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NOVEMBER 2013

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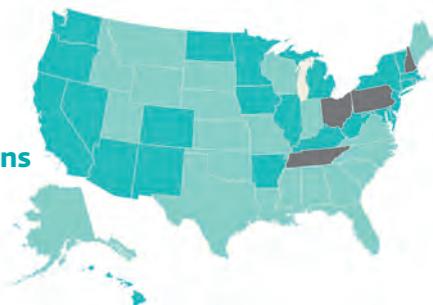
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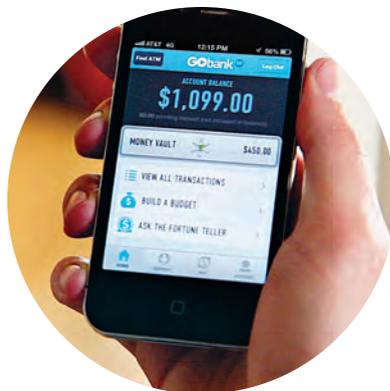
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93

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MHW8000AW



45

DieHard
Advanced
Gold 50748



▶ Savings this issue

\$875

Get the Miele S 7210 Twist **vacuum** for \$475 instead of the Kirby Sentria to save this amount.

\$100

Buy the Calphalon Stainless Steel 4-Slot **toaster** instead of the Breville BTA840XL to save this much.

\$60

Purchase the Echo PB-250 **gas-powered blower** for \$170 and save this much over the Stihl BG 66L.

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Who we are

Consumer Reports

is the world's largest independent consumer-product-testing organization. We also survey millions of consumers about their experiences with products and services. We're based in Yonkers, N.Y., and are a nonprofit organization.

What we do We buy all of the products we rate.

What we don't do We don't accept paid advertising; we get our money mainly through subscriptions and donations. We don't accept free test samples from manufacturers. And we don't allow our name or content to be used for any promotional purposes.

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Ratings We rate products using these symbols:

● Excellent ● Very good ○ Good ● Fair ● Poor



CR Best Buy Products with this icon offer the best combination of performance and price.



Recommended product Models with this designation perform well and stand out for reasons we note.



Recommended car These tested well, are reliable, and performed adequately if crash-tested or included in a federal rollover test.



Don't Buy We label products with this icon when we judge them to be safety risks or to have serious performance problems.

ON YOUR MIND

Defeat high fees

"Grow Your Savings" (September 2013) was a great article. CONSUMER REPORTS has been consistent in the past and demonstrates going into the future that it understands the issue of high fees and expenses extracted from the vast majority of mutual-fund enterprises. A great many people think there is not much they can do about their financial situation. Your article shows that is not necessarily the case.

—*Carl E. Waranowski* Hooksett, NH

When I retired, I rolled over my 401(k) and lump sum pension to an IRA with an investment management company. My annual return for 10 years was 0.15 percent



and management fees were \$150,665. Three years later I moved my savings to a different company. Had I opened the IRA with this company initially, the management fees would have been \$15,000 to \$20,000. As you pointed out in "Grow Your Savings," fees, along with asset allocation, are critical for long-term growth.

—*Phil Franco* Ocean Grove, NJ

Lower drug costs

My doctor was a great source to get my drugs cheaper ("Surprising Ways to Cut Your Drug Costs," September 2013). He wrote me a prescription and told me to go to Costco to get it filled. With my membership card,

a 90-day supply was only \$30. My insurance does not cover the particular drug, and Costco's price is a whole lot cheaper than the over-the-counter price for the same drug.

—*Randy Geisel* Arlington, TX

Family focus

As I was reading through one of your issues, both of my boys climbed into my lap and asked to read with me. They were not as excited as I was to discover how much we could save per load with Costco laundry detergent (August 2013), but they did enjoy all the pictures! I am sure that someday they will appreciate the content as much as I do.

—*David Costa* McHenry, IL

SEND YOUR LETTERS TO

ConsumerReports.org/lettertoeditor.

Ask our experts

Q It seems that using color-safe bleach (i.e., Clorox 2) is often suggested, but does it really work? Is it worth buying this laundry additive or is using detergent alone good enough?

—*David Bassan* Necedah, WI

Color-safe bleach is useful if you need to whiten or lighten up an item that cannot be bleached with chlorine bleach, that has a stain that's out of the ordinary on it (you spilled red wine, fruit juice, blood, or something colored), or that has been run through the wash but a stain did not come out. Use it as an additive only if you need it. For normal laundry, a good detergent is sufficient.

Q I recently read an article discussing the safety of old air bags—it's easy to forget that some of the first generation ones are more than 20 years old. Many people seem to argue that the propellant degrades over time and does not inflate the bag properly or quickly enough. What can you tell me about this issue?

—*William McQuail* Oceanside, CA

Many owner's manuals say to replace air bags after a certain number of years. There's little evidence that people are doing that. It's a difficult proposition, as replacing the air bags with new ones would cost approximately \$2,000—often a big chunk of the price of the car. And there doesn't seem to be much need to do so. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety crash-tested two of the first air bag-equipped cars (from 1973) and found that the air bag inflated as designed. Because air bags are part of a self-monitoring system, if an air-bag warning light is illuminated, it's important to get the system checked out and fixed.



WASHDAY STAINS Color-safe bleach is needed only when you have a tough spot.

Q What are the results of ink use if the printer is not turned off between print jobs, and is there a way to disable/suspend the maintenance function?

—*Mark B. Nelson* Kirkland, WA

In our pilot tests, leaving the printers on between uses made some printers use much less maintenance ink. But in ongoing tests, we don't know on a model-by-model basis what difference leaving a printer on will make. And there is no way with settings available to consumers to make a printer skip automatic maintenance cycles, nor have we been able to find out from the manufacturers any specific advice on how to use less maintenance ink. Printers certainly vary in their frequency,

duration, and timing of maintenance cycles, and that's why we test them.

Q As you point out in "Are New GPS Units Worth the Cost?" (September 2013), many people use their smart phones for GPS. But is using these new units better than using your smart phone?

—*Rick Zaccane* Lewisburg, PA

Smart phones offer free basic navigation help but do better with apps. The two new units we tested did not improve much on the lower-priced GPS models that we recommend.

SEND YOUR QUESTIONS TO

ConsumerReports.org/askourexperts.

This page highlights efforts of Consumers Union, the policy and action arm of Consumer Reports, to improve the marketplace.

▣ WHERE WE STAND

Supplement safety

THE ISSUE Current law makes it too easy for dangerous supplements to land in your medicine cabinet.

OUR TAKE The Food and Drug Administration has limited authority over supplements and doesn't approve them for safety or effectiveness before they go on sale. What's more, many product labels don't warn about potentially serious side effects and drug interactions.

A new bill in Congress called the Dietary Supplement Labeling Act could change the landscape. Sponsored by Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., and Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., the bill would demand more information on



labels and require manufacturers to register products and ingredients with the FDA. They'll also have to provide evidence for any cited health claims.

We believe this bill would help ensure that supplement makers put safer products on shelves and more information into the hands of consumers.

\$7.5 million

That's the record-setting fine against Mortgage Investors, a leading refiner of veterans' home loans, levied by the Federal Trade Commission. The FTC alleged that the corporation called more than 5.4 million consumers whose phone numbers were on the commission's Do Not Call registry, failed to remove them from its contact lists upon demand, and misstated the terms of loan products during telemarketing calls. You should still opt out of receiving those calls by registering your telephone numbers at DoNotCall.gov.

▣ Health insurance: Let us guide your choices

On Oct. 1, millions of Americans will gain access to online marketplaces for health insurance. This new kind of virtual insurance store (a major provision of the Affordable Care Act) allows you to compare plans in your state, enroll, and check to see whether you qualify for income-based tax credits. To help answer your questions about the new law and marketplace experience, we've created HealthLawHelper.org. It's a free, confidential tool that explains the responsibilities and plan options tied to your situation. The site offers clear, unbiased advice and links to additional resources from Consumers Union. See "It's Showtime for Health Care Reform," on page 30, for more coverage.



▣ FROM OUR PRESIDENT

What's a body to do?

"Probably more pseudo-scientific nonsense has been written about the human mouth by advertisers and more millions of dollars wasted on the mouth by consumers than any other part of the body," read a line from "How to Select a Toothbrush," in the first issue of CONSUMER REPORTS in 1936.



For us, being on the side of consumers has always meant challenging advertising. In 2013, that doesn't stop at the mouth.

Wear this! Parents will do pretty much anything to keep their kids safe, a point that's not lost on marketers. Certain pricey models of sports helmets are claimed to protect against concussion. But a University of Wisconsin study of high school football players found that no brand did better than others at reducing the number or severity of concussions. A bill now in Congress, endorsed by Consumers Union, bans false or misleading claims about the safety benefits of helmets.

Take this! Drugmakers spent about \$2.5 billion last year on ads urging you to "ask your doctor" for their brand-name drug. But the ads rarely tell the whole story. They might imply that a drug works wonders for everyone when it's only marginally better than a placebo. And they tout new drugs that don't have an established safety record. We've long pushed for less direct-to-consumer drug advertising, more disclosure of drug-trial results, and a strong reliance on treatments that are proved to work.

Drink this! The energy-drink industry wants you to be *awake!* The supercharged drinks might be fine for adults, but the marketing, packaging, and placement—often near soda and juice—is largely targeted at teens and younger children. CONSUMER REPORTS' 2012 tests found that caffeine levels, which aren't required on the label, can be more than twice that of a cup of coffee. The American Academy of Pediatrics says children and adolescents should never consume the drinks, which in 2011 sent almost 1,500 kids to the emergency room.

Today's ads, which assault us in increasingly surreptitious ways, push products we probably don't need and that might not be safe. Caution, consumers.

Joni Guest
JIM GUEST
 President



Up front

BE SEXY! TREAT ACNE!

LOOK YOUNGER! CURE CANCER!
LOSE POUNDS NOW! SMALLER THIGHS!
REMEMBER EVERYTHING!
NO MORE PAIN!

Snake oil for the 21st century

“INSTANTLY TAKE OFF 10-15 pounds!” “Stay sharp and mentally focused—even at age 90!” “Help almost every health problem ever experienced by a human being!”

Yes, a century and a half after “snake oil” salesmen roamed the U.S. selling fake medical cures, marketers are still touting an array of products with health claims that seem a little ... exaggerated, to use a word our legal department will allow. Among the pitches in our mailbag, in addition to those above: ads for youth hormones, Chinese miracle berries, stem-cell anti-aging nostrums, and a device that lets you “exhale your excess weight.”

How can companies get away with such grandiose claims? Some don’t. (See below.) But marketers can be very savvy about what they claim, according to Mary Engle, associate director for advertising practices at the Federal Trade Commission,

which is charged with protecting consumers from deceptive business practices. “They won’t say something directly or expressly,” Engle says, “but they will imply it by other things they say, or by certain imagery, and those can be harder cases for us.” A product might not state outright that it prevents colds in children, for instance, but will create that impression with images of kids and terms such as “boost immunity.”

It’s a ‘miracle!’

Health products are an especially fertile area for scams in part because most people can’t tell whether a product is really helping, experts say. Marketers often capitalize on the hopes of those who need to lose weight or have a hard-to-cure illness. “People may be desperate to try something else if nothing is working,” Engle says.

The concerns of an aging population are fodder for scams, so memory-boosting products are on the FTC’s radar. And digital technology has opened up a new avenue for scammers: mobile apps that claim to detect or treat diseases.

How can you spot a scam? Aside from an overuse of exclamation points and funky grammar (“smoothens deep wrinkles”?), questionable health products often claim to: work for everyone or treat a wide range of diseases; enhance weight loss, sexual performance, or memory; or work superfast (“eliminates skin cancer in days”). And some modern snake-oil makers accuse the government and drug industry of hiding their “breakthrough technology” or “miracle cure” from the public.

If you think you’ve found a fraudulent product, contact the FTC at ftccomplaintassistant.gov or 877-382-4357.

Health claims that were too good to be true

▶ AcneApp and Acne Pwner. The maker claimed these apps treated acne with colored lights from smart phones or other mobile devices.

Busted. The FTC announced in 2011 that the apps’ makers agreed to a settlement barring them from making acne-treatment claims without competent and reliable scientific evidence.



▶ Q-Ray bracelet. It was claimed to alter the body’s energy, relieving pain, and the maker cited a study showing that wearers had less pain.

Busted. The FTC said in 2011 that nearly \$12 million would be refunded to people who bought bracelets between 2000 and 2003. It added that in the study, a placebo bracelet relieved pain as well as Q-Ray. The website now calls Q-Rays “wellness bracelets.”



▶ Speak. This blend of nutrients was claimed to aid speech development in children “as soon as the first week.”

Busted. In August, a division of the Better Business Bureau recommended that Speak’s maker, NourishLife, stop certain ad claims. The action came at the urging of Truth in Advertising, a consumer-watchdog group. NourishLife has removed some claims and testimonials from its website.

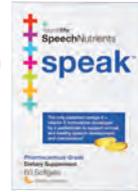


ILLUSTRATION: CHRIS LYONS



Makin' the best bacon

CHOCOLATE-COVERED BACON, bacon martinis, bacon ice cream, bacon-of-the-month clubs ... Is there any doubt that bacon is beloved? Unfortunately, there's also no doubt that bacon is not health food. Just two slices of pork bacon can have about 80 calories, 7 grams of fat (about a third saturated), and 200 to 400 milligrams of

sodium. Eat turkey bacon and you can cut those numbers in half, but you'll cut taste too, our tests showed. We tested regular and thick-sliced uncooked bacon, pre-cooked bacon, and turkey bacon.

Kirkland Signature was the only excellent product. It crisped up nicely and consistently had balanced fat and meat flavors comple-

mented by wood smoke and a hint of sweetness. The other pork bacons were close in quality and very good overall. Niman Ranch, Trader Joe's, Wright, and the two precooked bacons were smokier than some others; the two Hormel Black Labels were a bit sour.

The turkey bacons, cheaper but lower rated than the rest, were uniform slices of seemingly re-formed meat. They tasted low in fat, with a flavor of liquid smoke.

Bottom line. Enjoy bacon occasionally. Kirkland Signature Regular tastes best. It's sold as four 1-pound packages, so you may need to freeze some. (In general, you can keep opened bacon in a refrigerator for up to a week.)

Very good alternatives include Great Value Lower Sodium or, for thicker slices, Oscar Mayer Thick Cut. A higher price didn't mean better bacon: The priciest product of all, Oscar Mayer Fully Cooked, rated lower than many others.

Heating bacon in a microwave oven is quick and convenient; pan-frying gives you control over crispness; and broiling or baking lets you cook for a crowd.

▶ DID YOU KNOW?

To remove bacon grease from cloth, make a paste of Fels Naptha and water, rub it in, let it sit overnight, and then launder.

Gadgets to get you going

Activity trackers are like pedometers, but upgraded for this century. They count not only steps taken but also calories burned—and many measure sleep quality, compute calorie intake, and serve as alarm clocks or watches. Some display your progress in real time; all can show it later on a smart phone, tablet, or computer.

Trackers provide insight about habits and health, but using one might also help you shed a few pounds. Neil Busis, M.D., a Pittsburgh neurologist who lost 40 pounds in less than a year after undergoing heart-bypass surgery, credits a "personal health network" that includes an activity tracker, a calorie-counting app, a scale that interacts with the tracker, and a blood pressure monitor.

We measured how accurate six trackers were at counting

steps and calories, checked how easy each was to use, and assessed their features. For our step-count test, four men and four women wore the trackers as they walked on a treadmill, used an elliptical exerciser, went up and down stairs, and picked up toys. We compared each device's step count against the actual counts we had recorded.

For our calorie-count test, the panelists used a treadmill and an elliptical exerciser while wearing the trackers. Then an instrument measured the actual calories panelists burned. We compared tracker counts with actual counts.

Bottom line. A basic pedometer tracks daily steps, but for more versatility, consider the Fitbit One, Nike+ FuelBand, or Up by Jawbone. There's a learning curve with activity trackers, but most offer instructions online.

Ratings

All tested products In performance order.

CR Best Buy
 Recommended

| Recommendation | Brand & model | Overall score | Price | Type | Test results | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|---------------|------------------|------------------|--------------|----------|---------------|
| | | | | | Steps | Calories | Use, features |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Fitbit One ¹ | 80 | \$100 | clip-on | ● | ● | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Nike+ FuelBand ¹ | 70 | 150 | wrist | ● | ● | ○ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Up by Jawbone | 67 | 130 | wrist | ● | ● | ● |
| | BodyMedia Fit Link Armband | 64 | 150 ² | armband | ● | ○ | ○ |
| | Fitbit Flex | 63 | 100 | wrist | ● | ○ | ● |
| | iHealth Wireless Activity and Sleep Tracker ¹ | 62 | 60 | wrist or clip-on | ● | ○ | ● |

¹ Instant feedback without need to link to phone, tablet, or computer. ² Extra cost: 3 mos. free, then \$6.95 per mo.

TALK THE TALK

Thick cut. Some bacons boast of thicker slices, and they have a serving size of one slice instead of two. Niman Ranch is thicker than most but doesn't advertise it.

Nitrites, nitrates. They help in curing bacon—a preservation, flavoring, and coloring process—but can form nitrosamines, chemicals found to cause cancer in lab animals.

Uncured. Curing is done with salt, sodium nitrite, sugar, and sometimes other ingredients. Uncured bacon contains no synthetic nitrites or nitrates, but (as with the Trader Joe's and Niman Ranch bacons) it has them in natural form—from celery powder, for example.

Fully cooked. Eaten from the package, in a BLT sandwich for example, it's not very crisp. You can crisp it by cooking, but that defeats the purpose. The fully cooked pork bacons we tested didn't taste as good as the others.

No antibiotics ever. The animal wasn't fed antibiotics for illness or to promote growth, a practice that can lead to a rise in antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Niman Ranch is the only tested brand claiming to raise pigs without these drugs.

100% real bacon! Huh? That's a claim on Oscar Mayer Fully Cooked.

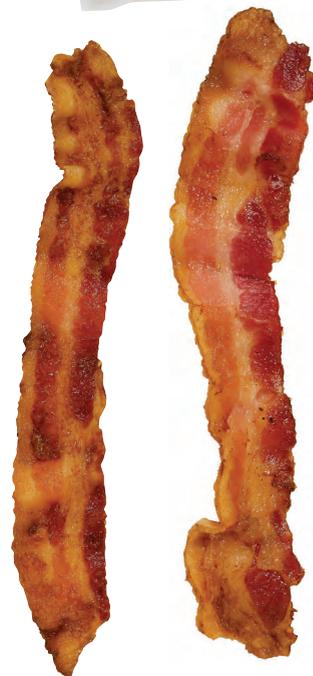
Ratings

All tested products In taste order.

Recommended

| Rec. | Product | Per serving (about ½ oz.) | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|---------------------------|--------|----------|---------|-------------|
| | | Cost | Slices | Calories | Fat (g) | Sodium (mg) |
| EXCELLENT | | | | | | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Kirkland Signature Regular Sliced (Costco) | 47¢ | 2 | 80 | 7 | 300 |
| VERY GOOD | | | | | | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Oscar Mayer Thick Cut | 42 | 1 | 60 | 5 | 220 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Great Value Lower Sodium (Walmart) | 43 | 2 | 80 | 7 | 173 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Wright Applewood | 55 | 2 | 90 | 7 | 270 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Oscar Mayer Naturally Hardwood Smoked | 48 | 2 | 70 | 6 | 260 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Hormel Black Label Original | 55 | 2 | 90 | 7 | 400 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Hormel Black Label Thick Cut | 38 | 1 | 55 | 4.5 | 265 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Trader Joe's Uncured Apple Smoked | 36 | 1 | 90 | 7 | 240 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Smithfield Hometown Original | 53 | 2 | 80 | 7 | 310 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Niman Ranch Maple Uncured | 73 | 1 | 70 | 7 | 130 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Hormel Fully Cooked Original | 68 | 2 | 70 | 5 | 290 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Oscar Mayer Fully Cooked Original | 88 | 3 | 80 | 6 | 340 |
| GOOD | | | | | | |
| | Oscar Mayer Turkey | 14 | 1 | 35 | 3 | 180 |
| | Jennie-O Turkey | 14 | 1 | 30 | 2.5 | 130 |
| | Butterball Turkey Original | 11 | 1 | 25 | 2 | 135 |

¹ Sold only as four 1-pound packages. ² For most products, nutrition numbers are for cooked bacon; Butterball numbers are for uncooked.



Kirkland Signature

Oscar Mayer Thick Cut

Fitbit One

Pros. Shows progress as a flower that "grows." Encourages: "Faster, Ed!" Tracks calorie intake. Syncs with apps like MyFitnessPal and SparkPeople. Tracks how long you slept and how often you woke during night. Clips on waistband, bra, or pocket.
Cons. Hard to read in sunlight. USB dongle enabling wireless hookup is tiny and could be lost.



Up by Jawbone

Pros. Tracks calorie intake and connects to apps including RunKeeper and MyFitnessPal. Tracks sleep, provides health tips, and can be worn in the shower.
Cons. Doesn't provide instant feedback or sync wirelessly; must be plugged into a smart phone or an Apple tablet.



Fitbit Flex

Pros. Lights show progress toward daily goal. Tracks calorie intake, logs food you eat, and tracks sleep. You can swim and shower with it (but it won't track swimming as an activity).
Cons. No instant results are shown; must be synced with a computer or smart phone. USB dongle enabling wireless hookup is tiny—could be lost.



Nike+ FuelBand

Pros. Displays progress as a "fuel number" and has lights that turn green when you reach a daily goal. Easiest of those tested to read in sunlight. You can shower with it.
Cons. No food logging. Doesn't track sleep.



BodyMedia Fit Link Armband

Pros. Works with other apps, tracks sleep, and has a food log feature.
Cons. Most panelists didn't like how it felt on their arms. Doesn't give instant feedback. Has to be synced with a smart phone or computer.



iHealth Wireless Activity and Sleep Tracker

Pros. Frog "leaps" as you near 10,000 steps. Tracks sleep and calorie intake (with use of compatible Apple products).
Cons. Looks bulky on wrist and was less accurate on the wrist than when clipped on. Hardest to read in sunlight.

Battle of the broths

WHAT'S MORE "VANILLA" than chicken broth? And yet, our experts found that not all taste alike. Not all come in the usual liquid form, either. The best in our tests is Knorr Homestyle Chicken Stock, a concentrated gel that you can use as a rub, add to dishes, or dissolve in hot water to create a broth. It's also a CR Best Buy. It has strong chicken flavor and no off-tastes.

Most of the broths have moderate chicken flavor; have some onion, carrot, and celery flavor; and taste salty. Among the very good ones, Swanson Chicken Stock and Kitchen Basics taste a little like roasted chicken, Kirkland Signature and College Inn Fat Free & Lower Sodium taste less salty than most, and Trader Joe's is slightly sour.

Lower-rated broths have issues: Knorr Chicken Flavored Bouillon and Better Than Bouillon taste quite salty, and Pacific has an off-taste we couldn't identify. And there's a soapy note in Swanson Broth (the company cites its "distinctive flavor," not to be confused with Swanson Stock's "robust flavor").

Per cup, broths are very low in calories (5 to 20) and fat (zero to 1 gram), but sodium can be a concern, so we've listed it in the Ratings. Some tested broths have at least a third of the recommended daily limit of sodium for most people, 2,300 milligrams.

Bottom line. Knorr Homestyle Stock is very good overall and costs just 25 cents per cup of broth. Don't buy by brand: Knorr Chicken Flavored Bouillon was just OK, and one Swanson product beat the other.



Knorr Homestyle Stock



Swanson Stock

Ratings

All tested models In taste order.

CR Best Buy
 Recommended

| Rec. | Product | Type | Per cup ¹ | |
|------|---------|------|----------------------|-------------|
| | | | Cost | Sodium (mg) |

VERY GOOD

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|--------|-----------------|-----|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Knorr Homestyle Stock | gel | 25¢ | 750 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Swanson Stock | liquid | 99 | 510 |
| | Kitchen Basics Original Stock | liquid | 74 | 430 |
| | Kirkland Signature Organic Stock (Costco) | liquid | 48 ² | 440 |
| | Market Pantry Broth (Target) | liquid | 47 | 860 |
| | College Inn Broth Fat Free & Lower Sodium | liquid | 55 | 420 |
| | College Inn Broth | liquid | 55 | 980 |
| | Trader Joe's Organic Free Range Broth | liquid | 50 | 570 |
| | Great Value Broth (Walmart) | liquid | 47 | 860 |
| | Family Gourmet Broth (Family Dollar) | liquid | 38 | 960 |

| Rec. | Product | Type | Per cup ¹ | |
|------|---------|------|----------------------|-------------|
| | | | Cost | Sodium (mg) |

VERY GOOD

| | | | | |
|--|---|--------|----|-----|
| | Rachael Ray Stock | liquid | 58 | 480 |
| | 365 Everyday Value Organic Broth (Whole Foods) | liquid | 50 | 570 |

GOOD

| | | | | |
|--|--|--------|----|------|
| | Swanson Broth | liquid | 78 | 860 |
| | Knorr Chicken Flavored Bouillon | cube | 12 | 1240 |
| | Better Than Bouillon Chicken Base | paste | 12 | 680 |
| | Emeril's Organic Chicken Flavored Stock | liquid | 74 | 590 |
| | Pacific Organic Free Range Broth | liquid | 89 | 570 |

¹ Prepared. ² Sold as a case of six 32-ounce containers.

When wardrobe malfunctions cause fashion faux pas

We tested five quick fixes for missing buttons, ripped hems, tight shoes, broken zippers, and tight slacks (holiday treats are making their way toward a table near you). All are sold online. One gizmo was a winner; the others weren't as easy to use as in infomercials or worked no better than cheaper fixes such as hem tape, wig tape (sold at a shoemaker or dry cleaner), safety pins or ... wait for it ... a needle and thread.



Worth a try

Style Snaps
\$10 per pair plus \$6.95 shipping and handling
The point. Raise a hem (even temporarily, as with women's slacks worn with flats or heels). You place two snaps inside a pants-leg, sticky side against fabric; cuff the pants; and snap the gizmos together.
Bottom line. They work best on straight-leg pants. They can also close a gap between shirt buttons or keep a wrap skirt from flying open. When the sticky sides collect lint, wash and air-dry them to reuse.

Don't bother

Buttoneer
\$14 plus \$6.95 shipping and handling
The point. Attach buttons in seconds, using a U-shaped fastener.
Bottom line. It is not easy to use, works only on small buttons, and pulls out of loose weaves.
Easy Fit Buttons
\$10 plus \$6.95 shipping and handling
The point. Fabric strips with a buttonhole on one end and button on the other extend pants or shirt waistband up to 2 inches.
Bottom line. Buttons must be the right size. When a strip is used, a gap keeps zippers from being closed all the way.

CLAIM CHECK

Flipping for GustBuster

The claim. GustBuster is the only “UN-Flip-pable, UN-Flappable, UN-Leakable umbrella in the World!” boasts its manufacturer, touting the “exclusive, raindrop-shaped wind-release vents” that enable the umbrella to withstand winds of more than 55 mph. GustBusters come in various sizes. We paid \$34.95 for a foldable Metro with a 43-inch canopy.

The check. We tested the GustBuster against a foldable Totes umbrella. We attached open umbrellas to the outside of a car and drove at ever-faster speeds with the umbrellas in three orientations: into the wind, across the wind, and catching the wind. (To our loved ones: We were in an enclosed area and wore seat belts.) We also checked how easy the GustBuster was to use and whether it kept us dry.

Bottom line. Bring on the breeze. Although the GustBuster is not “UN-Flippable,” it’s strong and works well in a big wind. Catching the wind, the Totes inverted and broke at 15 mph; GustBuster inverted at 30 mph but didn’t break, even at speeds topping 50 mph. Oh—it also shielded us from rain. Our GustBuster cost twice as much as the tested Totes, but it may be worth buying if you tend to collect mangled umbrellas all fall.



TOP RIGHT: JAMES WORELL; PROP STYLING: JEN EVERETT

Stretch Genie

\$10 plus \$6.95 shipping and handling

The point. Stretch tight leather shoes using spray (rubbing alcohol and water) and an expander device.

Bottom line. Shoes fit better but not perfectly, and the expander left bumps in the shoes. Sprayed shoes took 2 to 3 hours to dry.

Zip Tips

\$2 plus \$3.98 shipping and handling

The point. Remove a broken zipper and clip on a Zip Tip.

Bottom line. You still have to remove the broken slider and make repairs such as replacing the bottom clamp. And when we did that, the Zip Tip popped off.



SAME IN NAME ONLY Boston Market restaurants serve browned, seasoned, flavorful meatloaf and fresh-tasting potatoes (left). The frozen version (right): chewy patties low in beef flavor, and potatoes that taste as if they came from a box.

Restaurant meals in the freezer aisle?

When frozen foods sold in supermarkets are labeled Boston Market, California Pizza Kitchen, P.F. Chang’s, or TGI Friday’s, you might think they’d resemble their restaurant counterparts. Sometimes yes, sometimes no. Our experts compared sound-alikes from those brands and found:

- Most of the California Pizza Kitchen, P.F. Chang’s, and TGI Friday’s frozen foods we tested had at least a nodding acquaintance with their restaurant counterparts. Boston Market frozen foods didn’t.
- Some of the frozen foods tasted decent but different than their restaurant versions. Even when similar, they weren’t as good as foods of the same name when they were freshly cooked in a restaurant.
- Nutritionally, some of the pairs were quite different. Although you’ll get six potato skins in a half-order at TGI Friday’s restaurant and in the frozen food aisle, the restaurant version has more than three times the calories and fat. Sometimes

frozen foods look much more healthful simply because they cite a serving about half as big as the one in a restaurant. The Boston Market frozen chicken pot pies are about the same size as those in the restaurant, but the frozen serving is supposed to be a half-pie.

- The gap in price was sometimes large, with the restaurant meal usually costing more. The California Pizza Kitchen pie we tried is \$14.75 in the restaurant and just \$5.99 frozen; and TGI Friday’s potato skins cost more than twice as much at a restaurant as in the frozen-food aisle. On the other hand, P.F. Chang’s shrimp lo mein costs about the same in the restaurant and supermarket.

Bottom line. The chart tells the tale of one food from each restaurant. Read nutrition facts panels on frozen foods and see websites for nutrition information about the restaurant versions—and pay attention to the serving size. If price is nearly the same, enjoy a night out.

Brand/meal

Restaurant vs. frozen

Boston Market

Chicken pot pie
\$5.80 whole pie restaurant;
\$4.25 whole pie frozen

Restaurant pie has big chicken pieces, thick sauce, crust on top; frozen pie has cubes of spongy re-formed chicken, thin gravy, but tasty crust all around.

California Pizza Kitchen

BBQ Recipe Chicken Thin Crust
\$14.75 restaurant; \$6 frozen

Topped with same ingredients (barbecue sauce, cheese, chicken, onion, cilantro). Frozen has overpowering barbecue flavor, toasted crust like flatbread.

P.F. Chang’s

Shrimp lo mein
\$9.95 restaurant; \$9.50 frozen

Both have noodles with sliced mushrooms, carrots, celery. Restaurant has medium, tasty shrimp; frozen has small, less-flavorful shrimp.

TGI Friday’s

Buffalo wings
\$10 for 10 pieces at restaurant;
\$4 for 6 pieces frozen

Restaurant has bigger wings but both are tasty; frozen sauce is less vinegary, more spicy.

Dump your big bank and save

REMEMBER BANK TRANSFER DAY, two years ago this month? That's when mad-as-hell consumers were supposed to bring giant banks such as Bank of America, Chase, and Citibank to their knees by moving their money to nonprofit credit unions.

It was a bust. Few people switched, in part because of the grip big banks had on them with their alluring online and mobile-banking services. Those let you use your computer and smart phone to watch balances, find ATMs, make account transfers, pay bills, and even deposit checks.

Now the top 10 credit unions have caught up, and many smaller ones have added, or are working to add, smart-phone banking, says Mary Monahan, an executive at Javelin Strategy & Research, a California market research firm. And new competitors have entered the fight for your dollars.

So if you're still sick and tired of your megabank's sneaky fees, questionable investment tactics, and slippery mortgage-lending practices, now may be the time for Bank Transfer Day 2. Here's the lowdown on four alternatives worth considering.

▣ Credit unions

Why? They offer all of the services of a bank (and federal deposit insurance) but tend to charge considerably less for checking accounts and loans. And they generally pay higher interest rates on savings.

Why not? The customer-satisfaction rating for credit unions dropped five points last year, to 82, according to the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), which tracks 48 industries. Nevertheless, they still outscored Chase (74), Citibank (70), and Bank of America (66).

Where to find them. Membership is open only to people in a specific group, such as employees of a company, members of an association, or residents of certain communities. Go to mycreditunion.gov to find prospects near you.

▣ Regional banks

Why? If you're uncomfortable cutting the cord to a traditional bank, check out a regional or midsized bank. They now offer the same technological bells and whistles but also provide significantly higher satisfaction than the four biggest national banks, according to the ACSI. Their satisfaction score was 79 last year, placing them below credit unions but above the big banks.

Why not? Smaller isn't always better. In Texas, Regions Bank ranked last among 13 banks assessed in J.D. Power's 2013 Retail Banking Satisfaction Survey. That was worse than Wells Fargo, Citibank, and Bank of America, though Frost National, another regional, topped the Lone Star State list.

Where to find them. Go to jdpower.com

for rankings of regional banks serving your section of the country.

▣ Virtual banks

Why? They typically charge no monthly fees, have low penalties or none at all, and offer FDIC insurance, direct deposit, electronic bill payment, debit cards, photo check deposit, and national networks of fee-free ATMs.

Why not? There are no physical branches, which might be unsettling unless you've embraced mobile banking and rarely need to set foot inside a branch. Plus the low- or no-fee business model might be jeopardized at some virtual banks that partly finance their operations from the fees they collect every time a customer uses a debit card to make a purchase, because in July a federal court ruling signaled that those fees might be regulated lower.

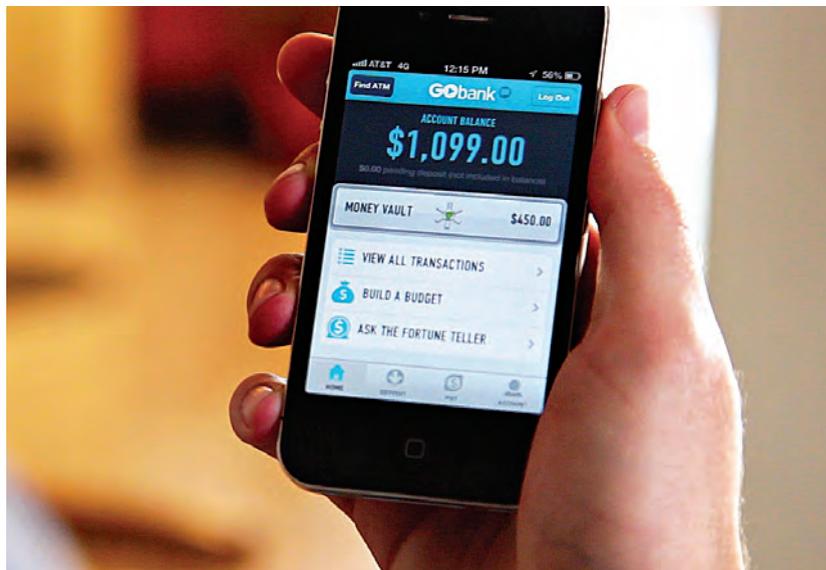
Where to find them. Search online for virtual banks including Ally, Capital One 360 Checking, GoBank, and Simple.

▣ Prepaid cards

Why? Once a high-priced option for low-income consumers who couldn't qualify for a checking account or credit card, prepaid cards have moved into the mainstream and offer many of the features of a checking account. Almost all of them come with FDIC insurance. And when CONSUMER REPORTS rated 26 cards in July on value, convenience, safety, and other measures, it found that consumers could avoid the few fees that the best ones had.

Why not? All prepaid cards aren't created equal. And while our Ratings didn't compare the cost of checking accounts vs. a prepaid-card alternative, we did find that the worst prepaid cards have high, unavoidable charges, including activation and monthly fees, and that one lacked FDIC insurance. Four prepaid cards to avoid: AccountNow Gold Visa Prepaid Card (MetaBank), Reach Visa Prepaid Card (Tom Joyner), Redpack Mi Promesa Prepaid MasterCard, and American Express for Target.

Where to find them. Consider the best we found: Bluebird with direct deposit (American Express), H&R Block Emerald Prepaid MasterCard, Green Dot Card (Green Dot Bank), and Approved Prepaid MasterCard (Suze Orman) with or without direct deposit.



MORE OPTIONS If you're comfortable with technology, the low fees of Internet-only banks, which deliver services via smart phone and computer, might be appealing.

5-MINUTE CONSULT

Don't wait to plan long-term care



Orly Avitzur, M.D., a board-certified neurologist, is a medical adviser to Consumer Reports.

AS A NEUROLOGIST with patients who include those affected by Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and strokes, I'm all too aware that, like it or not, many of us will need help caring for ourselves someday. And we can't always predict when that day might come. I worry about my older patients

who need to move into assisted living and lack the funds to do so. But I also worry about my younger patients—those age 45 to 60—who might need help someday (potentially very expensive help) and haven't made any provisions for it.

The reality is that an estimated 70 percent of people now turning 65 can expect to require some form of long-term care in their lifetime, either at home or in a residential or day-care facility, according to the Department of Health and Human Services. Here are answers to some basic questions about long-term care and why you should have a plan in place—even long before you need it.

What is long-term care, exactly?

The term refers to ongoing care to help you with the activities of day-to-day living. That could range from having a home health aide a few hours a day help with bathing, dressing, and meals, to skilled nursing services (such as giving medication or monitoring a catheter) at a nursing home or assisted-living facility. Unless a spouse or adult child will fulfill the role of your permanent, primary caregiver, it's likely that you'll need at least some outside help if you become disabled.



Is long-term care expensive?

Yes; in fact, the cost can be staggering. It currently costs an average of \$6,235 a month for a semiprivate room in a nursing home, \$3,293 a month for a one-bedroom unit in an assisted-living facility, \$21 an hour for a home health aide, and \$67 a day for an adult day-care center. That's probably why the financial guru Suze Orman says that long-term-care insurance is something everyone should have as long as they can afford it. But the coverage is complicated and costly. And the longer you wait to buy it, the more expensive it becomes.

When is the best time to buy a policy?

You'll pay less if you buy one before age 60. Premiums rise after that age, as does your risk of disability. But there's a caveat: You should buy a policy only if you can afford to keep paying the premiums, which can almost double over time. Most policies terminate if you stop premium payments, so you'll lose any benefits you've accrued.

Some policies offer a nonforfeiture option that preserves some benefits even if you stop paying, but that increases the cost, and you typically need to have the policy for at least three years first.

What do policies cover, and what do they cost?

They vary, but services might include expenses related to home health care, hospice care, adult day care, or care in a nursing home or assisted-living facility. The price varies widely as well, depending on your age, your current health, where you live, and the benefits you want. A 50-year-old buying a new policy will pay an average of \$888 a year; a 65-year-old, \$1,850; and a 75-year-old, \$5,880, according to the National Association of Insurance Commissioners. If you have questions, a financial planner can help you explore your options.

Won't Medicare pay for some of this?

Not for truly long-term help. Medicare in certain cases will pay for up to 100 days in a skilled nursing facility after you've been hospitalized, or for the same number of days of skilled nursing services at home (not basic assistance like cleaning or help with meals). In contrast, the average stay for custodial care in a nursing home is more than two years. So unless you have ample savings to cover prolonged care, it's worth considering at least partial coverage through a long-term-care policy.

Where to learn more

- ConsumerReports.org/cro/2012/08/long-term-care-insurance. There's advice from our money experts for people considering long-term-care insurance as well as those with existing policies.
- longtermcare.gov. This government site has information about the limitations of coverage within Medicare and resources for learning more about long-term-care insurance.

- naic.org/documents/consumer_alert_ltc.htm. This is a consumer primer on long-term-care insurance from the National Association of Insurance Commissioners.
- dehpg.net/lcpartnership. A promising initiative called The Long-Term Care Partnership Program lets you use long-term-care insurance first, then Medicaid as a safety net without losing all of your assets.



Two BeBeLove high chairs pose safety risk

MOST HIGH CHAIRS sold in America comply with a voluntary safety standard that includes a crotch post. The post is supposed to keep an unharnessed child from sliding out and falling to the floor—or being strangled if the child's head gets caught on the way down. Among the glaring exceptions: BeBeLove's 604-1, \$40 to \$65, and 604-B, \$90.

BeBeLove's 604-1 lacks a crotch post. The pricier 604-B includes the post, but it comes unattached without installation instructions. An uninstalled crotch post can still meet the voluntary safety standard if, when installed, it prevents a metal wedge that approximates a small child's torso from passing through the chair's leg openings.

We tested the crotch post on the BeBeLove 604-B as we do on other high chairs, using a metal wedge the same size as the one specified in the voluntary standard: The wedge passed easily through the leg

openings on two separate samples of the BeBeLove 604-B. We've judged the BeBeLove 604-1 and 604-B high chairs a Don't Buy: Safety Risk as a result.

We contacted BeBeLove, in Pico Rivera, Calif.; the company hadn't gotten back to us with a comment when we went to press. We also shared our findings with the Consumer Product Safety Commission, which said it is looking into the matter.

High chairs are slated to eventually join other child products that must meet mandatory safety standards under federal law. If you already own a BeBeLove 604-1 or 604-B high chair, stop using it and ask the retailer or manufacturer for a refund. And if you're high-chair shopping, buy one that has a crotch post. The Mia Moda Alto, a CR Best Buy at \$100, is one of several top-scoring models that come with the post built in. Also be sure to always fasten the chair's harness to secure the child.

4.8 million

That's the number of potentially hazardous items stopped by federal authorities from entering the country during the latest year of reporting, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Children's products accounted for more than half of the total, or 2.7 million units. And the majority of those were stopped for lead paint or lead contained in the product. The inspection tally covers the federal fiscal year from October 2011 to September 2012 and results from more than 18,000 product screenings. Non-children's products that were stopped included cigarette and other types of lighters, fireworks, bicycle helmets, hair dryers, and electric aquarium equipment.

RECALLS

AUTOMOBILES

'06-'11 Hyundai Sonata and Azera

Road salt and water can enter the rear crossmember and corrode its steel parts. That could lead to detachment of one of the rear control arms, which may suddenly change the rear wheel alignment and affect the handling of the vehicle.

MODELS 239,000 '06-'10 Sonatas manufactured March 1, 2005, through Jan. 21, 2010, and '06-'11 Azeras manufactured Sept. 27, 2005, through Nov. 22, 2010, and sold in or currently registered in CT, DE, IA, IL, IN, MA, MD, ME, MI, MN, MO, NH, NJ, NY, OH, PA, RI, VT, WV, WI, and Washington, D.C.
WHAT TO DO Dealers will repair or replace the crossmember assembly. Call Hyundai at 800-633-5151 for details.



2013 Hyundai Santa Fe Sport

Because of a manufacturing issue, the right front axle shaft may fracture, which could lead to a loss of power to the wheels. Also, if the vehicle is parked without a parking brake applied, it may roll away.

MODELS 20,300 2013 Santa Fe Sports manufactured July 13, 2012, through March 12, 2013, and equipped with a 2.4-liter engine.

WHAT TO DO Dealer will replace the front axle shaft assembly. Call Hyundai at 800-633-5151 for details.



HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS Vitamix 64-ounce low-profile container

The blade in the blender container can break, posing a risk of cuts.

PRODUCTS About 165,000 containers with blade part No. 103208 with date codes from March 2012 through July 2013. The clear plastic containers were sold with Vitamix models 7500, Professional Series 300, Professional Series 750, and individually. Cost was \$529 to \$749 with blender, \$149 for container alone.

WHAT TO DO Consumers should stop using the container immediately and contact Vitamix at 888-350-4386 for instructions on getting a repair.





Best of the year

Top products and great buys for every budget

550+



Busy this time of year? No kidding. So to save you time (and in some cases, money), we're showing you just the items at the top of our lists.

Here we have selected the best TVs, cameras, tablets, laptops, ranges, dishwashers, fitness equipment, and other products from a year's worth of testing.

We buy products, test them in our labs, and evaluate their performance so that you can get the most bang for

your buck. The result: Ratings for more than 3,550 products in total. The bill: about \$1.7 million for products and an additional \$2.5 million for autos.

We have more than 550 recommended items for you in almost two dozen categories. And because we know that cost is always important, we've arranged some products by price range in the middle of each page so that you can get find something for every budget. Happy shopping!



Refrigerators

WHAT'S NEW Mega fridges, including French-door models with 33 cubic feet of claimed storage. Refrigerator facades have also evolved, with enhanced dispensers that serve up hot water and seltzer, Wi-Fi-enabled screens, and hidden compartments that let you grab drinks, condiments, and more without accessing the main fridge.

SHOPPING TIP Width is important if the refrigerator will fill an existing opening, but you also need to factor in door swings relative to other appliances, walls, and other fixed objects.



KitchenAid KSF26C6X

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------|---------------|
| Side-by-sides | Samsung RS265TD[W/P] | \$1,300 | 76 |
| | KitchenAid KSF26C6X[YY] | 1,950 | 75 |
| | Bosch Linea 800 B22CS80SN[S] | 2,700 | 74 |
| | Maytag MSD2559XE[W] | 1,250 | 73 |
| | DCS RX215PJX1 | 2,500 | 73 |
| French-door bottom-freezers | Samsung RF261BIAESR | 2,100 | 84 |
| | Kenmore Elite 72093 | 3,400 | 83 |
| | Kenmore 7160[3] | 1,700 | 83 |
| | LG LFX33975ST | 3,000 | 83 |
| | Whirlpool Gold GX5FHTXV[Q] | 1,700 | 82 |
| | Samsung RFG298HD[RS] (Lowe's) | 2,800 | 81 |
| | LG LFC25776[SW] | 1,750 | 81 |
| | Samsung RF323TEDB[SR] | 3,300 | 80 |
| | LG LFX28979[ST] | 2,850 | 79 |
| | Samsung RF31FMESBSR | 2,900 | 79 |
| | Kenmore Elite 7103[2] | 2,500 | 79 |
| | LG LFX31925[ST] | 3,200 | 79 |
| | GE Café CFE29TSDSS | 3,000 | 78 |
| | Samsung RF261BEAE[SR] | 2,100 | 78 |
| | Kenmore 7201[2] | 1,550 | 78 |
| | LG LFC25765[ST] | 1,900 | 78 |
| | Kenmore Elite 7205[3] | 3,200 | 78 |
| LG LFX28978[SW] | 2,700 | 78 | |
| LG LFX25991[ST] | 3,400 | 77 | |
| Kenmore Elite 7230[3] | 1,920 | 76 | |

Great buys
\$50 and under



▶ The **Calphalon Simply Nonstick 10-inch Omelette Pan**, a \$40 CR Best Buy, beat out models from All-Clad, Le Creuset, and Rachael Ray. It is superb at evenly heating food, say, for an omelet or frittata, it's easy to clean, and it shrugged off our tough durability test in which steel wool is rubbed over a pan up to 2,000 times.

▶ **Google Chromecast**, \$35, is a pint-sized media player that packs a powerful Web wallop. Slip it into a TV's HDMI slot, power it up, connect it to your Wi-Fi network, and start streaming TV shows and movies from Netflix, YouTube videos, and more. You can also "cast" Internet content from a PC or Mac loaded with a Chrome browser to a TV. There's no remote—you use a laptop, smart phone, or tablet.



LG 60LA8600

LCD TVs

WHAT'S NEW All but the lowest-priced LCD sets now use LED backlights (so-called LED TVs), enabling slimmer designs and better energy efficiency. More models let you use a phone or tablet as a remote control and work with "second-screen apps" that enable you to send content from a smart phone or tablet to your TV screen.

SHOPPING TIP Viewing angle is still a challenge for LCD sets, so check out the screen from the side to see whether changes in picture quality—such as a shift in colors or a washed-out look—bother you.

| Size | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|---------|---------------|
| 60-inch and larger | LG 60LA8600 | \$2,300 | 75 |
| | Samsung UN60F7500 | 2,200 | 72 |
| | Sharp Aquos LC-60LE857U | 2,000 | 72 |
| | Samsung UN65F8000 | 3,000 | 70 |
| | Panasonic Viera TC-L60DT60 | 2,400 | 69 |
| | Sony Bravia KDL-60R550A | 1,500 | 68 |
| | Vizio M601d-A3R | 1,400 | 67 |
| | Sharp Aquos LC-70C7500U | 2,200 | 65 |
| 55- to 59-inch | LG 55GA7900 | 1,500 | 74 |
| | Samsung UN55ES8000 | 2,100 | 74 |
| | Sony Bravia XBR-55X900A | 4,000 | 74 |
| | LG 55LA7400 | 1,500 | 74 |
| | Samsung UN55ES6500 | 1,400 | 72 |
| | Samsung UN55F7100 | 1,500 | 69 |
| | Sony Bravia KDL-55W900A | 2,300 | 69 |
| | Samsung UN55F6400 | 1,300 | 67 |
| 46- to 52-inch | Toshiba 58L7350U | 1,300 | 67 |
| | JVC JLE55SP4000 | 1,100 | 66 |
| | LG 47LA6900 | 1,050 | 71 |
| | Samsung UN46ES6600 | 1,200 | 70 |



| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|-----------------|--|---------|---------------|
| Bottom-freezers | Whirlpool Gold GB2FHDWX[Q] | \$1,200 | 73 |
| | Amana ABB2224WE[] | 1,350 | 73 |
| | Maytag MBF2258XE[W] | 1,100 | 73 |
| | Maytag MBF1958XE[W] | 1,150 | 72 |
| Top-freezers | GE Profile PTS22LHS[WW] | 1,400 | 69 |
| | Whirlpool WRT771REY[W] | 1,100 | 67 |
| | Haier HT21TS45SSW | 900 | 65 |
| | LG LTC22350[SW] | 1,000 | 65 |
| | Frigidaire Gallery FGHT2144K[F] | 800 | 64 |
| | Haier HT21TS77SP | 700 | 63 |
| | Haier HT18TS77SP | 600 | 63 |
| | Frigidaire LFHT2117L[W] (Lowe's) | 700 | 62 |
| | Kenmore 78892 | 700 | 62 |
| | Maytag MITXEGMY[W] | 770 | 62 |
| | Kenmore 79433 | 1,400 | 62 |
| Built-ins | Thermador Freedom Collection T36BB820SS | 7,400 | 80 |
| | Jenn-Air JS42PPDUB[SS] | 7,200 | 80 |
| | Bosch Integra 800 Series B36BT830NS | 7,500 | 78 |
| | Thermador Freedom Collection T36BT810NS | 8,000 | 78 |
| | Thermador KBUDT4265E[S] | 8,750 | 77 |
| | Sub-Zero BI42S[S] | 8,000 | 76 |
| | Miele KF1901Vi | 7,200 | 76 |



SPOTLIGHT

The **Samsung RF31FMESBSR, \$2,900**, is the first four-door refrigerator to make our picks list, boasting superb temperature control and efficiency. Its temperature-controlled middle drawer can go from 29° F for meat to 42° F for party platters. This is also the first-ever fridge with a built-in sparkling water dispenser from SodaStream.



◀ You can get some very good wines for under \$10 a bottle. Our taste testers found chardonnays: **Charles Shaw, \$3**, from Trader Joe's, is very good, as are Whole Foods' **Trackers Crossing 365, \$7**, and Costco's **Kirkland Signature Sonoma, \$7**.

▶ The 12-cup **Mr. Coffee BVMC-SJX33GT, \$40**, delivers great value and an even better cup of joe. The automatic drip machine gets the water hot enough to bring out the coffee's full flavor, and we found it easy to set up, operate, and clean. Plus the spill-free carafe is helpful if you're a bit clumsy before that first morning cup.



▶ **Sennheiser's CX-215 earphones, \$40**, come in five fun, funky colors and have easily gripped, contoured shells. The overall sound quality is very good, and the in-ear design helps muffle outside noise.



| Size | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------|---------------|
| 46- to 52-inch continued | Panasonic Viera TC-L47WT60 | \$2,500 | 69 |
| | Samsung UN46EH5300 | 650 | 68 |
| | LG 47LA6200 | 800 | 68 |
| | Sony Bravia KDL-47W802A | 1,100 | 66 |
| | Panasonic Viera TC-L50ET60 | 1,300 | 66 |
| | Vizio E500d-A0 | 650 | 66 |
| | Samsung UN46EH5000 | 600 | 65 |
| | Toshiba 50L7300U | 850 | 65 |
| 40- to 43-inch | LG 42GA6400 | 850 | 67 |
| | Panasonic Viera TC-L42E60 | 600 | 66 |
| | Samsung UN40F5500 | 530 | 65 |
| | Sony Bravia KDL-40EX640 | 900 | 65 |
| 32-inch | Samsung UN32EH5000 | 300 | 66 |
| | Samsung UN32F6300 | 600 | 65 |
| 29-inch and smaller | Samsung UN26EH4000 | 300 | 64 |
| | Samsung UN29F4000 | 280 | 60 |
| | Vizio E291i-A1 | 250 | 58 |
| | LG 29LN4510 | 250 | 58 |
| | Toshiba 29L1350U | 200 | 58 |
| | Philips 26PFL4907 | 300 | 56 |



SPOTLIGHT

UltraHD TVs such as this LED-lit LCD model have higher-resolution screens (3840x2160, so-called 4K) with four times as many pixels as 1080p sets. That enables them to show extremely detailed, lifelike images. The **Sony Bravia XBR-55X900A, \$4,000**, wowed us with its realistic picture. But UltraHD sets are pricey and there isn't much 4K content, so don't rush out to buy one yet.

Dishwashers

WHAT'S NEW Dedicated zones for power washing, visible cycle-status indicators (helpful as machines get extremely quiet), and innovative ways to adjust the upper rack for specially sized items. But overall washing still matters most among our top picks.

SHOPPING TIP Look for savings of up to \$200 at major retailers over the holidays. With brand-new models, prices usually drop six to eight weeks after they debut.

| Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|---|---------|---------------|
| Kenmore Elite 12793 | \$1,350 | 85 |
| Kenmore Elite 12783 | 1,200 | 82 |
| Bosch Ascenta SHX3AR7[5]UC | 700 | 81 |
| KitchenAid KDFE454CSS | 1,500 | 81 |
| Thermador Topaz Series DWHD640JFM | 1,500 | 80 |
| Bosch 800 Plus Series SHX7PT55UC | 1,300 | 80 |
| Bosch 500 Series SHP6T55UC | 900 | 80 |
| Miele Futura Dimension G5675SCSF | 1,900 | 80 |
| Bosch 300 Series DLX SHX53TL5UC | 850 | 80 |
| KitchenAid KUDE48FX[SS] | 1,100 | 79 |
| KitchenAid KUDE50FBSS | 1,500 | 79 |
| Bosch 800 Plus Series SHX9ER5[5]UC | 1,800 | 79 |
| Bosch 800 Series SHE68T55UC | 950 | 79 |



SPOTLIGHT

Paying more for the **Kenmore Elite 12793, \$1,350**, gets top-notch washing, energy-efficient operation, and especially quiet cycles. You'll get loads of helpful features, including a soil sensor, an adjustable upper rack, and an industry-first motorized spray arm that reverses direction if a utensil falls through the racks and blocks the arm's rotation.

Great buys
\$100 and under

▼ Many hand vacs have a hard time keeping in the dirt and dust that they pick up, but not the **Shark Perfect Pet II SV780, \$80**. The 4-pound cordless unit offers impressive surface cleaning on carpets and even better performance on bare floors.



► The **Jacques' Choice** box of chocolates, **\$66**, from Jacques Torres, provides an excellent selection of small ultrasoft pieces of milk, dark, and white chocolates. It contains 50 pieces, some of which have fillings that include tropical fruit, caramel, nut butter, and more.



Plasma TVs

WHAT'S NEW Plasma TVs continue to improve, even in areas in which they already excel, such as deep black levels. In larger sizes, most of our top-rated sets are plasmas. As with LCD sets, you can control many plasmas with a phone or tablet and view content from those screens.

SHOPPING TIP Looking for a low-priced 42- or 50-inch TV? Consider a 720p plasma set. At those sizes, it's hard to see the added detail of 1080p.

| Size | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|---------|---------------|
| 60-inch and larger | Samsung PN64F5500 | \$1,800 | 74 |
| | Panasonic Viera TC-P65VT60 | 3,100 | 73 |
| | Panasonic Viera TC-P60ZT60 | 3,300 | 73 |
| | Samsung PN64F8500 | 2,900 | 73 |
| | Panasonic Viera TC-P60ST60 | 1,500 | 72 |
| | LG 60PH6700 | 1,050 | 72 |
| 46- to 55-inch | Samsung PN64E550 | 2,100 | 71 |
| | Samsung PN60F5500 | 1,200 | 71 |
| | Samsung PN51F8500 | 1,600 | 75 |
| | Samsung PN51E490 | 720 | 72 |
| | Panasonic Viera TC-P55ST60 | 1,350 | 72 |
| | Panasonic Viera TC-P50S60 | 700 | 67 |
| 40- to 43-inch | LG 50PN6500 | 600 | 66 |
| | Samsung PN51F5300 | 650 | 66 |
| | Samsung PN43E450 | 420 | 68 |



Samsung PN51F8500

Microwave ovens

WHAT'S NEW Larger usable capacities and a wire rack for cooking two foods at the same time help get the job done faster. Over-the-range models can be vented to the outside but still won't match the smoke and fume-clearing ability of a capable range hood.

SHOPPING TIP Consider whether features, such as grilling, browning, and convection, are worth the extra money. Our tests have found that they generally can't compete with a range's broiler or an outdoor grill.



Sharp R-323TKC

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|-----------------------|--|-------|---------------|
| Mid-sized counter-top | Sharp R-323TKC | \$140 | 79 |
| | Panasonic Genius Prestige NN-SD681S | 180 | 72 |
| | Kenmore 72123 | 150 | 72 |
| Large counter-top | Jenn-Air JMC1150WS | 700 | 77 |
| | Whirlpool MT4155SP[B] | 185 | 76 |
| | Whirlpool Gold GT4175SP[B] | 280 | 76 |
| | Kenmore Elite 7915[9] | 150 | 76 |
| | GE Profile PEB2060DM[BB] | 230 | 75 |
| | Panasonic Inverter NN-H965BF | 180 | 75 |
| Over-the-range | Kenmore Elite 74223 | 200 | 75 |
| | Panasonic Genius Prestige NN-SD297[SR] | 430 | 73 |
| | Samsung SMH1816S | 320 | 72 |
| | Samsung SMH2117[S] | 500 | 71 |
| | GE JVM1540DP[WW] | 220 | 71 |
| | Samsung SMH1713[S] | 270 | 71 |



▲ Fight back itchy eyes and sore throats with the **Vicks V4500** tabletop humidifier, **\$70**. The quiet, filter-free device can humidify up to 420 square feet with ease, and it's effective at inhibiting bacterial growth, though as with all humidifiers, regular cleaning is required.

▶ With its rugged, weather-resistant case, the **Casio G'zOne Commando 4G LTE**, **\$100** (Verizon, with two-year contract), should survive anything nature (or your toddler) throws at it. It has a larger display and a better rear-facing camera than its predecessor. It also adds a front-facing camera, near-field communication (NFC) technology, global roaming, and 4G LTE.



SPOTLIGHT

OLED TVs combine the deep blacks, high contrast, and unlimited viewing angles of plasma TVs with the bright images, super-slim designs, and energy efficiency of LCD sets with LED backlights. The 55-inch **Samsung KN55S9C**, which has a curved screen, is the best TV we've ever seen. The downside: It costs **\$9,000**.



Hisense Pulse

Netgear TV Prime

Streaming media players

WHAT'S NEW Some models can connect you to content stored on your home network so that you can access your own videos, music, and photos, as well as TV shows and movies from streaming services such as Amazon and Netflix. Some new "stick"-style players, including the Google Chromecast (see page 16), resemble USB flash drives.

SHOPPING TIP WPS (Wi-Fi Protected Setup) lets you connect some players to your home network without manually entering a password.

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|----------|----------------------------|-------|---------------|
| Advanced | Hisense Pulse | \$ 75 | 67 |
| | Netgear TV Prime | 100 | 67 |
| Basic | Western Digital WD TV Play | 60 | 68 |
| | Roku 3 | 100 | 62 |
| | Panasonic DMP-MST60 | 80 | 61 |

SPOTLIGHT

Apple TV, \$100, is a great media player for iTunes fans and for those with videos, music, and more stored on a Mac computer or in iCloud. This tiny device streams HBO Go, Hulu Plus, and Netflix, and lets you view whatever is on your iOS device on your TV. Not an Apple diehard? Try the models in our Ratings (at left).



Ranges

WHAT'S NEW Double-oven ranges, which let you cook multiple dishes at different temperatures, have become so common that they have their own category in our Ratings. Some versions feature a smaller top oven for daily dinners and a larger oven below for entertaining and holiday meals. Others have two same-sized ovens for households that do a lot of cooking on a regular basis. **SHOPPING TIP** If you're considering a double oven, borrow a roasting pan from the housewares aisle and place it in the lower compartment. Pretend it's holding a 26-pound turkey, then pull out the rack and lift the roaster from the oven. How's your back?

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|---|-----------------------|---------|---------------|
| 30-inch electric smoothtop double ovens | GE Profile PS978STSS | \$2,800 | 86 |
| | Maytag MET8885XS | 1,700 | 83 |
| | Frigidaire FGFE302TNF | 1,400 | 82 |
| | Frigidaire FGFE308TNF | 1,800 | 81 |
| | LG LDE3015ST | 1,300 | 81 |
| 30-inch electric smoothtop single ovens | Kenmore 92163 | 1,550 | 87 |
| | GE JB705STSS | 1,000 | 86 |
| | LG LRE3023S | 1,000 | 86 |
| | GE Café CS980SNSS | 2,800 | 86 |
| | LG LRE3025S | 1,250 | 86 |
| | GE PB920STSS | 1,800 | 85 |
| | Kenmore 92803 | 850 | 84 |
| | Electrolux EW30EF65GW | 2,200 | 83 |
| | GE JB650DTWW | 800 | 81 |
| | LG LRE3012ST | 850 | 81 |
| 30-inch electric coil | Kenmore 90212 | 430 | 81 |
| | GE Profile PHB925STSS | 2,700 | 90 |
| 30-inch induction single ovens | Kenmore Elite 97203 | 2,500 | 89 |
| | Samsung FTQ307NWGX | 2,000 | 89 |
| 30-inch gas double ovens | LG LDG3037ST | 1,900 | 75 |
| | LG LDG3016ST | 1,800 | 70 |



Kenmore Elite 97203

Great buys \$100 and under



◀ The **Ninja Professional NJ600, \$100**, outperformed many premium blenders that cost four or five times as much. With its 9-cup container, the blender makes a superb fruit smoothie, purées soups and sauces to perfection, and whips up a fabulous frozen drink. It also aced our durability test, so it should stand the test of time.



▶ **Canon's Pixma MG3220, \$70**, is an all-in-one inkjet that has a low price and offers very good overall performance, including the ability to print very good quality photos quickly. Plus it's wireless, so you can print photos and text from your phone or tablet.

SPOTLIGHT

If you have a he-man-sized TV that sounds like a 97-pound weakling, a sound bar could be just the ticket. The **Sonos Playbar, \$700**, can improve your TV's sound and then some. It connects directly to several Internet music services and has very good sound that's suitable for listening to music, as well as movie sound tracks. Add an optional subwoofer and speakers for a full 5.1-channel surround-sound system. The **Sony HT-CT260 2.1-channel system, \$300**, with a wireless subwoofer, also has very good sound.

Sonos Playbar



Basic cameras

WHAT'S NEW The zoom range on point-and-shoots just keeps on getting better. For instance, the 16-megapixel Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ70 has a 60x optical zoom lens, the longest we've ever seen on a fixed-lens camera.

SHOPPING TIP Don't focus only on the long end of the zoom. A zoom with a wide, 24mm lens is great for panoramas and group shots.

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|-----------|---------------------------|-------|---------------|
| Superzoom | Canon Powershot SX280 HS | \$300 | 64 |
| | Panasonic Lumix DMC-ZS30 | 400 | 64 |
| | Olympus Stylus SH-50 iHS | 270 | 63 |
| | Sony Cyber-shot DSC-HX50V | 450 | 63 |
| | Sony Cyber-shot DSC-HX300 | 470 | 63 |
| | Olympus Stylus SP-820UZ | 300 | 62 |
| | Fujifilm FinePix F900EXR | 400 | 60 |
| | Nikon Coolpix S9500 | 280 | 59 |
| | Nikon Coolpix S9400 | 250 | 59 |
| | Olympus Stylus SZ-16 iHS | 230 | 59 |
| | Nikon Coolpix P520 | 400 | 59 |
| | Nikon Coolpix L820 | 230 | 59 |
| | Leica V-Lux 40 | 700 | 59 |
| | Panasonic Lumix DMC-ZS8 | 280 | 59 |
| | Sony Cyber-shot DSC-WX300 | 300 | 58 |



Canon Powershot SX280 HS



Nikon Coolpix P330



Olympus Stylus TG-830 iHS



Kenmore 92163



KitchenAid KDRS505XSS

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------|---------------|
| 30-inch dual-fuel double oven | KitchenAid KDRS505XSS | \$2,000 | 71 |
| | LG LRG3097ST | 1,900 | 74 |
| 30-inch gas single ovens | LG LRG3095ST | 1,500 | 72 |
| | Frigidaire Gallery FGGF3032MW | 775 | 71 |
| | LG LRG3091SW | 1,000 | 71 |
| 30-inch professional dual-fuel | KitchenAid KDRS407VSS | 4,000 | 72 |
| 36-inch professional dual-fuel | KitchenAid KDRU763VSS | 6,000 | 74 |
| | GE Monogram ZDP364NDPSS | 7,500 | 72 |

Wall ovens

WHAT'S NEW Electronic touchpad controls with digital displays make it easier to set and monitor temperatures. The recommended GE models let you control oven functions using a smart phone.

SHOPPING TIP For double ovens, check whether features are in both ovens. Some have the timesaving convection option in the top only.

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------|---------------|
| 30-inch electric double ovens | Whirlpool WOD93ECOAS | \$2,500 | 80 |
| | Maytag MEW9630A | 2,700 | 80 |
| | KitchenAid KEBS209BSP | 3,500 | 79 |
| | GE PT9550FSSS | 3,600 | 73 |
| | Whirlpool WOD51ECO A | 2,000 | 72 |
| | Maytag MEW7630A | 1,700 | 72 |
| | Bosch HBL5650UC | 2,805 | 72 |
| | Bosch HBL8650UC | 3,115 | 72 |
| 30-inch electric single ovens | Whirlpool WOS92ECOAH | 1,500 | 80 |
| | Maytag MEW9530AW | 1,400 | 80 |
| | KitchenAid KEBS109BWW | 2,000 | 79 |
| | GE PT9050FSSS | 2,600 | 73 |
| | Whirlpool WOS51ECOAS | 1,300 | 72 |
| | Maytag MEW7530AW | 1,000 | 72 |
| Bosch HBL5450UC | 1,900 | 72 | |



◀ Here are headphones for guitarists, as well as those who love listening to music. The **Vox AmPhones Twin headphones, \$100**, can double as a personal guitar amplifier, letting you get your inner Satriani on without disturbing others. You can even plug in an audio player and jam along. When used as conventional headphones, the AmPhones Twin delivers very good sound quality.



◀ Yes, you can find a helpful navigator for a modest budget. The **Magellan 2230T-LM, \$100**, is an intuitive device with helpful exit guides, reality view, lane assistance, multi-destination routing, and pedestrian mode. It might not be quite as easy to use or have as long a battery life as pricier models, but it's still a bargain.

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------|
| Superzoom continued | Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ60 | \$350 | 58 |
| | Fujifilm FinePix S8400W | 280 | 57 |
| | Leica V-Lux 30 | 680 | 56 |
| | Panasonic Lumix DMC-ZS15 | 280 | 56 |
| | Sony Cyber-shot DSC-HX10V | 300 | 55 |
| | Sony Cyber-shot DSC-HX200V | 480 | 55 |
| Subcompact | Nikon Coolpix P330 | 320 | 63 |
| | Nikon Coolpix S800c | 250 | 60 |
| | Nikon Coolpix S6500 | 220 | 57 |
| Rugged & waterproof | Canon PowerShot ELPH 110 HS | 200 | 57 |
| | Panasonic Lumix DMC-TS5 | 400 | 58 |
| | Olympus Stylus TG-830 iHS | 250 | 57 |
| | Nikon Coolpix AW110 | 280 | 56 |
| | Panasonic Lumix DMC-TS4 | 300 | 56 |
| | Sony Cyber-shot DSC-TX30 | 270 | 56 |
| | Fujifilm FinePix XP200W | 250 | 56 |
| | Olympus Stylus TG-2 iHS | 330 | 53 |
| | Canon PowerShot D20 | 300 | 53 |
| Olympus Stylus TG-630 iHS | 180 | 52 | |



SPOTLIGHT

This **Sony Cyber-shot DSC-HX50V, \$450**, a wireless superzoom, is packed with features and has a long 30x zoom lens in a small, compact camera body. It shoots very good quality photos and video. It also can fire off photos at 10 frames per second, includes many manual controls, and can be manually focused.

Appliances

Cooktops

WHAT'S NEW More 30-inch gas cooktops have a fifth burner for added versatility, though using all the burners at the same time can be a challenge. Among induction models, the entire surface of the 36-inch Thermador is a cooking area, providing added flexibility. Like all induction cooktops, it delivered fast heating and superb simmering in our tests.

SHOPPING TIP Look for models with hot-surface warning lights, especially on smoothtops, which can remain hot long after the element has been turned off.



Thermador SGSX365FS

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|-------------|--------------------------------|---------|---------------|
| 30-inch gas | Bosch NGM8054UC | \$1,100 | 79 |
| | Kenmore 32353 | 1,200 | 76 |
| | LG LCG3091ST | 1,150 | 73 |
| 36-inch gas | Thermador SGSX365FS | 1,900 | 81 |
| | GE Monogram ZGU385NSMSS | 1,400 | 80 |
| | GE Profile JGP975WEKWW | 1,200 | 80 |
| | GE Café CGP650SETSS | 1,400 | 77 |
| | Electrolux EW36GC55GS | 1,300 | 74 |
| | LG LCG3691ST | 1,300 | 74 |
| | Bosch NGM8654UC | 1,200 | 70 |
| | Kenmore 32313 | 1,200 | 69 |

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|-----------------------------|---|--------|---------------|
| 30-inch electric smooth-top | KitchenAid KECC604BBL | \$ 900 | 94 |
| | Maytag MEC7430WS | 700 | 94 |
| | Kenmore 44273 | 1,150 | 93 |
| | Kenmore 42733 | 640 | 91 |
| | Frigidaire Professional FPEC3085KS | 950 | 90 |
| | GE Café CP350STSS | 1,200 | 90 |
| | Electrolux Icon E30EC65ESS | 1,200 | 88 |
| | LG LCE3081ST | 1,000 | 87 |
| | Whirlpool G7CE3034XP | 700 | 86 |
| | GE Profile PP945BMBB | 950 | 86 |
| | Bosch NET5054UC | 900 | 85 |

Great buys \$250 and under



◀ The **Samsung Galaxy Tab 3 7.0 (Wi-Fi, 8GB), \$200**, is all about portability, weighing in at just 0.7 pound, with an impressive 9.7-hour battery life. It also packs a lot of features for the money, including a memory-card reader, GPS, and the ability to double as a remote control for your home theater.



▲ The **Olympus Stylus TG-630 iHS** rugged point-and-shoot is relatively inexpensive, at **\$180**. It takes very good flash photos and is easy to use. It's designed to be waterproof to a depth of 16 feet and to withstand a 5-foot drop. It has a 5x non-telescoping zoom lens and is faster than most models.



Electronics

Advanced cameras

WHAT'S NEW Larger sensors and smaller bodies make SLR-like models even more attractive. And SLRs are adding features that make them easier to use. Canon's EOS T5i, for instance, has a high-dynamic range (HDR) mode for shooting photos in challenging light.

SHOPPING TIP Older lenses for a 35mm film SLR may fit your digital SLR.

Panasonic Lumix DMC-G5K

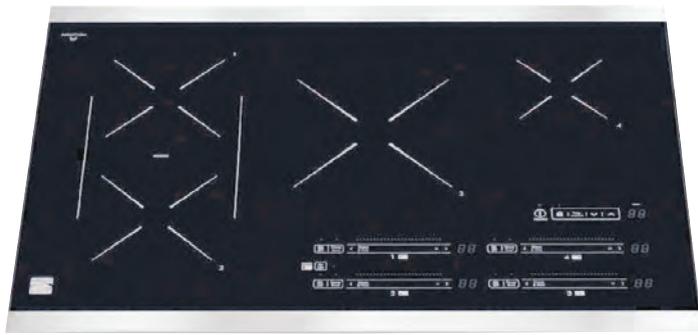


Nikon D7100



| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|----------|---------------------------------|---------|---------------|
| SLR-like | Panasonic Lumix DMC-GH3 | \$1,100 | 72 |
| | Panasonic Lumix DMC-G6K | 750 | 70 |
| | Panasonic Lumix DMC-G5K | 600 | 69 |
| | Olympus OM-D E-M5 | 1,000 | 68 |
| | Panasonic Lumix DMC-GF6K | 600 | 68 |
| | Samsung NX300 | 700 | 68 |
| | Sony SLT-A57K | 800 | 68 |
| | Sony NEX-3NL | 450 | 67 |
| | Samsung NX20 | 850 | 66 |
| | Olympus Pen E-P5 | 1,000 | 65 |
| | Sony SLT-A65VK | 800 | 65 |
| | Sony NEX-7K | 1,250 | 65 |
| | Sony SLT-A77V | 900 | 65 |
| | Olympus E-PM2 | 500 | 64 |
| | Sony NEX-6L | 800 | 64 |
| | Samsung NX1100 | 600 | 64 |
| | Sony SLT-A58K | 600 | 63 |
| | Samsung NX210 | 850 | 63 |

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|--------|---------------|
| SLR | Canon EOS Rebel T5i | \$ 900 | 73 |
| | Nikon D7100 | 1,500 | 72 |
| | Canon EOS 60D | 1,000 | 71 |
| | Canon EOS Rebel SL1 | 750 | 71 |
| | Nikon D7000 | 1,100 | 70 |
| | Canon EOS Rebel T3i | 600 | 70 |
| | Canon EOS 7D Digital | 1,800 | 69 |
| | Canon EOS Rebel T3 | 600 | 67 |
| | Nikon D5200 | 800 | 66 |
| | Nikon D3200 | 550 | 66 |
| | Nikon D3100 | 450 | 65 |
| | Pentax K-30 | 750 | 65 |
| | Pentax K-5 | 1,250 | 65 |
| | Nikon D5100 | 600 | 65 |
| Advanced point-and-shoot | Nikon Coolpix A | 1,100 | 71 |
| | Fujifilm X100S | 1,300 | 69 |
| | Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ200 | 600 | 69 |
| | Ricoh GR | 800 | 69 |



Kenmore 43820

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|-----------------------------|---|--------|---------------|
| 36-inch electric smooth-top | Maytag MEC7536W | \$ 830 | 94 |
| | Maytag MEC7636W | 1,100 | 94 |
| | Frigidaire Professional FPEC3685KS | 1,000 | 90 |
| | Kenmore 43820 | 1,700 | 99 |
| 30-inch induction | GE Profile PHP900DMBB | 1,400 | 99 |
| | Kenmore 43800 | 1,400 | 97 |
| | Bosch NIT5065UC | 1,800 | 97 |
| | KitchenAid KICU500XB | 1,400 | 95 |
| | Whirlpool GC13061XB | 1,200 | 95 |
| | LG LCE30845 | 1,800 | 93 |
| 36-inch induction | Thermador CIT36XKB | 5,000 | 92 |

Gas grills

WHAT'S NEW More grills have handy features such as electronic igniters, fuel gauges, illuminated control knobs for nighttime grilling, and fold-down shelves for food prep. A few come with a grill-temperature thermometer that doubles as a meat thermometer.

SHOPPING TIP Medium-sized grills hold about 16 to 30 burgers, and a large grill fits 30 or more. We measure only the main cooking area; manufacturers might include warming racks and searing burners.

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|--------|--|--------|---------------|
| Medium | Weber Spirit SP-320 46700401 | \$ 600 | 83 |
| | Vermont Castings Signature Series VCS323SSP | 1,000 | 80 |
| | Weber Genesis S-330 | 950 | 79 |
| | Weber Spirit E-320 46710001 | 820 | 77 |
| | Brinkmann 810-2545-C (Walmart) | 260 | 76 |
| | Weber Genesis E-330 | 800 | 75 |
| | Kenmore 16142 | 350 | 74 |
| Large | KitchenAid 720-0709C (Sam's Club) | 800 | 77 |
| | Grand Hall Grand Tech | 500 | 76 |
| Small | Weber Spirit E-220 46310001 | 450 | 79 |
| | Napoleon Terrace SE325PK | 600 | 72 |



◀ With its unique double-infrared technology, the **Panasonic FlashXpress NB-G110P, \$150**, eliminates the 5-minute preheat time of other toaster ovens. Pizza and corn muffins both came out nicely in our tests, and the Panasonic is also a capable toaster, delivering evenly browned results with almost every batch.



▲ The **Philips Hue LED Web-enabled system, \$199**, lets you use any smart device to switch the color of your LED bulbs, say, from warm yellow when you first wake up to vibrant white or many other colors while you're getting dressed. Setup is simple, and our testers found the app easy to use.

▼ Ruggedly handsome (and designed to be weather-resistant), the **TDK Life on Record** portable Bluetooth speaker, **\$150**, is just the ticket when you want to pump up the volume with friends. The speaker has a rechargeable battery, and its built-in microphone lets you use it as a speakerphone.



Fujifilm X100S



| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------|---------------|
| Advanced point-and-shoot continued | Panasonic Lumix DMC-LF1 | \$ 500 | 68 |
| | Panasonic Lumix DMC-LX7 | 450 | 66 |
| | Canon PowerShot G15 | 450 | 65 |
| | Fujifilm X20 | 600 | 65 |
| | Pentax MX-1 | 450 | 65 |
| | Leica X Vario | 2,850 | 64 |
| | Olympus Stylus XZ-2 | 600 | 64 |
| | Sony Cyber-shot DSC-RX100 | 600 | 62 |



SPOTLIGHT

Just flip the screen and the **Dell XPS 12 Convertible Touch Ultrabook (3rd Gen i5), \$1,100**, changes from a laptop to a tablet and back. This speedy laptop has a great touch screen and weighs 3.3 pounds—light for a 12-inch laptop but heavy for a tablet.

Washing machines

WHAT'S NEW Front-loaders use a lot less water to clean clothes, but that has led to longer wash times. Some of the latest high-efficiency washers are much faster without sacrificing performance. Wi-Fi-enabled models let you check the status of your laundry using a smart phone.

SHOPPING TIP Some states and utility companies offers rebates on Energy Star qualified washers; check the Dsire.org website.

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|---------|---------------|
| Front-loaders | Maytag Maxima XL MHW8000AW | \$1,300 | 93 |
| | Maytag Maxima XL MHW7000AW | 1,150 | 90 |
| | Whirlpool Duet WFL98HEBU | 1,500 | 90 |
| | Whirlpool Duet WFW86HEBC | 1,100 | 90 |
| | Kenmore Elite 41073 | 1,500 | 90 |
| | Whirlpool Duet WFW88HEAW | 1,000 | 90 |
| | Whirlpool Duet WFW70HEBW | 800 | 89 |
| | Samsung WF457ARGS[GR] | 1,550 | 89 |
| | LG WM8000H[V]A | 1,350 | 89 |
| | LG WM3470H[W]A | 1,100 | 88 |
| | Whirlpool Duet WFW96HEA[W] | 1,300 | 87 |
| | Samsung WF433BTGJ[] | 1,000 | 87 |
| | Whirlpool Duet WFW94HEAW | 1,100 | 87 |



Maytag Maxima XL MHW7000AW

Great buys
\$500 and under

► In addition to delivering superb evenness in mulching and bagging modes, the self-propelled **Honda HRR2169VLA** mower, **\$500**, has an electric-start feature with a battery that recharges while you mow. Easy handling is another plus for this 21-inch, rear-drive model, as are infinitely variable drive speeds, a premium engine, and no-prime starting.



▲ The **Amazon Kindle Fire HD 8.9 (Wi-Fi, 16GB)**, **\$280**, is a great tablet for bookworms, with an 8.9-inch display that's a perfect size for reading magazines. The top-quality display is also great for viewing videos. And subscribers to Amazon Prime (\$80 per year) can get lots of videos free.

Tablets

WHAT'S NEW Do you want a tablet that's lightweight or has a long-lasting battery? You don't have to choose between portability and battery life anymore. Batteries on smaller, 7- to 9-inch tablets now last much longer—up to 10 or 11 hours—thanks to more efficient processors.

SHOPPING TIP A display with very high resolution is the best choice for watching videos and reading.

Samsung Galaxy Note 8.0 (16GB)



| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|---------------------------|---|-------|---------------|
| 7 to 8 inches, Wi-Fi only | Samsung Galaxy Note 8.0 (16GB) | \$380 | 85 |
| | Samsung Galaxy Tab 3 8.0 (16GB) | 300 | 84 |
| | Apple iPad Mini (16GB) | 330 | 80 |
| | Samsung Galaxy Tab 3 7.0 (8GB) | 200 | 80 |
| | Wikipad 7 (16GB) | 250 | 71 |
| | Samsung Galaxy Tab 2 (7.0) (8GB) | 200 | 71 |
| | Kobo Arc (32GB) | 250 | 68 |

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|---------------------------------------|--|-----------|---------------|
| 9 to 12 inches, Wi-Fi only | Google Nexus 10 (16GB) | \$400 | 83 |
| | Apple iPad (16GB) (4th gen.) | 500 | 83 |
| | Samsung Galaxy Tab 3 10.1 (16GB) | 400 | 82 |
| | Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1 (16GB) | 500 | 81 |
| | Samsung ATIV Smart PC (64GB) | 700 | 80 |
| | Samsung Galaxy Tab 2 (10.1) (16GB) | 350 | 80 |
| | Microsoft Surface with Windows RT (32GB) | 350 | 79 |
| | Dell Latitude 10 (64GB) | 650 | 79 |
| | Dell Latitude 10 Essentials (32GB) | 500 | 79 |
| | Asus Transformer Pad Infinity TF700T (32GB) | 500 | 78 |
| | Apple iPad 2 (16GB) | 400 | 77 |
| | Dell XPS 10 (32GB) | 450 | 77 |
| | Acer Iconia W510 (64GB) | 550 | 77 |
| | Lenovo IdeaTab Lynx K3011 (64GB) | 500 | 76 |
| Acer Iconia Tab A700 (32GB) | 450 | 76 | |
| 7- to 9-inch-screen specialty tablets | Amazon Kindle Fire HD 8.9 (Wi-Fi, 16GB) | 285 | 75 |
| | Amazon Kindle Fire HD (Wi-Fi, 16GB) | 215 | 74 |
| | Barnes & Noble Nook HD+ (Wi-Fi, 16GB) | 150 | 66 |
| | Barnes & Noble Nook HD (Wi-Fi, 16GB) | 150 | 66 |



Whirlpool
Duet
WFL98HEBU

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|-------------------------------------|--|-----------|---------------|
| Front-loaders continued | Kenmore 4137[2] | \$1,050 | 87 |
| | LG WM3070H[W]A | 900 | 87 |
| | Samsung WF511AB[W] | 1,300 | 86 |
| | Kenmore Elite 4157[2] | 1,200 | 86 |
| | Samsung WF405ATPA[WR] | 1,100 | 86 |
| Top-loaders (high-efficiency) | LG WT1101CW | 700 | 82 |
| | Samsung WA422PRHD[WR] | 800 | 82 |
| | LG WT5070C[W] | 1,000 | 81 |
| | GE GTWN7450DWW | 800 | 80 |
| | LG Smart ThinQ WT6001HV | 1,600 | 79 |
| | Samsung WA50F9A6DSW | 1,000 | 79 |
| | Samsung WA50F9A8DSP | 1,200 | 79 |
| | Maytag Bravos XL MVWB750Y[W] | 850 | 79 |
| | Samsung WA400PJHD[WR] | 700 | 78 |
| | LG WT5170H[W] | 1,100 | 78 |
| | Samsung WA456DRHD[WR] | 850 | 78 |
| | GE Adora GHWN8350DWS (Home Depot) | 1,000 | 77 |
| | LG WT4870C[W] | 800 | 77 |
| Maytag Bravos XL MVWB950Y[W] | 1,000 | 76 | |



SPOTLIGHT

Kirkland Signature Ultra Clean Pacs, a Costco exclusive, vanquished grass, blood, and ring around the collar in our tests and became our highest-rated laundry detergent pod, suitable for all types of washers. At **14 cents** per load, it's also a great value.



▶ The **Nokia Lumia 1020, \$300** (AT&T, with two-year contract), is essentially a high-resolution camera fused to a capable smart phone. Its 38.2-megapixel camera takes the sharpest photos of any smart-phone camera we've tested, even in low light, and pro-style controls, editing tools, and a bevy of features help you take pictures like a pro. This Windows phone also features a dazzling 4.5-inch display so that you can enjoy your handiwork.



▶ Want a compact TV for a dorm room or the nightstand? **Samsung's UN29F4000, \$280**, is a basic 29-inch 720p LCD TV that has excellent high-definition picture quality. And its energy-efficient LED backlight will keep electric bills low.

▶ Who says you have to trade performance for fashion? The **Beats by Dr. Dre Executive** over-ear headphones, **\$300**, provide something most noise-canceling models can't: excellent sound quality in addition to very good noise reduction and a stylish design.



SPOTLIGHT

E-book readers with built-in lighting make for easy reading in the dark and boast much longer life than any tablet. The excellent **Barnes & Noble Nook Simple Touch with GlowLight, \$120**, has very fast response when turning pages or opening books. We haven't yet tested the new **Amazon Kindle Paperwhite, \$119**, introduced at press time, but the earlier version we tested was excellent, and this one promises more.

All-in-one inkjet printers

WHAT'S NEW Some new inkjets can crank out black text at more than 10 pages per minute, approaching the speed of laser printers. But they have the added ability to print color photos, graphics, and more.

SHOPPING TIP All-in-ones with separate color cartridges can save you money on ink because you replace only the color that has run out.

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|--------------------------|--|-----------|---------------|
| All-in-one | HP Photosmart 7520 | \$200 | 78 |
| | Epson Expression Premium XP-800 | 180 | 76 |
| | Epson Expression Premium XP-600 | 100 | 73 |
| | HP Photosmart 6520 | 150 | 72 |
| | Canon Pixma MG3220 | 60 | 72 |
| | Canon Pixma MG6320 | 150 | 72 |
| | Canon Pixma MG5420 | 100 | 71 |
| | Canon Pixma MX922 | 200 | 71 |
| | Brother DCP-J140W | 90 | 71 |
| | HP Officejet Pro 8600 Plus | 230 | 71 |
| | Brother MFC-J6910DW | 300 | 70 |
| | Brother MFC-J5910DW | 200 | 70 |
| | Canon Pixma MX892 | 200 | 70 |
| | Canon Pixma MG2220 | 70 | 70 |
| Canon Pixma MX512 | 150 | 70 | |



HP Photosmart 7520



Epson Expression Premium XP-800

Appliances

Dryers

WHAT'S NEW Some higher-priced dryers let you monitor your laundry's progress and control functions using your computer, tablet, or smart phone. The apps are easy to download, and Whirlpool's even sends you an e-mail or text when laundry is done.

SHOPPING TIP Dryers still aren't covered by the Energy Star program, but models with a moisture sensor will save energy—and help protect delicate clothing—by turning off when garments are dry.

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|----------|-----------------------------------|---------|---------------|
| Electric | Samsung DV50F9A8EVP | \$1,100 | 83 |
| | GE GFDR485EFMC | 1,400 | 81 |
| | Maytag Maxima XL MED8000AG | 1,450 | 79 |
| | Kenmore Elite 81073 | 1,350 | 79 |
| | LG DLEX3470[W] | 1,000 | 79 |
| | Samsung DV456EWHW[WR] | 900 | 78 |
| | Whirlpool Duet WED96HEAW | 1,300 | 78 |
| | Maytag Bravos X MEDX700AG | 900 | 78 |
| | Kenmore Elite 6152[2] | 1,000 | 78 |
| | LG DLEX8000[V] | 1,350 | 78 |
| | GE GFDS260EFWW | 1,100 | 78 |
| | LG Smart ThinQ DLEX6001V | 1,500 | 78 |
| | LG DLEX5170[W] | 900 | 78 |



Maytag Maxima XL MED8000AG



GE GFDR485EFMC

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|--------|---------------|
| Electric continued | Kenmore 8137[2] | \$ 950 | 78 |
| | Whirlpool Cabrio WED5700AC | 900 | 78 |
| | Samsung DV457EVGS[GR] | 1,550 | 78 |
| | Whirlpool Duet WEL98HEBU | 1,500 | 77 |
| | Kenmore 8117[2] | 720 | 77 |
| | LG DLEX3360[W] | 900 | 77 |
| | LG DLEX4070W | 1,200 | 77 |
| | Kenmore 6800[2] | 800 | 77 |
| | Whirlpool Duet WED94HEAW | 1,100 | 77 |
| | LG DLE4870W | 800 | 77 |

Great buys over \$500



Impressively quick and clean snow removal, along with plenty of muscle for the dense piles left by municipal plows, are top attractions of the gas-powered **Craftsman 88173, \$680**. The 24-inch, compact two-stage model also offers electric start, and the unit stores more easily than the largest model we tested.



Electronics

Smart phones

WHAT'S NEW Smart-phone cameras now take better pictures, thanks to higher-resolution image sensors (8 megapixels and more), pro-style controls, and a bevy of editing tools and special effects. Near-field communication (NFC) technology makes it easy to wirelessly beam photos, music, and more to compatible devices by bumping them together. And more phones are water-resistant, great for poolside fun.

SHOPPING TIP To keep costs low, upload large files and stream media over a secure Wi-Fi connection rather than on a pricey 3G/4G data plan.

| Provider | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|----------|--------------------------------------|-------|---------------|
| AT&T | Samsung Galaxy S 4 (16GB) | \$200 | 81 |
| | Samsung Galaxy S 4 Active | 200 | 80 |
| | LG Optimus G | 50 | 79 |
| | HTC One (32GB) | 200 | 79 |
| | Samsung Galaxy S III (16GB) | 100 | 78 |
| | Apple iPhone 5 (16GB) | 200 | 77 |
| | Nokia Lumia 1020 | 300 | 77 |
| | Pantech Discover | 50 | 77 |
| | HTC One X+ | 200 | 77 |
| | HTC One VX | 50 | 77 |
| | Samsung Galaxy Note II (16GB) | 300 | 77 |
| | LG Optimus G Pro | 100 | 77 |
| | HTC Windows Phone 8X (16GB) | 100 | 76 |
| | Nokia Lumia 920 | 100 | 76 |



LG Optimus G

| Provider | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------|---------------|
| AT&T continued | BlackBerry Z10 | \$200 | 75 |
| | Apple iPhone 4S (16GB) | 100 | 74 |
| | Pantech Flex | 0 | 72 |
| | Samsung Galaxy Rugby Pro | 100 | 72 |
| | BlackBerry Q10 | 200 | 71 |
| Sprint | HTC First | 0 | 70 |
| | Samsung Galaxy S 4 (16GB) | 150 | 79 |
| | LG Optimus G | 0 | 77 |
| | HTC One (32GB) | 100 | 77 |
| | Samsung Galaxy S III (16GB) | 100 | 76 |
| | Apple iPhone 5 (16GB) | 100 | 75 |
| | Samsung Galaxy Note II (16GB) | 250 | 75 |
| | LG Optimus F3 | 0 | 73 |
| | Motorola Photon Q 4G LTE | 100 | 73 |
| | HTC 8XT | 100 | 73 |
| | Sprint Vital | 0 | 73 |
| | Samsung Galaxy Victory 4G LTE | 50 | 71 |
| | LG Viper | 0 | 69 |
| | Kyocera Torque | 0 | 68 |
| Apple iPhone 4S (16GB) | 100 | 67 | |
| T-Mobile | Samsung Galaxy S 4 (16GB) | 0 | 81 |
| | HTC One (32GB) | 0 | 79 |
| | Samsung Galaxy S III (16GB) | 0 | 78 |
| | Apple iPhone 5 (16GB) | 150 | 77 |

Price is based on a two-year contract commitment, as of August 2013, including rebates.

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------|---------------|
| Gas | Samsung DV50F9A8GVP | \$1,200 | 83 |
| | GE GFDR485GFMC | 1,500 | 81 |
| | Maytag Maxima XL MGD8000AG | 1,550 | 79 |
| | Kenmore Elite 91073 | 1,450 | 79 |
| | LG DLGX3471[W] | 1,200 | 79 |
| | Samsung DV456GWHDR | 1,000 | 78 |
| | Whirlpool Duet WGD96HEAW | 1,400 | 78 |
| | Maytag Bravos X MGD700AG | 1,000 | 78 |
| | Kenmore Elite 71522 | 1,100 | 78 |
| | LG DLGX8001[V] | 1,440 | 78 |
| | GE GFDS260GFWW | 1,200 | 78 |
| | LG Smart ThinQ DLEX6002V | 1,600 | 78 |
| | LG DLGX5171[W] | 1,050 | 78 |
| | Kenmore 9137[2] | 1,100 | 78 |
| | Whirlpool Cabrio WGD5700AC | 1,000 | 78 |
| | Samsung DV457GVGS[GR] | 1,700 | 78 |
| | Kenmore 9117[2] | 900 | 77 |
| | LG DLGX3361[W] | 980 | 77 |
| | LG DLGX4071W | 1,300 | 77 |
| | Kenmore 7800[2] | 900 | 77 |
| Whirlpool Duet WGD94HEAW | 1,200 | 77 | |
| LG DLG4871W | 900 | 77 | |

SPOTLIGHT

Laundry rooms are migrating from the basement to more visible parts of the home, and sales of matching washer and dryer sets are up. The recommended **LG WT1101CW** washer and the **DLE1101W** electric dryer are **\$700** each. (The DLG1102W gas dryer is \$800.) Both do their primary tasks superbly, with large capacities and relatively quiet operation.



◀ The **Panasonic Viera TC-P60ST60** 60-inch plasma TV is a sweet deal at **\$1,500**. It has excellent high-def picture quality and a ton of features, including 3D and a full Web browser, an apps market, and access to streaming movies and TV shows from several services. Using the remote control app, you can send content back and forth between your TV and smart phone or tablet.

▶ The **ProForm Pro 2000, \$1,300**, is a CR Best Buy. It's excellent for ergonomics and exercise range, with a longer, 61-inch running surface, and it has among the highest maximum inclines for folding treadmills.



◀ The **Samsung Ativ Book 8 NP880Z5E-X01UB, \$1,200**, is one of the new breed of touch-screen laptops designed to optimize Windows 8. Another new feature on this speedy, top-scoring model: You can share the screen, keyboard, and mouse with Samsung phones and tablets. Battery life is an impressive 10-plus hours.

| Provider | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------|---------------|
| T-Mobile continued | Samsung Galaxy Note II (16GB) | \$ 0 | 77 |
| | Sony Xperia Z | 0 | 77 |
| | Nokia Lumia 925 | 0 | 77 |
| | Google Nexus 4 (16GB) | 0 | 76 |
| | LG Optimus L9 | 0 | 76 |
| | BlackBerry Z10 | 0 | 75 |
| | Samsung Galaxy S II | 0 | 75 |
| | Apple iPhone 4S (16GB) | 70 | 74 |
| | Samsung Galaxy Exhibit | 0 | 71 |
| | BlackBerry Q10 | 0 | 71 |
| Nokia Lumia 521 | 0 | 71 | |

| Provider | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|----------|--------------------------------------|-------|---------------|
| Verizon | Samsung Galaxy S 4 (16GB) | 200 | 79 |
| | Motorola Droid Razr Maxx HD | 150 | 79 |
| | Motorola Droid Razr HD | 50 | 77 |
| | Samsung Galaxy S III (16GB) | 100 | 76 |
| | Motorola Droid Razr M | 0 | 75 |
| | Apple iPhone 5 (16GB) | 200 | 75 |
| | Samsung Galaxy Note II (16GB) | 250 | 75 |
| | Nokia Lumia 928 | 100 | 75 |
| | BlackBerry Z10 | 100 | 74 |
| | LG Spectrum 2 | 0 | 74 |
| | Pantech Perception | 0 | 73 |
| | HTC Droid DNA | 50 | 73 |
| | LG Lucid 2 | 20 | 73 |

Motorola Droid Razr Maxx HD

| Provider | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------|-------|---------------|
| Verizon continued | Nokia Lumia 822 | \$ 20 | 73 |
| | HTC Windows Phone 8X (16GB) | 50 | 73 |
| | Motorola Droid 4 | 100 | 73 |
| | Samsung Ativ Odyssey | 0 | 71 |
| | Casio G'zOne Commando 4G LTE | 100 | 71 |
| | Samsung Galaxy Stellar | 0 | 71 |
| | Samsung Galaxy Stratosphere II | 50 | 70 |
| | BlackBerry Q10 | 200 | 69 |
| | LG Intuition | 0 | 68 |
| | Apple iPhone 4S (16GB) | 100 | 67 |

SPOTLIGHT

The **Uniden D3588-2** phone/answerer combo, **\$100**, has two cordless handsets plus a corded phone on the base that will work if you lose power. Conversations on the corded phone may sound better than on its cordless siblings, and you can pair it with your mobile phone to make and take calls using your cell's service plan.



Thermostats

WHAT'S NEW Interactive touch-screen displays are especially easy to use and see. Some models can be programmed using prompts or by answering questions about daily habits. Others can be changed using a smart phone or computer.

SHOPPING TIP Most let you program different settings for each day. But if you have a regular routine, look for models that offer one schedule for weekdays and another for weekends.



Venstar ColorTouch Series T5800

SPOTLIGHT

The **Nest Learning Thermostat, \$250**, will program itself according to settings you make during the first week, and then it continues making adjustments based on your changing schedule. And the Wi-Fi-enabled device receives IQ-enhancing software upgrades. An example is Sunblock, which tracks the sun's patterns because direct sunlight can cause conventional thermostats to think it's warmer than it is, making your home uncomfortably cool as the A/C kicks into high gear.



| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|------------------|---|-------|---------------|
| Seven-day models | Venstar ColorTouch Series T5800 | \$170 | 96 |
| | Honeywell Prestige HD YTHX9321R | 250 | 95 |
| | ecobee EB-STAT-02 | 300 | 94 |
| | Aprilaire Communicating Touchscreen 8800 | 300 | 46 |
| | Lux TX9600TS | 70 | 45 |
| | nest Learning Thermostat | 250 | 74 |
| | Honeywell FocusPRO 6000 TH6110D* | 80 | 74 |
| | Robert Shaw 9801i2 | 125 | 73 |

*One schedule for weekdays, another for weekends.

Great buys over \$500



◀ Weber's entire revamped Spirit line impressed us, especially the **Weber Spirit SP-320 46700401, \$600**. Our top-rated mid-sized grill, it preheats quickly and provides superb grilling at low, high, and indirect heat. An electronic igniter fires up the grill's three burners reliably, and its stainless-steel grates offer maximum durability.



▲ Fine wines deserve first-class storage. The **Electrolux IQ-Touch E124WC65GS**, undercounter wine chiller, **\$1,530**, is tops in our tests, maintaining steady conditions throughout its interior, which can hold almost 60 bottles. The unit's shelves have full-extension ball-bearing glides for easy access, and it's one of the most energy-efficient models we tested.

Laptops

WHAT'S NEW You'll find more thin-and-light laptops and more models with touch screens. A few use the new, faster 802.11ac standard.

SHOPPING TIP Solid-state drives are smaller than traditional hard drives, use less power, and are faster and more durable.

Sony Vaio Pro SVP13213CX5 Ultrabook



Apple MacBook Pro 15-inch ME664LL/A



| Size | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|--|--|--|---------------|
| 13-inch | Sony Vaio Pro SVP13213CX5 Ultrabook | \$1,250 | 79 |
| | Apple MacBook Air 13-inch MD231LL/A | 1,000 | 74 |
| | Apple MacBook Air 13-inch MD760LL/A | 1,100 | 73 |
| | Toshiba Kirabook 13 | 1,600 | 73 |
| | Apple MacBook Pro 13-inch with Retina Display MD212LL/A | 1,500 | 72 |
| | Asus Zenbook Prime UX32VD-DH71 Ultrabook | 1,300 | 67 |
| | Apple MacBook Pro 13-inch MD101LL/A | 1,200 | 66 |
| | Lenovo ThinkPad X1 Carbon Touch Ultrabook | 1,300 | 70 |
| 14-inch | Vizio CT14T-B1 | 1,300 | 69 |
| | Lenovo ThinkPad X1 Carbon Ultrabook | 1,200 | 69 |
| | Samsung Ativ Book 5 NP540U4E-K01US | 900 | 69 |
| | Lenovo IdeaPad Y410p 59369921 | 825 | 65 |
| | 15- to 16-inch | Apple MacBook Pro 15-inch with Retina display ME664LL/A | 2,200 |
| Samsung Ativ Book 8 NP880Z5E-X01UB | | 1,200 | 77 |
| Apple MacBook Pro 15-inch with Retina display MC975LL/A | | 1,900 | 76 |

| Size | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|-------------------------------------|---|---------|---------------|
| 15- to 16-inch continued | Acer Aspire R7-571-6858 | \$1,000 | 74 |
| | Vizio CT15T-B1 Ultrabook | 1,300 | 73 |
| | Asus Q550LF-BB17T07 | 1,000 | 71 |
| | Apple MacBook Pro 15-inch MD103LL/A | 1,800 | 70 |
| | Vizio CN15-A5 | 1,000 | 69 |
| | MSI GT60 2OC-022US | 1,325 | 69 |
| | Dell Inspiron 15R | 850 | 68 |
| | Toshiba Satellite P50-AST2NX1 | 900 | 67 |
| | HP Envy Touchsmart Sleekbook m6-k015dx | 750 | 67 |
| | Vizio CT15-A4 Ultrabook | 800 | 67 |
| | Samsung Ativ Book 4 NP470R5E-K02UB | 700 | 67 |
| | HP Envy Touchsmart 15t-j000 | 900 | 66 |
| | Toshiba Satellite L55-A5284NR | 675 | 66 |
| | Toshiba Satellite S55t-A5258NR | 950 | 65 |
| Lenovo IdeaPad U510 59347424 | 650 | 65 | |

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It's showtime for health care reform

What the new law means for you and your family

PRESIDENT OBAMA signed the new health law into effect back in 2010, but its four most momentous changes kick in Jan. 1, 2014:

- Just about everyone in the U.S.—except for foreign tourists, undocumented residents, prisoners, and a few other exceptions—will be required to have some kind of health insurance.
- If they don't, most will have to pay a penalty at tax time of \$95 per adult and up to \$285 per family for the 2014 tax year, and that escalates to \$695 for adults and \$2,085 for families in 2016.
- The long-standing insurance-company practice of turning people down or charging them extra because of pre-existing conditions will be outlawed.
- Low- and moderate-income households will get financial help in the form of a new kind of tax credit that they can use right away to help pay for premiums.

A new health marketplace

The centerpiece of the transformed health care system wrought by the Affordable Care Act is an entirely new way of choosing and purchasing individual health insurance known generically as marketplaces. They open for business Oct. 1, 2013, in every

state, whether the state is willing or not.

This year only, marketplace open enrollment will run from Oct. 1, 2013, through March 31, 2014. In subsequent years, it will take place on the same schedule as Medicare open enrollment: Oct. 15 through Dec. 7.

In the marketplace, a kind of virtual insurance store, millions of Americans will

be able to sign up for the plan of their choice, just like that, no questions asked about their medical history. Well more than half will get the welcome news that they have income-based tax credits coming to them to help pay the premiums.

In addition, about 4 million of the poorest Americans will become newly entitled to free or ultra-low-cost Medicaid coverage, which they can apply for on the spot in their state's marketplace. It's one of the most significant expansions of this government-paid health program since its creation in 1965. But at least 5 million more will live in states that have decided not to expand Medicaid in that way, leaving them uninsured and too poor to get tax credits.

Judging from the decibel level of the public argument, you'd think that the new health law will upend the health insurance of practically everybody. But that's not the case. At least 80 percent of Americans will notice almost no change because they already have insurance that meets the law's requirements.

That includes the 49 percent of Americans who get health insurance through their or someone else's job, as well as people who get insurance through the government. That includes Medicare, most

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Finding a plan

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Medicaid coverage, CHIP (health insurance for children in low-income families), certain Veterans Affairs coverage, and Tricare (health insurance for active-duty military, retirees, and their families).

State-by-state rules

Although the law applies across the land, how you experience it will depend on your state. Some states have embraced the law. They've been working on their marketplaces for some time and have leaned on insurance companies to give consumers a good deal. In those states, you're likely to see lots of ads and public-service announcements and find it easy to get information about the new law.

But other states have been less gung-ho. As we went to press, 22 were not expanding Medicaid, and four more were still debating it. Thirty-four have forced the federal government to run their marketplaces in whole or in part, a development that is putting federal officials under deadline pressure.

Step-by-step help

This report explains what you need to do to get ready for the new law, depending on whether you now get insurance:

- Through work.
- Through Medicare.
- On your own or not at all.

For more detailed advice, as well as calculators that can help you determine your eligibility for subsidies and links to state-run marketplaces, go to our comprehensive online guide at HealthLawHelper.org.

Regardless of how you get your insurance, also check out the rankings of health plans starting on page 36, which can help you choose a plan.

HOW YOU'RE AFFECTED

▶ I get insurance through work

If you get health insurance through your work or someone else's, you've met your obligation to be insured.

Your only job will be to hang onto a couple of forms that you'll be given:

- By Oct. 1, 2013, your employer will give you a form with the catchy name "New Health Insurance Marketplace Coverage Options and Your Health Coverage," or something similar. Don't throw the form away.
- At some point in early 2015, your insurer will send you a form (the government hasn't specified what it will look like) verifying that you have insurance. You'll need to submit that when you file your 2014 tax return.

Even if you have insurance through your employer, you might need to consider other options in two scenarios:

Your employer cancels your plan for 2014. That could happen, especially if you have a so-called "mini-med" plan that provides severely limited benefits. Those plans had an exemption to continue operating through the end of 2013 only. If you lose your employee coverage, you may be able to get better insurance through your state marketplace and possibly qualify for subsidies to help pay for it.

You have a very expensive plan. In that case, you may—or may not—qualify for some financial relief.

Dig out that employee form you got in the fall. You should find what your employer charges employees for the cheapest individual plan it offers.

If that number is more than 9.5 percent of your household income, and your in-

come is below certain levels, you can turn the plan down and purchase your own coverage on your state's marketplace, with a subsidy. But if it's less than 9.5 percent you can get a subsidy only if your plan covers less than a "minimum value" of expected medical costs. The form should include information about that.

But an important catch may ensnare some families with multiple members covered on the same plan.

If, for instance, your employer charges you \$20 a month but \$750 more to add your spouse and \$250 more to add your kids, even if the total premium adds up to more than 9.5 percent of your family's income, you can't get a marketplace subsidy because the employee-only contribution is the one that counts. It's unfair and may need to be fixed with new legislation.

If that happens to you, price out plans in the marketplace for your dependents anyway. Even at full price it might be cheaper than keeping them on your employer plan.



HOW YOU'RE AFFECTED

▶ I buy insurance on my own or don't have any



The marketplace is designed for people like you.

You can't compare it to anything you have already experienced because it's an entirely new animal, a centralized resource where you can do the following:

Investigate financial help. Find out whether you qualify for income-based assistance with your premiums, lower out-of-pocket costs, or free or almost-free Medicaid. (See the table on the facing page for what types of help are available depending on income level.) You can still buy private insurance outside the marketplace, but you can qualify for and receive financial assistance only within the marketplace.

The help will come in the form of a tax credit that you can use right away to lower your premium. Lower-income households will also receive help with out-of-pocket costs. For details, download our free brochure at ConsumerReports.org/healthtaxcredit.

Shop for health plans. Compare private insurance plans that offer comprehensive health benefits and meet other qualifications. You'll be able to see the premiums you would pay, the health care providers who belong to each plan's network, plan details such as deductibles and co-pays, and in some states, quality ratings. (You should also check our health plan rankings, beginning on page 36 and available free at ConsumerReports.org/healthinsurancerankings, to see how similar plans fared.)

Enroll in a plan. Coverage can start as early as Jan. 1, 2014. You won't have to provide any information on your health history because insurance companies won't need it anymore.

Get Medicaid or CHIP. Enroll in Medicaid or CHIP for your kids if your income qualifies. More people will be eligible for Medicaid in states that are expanding the program.

To find your state's marketplace, start at HealthCare.gov, the federal government's omnibus health reform site. (In your state the marketplace may be called something else, such as Kynect, MNsure, or NY State of Health.) Or call the federal information line at 800-318-2596 to talk with a real person. Licensed insurance brokers can act as marketplace intermediaries according to state regulations.

If you already have bought health insurance on your own, you can keep it and it will satisfy the new requirement to have insurance. But it still pays to check out your marketplace options. You might find that you qualify for a better plan at lower cost.

HOW YOU'RE AFFECTED

▶ I'm on Medicare

You don't have to do anything or buy anything extra.

Medicare Part A and Advantage plans fully qualify as insurance under the new law. And nothing significant about Medicare is changing in 2014. Benefits and programs will work the same as they do now.

But there is one situation in which the new health care law might help: You are a new enrollee and your spouse isn't on Medicare yet.

Once the older spouse retires and enrolls in Medicare, the younger, often nonworking spouse, may suddenly be without insurance. The spouse often has a hard time buying an individual policy because of pre-existing conditions.

Now the younger spouse can buy a plan on the marketplace and not worry about getting turned down or charged extra on the basis of a pre-existing condition.

Note: If you're the younger spouse, you'll need to put down your joint income when applying for marketplace coverage, even though you're the only one doing the buying. Your subsidy, if any, will be based on that number.



▶ CLOSE-UP

Try our new online tool

In this article we've given some basic background information on health care reform and explained what you need to do in three common situations. But the U.S. health care system and the new law itself are complex, and people may find themselves in dozens of other situations.

We're creating an online guide, HealthLawHelper.org, to cover more of those cases. After answering a series of simple questions about your family

size, income range, and current insurance situation, you'll receive personalized information on what, if anything, you need to do next. Note that your answer won't include the name of a particular insurance plan to buy, although we'll provide plenty of advice on how to make that decision.

HealthLawHelper.org is free, and your answers will be held in strictest privacy. The tool is also available in Spanish, at AseguraTuSalud.org.



Can I get help paying for health insurance?

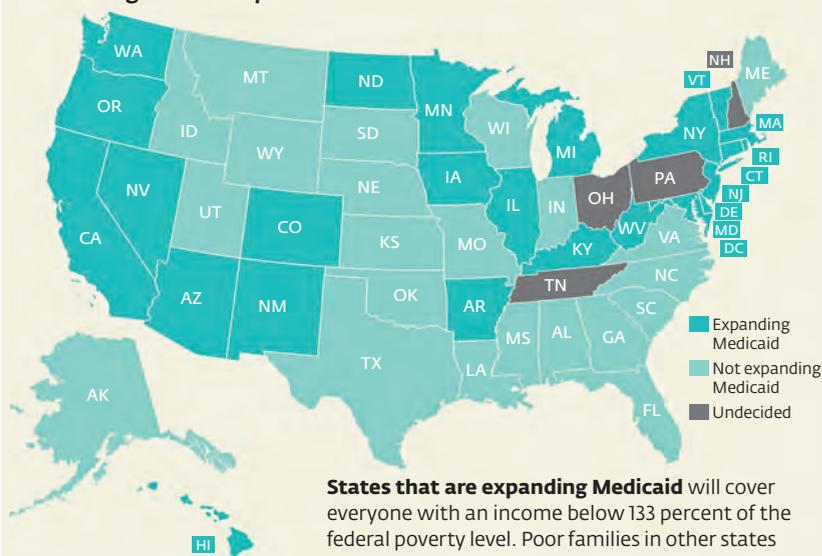
Maybe, depending on where you live and how much you make.

People who buy insurance through the new marketplace can receive various levels of financial help depending on where their household income falls in relation to the current federal poverty level. In states that are expanding Medicaid, all low-income households will be enrolled. In other states, many may be left with no affordable source of health insurance. (But they won't be fined in that case.)

1 Check the table below to see your income as a percentage of the federal poverty level

| Family size | Annual income | | | |
|------------------------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1 | \$11,490 | \$15,282 | \$28,725 | \$45,960 |
| 2 | \$15,510 | \$20,628 | \$38,775 | \$62,040 |
| 3 | \$19,530 | \$25,975 | \$48,825 | \$78,120 |
| 4 | \$23,550 | \$31,322 | \$58,875 | \$94,200 |
| 5 | \$27,570 | \$36,668 | \$68,925 | \$110,280 |
| Federal poverty level | 100% | 133% | 250% | 400% |

2 Check the map see whether your state has agreed to expand Medicaid



States that are expanding Medicaid will cover everyone with an income below 133 percent of the federal poverty level. Poor families in other states will have no new affordable health care option.

3 Check the chart below to see what you are eligible for

| Percentage of federal poverty level | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|--|---------------|
| Is your state expanding Medicaid? | You are eligible for ... | | | |
| | 0% 100% 133% 250% 400% and over | | | |
| NO | No new affordable health insurance options. | Help with premiums and cost-sharing for plans bought in marketplaces. | Help with premiums for plans bought in marketplaces. | No subsidies. |
| YES | Medicaid*. | | | |

*In a few states, people may be enrolled in Medicaid at somewhat higher income levels.

Health insurance 101



Health care can be very expensive, far beyond the means of most people. It costs about \$30,000 to deliver a baby or to stay in the hospital for three days, and a bout of breast cancer can top \$100,000. Health insurance reduces your costs by sharing risk with others. That works because most people are mostly healthy most of the time. Here are three things you need to know when choosing insurance:

▶ What does the plan cover?

Before health reform, insurers were allowed to sell plans that didn't cover important services, such as prescription drugs, mental health, and maternity care. Plans for individuals and small businesses that take effect on or after Jan. 1, 2014, must offer these "essential health benefits": emergency services; hospitalization; laboratory tests; maternity and newborn care; management of chronic diseases such as diabetes; mental health and substance-abuse treatment; outpatient care; pediatric services including dental and vision care; prescription drugs; preventive services such as immunizations, mammograms, and colonoscopies; and rehabilitation and habilitation services. Most plans through large employers will provide the same benefits.

▶ What does it cost?

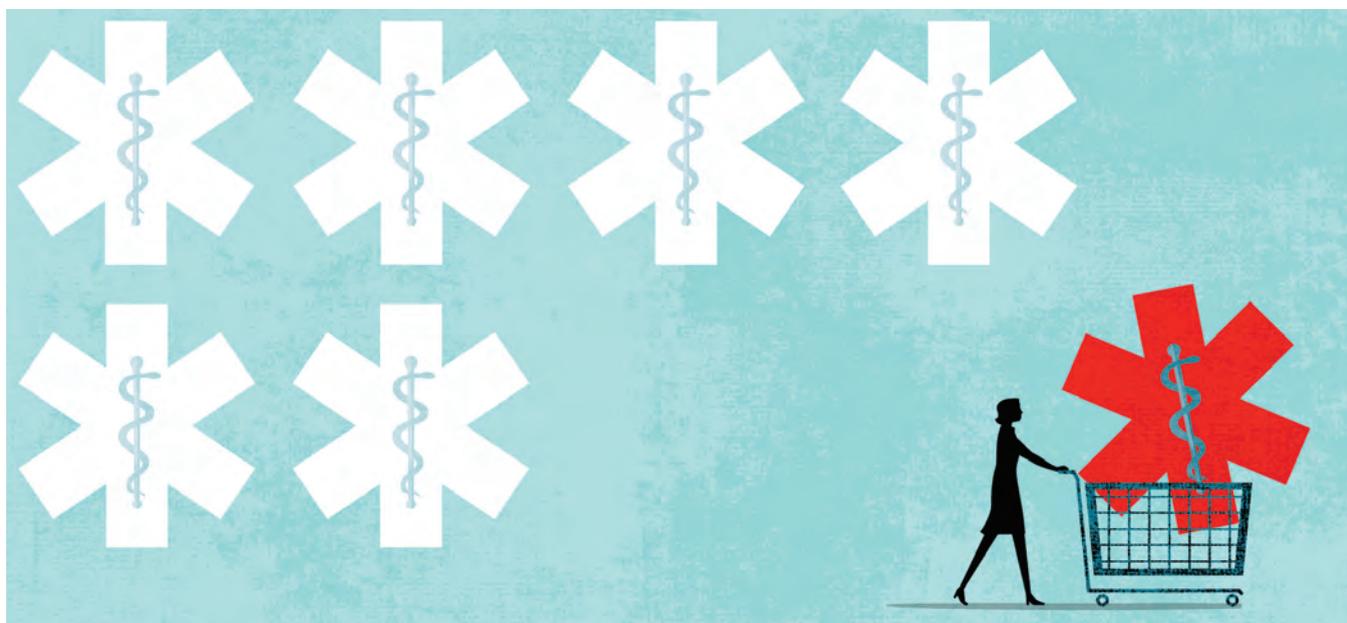
You pay for health insurance in two ways: up front in the form of a monthly premium and when you actually receive health care in the form of out-of-pocket expenses such as deductibles, co-insurance, and co-pays.

Whether you are better off with a high premium and low out-of-pocket expenses or vice versa depends on your situation:

- If you know you have an expensive medical condition, consider a plan with a higher premium that covers more of your costs.
- If you are generally healthy, you could consider paying a lower premium and a bigger share of costs for the services you use. But you must then be prepared to pay more out of pocket if you unexpectedly become sick or injured.

▶ What providers can you see?

No private health plan gives unrestricted access to doctors and hospitals. Every plan has a network of doctors, hospitals, laboratories, imaging centers, and pharmacies that provide services to plan members at a contracted price. Every marketplace plan must provide a directory of participating providers that you can consult before you make your final plan selection.



Find a 'Best Value' health plan

SOME HEALTH PLANS excel at helping you get high quality medical care. Some excel at helping you avoid costly care. And some plans do both. For the first time in the four years we've published rankings of health insurance plans we've identified Best Value plans—those that give the biggest bang for your health care dollar.

The Best Value designation is based on how well plans help people with diabetes manage their condition. We are focusing on diabetes for several reasons.

First, the disease has reached epidemic proportions, affecting some 26 million Americans and projected to reach a third of U.S. adults by 2050. So even if you don't have diabetes now, you might want a plan that manages it effectively in case you or someone in your family develops it later.

In addition, managing diabetes requires good, basic care—for things like high blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood glucose levels—as well as coordination among providers. That means plans that get diabetes right are likely to do a lot of things well.

Finally, treating diabetes is expensive, especially if basic care is neglected, so plans that provide good diabetes care for less money should have more resources available to cover other conditions or to reduce premiums. And that's important for everyone.

What your money buys

The data for the rankings and the Best Value designation come from the National Com-

mittee for Quality Assurance (NCQA), a non-profit health care quality measurement group. It is funded mainly by fees from health plans for accreditation, by government research contracts, and by sales of other products and services. Overall, we have some information on 997 private and Medicare plans, and full data on quality and cost for diabetes care for 472 of them.

The information is part of an effort to better track and control health care spending, and to make the data available to consumers. "Many people assume that the

Expensive care doesn't mean better care, our analysis found.

more money that's spent on health care, the better health care will be," says John Santa, M.D., medical director of Consumer Reports Health. "But as these rankings show, that is not always the case."

In fact, our analysis of the data found no connection between cost and quality: Plans that avoided costly care were just as likely to provide high quality care as those that spent more lavishly.

Better care for less

NCQA identified Best Value plans by studying how well they performed on several key diabetes measures and how often and how long diabetic patients were hospitalized. Then NCQA compared similar plans

covering the same region.

The quality measures include how well plan members have their glucose, blood pressure, and cholesterol measured and controlled, how well their kidney function is monitored, and whether they get regular screenings for eye disease.

NCQA focused on hospitalization to identify plans that avoid costly diabetes care. Hospitalization is by far the most expensive kind of care. And with a disease like diabetes, it's often avoidable.

Plans that do well in managing diabetes

tend to do a good job of helping members stay out of the hospital. Keeping you out of the hospital helps keep your medical bills down—and it can help insurance companies control their costs, too. After all, it costs more to hospitalize a diabetic patient for a heart attack than it does to provide the care that can prevent heart attacks in the first place.

Top-performing plans

Our analysis shows that 114 plans got a Best Value designation, earning check marks for both providing high quality care and avoiding costly care. Many more—402 plans—got a check mark for one but not both of those measures. And 481 plans

didn't get a check mark for either. That could be because they had poor results for those measures or they did not report the data needed for this analysis.

Doing poorly on either measure is obviously worrisome, but not sharing results publicly can be just as bad.

"If plans don't measure and disclose information about quality and resource use, it's hard for consumers to have all the information they need," says NCOA president Margaret E. O'Kane. "And without that information, it's also hard for plans to know where they need to improve."

Not surprisingly, plans with a Best Value designation also tended to do better in other measures that are included in the rankings that start on the following page. Specifically, Medicare plans with a Best Value check mark did better in consumer satisfaction, and private plans with a Best Value check mark had higher average overall scores.

How big plans fared

We looked at large insurers that offer multiple health plans to see how they compare when it comes to making sure that their members with diabetes get higher quality care and avoid costly care. The table shows the number of plans for each insurer, and the percentage that earned a Best Value check mark. Note that 20 percent of unaffiliated plans also got a Best Value check mark.

| Insurer | % of plans that are a Best Value* |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Kaiser Permanente | 25% (5 of 20 plans) |
| Health Net | 25% (2 of 8 plans) |
| Coventry Health Care | 20% (6 of 30 plans) |
| Blue Cross and Blue Shield | 13% (11 of 84 plans) |
| Humana | 10% (11 of 111 plans) |
| UnitedHealthcare | 5% (10 of 188 plans) |
| CIGNA HealthCare | 5% (5 of 99 plans) |
| Aetna | 4% (5 of 118 plans) |
| Wellpoint | 0% (0 of 39 plans) |

*Includes plans that do not report Best Value data.



Guide to the insurance rankings

Rankings start on next page

The NCQA rankings of 997 private and Medicare plans nationwide provide several key pieces of information that can help you compare health insurance plans:

- Overall score.** Each plan is given a score from 1 to 100, based on such factors as how well plans provide recommended cancer screenings, immunizations, and other preventive services, and how well they cover treatments for chronic diseases such as heart disease, osteoporosis, and mental illness. (Note that the overall score is also used to determine a plan's national rank, shown in the far left column of the chart.)
- Consumer satisfaction.** Members of high-ranking plans are more likely to report getting timely doctor appointments and receiving good customer service. This measure also factors into the overall score.
- Best value.** Plans that earn a Best Value check mark provide higher quality care and avoid costly care for diabetic patients.
- Accreditation.** Most plans in the rankings are accredited by the NCQA, an exacting process in which insurers show their commitment to high-quality care, plans for improvement, responsive customer service, and disclosure. Accreditation status accounts for up to 15 points in the overall score. Plans that are not accredited by NCQA are marked with a footnote, although they may be accredited by another organization. Insurers pay fees to any organization that accredits their plans, including NCQA.

How should I use these rankings?

How you use the rankings depends on whether you get insurance from your employer, Medicare, or Medicaid, or if you buy on your own through the new Health Insurance Marketplaces. For details, go to ConsumerReports.org/healthinsurancerankings.

- If you get insurance through your employer:** Get a list of the plans your employer offers, and see how each of your choices performs in your state. Then look at the rankings of private HMO and PPO plans that start on page 36. See how their overall scores compare, and if any of your choices earned a Best Value check mark. Look as well at how consumers rate their satisfaction with the plans.
- If you get insurance through Medicare:** Americans 65 and older almost always qualify for Medicare coverage. You can also enroll in a Medicare Advantage HMO or PPO. To see whether the plans make sense for you, go to ConsumerReports.org/medicare. Then look at the rankings of Medicare Advantage HMOs and PPOs on the following pages to see how the options compare on overall score, their consumer satisfaction score, and whether they earned a Best Value check mark. Also check Medicare's website, medicare.gov, for the plans' star rating scores. NCQA's rankings reflect much of the data you'll find there, but Medicare also includes some of its own data. Most important, Medicare pays bonuses to plans that earn three or more stars in its scoring system,

- so plans that score high in the Medicare star ratings may have more funds to spend on your care.
- If you get insurance through Medicaid:** More people than ever will now be eligible for Medicaid, because of changes from the Affordable Care Act. To see NCQA rankings for Medicaid HMOs, go to ConsumerReports.org/medicaid.
- If you get insurance on your own through the new Health Insurance Marketplaces:** These rankings can help by showing you the track record of similar plans in your state in previous years. First, see the article on page 30 and use our online tool at HealthLawHelper.org to learn about the new health law and how the marketplaces will function. Then check the rankings of private plans on the pages that follow to see if any of the plans are similar to those offered through your state's marketplace. Note that the plans listed on your marketplace and in the NCQA rankings aren't identical. That's because all of the plans in the marketplace are new, so NCQA does not yet have data for them. But a plan's record in your state provides an indication of how well the new marketplace plan may perform.

Private health plan rankings from NCQA

Top-ranked plans in each state, in rank order, within states.

| National rank | Plan name | Overall | | Care factors (diabetes) | | |
|-----------------------------|--|---------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|------------|
| | | Overall score | Consumer satisfaction | Getting higher quality of care | Avoiding costly care | Best Value |
| ALABAMA | | | | | | |
| 417 | UnitedHealthcare Insurance (PPO) | 77 | 2 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 417 | UnitedHealthcare Services (PPO) | 77 | 2 | | | |
| 438 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 76 | 3 | | | |
| ALASKA | | | | | | |
| 448 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 75 | 1 | | | |
| ARIZONA | | | | | | |
| 173 | Cigna HealthCare of Arizona (HMO/POS) | 82 | 2 | | | |
| 194 | UnitedHealthcare of Arizona (HMO) | 82 | 3 | ✓ | | |
| 204 | Cigna Health and Life Insurance (PPO) | 82 | 3 | | | |
| 204 | Connecticut General Life Insurance (Cigna) (PPO) | 82 | 3 | ✓ | | |
| ARKANSAS | | | | | | |
| 420 | UnitedHealthcare Insurance (PPO) | 77 | 4 | | | |
| 420 | UnitedHealthcare Services (PPO) | 77 | 4 | | | |
| 444 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 75 | 3 | | | |
| CALIFORNIA | | | | | | |
| 7 | Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of Northern California (HMO) | 89 | 3 | ✓ | | |
| 17 | Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of Southern California (HMO) | 88 | 3 | ✓ | | |
| 101 | Sharp Health Plan (HMO) | 83 | 3 | ✓ | | |
| COLORADO | | | | | | |
| 13 | Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of Colorado (HMO) | 89 | 4 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 75 | Cigna HealthCare of Colorado (HMO/POS) | 84 | 3 | ✓ | | |
| 91 | HMO Colorado (HMO/POS) | 84 | 3 | ✓ | | |
| CONNECTICUT | | | | | | |
| 29 | Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield in Connecticut (HMO/POS) | 87 | 5 | | | |
| 46 | ConnectiCare (HMO/POS) | 86 | 3 | ✓ | | |
| 59 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 3 | | | |
| 65 | Oxford Health Plans (HMO/POS) | 85 | 4 | | ✓ | |
| 72 | Cigna Health and Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 3 | | | |
| 72 | Connecticut General Life Insurance (Cigna) (PPO) | 85 | 3 | | | |
| DELAWARE | | | | | | |
| 105 | Highmark BCBS (HMO/POS) | 83 | 5 | ✓ | | |
| 129 | AmeriHealth HMO (HMO/POS) | 83 | 3 | | | |
| 207 | Aetna Health (Pennsylvania) (HMO/POS) | 82 | 3 | | ✓ | |
| DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA | | | | | | |
| 16 | Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of the Mid-Atlantic States (HMO) | 88 | 4 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 96 | Cigna Health and Life Insurance (HMO/POS) | 84 | 3 | | | |
| 96 | Connecticut General Life Insurance (Cigna) (HMO/POS) | 84 | 3 | | ✓ | |
| FLORIDA | | | | | | |
| 15 | Capital Health Plan (HMO) | 88 | 5 | ✓ | | |
| 100 | Health First Health Plans (HMO) | 83 | 4 | ✓ | | |
| 123 | Florida Health Care Plans (HMO/POS) | 83 | 3 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| GEORGIA | | | | | | |
| 20 | Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of Georgia (HMO) | 88 | 4 | ✓ | | |
| 149 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 83 | 3 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 191 | Cigna Health and Life Insurance (PPO) | 82 | 4 | | | |
| 191 | Connecticut General Life Insurance (Cigna) (PPO) | 82 | 4 | ✓ | | |
| HAWAII | | | | | | |
| 25 | Kaiser Foundation Health Plan - Hawaii (HMO) | 87 | 3 | ✓ | | |

| National rank | Plan name | Overall | | Care factors (diabetes) | | |
|-------------------------|--|---------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|------------|
| | | Overall score | Consumer satisfaction | Getting higher quality of care | Avoiding costly care | Best Value |
| HAWAII continued | | | | | | |
| 44 | Hawaii Medical Service Association (Federal Plan 87) (HMO/POS) | 86 | 5 | ✓ | | |
| 70 | Hawaii Medical Service Association (PPO) | 85 | 5 | ✓ | | |
| IDAHO | | | | | | |
| 52 | Group Health Cooperative (HMO) | 85 | 4 | | ✓ | |
| 153 | SelectHealth (HMO/POS) | 83 | 3 | ✓ | | |
| 380 | UnitedHealthcare Insurance (PPO) | 79 | 3 | | ✓ | |
| 380 | UnitedHealthcare Services (PPO) | 79 | 3 | | ✓ | |
| ILLINOIS | | | | | | |
| 55 | Health Alliance Medical Plans (HMO/POS) | 85 | 5 | | ✓ | |
| 83 | Coventry Health Care of Illinois (HMO/POS) | 84 | 5 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 109 | Cigna Health and Life Insurance (PPO) | 83 | 4 | | | |
| 109 | Connecticut General Life Insurance (Cigna) (PPO) | 83 | 4 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| INDIANA | | | | | | |
| 90 | Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield in Indiana (HMO) | 84 | 5 | ✓ | | |
| 240 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 81 | 3 | | | |
| 312 | HMO Illinois and Blue Advantage HMO (HMO) | 80 | 3 | | | |
| IOWA | | | | | | |
| 55 | Health Alliance Medical Plans (HMO/POS) | 85 | 5 | | ✓ | |
| 63 | Medical Associates Health Plan (HMO/POS) | 85 | 5 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 89 | Wellmark Health Plan of Iowa (HMO/POS) | 84 | 3 | ✓ | | |
| KANSAS | | | | | | |
| 136 | Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City, Good Health HMO (HMO) | 83 | 5 | | | |
| 179 | UnitedHealthcare of the Midwest (HMO/POS) | 82 | 4 | | | |
| 236 | Humana Health Plan - Kansas City (HMO/POS) | 81 | 4 | | | |
| KENTUCKY | | | | | | |
| 135 | Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield in Kentucky (HMO/POS) | 83 | 5 | ✓ | | |
| 252 | Humana Health Plan - Kentucky (HMO/POS) | 81 | 2 | | | |
| 318 | Aetna Health (Pennsylvania) - Ohio (HMO/POS) | 80 | 3 | | | |
| LOUISIANA | | | | | | |
| 302 | Humana Health Benefit Plan of Louisiana (HMO/POS) | 80 | 3 | ✓ | | |
| 397 | UnitedHealthcare Insurance (PPO) | 78 | 3 | | | |
| 397 | UnitedHealthcare Services (PPO) | 78 | 3 | | | |
| MAINE | | | | | | |
| 1 | Harvard Pilgrim Health Care (HMO/POS) | 90 | 5 | ✓ | | |
| 23 | Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield in Maine (HMO/POS) | 88 | 5 | ✓ | | |
| 84 | Aetna Health (HMO/POS) | 84 | 3 | | | |
| MARYLAND | | | | | | |
| 16 | Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of the Mid-Atlantic States (HMO) | 88 | 4 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 32 | Johns Hopkins US Family Health Plan (HMO) | 87 | 5 | ✓ | | |
| 121 | Cigna Health and Life Insurance (PPO) | 83 | 3 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 121 | Connecticut General Life Insurance (Cigna) (PPO) | 83 | 3 | | | |
| MASSACHUSETTS | | | | | | |
| 1 | Harvard Pilgrim Health Care (HMO/POS) | 90 | 5 | ✓ | | |
| 3 | Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Massachusetts HMO Blue (HMO/POS) | 90 | 5 | ✓ | | |
| 4 | Harvard Pilgrim Health Care (PPO) | 89 | 5 | ✓ | | |
| 4 | Harvard Pilgrim Insurance (PPO) | 89 | 5 | | | |
| 6 | Tufts Associated Health Maintenance Organization (HMO/POS) | 89 | 4 | ✓ | | |

| National rank | Plan name | Overall | Care factors (diabetes) | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|---------|-------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| | | | Overall score | Consumer satisfaction | Getting higher quality of care | Avoiding costly care |
| MASSACHUSETTS continued | | | | | | |
| 8 | Tufts Benefit Administrators (PPO) | 89 | 5 | ✔ | | |
| 14 | Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Massachusetts (PPO) | 88 | 5 | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| 28 | Health New England (HMO/POS) | 87 | 3 | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| 34 | Fallon Community Health Plan (HMO/POS) | 87 | 3 | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| 46 | ConnectiCare of Massachusetts (HMO/POS) | 86 | 3 | | | |
| 50 | Cigna Health and Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 1 | | | |
| 50 | Connecticut General Life Insurance (Cigna) (PPO) | 85 | 1 | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| 58 | Neighborhood Health Plan (HMO) | 85 | 1 | | ✔ | |
| 66 | Aetna Health (Pennsylvania) (HMO/POS) | 85 | 2 | | | |
| MICHIGAN | | | | | | |
| 24 | Grand Valley Health Plan (HMO) | 87 | 4 | ✔ | | |
| 33 | HealthPlus of Michigan (HMO/POS) | 87 | 5 | ✔ | | |
| 41 | Priority Health (HMO/POS) | 86 | 3 | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| 56 | Health Alliance Plan of Michigan (HMO) | 85 | 5 | | | |
| MINNESOTA | | | | | | |
| 30 | HealthPartners (HMO/POS/PPO) | 87 | 4 | ✔ | | |
| 82 | Medica (HMO/POS/PPO) | 84 | 3 | ✔ | | |
| 133 | Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota (PPO) | 83 | 3 | ✔ | | |
| MISSISSIPPI | | | | | | |
| 98 | Cigna HealthCare of Tennessee (HMO/POS) | 84 | 5 | ✔ | | |
| 428 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 77 | 4 | | | |
| 435 | Cigna Health and Life Insurance (PPO) | 76 | 3 | | | |
| 435 | Connecticut General Life Insurance (Cigna) (PPO) | 76 | 3 | | | |
| MISSOURI | | | | | | |
| 136 | Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City, Good Health HMO (HMO) | 83 | 5 | | | |
| 179 | UnitedHealthcare of the Midwest (HMO/POS) | 82 | 4 | | | |
| 186 | Cigna Health and Life Insurance (PPO) | 82 | 3 | | | |
| 186 | Connecticut General Life Insurance (Cigna) (PPO) | 82 | 3 | ✔ | | |
| MONTANA | | | | | | |
| 407 | UnitedHealthcare Insurance (PPO) | 78 | 1 | ✔ | | |
| 407 | UnitedHealthcare Services (PPO) | 78 | 1 | | | |
| 431 | Cigna Health and Life Insurance (PPO) | 76 | 2 | | | |
| 431 | Connecticut General Life Insurance (Cigna) (PPO) | 76 | 2 | | | |
| NEBRASKA | | | | | | |
| 195 | UnitedHealthcare Insurance (PPO) | 82 | 3 | | | |
| 195 | UnitedHealthcare Services (PPO) | 82 | 3 | | | |
| 357 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 79 | 3 | | | |
| NEVADA | | | | | | |
| 298 | Aetna Health (Pennsylvania) (HMO/POS) | 80 | 2 | ✔ | | |
| 308 | Saint Mary's HealthFirst (HMO/POS) | 80 | 2 | | | |
| 400 | UnitedHealthcare Insurance (PPO) | 78 | 3 | ✔ | | |
| 400 | UnitedHealthcare Services (PPO) | 78 | 3 | | | |
| NEW HAMPSHIRE | | | | | | |
| 9 | Harvard Pilgrim Health Care of New England (HMO/POS) | 89 | 5 | ✔ | | |
| 37 | Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield in New Hampshire (POS) | 86 | 5 | ✔ | | |
| 37 | Anthem Health Plan of New Hampshire (HMO/POS) | 86 | 5 | | | |
| NEW JERSEY | | | | | | |
| 85 | Cigna HealthCare of New Jersey (HMO/POS) | 84 | 3 | ✔ | | |
| 119 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 83 | 3 | ✔ | | |

| National rank | Plan name | Overall | Care factors (diabetes) | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|---------|-------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| | | | Overall score | Consumer satisfaction | Getting higher quality of care | Avoiding costly care |
| NEW JERSEY continued | | | | | | |
| 124 | Cigna Health and Life Insurance (PPO) | 83 | 2 | | | |
| 124 | Connecticut General Life Insurance (Cigna) (PPO) | 83 | 2 | ✔ | | |
| NEW MEXICO | | | | | | |
| 287 | Presbyterian Health Plan (HMO/POS) | 81 | 1 | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| 361 | Presbyterian Insurance (PPO) | 79 | 1 | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| 362 | Lovelace Insurance (PPO) | 79 | 1 | | ✔ | |
| NEW YORK | | | | | | |
| 18 | Capital District Physicians' Healthcare Network (HMO/POS) | 88 | 5 | ✔ | | |
| 19 | Capital District Physicians' Health Plan (HMO) | 88 | 5 | | | |
| 26 | CDPHP Universal Benefits (PPO) | 87 | 5 | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| 26 | Capital District Physicians' Healthcare Network (Self-Funded) (PPO) | 87 | 5 | | | |
| 31 | Independent Health Association (HMO/POS) | 87 | 5 | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| 40 | Excellus BlueCross BlueShield (HMO/POS) | 86 | 3 | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| 53 | MVP Health Care (HMO/POS) | 85 | 5 | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| 74 | HealthNow New York (HMO/POS/PP0) | 85 | 4 | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| NORTH CAROLINA | | | | | | |
| 159 | Cigna HealthCare of North Carolina (HMO/POS) | 83 | 4 | ✔ | | |
| 174 | Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina (PPO) | 82 | 4 | ✔ | | |
| 181 | Cigna Health and Life Insurance (PPO) | 82 | 3 | | | |
| 181 | Connecticut General Life Insurance (Cigna) (PPO) | 82 | 3 | ✔ | | |
| NORTH DAKOTA | | | | | | |
| 82 | Medica (HMO/POS/PPO) | 84 | 3 | ✔ | | |
| 165 | Sanford Health Plan (HMO) | 82 | 4 | ✔ | | |
| 437 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 76 | 2 | | | |
| OHIO | | | | | | |
| 10 | Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of Ohio (HMO) | 89 | 5 | ✔ | | |
| 62 | Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield in Ohio (HMO/POS) | 85 | 4 | ✔ | | |
| 69 | AultCare HMO (HMO) | 85 | 5 | ✔ | | |
| OKLAHOMA | | | | | | |
| 348 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 80 | 3 | | | |
| 351 | UnitedHealthcare of Oklahoma (HMO) | 80 | 3 | | | |
| 382 | UnitedHealthcare Insurance (PPO) | 78 | 3 | | | |
| 382 | UnitedHealthcare Services (PPO) | 78 | 3 | | | |
| OREGON | | | | | | |
| 2 | Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of the Northwest (HMO) | 90 | 4 | ✔ | | |
| 242 | Cigna Health and Life Insurance (PPO) | 81 | 2 | | | |
| 242 | Connecticut General Life Insurance (Cigna) (PPO) | 81 | 2 | ✔ | | |
| PENNSYLVANIA | | | | | | |
| 11 | UPMC Health Plan (HMO) | 89 | 5 | ✔ | | |
| 12 | UPMC Benefit Management Services (HMO) | 89 | 5 | | | |
| 22 | Geisinger Health Plan (HMO/POS) | 88 | 3 | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| 35 | HealthAmerica Pennsylvania (HMO) | 86 | 4 | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| 42 | Keystone Health Plan West (HMO) | 86 | 5 | | | |
| 48 | UPMC Health Network (PPO) | 86 | 5 | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| 48 | UPMC Benefit Management Services (PPO) | 86 | 5 | | | |
| 54 | Geisinger Quality Options (PPO) | 85 | 4 | ✔ | | |
| PUERTO RICO | | | | | | |
| 483 | Humana Health Plans of Puerto Rico (HMO/POS) ¹ | 59 | 3 | | | |
| 484 | Humana Health Plans of Puerto Rico (PPO) ¹ | 57 | 3 | | | |

¹ Not accredited by the NCQA. ² In the process of accreditation by the NCQA. ³ Scheduled for accreditation by the NCQA.

| National rank | Plan name | Overall | | Care factors (diabetes) | | |
|---------------|-----------|---------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|------------|
| | | Overall score | Consumer satisfaction | Getting higher quality of care | Avoiding costly care | Best Value |

RHODE ISLAND

| | | | | | | |
|----|------------------------------------|----|---|---|--|--|
| 8 | Tufts Benefit Administrators (PPO) | 89 | 5 | ✓ | | |
| 67 | UnitedHealthcare Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 3 | | | |
| 67 | UnitedHealthcare Services (PPO) | 85 | 3 | | | |

SOUTH CAROLINA

| | | | | | | |
|-----|---|----|---|--|---|--|
| 244 | BlueChoice HealthPlan of South Carolina (HMO/POS) | 81 | 4 | | | |
| 246 | Aetna Health (Pennsylvania) (HMO/POS) | 81 | 3 | | ✓ | |
| 356 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 79 | 3 | | | |

SOUTH DAKOTA

| | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----|---|---|--|--|
| 165 | Sanford Health Plan (HMO) | 82 | 4 | ✓ | | |
| 431 | Cigna Health and Life Insurance (PPO) | 76 | 2 | | | |
| 431 | Connecticut General Life Insurance (Cigna) (PPO) | 76 | 2 | | | |

TENNESSEE

| | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----|---|---|--|--|
| 98 | Cigna HealthCare of Tennessee (HMO/POS) | 84 | 5 | ✓ | | |
| 138 | Cigna Health and Life Insurance (PPO) | 83 | 4 | | | |
| 138 | Connecticut General Life Insurance (Cigna) (PPO) | 83 | 4 | ✓ | | |

TEXAS

| | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----|---|---|---|---|
| 178 | Scott and White Health Plan (HMO) | 82 | 3 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 203 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 82 | 4 | ✓ | | |
| 258 | Cigna Health and Life Insurance (PPO) | 81 | 3 | | | |
| 258 | Connecticut General Life Insurance (Cigna) (PPO) | 81 | 3 | ✓ | | |

UTAH

| | | | | | | |
|-----|----------------------------------|----|---|---|---|---|
| 153 | SelectHealth (HMO/POS) | 83 | 3 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 366 | UnitedHealthcare Insurance (PPO) | 79 | 2 | ✓ | | |
| 366 | UnitedHealthcare Services (PPO) | 79 | 2 | | | |

VERMONT

| | | | | | | |
|----|---|----|---|--|---|--|
| 39 | Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Vermont (POS) | 86 | 4 | | | |
| 53 | MVP Health Care (HMO/POS) | 85 | 5 | | ✓ | |
| 81 | Vermont Health Plan (HMO/POS) | 84 | 3 | | ✓ | |

Medicare Advantage health plan rankings from NCQA

Top-ranked plans in each state, in rank order, within states.

| National rank | Plan name | Overall | | Care factors (diabetes) | | |
|---------------|-----------|---------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|------------|
| | | Overall score | Consumer satisfaction | Getting higher quality of care | Avoiding costly care | Best Value |

ALABAMA

| | | | | | | |
|-----|---|----|---|---|--|--|
| 190 | Humana Health Plan - Kentucky (HMO) | 81 | 3 | | | |
| 201 | UnitedHealthcare of Alabama (HMO) | 80 | 3 | | | |
| 263 | Humana Insurance (Central North) (PPO) ¹ | 69 | 3 | ✓ | | |

ALASKA

| | | | | | | |
|-----|---|----|---|---|--|--|
| 263 | Humana Insurance (Central North) (PPO) ¹ | 69 | 3 | ✓ | | |
|-----|---|----|---|---|--|--|

ARIZONA

| | | | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------------|----|---|---|--|--|
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |
| 129 | Aetna Health (Pennsylvania) (HMO) | 83 | 2 | | | |
| 158 | PacificCare of Arizona (HMO) | 83 | 3 | ✓ | | |

ARKANSAS

| | | | | | | |
|-----|-------------------------------------|----|---|---|--|--|
| 162 | Humana Insurance - Texas (PPO) | 83 | 3 | ✓ | | |
| 173 | Humana Insurance - Tennessee (PPO) | 82 | 3 | ✓ | | |
| 190 | Humana Health Plan - Kentucky (HMO) | 81 | 3 | ✓ | | |

| National rank | Plan name | Overall | | Care factors (diabetes) | | |
|---------------|-----------|---------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|------------|
| | | Overall score | Consumer satisfaction | Getting higher quality of care | Avoiding costly care | Best Value |

VIRGINIA

| | | | | | | |
|----|--|----|---|---|---|---|
| 16 | Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of the Mid-Atlantic States (HMO) | 88 | 4 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 61 | Coventry Health Care of Virginia (HMO/POS) | 85 | 4 | | ✓ | |
| 96 | Cigna Health and Life Insurance (HMO/POS) | 84 | 3 | | | |
| 96 | Connecticut General Life Insurance (Cigna) (HMO/POS) | 84 | 3 | | ✓ | |

WASHINGTON

| | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----|---|---|---|--|
| 2 | Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of the Northwest (HMO) | 90 | 4 | ✓ | | |
| 52 | Group Health Cooperative (HMO) | 85 | 4 | | ✓ | |
| 232 | Cigna Health and Life Insurance (PPO) | 81 | 2 | | | |
| 232 | Connecticut General Life Insurance (Cigna) (PPO) | 81 | 2 | ✓ | | |

WEST VIRGINIA

| | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----|---|--|--|--|
| 35 | HealthAssurance Pennsylvania (POS) | 86 | 4 | | | |
| 111 | Health Plan of the Upper Ohio Valley (HMO) | 83 | 5 | | | |
| 239 | Optimum Choice (HMO/POS) | 81 | 2 | | | |

WISCONSIN

| | | | | | | |
|----|---|----|---|---|---|---|
| 21 | Group Health Cooperative of South Central Wisconsin (HMO) | 88 | 3 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 30 | HealthPartners (HMO/POS/PPO) | 87 | 4 | ✓ | | |
| 43 | Unity Health Plans (HMO/POS) | 86 | 4 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 45 | Security Health Plan of Wisconsin (HMO/POS) | 86 | 4 | ✓ | | |
| 57 | Network Health Plan (HMO) | 85 | 4 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 60 | Physicians Plus Insurance (HMO/POS) | 85 | 3 | ✓ | | |
| 63 | Medical Associates Health Plans (HMO/POS) | 85 | 5 | | | |
| 71 | Dean Health Plan (HMO) | 85 | 4 | ✓ | | |

WYOMING

| | | | | | | |
|-----|----------------------------------|----|---|--|--|--|
| 437 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 76 | 2 | | | |
| 446 | UnitedHealthcare Insurance (PPO) | 75 | 2 | | | |
| 446 | UnitedHealthcare Services (PPO) | 75 | 2 | | | |

| National rank | Plan name | Overall | | Care factors (diabetes) | | |
|---------------|-----------|---------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|------------|
| | | Overall score | Consumer satisfaction | Getting higher quality of care | Avoiding costly care | Best Value |

CALIFORNIA

| | | | | | | |
|----|--|----|---|---|--|--|
| 1 | Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of Southern California (HMO) | 91 | 4 | ✓ | | |
| 2 | Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of Northern California (H0524) (HMO) | 91 | 4 | ✓ | | |
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |

COLORADO

| | | | | | | |
|-----|---|----|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of Colorado (HMO) | 91 | 4 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |
| 131 | PacificCare of Colorado (HMO) | 83 | 3 | ✓ | | |

CONNECTICUT

| | | | | | | |
|----|---|----|---|--|--|--|
| 53 | Aetna Health (HMO) | 85 | 4 | | | |
| 60 | Oxford Health Plans - Connecticut (HMO/POS) | 85 | 4 | | | |
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |

| National rank | Plan name | Overall | | Care factors (diabetes) | | |
|---------------|-----------|---------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|------------|
| | | Overall score | Consumer satisfaction | Getting higher quality of care | Avoiding costly care | Best Value |

DELAWARE

| | | | | | | |
|-----|---|----|---|---|--|--|
| 95 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | ✔ | | |
| 138 | Aetna Health (Pennsylvania) (HMO) | 83 | 3 | ✔ | | |
| 263 | Humana Insurance (Central North) (PPO) ¹ | 69 | 3 | ✔ | | |

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

| | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----|---|---|--|--|
| 8 | Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of the Mid-Atlantic States (HMO) | 89 | 4 | ✔ | | |
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |
| 210 | Bravo Health Mid-Atlantic (HMO) | 79 | 1 | | | |

FLORIDA

| | | | | | | |
|----|---------------------------------|----|---|---|--|--|
| 6 | Capital Health Plan (HMO) | 90 | 5 | ✔ | | |
| 34 | Health First Health Plans (HMO) | 86 | 4 | ✔ | | |
| 50 | AvMed Health Plans (HMO) | 85 | 5 | ✔ | | |
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |

GEORGIA

| | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----|---|---|---|--|
| 16 | Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of Georgia (HMO) | 88 | 4 | ✔ | | |
| 125 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 84 | 3 | | ✔ | |
| 140 | Aetna Health (HMO) | 83 | 3 | | | |

HAWAII

| | | | | | | |
|----|--|----|---|---|--|--|
| 5 | Kaiser Foundation Health Plan - Hawaii (HMO) | 90 | 5 | ✔ | | |
| 56 | Hawaii Medical Service Association (R7439) (PPO) | 85 | 4 | ✔ | | |
| 59 | Hawaii Medical Service Association (H3832) (PPO) | 85 | 4 | ✔ | | |
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |

IDAHO

| | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----|---|---|---|---|
| 156 | UnitedHealthcare Insurance (PPO) | 83 | 3 | | | |
| 190 | Humana Health Plan - Kentucky (HMO) | 81 | 3 | | | |
| 251 | Blue Cross of Idaho Health Services (HMO) ¹ | 70 | 4 | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |

ILLINOIS

| | | | | | | |
|----|---------------------------------------|----|---|---|---|---|
| 33 | Health Alliance Medical Plans (HMO) | 87 | 5 | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| 36 | Medical Associates Health Plan (HMO) | 86 | 5 | ✔ | | |
| 43 | Humana Benefit Plan of Illinois (HMO) | 85 | 4 | ✔ | | |
| 54 | Health Alliance Medical Plans (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | ✔ | |
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |

INDIANA

| | | | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------------|----|---|--|--|--|
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |
| 115 | UnitedHealthcare Insurance (PPO) | 84 | 3 | | | |
| 128 | Humana Insurance - Kentucky (PPO) | 83 | 4 | | | |

IOWA

| | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----|---|---|---|---|
| 36 | Medical Associates Health Plan (HMO) | 86 | 5 | ✔ | | |
| 108 | UnitedHealthcare of the Midlands (HMO/POS) | 84 | 4 | ✔ | | |
| 120 | Humana Insurance (PPO) | 84 | 3 | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |

KANSAS

| | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----|---|---|--|--|
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |
| 102 | Aetna Health (Pennsylvania) (HMO) | 85 | 3 | | | |
| 103 | Humana Health Plan - Kansas City (HMO) | 85 | 3 | ✔ | | |

KENTUCKY

| | | | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------------|----|---|---|--|--|
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |
| 105 | Aetna Health (Pennsylvania) (HMO) | 84 | 3 | | | |
| 128 | Humana Insurance - Kentucky (PPO) | 83 | 4 | ✔ | | |

LOUISIANA

| | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----|---|---|--|--|
| 107 | Humana Health Benefit Plan of Louisiana (HMO) | 84 | 4 | ✔ | | |
| 263 | Humana Insurance (Central North) (PPO) ¹ | 69 | 3 | ✔ | | |
| 341 | Humana Health Benefit Plan of Louisiana (PPO) ¹ | 66 | 3 | | | |

| National rank | Plan name | Overall | | Care factors (diabetes) | | |
|---------------|-----------|---------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|------------|
| | | Overall score | Consumer satisfaction | Getting higher quality of care | Avoiding costly care | Best Value |

MAINE

| | | | | | | |
|----|----------------------------------|----|---|---|---|---|
| 20 | Aetna Health (HMO) | 88 | 5 | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| 52 | UnitedHealthcare Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | ✔ | | |
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |

MARYLAND

| | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----|---|---|---|--|
| 8 | Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of the Mid-Atlantic States (HMO) | 89 | 4 | ✔ | | |
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |
| 143 | Aetna Health (Pennsylvania) (HMO) | 83 | 2 | | ✔ | |

MASSACHUSETTS

| | | | | | | |
|----|--|----|---|---|---|---|
| 13 | Health New England (HMO/POS) | 88 | 5 | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| 15 | Fallon Community Health Plan (HMO) | 88 | 5 | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| 26 | Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Massachusetts (PPO) | 87 | 4 | ✔ | | |
| 32 | Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Massachusetts HMO Blue (HMO) | 87 | 4 | ✔ | | |
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |

MICHIGAN

| | | | | | | |
|----|---|----|---|---|--|--|
| 12 | Priority Health (HMO/POS) | 88 | 5 | ✔ | | |
| 17 | HealthPlus of Michigan (HMO) | 88 | 4 | ✔ | | |
| 35 | Health Alliance Plan of Michigan (HMO) | 86 | 4 | ✔ | | |
| 44 | Blue Care Network of Michigan (HMO/POS) | 85 | 3 | ✔ | | |
| 47 | Priority Health (PPO) | 85 | 4 | ✔ | | |
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |

MINNESOTA

| | | | | | | |
|-----|--------------------------------------|----|---|---|---|---|
| 14 | Group Health Plan (Cost) (HMO) | 88 | 5 | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| 220 | UCare (H2459) (HMO/POS) ¹ | 72 | 4 | ✔ | | |
| 228 | Medica (Cost) (HMO) ¹ | 71 | 5 | ✔ | | |

MISSISSIPPI

| | | | | | | |
|-----|---|----|---|---|---|--|
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |
| 173 | Humana Insurance - Tennessee (PPO) | 82 | 3 | | ✔ | |
| 263 | Humana Insurance (Central North) (PPO) ¹ | 69 | 3 | ✔ | | |

MISSOURI

| | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----|---|---|--|--|
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |
| 102 | Aetna Health (Pennsylvania) (HMO) | 85 | 3 | | | |
| 103 | Humana Health Plan - Kansas City (HMO) | 85 | 3 | ✔ | | |

MONTANA

| | | | | | | |
|-----|---|----|---|---|--|--|
| 263 | Humana Insurance (Central North) (PPO) ¹ | 69 | 3 | ✔ | | |
| 281 | New West Health Services (PPO) ¹ | 69 | 4 | | | |
| 389 | Pyramid Life Insurance (PPO) ¹ | 64 | 3 | | | |

NEBRASKA

| | | | | | | |
|-----|---|----|---|---|---|--|
| 108 | UnitedHealthcare of the Midlands (HMO/POS) | 84 | 4 | ✔ | | |
| 144 | UnitedHealthcare Insurance (Midlands) (HMO/POS) | 83 | 3 | | | |
| 190 | Humana Health Plan - Kentucky (HMO) | 81 | 3 | | ✔ | |

NEVADA

| | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----|---|---|--|--|
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |
| 149 | Health Plan of Nevada (HMO) | 83 | 2 | ✔ | | |
| 258 | Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield (PPO) ¹ | 69 | 3 | ✔ | | |

NEW HAMPSHIRE

| | | | | | | |
|-----|---|----|---|---|---|---|
| 221 | Martin's Point Generations (HMO/POS) ³ | 72 | 5 | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| 263 | Humana Insurance (Central North) (PPO) ¹ | 69 | 3 | ✔ | | |
| 272 | Martin's Point Generations (PPO) ³ | 69 | 5 | | | |

NEW JERSEY

| | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----|---|---|--|--|
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |
| 119 | Aetna Health (HMO) | 84 | 3 | ✔ | | |
| 126 | Horizon Healthcare of New Jersey (HMO/POS) | 84 | 3 | ✔ | | |

¹ Not accredited by the NCQA. ² In the process of accreditation by the NCQA. ³ Scheduled for accreditation by the NCQA.

✓ Best Value
 1
2
3
4
5
Worse than average
Better than average

| National rank | Plan name | Overall | Care factors (diabetes) | | | |
|-----------------------|--|---------|-------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| | | | Overall score | Consumer satisfaction | Getting higher quality of care | Avoiding costly care |
| NEW MEXICO | | | | | | |
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |
| 110 | Presbyterian Health Plan (HMO) | 84 | 2 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 123 | Lovelace Health Plan (HMO) | 84 | 3 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| NEW YORK | | | | | | |
| 9 | Capital District Physicians' Health Plan (HMO) | 89 | 5 | ✓ | | |
| 18 | MVP Health Care (Rochester/Buffalo) (HMO/POS) | 88 | 4 | ✓ | | |
| 19 | MVP Health Care (East/Central NY) (HMO/POS) | 88 | 5 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 23 | Excellus BlueCross BlueShield (HMO) | 87 | 4 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 23 | Univera Healthcare (HMO) | 87 | 4 | | | |
| 28 | Independent Health Association (HMO) | 87 | 4 | ✓ | | |
| 41 | HealthNow New York (PPO) | 86 | 3 | ✓ | | |
| 42 | Excellus BlueCross BlueShield (PPO) | 85 | 4 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |
| NORTH CAROLINA | | | | | | |
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |
| 99 | Aetna Health (Pennsylvania) (HMO) | 85 | 3 | | | |
| 147 | UnitedHealthcare of North Carolina (PPO) | 83 | 3 | ✓ | | |
| NORTH DAKOTA | | | | | | |
| 263 | Humana Insurance (Central North) (PPO) [1] | 69 | 3 | ✓ | | |
| OHIO | | | | | | |
| 11 | Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of Ohio (HMO) | 88 | 4 | ✓ | | |
| 38 | PrimeTime Health Plan (HMO) | 86 | 5 | ✓ | | |
| 39 | Health Plan of the Upper Ohio Valley (Hometown Region) (HMO) | 86 | 5 | ✓ | | |
| 49 | SummaCare (HMO/POS) | 85 | 4 | | | |
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |
| OKLAHOMA | | | | | | |
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |
| 187 | UnitedHealthcare of Oklahoma (HMO) | 81 | 3 | ✓ | | |
| 263 | Humana Insurance (Central North) (PPO) [1] | 69 | 3 | ✓ | | |
| OREGON | | | | | | |
| 3 | Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of the Northwest (HMO) | 91 | 5 | ✓ | | |
| 51 | UnitedHealthcare of Oregon (HMO) | 85 | 4 | ✓ | | |
| 153 | UnitedHealthcare Insurance (HMO/POS) | 83 | 3 | | | |
| PENNSYLVANIA | | | | | | |
| 7 | Geisinger Health Plan (HMO) | 89 | 5 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 29 | HealthAmerica Advantra (HMO) | 87 | 4 | ✓ | | |
| 30 | Keystone Health Plan Central (HMO) | 87 | 4 | ✓ | | |
| 31 | Geisinger Indemnity Insurance (PPO) | 87 | 4 | ✓ | | |
| 40 | UPMC Health Network (PPO) | 86 | 4 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 48 | UPMC Health Plan (HMO) | 85 | 4 | ✓ | | |
| 57 | Highmark Health Services (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | ✓ | |
| 58 | Keystone Health Plan West (HMO) | 85 | 4 | ✓ | | |
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | ✓ | |
| PUERTO RICO | | | | | | |
| 193 | MMM Healthcare (HMO) | 81 | 4 | ✓ | | |
| 194 | PMC Medicare Choice (HMO) | 81 | 5 | ✓ | | |
| 318 | Triple-S Salud (H5732) (HMO) [1] | 67 | 4 | | | |
| RHODE ISLAND | | | | | | |
| 45 | UnitedHealthcare of New England (HMO/POS) | 85 | 4 | ✓ | | |

| National rank | Plan name | Overall | Care factors (diabetes) | | | |
|-------------------------------|--|---------|-------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| | | | Overall score | Consumer satisfaction | Getting higher quality of care | Avoiding costly care |
| RHODE ISLAND continued | | | | | | |
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |
| 160 | UnitedHealthcare Insurance (Regional) (PPO) | 83 | 3 | | | |
| SOUTH CAROLINA | | | | | | |
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |
| 184 | UnitedHealthcare Insurance (HMO/POS) | 82 | 3 | | | |
| 190 | Humana Health Plan - Kentucky (HMO) | 81 | 3 | | | |
| SOUTH DAKOTA | | | | | | |
| 263 | Humana Insurance (Central North) (PPO) [1] | 69 | 3 | ✓ | | |
| TENNESSEE | | | | | | |
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |
| 97 | Cariten Health Plan (HMO) | 85 | 4 | ✓ | | |
| 173 | Humana Insurance - Tennessee (PPO) | 82 | 3 | | ✓ | |
| TEXAS | | | | | | |
| 21 | Scott and White Health Plan (HMO) | 87 | 5 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 104 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 3 | | | |
| 148 | UnitedHealthcare Benefits of Texas (HMO) | 83 | 3 | ✓ | | |
| UTAH | | | | | | |
| 176 | UnitedHealthcare of Utah (HMO/POS) | 82 | 3 | ✓ | | |
| 199 | Humana Insurance (PPO) | 80 | 2 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 263 | Humana Insurance (Central North) (PPO) [1] | 69 | 3 | ✓ | | |
| VERMONT | | | | | | |
| 18 | MVP Health Care (Rochester/Buffalo) (HMO/POS) | 88 | 4 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 19 | MVP Health Care (East/Central NY) (HMO/POS) | 88 | 5 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 160 | UnitedHealthcare Insurance (Regional) (PPO) | 83 | 3 | | | |
| VIRGINIA | | | | | | |
| 8 | Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of the Mid-Atlantic States (HMO) | 89 | 4 | ✓ | | |
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |
| 173 | Humana Insurance - Tennessee (PPO) | 82 | 3 | | ✓ | |
| WASHINGTON | | | | | | |
| 3 | Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of the Northwest (HMO) | 91 | 5 | ✓ | | |
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |
| 151 | UnitedHealthcare of Washington (HMO) | 83 | 3 | ✓ | | |
| WEST VIRGINIA | | | | | | |
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |
| 109 | Health Plan of the Upper Ohio Valley (SecureCare) (HMO) | 84 | 4 | ✓ | | |
| 157 | Humana Insurance - Ohio (PPO) | 83 | 3 | ✓ | | |
| WISCONSIN | | | | | | |
| 10 | Security Health Plan of Wisconsin (HMO/POS) | 89 | 5 | ✓ | | |
| 14 | Group Health Plan (Cost) (HMO) | 88 | 5 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 22 | Humana Wisconsin Health Organization Insurance (HMO/POS) | 87 | 4 | ✓ | | |
| 25 | Gundersen Health Plan (HMO) | 87 | 5 | ✓ | | |
| 27 | Network Health Insurance (NHIC) (PPO) | 87 | 5 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 36 | Medical Associates Health Plans (HMO) | 86 | 5 | | | |
| 46 | Humana Insurance - Wisconsin (PPO) | 85 | 3 | ✓ | | |
| 55 | UnitedHealthcare of Wisconsin (HMO/POS) | 85 | 4 | ✓ | | |
| 61 | Aetna Life Insurance (PPO) | 85 | 4 | | | |
| WYOMING | | | | | | |
| 263 | Humana Insurance (Central North) (PPO) [1] | 69 | 3 | ✓ | | |

[1] Not accredited by the NCQA. [2] In the process of accreditation by the NCQA. [3] Scheduled for accreditation by the NCQA.

Reports

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Lab tests

Leaf blowers with oomph

Quick leaf clearing and ear-splitting noise don't have to go hand in hand. Our latest tests include several gasoline models that were tops at sweeping and loosening leaves, yet should meet most local noise regulations. The best corded-electric handheld blowers are also better this year.

Two top electrics get a redo. Corded handheld blowers are the obvious choice for small properties. As impressive as Toro's Ultra Blower Vac 51599 and Super Blower Vac 51592 were in previous tests, complaints about burned-out motors and switches figured prominently in user reviews. This year's replacements, **A1** and **A2**, have a redesigned motor that also managed to pump out more oomph in our tests. Both are also CR Best Buys at just \$75 and \$60 each.

Quieter handheld gas models. Gas blowers add mobility but require fueling and added upkeep. The **B2 Echo**, \$200, and **B3 Husqvarna**, a CR Best Buy at \$150, excelled at sweeping and loosening leaves. Yet they're also among the quietest gas blowers we tested, emitting less than 70 decibels at the 50-foot distance used for most noise regulations. The **B7 Echo**, \$170, and **B9 Stihl**, \$230, made even less noise but trade some sweeping power for quietness. All are still loud enough to necessitate hearing protection.

Back-saving backpacks. These blowers shift weight from your arms to your shoulders. The **C6 Ryobi**, a CR Best Buy at \$200, uses a smaller fan that's mounted horizontally to help this compact model perform like a larger one. Even lighter and quieter: The \$280 **Stihl C8**. But neither match the **C1 Husqvarna** for quietness and overall performance.

Lighter roll-arounds. Wheeled blowers have the most power overall. The **D2 Billy Goat**, \$800, was the lightest at 76 pounds and was easy to push. But the **D3 Troy-Bilt**, \$470, weighs just 2 pounds more and gives up a little power for a lot less money. It's also the quietest of these wheeled blowers.



Ratings

Recommended models only From 57 tested.

- CR Best Buy
- Recommended

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

| Rec. | Rank | Brand & model | Price | Weight (lb.) | Overall score | Test results | | | | | |
|------|------|---------------|-------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| | | | | | | Sweeping | Loosening | Vacuuming | Handling and ease | Noise at 50 ft. | Noise at ear |
| | | | | | 0 | | | | | | |
| | | | | | 100 | | | | | | |
| | | | | | P I F I G I V G I E | | | | | | |

A CORDED-ELECTRIC HANDHELD The best blend performance and value for small yards.

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|------|---|----|---|---|----|---|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 1 | Toro Ultra Blower Vac 51609 | \$75 | 8 | 80 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 2 | Toro Super Blower Vac 51602 | 60 | 7 | 78 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 3 | Toro Rake and Vac 51574 | 55 | 7 | 77 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 4 | Stihl BGE 61 | 100 | 7 | 75 | ● | ● | NA | ● | ● | ○ |

B GASOLINE HANDHELD The best are more powerful than electrics but usually cost more.

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|------------------|-----|----|----|---|---|----|---|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 1 | Echo PB-250 | 170 | 10 | 80 | ● | ● | NA | ● | ● | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 2 | Echo PB255LN | 200 | 10 | 80 | ● | ● | NA | ● | ● | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 3 | Husqvarna 125B | 150 | 9 | 80 | ● | ● | NA | ● | ● | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 4 | Husqvarna 125BVx | 190 | 10 | 80 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 5 | Stihl BG 56 C-E | 170 | 9 | 79 | ● | ● | NA | ● | ● | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 6 | Stihl BG 55 | 150 | 9 | 79 | ● | ● | NA | ● | ○ | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 7 | Echo PB-250LN | 170 | 10 | 78 | ● | ● | NA | ● | ● | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 8 | Hitachi RB24EAP | 150 | 9 | 75 | ● | ● | NA | ○ | ● | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 9 | Stihl BG 66L | 230 | 10 | 75 | ● | ● | NA | ● | ● | ● |

C GASOLINE BACKPACK These shift weight off your arms, a plus for larger jobs.

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|------------------|-----|------|----|---|---|----|---|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 1 | Husqvarna 2356BT | 480 | 23 | 90 | ● | ● | NA | ● | ● | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 2 | Stihl BR 350 | 350 | 22 | 89 | ● | ● | NA | ● | ● | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 3 | Echo PB-500H | 330 | 23.2 | 87 | ● | ● | NA | ● | ○ | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 4 | Husqvarna 150BT | 300 | 22.6 | 86 | ● | ● | NA | ● | ○ | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 5 | Husqvarna 350BT | 300 | 20 | 86 | ● | ● | NA | ● | ○ | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 6 | Ryobi RY08420 | 200 | 18 | 85 | ● | ● | NA | ● | ● | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 7 | Stihl BR 380D | 360 | 21 | 83 | ● | ● | NA | ● | ● | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 8 | Stihl BR 200 | 280 | 13 | 80 | ● | ● | NA | ● | ● | ● |

D GASOLINE WHEELED These offer the most blowing power but weigh and cost the most.

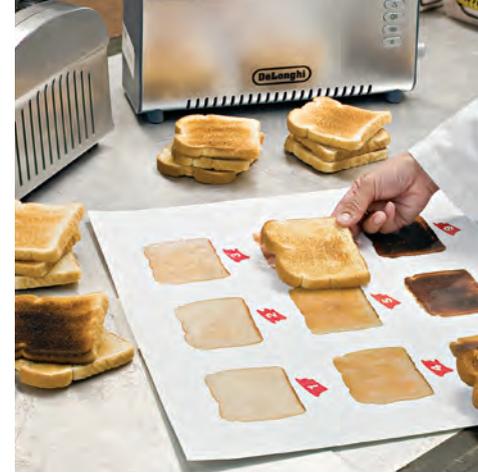
| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|------------------------|-----|-----|----|---|---|----|---|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 1 | Little Wonder LB160H* | 800 | 117 | 86 | ● | ● | NA | ○ | ● | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 2 | Billy Goat F6015* | 800 | 76 | 86 | ● | ● | NA | ○ | ● | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 3 | Troy-Bilt TB672* | 470 | 78 | 84 | ● | ● | NA | ● | ● | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 4 | Powermate P-WB-163150* | 350 | 88 | 83 | ● | ● | NA | ● | ○ | ● |

* Four-stroke engine; other gas models are two-stroke.

WATCH OUR FREE BUYING GUIDE VIDEO

Use your smart phone to download the RedLaser or ShopSavvy app and scan the code for the video.





▶ HOW WE TEST

Shades of brown

After toasting almost 900 slices of bread, our testers are pretty good at spotting the perfect degree of doneness. You might think the perfect toast is browned enough for butter to slide across but still soft and chewy on the inside. But with their well-trained eyes, the testers score every slice against an industry standard toast-color chart (above).

While set to medium, each toaster and toaster oven is judged by how well it makes a single slice of toast, a full batch, and four successive batches. With the best models, results all match the evenly browned center of the chart. Because not everyone likes toast the same way, testers also use the chart to measure color range, or how well appliances produce toast that's light, dark, or somewhere in between.

Ratings Toasters

Recommended models only From 56 tested.

- CR Best Buy
- Recommended
- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

| Rec. Rank | Brand & model | Price | Overall score | Test results | | | | | | |
|-----------|---------------|-------|-------------------|--------------|------------|-----------|--------------------|-------------|------------------|--|
| | | | | Color range | Full batch | One slice | Successive batches | Ease of use | Ease of cleaning | |
| | | | 0 | | | | | | | |
| | | | 100 | | | | | | | |
| | | | P F G V E | | | | | | | |

B TWO-SLICE TOASTERS

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|-------|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 1 | Calphalon Stainless Steel 2-Slot HE200ST | \$ 60 | 77 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 2 | Cuisinart CPT-420 | 80 | 74 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 3 | Cuisinart CPT-170 | 70 | 73 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ○ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 4 | Magimix Vision Toaster (Williams-Sonoma) | 250 | 73 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ○ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 5 | Hamilton Beach Digital 22502 | 35 | 73 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 6 | Frigidaire Professional 2-Slice Wide Slots FPTT02D7MS | 60 | 72 | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ● | ● |

C FOUR-SLICE TOASTERS

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|-----|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 1 | Calphalon Stainless Steel 4-Slot HE400ST | 80 | 77 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 2 | Cuisinart CPT-440 | 100 | 74 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 3 | Frigidaire Professional 4-Slice Wide Slots FPTT04D7MS | 80 | 72 | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ● | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 4 | Breville BTA840XL | 180 | 71 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |

Best glucose meters

Our latest tests found nine recommended blood glucose meters, including two CR Best Buys, that offer exceptional value. All are standout choices for those with diabetes who benefit from testing. About 26 million people in the U.S. have the condition.

Blood glucose monitoring at home can be particularly important for those taking insulin or diabetes medication, women with gestational diabetes, and people having difficulty controlling their diabetes.

All of the meters can display their readings as averages, and date and time stamp the results. 1 and 7 Accu-Chek, 2 and 9 FreeStyle, 3 and 4 Bayer, and 8 TRUEresult can store 360 or more test results and download the readings to a computer.

5 Up & Up and 6 ReliOn, judged CR Best Buys, had excellent accuracy and very good repeatability scores, and the average yearly cost of their strips—assuming 4 tests a day—is \$525, much less than the most expensive strips shown here, costing \$1,750 a year.

Bottom line. Talk with your doctor or diabetes educator about your goals, and decide which features, price, and attributes matter the most.

Ratings

Recommended models only From 25 tested.

- CR Best Buy
- Recommended
- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

| Recommendation | Rank | Brand & model | Price | Overall score | Test results | | | Features | | | |
|-------------------------------------|------|---|-------|-------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| | | | | | Accuracy | Repeatability | Convenience | Auto strip coding | Uses a code chip to enter strip code | Download to computer | Stores 360 readings or more |
| | | | | 0 | | | | | | | |
| | | | | 100 | | | | | | | |
| | | | | P F G V E | | | | | | | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 1 | Accu-Chek Aviva | \$20 | \$1,710 | 88 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 2 | FreeStyle Lite | 20 | 1,750 | 87 | ● | ● | ● | ● | NA | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 3 | Bayer Contour Next | 20 | 1,710 | 85 | ● | ● | ● | ● | NA | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 4 | Bayer Breeze 2 | 25 | 1,710 | 84 | ● | ● | ● | ● | NA | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 5 | Up & Up (Target) | 15 | 525 | 83 | ● | ● | ● | ● | NA | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 6 | ReliOn Micro (Walmart) | 15 | 525 | 82 | ● | ● | ○ | ● | NA | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 7 | Accu-Chek Compact Plus | 75 | 1,680 | 82 | ● | ● | ○ | ● | NA | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 8 | TRUEresult Blood Glucose Monitoring System* | 18 | 1,050 | 82 | ● | ● | ● | ● | NA | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 9 | FreeStyle Freedom Lite | 20 | 1,750 | 82 | ● | ● | ● | ● | NA | ● |

* Also available under pharmacy brand names.



WEIGHING IN Hoover's 16-pound WindTunnel T-Series UH30300 is among the lighter vacuums that handle heavy-duty cleaning.

Vacuums

28 top uprights and canisters clean up in our tests

IF YOU'RE LIKE a lot of people, you want a vacuum that's tough on dirt and pet hair, yet easy to maneuver. Our tests of 106 models show that many fit that bill for carpets and even pet hair, including a \$160 Eureka upright and a \$300 Panasonic canister we've added to our CR Best Buys. But vacuum makers still have some work to do when it comes to trimming weight.

Most of the best uprights and canisters tip the scales at 21 pounds or more. The Hoover Air Steerable UH72400, \$190, Dyson DC50 Animal, \$500, and cordless Gtech AirRam, \$350, are among a new breed of bagless uprights that weigh as little as 8 pounds. But none was better than mediocre at the carpet cleaning that counts. Among canisters, subpar carpet cleaning and dismal airflow for tools put the light new bagless Dyson DC47 Animal, \$450, dead last in our scores.

Two better bets among uprights: The bagged Hoover WindTunnel T-Series UH30300, \$140, and bagless Bissell CleanView Helix Deluxe 71V9, \$100, which

weigh relatively little—16 pounds—without compromising cleaning efficacy.

Our tests covering more than 20 miles of carpet and bare floors also found some once-winning models that weren't quite as impressive this time around. Still others are surprisingly limited for the price,

Vacuums that clean best often put more weight over the brush.

and a few spew out too much of what they pick up. Here are the details:

Some high-fliers slip. We periodically retest vacuums to be sure they haven't changed. Hoover's WindTunnel Anniversary Edition U6485-900 upright and Kenmore's Intuition 28014 canister sat at the top of their categories in our last report. Both are still top picks, though the newer versions' less-thorough carpet cleaning

lowered their place in our latest tests.

Several come without tools. Nozzles and other tools for upholstery, carpets, and edges are also high on most wish lists. The \$500 Oreck Magnesium and \$550 Riccar Supralite RSL4 uprights don't accept tools, despite their high prices.

A few left some dust. We measure how much of what a vacuum sucks up stays in. The bagless upright Hoover WindTunnel 3 UH72600, Bissell Rewind CleanView Pet 18M9W, and Eureka AirSpeed One Pet AS2030A scored lowest of all in this test, a concern for allergy and asthma sufferers.

How to choose

A vacuum manufacturer we spoke with confirmed the link between performance and weight. "Vacuums that work best on carpets tend to put more weight over the brush roll, which helps the bristles go farther into the carpet for better pickup," says Jeff Vogel, Panasonic's Senior Marketing Manager. Here's what else to keep in mind as you shop:

Look for smart features. A brush on/

off switch protects a bare floor's finish and avoids scattering debris. A motorized brush deep-cleans carpets far better than suction alone. (All of our top canisters have it.) Other helpful features include manual carpet-height adjustment and suction control for tools.

Don't go by the name alone. Some models with similar names perform very differently. Eureka's AirSpeed AS1000A is a top pick for bagless uprights. But the same brand's AirSpeed Zuum AS5203A ranked only mid-pack, and the AirSpeed One Pet AS2030A finished near the back.

Stick with a reliable brand. We survey our subscribers annually about the appliances they own for feedback about repairs and other issues. Our vacuum picks include top performers from steady brands, where repair data are available.

Try before you buy. Even if you plan on buying your next vacuum online, try to push, pull, turn, and lift models you're considering at a physical store. Check controls and features. And ask whether the store will match the best price you can get for that model online.

Can't find a rated model?

We analyzed vacuums we've tested over the past three years to see which brands have performed best over time. A strong performance history doesn't guarantee that all of a brand's models will be winners, but it boosts the odds.

Upright vacuums. Relatively safe bets include LG and Miele. Both brands have performed very well overall, with many models among our top-scoring uprights. Miele models have also been notably quiet. Also strong: Hoover, Kenmore, Panasonic, and Riccar, though some of their models haven't matched the best from Miele and LG. Less steady: Bissell, Dirt Devil, Dyson, Electrolux, Eureka, Oreck, Sebo, and Shark. Several of those brands have included top-scoring models, but they've had fewer of them and, for many, a number of low performers. For those brands, stick with models that scored well in our Ratings.

Canister vacuums. Kenmore is the safest bet if you want a top-performing canister. Most models have scored Very Good in our tough tests. Less steady: Dyson, Electrolux, Hoover, and Miele. All four have had fewer top performers and more low scorers for canisters. For those, stick with models that scored well in our Ratings. Electrolux and Hoover have also been the most repair-prone canister brands in our latest brand reliability survey, highlighted on page 47.

CLOSE-UP

Robotic vacuums improve (but don't ditch your regular vac)

High prices, missed areas, and a tendency to close doors behind them have given robotic vacs a reputation for being more novelties than necessities. Our tests of three new ones show that robovacs are getting better, though one is clearly the best of the trio.

iRobot Roomba 760

The \$450 Roomba is the only model that picked up every piece of paper, all of the cereal and sand, and virtually all the rice we laid down on our carpet. It also found its way out of tight spots and around extension cords. And as with the others, you can program it not to run when guests or children are around. A random pattern with more passes over the same spot helped account for its cleaning, though that also meant the Roomba roved around our 12x16-foot test area four to five times longer than the other two before it returned to its charging base.

LG Hom-Bot Square LrV790R

This one proved the quietest and, at \$800, the priciest by far. Instead of cleaning in a random pattern like the Roomba, the LG goes back and forth and typically covers a spot just once. A "turbo" mode kicks in on carpets, and a spot-cleaning mode lets the LG circle over a 4- or 5-foot area for several minutes. But it cleaned less thoroughly than the Roomba, picking up most of the rice and sand while

simply pushing around some of the cereal. It couldn't pick up the paper we dropped on bare floors. And it had trouble sidestepping power cords and narrow objects.

Neato XV-21

Contrary to its name, this \$400 robotic vacuum left the most litter behind while making the most noise. Its straight-line pattern picked up all the cereal from bare floors—and most of it from our carpet—and got most of the rice and sand. But the Neato couldn't pick up paper. It also tended to trap itself between chair legs and could end up stopping short of its charging base as it runs down.

The bottom line. No robotic vacuum can match the deep cleaning you'll get with the best uprights and canisters. We also suggest thinking twice about any robotic vacuum if you have shag carpeting or area rugs. Otherwise, consider the iRobot Roomba 760 for its less-lavish price. And consider it only for maintenance between primary vacuuming, not as an alternative to an upright or canister.

WATCH A ROBOTIC VAC IN ACTION

Use your smart phone to download the RedLaser or ShopSavvy app and scan the code for the video.



TOTAL COVERAGE iRobot's Roomba 760 thoroughly covered our test area as shown by the LED light trails in this roughly hour-long, time-lapse photograph.

Overview

Top-scoring vacuums did well in our carpet, floor, and airflow tests. Most were also impressive on pet hair. We focus below on picks with special strengths and value.

✓ **CR Best Buy** These blend performance and value. All are recommended.

✓ **Recommended** These are fine performers that stand out for the reasons below.

BEST UPRIGHTS FOR MOST

- A1 Miele** \$475
- A5 Kenmore** \$200 **CR Best Buy**
- A6 Hoover** \$180 **CR Best Buy**
- A14 Hoover** \$140

All have a bag and superb pet-hair pickup. **A1** blends impressive cleaning with less noise. **A5** and **A6** cost far less but don't deep-clean carpets as well. **A14** weighs just 16 pounds and boasts easy handling and a low price.

BEST CANISTERS FOR MOST

- C2 Panasonic** \$300 **CR Best Buy**
- C3 Kenmore** \$300 **CR Best Buy**
- C4 Kenmore** \$250 **CR Best Buy**
- C6 Panasonic** \$250 **CR Best Buy**

All have a bag. **C2** and **C3** cost roughly a third of the price of the top Miele and perform virtually as well. Choose the lower-priced **C4** and **C6** if pet hair is less of a priority.

IF YOU WANT A BAGLESS VAC

- B1 LG** \$400
- B2 Hoover** \$130 **CR Best Buy**
- B4 Eureka** \$120 **CR Best Buy**
- B6 Bissell** \$100 **CR Best Buy**
- D1 LG** \$400

All the uprights did well on pet hair. Among them, **B1** is the best choice for carpets. Consider **B2** for its airflow, **B4** for its well-placed on/off switch, and **B6** for its lighter, 16-pound weight. Among canisters, **D1** is a strong bagless pick, but not for pet hair.

And the worst from our tests

Overall scores of 40 or less earn a few vacuums a place on this dubious list. Here are the ones from our latest tests:

Uprights

- Eureka AirExcel NLS 5403A, \$100
- Eureka AirSpeed One Pet AS2030A, \$100
- Eureka Endeavor NLS5400A (Walmart)

All three bagless vacuums were subpar at carpet cleaning; the AirExcel and AirSpeed also spewed dust in our emissions tests.

Canisters

- Dirt Devil Vision M082750, \$170
- Dyson DC47 Animal, \$450

Subpar carpet cleaning and little airflow for tools put both bagless models on this list.



A1 Miele



A5 Kenmore



B1 LG



B2 Hoover

Ratings Upright vacuums

Recommended models only from 72 tested.

- ✓ **CR Best Buy**
- ✓ **Recommended**
- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

| Recommendation | Rank | Brand & model | Price | Overall score | Weight (lb.) | Test results | | | | | | | |
|----------------|------|--|-------|---------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------|-----------|----------|----------|--|
| | | | | | | Carpet | Bare floors | Tool airflow | Noise | Emissions | Handling | Pet hair | |
| | | Similar models, in small type, are comparable to tested model. | | 0 | 100 | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | P | F | I | G | V | G | E | | | |

A BAGGED UPRIGHTS These tend to be best for carpets.

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|----|---|--------|----|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ✓ | 1 | Miele S 7210 Twist [1] | \$ 475 | 72 | 22 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✓ | 2 | Kirby Sentria [2] | 1,350 | 72 | 23 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✓ | 3 | Miele S 7260 Cat & Dog [1] | 715 | 72 | 22 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✓ | 4 | Kenmore Intuition 31100 [3] | 250 | 71 | 21 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✓ | 5 | Kenmore Progressive 31069 | 200 | 71 | 19 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✓ | 6 | Hoover WindTunnel Max UH30600 [3] | 180 | 70 | 17 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✓ | 7 | Kenmore Intuition 31200 [3] | 300 | 69 | 21 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✓ | 8 | Eureka Boss Smart Vac 4870 [] [3] | 160 | 69 | 21 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✓ | 9 | Miele S 7580 Bolero [1] | 880 | 69 | 22 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✓ | 10 | Miele S 7280 Jazz [1] | 600 | 69 | 22 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✓ | 11 | Hoover WindTunnel Anniversary Edition U6485-900 [2] [3] | 230 | 67 | 21 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✓ | 12 | Sebo Felix Premium | 600 | 66 | 16 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✓ | 13 | Hoover WindTunnel T-Series Pet UH30310 [3] | 150 | 65 | 17 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✓ | 14 | Hoover WindTunnel T-Series UH30300 [3] | 140 | 65 | 16 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |

B BAGLESS UPRIGHTS These trade a bag for a bin but can be messier to empty.

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|-----|----|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ✓ | 1 | LG Kompressor LuV350P [1] [3] | 400 | 70 | 18 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✓ | 2 | Hoover WindTunnel T-Series Rewind Bagless UH70120 [3] [4] | 130 | 69 | 18 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✓ | 3 | Kenmore Intuition 31040 [3] | 225 | 66 | 23 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✓ | 4 | Eureka AirSpeed AS1000A [3] [4] AS1001A Gold | 120 | 66 | 18 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✓ | 5 | Shark Rotator Professional Lift-Away NV501 [1] | 250 | 65 | 17 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✓ | 6 | Bissell CleanView Helix Deluxe 71V9 [D] [3] [4] 71V9-2 (Lowe's) | 100 | 64 | 16 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✓ | 7 | Shark Navigator Lift Away NV352 [1] NV351 (Walmart) | 200 | 63 | 14 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |

Guide to the Ratings

Overall score is mainly cleaning, airflow, handling, noise, and emissions; scores for previously tested models may have changed. **Carpet** is ability to lift embedded talc and sand from medium-pile carpet. **Bare floors** is vacuuming sand without dispersing it. **Tool airflow** is through hose with increasing amounts of dust-simulating wood flour. **Noise** reflects decibel-meter results; we recommend hearing protection for models testing Poor. **Emissions** is release of small particles while vacuuming. **Handling** is ease of pushing, pulling, and carrying. **Pet hair** uses long cat fur on medium-pile carpet. **Weight** is vacuum and onboard tools. **Price** is approximate retail.



C2 Panasonic

C3 Kenmore

D1 LG

Ratings Canister vacuums

Recommended models only from 34 tested.

- CR Best Buy
- Recommended

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

| Recommendation | Rank | Brand & model <small>Similar models, in small type, are comparable to tested model.</small> | Price | Overall score | Weight (lb.) | Test results | | | | | | | |
|----------------|------|--|-------|---------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------|-----------|----------|----------|--|
| | | | | | | Carpet | Bare floors | Tool airflow | Noise | Emissions | Handling | Pet hair | |
| | | | | 0 | 100 | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | P | F | G | V | G | E | | | | |

C BAGGED CANISTERS These tend to do better with tools than uprights and are more stable on stairs.

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------------|-------|----|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 1 | Miele S 5281 Callisto | \$990 | 71 | 24 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 2 | Panasonic MC-CG937 | 300 | 71 | 23 | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 3 | Kenmore Progressive 21614 | 300 | 70 | 23 | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 4 | Kenmore Progressive 21514 | 250 | 68 | 23 | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 5 | Kenmore Intuition 28014 | 500 | 67 | 26 | ○ | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 6 | Panasonic MC-CG902 | 250 | 65 | 23 | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

D BAGLESS CANISTER This trades a bag for a bin but can be messier to empty.

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|-----------------------|-----|----|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 1 | LG Kompressor LcV900B | 400 | 69 | 23 | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
|-------------------------------------|---|-----------------------|-----|----|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

- ① Lacks manual pile-height adjustment. ② Self-propelled. ③ Lacks suction control. ④ Lacks brush on/off.
- ⓓ Discontinued, but similar model is available; price is for similar model.

▶ CLOSE-UP

One for the road: Honda Odyssey's onboard vacuum

Paying roughly \$45,000 for the top-level Odyssey EX-L Touring Elite minivan buys you a 12-speaker sound system and other features you might expect, plus one you might not: a canister vacuum that's hardwired to the vehicle. Made by Shop-Vac, it includes a 16-foot hose and tools, and it runs for 8 minutes off the Odyssey's car battery—or as long as you like while the engine is running.

Is the built-in vacuum as good as the rest of the

Odyssey? (See page 61.) To find out, we pitted it against our two top corded hand vacuums,



Eureka's Easy Clean 71B, \$50, and Black & Decker's DustBuster HV9010P, \$65, along with a high-scoring Kenmore canister. Our results show this winning minivan is also a winner at helping clean up the messes these family haulers may attract.

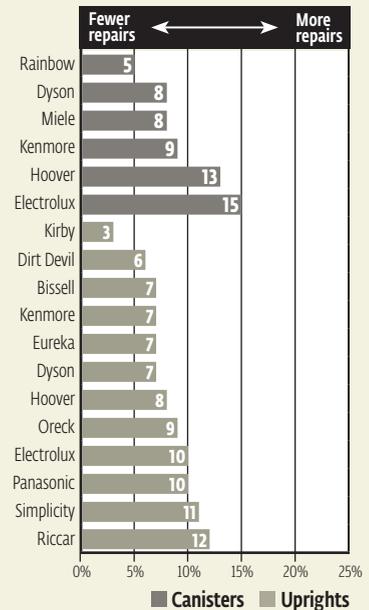
How we tested. We duplicated our hand-vacuum tests on carpets with cereal, uncooked rice, sand, and pet hair. Honda's vacuum vanquished most of those spills as

Most and least reliable

102,000 readers sound off

Choosing a vacuum with a good repair history can improve your odds of getting a reliable model. So each year we survey thousands of our readers about their experiences. Kirby was among the less repair-prone brands of upright vacuums in our latest survey. Rainbow was among the less repair-prone brands of canister vacuums, and Hoover and Electrolux were the most repair-prone in that category.

VACUUMS



Source: Consumer Reports Annual Product Reliability Survey. Our findings are based on more than 102,000 vacuums readers bought new between 2008 and 2012. Differences of fewer than 4 points aren't meaningful. Data are adjusted to eliminate differences linked solely to the age and use of the vacuum. Models within a brand may vary, and design or manufacture changes may affect future reliability.

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Between 04/01/13 and 04/30/13, the average estimated savings off MSRP presented by participating dealers to users of the Consumer Reports Build & Buy Program based on user new vehicle configurations was \$2,791. Your savings may vary.

**Guaranteed Savings currently not available in all states. See site for details.

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Cars

Road tests, auto products, hot topics



Safety upgrades for your car

TODAY'S NEW VEHICLES are brimming with advanced safety features. Blind-spot monitoring, for example, helps keep you from hitting an unseen car when changing lanes. A forward-collision warning system signals if your car is in danger of striking one in front. And a lane-departure system alerts you if you begin drifting out of your lane, which might happen if you're distracted or sleepy.

Now you can get those safety features for your current car. We recently evaluated two products: the \$850 Mobileye 560 and the \$250 Goshers Blind Spot Detection System.

With Mobileye, a camera mounted behind the inside rearview mirror "reads" the road ahead, monitoring such things as lane markings and the distance to the car in front. Using a built-in speaker and a small display unit, it will give you audible and visual warnings if your car begins leaving a lane, you're following a car too closely, it senses a pedestrian or bicyclist, or it calculates that you need to take action to avoid hitting a car in front. The system can also switch your headlights from high to low beam for oncoming cars and read speed-limit signs to signal if you're going too fast.

The sensitivity of the various systems can be adjusted along with the volume of the audible warning, and each function has its own audible and visual warnings.



DRIVING COACH You get alerts through Mobileye's small display (shown in top photo) or a smart-phone app (above left). Distance to a car in front, for example, is shown in seconds.



HIDDEN DANGER The Goshers system activates a warning light when a car is in your blind spot.

Some functions can be turned off if you find that they're not useful. A smart phone can also serve as the system's display by using a wireless Bluetooth connection and a separate Mobileye app.

Overall, we found that Mobileye's features worked well and gave us ample time to react, both on the road and in simulated situations at our track. But staffers noticed one annoyance: At speeds faster than 19 mph, the display constantly shows the number of seconds—up to 2.5—that

your car is behind the one in front.

Mobileye needs to be professionally installed, which adds about \$150 to the cost.

Seeing into your blind spot

The Goshers system is designed to do only one thing: alert you to a car in your blind spot. It uses sensors mounted on each side of the rear bumper, corresponding warning lights for the interior, and an audible alarm. We found that the system reliably warned us of other cars but that it can be a bit overzealous, with guardrails and other objects causing false alerts. It was more helpful when we adjusted its sensitivity to its lowest setting and opted to get warnings only when a turn signal was activated.

Installation took our mechanic about 4 hours. We don't think it's a job for the average do-it-yourselfer.

Overall, both products can help you avoid crashes, although neither provides the visual and functional integration of a built-in system. And neither is a replacement for maintaining a safe following distance, checking your mirrors, and looking over your shoulder when changing lanes.

SEE MOBILEYE IN ACTION

Use your smart phone to download the RedLaser or ShopSavvy app and scan the code for the video.





RUBBER MATCH Our tire testers put 50 ultra-high-performance and winter treads through their paces.

High-performance tires

Michelin is among the best for all-season, summer, and winter

AS AUTOMAKERS TRY to boost the handling and fun-to-drive quotient of their cars, they're coming out with more models equipped with performance tires designed to optimize cornering, grip, and handling. And in the upper tier of this market—in both capability and price—are ultra-high-performance (UHP) tires.

UHP rubber, which is usually found on sports and high-performance luxury cars, is now showing up on less-expensive models, such as the Mini Cooper S and the Volkswagen GTI. Even mainstream models like the Buick LaCrosse and the Chevrolet Malibu offer UHP tire packages.

Those tires have a wide tread to maximize grip and short, stiffer sidewalls that

minimize flexing while cornering. Both attributes help them deliver more responsive handling. The trade-offs, however, are typically a stiffer ride and a shorter tread life. Mainstream tire types might have a tread-wear warranty of 75,000 to 100,000 miles, for example, but a warranty for a UHP model, if there is one, goes up to only 60,000 miles.

The models we tested have speed ratings of W, Y, and Z, which means that they're capable of sustaining speeds of more than 149 mph. That might seem like overkill on public roads, but speed ratings are a good guide for a tire's overall performance. We found that tires with higher speed ratings also have better overall grip at normal highway speeds.

We tested two types of UHP tires: summer and all-season. Summer tires are designed to deliver maximum grip in temperate conditions. But they give up grip when the mercury dips to near freezing, and they provide very little grip on snowy or icy roads. UHP all-season models are for year-round use, although they don't perform as well as dedicated winter tires on snowy and icy roads. We also found that they typically last longer than summer models, which often have no tread-wear warranty.

Among the all-season models we tested, the Michelin Pilot Sport A/S 3 stands out. It delivers excellent dry-braking and handling capabilities that beat even many summer tires, as well as very good tread life.

The second-place Goodyear Eagle F1 Asymmetric All Season has slightly lower dry-braking and handling performance, but it still offers impressive overall grip, commendable handling, and long tread life.

Among the summer tires, the Pirelli P Zero and Michelin Pilot Super Sport received top marks. The P Zero earned excellent ratings for dry and wet braking, and for handling. The Pilot Super Sport is impressive for its precise handling on dry and wet surfaces, and it provides the longest tread life of any summer tire.

We also tested eight performance winter models, which are designed to provide added grip on snowy and icy roads. See our results at right.

Dollars and sense

It might be tempting to shop strictly by price when you need to replace your UHP tires after two or three years, but we found that you tend to get what you pay for and that there are no standout bargains among the tires we tested.

Michelins, for example, tend to cost a little more than other brands. But they consistently rate highly in our tests and generally have impressive tread life based on our evaluations.

Because tire prices can vary significantly among outlets, we recommend that you start shopping before your current tires are worn out and that you keep an eye on sales and other discounts. Begin your hunt when the tread depth of your tires reaches $\frac{1}{32}$ of an inch. You can easily check this by inserting a quarter into each tread groove, with George Washington's head pointed down. If you can see the top of his head, it's time to start shopping.

When buying replacement tires, it's best to stick with the same size and speed rating as your car's original tires. First, check our Ratings for models with good overall scores and good braking, handling, and hydroplaning resistance. Those are important safety factors that can help you avoid an accident. Once you've narrowed down your choices, look for models that performed well in other areas that are important to you, such as noise, ride comfort, or rolling resistance (a factor in fuel economy). Given the expense of these tires, choosing one with longer tire life is not only a money saver; it can also give you a wider margin of safety by letting you drive more miles before the tire's performance is degraded from wear.

Best winter tires for high-performance cars

If you expect to drive extensively on snowy or icy roads, you should consider getting winter tires. Designated by a mountain and snowflake symbol on the sidewall, they provide much better grip in those conditions than all-season tires.

We tested eight winter-tire models that fit the same cars as the ultra-high-performance tires in our larger test. And we saw a noticeable improvement in winter grip. When accelerating from 0 to 20 mph on snow, for example, these tires helped our car reach 20 mph in half the distance of UHP all-season tires.

But winter tires typically deliver relatively poor traction on cleared roads and they wear out more quickly than conventional tires. Performance snow tires are also expensive, from \$165 to \$250 each. Those are all good reasons to take them off at the end of the snowy season.

This year the Nokian WR G3, a top-rated tire, proved to be an exception to the usual trade-offs. It didn't offer the best snow and ice traction in our tests, but it did maintain much better dry and wet grip than other winter tires, making



it a good choice for areas where roads are often plowed. For a few dollars less, the Michelin Pilot Alpin PA4 performs almost as well. Those two models are also the only ones that provide a tread-wear warranty: the Nokian offers a 55,000-mile warranty and the Michelin 30,000 miles.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is the Nokian Hakkapeliitta R2, which delivered excellent winter traction but had poor wet- and dry-braking distances. This tire isn't for everybody, but if you live in a place where you'll be driving more on snow and ice than on pavement all winter, it might be the right rubber to pull you through those tough conditions.



A1 Nokian



A2 Michelin



A3 Nokian



A4 Hankook

Ratings Performance winter tires

All tested models in performance order, within types.

Recommended

● Excellent
● Very good
○ Good
○ Fair
● Poor

| Recommended | Rank | Brand & model | Price as tested | Overall score | Winter driving | | Three-season driving | | | Comfort | | Rolling resistance |
|-------------------------------------|------|--|-----------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------|--------------|----------|------|--------------------|
| | | | | | Snow traction | Ice braking | Dry braking | Wet braking | Hydroplaning | Handling | Ride | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 1 | Nokian WR G3 | \$245 | 66 | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ● | ● | ○ | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 2 | Michelin Pilot Alpin PA4 | 240 | 66 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ● |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 3 | Nokian Hakkapeliitta R2 | 250 | 64 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ● | ● |
| | 4 | Hankook Winter I^cecept Evo | 183 | 62 | ● | ○ | ● | ○ | ● | ○ | ● | ○ |
| | 5 | Dunlop SP Winter Sport 4D | 220 | 62 | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ○ | ○ | ● |
| | 6 | Pirelli Winter 240 Sottozero Serie II | 189 | 60 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ● |
| | 7 | Vredestein Wintrac Xtreme | 235 | 60 | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ○ | ○ | ● | ● |
| | 8 | Cooper WeatherMaster Snow | 165 | 56 | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ● | ○ | ● | ○ |

Overview

Ultra-high-performance (UHP) tires are designed for excellent handling and maximum grip, but they're not as smooth-riding or long-lasting as other tires. Performance winter tires provide maximum grip on snow and ice.

☑ **Recommended** These are high-scoring models that stood out in our testing.

BEST FOR OVERALL WINTER DRIVING

- A1 **Nokian** WR G3
- A2 **Michelin** Pilot Alpin PA4

BEST FOR SEVERE WINTER DRIVING

- A3 **Nokian** Hakkapeliitta R2

BEST UHP ALL-SEASON TIRES

- B1 **Michelin** Pilot Sport A/S 3
- B2 **Goodyear** Eagle F1 Asymmetric All Season
- B4 **Hankook** Ventus S1 Noble 2
- B6 **Pirelli** P Zero Nero All Season
- B7 **Cooper** Zeon RS3-A

BEST UHP SUMMER TIRES

- C1 **Pirelli** P Zero
- C2 **Michelin** Pilot Super Sport
- C3 **Yokohama** ADVAN Sport V105
- C4 **Nokian** zLine
- C5 **Continental** Extreme Contact DW
- C6 **Goodyear** Eagle F1 Asymmetric 2
- C7 **Vredestein** Ultrac Vorti

All-season tire update

In last year's all-season tire test, we found the V-speed-rated Bridgestone Turanza Serenity offered excellent dry and wet braking. But it fell short in tread life and had little grip on snow or ice. As a result, it scored near the bottom of the category.



Bridgestone
Turanza Serenity
Plus

We recently tested an updated version, the Bridgestone Turanza Serenity Plus, which was introduced last year but was too late to be in last year's test.

The Serenity Plus rated much higher, placing ninth out of the 23 models in the category. It delivers good snow and ice performance, and more resistance to hydroplaning, and it offers longer tread life. But it gives up some performance in wet and dry braking and handling.

Both Serenity tires are currently being sold, but the new Serenity Plus is a relative bargain among performance all-season tires (we paid \$111 for a tire in our test size). Subscribers to ConsumerReports.org can check our latest Ratings in all tire categories.

Ratings Ultra-high-performance tires

All tested models In performance order, within types.

| Recommended | Rank | Brand & model | Price as tested | Overall score | Three-season driving | | | | | Winter | | Comfort | | Other | |
|-------------|------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|----------------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|---------|-------|--------------------|------------|
| | | | | | Dry braking | Dry handling | Wet braking | Wet handling | Hydroplaning | Snow traction | Ice braking | Ride | Noise | Rolling resistance | Tread life |

B ULTRA-HIGH-PERFORMANCE ALL-SEASON TIRES

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|----|--|-------|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ☑ | 1 | Michelin Pilot Sport A/S 3 | \$175 | 76 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ● | ● | ○ | ● |
| ☑ | 2 | Goodyear Eagle F1 Asymmetric All Season | 166 | 70 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ○ | ● | ● | ● |
| | 3 | Continental Extreme Contact DWS | 148 | 66 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ● |
| ☑ | 4 | Hankook Ventus S1 Noble 2 | 165 | 66 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| | 5 | BFGoodrich g-Force Super Sport A/S | 140 | 66 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| ☑ | 6 | Pirelli P Zero Nero All Season | 132 | 64 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| ☑ | 7 | Cooper Zeon RS3-A | 153 | 64 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| | 8 | Uniroyal Tiger Paw GTZ | 131 | 62 | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ● |
| | 9 | General G-Max AS-03 | 121 | 62 | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| | 10 | Nexen N7000 | 129 | 62 | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| | 11 | Bridgestone Potenza RE970AS Pole Position | 180 | 60 | ● | ○ | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| | 12 | Sumitomo HTR A/S P01 | 120 | 58 | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| | 13 | Kumho Ecsta 4x | 111 | 58 | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| | 14 | Nitto Motivo | 166 | 56 | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| | 15 | Falken Azenis PT722 A/S | 126 | 56 | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| | 16 | Toyo Proxes 4 Plus | 133 | 56 | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| | 17 | Falken Ziex ZE912 | 102 | 56 | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| | 18 | Maxxis Victra MA-Z4S | 120 | 54 | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| | 19 | Yokohama Avid ENVigor | 133 | 52 | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| | 20 | Firestone Firehawk Wide Oval AS | 141 | 52 | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| | 21 | Fuzion UHP | 104 | 52 | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Guide to the Ratings

Price as tested is the retail amount we paid for the (P)225/40R18 size tested. **Overall scores** are a weighted average emphasizing braking, handling, and hydroplaning. Scores for performance winter tires are more heavily weighted to snow traction and ice braking. Overall scores are relative to the category. **Dry and wet braking** is conducted from 60 mph. **Dry handling** reflects a tire's performance in our avoidance maneuver, cornering on our dry skid pad, and subjective steering feel. **Wet handling** includes cornering on our wet skid pad and handling on our wet circuit. Handling for winter tires consists of cornering on dry and wet skid pads, avoidance-maneuver performance, and steering feel. **Hydroplaning** reflects how quickly we could drive through standing water before the tires began to skim on the surface. **Snow traction** reflects the distance our test car needed to accelerate from 5 to 20 mph on moderately packed snow. We tested **ice braking** on a skating rink from 10 mph. Summer tires are not tested for snow traction and ice braking. **Ride comfort** and **noise** reflect our on-road judgments. **Rolling resistance** is a factor in fuel economy. **Tread life** is an indicator of wear potential from our 12,000-mile mixed driving test. Rolling resistance and tread-life evaluations are conducted by contract labs for Consumer Reports.

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

Recommended

| Recommended | Rank | Brand & model | Price as tested | Overall score | Three-season driving | | | | | Comfort | | Other | |
|-------------|------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|----------------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|---------|-------|--------------------|------------|
| | | | | | Dry braking | Dry handling | Wet braking | Wet handling | Hydroplaning | Ride | Noise | Rolling resistance | Tread life |

C ULTRA-HIGH-PERFORMANCE SUMMER TIRES

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|----|--|-------|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 1 | Pirelli P Zero | \$177 | 78 | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 2 | Michelin Pilot Super Sport | 203 | 78 | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 3 | Yokohama ADVAN Sport V10S | 199 | 76 | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 4 | Nokian zLine | 220 | 76 | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 5 | Continental Extreme Contact DW | 198 | 76 | ● | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 6 | Goodyear Eagle F1 Asymmetric 2 | 176 | 74 | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 7 | Vredestein Ultrac Vorti | 213 | 72 | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| | 8 | Bridgestone Potenza S-04 Pole Position | 192 | 70 | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| | 9 | Toyo Proxes T1 Sport | 168 | 68 | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| | 10 | Bridgestone Potenza RE-11 | 218 | 66 | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| | 11 | Bridgestone Potenza RE760 Sport | 146 | 66 | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| | 12 | Hankook Ventus V12 evo | 137 | 66 | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| | 13 | BFGoodrich g-Force Sport COMP-2 | 131 | 66 | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| | 14 | GT Radial Champiro UHP1 | 87 | 64 | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| | 15 | Falken Azenis FK-453 | 159 | 64 | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| | 16 | Kumho Ecsta LE Sport | 111 | 62 | ● | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| | 17 | Yokohama S Drive | 140 | 62 | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| | 18 | Sumitomo HTR ZIII | 133 | 62 | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| | 19 | Maxxis Victra MA-Z1 | 125 | 60 | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| | 20 | Cooper Zeon RS3-S | 163 | 58 | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| | 21 | Firestone Firehawk Wide Oval Indy 500 | 116 | 56 | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |



B1 Michelin



B2 Goodyear



B4 Hankook



C1 Pirelli



C2 Michelin



C3 Yokohama

Should you upgrade?

For the best combination of performance and comfort, it's wise to stay with tires of the same type, size, and speed rating that originally came on your car. Still, if you upgrade to a higher speed rating, you can often get better cornering, grip, and handling. The downsides are typically less tread life and a higher price. **ANOTHER COMMON**, although even pricier, upgrade is to "plus size" your wheels and tires. A "plus-one conversion," for example, involves going with a wheel that has a diameter that's 1 inch larger and a tire with a sidewall that's about 1 inch shorter, so the combo maintains a similar outer diameter as the original set.

This generally gives you more cornering and braking grip. And using a higher-performance tire can deliver even greater benefits. But it will cost a lot for new wheels and tires, as well as new tire-pressure monitoring sensors, if necessary. Plus, the improved grip might not outweigh the decline in ride comfort, hydroplaning resistance, tread life, and winter grip.

Moreover, our tests have shown that going with wheels larger than a "plus one" brings even more compromises in ride comfort and hydroplaning resistance.



GRIPPING UHP tires now come on sports and mainstream cars.

SEE OUR UHP TIRE TEST

Use your smart phone to download the RedLaser or ShopSavvy app and scan the code for the video.



BARGAIN BOOST

EverStart Maxx batteries from Walmart are top performers.



Car batteries

Big brands don't always mean big performance

GETTING STUCK with a dead battery is an annoyance at best. If you're stranded in bad weather or an isolated location, it can jeopardize your safety. So, with winter around the bend, now is the time to check up on your battery's health and replace it if necessary.

When shopping, don't assume that buying a well-known brand or spending top dollar is the way to go. Four different brands grabbed the top spot in the six group sizes we tested. That means a battery that topped one category may be an also-ran in the size you need.

DieHard batteries, for example, scored at or near the top in some of the group sizes we tested but ended up dead last in others. And with prices ranging from \$110 to as much as \$175, DieHard models were some of the most expensive.

On the other hand, relatively affordable EverStart batteries from Walmart were

some of the top scorers in all six group sizes we tested. They're also among the most reasonably priced, ranging from around \$85 to \$110.

Absorbed glass mat (AGM) designs are strong performers, accounting for the top three models in Group 34. But they are also the most expensive, with the \$210 Optima at the top of the range. AGM batteries are being used in more new cars to supply added power for electronic safety and convenience features, as well as fuel-saving engine stop-start systems. But our tests have found similar or better overall performance from batteries costing less than half as much.

Don't be surprised

Although cold temperatures can make a battery struggle to start a car, a battery actually degrades more quickly in hot weather, and one that has weakened over the summer may fail completely when the

mercury drops. Moreover, because of the efficiency of modern electrical systems, most cars can now start with a minimum of cranking. So, you may not even know your battery is getting weak until it's too late.

The key to avoiding battery failure is regular testing. Have the battery tested annually by a mechanic once it is 2 years old if you live in a warm climate, or once every four years in colder climes. If your battery fails the test, don't hesitate to replace it, even if your car is still starting right up.

How to choose

Batteries come in a variety of sizes. You'll find the right one for your car in the owner's manual or an in-store fit guide. Armed with that information, you can check our Ratings to find the best model for your needs and budget. Then, narrow your choices based on these three important criteria we evaluate in testing.

Overview

In addition to choosing the right size and capacity, an important thing to consider is how long a battery will last. That's why our Ratings value life-test results more than reserve capacity or cold-cranking performance. The Ratings chart displays batteries by overall performance within six group sizes, with test results and features for each.

✓ **CR Best Buy** These offer the best combination of performance and price. All are recommended.

✓ **Recommended** All of these are worth consideration, depending on your climate.

FOR COLD-CRANKING AMPS

- A1 Kirkland \$85
- A2 DieHard \$145
- A3 DieHard \$175
- B1 DieHard \$165
- B2 Optima \$210
- B3 DieHard \$165
- D1 EverStart \$100
- F2 EverStart \$110

FOR LONGEST LIFE

- A1 Kirkland \$85
- A2 DieHard \$145
- A3 DieHard \$175
- A4 EverStart \$100
- B1 DieHard \$165
- B2 Optima \$210
- B3 DieHard \$165
- B4 EverStart \$100
- B5 Duralast \$100
- B6 EverStart \$100
- B7 DieHard \$130
- B8 Duralast \$100
- C1 EverStart \$85
- C2 EverStart \$85
- D1 EverStart \$100
- D2 EverStart \$100
- D3 Duralast \$100
- E1 EverStart \$85
- E2 Interstate \$110
- F1 Interstate \$110

Life. Batteries that scored well in our life test are the models that held up longest through repeated cycles of draining and recharging while immersed in water heated to 167° F. This simulates the typical conditions a battery is exposed to under the hood of your car.

Reserve capacity. This is an estimate of how long a battery can power your car if the electrical system fails. It's also important if you do a lot of stop-and-go driving with frequent restarts.

Cold-cranking amps (CCA). Focus on CCA if you live in a cold climate. A high score here indicates good starting performance in sub-freezing temperatures.

Keep in mind that any battery will lose strength over time, even sitting on a store shelf. Get one that's six months old or less. Look for a code printed on stickers on the case that uses a letter for the month (A for January and so forth, although September skips I and goes to J) and a number for the year (3 for 13).



A1 Kirkland



A2 DieHard



B1 DieHard



B2 Optima



C1 EverStart



C2 EverStart

Ratings Car batteries

All tested models In performance order, within types.

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- ✓ CR Best Buy
- ✓ Recommended

| Recommendation | Rank | Brand & model | Price | Overall score | Test results | | | Features | | | | | | | |
|----------------|------|---------------|-------|---------------|--------------|------------------|-----|----------|--------|----------------|-------------|--|---|--|---|
| | | | | | Life | Reserve capacity | CCA | Warranty | Handle | Removable caps | Claimed CCA | | | | |
| | | | | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | 100 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | P | | F | | G | | V | | G | | E |

A GROUP 65 TOP TERMINAL Fits many large Ford vehicles.

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|--|-------|----|---|---|---|--------|---|---|-----|
| ✓ | 1 | Kirkland Signature 12866 ⁽¹⁾ | \$ 85 | 88 | ● | ● | ● | 36/100 | ● | ● | 850 |
| ✓ | 2 | DieHard Gold 50865 ⁽²⁾ | 145 | 87 | ● | ● | ● | 36 | ● | | 880 |
| ✓ | 3 | DieHard Advanced Gold 50765 ^{(2) (3)} | 175 | 84 | ● | ● | ● | 36 | ● | | 775 |
| ✓ | 4 | EverStart MAXX-65S (South) ⁽⁴⁾ | 100 | 83 | ● | ○ | ○ | 36 | ● | ● | 700 |
| | 5 | NAPA 8465 ⁽⁵⁾ | 85 | 74 | ○ | ○ | ● | 24/84 | ● | | 750 |
| | 6 | DieHard Gold 50965 (South) ⁽²⁾ | 145 | 67 | ○ | ○ | ○ | 36 | ● | | 750 |
| | 7 | Interstate Mega-Tron II MT-65 | 120 | 66 | ○ | ○ | ○ | 24/60 | ● | | 675 |
| | 8 | Plus Start 51265 ⁽²⁾ | 110 | 65 | ○ | ● | ○ | 12 | ● | | 650 |
| | 9 | DieHard 50365 ⁽²⁾ | 125 | 61 | ○ | ○ | ○ | 24 | ● | | 675 |

B GROUP 34, 78 & 34/78 DUAL TERMINAL Fits many large Chrysler and GM pickups, SUVs, and sedans.

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|----|--|-----|----|---|---|---|--------|---|---|-----|
| ✓ | 1 | DieHard Advanced Gold 50778 ^{(2) (3)} | 165 | 92 | ● | ● | ● | 36 | ● | | 775 |
| ✓ | 2 | Optima Yellow Top 3478DT ⁽³⁾ | 210 | 90 | ● | ○ | ● | 36 | ● | | 750 |
| ✓ | 3 | DieHard Advanced Gold 50734 ^{(2) (3)} | 165 | 89 | ● | ● | ● | 36 | ● | | 775 |
| ✓ | 4 | EverStart MAXX-78N (North) ⁽⁴⁾ | 100 | 81 | ● | ○ | ○ | 36 | ● | ● | 800 |
| ✓ | 5 | Duralast 34-DL ⁽⁶⁾ | 100 | 80 | ● | ○ | ○ | 24/84 | ● | ● | 660 |
| ✓ | 6 | EverStart MAXX-34S (South) ⁽⁴⁾ | 100 | 76 | ● | ○ | ○ | 36 | ● | ● | 660 |
| ✓ | 7 | DieHard Gold 50978 (South) ⁽²⁾ | 130 | 76 | ● | ○ | ○ | 36 | ● | | 700 |
| ✓ | 8 | Duralast 78-DL ⁽⁶⁾ | 100 | 75 | ● | ○ | ○ | 24/84 | ● | ● | 700 |
| | 9 | Kirkland Signature 12877 ⁽¹⁾ | 90 | 73 | ○ | ○ | ○ | 36/100 | ● | ● | 795 |
| | 10 | EverStart MAXX-78S (South) ⁽⁴⁾ | 100 | 66 | ○ | ○ | ○ | 36 | ● | ● | 650 |
| | 11 | DieHard Gold 50934 (South) ⁽²⁾ | 130 | 66 | ○ | ○ | ○ | 36 | ● | | 700 |
| | 12 | Interstate Mega-Tron II MT-34 | 110 | 62 | ○ | ● | ○ | 24/60 | ● | | 700 |
| | 13 | Kirkland Signature 12872 ⁽¹⁾ | 85 | 62 | ○ | ○ | ○ | 36/100 | ● | ● | 800 |
| | 14 | EverStart MAXX-34N (North) ⁽⁴⁾ | 100 | 61 | ○ | ○ | ○ | 36 | ● | ● | 800 |
| | 15 | DieHard 50378 ⁽²⁾ | 110 | 60 | ○ | ○ | ○ | 24 | ● | | 685 |
| | 16 | Interstate Mega-Tron II MT-78 | 110 | 55 | ○ | ○ | ○ | 24/60 | ● | | 700 |
| | 17 | DieHard Gold 50878 (North) ⁽²⁾ | 130 | 54 | ○ | ○ | ○ | 36 | ● | | 770 |

Ratings continued on next page



D1 EverStart

D2 EverStart



E1 EverStart

E2 Interstate



F1 Interstate

F2 EverStart

Replacing it yourself

Some stores will install your new battery free and dispose of the old one for you. Check before you buy.

If you do the installation yourself, expect to pay a small core charge when you buy the new battery. It'll be refunded when you bring the old one back, as long as you keep your receipt. Batteries are highly toxic but easily recycled. Most states require retailers to accept used batteries.

If you own a newer car, keep in mind that once you've disconnected your current battery, the radio may require you to enter a code before it will operate again. That code should have been provided by the dealer when your car was new, and with any luck you still have it.

One way to avoid that hassle is with an inexpensive device that plugs into a car's 12-volt outlet and supplies power to the radio while you make the swap. A staffer had success using one that he bought online on his personal vehicle, although we have seen mixed user reviews.



Ratings Car batteries

All tested models In performance order, within types.

- Excellent
 - Very good
 - Good
 - Fair
 - Poor
- CR Best Buy
 Recommended

| Recommendation | Rank | Brand & model | Price | Overall score | Test results | | | Features | | |
|----------------|------|---------------|-------|---------------|--------------|------------------|-----|----------|--------|----------------|
| | | | | | Life | Reserve capacity | CCA | Warranty | Handle | Removable caps |

C GROUP 24 & 24F TOP TERMINAL Fits many Acura, Honda, Infiniti, Lexus, Nissan, and Toyota vehicles.

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|-----|----|---|---|---|-------|---|---|-----|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 1 | EverStart MAXX-24FN (North) ⁴ | 85 | 87 | ● | ● | ● | 36 | ● | ● | 750 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 2 | EverStart MAXX-24S (South) ⁴ | 85 | 84 | ● | ● | ● | 36 | ● | ● | 700 |
| | 3 | DieHard Gold 50923 (South) ² | 120 | 78 | ● | ● | ● | 36 | ● | ● | 700 |
| | 4 | DieHard 50324 | 105 | 67 | ● | ○ | ● | 24 | ● | ● | 650 |
| | 5 | Interstate Mega-Tron II MT-24 | 105 | 62 | ● | ● | ○ | 24/60 | ● | ● | 600 |

D GROUP 35 TOP TERMINAL Fits many Japanese models.

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|-----|----|---|---|---|--------|---|---|-----|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 1 | EverStart MAXX-35N (North) ⁴ | 100 | 86 | ● | ● | ● | 36 | ● | ● | 640 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 2 | EverStart MAXX-35S (South) ⁴ | 100 | 81 | ● | ● | ○ | 36 | ● | ● | 550 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 3 | Duralast 35-DL ⁶ | 100 | 69 | ● | ○ | ○ | 24/84 | ● | ● | 500 |
| | 4 | Kirkland Signature 12865 ¹ | 75 | 66 | ○ | ● | ● | 36/100 | ● | ● | 640 |
| | 5 | Interstate Mega-Tron II MT-35 | 100 | 61 | ○ | ● | ● | 24/60 | ● | ● | 550 |
| | 6 | Plus Start 51235 ² | 100 | 54 | ○ | ○ | ● | 12 | ● | ● | 550 |
| | 7 | DieHard Gold 50935 (South) ² | 130 | 52 | ○ | ○ | ● | 36 | ● | ● | 600 |
| | 8 | DieHard 50335 ² | 110 | 50 | ○ | ○ | ● | 24 | ● | ● | 550 |

E GROUP 75 SIDE TERMINAL Fits some GM mid-sized and compact models and a few Chrysler models.

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|-----|----|---|---|---|--------|---|---|-----|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 1 | EverStart MAXX-75S (South) ⁴ | 85 | 78 | ● | ● | ○ | 36 | ● | ● | 550 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 2 | Interstate Mega-Tron II MT-75 | 110 | 71 | ● | ○ | ● | 24/60 | ● | ● | 650 |
| | 3 | EverStart MAXX-75N (North) ⁴ | 85 | 69 | ● | ● | ● | 36 | ● | ● | 700 |
| | 4 | DieHard Gold 50975 (South) ² | 120 | 68 | ● | ● | ● | 36 | ● | ● | 640 |
| | 5 | Kirkland Signature 12869 ¹ | 70 | 65 | ● | ○ | ● | 36/100 | ● | ● | 700 |
| | 6 | Duralast 75-DL ⁶ | 85 | 62 | ● | ○ | ○ | 24/84 | ● | ● | 650 |
| | 7 | Plus Start 51275 ² | 85 | 54 | ○ | ● | ○ | 12 | ● | ● | 570 |
| | 8 | DieHard 50375 ² | 120 | 47 | ○ | ○ | ● | 24 | ● | ● | 635 |
| | 9 | DieHard Gold 50875 (North) ² | 120 | 47 | ○ | ○ | ● | 36 | ● | ● | 695 |

F GROUP 48 TOP TERMINAL Fits many European and some GM models.

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|-----|----|---|---|---|-------|---|---|-----|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 1 | Interstate Mega-Tron Plus MTP-48/H6 | 150 | 81 | ● | ● | ● | 30/60 | ● | ● | 730 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 2 | EverStart MAXX-H6 ⁴ | 110 | 73 | ● | ● | ● | 36 | ● | ● | 730 |
| | 3 | DieHard Gold 50948 (South) ² | 145 | 64 | ● | ● | ● | 36 | ● | ● | 615 |
| | 4 | DieHard Advanced Gold 50748 ² ³ | 170 | 45 | ● | ● | ● | 36 | ● | ● | 760 |

¹ At Costco only. ² At Sears and Kmart only. ³ Absorbed glass mat technology. ⁴ At Walmart only. ⁵ At NAPA only. ⁶ At Autozone only.

Guide to the Ratings

Under **brand & model**, we note models sold only in the North or South; others are sold nationally. **Price** is the approximate retail, rounded to the nearest \$5. **Overall score** combines life-test performance, reserve capacity, and cold-cranking-amp (CCA) performance; scores are relative to others in their group sizes. **Life** test measures how a battery endures repeated charge-and-discharge cycles at engine-compartment temperatures in hot climates. The more cycles endured while maintaining a higher voltage, the higher the score. **Reserve capacity** estimates how long batteries can run a car if the charging system fails. **CCA** performance reflects voltage at our load of half the average claimed CCA for each group size after cranking for 15 seconds at 0° F. We charged batteries at the 14.5 volts that vehicles usually supply rather than at the higher voltage that manufacturers use. Batteries charged at the lower voltage met industry voltage standards for a fully charged battery. **Warranty** reflects the free replacement period and the total prorated periods in months. **Claimed CCA** is the manufacturer's claimed performance that appears on the battery.

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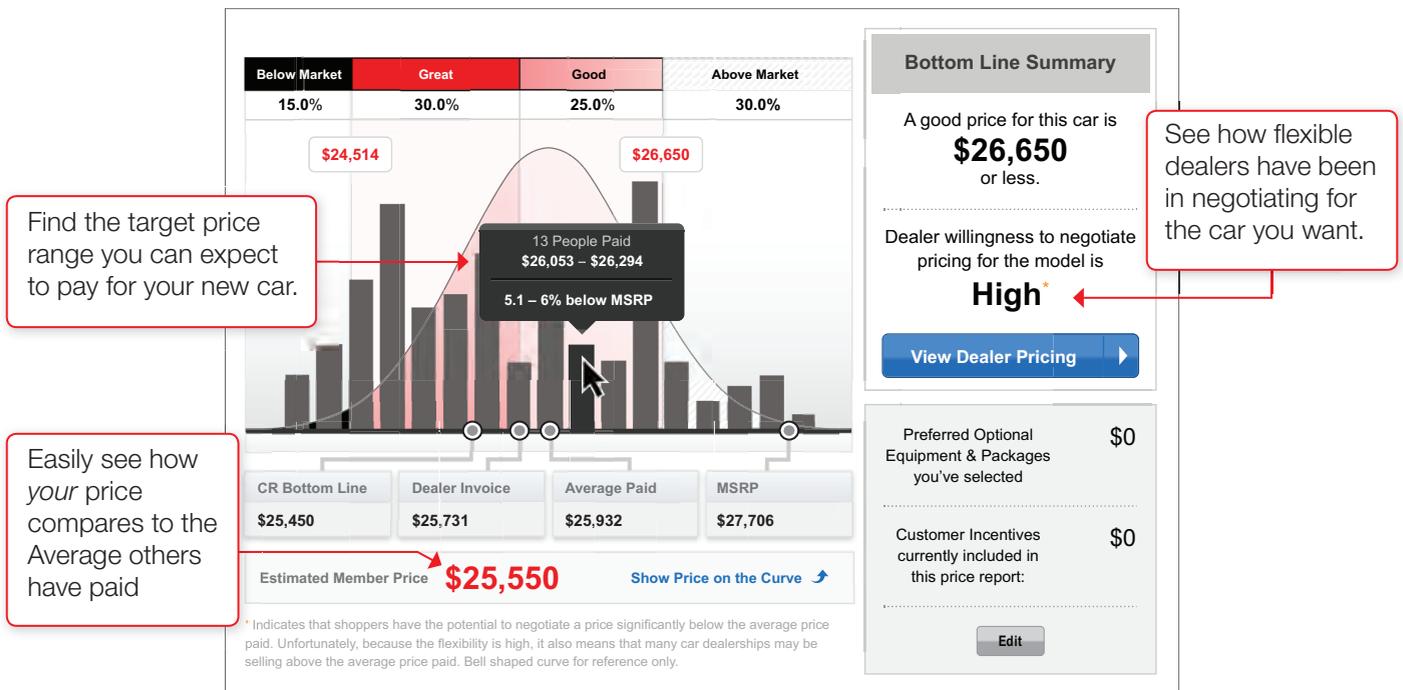
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Chevrolet Silverado 1500 vs. Ram 1500

Chevy's on top, but second place looks better to some

IN A HEAVY-METAL DUEL of two top pickups, the Chevrolet Silverado's excellent road-test score of 81 makes it the top-rated truck. But as one of our testers put it, "The second-place Ram 1500 is the better 'car.'" Huh?

This issue's showdown between the redesigned 2014 Silverado and the updated 2013 Ram was neck-and-neck throughout. Each model won skirmishes along the way. And in the end, they finished one-two in the category, separated by only 3 points.

The Silverado edged the Ram in several areas important to many pickup owners. When typically configured, it has a

significantly larger bed and more payload capacity, and it can tow more weight. The Silverado also has a lower step-in height than the Ram, aiding access. It handles a bit better in everyday driving (though no big pickup is particularly agile). And it delivers best-in-class fuel economy of 16 mpg overall, which is 1 mpg better than the Ram. That could save you about 50 gallons of gas per year.

But if you use your truck more for day-to-day driving, the Ram is a nicer place to spend your time. It rides better and has more comfortable seats, a nicer rear seat, and a slightly friendlier control layout. It's also quicker than the Silverado, and it

feels much brawnier in real-world driving. The Ram also brings its own impressive workhorse credentials.

The reality is that you can't go wrong with either truck. In the versions we tested—four-door crew cabs with V8 engines and four-wheel drive—both get decent gas mileage and are as quiet inside as a good luxury car.

With average reliability, we recommend the Ram, but the Silverado is too new for us to have reliability data. The redesigned GMC Sierra 1500 is a virtual twin of the Silverado.

The best-selling Ford F-150 is headed for its own redesign for 2015. So stay tuned; another battle is brewing.



A LEG UP The Chevy's rear-bumper steps help when climbing into the bed.



QUICK TAKE The Ram's large touch screen is easy to read at a glance.

Chevrolet Silverado 1500

ROAD-TEST SCORE
81

For years the Silverado has scored well in our tests, and the redesigned 2014 model is the best yet. Handling is more carlike than in most trucks, the cabin is very quiet, and it provides impressive towing and payload capabilities. And at 16 mpg overall, our Silverado got the best fuel economy of any full-sized truck we've tested.

You can choose from three all-new engines, each mated to a six-speed automatic transmission. We opted for the widely sold 355-hp, 5.3-liter V8. The 285-hp, 4.3-liter V6 gets the job done, but towing and payload capacities are lower. Still to come is a 6.2-liter V8 with an estimated 420 hp.

Our 5.3 delivers ample power, but it lacks the thrust of the 5.7-liter V8s in the Ram 1500 and Toyota Tundra. The transmission upshifts smoothly and quickly, but it's reluctant to downshift, making the truck feel underpowered. It also takes a prod on the throttle to get the truck going. The four-wheel-drive system includes a convenient full-time mode. Off-road performance was good but hampered by ground clearance.

Our truck hauled our 5,000-pound trailer to 60 mph in 14.8 seconds, which is good. It can be equipped to tow up to 11,200 pounds.

With well-contained body lean and linear, responsive steering, this truck feels eminently controllable. The steering has good heft yet

feels light enough at low speeds for easy maneuvering. When pushed to its limits the Silverado proved stable and secure. It reached those limits rather early but remained predictable and forgiving.

A counter spring makes it easy to raise or lower the tailgate with one hand, a nice convenience when loading cargo.

Comfort considerations

Although the ride is tolerable, the suspension transmits some snappy motions on bumps and ruts and remains a little busy even on smooth roads. Its relatively low ride height eases access, and the cabin stays amazingly quiet inside, a quality shared with the Ram.

The spacious interior is nicely finished overall. Drivers will find ample room, and a telescoping steering wheel is available, which is rare in a pickup. Seat comfort, though, is mediocre. Our cloth seats fall short on support, with a tendency to give out on long trips. Raising the center bin opens up room for a third front passenger. The rear has plenty of room, but the seat shares the same lack of support.

The main gauges are large and easy to read, and the controls use big, well-labeled buttons and knobs. The automatic climate controls display the set temperature within their knobs, which is a nice, user-friendly touch.

Chevy's MyLink touch-screen radio system offers modern capabilities with simple controls for the basic functions. But it uses cumbersome swipe motions to scroll through station lists.

You can use voice commands to execute music, phone, and navigation functions. Pairing a phone is easy. An iPhone integrates with the system better than Android devices do, but it needs to be tethered to use Pandora or access its music files by voice.



Tested vehicle

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| HIGHS | Fuel economy, quietness, relatively good agility and access, towing and payload capacities, low-effort tailgate |
| LOWS | Ride, braking on wet pavement, seat comfort |
| TRIM LINE | 4WD LT Crew Cab (short box) |
| DRIVETRAIN | 355-hp, 5.3-liter V8; six-speed automatic transmission; four-wheel drive |
| MAJOR OPTIONS | 5.3-liter V8, 18-inch wheels, tow package, MyLink audio system, rear camera, 3.42 rear axle ratio |
| TESTED PRICE | \$42,070 |

More test findings

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| BRAKING | Wet stopping distance is very long. |
| HEADLIGHTS | Good visibility overall but not very bright. |
| ACCESS | The step-in height is lower than that of most other trucks. |
| VISIBILITY | The windows are large, but a big, flat hood limits the forward view. There's a large rear blind zone, but a backup camera is readily available. |
| CABIN STORAGE | Abundant storage facilities. |
| HEAD RESTRAINTS | There are no restraints in the front and rear center positions. |
| CHILD SEATS | Top-tether straps can be confusing to route through flexible loop anchors. |



Scan for video.

How they compare

| Rec. | PICKUPS | 0 | 100 |
|------|---|-----------|---------------|
| | | P | F G V E |
| | Chevrolet Silverado 1500 LT (5.3L V8) | 81 | |
| ✓ | Ram 1500 Big Horn (5.7L V8) | 78 | |
| ✓ | Ford F-150 XLT (3.5L EcoBoost V6) | 70 | |
| ✓ | Ford F-150 XLT (5.0L V8) | 70 | |
| ✓ | Toyota Tundra SR5 (5.7L V8) | 69 | |
| | Nissan Titan SV (5.6L V8) | 66 | |



Ram 1500

 Recommended

ROAD-TEST SCORE
78

With a number of improvements for 2013, the Ram is surprisingly refined and inviting for a pickup truck, yet it's fully capable of getting its hands dirty when duty calls. A coil-spring rear suspension—unique for full-sized pickups—gives it a smooth ride, the powertrain is a gem, and the whisper-quiet cabin makes the truck feel like a luxury vehicle.

We tested a four-wheel-drive Big Horn version with Chrysler's 5.7-liter Hemi V8 and a new eight-speed automatic transmission that's smooth and efficient. That combination delivers seamless and effortless power while returning a relatively good 15 mpg overall.

An alternative is a 3.6-liter V6, which does an admirable job as long as your towing needs are modest. An underwhelming 4.7-liter V8 with a six-speed automatic is available only on base versions. Coming soon is a 3.0-liter turbodiesel V6, which should be the most fuel-efficient engine available in a full-sized pickup.

The driver-selectable full-time four-wheel-drive system works well, and the truck scrambled up our rock hill with ease. It can tow up to 9,950 pounds when properly equipped. Our truck pulled our 5,000-pound trailer up to 60 mph in 14.9 seconds, a strong showing.

Sitting pretty

The Ram is arguably the most comfortable-riding pickup on the market. Ride motions are gradual and controlled, and bumps are well-muted. It's no ballet dancer, but the Ram handles fairly well and you have to corner pretty hard before excessive body lean sets in.

When pushed to its limits, the Ram proved clumsy, typical of a big truck, but ultimately secure and predictable.

With a very high step-up, the optional running boards are a must. Inside, you'll find a roomy driving position but no telescoping steering wheel, which some drivers might miss.

Interior fit and finish is competitive but definitely not plush. Our truck's cloth bucket seats are large and firmly padded, with a good range of power adjustments, and their support remains decent even on long trips. The optional leather seats are even better. The rear seats are perhaps the best in the class, with oodles of leg room and wide, well-shaped cushions. Three adults can fit with ease.

The comprehensive analog gauges are large and legible. A slick display screen in the gauge cluster lets you custom-select a wide array of vehicle information. Controls are simple, with some big knobs for basic functions and the optional Uconnect touch-screen system managing the more detailed audio, climate, and communications functions. Some buttons are a bit of a reach, and the onscreen temperature adjustment takes a lot of taps, but mostly we like the system very much.

It's easy to pair phones, and iPods and iPhones can stream music through Bluetooth or with a USB cable that enables using the truck's audio controls or voice commands. Android devices use Bluetooth only, so functions are more limited.

The tailgate is heavy to raise and lower; it's too bad it isn't damped, like the Silverado's. But we're told that Chrysler is working on that.



Tested vehicle

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| HIGHS | Engine, transmission, ride, quietness, cabin space, Uconnect infotainment system |
| LOWS | Access, heavy tailgate |
| TRIM LINE | Big Horn |
| DRIVETRAIN | 395-hp, 5.7-liter V8; eight-speed automatic transmission; four-wheel drive |
| MAJOR OPTIONS | 20-inch wheels, tow hitch, power driver's seat, bucket seats, heated front seats and steering wheel, Uconnect 8.4 touch screen |
| TESTED PRICE | \$42,810 |

More test findings

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| BRAKING | Short stopping distances. |
| HEADLIGHTS | They aren't very bright, but illumination is OK overall. |
| ACCESS | With the high step-up, running boards are a must. |
| VISIBILITY | There are big windows but a long rear blind zone. A backup camera helps. |
| CABIN STORAGE | Huge bins throughout. |
| HEAD RESTRAINTS | The center restraint is too low, even when raised. |
| CHILD SEATS | Certain forward-facing seats don't fit well, and top-tether anchor loops can be confusing to route. |



Scan for video.



ROOM TO SPARE The generous cabin storage allows the CD player to be tucked inside the deep center bin.

 Recommended



Honda Odyssey

ROAD-TEST SCORE
86

Sorry, image-conscious parents. Despite the popularity of SUVs, none of them can match a minivan for overall versatility and practical family transportation. And the Odyssey is the best at that. It was our 2013 Top Pick, and it has gotten even better with a 2014 freshening. Our EX-L version blends a comfortable cabin, flexible seating, and room for eight people with responsive handling and impressive fuel economy.

For 2014, all Odysseys come with a six-speed automatic transmission, which contributes to best-in-class fuel economy of 21 mpg overall. In addition, crash protection has been further improved and advanced electronic safety features, such as forward-collision and lane-departure warnings, are commonly available.

The Odyssey's key attributes have been maintained. With its slick engine and transmission, it delivers relaxed cruising and ample power. The ride is supple and steady. And the Odyssey is commendably agile, challenging the notion that a minivan has to be boring to drive.

Inside you're treated to a quiet cabin and supportive, well-padded seats. It's easy to step in or out, there are generous child-seat accommodations, and there's plenty of cabin storage throughout, including a plethora of cup and bottle holders.

Another highlight is the array of possible seating configurations, which provides flexibility when carrying people or cargo. Each of the second-row seats can be removed individually, and the two outboard chairs can be moved next to each other. You can also remove and stow the center seat, creating an aisle between the second-row seats. The front console can then be moved from between

the front seats to between the second-row chairs. Yes, the Odyssey is a bit like a Transformers character but without the noise.

The third-row seat can fit three adults, but it's narrower than the second row, so they won't be happy for long. Still, compared with the cramped third rows in most SUVs, the Odyssey's is welcoming and comfortable.

Downsides? A new dual-screen in-dash control system is more complicated than the previously simple controls. Interior fit and finish is rather lackluster for this price range. And all-wheel drive isn't available. For that you'll need to go with a Toyota Sienna or, OK, an SUV.

Reliability of the Odyssey has been average.

Best version to get. All Odysseys are rather well equipped. But there isn't a lot of flexibility when ordering options. The EX-L is the sweet spot in the lineup, providing leather upholstery, a power tailgate, a cooled beverage bin, and a variety of electronic safety aids. We wouldn't buy a higher-trim Odyssey.

A new feature that's getting a lot of attention is a built-in vacuum cleaner. But it's available only in the \$45,000 Touring Elite version. See page 47 to see how it stacks up against conventional vacs.



KID-FRIENDLY The wide second row, with three sets of lower LATCH anchors, lets you install three child seats across.



Tested vehicle

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| HIGHS | Ride, powertrain, spacious and flexible interior, fuel economy, comfortable seats |
| LOWS | Confusing uplevel radio, fit and finish, no all-wheel drive |
| TRIM LINE | EX-L |
| DRIVETRAIN | 248-hp, 3.5-liter V6; six-speed automatic transmission; front-wheel drive |
| MAJOR OPTIONS | Rear entertainment system |
| TESTED PRICE | \$38,055 |

More test findings

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| BRAKING | Short stopping distances. |
| HEADLIGHTS | Low beams provide good visibility; high beams are very good for visibility and intensity. |
| ACCESS | It's as easy as it gets, with flat sills, an easy step-in height, giant front doors, and large sliding side doors. Third-row access is decent. |
| VISIBILITY | Pretty good, thanks to large windows, but there are some thick pillars. A backup camera is standard. |
| CABIN STORAGE | There are lots of storage options. |
| HEAD RESTRAINTS | Front head restraints are active to protect occupants during a rear-end collision. |
| CHILD SEATS | The second-row "wide mode" easily lets you install three child restraints across. |



How they compare

| Rec. | MINIVANS | 0 | 100 |
|---|--|-----------|---------------|
| | | P | F G V E |
|  | Honda Odyssey EX-L | 86 | |
|  | Nissan Quest SL | 81 | |
|  | Toyota Sienna XLE (FWD) | 80 | |
|  | Toyota Sienna XLE (AWD) | 79 | |
| | Kia Sedona EX | 77 | |
| | Chrysler Town & Country Touring-L | 74 | |

Ford Focus ST

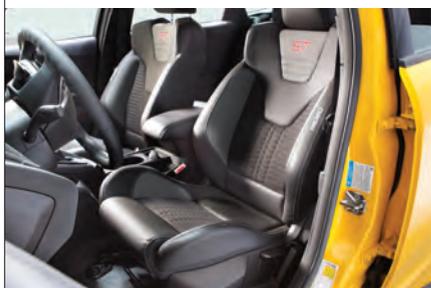
ROAD-TEST SCORE
74

The Focus ST is a sporty, fun-to-drive hatchback that's geared toward high performance.

In short, it's Ford's answer to the Volkswagen GTI, which is a modern classic among budget-minded driving enthusiasts.

The ST delivers effortless power and terrific agility. In addition, it has an invigorating exhaust note, is relatively quiet and refined for a pocket-rocket, and provides the practical versatility of a hatchback. Despite its firm suspension, the ST also delivers a relatively civilized ride that doesn't beat you up. We measured a modest 25 mpg overall in our fuel-economy tests.

Drawbacks? The optional Recaro seats fit like a glove, hugging your body relentlessly whether you're flinging the car through corners or cruising the highway. Even drivers who fit the seats found them confining; others found them downright uncomfortable. The cumbersome controls for the MyFord Touch infotainment system are complicated and distracting. Notable torque steer points to the limitations of front-wheel drive. And leg room, which is already tight in the regular Focus, is even tighter in the ST.



TOO SPORTY? The optional Recaro seats are confining for some, and the high bolsters can be a nuisance when slipping into the driver's seat.

Overall, the ST is a sports car that provides an inviting balance of performance and practicality. And it's easier to live with day-to-day than a more hard-core sports coupe such as the Scion FR-S or Subaru BRZ. OK, the similarly priced GTI is more refined, gets better fuel economy, and scored notably higher overall in our testing. But it's not as quick as the ST.

Both cars have had below-average reliability, so regardless of the fun factor, we can't recommend either.

Performance bred

If you're set on an ST, you'll have to shift for yourself, as the 252-hp turbocharged four-cylinder engine is matched only with a six-speed manual transmission. That combo serves up plenty of power in any gear, which helps the ST feel even quicker than its 6.6-second 0-to-60-mph runs.

The ST is fun to carve through a twisty road. It stays flat when tackling corners, it's eager to change directions, and the steering is well-weighted and linear. But due to the abundant power, an overzealous throttle application results in notable torque steer. Also, when pushed to its handling limits at our track, the lax electronic stability control system let the rear end slide out quite a bit before it kicked in. Though that can be rewarding for a driving enthusiast in the right conditions, it limited the ST's performance in our avoidance maneuver, where it posted a modest speed and instilled only so-so confidence in our drivers.

One other note: The ST's summer tires provide great grip in temperate climes, but you'll need to swap them for different rubber if you have to drive in wintry conditions.



Tested vehicle

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| HIGHS | Handling, fun to drive, acceleration, braking, relatively civilized as a daily driver |
| LOWS | MyFord Touch controls, snug Recaro seats, some torque steer, turning circle, reliability |
| TRIM LINE | ST |
| DRIVETRAIN | 252-hp, 2.0-liter turbo-charged four-cylinder engine; six-speed manual transmission; front-wheel drive |
| MAJOR OPTIONS | MyFord Touch, Recaro seats, moonroof, automatic climate control, tangerine paint |
| TESTED PRICE | \$28,270 |

More test findings

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| BRAKING | Excellent; very short stops. |
| HEADLIGHTS | Low and high beams provide good visibility, but low beams lack intensity. |
| ACCESS | High side bolsters on Recaro seats impede front access. |
| VISIBILITY | OK in front, but tight through the rear. No backup camera is available. |
| CABIN STORAGE | Minuscule. |
| HEAD RESTRAINTS | Rear-center restraint must be raised for protection. |
| CHILD SEATS | Rear-facing seats can be hard to install with seat belts. LATCH anchors are hard to access. |



Scan for video.



How they compare

| Rec. | SPORTY CARS | 0 | 100 |
|------|-------------------------------|----|---------------|
| | | P | F G V E |
| | Volkswagen GTI (4-door) | 85 | |
| ✓ | Subaru Impreza WRX | 84 | |
| | Scion FR-S | 83 | |
| | Subaru BRZ Premium | 82 | |
| | Volkswagen Jetta GLI Autobahn | 76 | |
| | Ford Focus ST | 74 | |
| | Mini Cooper S | 74 | |
| | Fiat 500 Abarth | 71 | |
| ✓ | Honda Civic Si | 70 | |



Honda Crosstour

ROAD-TEST SCORE
62

The Crosstour is a crossover wagon that's trying too hard to multitask. It's intended to be a blend of a sedan and an SUV, but it really doesn't succeed at doing either well.

Though this Honda is based on the previous-generation Accord, it doesn't deliver the handling of a sedan. Its hatchback design gives it more versatility than a sedan, but the vehicle's love-it-or-hate-it styling, with its dramatically sloping roof, compromises cargo capacity and results in huge blind spots in the rear corners. With the rear seatbacks folded down, we measured rectangular cargo volume at just 22 cubic feet, which is less than that of many small SUVs.

Yes, the Crosstour has its strong points. The 278-hp V6 in our all-wheel-drive EX-L test vehicle is lively, smooth, and responsive, and it's mated to a new six-speed automatic transmission that shifts seamlessly. The ride is compliant, and the roomy interior provides comfortable seating. A four-cylinder engine is also available, but only with a five-speed automatic and front-wheel drive.

A freshening for 2013 turned out to be a mixed bag. On the plus side, fuel economy improved slightly to 21 mpg, which is about

par for this class. Advanced safety systems, such as lane-departure and forward-collision warnings, became available, and a backup camera is standard.

But the new electric power steering feels numb. This updated Crosstour is less agile than the previous model, and it's more ungainly than some large SUVs when it's pushed to its limits. And a complicated touch-screen radio has displaced the previously super-simple controls.

Also new for the Crosstour is Honda's LaneWatch blind-spot camera system, which drew varied reviews from our testers. When the right turn signal is on, the system displays a view of the area to the right of the car in the large in-dash display. Because of the Crosstour's terrible rear visibility, LaneWatch was welcomed by drivers trying to change lanes on a busy highway. But others were annoyed by the screen coming on every time they activated the turn signal. Overall, a conventional blind-spot warning system that works on both sides of the car would be more useful and less distracting.

The large cabin is neatly finished but not a standout. Head, leg, and foot room are generous, and even short drivers can dial in a good position with easy reach to the pedals and tilt-and-telescoping steering wheel. The large front seats are nicely shaped and firmly padded, and supply good overall support. Rear seating is spacious and comfortable too, although the center passenger has to cope with a wide tunnel.

The convoluted radio uses a touch screen and a separate display screen, and it's not always easy to tell which one you're supposed to consult. The audio system comes with the Aha streaming service and a Pandora app, but to use them you must first install those and a Hondalink app on

| Tested vehicle | |
|------------------------|---|
| HIGHS | Powertrain, seat comfort |
| LOWS | Agility, rear visibility, radio controls, small cargo area, wide turning circle |
| TRIM LINE | EX-L V6 |
| DRIVETRAIN | 278-hp, 3.5-liter V6; six-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive |
| MAJOR OPTIONS | None |
| TESTED PRICE | \$35,820 |
| More test findings | |
| BRAKING | Relatively long stops. |
| HEADLIGHTS | Good visibility and intensity from both low and high beams. |
| ACCESS | Easy step-in height and large doors but wide sills. |
| VISIBILITY | Sloping roof, large rear pillars, and a split rear window limit the view aft. |
| CABIN STORAGE | Ample storage up front includes numerous covered bins and a huge glove box. |
| HEAD RESTRAINTS | The center-rear restraint is too low even when it's fully raised. |
| CHILD SEATS | Installing child seats is difficult using belts alone, but the LATCH anchors are easy to reach and use. |





Scan for video.



OUTSIDE VIEW Honda's LaneWatch system can be handy on busy highways but annoying on many single-lane roads.

| How they compare | | 0 | 100 |
|------------------|----------------------------------|-----------|---------------|
| Rec. | CROSSOVERS | P | F G V E |
| ✓ | Nissan Murano SL | 78 | |
| ✓ | Toyota Venza (V6) | 77 | |
| ✓ | Subaru Outback 2.5i Limited | 73 | |
| | Ford Edge SEL (3.5) | 63 | |
| | Honda Crosstour EX-L (V6) | 62 | |

your smart phone. Phone pairing is easy, once you find the menu for it.

Although reliability is average, we can't recommend the Crosstour because its test score of 62 is too low to make the cut.

Compare



| VERSION | Chevrolet Silverado 1500 | Ram 1500 | Honda Odyssey | Ford Focus | Honda Crosstour |
|--|--|--|---|--|--|
| TRIM LINE | LT | Big Horn | EX-L | ST | EX-L |
| PRICE: BASE/TESTED ⁽¹⁾ | \$37,840/\$42,070 | \$37,040/\$42,810 | \$37,225/\$38,055 | \$23,700/\$28,270 | \$34,990/\$35,820 |
| DRIVETRAIN | | | | | |
| Engine | 5.3-liter V8 (355 hp) | 5.7-liter V8 (395 hp) | 3.5-liter V6 (248 hp) | 2.0-liter 4-cyl. (252 hp) turbo | 3.5-liter V6 (278 hp) |
| Transmission | 6-speed automatic | 8-speed automatic | 6-speed automatic | 6-speed manual | 6-speed automatic |
| Drive wheels | 4WD | 4WD | Front | Front | AWD |
| TIRES TESTED | | | | | |
| Model & size | Goodyear Wrangler SR-A, size P265/65R18 112T | Goodyear Wrangler SR-A, size P275/60R20 114S | Michelin Primacy MXV4, size P235/65R17 103T | Goodyear Eagle F1 Asymmetric 2, size 235/40R18 95Y | Michelin Latitude Tour HP, size 225/60R18 100H |
| RATINGS | | | | | |
| PERFORMANCE | | | | | |
| Acceleration | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| 0 to 60 mph, sec. | 7.5 | 7.1 | 8.4 | 6.6 | 7.0 |
| 45 to 65 mph, sec. | 3.7 | 4.7 | 5.5 | 5.4 | 4.7 |
| Quarter-mile, sec. | 15.9 | 15.5 | 16.6 | 15.1 | 15.4 |
| Transmission | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| Routine handling | ○ | ● | ● | ● | ○ |
| Emergency handling | ● | ● | ○ | ● | ○ |
| Avoid. maneuver, speed, mph | 45.5 | 47.0 | 47.5 | 53.0 | 49.5 |
| Braking | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| From 60 mph, dry/wet, ft. | 138/164 | 141/154 | 136/143 | 122/135 | 143/149 |
| Headlights | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| COMFORT AND CONVENIENCE | | | | | |
| Ride | ○ | ● | ● | ○ | ● |
| Noise | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ● |
| Driving position | ○ | ○ | ● | ○ | ● |
| Front-seat comfort | ○ | ● | ● | ○ | ● |
| Rear-seat/third-seat comfort | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ● |
| Access | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ● |
| Controls and displays | ● | ● | ● | ○ | ○ |
| Interior fit and finish | ○ | ○ | ○ | ● | ○ |
| Cargo area | ○ | ● | ○ | ● | ● |
| PREDICTED RELIABILITY | New | ○ | ○ | ● | ○ |
| FUEL | | | | | |
| Overall mpg | 16 | 15 | 21 | 25 | 21 |
| City/highway mpg | 11/23 | 10/21 | 13/31 | 19/32 | 14/32 |
| Type | regular | regular | regular | premium | regular |
| Capacity, gal./Cruising range, miles | 26.0/420 | 26.0/380 | 21.0/440 | 12.1/315 | 18.5/395 |
| Annual cost, 12K mi. @ \$3.50/gal. | \$2,595 | \$2,860 | \$2,000 | \$1,645 @ \$3.70/gal. | \$1,970 |
| SAFETY | | | | | |
| CRASH TESTS | | | | | |
| IIHS frontal offset | NA | Good | Good | Good | Good |
| IIHS side | NA | NA | Good | Good | Good |
| IIHS rear | NA | Good | Good | Good | Good |
| IIHS roof strength | NA | Marginal | Good | Good | Good |
| NHTSA front, driver/pass. | ●/● | ●/● | NA/NA | ●/● | NA/NA |
| NHTSA side, driver/rear | ●/● | ●/● | NA/NA | ●/● | NA/NA |
| NHTSA rollover 2WD/4WD | ●/● | ●/○ | ●/NA | ●/NA | ●/● |
| AIR BAGS | | | | | |
| Side, front/rear | std./no | std./no | std./no | std./no | std./no |
| Head protection | standard | standard | std. w/rollover | standard | std. w/rollover |
| SPECIFICATIONS | | | | | |
| DIMENSIONS AND WEIGHT | | | | | |
| Length/width/height, in. | 230/80/74 | 229/79/79 | 203/79/68 | 172/72/58 | 197/75/66 |
| Wheelbase, in. | 144 | 141 | 118 | 104 | 110 |
| Turning circle, ft. | 49 | 49 | 40 | 42 | 43 |
| Ground clearance, in. | 8.0 | 8.5 | 5.0 | 3.5 | 7.0 |
| Curb weight, lb. (% front/rear) | 5,415 (59/41) | 5,495 (57/43) | 4,530 (56/44) | 3,250 (60/40) | 4,075 (57/43) |
| Maximum load, lb. | 1,705 | 1,270 | 1,340 | 825 | 850 |
| Cargo volume, cu. ft. | 42.5 (bed) | 39.0 (bed) | 61.5 | 21.5 | 22.0 |
| Towing capacity, lb. | 11,200 | 9,950 | 3,500 | NR | 1,500 |
| INTERIOR ROOM | | | | | |
| Front shoulder room, in. | 65.0 | 65.5 | 64.0 | 55.0 | 56.0 |
| Front leg room, in. | 44.0 | 41.5 | 41.0 | 41.0 | 41.0 |
| Front head room, in. ⁽²⁾ | 8.5 | 7.0 | 2.5 | 3.5 | 4.5 |
| Rear shoulder room, in. | 64.0 | 65.5 | 62.5 | 50.0 | 54.5 |
| Rear leg room, in. | 32.0 | 31.0 | 32.0 | 27.5 | 30.0 |
| Rear head room, in. ⁽²⁾ | 5.5 | 2.5 | 5.0 | 3.0 | 3.0 |
| Third-row shoulder room, in. | - | - | 59.5 | - | - |
| Third-row leg room, in. | - | - | 29.0 | - | - |
| Third-row head room, in. ⁽²⁾ | - | - | 3.5 | - | - |

⁽¹⁾ Based on sticker price at time of purchase. ⁽²⁾ Above a person 5'9" tall.



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|-------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|
| 62 | 4.5% | 76 / 73 | 5.0% |
| 73 | 5.5 | 83 / 80 | 6.0 |
| 81 | 7.0 | | |
| 90 | 9.0 | | |

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1113AFR

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Golden Cocoon Award

A reader described this photo as follows:

Right: The box my Lenovo Lynx tablet keyboard was packaged in.

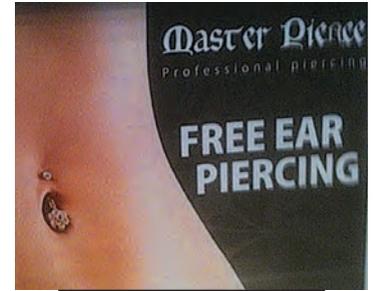
Left: The box Rakuten.com shipped it in.

Back: The 98 feet of paper that surrounded it.



'B' is for ...

A diner in Brooklyn found a way to brag about a sanitation grade lower than "A."



You say, "ear." I say, "belly."

Umm ... we're pretty sure you can't hear with that.



Lost in translation

A reader said he was glad he had checked the safety notice on his new cell-phone charger: "Kids are gone, and I feel safer already."



Whoo-hee! A cylinder!

"I wonder what the 'unfun' shapes are!" wrote a reader who was expecting at least a star or a dinosaur.



Hair, there, everywhere!

If that's what he looks like after 20 seconds, he must be rocking a Rapunzel-length ponytail by now.



Dog 'Gone' Treats

Dogs and owners must both be growling about this half-empty bag.

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- Negotiating Tips and Traps
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*Between 04/01/13 and 04/30/13, the average estimated savings off MSRP presented to program users by participating based on user new vehicle configurations was \$2,791.

Canada Extra

Information from CONSUMER REPORTS® for Canadian readers

In this special section

| | |
|--------------------------|-----|
| Activity trackers | 34A |
| Top products of the year | 34B |
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How to use the Canada Extra section

Every month, Canada Extra provides Canadian pricing and availability information about products tested for that issue. The Ratings in this section are based on this month's reports, but they narrow your choices to the products that are sold in Canada.

You can use this section in either of two ways: Start with the main report, read about the products that interest you, and turn to this section to find whether they're sold—and for what price—in Canada. Or start here, find products sold in Canada whose price and overall score appear promising, and read more about them in the main report and full Ratings chart; page numbers appear with each Canadian report. (For some products, the Canadian model designation differs slightly from the one used in the U.S.)

In most cases, the prices we list here

are the approximate retail in Canadian dollars; manufacturers' list prices are indicated by an asterisk (*). Check marks identify CR Best Buys or recommended products in the U.S. Ratings. "NA" in a chart means that information wasn't available from the manufacturer. We include, in the Contact Info list on page 34D, the manufacturer's phone number and Web address in Canada, so that you can call or go online to get information on a model you can't find in the stores. (Many products that aren't available in Canadian stores can be bought online.)

We appreciate your support, but we don't take it for granted. Please write to CanadaExtra@cu.consumer.org and tell us what you think. We can't reply to every e-mail message or implement every suggestion, but with your help we'll try to keep growing to serve your needs.

- CR Best Buy** Products with this icon offer the best combination of performance and price. All are recommended.
- Recommended** Models with this designation perform well and stand out for reasons we note.

Activity trackers Report and Ratings, pages 8-9

Five of the six activity trackers are available, including all of the recommended models.

| Rec. | Brand & model | Overall score | Price | Type | Test results | | |
|------|---------------|--|-------|------|--------------|----------|---------------|
| | | | | | Steps | Calories | Use, features |
| | | 0 100 | | | | | |
| | | P F G VG E | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|-------|---------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Fitbit One ¹ | 80 | \$100 | clip-on | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Nike+ FuelBand ¹ | 70 | 300 | wrist | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Up by Jawbone | 67 | 130 | wrist | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

| Rec. | Brand & model | Overall score | Price | Type | Test results | | |
|------|---------------|--|-------|------|--------------|----------|---------------|
| | | | | | Steps | Calories | Use, features |
| | | 0 100 | | | | | |
| | | P F G VG E | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|--|---------------------------|-----------|--------------------|---------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| | BodyMedia Fit Link | 64 | \$180 ² | armband | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Fitbit Flex | 63 | 100 | wrist | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

¹ Instant feedback without need to link to phone, tablet, or computer. ² Extra cost: 3 months free, then \$6.95 per month.

Top products of the year Report, pages 15-28

These products are available in Canada, based on our recent price and currency reports.

Dishwashers

| Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|---|---------|---------------|
| Bosch Ascenta SHX3AR7[5]UC | \$1,050 | 81 |
| KitchenAid KDFE454CSS | 1,500 | 81 |
| Thermador Topaz Series DWH-D640JFM | NA | 80 |
| Bosch 800 Plus Series SHX7P-T55UC | 1,580 | 80 |
| Bosch 500 Series SHP65T55UC | 1,250 | 80 |
| Miele Futura Dimension G5675SCSF | NA | 80 |
| Bosch 300 Series DLX SHX53T-L5UC | 1,050 | 80 |
| KitchenAid KUDE48FX[SS] | 1,200 | 79 |
| KitchenAid KUDE50FBSS | 1,500 | 79 |
| Bosch 800 Plus Series SHX9ER5[5]UC | 2,200 | 79 |
| Bosch 800 Series SHE68T55UC | 1,200 | 79 |

Microwaves

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|-----------------------------|--|-------|---------------|
| Mid-sized countertop | Panasonic Genius Prestige NN-SD681S | \$200 | 72 |
| Large countertop | Jenn-Air JMC1150WS | NA | 77 |
| | GE Profile PEB206CSNSS | NA | 75 |
| Over-the-range | Samsung SMH1816S | 400 | 72 |
| | Samsung SMH2117[S] | 500 | 71 |
| | Samsung SMH1713[S] | 300 | 71 |

Wall ovens

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------|---------------|
| 30-inch electric double ovens | Whirlpool WOD93ECOAS | \$3,000 | 80 |
| | Maytag MEW9630A | 3,100 | 80 |
| | Bosch HBL8650UC | NA | 72 |
| 30-inch electric single ovens | Whirlpool WOS92ECOAH | 1,600 | 80 |
| | Maytag MEW9530AS | 2,000 | 80 |
| | Whirlpool WOS51ECOAS | 1,500 | 72 |
| | Maytag MEW7530AW | 1,800 | 72 |
| | Bosch HBL5450UC | NA | 72 |

Ranges

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|--|--------------------------------|---------|---------------|
| 30-inch electric smoothtop double oven | Maytag YMET8885XS | \$2,100 | 83 |
| 30-inch electric smoothtop single ovens | GE Café CBC980SNSS | 3,000 | 86 |
| | GE PB920STSS | 1,900 | 85 |
| | Electrolux CEW30EF6GW | 2,700 | 83 |
| 30-inch induction single oven | Samsung FTQ307NWX | 2,400 | 89 |
| 30-inch gas double oven | LG LDG3037ST | 2,400 | 75 |
| 30-inch dual-fuel double oven | KitchenAid KDRS505XSS | 2,900 | 71 |
| 30-inch gas single ovens | LG LRG3097ST | 2,400 | 74 |
| | LG LRG3095ST | 2,000 | 72 |
| 36-inch professional dual-fuel | GE Monogram ZDP364NDPSS | NA | 72 |

Cooktops

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------|---------------|
| 36-inch gas | Thermador SGSX365FS | \$2,000 | 81 |
| | GE Monogram ZGU385NSM[SS] | 1,900 | 80 |
| | GE Profile JGP975WEK[WW] | 1,600 | 80 |
| | LG LCG3691[ST] | 1,700 | 74 |
| | Bosch NGM8654UC | 1,500 | 70 |
| 30-inch electric smoothtop | KitchenAid KECC604BBL | NA | 94 |
| | Electrolux Icon E30EC65E[SS] | 1,800 | 88 |
| | LG LCE3081[ST] | 1,500 | 87 |
| | Whirlpool G7CE3034XS | 900 | 86 |
| | GE Profile PP945BM[BB] | 1,200 | 86 |
| 30-inch induction | GE Profile PHP900DM[BB] | 2,000 | 99 |
| | KitchenAid KICU500XB | 2,000 | 95 |
| | Whirlpool GCI3061X[B] | 1,700 | 95 |

Washing machines

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------|----|
| Front-loaders | Maytag Maxima XL MHW8000AW | \$1,400 | 93 | |
| | Maytag Maxima XL MHW6000AW | 1,200 | 90 | |
| | Whirlpool Duet WFW86HEBC | 1,100 | 90 | |
| | Whirlpool Duet WFW88HEAW | 1,200 | 90 | |
| | Samsung WF457ARGS[GR] | 1,600 | 89 | |
| | LG WM8000H[V]A | 1,500 | 89 | |
| | LG WM3470H[W]A | 1,300 | 88 | |
| | Whirlpool Duet WFW96HEA[W] | 1,400 | 87 | |
| | Samsung WF435ATG[JWR] | 1,500 | 87 | |
| | Whirlpool Duet WFW94HEAW | 1,100 | 87 | |
| | LG WM3070H[W]A | 1,200 | 87 | |
| | Samsung WF511AB[W] | 1,300 | 86 | |
| | Samsung WF405ATPA[WR] | 1,300 | 86 | |
| | Top-loaders (high-efficiency) | LG WT1101CW | 850 | 82 |
| | | Samsung WA422PRHD[WR] | 900 | 82 |
| | | LG WT5070C[W] | 1,100 | 81 |
| | | Samsung WA50F9A6DSW | 1,100 | 79 |
| Samsung WA50F9A8DSP | | 1,200 | 79 | |
| Maytag Bravos XL MVWB750Y[W] | | 1,000 | 79 | |
| Samsung WA400PJHD[WR] | | 800 | 78 | |
| LG WT5170H[W] | | 1,200 | 78 | |
| Samsung WA456DRHD[WR] | | 1,000 | 78 | |
| GE GTAN8250DWS | | 1,150 | 77 | |
| Maytag Bravos XL MVWB950Y[W] | 1,100 | 76 | | |

Dryers

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|---------|---------------|
| Electric | Samsung DV50F9A8EVP | \$1,200 | 83 |
| | Maytag Maxima XL YMED-8000AG | 1,500 | 79 |
| | LG DLEX3470[W] | 1,300 | 79 |
| | Samsung DV456EWH[WR] | 1,000 | 78 |
| | Whirlpool Duet YWED96HEAW | 1,400 | 78 |
| | Maytag Bravos X YMEDX700AG | 900 | 78 |
| | LG DLEX8000[V] | 1,500 | 78 |
| | LG DLEX5170[W] | 1,100 | 78 |
| | Whirlpool Cabrio YWED5700AC | 750 | 78 |
| | Samsung DV457EVGS[GR] | 1,600 | 78 |
| | Kenmore 6801[2] | 700 | 77 |
| | Whirlpool Duet YWED94HEAW | 1,100 | 77 |

Refrigerators

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|-----------------------------|--|---------|---------------|
| Side-by-sides | Samsung RS265TD[WP] | \$1,500 | 76 |
| | KitchenAid KSF26C6X[YY] | 2,600 | 75 |
| | Bosch Linea 800 B22CS80SN[S] | 3,000 | 74 |
| | DCS RX215PJX1 | NA | 73 |
| French-door bottom-freezers | Samsung RF261BIAESR | 2,100 | 84 |
| | LG LFX33975ST | 3,500 | 83 |
| | Whirlpool Gold GX5FHTXV[Q] | 1,800 | 82 |
| | Samsung RFG297HDRS | 2,800 | 81 |
| | LG LFC25776[SW] | NA | 81 |
| | Samsung RF323TEDB[SR] | 3,700 | 80 |
| | LG LFX28979[ST] | NA | 79 |
| | Samsung RF31FMESBSR | 3,400 | 79 |
| | Kenmore Elite 7103[2] | 2,500 | 79 |
| | LG LFX31925[ST] | 3,600 | 79 |
| | GE Café CFE29TSDSS | 3,000 | 78 |
| | Samsung RF261BEAE[SR] | 2,200 | 78 |
| | LG LFC25765[ST] | 1,900 | 78 |
| | Kenmore Elite 7205[3] | 3,700 | 78 |
| LG LFX28978[SW] | 3,000 | 78 | |
| LG LFX25991[ST] | 4,000 | 77 | |
| Bottom-freezers | Whirlpool Gold GB2FHDXW[Q] | 1,400 | 73 |
| | Amana ABB224WEW | 1,000 | 73 |
| | Maytag MBF2258XE[W] | 1,300 | 73 |
| | Maytag MBF1958XE[W] | 1,200 | 72 |
| Top-freezers | GE Profile PTS22LHS[WW] | 1,400 | 69 |
| | Whirlpool WRT71RWY[W] | 1,200 | 67 |
| | Frigidaire Gallery FGHT2134KW | 850 | 64 |
| Built-ins | Haier HT21TS77SP (Costco) | 700 | 63 |
| | Thermador Freedom Collection T36BB820SS | NA | 80 |
| | Jenn-Air JS42PPDUB[SS] | NA | 80 |
| | Bosch Integra 800 Series B36BT-830NS | NA | 78 |
| | Thermador Freedom Collection T36BT810NS | NA | 78 |
| | Thermador KBUDT4265E[S] | NA | 77 |
| | Sub-Zero BI42S[S] | NA | 76 |
| Miele KF1901Vi | NA | 76 | |

Gas grills

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|--------|--|-------|---------------|
| Medium | Weber Spirit SP-320 46700401 | \$700 | 83 |
| | Vermont Castings Signature Series VCS323SSP | NA | 80 |
| | Weber Genesis S-330 | 1,050 | 79 |
| | Weber Spirit E310 46510001 | 900 | 77 |
| | Weber Genesis E-330 | 1,000 | 75 |
| | Kenmore 690342 | 500 | 74 |
| Small | Weber Spirit E210 46110001 | 550 | 79 |
| | Napoleon Terrace SE325PK | 700 | 72 |

Plasma TVs

| Size | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|---------|---------------|
| 60-inch and larger | Panasonic Viera TC-P65VT60 | \$4,200 | 73 |
| | Panasonic Viera TC-P60ZT60 | 4,300 | 73 |
| | Panasonic Viera TC-P60ST60 | 1,900 | 72 |
| | LG 60PH6700 | 1,275 | 72 |
| | Samsung PN64E550 | 2,400 | 71 |
| 46- to 55-inch | Panasonic Viera TC-P55ST60 | 1,550 | 72 |
| | Panasonic Viera TC-P50S60 | 850 | 67 |
| | LG 50PN6500 | 700 | 66 |
| 40- to 43-inch | Samsung PN43E450 | 500 | 68 |
| | Panasonic Viera TC-P42S60 | 800 | 66 |

Streaming media players

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|----------|--|-------|---------------|
| Advanced | Netgear NeoTV Prime w/ Google TV (GTV100) | \$150 | 67 |
| Basic | Western Digital WD TV Play Media Player | 70 | 68 |
| | Panasonic DMP-MST60 | 90 | 61 |

LCD TVs

| Size | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|---------|---------------|
| 60-inch and larger | LG 60LA8600 | \$3,200 | 76 |
| | Samsung UN60F7500 | 3,100 | 72 |
| | Samsung UN65F8000 | 4,000 | 70 |
| | Panasonic Viera TC-L60DT60 | 2,700 | 69 |
| | Sony Bravia KDL-60R550A | 1,850 | 68 |
| | Sharp Aquos LC-70C7500U | 2,800 | 65 |
| | Samsung UN55ES8000 | 3,000 | 74 |
| | Sony Bravia XBR-55X900A | 5,500 | 74 |
| | LG 55LA7400 | 1,745 | 74 |
| 55- to 59-inch | Samsung UN55ES6500 | 1,700 | 72 |
| | Samsung UN55F7100 | 2,300 | 69 |
| | Samsung UN55F7100 | 2,300 | 69 |
| | Sony Bravia KDL-55W900A | 2,600 | 69 |
| | Samsung UN55F6400 | 2,000 | 67 |
| | Toshiba 58L7350U | 1,600 | 67 |
| | JVC JLE55SP4000 | 1,150 | 66 |
| | LG 47LA6900 | 1,025 | 71 |
| | Panasonic Viera TC-L47WT60 | 2,500 | 69 |
| | Samsung UN46EH5300 | 1,050 | 68 |
| 46- to 52-inch | LG 47LA6200 | 870 | 68 |
| | Sony Bravia KDL-47W802A | 1,500 | 66 |
| | Panasonic Viera TC-L50ET60 | 1,400 | 66 |
| | Samsung UN46EH5000 | 850 | 65 |
| | Toshiba 50L7300U | 1,150 | 65 |
| | LG 42GA6400 | 1,040 | 67 |
| 40- to 43-inch | Panasonic Viera TC-L42E60 | 850 | 66 |
| | Samsung UN40F5500 | 750 | 65 |
| | Sony Bravia KDL-40EX640 | 1,000 | 65 |
| | Samsung UN32F6300 | 680 | 65 |
| 32-inch and smaller | Samsung UN26EH4000 | 300 | 64 |
| | Samsung UN29F4000 | 330 | 60 |
| | LG 29LN4510 | 320 | 58 |
| | Toshiba 29L1350U | 240 | 58 |
| | Philips 26PFL4907 | 300 | 56 |

Tablets

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|---|--|-------|---------------|
| 7 to 8 inches, Wi-Fi only | Samsung Galaxy Note 8.0 (16GB) | \$400 | 85 |
| | Apple iPad Mini (16GB) | 300 | 80 |
| | Samsung Galaxy Tab 3 7.0 (8GB) | 200 | 80 |
| | Google Nexus 7 (16GB) (2nd gen.) | 270 | 76 |
| | Samsung Galaxy Tab 2 (7.0) (8GB) | 170 | 71 |
| | Kobo Arc (32GB) | 180 | 68 |
| 9 to 12 inches, Wi-Fi only | Google Nexus 10 (16GB) | 400 | 83 |
| | Apple iPad (16GB) (4th gen.) | 500 | 83 |
| | Samsung Galaxy Tab 3 10.1 (16GB) | 400 | 82 |
| | Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1 (16GB) | 450 | 81 |
| | Samsung Galaxy Tab 2 (10.1) (16GB) | 350 | 80 |
| | Microsoft Surface with Windows RT (32GB) | 350 | 79 |
| | Dell Latitude 10 Essentials (32GB) | 770 | 79 |
| | Asus Transformer Pad Infinity TF700T (32GB) | 500 | 78 |
| | Apple iPad 2 (16GB) | 400 | 77 |
| | Acer Iconia W510 (64GB) | 600 | 77 |
| 7- to 9-inch-screen specialty tablets, Wi-Fi only | Amazon Kindle Fire HD 8.9 (16GB) | 295 | 75 |
| | Amazon Kindle Fire HD (16GB) | 225 | 74 |

Basic cameras

| Type | Brand & name | Price | Overall score | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------|----|
| Superzoom | Canon Powershot SX280 HS | \$340 | 64 | |
| | Panasonic Lumix DMC-ZS30 | 400 | 64 | |
| | Olympus Stylus SH-50 iHS | 300 | 63 | |
| | Sony Cyber-shot DSC-HX50V | 450 | 63 | |
| | Sony Cyber-shot DSC-HX300 | 500 | 63 | |
| | Olympus Stylus SP-820UZ iHS | 300 | 62 | |
| | Fujifilm FinePix F900EXR | 370 | 60 | |
| | Nikon Coolpix S9400 | 300 | 59 | |
| | Olympus Stylus SZ-16 iHS | 200 | 59 | |
| | Nikon Coolpix P520 | 450 | 59 | |
| | Nikon Coolpix L820 | 280 | 59 | |
| | Leica V-Lux 40 | 700 | 59 | |
| | Sony Cyber-shot DSC-WX300 | 350 | 58 | |
| | Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ60 | 400 | 58 | |
| Subcompact | Fujifilm FinePix S8400W | 300 | 57 | |
| | Leica V-Lux 30 | 800 | 56 | |
| | Nikon Coolpix P330 | 400 | 63 | |
| | Nikon Coolpix S800c | 330 | 60 | |
| | Nikon Coolpix S6500 | 230 | 57 | |
| | Canon PowerShot ELPH 110 HS | 190 | 57 | |
| | Rugged & waterproof | Panasonic Lumix DMC-TS5 | 400 | 58 |
| | | Olympus Stylus TG-830 iHS | 280 | 57 |
| | | Nikon Coolpix AW110 | 380 | 56 |
| | | Sony Cyber-shot DSC-TX30 | 300 | 56 |
| Olympus Stylus TG-2 iHS | | 380 | 53 | |
| Canon PowerShot D20 | | 350 | 53 | |
| Olympus Stylus TG-630 iHS | 200 | 52 | | |

Printers

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|------------|-----------------------------------|-------|---------------|
| All-in-one | HP Photosmart 7520 | \$120 | 78 |
| | Canon Pixma MG6320 | 200 | 72 |
| | Canon Pixma MX922 | 200 | 71 |
| | HP Officejet Pro 8600 Plus | 330 | 71 |
| | Brother MFC-J6910DW | 350 | 70 |
| | Canon Pixma MG2220 | 70 | 70 |
| | Canon Pixma MX512 | 120 | 70 |

Advanced cameras

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| SLR-like | Panasonic Lumix DMC-GH3 | \$1,300 | 72 |
| | Panasonic Lumix DMC-G5K | 800 | 69 |
| | Olympus OM-D E-M5 | 1,300 | 68 |
| | Samsung EV-NX3002BSTCA | 900 | 68 |
| | Sony NEX-3NL | 500 | 67 |
| | Samsung EV-NX2022BSBCA | 1,100 | 66 |
| | Olympus Pen E-P5 | 1,300 | 65 |
| | Sony NEX-7KB | 1,250 | 65 |
| | Sony SLT-A77V | 1,000 | 65 |
| | Olympus Pen Mini E-PM2 | 500 | 64 |
| | Sony NEX-6LB | 900 | 64 |
| | Sony SLT-A58K | 600 | 63 |
| | SLR | Canon EOS Rebel T5i | 1,000 |
| Nikon D7100 | | 1,550 | 72 |
| Canon EOS 60D | | 1,330 | 71 |
| Canon EOS Rebel SL1 | | 930 | 71 |
| Nikon D7000 | | 1,300 | 70 |
| Canon EOS Rebel T3i | | 700 | 70 |
| Canon EOS 7D Digital | | 2,200 | 69 |
| Canon EOS Rebel T3 | | 550 | 67 |
| Nikon D5200 | | 930 | 66 |
| Nikon D3200 | | 650 | 66 |
| Nikon D3100 | | 530 | 65 |
| Pentax K-30 | | 730 | 65 |
| Nikon D5100 | | 650 | 65 |
| Advanced point-and-shoot | Fujifilm X100S | 1,300 | 69 |
| | Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ200 | 600 | 69 |
| | Ricoh GR | 800 | 69 |
| | Panasonic Lumix DMC-LF1 | 525 | 68 |
| | Panasonic Lumix DMC-LX7 | 480 | 66 |
| | Canon PowerShot G15 | 530 | 65 |
| | Fujifilm X20 | 600 | 65 |
| | Pentax MX-1 | 450 | 65 |
| | Olympus Stylus XZ-2 iHS | 600 | 64 |
| | Sony Cyber-shot DSC-RX100 | 700 | 62 |

Thermostats

| Type | Brand & model | Price | Overall score |
|------------------|--|-------|---------------|
| Seven-day models | Venstar ColorTouch Series T5800 | \$250 | 96 |
| | Honeywell Prestige HD YTHX9321R | 300 | 95 |
| | ecobee EB-STAT-02 | NA | 94 |
| | nest Learning Thermostat | 250 | 74 |
| | Honeywell FocusPRO 6000 TH6110D | 80 | 74 |

☐ One schedule for weekdays, another for weekends.

Autos

Report and Ratings, pages 58-64

All of the tested vehicles are available in Canada.

| Make & model | Price range | Acceleration (sec.) | | | | Fuel economy (liters per 100 km) | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|------------|-------------|------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|---------|
| | | 0-50 km/h | 0-100 km/h | 80-100 km/h | 500 meters | City driving | Highway driving | Overall |
| FULL-SIZED PICKUPS | | | | | | | | |
| Chevrolet Silverado (2014) | \$29,435-\$49,150 | 3.0 | 7.9 | 2.2 | 18.3 | 21.8 | 10.2 | 14.6 |
| Ram 1500 | 19,995-51,845 | 2.9 | 7.5 | 3.6 | 17.7 | 24.1 | 11.2 | 16.0 |
| MINIVAN | | | | | | | | |
| Honda Odyssey (2014) | 29,900-47,990 | 3.4 | 8.9 | 4.2 | 19.0 | 17.4 | 7.5 | 11.2 |
| SPORTY CAR | | | | | | | | |
| Ford Focus ST | 15,499-41,199 | 2.8 | 7.1 | 3.7 | 17.3 | 12.4 | 7.3 | 9.2 |
| CROSSOVER | | | | | | | | |
| Honda Crosstour | 28,990-39,335 | 3.0 | 7.4 | 3.6 | 17.7 | 17.0 | 7.4 | 11.0 |