Dell Visor Mixed Reality Headset Review [Updated]

By James Bruce / November 7, 2017 07-11-2017 / 17 minutes

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631 articles

James has a BSc in Artificial Intelligence, and is CompTIA A+ and Network+ certified. He's the lead developer of MakeUseOf, and spends his free time playing VR paintball and boardgames. He's been building PCs since he was a kid.

Our verdict of the **Dell Visor Mixed Reality Headset**:
The innovative tracking system has a few hiccups, but should be fine for most users and most experiences. With imminent SteamVR support, the Dell Visor is a viable alternative to other high end sets, though the Oculus Rift still represents best value for money.

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Admit it: you probably thought VR was going to fizzle out. But now Microsoft wants in, so much so that they're baking support for virtual reality right into the OS. Only they're calling it "Mixed Reality", because they think VR has a bad name for itself and

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Reality headset to make it to market. Don't be fooled though: it's VR in all but name.

Of course, the Dell Visor isn't entirely a new type of product. Both the **Oculus Rift and HTC Vive** have been on the market for over a year now, having received numerous price cuts. The Oculus Rift now costs as little as $400 with two camera and motion controllers. The Vive costs $600. The Dell Visor sits at the lower end at **$450 with the motion controllers**.

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Note: This review was updated as we gained access to the SteamVR preview and had a chance to play some Rec Room to really test the system out. You'll find the updated text below in the SteamVR section, or you can view our update video below.

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Dell Visor Design and Specification

Weight: 1.3lbs (0.6Kg)

1440 x 1440px resolution per eye via individual 90Hz LCD with RGB sub-pixels.

Fresnel lenses with 110-degree max field of view.

3-meter combined USB and HDMI cable, with stereo breakout on headset side.

Rigid headband with flip-up display.

Inside-out tracking system via dual cameras on the headset, requiring no external sensors.

A rigid headband secures the headset, and feels very similar to the **PlayStation VR**. Despite being heavier than the Rift, it's more comfortable, as the weight is placed on top of your head rather than pulling the headset into your face. The rigid strap is easy to adjust and tighten via a dial at the rear.

PlayStation VR Review

Sony has finally released their low-cost headset to the world, along with a slew of Playstation games that support the device. Is it worth it?

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Since headphones aren't built-in, you'll need to supply your own. This was where I encountered my first problem: the rigid head-strap, sitting just above my ears and being quite wide, stopped my headphones from actually touching my ears.

The screen of the headset is able to flip up, giving you quick access to real world. In theory anyway – if you wear glasses like me, you may find the bottom of the visor catches on your glasses, preventing it from fully lifting.

It should be noted however that the IPD is not adjustable in hardware. Both the Oculus Rift and Vive have a physical dial to adjust the Interpupillary Distance; the Dell does not. It has a software control, but this was difficult to unearth and no instructions were given during setup.

Another slight annoyance: the box doesn't contain a Bluetooth adapter, which is required to connect the controllers. For use with a laptop, this is unlikely to be an issue, but most desktops don't have an integral Bluetooth controller. Other high end headsets include a Bluetooth controller in the headset itself. The fact that the Dell Visor doesn't, makes the controllers feel a little disjointed to the headset – as if they were designed by someone else entirely and just thrown in the box as an afterthought.

Setting Up Windows Mixed Reality

Before you can get started with the Dell Visor, or any of the new MR headsets, you'll need to update Windows to the so-called **Creator's Update**, or more technically "Windows Feature Update 1709". This is an massive update which makes some fundamental changes to your system and is likely to break things. We strongly suggest you take a full backup first. You may also need to clean up some disk space, and mine took about an hour to download and install.

Do This Before Every Windows 10 Update or Installation

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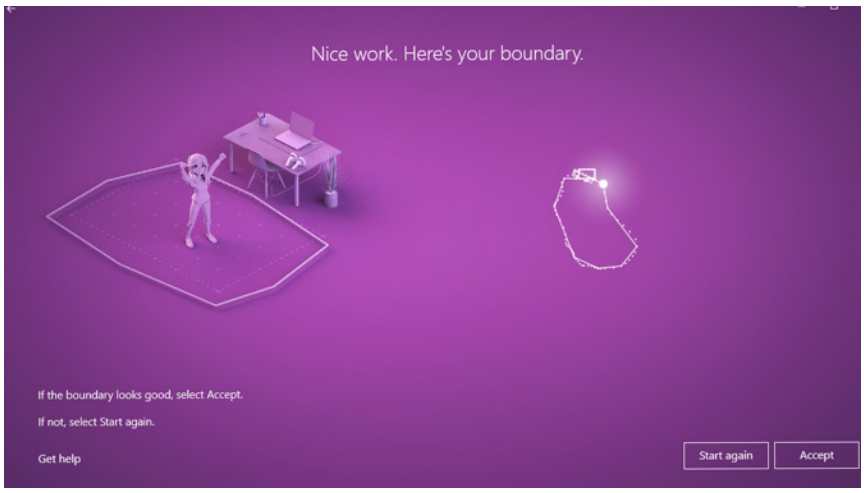
You'll be prompted to install this update automatically after plugging in the headset if you haven't already. I actually had to run through quite a few restarts and updates before things finally worked, since I hadn't turned this PC on in over a week. (Yes, Windows does seem to update on an almost daily basis nowadays, whether that's to install security patches or disable your favorite settings, like the one that says you don't want advertising on your start menu).

Once all that's done, setup is fairly smooth. You can trace your room scale boundaries by walking around the edge with your headset facing your PC. It's a little odd to do it this way – using the controllers would have been much more natural, as Oculus and SteamVR do, but it works regardless. Alternatively, you can just use the device in standing-only mode, with no boundaries.



It's at this point I hit a few snags though.

First: like most desktop PCs, my machine doesn't have Bluetooth. Luckily I found one in a drawer that I knew would come in useful one day.

Second: the cable is ludicrously short at just 3m. I've moved my VR room to a very modest 2m x 3m playspace, and I couldn't even make full use of that. I did try to use the HTC Vive's link box to extend the cable a little, but the headset complained it wasn't USB3 (it was).

You won't be able to move much unless you turn around your computer so the ports are at the front.

Next, it failed to recognise the controllers were on and paired. Despite successfully completing that step during setup, they apparently hadn't been added. I needed to open up Windows settings and manually pair each one, using a generic 0000 as a pairing key. After that, all was well.

A short intro sequence later, and you're throw into the Windows Mixed Reality Environment.

Don't move anything in your room, though. I must have moved my beanbag at some point, and upon next putting on the headset, it said it couldn't recognize the environment, and would need to me to setup the boundaries again.

Microsoft's Messy Mixed Marketing Madness

The term Mixed Reality has been misappropriated by Microsoft for marketing. Until now, it's been widely used in VR circles to mean positionally tracking a video camera in order to film VR activity with a green screen. The producer can then mix recorded game footage from the perspective of the camera with the real world footage of a person. Here's an example (don't get too excited by the footage though, if you purchase the Dell Visor you won't have access to anything on SteamVR until Christmas at the earliest):

Microsoft however says Mixed Reality an umbrella term for all of the holographic, VR, and AR products they are (yet) to release. But the first generation of Microsoft's Mixed Reality headsets are actually just VR. They don't "mix" anything from the real world, and don't have the capability to even pass through a simple video stream like the HTC Vive does. Make no mistake, the Dell Visor is a VR headset. Mixed Reality is simply a marketing term.

The Mixed Reality Market Truths

You'll see a number of first generation Mixed Reality headsets arrive over the course of the next month, and they all have identical specs – except for the **Samsung Odyssey**. In fact, they even have the exact same tacky controllers. The headset hardware is manufactured by third parties: Dell, Acer etc. But the design is essentially dictated by Microsoft, as is the tracking system and controllers. That's why if these aren't great, we can and should lay the blame squarely at Microsoft's feet.

It's not clear why the Samsung Odyssey is the odd one out. It has a significantly higher screen resolution. It's likely that it's

plans to sell the device in Europe.

Display Quality

At 1440 x 1440px per eye, the resolution of the Dell Visor is a little higher than both Oculus rift and HTC Vive, though still not high enough that you can read text comfortably. We don't have an accurate way to measure field of view (FOV), but it did feel smaller than Vive and probably about the same as the Oculus Rift. This could be purely because the screen isn't pulled in toward your face.

In terms of brightness, it's about the same as Rift, though not as bright as Vive (which many claim is abnormally bright). There is definitely still a visible mesh, or so-called *screen-door effect* – that hasn't been eliminated. And despite tweaking the software IPD setting (there is no physical adjustment), I couldn't help shaking the feeling that the convergence was always off.

Overall, it feels neither here nor there compared to other high end PC headsets. In the unfamiliar Mixed Reality beach house environment, it was difficult to tell if the resolution bump made much of a difference, but it's more noticeable now that we can try in SteamVR. When looking at further distances, it's markedly better, but not so much that I would say ditch your Vive or Oculus and go "upgrade" to this, or that you would be getting any tactical advantage.

If you were hoping for a more significant jump, I'd recommend holding out until the Samsung Odyssey hits the shelves, or the PiMax 8K next year.

Tracking Quality

A few years ago, "tracking quality" wasn't really a thing we would objectively review. The first developer iteration of the Oculus Rift didn't even know where your head was, only the rotational value of where it was looking – and there were no Oculus motion controllers at the time.

seated at your desk. But Oculus was soon playing catch-up to the HTC Vive, which for the first time allowed users to physically walk around a play area up to around 4 meters squared, by placing laser emitters in the corner of the room. Those who experienced this kind of "room scale tracking" soon realised it was now a must-have feature. When the **Oculus Touch controllers** first came out, Oculus began testing its own experimental room-scale tracking, which required at least two cameras.

Oculus Touch VR Controllers Review

The Oculus Rift has been missing something fundamental since launch: VR controllers. With the addition of Touch, the Oculus VR experience is finally complete.

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And now we have the first generation Windows Mixed Reality headsets, which are pushing forward in a slightly different direction. Designed with the belief that having to set up tracking cameras or basestations is far too much effort for the average consumer (they're probably right in that regard), these WMR headsets use a new kind of "inside-out" tracking called SLAM, or *Simultaneous Localization and Mapping*.

The cameras are built into the headset itself. They don't track where the headset is directly, but rather how the surroundings change as you move around. Combined with the standard set of gyroscopic sensors, the software knows that if it sees the wall moving upwards or getting closer, it's because you looked down, or moved toward the wall. It's a very clever system that I suspect will ultimately be the future of all VR and AR headsets. Oculus has already demonstrated similar technology in their high end standard system, codenamed **Santa Cruz**.

It's not perfect, and the tracking can be easily broken if you know how, but for most interactions we found it was good

Controller Issues

Mainly, it's the controllers that present a problem. The inside-out tracking system can only track what the camera sees. It does this with two cameras, roughly positioned in front of your eyes. This is fine for the headset itself, but the controllers aren't always visible. If you put your hand behind your back, or to your side, they disappear from the field of view of the headset's tracking cameras, or they get stuck in place, creating a mismatch between real world actions and the virtual representations. The system makes a best guess using gyroscopic data for a short time, so swinging your hand temporarily behind you does result in your virtual hand matching the motion. But this only works briefly before tracking is completely lost.

With a ring of tracking LEDs, the controllers are just as badly affected by bright sunlight as Oculus Touch is. Despite solid positional tracking on the headset, I experienced numerous tracking issues with the controllers, with them often jumping off to a meter or so in front of me. Don't think you can solve this by playing in the dark though: the black and white cameras need light!

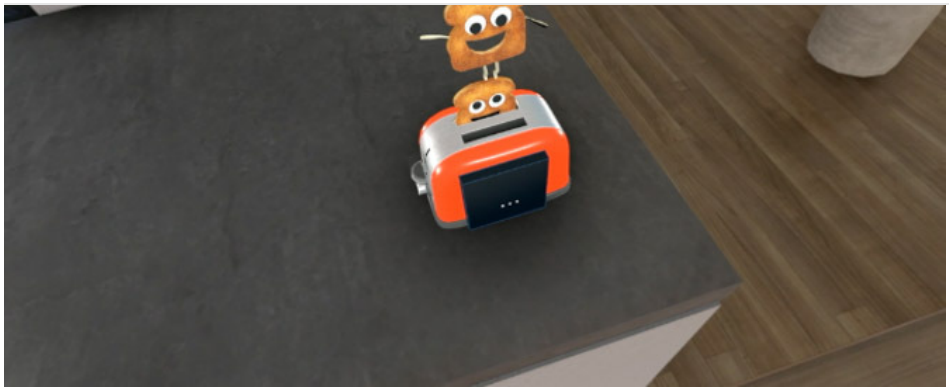
Having tried in a multiplayer gaming environment, I can confirm that the controller tracking is good enough to be competitive. This will depend on the game though: Rec Room uses magnetized pick-up system, so you don't actually need to fully lean over or crouch down to pick something up, just have your hand be within a set bubble around the item.

Windows Mixed Reality Home

Welcome to your virtual home. I hope you like it, because it's the only one you've got at the moment. It's not quite palatial, but it's nice and airy, with a big underground cinema room. I should note, there are far better VR movie viewing apps on both SteamVR and the Oculus store.

You can't paint the walls, but you can decorate your home with various widgets, or as Microsoft would like you call them, "holograms". I was quite pleased that I could placed a giant hamburger obnoxiously in the middle of the hallway. Some include a short animation when you click on them. They're all a bit rubbish though, really. To put it simply, this is exactly what I would expect Microsoft to come up with for a VR experience.

The thing is: SteamVR does the same, but better. You can get special objects from the games you own, or through achievements. Those have a meaning attached to them, something unique you can show off – and you can invite your friends round to hang out. What Microsoft offer is a meaningless store of 3D animated curiosities. If it tied this into your Xbox game achievements, it might make sense. But right now, it's just silly.



Mildly amusing for all of 5 seconds.

You're obviously going to get a lot more use out of the Windows Mixed Reality system if you're heavily invested in apps on the Windows store. Stock trackers, for instance – that could be cool, I guess? Weather widgets. These are all neat, productivity focussed ideas. Oooh, a huge spreadsheet of quarterly performance stuck on the wall next to your cinema. Doesn't that sound fun! Having to move your virtual avatar around a real home environment in order to multitask – that sounds much more effective than alt-tabbing on a flat monitor. The possibilities are … countable on one hand.

The thing is: I'd love to be convinced that general computing has a place in a VR environment, but if this is the best we can come up with, I don't think it does. **VR is fantastic for creativity**, for education, for gaming. I can't fathom going back to gaming on a flat monitor; even 2D games like Civ I play in SteamVR cinema mode now. But spreadsheets? Edge browser? Skype? Yeh!

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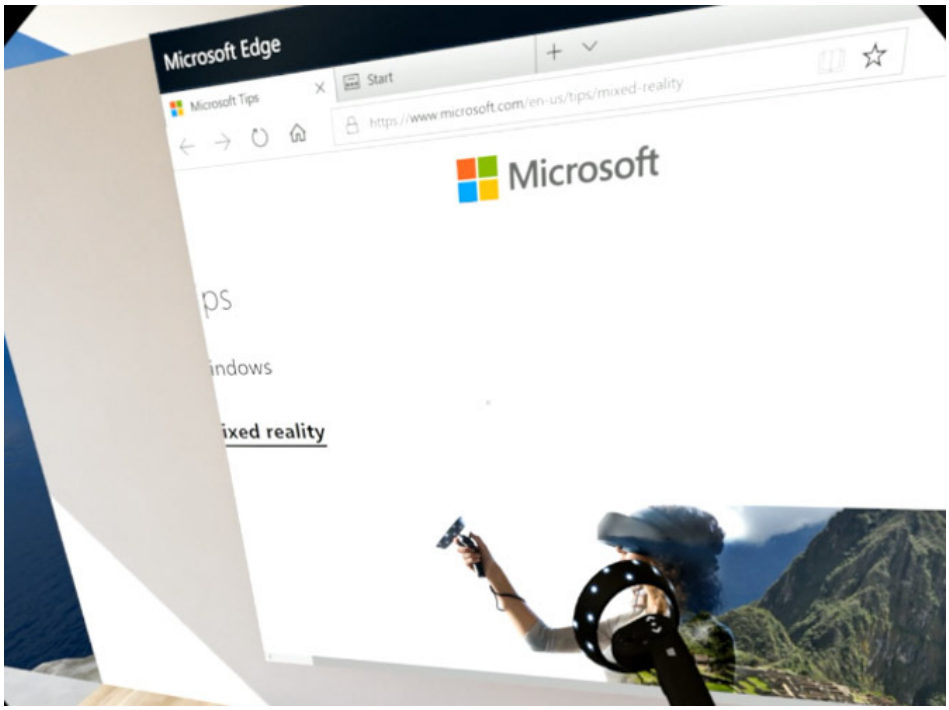

Just what you've always wanted: the Edge browser, in VR! It's just as janky as it is in 2D.

But remember: this is *Mixed Reality*. Once we have the ability to overlay these widgets onto our real world environment with some Augmented Reality headsets, general computing starts to make a lot more sense. It doesn't exclude the use of a keyboard and mouse: it augments it.

Another Walled Garden?

There's also an issue of exclusivity. From what we know, the Windows Mixed Reality environment is only compatible with WMR headsets. Neither Vive nor Rift will have access. There's a chance this could change, but Microsoft has given no indication that they will be allowed in, and it seems like the sort of thing it would say if that were the case. Of course, this is no different to the Oculus home environment right now either, but that exclusivity has been a bone of contention in VR circles for a while now. Many enthusiasts opt to not support Oculus on that basis alone.

SteamVR Works! [Updated]

When we initially reviewed this device, the selection of content available was extremely limited. The Windows store contained a disappointing Halo shooting gallery, and a few VR titles that have been out for a year or so on other platforms. Microsoft had promised SteamVR support would be coming, and it now looks like the public preview of that will be happening on November 15th. We gained early access to the preview, and are pleased to report that the experiences we tried worked well.

Halo VR: This is as horrendous as it looks.

There were a few bugs in our preview – the controller models were displaying as Vive wands, and the angle was wrong – but these should both be fixable with a software update. Unfortunately, for a game like **Rec Room** where the trackpad is used extensively for snap-turning, it highlighted how unresponsive that aspect of the Dell Visor controllers are. There should be workaround for this eventually, like using the thumbstick to turn instead.

Vive and Oculus Rift for well over a year now. In the Windows Mixed Reality environment however, it can only be played on a flat screen with traditional controls. There is no VR Minecraft for WMR headsets as of writing.

Should You Buy a Dell Visor?

Maybe.

From a hardware perspective, the inside out tracking eliminates the need for external cameras and is ludicrously easy to set up, and while not perfect, this feels like the ultimate future of VR. The headset itself gets great positional tracking, but the controllers can feel glitchy. It's good enough for basic UI interactions and most games where your hands sit out in front, but specific types of games may present issues. Perhaps this will improve with software updates – the Oculus Touch controllers were notoriously bad at launch, and it took about 3 months before Oculus sorted those issues out.

The controllers themselves feel cheap, and aren't particularly ergonomic. At one point, I even managed to pull the battery cover off while casually navigating around the home. The inclusion of both a trackpad and thumbstick implies they tried to copy the best bits of both the Vive wands and Oculus Touch, but failed miserably, instead producing a final product worse

developers should be able to work around these limitations though with configuration options.

The lack of built-in headphones is frustrating, especially when the rigid headstrap even prevents you from using your own comfortably. The fact that you need a separate Bluetooth dongle just to use the controllers makes the whole experience feel completely disjointed.

The best thing I can say about the Windows Mixed Reality Environment… is that it shows promise. It's pleasant enough, and being able to leave trailers running in the movie room or music playing from the Groove app while you wander around the rest of the house is quite fun. Some virtual parties here could be fun (though currently lacks any social support). But most of it just feels… forced? The holograms widgets are uninspiring, and there's little else in the way of customization. And more to the point, we already have VR apps that do all of these functions, better.

Moreover, both Oculus and SteamVR do the virtual environment better too. You can change your SteamVR home environment, add 3D objects from games you own, and invite friends to visit. The only thing you can't do is run multiple windowed apps, though you can still access your traditional desktop.

Oculus is soon to release a major dashboard update that allows you run multiple desktops in the native Oculus Home environment, as well as customize it with objects. They both

compelling reason to choose the Windows Mixed Reality environment. Do you really want Excel permanently pinned to your virtual wall?

A little gothic architecture to customize my beach house.

However, with SteamVR support, the Windows Mixed Reality environment can be completely ignored. If you just want to play your Steam games, and use SteamVR, you can.

Would I recommend the Dell Visor instead of the Oculus Rift or HTC Vive? That's tricky. It's a viable alternative now, absolutely. For easy of setup, the Dell Visor wins by a mile. The Oculus Rift is fiddly and requires external tracking cameras, but the controllers are superior, and you get a ton of fantastic games out of the box – and it remains the best value. The Vive is the most expensive, but has superior tracking, and is the most open system with wireless upgrades and new controllers coming soon.

8 COMMENTS

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Invasive Anti-Snoring Device Yet

By **James Bruce** / May 17, 2018 17-05-2018 / 8 minutes

Our verdict of the **Smart Nora Anti-Snoring Device**:
Smart Nora is an innovative non-invasive anti-snoring solution, but more importantly: it worked for us. If snoring is driving a wedge in your relationship, give it a go and reclaim your sleep.

10 10

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James has a BSc in Artificial Intelligence, and is CompTIA A+ and Network+ certified. He's the lead developer of MakeUseOf, and spends his free time playing VR paintball and boardgames. He's been building PCs since he was a kid.

this sleeping situation, my wife has resorted to kicking me until I stop. SmartNora–a device that began as a Kickstarter–has completely fixed that. When it detects snoring, it nudges my head up and down, clearing the airways and stopping the snoring. It's a non-invasive solution to an age old problem, and it's become a bedtime essential in our house.

The Smart Nora costs $300 direct from **SmartNora.com**. Anything that can get some precious sleep time back is worth every penny. Join us as we take a closer look at exactly how the Smart Nora works, and at the end of this review, we're giving one away.

What's In The Box?

There's quite a lot of unfamiliar tech in the box, so let's break down each component.

Pump and Case

Everything is housed inside a sleek felt-covered case measuring 4 x 7 x 10 inches. Integral to this case is the air pump in the center. Don't try to remove this from the case, as you may damage the unit. The whole box should be placed under your bed in normal use, but you'll need to unpack the other bits first.

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Inflator

In the largest pocket, you'll find the pillow inflator with attached hose. This consists of stiff outer plates with small plastic air pillows on the inside.

The design allows a small amount of air to move your whole pillow. Unfold this, and place it under your pillow or inside the pillow case, with the tube facing the outside.

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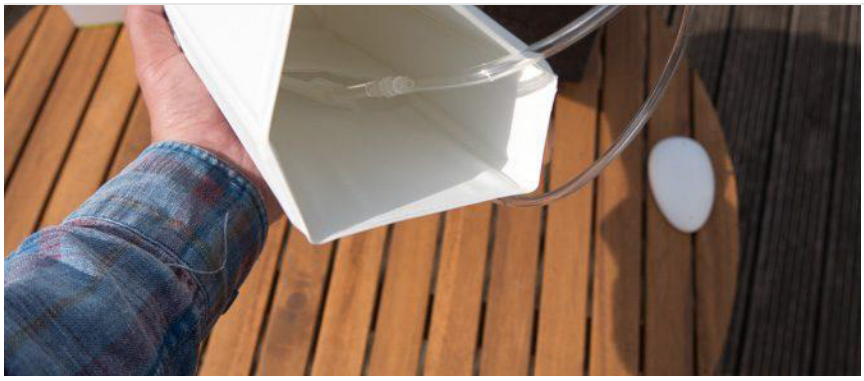


If you received a comfort sleeve, you can put the inflator inside this. This step is optional, but adds a little extra padding if you're using particularly thin pillows.

Pebble

You'll find the Pebble wireless sensor on the left, as well as a mounting bracket elsewhere in the box. Ideally, the sensor should placed no more than 4 inches above your head, mounted to your headboard. If this isn't possible though, you can also place it on a bedside table, no more than an arm's length away from your head.

The Pebble houses the microphone, but is also your main interaction point with the device.

Other Bits

Also in the package is a Micro USB cable, and mains power lead. The Micro USB cable is used to syncronize and charge the Pebble sensor unit. The battery lasts for approximately a week.

The base unit itself also houses a battery for the pump. This is intended only as a backup or for situations where you just don't have mains power, like camping. In normal situations, the base unit should be left plugged into the mains at all times and turned on.

I'd really like to commend them on the inclusion of 4 different easy-to-swap plug adaptors. Combined with the fact that everything can be packed down into itself, the Smart Nora is ideal for travelling. You needn't lose sleep just because you're not in your own bed.

Ease of Use and Setup

Once you've got the base unit plugged into mains power and the tube connected, turn on the main power button. Then unlock the Pebble with the slide switch underneath.

To pair the Bluetooth, plug the Micro USB cable from the Pebble into the base unit. You should also leave it plugged in for at least three hours if this is the first time you've done so. It'll flash green when fully charged, or red when the battery is low. If you want to go ahead and test the inflation, tap on the Bluetooth button underneath the Pebble.

Apart from the initial setup, daily operation couldn't be simpler. Each night before bed, all you need to do is tap on the Pebble to turn on the device. Hold down for a second to activate with the 30 minute delay. That's it. The delay is useful if you find Smart Nora is waking you while still trying to fall asleep. I have no trouble falling straight asleep, so I didn't need the delay.

Micro USB cable again will fix this.

How Does Smart Nora Actually Work?

To detect when someone is snoring, a sensor is needed: in this case, a microphone, housed within the Pebble unit. This listens carefully for the light snoring that usually precedes really loud snoring.

Then we get to the really clever bit: a flat, unobtrusive air sack is placed under the snorer's pillow. When snoring is detected, it gently inflates then immediately deflates, causing the snorer head to move. This adjusts the airways in your neck and throat, allowing air to flow freely, which stops the snoring. The whole inflation and deflation process takes about a minute for a full cycle.

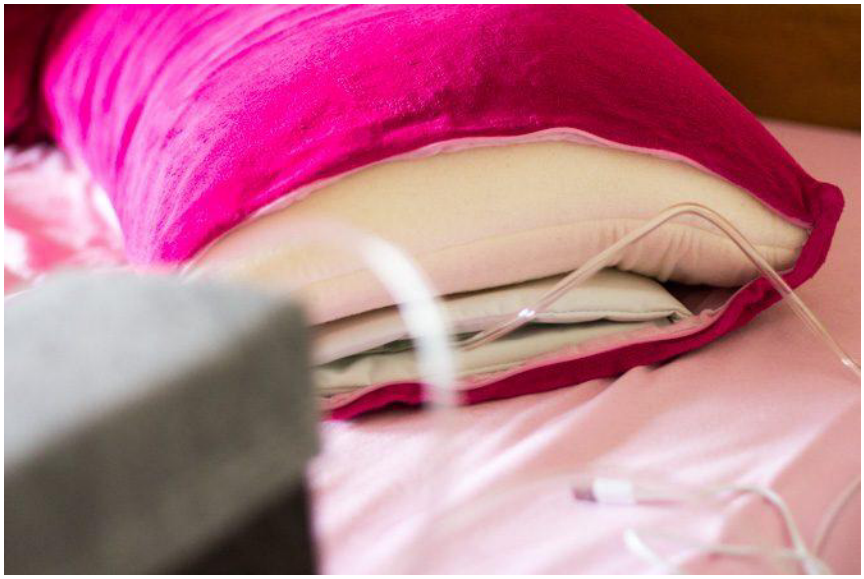
The pump is whisper-quiet. I could hear it while testing it in the daytime if I put my ear right next to it, but it's not loud enough to wake me up when sleeping. Even less so when placed under the bed. For the first few days, it was more the sound of the air sacks inflating that would wake me.

A Novel Reactive Approach

Smart Nora is the first device to use this completely novel approach. Yet, some reviewers have criticised this reactive method. In order for Smart Nora to work, it must first hear you

place, nor will it correct any underlying health issues. In fact, it's more or less exactly like your partner waking up and nudging you–but it's automated and a lot gentler.

We found this reactive method worked well. In most cases, she didn't wake up at all, because the Smart Nora caught me snoring before it became loud enough. On the rare occasion she did wake up and saw the pillow kick into action, she could immediately fall back to sleep. It's the process of actively engaging your brain and resetting that sleep cycle that causes real sleep loss. This happens if you need to shove your partner a little, or lie in bed waiting for them to stop. The Smart Nora avoids that situation.



This Smart Nora's unique approach means you can use it with your existing pillow. The Pebble is unobtrusive, and you needn't adapt to anything weird being strapped to your face. The entire system is so discreet that no one will even know it's there unless you point it out.

Sensitivity and Inflation Settings

There's two settings that you'll need to tweak in order to find the best setting for you.

how high your pillow will rise and fall. We found the highest was almost comical, pushing my head from horizontal to completely vertical. Medium was perfect.

On the underside of the Pebble, you'll find 5 levels of sensitivity for the microphone. The highest setting will activate immediately with the slightest noise. It should only be used in the most quiet of bedrooms. The lowest setting will only activate if it hears very loud snoring, multiple times. It can be used in very noisy rooms. The medium setting with be suitable for most people, activating with multiple snores, of normal loudness.

If your partner is very sensitive to your snoring, turn up the sensitivity so it activates faster.

work?

There are a few situations in which Smart Nora will be less effective.

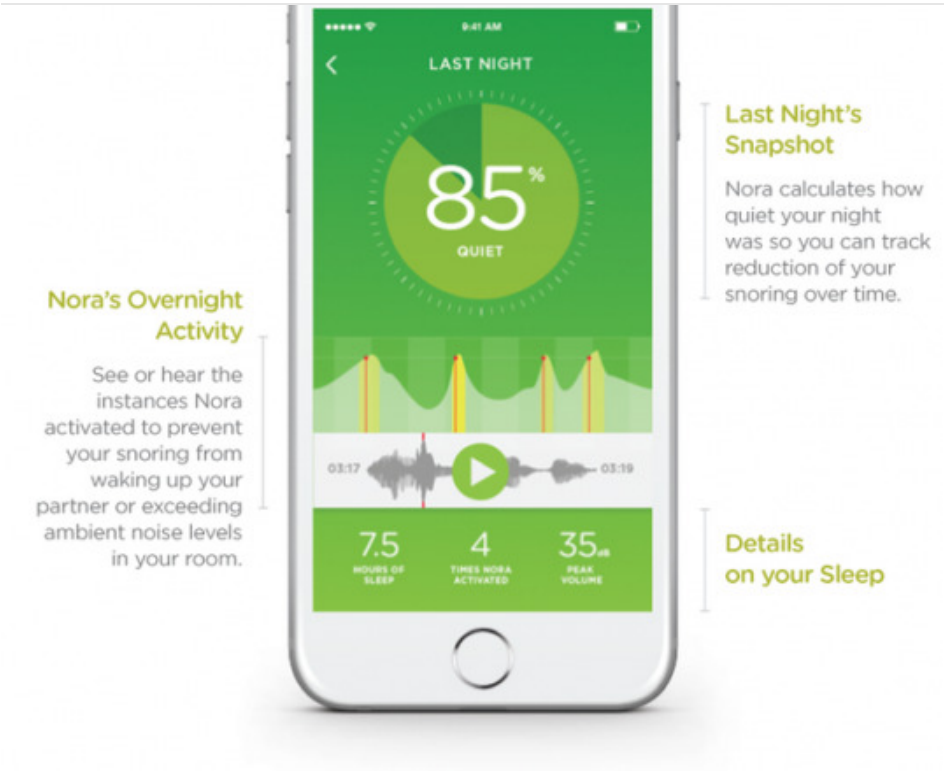
If you sleep with a white noise machine or similar, you'll need to reposition things. Make sure the white noise is further away from the Pebble microphone than you are. Set Smart Nora on low sensitivity, and it'll detect only the loudest noise. So as long as you snore louder than the white noise, it should still work.

Fans or air conditioning can also be an issue. If you've ever tried blowing into a microphone, you'll know how noisy it'll be. Ensure the airflow isn't pointed at the Pebble, and it should be fine. The ambient noise from a fan or aircon alone won't be enough to cause unintended activation. Even if it does, the motion isn't intrusive enough to wake you.

Lastly, remember that it works by raising or lowering your pillow. If you're the kind of person who slips off the pillow, it won't do anything for you. The opposite is also true: if you hug your pillow tightly, it may wake you up.

There's Also an App… Soon, Maybe

Promised very soon is an accompanying app. It'll be launching on iOS first, giving "additional insights into your snoring". Exactly what that entails is not yet clear. Unfortunately, the delay has angered some Kickstarter backers, since it was an integral part of the campaign.



Some of the Smart Nora app functionality promised on Kickstarter

To be clear, the Smart Nora system functions fully without an app. It'll still stop you snoring. It just doesn't take full advantage of the Bluetooth capabilities built into the system. Think of it as an added bonus coming at some point.

Will It Work For You?

For some people, snoring can be a debilitating condition. Loss of sleep is no laughing matter, and for couples it can drive a literal wedge between them. Some will spend many thousands of dollars trying to fix the problem to no avail. You'll funny shaped pillows, pills of every color, masks, and mouth gags – none of which really work, are utterly uncomfortable, or are so expensive that they're unaffordable for most people.

Smart Nora recommend a week to fully get used to the system, but they also have a 30-day money back guarantee in case it doesn't. That said, it only took a few days for me to acclimatise. The results were fantastic–or so my wife says. I'm a heavy sleeper, so while it's stopped my snoring, I'm ultimately not the

work for everyone. All I can say is: it worked for us.

If you or your partner are losing sleep from snoring, I would absolutely recommend giving the Smart Nora a go. It's a surprisingly simple approach, but it seems to actually work. Smart Nora is a bedtime must-buy.

Enter the Competition!

0	2686	19
Your Entries	Total Entries	Days Left

Smart Nora Anti-Snoring Solution

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