

Review: Helios Smart battery has charging options, including the sun

March 20 2015, by Jim Rossman, The Dallas Morning News



I love options. Most of us are familiar with external batteries that can be used to charge up a cellphone or tablet when a plug is not handy. I have several, and most of them get their power by plugging into a USB port. They're great until you use up the power. Then they're dead weight until you plug them in to recharge.

I've been testing the Helios Smart battery from Solpro. It can [power](#) up your device, but when it comes time to recharge it, you have options.

The Helios Smart (\$159 at amazon.com) is about the size of an iPhone

but twice as thick. It houses a 5,000-milliamp-hour battery that can charge an average smartphone three times.

That isn't such a great trick - the world is full of external batteries that can charge your phone. The Helios Smart stands out from the crowd because it conceals three [solar panels](#) that fold out of its cover. The battery can recharge from the sun.

Solpro says the Helios Smart can collect enough energy from the sun in 90 minutes to charge up your phone once.

If you can get five hours of sunlight, you'll charge the battery enough to recharge your phone's battery three times.

This is very cool indeed.

Of course, there is a USB input for charging from a computer or a wall plug if you have one available.

The convenience of leaving the Helios Smart out in the sun during the day and using its stored power to charge your phone at night is pretty great. Plus, it's an environmentally friendly way to stay connected.

Notice I didn't say it was cost-effective.

This is not a cheap solution, and if you think you'll be saving big money on electricity, think again.

According to Forbes.com, charging your phone once a day for a year costs about 25 cents (onforb.es/18AI8Rp).

The Helios Smart shines when you need to power up your devices and a plug isn't handy.

As an experiment, on a recent trip to a cabin in rural Louisiana, I kept my phone going all week without ever plugging into an AC outlet.

I was easily able to collect enough sunlight to charge the phone each day, and since the Helios Smart's battery has the capacity to charge the [phone](#) more than once, I wasn't afraid of a day or two of rain.

When showing the Helios Smart to a couple co-workers who are hikers, both said it might be a bit too heavy (10 ounces) to put in a backpack for all-day carrying. It would perhaps be better-suited to leave at a campsite.

I'm not a hiker, but my computer bag weighs about 25 pounds, so an extra 10 ounces didn't feel that heavy to me. But I only carry it from my car to my desk.

There are two ports on the top for charging. One provides up to 1 amp for charging smaller devices like phones and the other provides up to 2.1 amps for tablets or phones that can take more power (like the iPhone or Samsung Galaxy).

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Pros: Good capacity, easy to carry, fast charging.

Cons: Expensive.

Bottom line: A good [battery](#) with charging options, but the solar panels really bump the price.

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