. Allowing you to pause on demand and alternate between settings with ease, this shower head combines five digitally controlled settings with maximum water flow optimization.

Kohler's newest Flipside handshower (kohler.com) has four unique spray nozzles delivering four distinct showering sensations. Each nozzle has its own dedicated sprayface on your choice of three unique models. Just flip the spray head on its axis to select the spray of your choice. Within the Kohler handshower collection, you can



select a style and coordinate the rest of the sink and tub faucets to match the handshower.

Hansgrohe (hansgrohe-usa.com) has a model with a push button like a ballpoint pen to select from among three different spray modes. Their EcoAIR air-injection technology delivers water savings without sacrificing performance. Water flow/volume is enhanced even though the shower head uses up to 36% less water. A fan inside the unit spins in reverse and injects air into the shower head making 1.5 gallons per minute feel like 2.5 gallons per minute. Their Cromagreen handshower delivers performance at a water-saving flow rate of only 1.6 to 1.75 gallons per minute. Another company distinction is an antibacterial rubber hose that will not kink.

Shopping Notes

When you shop for a handshower, keep in mind this is an investment. You may only need one handshower for the rest of your life, if the unit has a lifetime warranty. This is a plumbing fixture you are likely to use every day. Ask



The right hand-held shower head provides the user with better control of where the water goes, and makes for an easier and more enjoyable shower experience.

your friends what they recommend. When you stay at hotels, look at the handshower and note the brand you like. Taking a picture of it will help you when shopping.

The shopping experience at a plumbing or hardware store will reveal lots of options in brands and models. Don't get overwhelmed. Think about what features you are looking for, as well as the look of the bathroom where you will be installing the handshower, so it complements other design elements.

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