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MARCH 2022

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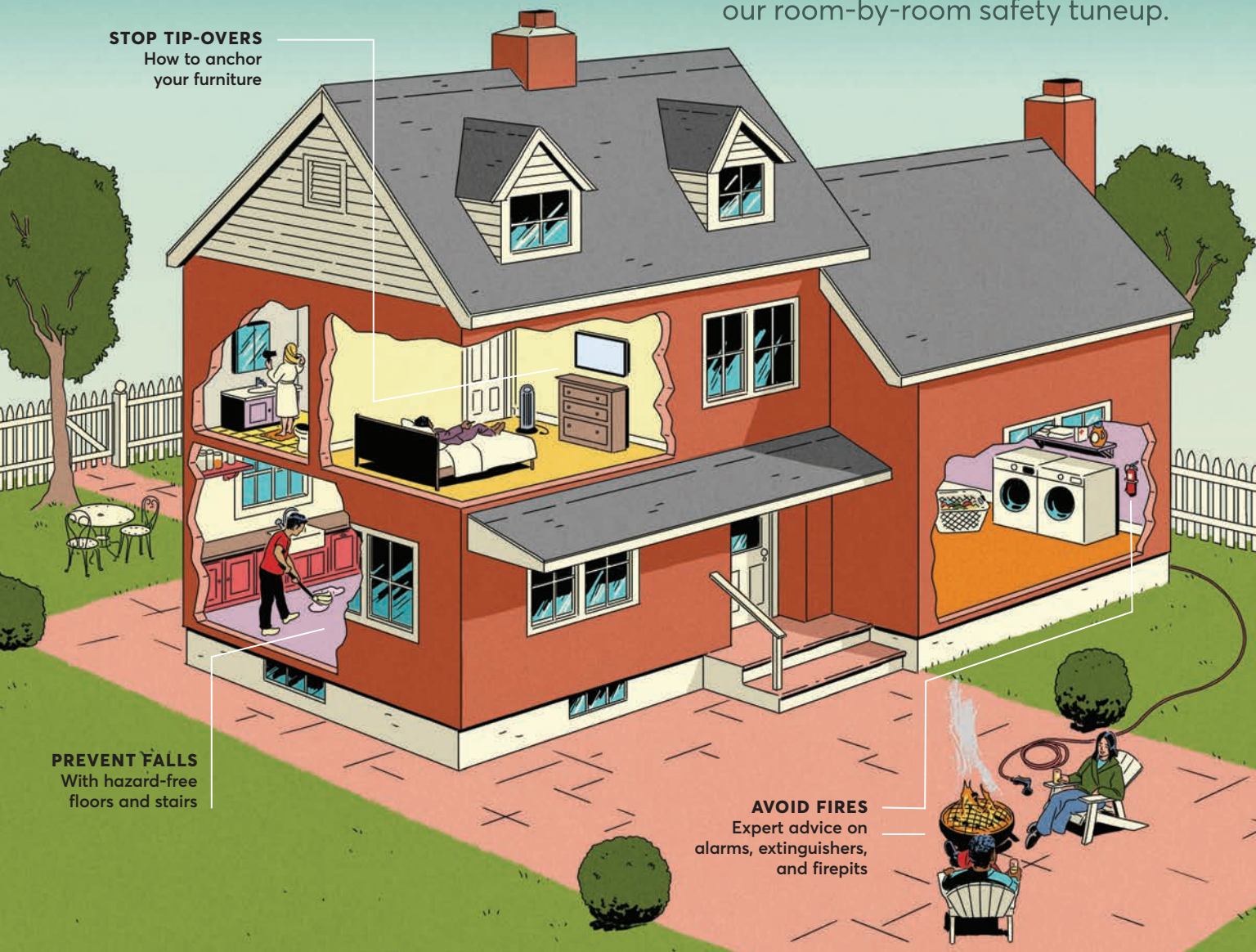
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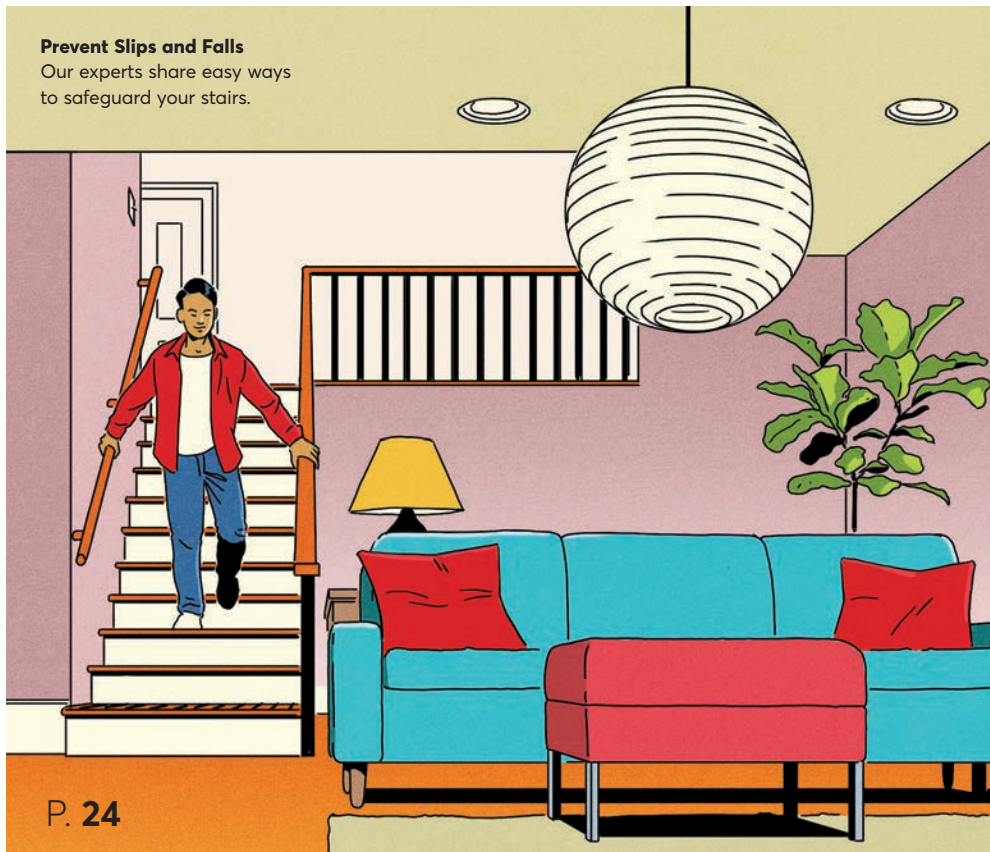
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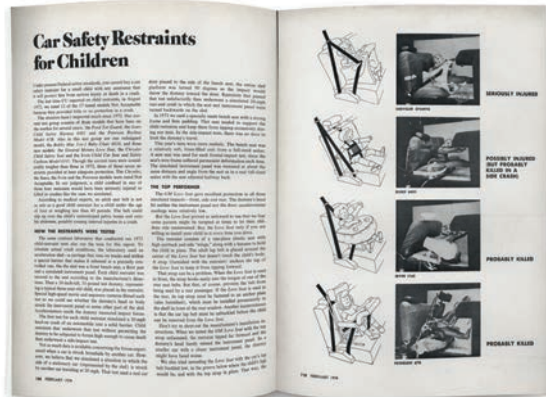
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✓ POOR ✓ FAIR ✓ GOOD
✓ VERY GOOD ✓ EXCELLENT

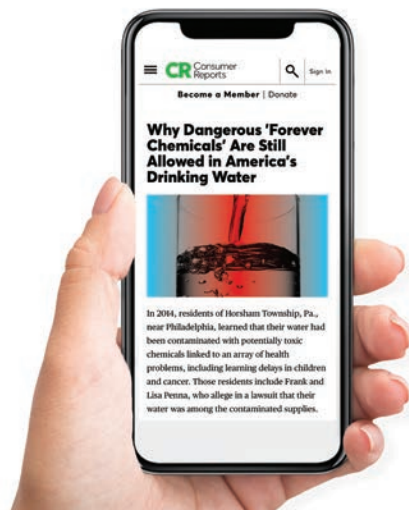


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Staying Strong Against COVID



OVER THE PAST few months, my family, like yours, has had to take precautions to see one another, from limiting the numbers at gatherings to testing before special occasions. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues into its third year, so many people have made sacrifices for the good of their communities, and there's no doubt it's wearing many of us down. That's understandable:

This is the largest global

health crisis in 100 years, and we're all learning as we go.

Like many of you, I look forward to the day when we can do many of the things that we once took for granted. But for now, we must stay the course, keeping up to date on all the new research on COVID-19, which is helping us to better understand, prevent, and treat this disease. The uncertainty we've been experiencing can be frustrating—all of us are craving certainty, when change seems to be the one constant. But we have to continue to adapt, following good science, testing hypotheses, and adhering to the changing advice as new data becomes available.

We will all need stamina, and so I invite you to continue visiting CR's Coronavirus Resource Hub ([CR.org/covid](https://www.consumerreports.org/covid)) for practical advice on new developments. For example, many experts recommend shifting from a cloth mask to an N95, a KN95, a KF94, or another high-performing mask, if possible. To avoid counterfeits, go to a reliable source that CR has identified, such as the nonprofit Project N95 (projectn95.org). Check with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)) for the latest guidance on vaccination, masking, and more. And follow the CDC's recommendation to get a booster, if you are eligible; studies show that it's one of our best defenses, but too many Americans have skipped it.

This pandemic is one of the biggest challenges we've ever faced—all the more so because of its duration, the lives lost, the economic effects, and the emotional toll of it all. At CR, we will keep following the scientific advice to better serve all of you as you protect yourselves and your loved ones.

Marta Tellado

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Automatic Braking for All

Safety should not be a luxury that only some can afford.

That's why CR has been pushing to make sure all new cars are equipped with automatic emergency braking (AEB), a technology that stops or slows a vehicle if a collision is imminent.

AEB has the potential to save thousands of lives on our roads, just as seat belts, airbags, and other safety technologies do. Yet some automakers continue to offer it only as a nonstandard option on select models—sometimes as part of a premium package, along with features like heated seats and chrome trim.

So CR cheered when, in 2016, 20 auto manufacturers joined a voluntary pledge brokered by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to equip almost all new cars with AEB by the 2022-2023 manufacturing year.

We also publicly monitored the automakers' progress toward the goal and pushed them along the way to step up—including by restricting our CR Top Pick selections to vehicles that come standard with forward collision warning and AEB with pedestrian detection.

Today 12 of the 20—Audi, BMW, Ford/Lincoln, Honda/Acura, Hyundai/Genesis, Mazda, Mercedes-Benz, Subaru, Tesla, Toyota/Lexus, Volkswagen, and Volvo—have succeeded in fulfilling the pledge.

Now we'll be watching to make sure the remaining eight automakers hit the target as quickly as possible.

42,000

Number of crashes that will be prevented over three years by fulfilling the AEB commitment, as estimated by the IIHS.



CALL TO ACTION

CR recently published a series of investigations demonstrating serious problems in the auto lending industry. Among other things, we found that some dealers and lenders offer high-interest loans even to consumers with good credit, apparently setting rates based not just on risk but also partly on what they think they can get away with. And we found that many state lending laws designed to stop such practices are rife with loopholes. Please sign our petition calling on the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to ensure that auto loans are fairly priced, at [CR.org/autoloans0322](https://www.consumerreports.org/autoloans0322).



Establishing a Right to Repair

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Certain electronics makers have long insisted that their devices be fixed only by authorized repair centers, which can be expensive or difficult to access. They enforce these restrictions through a range of practices, including by limiting access to spare parts, manuals, and specialized tools.

The upshot: Consumers sometimes have little choice but to throw their device away and buy a new one.

HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

As a leader of the "right to repair" movement, CR has long opposed these practices. Among other measures, we helped to

develop model right-to-repair legislation, versions of which have been introduced in more than 25 state legislatures and at the federal level. We also incorporated the right to repair into the Digital Standard, an open-source set of technical criteria for evaluating the data privacy and security—and influencing the design—of software, digital services, and internet-connected products.

Our efforts have recently been bearing fruit: Last summer President Joe Biden directed the Federal Trade Commission to draft rules banning unfair repair restrictions. And in November 2021, Apple said it would start providing some spare parts and instruction manuals to consumers who want to do their own repairs—another encouraging sign that we are getting through.

CR is now pushing for laws and regulations that would make Apple's policy an industry requirement.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Urge your representatives in Congress to pass the CR-endorsed Fair Repair Act, H.R. 4006, at [Congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov).

Your Feedback



Our January 2022 article “Best Ways to Renew Body & Mind” gave inspiration with 17 fresh ways to shake up your routine and get healthier and happier this year. Our readers wrote in to share their wellness secrets. To join the convo, go to CR.org/health0322.

IF YOU CAN start small and commit to the goal of moving more—little by little—walking farther is achievable. Tracking your movements with a Fitbit or other tracker can motivate you. Seeing how just the steps at your grocery trips can increase your movement numbers can motivate you to stretch to meet bigger goals. It's an ever-adapting commitment, and that's why walking can be effective.
—Melitta Rheeston, via Facebook

I'M 72 YEARS old and walk six or seven miles every day except when it's icy. I started three years ago by walking around the block, then added a block or two a day. I really love it.
—Patty Robison, via Facebook

I'VE READ THAT walking in nature may help depression. I walk among the redwoods a couple of miles every day. Life is at its best when one can walk it off amongst our natural forests.
—Sammi Sprouse, via Facebook

I THINK YOU have really hit some major points about aging well. I was struck with the yoga-for-sleep suggestion. Exercise for people who have been active and now must limit what they do because of health concerns

[is important]. I was a walker and a hiker, and no longer can do that. Also, a major problem for me and most people I know is isolation and loneliness. I have volunteered at humane societies and with the homeless, and can no longer do so due to my new limitations. These, too, are health issues, and most seniors I know have the same problems I do.
—Michelle Sewell, via CR.org

EDITOR'S NOTE Even if you can't take long walks or hikes, research has shown that simply being in nature—even in your own backyard—lowers stress levels. If you can't get outside, seeing greenery from your window or cultivating houseplants can help, too.

REGARDING “ANCIENT GRAIN”: When adding amaranth to a smoothie, should it be cooked or uncooked?

—Eric Mager, via Facebook

EDITOR'S NOTE Experts caution that raw grains might contain foodborne pathogens such as *E. coli* and salmonella. So it's probably best to cook most grains (amaranth included) to kill the pathogens first. Cooking the grains may also make them easier for your body to digest.

RE: “TREAT YOURSELF to a Self-Massage,” I bought a massage gun from Costco. I just use it for about 10 seconds on 1 (yes, the lowest setting). That's enough for me. I still prefer a massage from a trained professional. Unfortunately, COVID-19 [makes that difficult].
—David ZH Yu, via Facebook

EDITOR'S NOTE When it comes to powered massage gun devices, it's important to use them with care, experts say. Overstimulating muscles with one can cause bruising and, in rare cases, the acute breakdown of muscle tissue. Stop immediately if you feel any pain.

I WAS PUZZLED by the omission of biking from your January 2022 wellness suggestions. It offers low-impact exercise and is environmentally friendly, especially when a bike can substitute for a car. I commute to work four miles each way by bike. Entering my 80s, I adopted an e-bike, which nicely levels hills on my way home.
—David Lyons, Jamaica Plain, MA

EDITOR'S NOTE We agree! Cycling is great exercise and a fun, eco-friendly way to get around town. E-bikes are particularly helpful for more arduous journeys. Turn to page 46 of this issue to see our latest ratings of e-bikes.



WRITE

Go to CR.org/lettertoeditor to share your comments for publication.

RE: YOGA, DOING cobra pose really helped my sciatica. Once the pain subsided I started doing bird dog pose to keep it from coming back.

—Steven Mieland, via Facebook

ONE THING LEFT out of the first part of this article dealing with anxiety or stress ... get a dog! They change everything in a positive way.

—Donald Vetter, via CR.org



HEALTHIER CHICKEN

REGARDING “IS COSTCO Chicken Good for You?” (January 2022): You make many good points about how our food animals are raised. But isn’t the real answer federal legislation mandating more humane practices? Sure, you can roast your own chicken; I do frequently. But you are going to pay an average of \$7 to \$12 for that roasting bird,

and it won’t be ready to eat when you get home.

—Mary Miraglia, via CR.org

WHO CARES IF Costco chicken is good for you or not? It’s clearly not good for chickens. Given your acknowledgment that even so-called humanely raised chickens are subjected to crowded conditions and bright lights for 20 hours a day, I’m surprised your ultimate recommendation wasn’t “stop eating grocery store chicken.”

—Dianne Mitchell, Boulder, CO

MY ADVICE: TAKE some time to search out a local, human-scale pastured poultry producer in your area and support them!

—Dan Lefever, Nellysford, VA

THE NUTRIENTS WE need in order to thrive can be obtained more healthfully, humanely, and [from] environmentally responsible plant sources. There are marvelous vegan versions of virtually every type of food imaginable, including vegan “chicken.” Win-win-win.

—Mary Finelli, via CR.org

THANKS FOR THE information! I don’t have strong views personally on chicken, but I feel more comfortable in my purchases knowing the pros and cons.

—David Johnson, via Facebook

MY DAUGHTER BROKE my addiction to Costco rotisserie chicken. Now I buy the Whole Foods version: more expensive and not freakishly big, but it actually tastes better!

—Hank Arnold, via CR.org

IN MY HOUSE, Costco’s affordable food is loved—especially in the preparation of Eastern North Carolina soul food, chicken and pastry (aka chicken slick), where the “salty” chicken adds the exact amount of flavoring.

—Glenn Kling, Wilmington, NC



KEEPING KITCHEN KNIVES SHARP

Thank you for your report on kitchen knives (“The Best Chef’s Knives for Your Kitchen,” Insights, January 2022). However, even the best knife eventually needs to be resharpened. Yet you did not include ratings for which sharpeners to use. Any suggestions?

—Rabbi Chaim Casper, Miami

EDITOR’S NOTE

Our staffers are currently working on reviews of a number of knife sharpeners, which we hope to publish in an upcoming issue. In the meantime, you can go to [CR.org/sharpeners0322](https://www.consumerreports.org/sharpeners0322) for our advice on how to choose the best type of knife sharpener for your needs.



RELIABLE PRINTERS

REGARDING “SAVE BIG on a Great New Printer” (January 2022): I own an Epson ET 2750 and have found it to be an excellent printer with only one fault: In my case, I got an expensive doorstep at about 12,000 pages (three years of use). To have Epson fix it is neither cheap nor easy nor quick. Their authorized repair facilities are few and far between.

—Robert Pindell, Cleveland

EDITOR’S NOTE Long-lasting products are important. That’s why, when we rate printers, we factor in a brand’s predicted reliability score based on survey feedback from printer owners. These scores estimate the likelihood that a newly purchased model from a given brand will develop problems in the first four years. Digital and All Access members can see our reliability ratings at [CR.org/printers0322](https://www.consumerreports.org/printers0322).



CAR LOAN COSTS

“HOW TO SHOP for a Car Loan” (January 2022) contained lots of useful information. Probably the most useful was the diagram on how loan length affects cost. There are fairly cheap financial calculators (usually the student version) that have a “payment” function—meaning the user can easily input interest rate, loan amount, and loan length—to calculate a monthly payment. Information is power.

—Tom Straka, Pendleton, SC

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What We're Testing in Our Labs ...

In our 63 labs, we continually review and rate products. Here, timely picks for this month.

Big-Screen Smartphones

WE TESTED: 49 models
WE TEST FOR: Quality of the display, including color, clarity, and touch responsiveness; quality of front and rear cameras; ease of use; battery life; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 73
Range: 47-86

DURABLE DISPLAY & LONG BATTERY LIFE (6.7" SCREEN)

Apple iPhone 13 Pro Max
\$1,100

86
OVERALL
SCORE



TOP ANDROID PHONE WITH A GREAT CAMERA (6.9" SCREEN)

Samsung Galaxy Note20 Ultra 5G
\$1,200

85
OVERALL
SCORE



NICE PRICE FOR AN EXCELLENT LARGE DISPLAY (6.6" SCREEN)

OnePlus 8
\$450

83
OVERALL
SCORE



Drip Coffee Makers Under \$100

WE TESTED: 55 models
WE TEST FOR: A coffee maker's ability to reach optimal brewing temperatures (195° F to 205° F), ease of cleaning and changing filters, pouring (without drips), and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 69
Range: 36-88

BEST BREW PERFORMANCE
Ninja 12-Cup Programmable CE201 Coffee Maker
\$80

84
OVERALL
SCORE



EXCELLENT NO-DRIP CARAFE
Cuisinart Brew Central DCC-1200
\$95

81
OVERALL
SCORE



EASY-TO-USE BARGAIN
Bella 14755
\$40

80
OVERALL
SCORE



Ask Our Experts

My coffee maker overflows. What am I doing wrong?



FIRST, MAKE SURE you're not using too much water. You should always stay under the reservoir's maximum fill line. Don't overdo the coffee grounds, either. Leave at least a half-inch between them and the top of the filter basket. Then check the filter itself. If the strainer is dirty, it won't let water pass through quickly enough. If you're using a paper filter, make sure it's fully open and in the proper position. (If not, it can become a roadblock for water.) In our labs, we've also seen that some coffee makers are simply more prone to overflowing than others when brewing a full pot. On CR.org members can look at the "Highs and Lows" we note to see if a model overflowed in our tests.

ILLUSTRATION: SERGE BLOCH

For the latest ratings of these and other product categories, readers with a Digital or All Access membership can go to [CR.org](https://www.consumerreports.org).

Mattresses Under \$500

WE TESTED: 13 models
WE TEST FOR: Durability; support for side and back sleepers, whether petite, average, or large/tall in size; firmness (on a scale of 1 to 10); and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:

Median: 67
Range: 49-74

BEST BED FOR A LOW PRICE
Spa Sensations by Zinus 12" Theratouch M-FMS-1200Q, Foam
\$430

74
OVERALL
SCORE



LONG-LASTING & COMFY
Sleep Innovations Shiloh 14" Memory Foam
\$470

71
OVERALL
SCORE



EXCELLENT FOR SMALLER BACK SLEEPERS
Sealy Response Essentials 10" Innerspring
\$380

68
OVERALL
SCORE



Windows Laptops

WE TESTED: 117 models
WE TEST FOR: Ability to run large applications smoothly; quality of display; ergonomics, including the keyboard; battery life; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:

Median: 68
Range: 21-91

TOUCH SCREEN WITH SUPERB PERFORMANCE (15.6" SCREEN)
Samsung Galaxy Book Pro 360
\$1,500

85
OVERALL
SCORE



LIGHTWEIGHT BIG SCREEN FROM A RELIABLE BRAND (16" SCREEN)
LG Gram 16 (2021)
\$1,200

81
OVERALL
SCORE



EXTRA PORTABLE & LONG BATTERY LIFE (14" SCREEN)
Acer Swift SF314-511-75UX
\$770

74
OVERALL
SCORE



Multi-Cookers

WE TESTED: 24 models
WE TEST FOR: How well it steams broccoli and baby carrots, sautés onions, cooks rice, pressure-cooks ribs and chili, ease of use, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:

Median: 76
Range: 67-82

BEST FOR STEAMING VEGGIES
Zavor Lux LCD ZSELL02 (6 qt.)
\$160

82
OVERALL
SCORE



LARGE CAPACITY WITH BUILT-IN AIR-FRYING FUNCTION
Instant Pot Duo Crisp 11 in 1, 8 qt. With Air Fryer 140-0021-01
\$200

81
OVERALL
SCORE



NONSTICK & GREAT FOR SAUTÉING
Blue Diamond Weekday Wonder 16-in-1 CC004430-00 (6 qt.)
\$130

80
OVERALL
SCORE



Treadmills

WE TESTED: 35 models
WE TEST FOR: Ease of use; ergonomics, including belt and handrail design; sturdiness of construction; safety controls; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:

Median: 81
Range: 51-88

TOP-NOTCH SAFETY FEATURES
True Performance 100 (nonfolding)
\$4,200

87
OVERALL
SCORE



EASY-TO-USE FOLDING TREADMILL
Horizon Fitness 7.4AT
\$1,600

87
OVERALL
SCORE



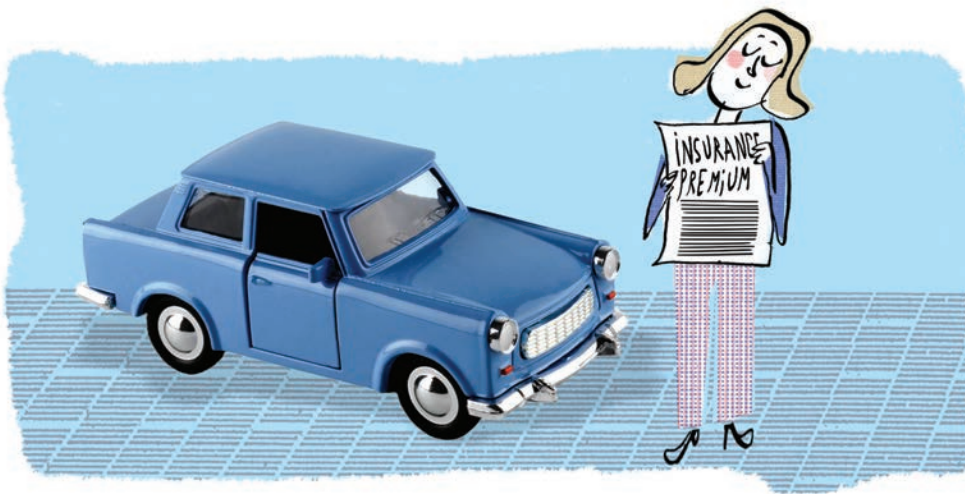
FOLDING TREADMILL BEST BUY
Nautilus T616
\$1,100

84
OVERALL
SCORE



Note: We rate different products according to different testing protocols; as a result, Overall Scores of one product category are not comparable with another.

COMING NEXT MONTH Bike Helmets & More



I know an electric car will save me money on gas—but what about on repairs and insurance?

A CR STUDY published in 2020 found that, overall, electric vehicles cost less to own than equivalent gas-powered vehicles, thanks to lower repair and maintenance costs (that's partly because EVs have fewer moving parts), as well as savings on fuel. In fact, our survey of hundreds of thousands of CR members showed that drivers of EVs and plug-in hybrids paid half as much to repair and maintain their vehicles—an average savings of \$4,600 in repair and maintenance costs over the life of the vehicle (15 to 16 years).

Most EV owners, however, do pay higher insurance premiums than owners of gas-powered cars. Lynne McChristian, director of the office of risk management and insurance

research at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, says that's most likely because insurers don't have decades of risk assessment data for EVs. This means they're less able to accurately gauge the risk of theft or damage after a crash, and they factor that ambiguity into a higher premium.

Fortunately for consumers, elevated insurance premiums for EVs are likely to trend downward as companies collect more data and more models come to market, McChristian says. The share of EVs being sold in the U.S. is still relatively small, at just 4 percent of all vehicles in 2021, but that number has been growing each year.

Is it okay to buy a TV online, without first checking it out in a store?

IT'S NOT ABSOLUTELY necessary to shop in person for a TV, but there are a few reasons you may prefer to do so. If you want to evaluate a set's overall aesthetics, the closer look you'll get in a store can help

you determine whether it's the right TV for you. You may also be able to get a better sense of scale when looking at a 48-inch TV compared with a 55-inch or 65-inch one—important info if you're switching to a larger set.

But be aware that the TV settings used in many retailer showrooms can be misleading. Retailers tend to boost the brightness and contrast of the display to unnatural levels that you wouldn't use at home, in order to create a picture that “pops” in a store environment, says CR TV expert Claudio Ciacchi. If picture quality is important to you, note that this means you might not be able to see the image the same way you would at home. Plus, those settings can artificially improve “wide-angle viewing” for shoppers—how well you can still see the picture when looking at the screen from the sides.

Before (or instead of) heading to a store, be sure to do some research online. Start by considering what size TV you want, then do a deep dive into our ratings (which can be viewed by our All Access and Digital members). Our experts evaluate hundreds of TVs each year and are able to make apples-to-apples comparisons by testing them in identical lab conditions.

My hearing feels muffled, almost as if I'm underwater. Do I need a hearing test?

YES. SCHEDULE a hearing test with your primary care physician; an ear, nose, and throat doctor; or an audiologist. This will help you determine whether your muffled hearing could be age-related hearing loss—due to factors such as genetics and long-term noise exposure. Get tested as soon as you suspect hearing issues, says Jani Johnson, AuD, PhD, director of the Hearing Aid Research Laboratory at the University of Memphis in Tennessee. That's because being checked out now can increase your chances of getting good results from a hearing aid. Your doctor can also examine your ears for a physical cause of hearing loss, such as an ear infection or earwax, which can muffle sound and sometimes even cause tinnitus. Earwax buildup is more common than you might think: About one-third of older adults have excessive amounts. It's also common among people who use hearing aids, which can physically block wax from leaving the ears.

If you suspect your problem could be due to earwax buildup, it's best to let a doctor remove the blockage; don't try to do it yourself. Using cotton-tipped swabs can push wax farther into the ear canal—or even perforate your eardrum.



We have more than 140 in-house experts who research, test, and compare. Submit your questions at [CR.org/askourexperts](https://www.consumerreports.org/askourexperts) ... and watch for the answers.

CR Insights

IN THE KNOW

Make Your Coffee Feel Special

YOU MAY ALREADY know that for a good a.m. brew you should start with a bean grinder (try the Oxo Brew Conical Burr, at right) and one of CR's top-rated coffee makers. But with a milk frother, you can go from good to great, turning that cup into a cappuccino, flat white, and more.

Milk frothers use a motorized whisk to whip milk into a silky-smooth foam. We tried six popular frothers to see how well each created tightly knit foam across several milk types, both heated and cold. We also assessed how the froth tasted, how quickly it dissolved, and how easy each tool was to clean. (Our favorites are shown here.)

The type of milk you froth up does matter. Whole milk is a good choice "because its proteins allow for a tight-knit, durable foam," says Michael Phillips, director of coffee culture at Blue Bottle Coffee. "Milks that have higher fat content, such as half and half, can be difficult to create a tight-knit foam. Milks with too little fat—skim and two percent—produce a texture that is a bit too stiff and dry." As for plant-based milks, Phillips says oat milk is superior to others, such as almond or soy.



GREAT HANDHELD FROTHER

Aerolatte To-Go \$20

You move this cordless wand around the cup to whip up milk to your desired level of froth. It's a breeze to clean and fits in a drawer. But frothing freehand is not quite as simple as with the push-button models below, and it won't warm up the milk for you.



SIMPLE & AFFORDABLE

Instant Milk Frother \$40

This frother can heat up milk quickly and well for a third of the price of the Nespresso. But its carafe is not dishwasher-safe, and it isn't good at frothing cold cow's whole milk or warm soy milk.



A FANTASTIC SPLURGE

Nespresso Aeroccino4 \$119

Though much pricier than competitors, it's capable of creating a tight-knit froth across a variety of milks, and it's dishwasher-safe (except for the base).



CR MONEY SAVER

SMART WAYS TO USE YOUR GIFT CARDS

In 2020, approximately \$14.2 billion was left on gift cards, unused. And according to a recent nationally representative CR survey of 2,184 U.S. adults, 51 percent of respondents had at least one unused gift card.

I always lose my gift cards. What can I do to keep track of them?

The best place for a physical gift card is in your wallet so that you can treat it just like cash, says Shelley Hunter, founder of Gift Card Girlfriend, a website that provides gift card insights. But if you tend to lose physical cards, there's another solution: Some retailers now have smartphone apps that allow you to upload gift balances to your phone. And retailers such as Dunkin' and Starbucks even let you add those e-gift cards to your Apple Wallet or

Google Pay app to use them for contactless payments. It may also help to keep an ongoing list of cards and balances in your phone's notes app.

How long do I have to use it?

Though many gift cards don't expire, some do—typically in five years. Some cards also charge an inactivity fee per year. Check the retailer's policy to be sure and, when in doubt, use cards you receive within a year.

I bought something with the card, but it still has a few dollars left on it. What should I do with it now?

One idea, of course, is to buy another item and apply the remaining amount to it. That's annoying if you don't want anything else from that store. But you might still be able to rescue that leftover money: First, check your state laws. If you live in certain states, you can request that the remaining value of a gift card be redeemed at the issuing retailer for cash—though states specify different amounts. In California, you can redeem a balance that's under \$10 for cash, but in Vermont the balance must be less than \$1. Or consider reloading the card (if possible) to give to someone else. Some cards can also be used at a store owned by the same parent company. A Gap-branded gift card, for example, is also redeemable at Old Navy, Banana Republic, and Athleta.

FACE-OFF

What You Should Know About AirPods

INTERESTED IN BUYING some AirPods but confused because Apple has four models on the market—three of which look pretty much the same? All four work great with iPhones (not quite as well with Android phones) but have different features—and very different CR ratings. “The meaningful differences among the various AirPods products are in terms of features, performance, and design,” says CR tech editor Thomas Germain.

To figure out which pair is right for your listening needs, check out our chart, at right. We also suggest some non-Apple competitors worth considering that perform similarly—or in some cases better—in our lab tests.

*Hours on a single charge with noise cancellation and transparency mode turned off, as stated by the manufacturer.

CR Time Traveler SCAMS

1940 CR blasts the NYC Board of Health for permitting the sale of an “adulterated” milk that contains sugar, stabilizers, and more. We say it cheats consumers.



1956 CR reports a price-fixing scheme: Companies put an inflated price tag on a product, which the retailer then discounts. It looks like the product is on sale, but it really isn't.

1963 Congress holds a hearing on scams targeting older adults. Testimony highlights frauds such as homes that were sold to retirees—located on a Hawaiian volcano.



1970 CR pushes for stronger regulations that will keep defective medical devices—like defibrillators that shock doctors and exploding anesthesia machines—off the market.



Apple AirPods (2nd Gen)

59 OVERALL SCORE



Apple AirPods (3rd Gen)

72 OVERALL SCORE



Apple AirPods Pro

74 OVERALL SCORE



Apple AirPods Max

81 OVERALL SCORE

PRICE	\$130	\$180	\$250	\$550
SOUND QUALITY	I	^	^	^
NOISE REDUCTION	None	None	^	^
BATTERY LIFE*	5 hr.	6 hr.	5 hr.	20 hr.
WIRELESS CHARGING	Only if you buy an up-graded case for \$79	Yes	Yes	No
CR'S TAKE	This pair doesn't have good enough sound quality to earn a CR recommendation. The buds below cost much less and are a CR Best Buy with very good sound.	Newer features, sound-quality improvements, and slightly longer battery life make these 3rd-gen AirPods a worthy upgrade over the 2nd generation.	This Pro offers a slight uptick in sound quality over the regular 2nd- and 3rd-gen AirPods, with the additional benefit of excellent noise cancellation.	A highly rated over-ear model, the Max has very good sound—but costs hundreds of dollars more than competing models with higher ratings and better sound.

ALSO CONSIDER ...

1More Piston Buds \$35

70 OVERALL SCORE

Microsoft Surface Earbuds \$100

72 OVERALL SCORE

Sony WF-1000XM3 \$200

87 OVERALL SCORE

Bose QuietComfort 35 Series II \$300

88 OVERALL SCORE

1987 Think you've won a trip to Bali? All it takes to seal the deal is your credit card number, says the voice on the phone. CR warns against common vacation scams like this one.



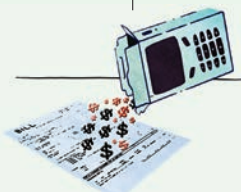
2010 CR alerts its readers to phone bill "cramming"—a term for charges added to your bill by third-party services such as a voicemail company—and tells readers how to stop bogus charges.



2022 With new ways to contact you, via email and social media, scammers are harder to sniff out than ever. To protect yourself, check out our guide on page 34 of this issue.



1997 With more people shopping on the World Wide Web, online fraud has more than tripled in a year. We share scam prevention tips, such as vetting the site's phone number and street address.



2015 Older adults lost \$3 billion dollars to scams in 2015, CR reports, falling prey to robocalls and other frauds. CR starts a petition demanding that telephone companies stop robocalls.



SAVVY SHOPPER

The Best Electric Can Openers

THE IDEAL ELECTRIC can opener should be easy to use, quiet, fast, reliable, and low-cost. Which of the many options on store shelves tick all of those boxes? We took home six top-selling can openers, all under \$50, and tested them on a variety of can sizes (from 15-ounce cans of beans to 28-ounce cans of tomatoes) and evaluated how safe and easy they were to use and clean. At right, we list them from best to worst so that you'll know which can openers will pop all your tops without trouble—and which to avoid.

	PROS	CONS
 <p>Kitchen Mama \$29</p>	Just press this handheld's button for smooth, safe edges. Hit the button again to stop it. The cutoff lid clings to a strong magnet.	It requires four AA batteries (more than the other handhelds we tried, below, which require only two batteries each).
 <p>Hamilton Beach Smooth Touch \$32</p>	Press down the lever to cut, leaving smooth, safe edges around the top. This is the best countertop-style opener we tried.	The lever is a little stiff—not ideal for users with arthritis. And its short cord means it needs to sit close to an outlet.
 <p>Sharper Image 1-Touch \$40</p>	This handheld can opener has a strong magnetic grip on lids and leaves a smooth, safe cut around edges.	This opener is loud and “screechy,” which was annoying to some of our at-home testers.
 <p>Cuisinart SCO-60 Deluxe \$48.50</p>	This one is very quiet during use, and some consumers may prefer the sleek stainless steel design.	It's pricey, at close to \$50. The lid grip is poor, and the opener leaves sharp edges. The blade needs to be cleaned between uses.
 <p>As Seen On TV Black Handy \$18</p>	This opener has an auto-stop function (it stops when the can top has been cut completely). It also doesn't leave sharp edges.	It sometimes stalled midway through a job. We also needed to fiddle with a dial to restart the opener a few times.
 <p>Oster \$15</p>	While the price is the lowest of those tested, performance and safety are poor. We don't recommend it. See our cons, at right.	We had trouble attaching cans, and it dropped a partly opened can during testing. It leaves crimped, sharp edges that could cut users.

CR SMART SOLUTION

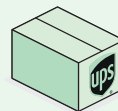
HOW TO PREVENT PACKAGE THEFT

According to CR's September 2021 nationally representative survey of 2,341 U.S. adults, 11 percent of Americans have had at least one package stolen from just outside their home in the past year. These shipping workarounds can help keep your goods away from thieves.



FOR AMAZON ITEMS

If packages have gone missing from your porch, try shipping your orders to a nearby Amazon Hub Locker or Counter pickup location. Amazon Hub Lockers are self-serve lockers, and Amazon Hub Counters are staffed with associates. Amazon Prime members in select areas can also sign up for Amazon Key In-Garage delivery, a service that gives Amazon delivery drivers access to your garage—but you'll need a \$30 Chamberlain myQ Smart Garage Control for it to work. CR staffers tried this In-Garage delivery service, and it worked flawlessly.



FOR UPS, FEDEX & USPS ITEMS

Try using UPS' My Choice tool, FedEx's Delivery Manager, and USPS' Delivery Instructions, which let you tell drivers to leave a package at a less conspicuous drop-off area, such as a back door. FedEx and UPS also let you place a delivery hold if you're on vacation, or reschedule a delivery for a different day. Both also let you opt to ship to local FedEx or UPS stores, as well as specific pharmacies and grocery stores. Keep in mind that many retailers allow you to ship items to a walk-in store for pickup (which can also save you on shipping fees).



HEALTH UPDATE

The Truth About Cold Remedies

ADULTS GET AN average of two to three colds per year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). That means a lot of time spent with a runny nose, sore throat, and more. So which remedies for these ills have actually proved to make us feel better—and which haven't? Read on for answers.

REMEDY 1

Chicken Soup

Some evidence suggests that soup may ease cold symptoms. One widely known study, from University of Nebraska pulmonologist Stephen Rennard, MD, found that chicken-vegetable soup inhibited the movement of white blood cells that trigger nasal congestion.

SHOULD YOU TRY IT? Yes. Rennard's findings are compelling, but the truth is that eating any type of hot soup will help hydrate you. That, in turn, can loosen mucous so

that you can better expel it, says William Schaffner, MD, professor of preventive medicine at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine in Nashville, Tenn.

REMEDY 2

Hot Drinks

Many of us turn to drinks like tea to soothe a sore throat. When the Cardiff University's Common Cold Centre in Wales gave 30 cold and flu sufferers hot or tepid drinks, those who sipped hot beverages reported more relief than those who sipped tepid ones.

SHOULD YOU TRY IT? Yes. Tea and other hot drinks may soothe a sore throat and ease congestion. If you have a cough, it's also a good idea to try stirring some honey into your tea: Research has also shown that honey may help suppress a cough. Drinking fluids of all types keeps you hydrated, but it is best to stick with uncaffeinated drinks when possible and water.

REMEDY 3

Salt Water Nasal Rinses

In 2015, researchers looked at five studies on rinsing nasal passages with salt water. Only one—the largest of the five, though—found that nasal rinses eased stuffiness and reduced decongestant use.

SHOULD YOU TRY IT? Maybe. A salt water rinse may have some value. But steer clear of over-the-counter products labeled "hypertonic." Some studies have found that these more concentrated solutions can irritate nasal passages. And if you opt to use a neti pot (a vessel you fill with warm water and salt), always use distilled or sterile water and clean it between uses. You can also boil tap water for 3 to 5 minutes and let it cool before use, says the Food and Drug Administration.

REMEDY 4

Zinc-Based Supplements & Sprays

In 2020, consumers spent roughly \$162 million on zinc supplements, which have long been touted as a way to feel better faster. But research results on their effectiveness have been mixed.

SHOULD YOU TRY IT? Probably not. Though some studies do indicate that zinc may help shorten the duration of a cold, there's little to support that it eases symptoms, and taking it may lead to nausea. What's more, all supplements—zinc included—are not thoroughly regulated by the FDA, and because you don't always know exactly what's in them, they might interact with other medications you're taking. It's also wise to avoid zinc-based nasal sprays: They may permanently destroy your sense of smell.

IS IT A COLD OR COVID-19?

The flu, colds, and COVID-19 all have similar symptoms, making them tough to self-diagnose. But it's important to find out whether you have COVID-19 early on so that you can get prompt treatment, if needed, and so that you can isolate yourself. If you have symptoms such as fever, cough, chills, runny nose, and/or congestion, get tested for COVID-19.

DINING OUT

WHERE TO FIND HEALTHY MEXICAN FAST FOOD

THERE'S GOOD NEWS at Mexican-style chain restaurants: Some of the most popular—like Chipotle and even Taco Bell—are offering healthier options. “Their meals can be built around nutritious ingredients, like beans, veggies, and corn tortillas,” says Amy Keating, RD, a CR nutritionist. “And at some, you can customize your order with tofu, plant-based meats, and whole grains.” But be aware that even if you include nutritious ingredients, your meal can be a sodium bomb with

1,000 calories or more—which isn't so good for you (most adults should consume only 1,800 to 2,600 calories and less than 2,300 mg of sodium a day). For instance, a burrito at Chipotle—chicken, black beans, brown rice, fajita veggies, guacamole, and salsa in a flour tortilla—contains 1,115 calories and 2,380 mg of sodium. To help you choose Mexican meals more wisely, we reviewed the menus at three chains and selected healthier dishes you'll still enjoy.



CHIPOTLE

▲ Paleo Salad Bowl

Contains guacamole, chicken, fajita veggies, tomatillo green-chili salsa, a mix of romaine lettuce, baby kale, and baby spinach.

CALORIES 460
FAT 29 g
SAT. FAT 6.5 g
CARBS 20 g
FIBER 20 g
PROTEIN 9 g
SODIUM 1,105 mg

WHY WE LIKE IT This bowl is the lowest-sodium choice of the chain's “Lifestyle Bowls,” and it's packed with fiber and vitamins A and C. Ask to go “light” on the salsa to cut an additional 130 mg of sodium.

Veggie Burrito Bowl

Contains guacamole, cilantro-lime brown rice, fajita vegetables, black beans, romaine lettuce.

CALORIES 595
FAT 29.5 g
SAT. FAT 4.5 g
CARBS 72 g
FIBER 17 g
PROTEIN 15 g
SODIUM 920 mg

WHY WE LIKE IT This plant-based option is high in protein and fiber, thanks to the black beans. Opt for brown rice over white because it's a whole grain and is higher in fiber.



QDOBA

▲ 3 Street Style Pulled Pork Corn Tacos

Contains slow-braised pulled pork, corn tortillas, salsa verde, pico de gallo, cotija cheese.

CALORIES 370
FAT 13 g
SAT. FAT 5 g
CARBS 41 g
FIBER 0 g
PROTEIN 26 g
SODIUM 960 mg

WHY WE LIKE IT Corn tortillas are a good-for-you whole grain and are lower in calories and sodium than flour tortillas. These tacos offer filling protein, but their size keeps calories in check.

Kid's Meal: Quesadilla and a Side of Black Beans

Contains chicken, flour tortilla, cheese, beans.

CALORIES 430
FAT 15 g
SAT. FAT 7.5 g
CARBS 50 g
FIBER 16 g
PROTEIN 22 g
SODIUM 890 mg

WHY WE LIKE IT When you're craving something cheesy, kid's meals are a good pick, even for adults. The portion sizes are smaller yet filling, especially when you add high-in-fiber black beans.



TACO BELL

▲ Power Bowl With Grilled Chicken

Contains grilled chicken, seasoned rice, reduced fat sour cream, tomatoes, guacamole, black beans, lettuce, avocado ranch sauce, cheese.

CALORIES 320
FAT 13 g
SAT. FAT 3.5 g
CARBS 27 g
FIBER 7 g
PROTEIN 23 g
SODIUM 1,000 mg

WHY WE LIKE IT This bowl is filling but low in calories. Ask to go “easy” on the cheese, sour cream, sauce, and rice to shave off calories, as well as some saturated fat and sodium.

2 Crunchy Chicken Tacos Supreme

Contains chicken, reduced fat sour cream, tomatoes, lettuce, cheese, crunchy corn tortilla.

CALORIES 340
FAT 16 g
SAT. FAT 6 g
CARBS 26 g
FIBER 4 g
PROTEIN 23 g
SODIUM 660 mg

WHY WE LIKE IT “Crunchy” equals fried, but in this case, it's a better choice than the “Soft” version on a white flour tortilla, which has more sodium, even though the other ingredients are the same.



RECALLS

TO STAY INFORMED ABOUT RECALLS FOR YOUR VEHICLES, READERS WITH MEMBERSHIP CAN USE OUR FREE CAR RECALL TRACKER AT [CR.ORG/MORE](https://www.consumerreports.org/more).



FORD F-150 TRUCKS

Ford has announced the recall of nearly 185,000 F-150 pickup trucks from the 2021 and 2022 model years to fix an issue where the driveshaft may be damaged by loose parts. Heat and noise insulation panels could come loose and impact the aluminum driveshaft. The driveshaft could fracture, which may result in the truck losing power. The driver could lose control of the vehicle if the driveshaft comes in contact with the ground. In addition, if the driver parks the F-150 without using the parking brake, the truck could roll away. The affected vehicles are 4x4 145-inch wheelbase Crew Cab configurations with 302A and above equipment group and sound insulation package that are equipped with an aluminum driveshaft.

What to do: Ford will notify owners of affected vehicles, but owners may also contact Ford at 866-436-7332. The NHTSA campaign number for this recall is 21V986. Ford's own number for this recall is 21S56.

DEWALT EARPHONES

E-filliate is recalling about 301,800 Dewalt Jobsite Pro wireless earphones because they can overheat while charging or in use, posing burn and fire hazards. The wireless earphones were sold at Home Depot, Lowe's, and other electronics stores and hardware stores, and online at [cyberguys.com](https://www.cyberguys.com), from December 2019 through July 2021 for about \$60.

What to do: Stop using the earphones. Contact E-filliate at 888-979-4439 or go to [effiliate.com/notices/DXMA1902091](https://www.effiliate.com/notices/DXMA1902091) for details and to receive a prepaid shipment label to return the product directly to E-filliate in order to receive a free replacement.

BED RAIL RECALLS

DRIVE DEVILBISS BED ASSIST HANDLES AND RAILS

Drive DeVilbiss Healthcare is recalling about 496,100 bed assist handles and bed assist rails because when they're attached to an adult's bed, the user can become entrapped within the bed rail or between the rail and the side of the mattress. This poses a serious entrapment hazard and risk of death by asphyxiation. (Similar bed rail products from other brands, below, have also been recalled for similar hazards.) So far, two deaths have been reported. The bed rails were sold at medical supply stores and online at Amazon and [walmart.com](https://www.walmart.com) from October 2007 through December 2021 for \$30 to \$80.

What to do: Stop using these products and contact Drive DeVilbiss Healthcare at 877-467-3099 or go to [drivemedical.com](https://www.drivemedical.com) for details and a full refund.

ENDURANCE BED RAILS

Essential Medical Supply is recalling about 272,000 Endurance hand bed rails because when they're attached to a bed, the user can become entrapped within the bed rail or between the rail and the side of the mattress. This poses a serious entrapment hazard and risk of death by asphyxiation. So far, one death has been reported. The rails were sold at medical supply stores and online at Amazon and [walmart.com](https://www.walmart.com) from October 2006 through

December 2021 for \$36 to \$98.

What to do: Stop using the rail. Essential Medical Supply will provide a prorated refund for bed rails sold or imported on or after Nov. 1, 2015, based on the age of the bed rail. The company is not offering a remedy for older bed rails. If you have rails sold between October 2006 and October 2015, stop use, disassemble, and dispose of them. Call Essential Medical Supply at 888-856-0111 or go to [essentialmedicalsupply.com/products/recalls](https://www.essentialmedicalsupply.com/products/recalls) for details.

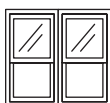
CAREX BED RAILS

Compass Health Brands is recalling about 104,900 Carex brand bed support rails (model P566) and Easy Up 2-in-1 bed rails (model P569) because when they're attached to a bed, the user can become entrapped within the rail or between the rail and the side of the mattress. This poses a serious entrapment hazard and risk of death by asphyxiation. So far, three deaths have been reported. The bed rails were sold at medical supply stores and online at Amazon, [carex.com](https://www.carex.com), and [walmart.com](https://www.walmart.com) from November 2012 through December 2021 for \$22 to \$80.

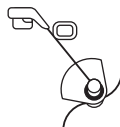
What to do: Stop using the bed rail. Contact Compass Health Brands at 888-571-2710 or go to [compasshealthbrands.com](https://www.compasshealthbrands.com) for details and to get a free repair kit for the bed rail or a refund for the Easy Up 2-in-1 rail.

**MARCH
IS THE
BEST TIME
TO BUY ...**

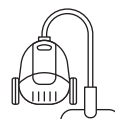
REPLACEMENT WINDOWS



STRING TRIMMERS



VACUUM CLEANERS



For more info, go to
[CR.org/buy0322](https://www.consumerreports.org/buy0322).

PRODUCT UPDATE



THE LATEST
RATINGS FROM
OUR LABS

✓ VIZIO ELEVATE
P514A-H6 \$900

68 OVERALL
SCORE

Pump Up Your TV's Sound

Want to feel like you're
at the multiplex?
Get a soundbar to go
with your television.

by James K. Willcox

✓ YAMAHA
SR-B20A \$150

60 OVERALL
SCORE

AT THIS TIME of the year, a lot of us are enjoying new TVs, courtesy of fall and winter discounts. But whether your TV is brand-new or a couple of years old, there's a good chance it looks better than it sounds.

Consumer Reports has 250-plus sets in our TV ratings, and most earn no more than a decent score for sound. That might be fine for the evening news, but for movies and TV dramas, you might want a bit more sonic *oomph*.

Fortunately, there's an easy—and often inexpensive—remedy: an add-on soundbar speaker system.

At their simplest, soundbars are just external speakers that can improve TV sound. Most models are slim, rectangular units that sit or are wall-mounted below the TV. You can also choose a sound base that supports the weight of a TV, but they're becoming less common as TVs get larger.

Soundbars can range in length from about a foot to more than 50 inches. A rule of thumb is to choose a model no wider than your TV, largely for aesthetics. However, longer models tend to produce a wider, more encompassing “stereo image.” That can add a sense of width and depth to audio. For instance, in a movie where a car is driving from left to right across the screen, you might hear the sound move as well—coming from the left, then fading away off to your right.

If you'll be placing the soundbar on a table or media console, make sure that there's enough room in front of the set and that it doesn't block the remote control's line of sight to the TV if your set has an infrared remote.

Prices vary widely, as you can see from the ratings on page 23. You can spend \$150 or less for a basic all-in-one soundbar such as the Yamaha SR-B20A (shown on facing page) and still make the average TV sound much better. Or



SHOPPING TIPS

HERE ARE a few things to keep in mind before you choose a soundbar.

■ **Don't pay for better sound quality than you need.** If you are using the soundbar only for everyday TV shows, any model with Good sound quality might do. The best reasons to splurge for Very Good or Excellent sound are to use the soundbar for music and to enjoy a fuller experience of dramatic soundtracks.

■ **Make the right connections.** Ensure that the inputs on the soundbar you're considering match the outputs on whatever gear (TVs, cable boxes, streaming players, game consoles, etc.) you'll want to connect. Most soundbars now receive digital audio signals over an HDMI cable. Every model in our ratings also has either optical or coaxial digital audio inputs, which, like HDMI, support multichannel sound. But if you have an older TV or other equipment to hook up, look for a soundbar with red and white RCA stereo audio inputs.

■ **Be sure you can return or exchange the soundbar.** This is true even if you get to listen to it in a store before buying it. Speakers may sound very different in your home from how they sound during an in-store demo.

you can splurge on a more advanced system, such as Vizio's top-of-the-line Elevate P514a-H6 for \$900 (on facing page) and get a full-blown surround-sound experience that can rival what you'll find in a movie theater.

As you go up in price, you'll typically—but not always—get better sound quality, more channels (we'll explain that below), and extra features that can make the soundbar more convenient to use or more versatile.

What kind of features? Some soundbars are easy to use for playing music, in addition to watching TV. For instance, the Bose Smart Soundbar 300, \$450, is among a number of models that can connect to your WiFi network, letting you access online music services such as Pandora and Spotify. And it has two-way Bluetooth, so you can send music from the soundbar to Bluetooth-enabled headphones, as well as play music from your phone on the soundbar.

Models such as the Onn Roku Smart Soundbar, \$130, and Roku Streambar Pro, \$150, can stream movies or TV shows from services such as Amazon, Hulu, and Netflix as an alternative to using the smart features on a TV. And a number of newer models, including the top-rated Sonos Arc, \$900, and Bose Soundbar 700, \$800, double as fully functional smart speakers, with Amazon Alexa and Google Assistant built in.

Channel Choices

You can't see inside, but soundbars come with multiple speakers in the main enclosure. Some also have external subwoofers, which can help produce deeper bass, plus satellite speakers you place in the back of the room. The number of speakers a system comes with is an important feature, and you'll see it expressed as a number printed on packaging and in ads—2.0, 2.1, 5.1, and so on.



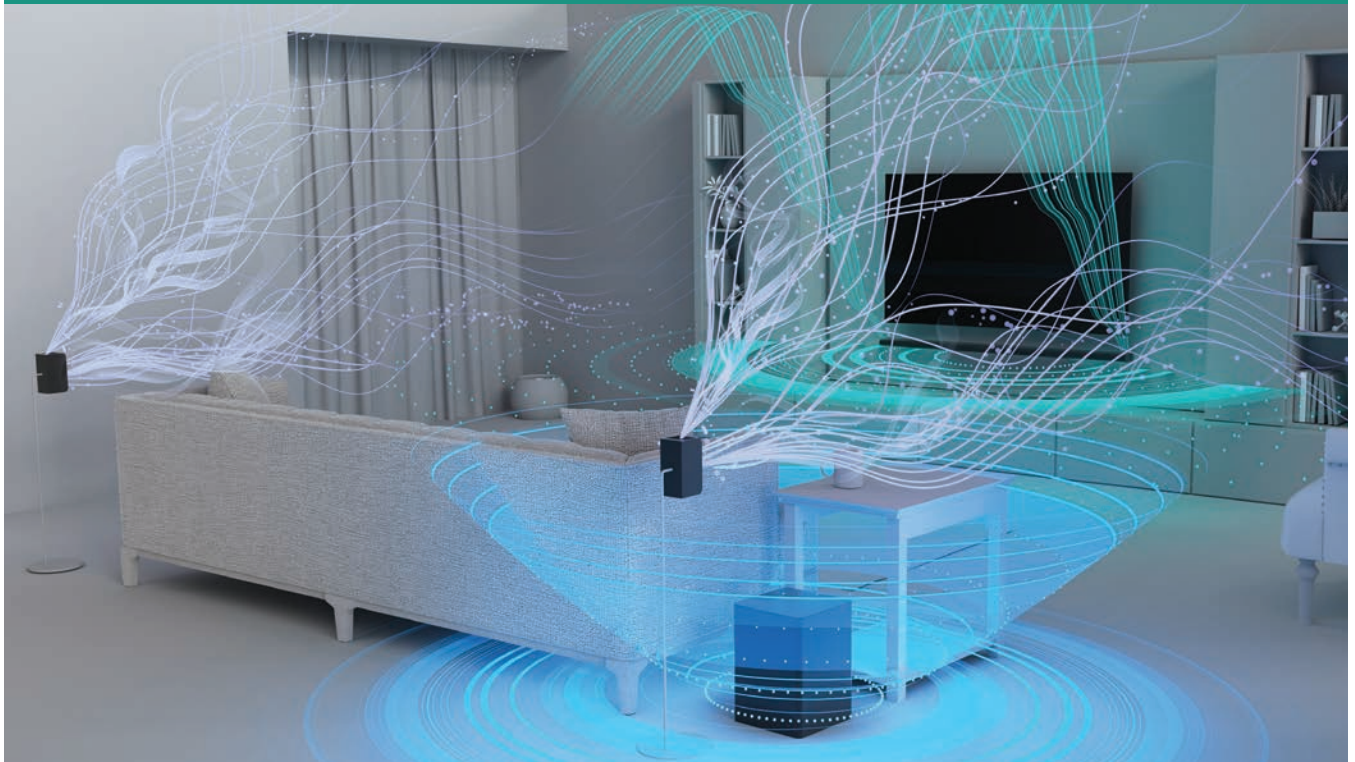
The first digit tells you how many channels of sound you get. A 2.0-channel system has right and left speakers in the main enclosure. This is a basic stereo system, and it can make your TV sound better. However, adding more components has advantages. A 2.1-channel system adds a subwoofer (the .1 in the number).

A 3.0 system such as the Sonos Beam has a third main speaker, which handles dialogue. It ensures that conversations seem to be coming from the characters onscreen.

Getting a 5.1- or 7.1-channel soundbar brings you into the world of real surround sound, with a separate subwoofer and separate rear speakers.

Finally, systems such as the Vizio on page 20 also have Dolby Atmos or DTS:X, newer technologies that add the element of height to standard surround sound, as detailed below. Atmos systems have three digits, such as 5.1.2 or 7.1.4, where the last number indicates the number of “height,” or upward-facing, speakers.

Pushing Surround Sound to New Heights



MANY SOUNDBARS OFFER multichannel audio, and a growing number now also support Dolby Atmos and/or DTS:X. These “object based” audio technologies make it seem like sounds are coming from specific locations in your environment.

So in an action scene you might hear a helicopter flying

above you and then disappearing in the distance. Most shows on cable TV don’t have this kind of sound, but plenty of content on streaming services and on Blu-ray discs do. “When this is done well, listeners can really get a three-dimensional sound experience,” says Rich Fisco, who leads electronics testing at Consumer Reports.

There are subtle differences between the technologies. Soundbars that support Dolby Atmos have speakers that direct sound upward, to bounce off the ceiling. DTS:X, a rival technology, creates the illusion of height using any surround-sound system; it doesn’t require special upfiring height speakers. Many better-performing systems also

use rear speakers, but not all do. Both versions of object-based audio can work well, depending on the specific soundbar.

In addition, some soundbars—mainly less expensive ones—use similar-sounding “virtual” technologies from Dolby or DTS to simulate the same experience without extra speakers. But the results are mixed, we’ve found.

Ratings ➤ **Sound Decisions** Any of CR's recommended soundbars can improve a typical TV's audio. Some of the top models add surround sound and other features, and also work well for playing music.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results	Features
			Sound quality Ease of use (TV)	Number of channels

FULL-FEATURED SOUNDBARS

✓ Sonos Arc Soundbar	73	\$900	⬆️ ⬆️	5.0.2/5.1.2*
✓ Bose Soundbar 700	72	\$800	⬆️ ⬆️	2.0/4.1*
💰 Sonos Beam	69	\$400	⬆️ ⬆️	3.0/5.1*
✓ Vizio Elevate P514a-H6	68	\$900	⬆️ ⬇️	5.1.4
💰 Samsung HW-Q65T/ZA	64	\$420	⬆️ ⬆️	5.1
✓ LG SP8YA	60	\$800	⬇️ ⬆️	3.1.2/5.1.2*
✓ Bose Smart Soundbar 900	60	\$900	⬇️ ⬇️	5.0.2/7.2.2*
✓ Denon Home Sound Bar 550	60	\$600	⬇️ ⬆️	4.0/6.1* (pend. future update)
✓ Polk Audio MagniFi Max SR	60	\$600	⬇️ ⬆️	5.1
💰 Samsung HW-S60A/ZA	60	\$330	⬇️ ⬆️	5.0/7.1*
💰 Yamaha YAS-209	60	\$300	⬇️ ⬆️	2.1
💰 Polk Audio Command Bar	57	\$260	⬆️ ⬆️	2.1
✓ Definitive Technology Studio 3D Mini	57	\$900	⬇️ ⬆️	4.1
💰 Samsung HW-S50A/ZA	55	\$220	⬇️ ⬆️	3.0/5.1*
Bose Smart Soundbar 300	54	\$450	⬇️ ⬆️	3.0/5.2*
Samsung HW-A450/ZA	54	\$130	⬇️ ⬇️	2.1/4.1*
Vizio V51-H6	54	\$200	⬇️ ⬆️	5.1
Vizio SB36312-G6	53	\$440	⬇️ ⬆️	3.1.2
Onn Roku Smart Soundbar	53	\$130	⬇️ ⬆️	2.0/2.1*
Polk Audio React Soundbar	52	\$200	⬇️ ⬆️	2.0/4.1*
Polk Audio MagniFi Mini	52	\$250	⬇️ ⬇️	2.1
JBL Bar 5.0 MultiBeam	51	\$400	⬇️ ⬆️	5.0
Samsung HW-A550/ZA	51	\$180	⬇️ ⬇️	2.1/4.1*

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score is based on sound quality, ease of setup and use with a TV, ease of setup and use of features, and versatility. The displayed

score is out of a total of 100 points. **Sound quality** represents tonal accuracy and the reproduction of fine sonic detail. Judgments are made with

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results	Features
			Sound quality Ease of use (TV)	Number of channels

FULL-FEATURED SOUNDBARS *Continued*

Sony HT-A7000	50	\$1,300	⬇️ ⬆️	5.0.2/7.1.2*
Roku Streambar Pro	49	\$150	⬇️ ⬆️	2.0/4.1*
LG SP7Y	47	\$300	⬇️ ⬆️	5.1/5.1*
Roku Streambar	40	\$100	⬇️ ⬆️	2.0/4.1*
Klipsch Bar 48	40	\$300	⬇️ ⬆️	3.1/5.1*
Polk Audio SIGNA S3	40	\$250	⬇️ ⬆️	2.1

BASIC SOUNDBARS

💰 Yamaha SR-B20A	60	\$150	⬇️ ⬆️	2.0/2.1*
💰 Creative Stage 2.1	57	\$90	⬇️ ⬇️	2.1
💰 Vizio M21d-H8R	55	\$150	⬇️ ⬆️	2.0
Philips TAB7305/37	53	\$150	⬇️ ⬇️	2.1
LG SP2	51	\$150	⬇️ ⬆️	2.0
Q Acoustics M4	51	\$300	⬇️ ⬇️	2.0
Edifier CineSound B3 Soundbar	51	\$200	⬇️ ⬇️	2.0/2.1*
Denon DHT-S316	49	\$300	⬇️ ⬇️	2.1
Samsung HW-S40T/ZA	48	\$180	⬇️ ⬆️	2.0
Polk Audio SIGNA S2	48	\$150	⬇️ ⬇️	2.1
TCL Alto 8i	44	\$150	⬇️ ⬇️	2.0
LG SK1	40	\$100	⬇️ ⬆️	2.0
Sony HT-X8500	40	\$400	⬇️ ⬆️	2.0
Bestisan Soundbar SG08	40	\$120	⬇️ ⬇️	2.1
Hisense HS214	40	\$100	⬇️ ⬇️	2.0
Insignia NS-HTSB22	40	\$100	⬇️ ⬆️	2.0
Sony HT-G700	36	\$600	⬇️ ⬆️	3.1
Sony HT-S350	31	\$280	⬇️ ⬆️	2.1
Razer Leviathan	30	\$205	⬇️ ⬇️	2.1

the system's own auto speaker setup (if equipped), and all "enhancement" features turned off. **Ease of use (TV)** indicates how easy it is to set up and use

with a TV. **Number of channels** indicates the number of channels the system has as shipped; some models offer the ability to add extra speakers.

*System can be expanded to include surround-sound speakers.

HOME SAFE

Water and electric appliances such as hair dryers and curlers can be a dangerous combo. And wet tile floors can be slick, setting you up for a fall.


Kitchens are the most common spot for accidents in the home, according to government data.



HOME

Make your space more secure by protecting yourself from fires, falls, and much more. With this safety tuneup, you can really relax.

By Rachel Rabkin Peachman
Illustrations by Jack Richardson



Unstable space heaters, furniture, and TVs can tip over, causing serious injuries.

Laundry pods and young children are a bad mix. And lint in dryer vents is a leading cause of house fires.

An outdoor fire can be cozy, but not if it's too close to your house or under an awning.

Glass shower doors that suddenly shatter. Electric heaters that set the drapes, then the house, aflame. Faulty refrigerators that allow food to spoil and send everybody running to the toilet.

These may sound like plot points of a bad horror flick. But they are just a few of the kinds of real-life hazards you can encounter at home, according to a Consumer Reports review of government data.

And they happen more often than you'd think. As a reporter who covers product safety, I was surprised to learn just how many people each year get injured in their homes by everyday household items. Even dishwashers can cause injuries. We based our analysis on reports made to SaferProducts.gov, the public database of the Consumer Product Safety Commission, the government agency that oversees about 15,000 types of products. Items ranging from furniture to fixtures were cited in the complaints.

Taking steps to promote home safety, while always important, is extra-critical these days because the pandemic has caused many of us to spend more time in our homes. In 2021, CR conducted several nationally representative surveys, each with more than 2,000 people, to identify home safety issues that concern Americans. Here, we go room by room to identify the problem areas and to provide expert advice on how to make your home a safe space.



KITCHEN

THE KITCHEN IS the heart of the home, but it's also an injury hotspot. In the 10-year period CR analyzed, we found more than 10,000 reports of injuries that happened in the kitchen—more than any other room in the house. As you might expect, many of them are burns and lacerations—after all, it's easy to underestimate your need for oven mitts or overestimate your skills with a chef's knife. But cooking fires and electrical wiring problems were also prominent causes. And those dishwashers: Turns out when interior plastic parts warp, they can expose sharp edges that can cut people. While there isn't one single way to prevent kitchen dangers, experts recommend taking the following steps.



SAFETY BASICS

Fire Extinguishers

Keep one near but not next to your stove: Smoke or fire from the appliance could block access. For the kitchen, one with just a B on its label is okay because it will work on oil and grease fires and is small, making it easy to handle. But others in the house—put one on each floor—should be labeled ABC. They also work on electric, wood, and paper fires. Check periodically to make sure they are pressurized, and replace after about 12 years.

GOOD TO KNOW: Don't store it under a sink. Leaks could damage it, and it could be hard to find behind a mess of cleaning supplies.

AVOID SLIPS AND FALLS

Tripping over an open dishwasher door can bang your shin and send you sprawling. So close it when you finish loading the dishwasher. Other good habits: If you spill something, mop it up right away; put commonly used items in easy-to-reach cabinets; and for things stored up high, use a sturdy step stool, not a chair.

FIX OLD WIRES

Up-to-date wiring is extra-important in kitchens because of all the gadgets we plug in there. Wiring that's not up to snuff can spark fires when those appliances power up, says

Jim Nanni, associate director of appliance testing at CR. If you've lived in your home for many years and haven't had it inspected lately, have an electrician check the wiring. That's a step only 35 percent of single-family homeowners say they've done in their current home, according to one of CR's 2021 surveys. And do a periodic self-check. One sign of trouble: A plug won't stay in.

GET GROUNDED

Be sure you have GFCI (ground-fault circuit interrupter) outlets in your kitchen. They are the ones with reset buttons: When they detect any variation from normal current, an internal switch cuts the flow of electricity. They're

key in the kitchen because water and electricity don't play nicely together, Nanni says.

MONITOR FRIDGE AND FREEZER TEMPS

Don't let food poisoning be the first sign that your fridge is on the fritz. Refrigerators don't always keep the temp where you want it, or the temperature display might not be accurate. Some warning signs: Your butter seems softer than normal, or there's condensation in the fridge or ice on freezer walls. Make sure that gaskets on fridge and freezer doors seal tight. And to make sure temperatures are where they belong—37° F

for the fridge and 0° F for the freezer—buy separate thermometers to put in each.

TAKE CARE WITH OVEN DOORS

Glass oven doors can shatter, according to CR's analysis of the CPSC data. One woman, for example, reported that she was taking a sheet of cookies out of her stove when glass from the oven door erupted all over her and the floor. Nanni says the cause could have been a defect in the glass, or a scratch that created a stress point exacerbated by the oven's high heat. To avoid this, keep pots and pans from banging into the glass. And never place cookware on an open glass oven door.

BATHROOM

EVEN EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES—showering, blow-drying, shaving—can sometimes be hazardous. That’s partly because bathrooms get wet and the hard surfaces—sinks, tubs, and tiled walls and floors—can be unforgiving if you fall. There’s also the unhappy mix of water and electric current. Here’s how to injuryproof your bathroom.

USE RUBBER-BACKED BATH RUGS

Alternatively, put a nonskid mat under a bathroom rug, says Melanie Musson, a home safety expert with US Insurance Agents, a website that allows consumers to compare insurance quotes. Whichever rug you use, choose one with a low profile. Thick or plush ones might not seem quite so luxurious if you end up with a bruise after tripping on one. Also consider putting nonslip mats in tubs and showers.

FIX SHOWER DOORS

Yes, these also sometimes shatter. Shower and tub doors were linked to over 300 injuries in CR’s analysis of CPSC data. As with glass oven doors, even minor nicks and scratches can cause stress points, making them vulnerable to breaking if, say, you hit one with your elbow while reaching for the shampoo. Glass could also shatter if doors aren’t aligned properly when they are installed or if they become loose over time. So repair or replace any glass enclosure that is damaged or scratched, or that doesn’t seem to close properly.

SHOWER SAFELY

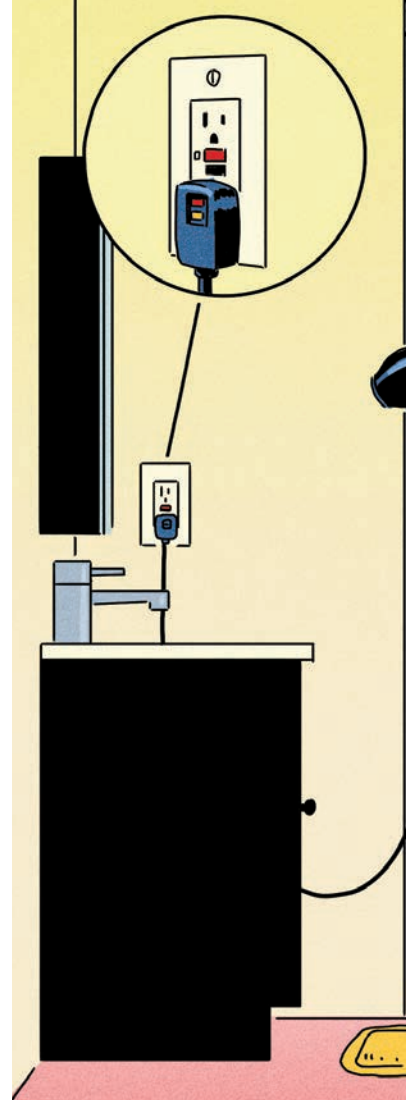
Lower the temperature on your water heater to 120° F. That can help prevent scalding, according to the CPSC. (It can also help you save on your hot water bills.) And if you’re a little unsteady, add a shower seat with rubber tips on the feet so you can sit while you clean yourself. Also consider installing a handheld showerhead set on a sliding bar with a 6-foot hose that you can use while you are sitting or standing.

BE CAREFUL WITH ELECTRONICS

You know that blow-drying your hair while taking a bath is a really bad idea. But also dangerous: using a blow-dryer or any other plugged-in appliance if the water is merely running. If you’re holding a live hair dryer or beard trimmer and it comes into contact with a stream of water from a faucet or an errant spray from a shower, you could get a jolt. Also, though you might not think of your cell phone as a major appliance, it can pack a punch if you plug it in while taking a bath and it plops into the water along with the bubbles. So as in the kitchen, make sure that only GFCI outlets are in the bathroom.

TRY GRAB BARS

Admit it: When you find yourself in a public restroom with a grab bar, you like having it there. So consider installing one at home, too, especially if you are a little unstable on your feet. Place it near the toilet, shower, or tub—or all three places. Having one for visitors is a really good idea, too, both for courtesy and because we live in litigious times. Or do it for your future self: Advance planning helps people stay in their homes as they age, says Geoffrey Hoffman, PhD, an assistant professor at the University of Michigan School of Nursing who has studied preventing falls. For an extra boost getting off the toilet, consider a “comfort height” seat, which is a little taller than standard.



SAFETY BASICS

First-Aid Kit

Every house, and vehicle, should have at least one proper first-aid kit, along with a list of emergency numbers, including those for poison control and your doctors. The American Red Cross says to be sure your first-aid kit contains:

- a roll of adhesive cloth tape, plus a mix of bandages and compress dressings
- sterile gauze pads and gauze rolls
- antiseptic wipes and antibiotic ointment
- hydrocortisone ointment or cream
- instant cold compresses
- tweezers
- over-the-counter pain relievers
- oral thermometer
- disposable medical gloves
- an emergency survival blanket
- a “breathing barrier” to use when performing CPR, and instructions on how to use it
- a first-aid manual

Also, download the American Red Cross first-aid app for instant access to information on how to handle emergencies ranging from scrapes to heart attacks.



LAUNDRY ROOM

YOU EXPECT FIRES to start in your kitchen, but your laundry room? Local fire departments respond to almost 14,000 dryer fires every year, according to a 2020 National Fire Protection Association report. A common culprit: lint, which turns out to be remarkably flammable stuff. (In fact, DIYers on YouTube can show you how to use the stuff as kindling for your fireplace.) Washing machines with faulty wire or cable insulation can also trigger house fires. To prevent these and other hazards, follow these tips.

CLEAN YOUR VENTS

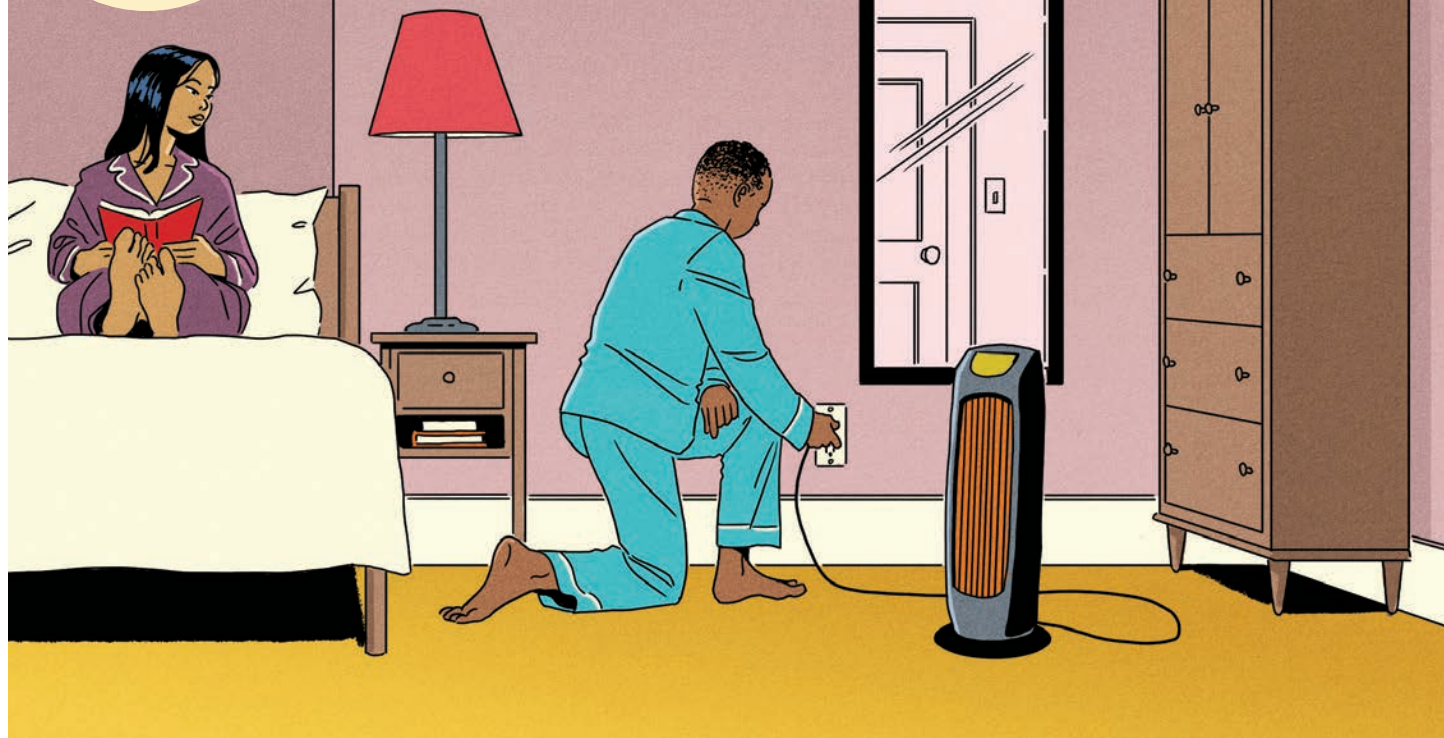
Have your dryer vent cleaned and inspected annually by a professional who maintains heating, ventilating, and air conditioning systems. And clean the lint filter before each use. The NFPA estimates that about a third of dryer fires are caused by vents clogged with fibers that ignite when the dryer is running. Rick Bohdel, president of Ductz International, which specializes in dryer vents and other HVAC systems, says to watch for these signs of a clogged vent.

- *It's taking longer than usual for clothes to dry.*
- *Just-dried clothes feel hotter to the touch than normal.*
- *The laundry room is starting to feel like a sauna.*

LOCK UP LAUNDRY PODS

These detergent packets can look like candy to kids, but they're quite dangerous if ingested. Even touching the pods and then rubbing your skin or eyes can cause harm. From January through November 2021, there were 9,548 calls to poison control centers involving children 5 and younger who ingested or touched laundry pods, according to the American Association of Poison Control Centers. So store laundry pods on a high shelf or in a locked cabinet. If you live in a home with a child under 6 or a cognitively impaired adult, CR recommends using liquid detergent instead of laundry pods.

Anchor furniture securely to studs in the wall to prevent it from tipping over. And unplug space heaters so they can't spark a flame overnight.



BEDROOM

IDEALLY, YOUR BEDROOM is your safe haven, where you can escape life's stressors. And it can be. These tips will help you sleep more safely and soundly.

SECURE FURNITURE

That means attaching heavy furniture—think dressers, bookcases, and jumbo-sized TVs—to the wall, particularly in kids' rooms. Each year from 2017 through 2019, an average of 19,900 people went to ERs for injuries related to furniture tip-overs. And between 2000 and

2019, 351 people were reported killed in tip-over incidents, according to the CPSC. And it's not just young children: More than 11,000 adults are injured each year by tip-overs. Even expensive and seemingly well-made dressers can tip, especially when a drawer is open or a TV is on top. Yet in one of CR's 2021 surveys, less than a third of Americans said they anchor any of

their furniture. So keep your furniture and TV stable. Here's how.

- When purchasing new dressers, check CR's tests to identify stable ones. Go to [CR.org/tipover0322](https://www.consumerreports.org/tipover0322).
- Anchor dressers to studs in your wall, using anti-tip kits that come with the product or stand-alone kits you buy separately.
- Never use drywall anchors or toggles; they pull out too easily.
- On the furniture, attach the bracket as high as you can, preferably into solid wood.
- For TVs, use a wall mount when possible instead of putting the set on top of a dresser or another piece of furniture.
- If you can't mount the TV on a wall, make sure the piece of furniture it is on is stable and large enough to support it, and anchor the TV as you would a dresser.

SPACE HEATER RULES

About 1,700 house fires and 80 deaths are tied to portable space heaters annually. Here are some tips for safe use.

- Place space heaters on hard, level, nonflammable flooring.
- Don't use in a child's room, and never leave one unattended.
- Keep them at least 3 feet away from bedding, curtains, and other combustible materials.
- Check cords for damage, don't use with extension cords, and consider arc-fault circuit interrupter outlets or circuit breakers. They prevent fires when appliances that draw a heavy current cause an electric arc or overheat loose connections.
- Check CR's ratings ([CR.org/spaceheaters0322](https://www.consumerreports.org/spaceheaters0322)) for heaters that did well in safety testing.



SAFETY BASICS

Smoke & Carbon Monoxide Detectors

Put at least one smoke detector on every level of your home, including the basement. Also put one in hallways, especially outside bedrooms, and in each sleeping area. Bedroom alarms are critical if people sleep with their doors closed—which is a good idea because that helps keep fires from spreading.

Also place carbon monoxide detectors, which check for the potentially lethal odorless gas, on every level of your home and outside each bedroom.

Don't put detectors within 10 feet of the stove, because normal cooking smoke can trigger false alarms and prompt you to disable the device. That's a bad idea, but it's something that 30 percent of Americans in one of CR's 2021 surveys said they had done.

CR recommends interconnected devices, especially for large homes; if a problem occurs in one part of the house, you'll be alerted wherever you are.

Hardwired detectors need special wiring, and the outlets for plug-in models are often low on a wall, which is not ideal. Battery-powered ones can go anywhere, and many last years. For more go to [CR.org/detectors0322](https://www.consumerreports.org/detectors0322).

A Safe, and Cozy, Nursery

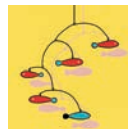
As a mom who also writes about product safety, my new-parent friends are maybe just a little tired of hearing my repeated warnings about all the products they need to watch out for in their infants' nurseries. And it's true, the standard advice—babies should be put to bed on their backs on a firm, flat surface free of soft bedding—can sound cold. But here's what I also want my friends to know: You don't have to sacrifice comfort to create a safe sleep space. You just need to think creatively about how to achieve it. Here are some ideas.



INSTEAD OF:
A loose blanket in your infant's crib
GO WITH:
Sleep sacks or swaddles

Any soft bedding is a no-no because it increases the risk of suffocation. But keep your baby warm overnight and during naps in a cuddly sleep sack, which is a kind of wearable blanket. That has the extra benefit of being something your baby can't kick off. You can also wrap your newborn in a swaddle—essentially a small blanket wrapped and tucked in around your baby. That simulates the snug environment of the womb and can help babies sleep more soundly. To swaddle safely: Leave legs and hips

loose so your baby can stretch, and stop swaddling when they begin to try to roll over, typically around 2 months.



INSTEAD OF:
Pillows, toys, and padded bumpers in the crib
GO WITH:
Mobile-type toys

Pillows of any type—even those marketed to treat minor flat-head syndrome—can be a hazard. But it's okay to have toys suspended above your baby's crib, as long as they're out of reach. And of course, go ahead and make the rest of the baby's room cozy, with embroidered pillows, soft toys, or stuffed animals, as long as they are out of reach.



INSTEAD OF:
Bed-sharing
GO WITH:
Room sharing

Don't have an infant in bed with you except for nursing or comfort. But it's a good idea to keep the baby's crib, bassinet, portable crib, or play yard in your bedroom, close to your bed. That cuts the risk of sudden infant death syndrome by as much as 50 percent, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics, and will make it easier for you to feed, comfort, and watch your baby.



INSTEAD OF:
An inclined sleeper
GO WITH:
A bouncy seat

Inclined sleepers—tiny, hammocklike beds for infants—were essentially banned by the CPSC in June 2021 after they were linked to numerous infant deaths. But it's still fine to use a bouncy seat. That's a similar-looking product but is meant to be used when the baby is awake and being supervised. If your baby begins to nod off in the seat, move them to a crib, bassinet, or play yard.

Rachel Rabkin Peachman
Rachel covers product safety for Consumer Reports, and led CR's investigation into the dangers of inclined sleepers.





LIVING AREAS & STAIRS

FALLS, FIRES, AND FREAKISH ACCIDENTS with kids: Those are three of many homeowners' biggest concerns, and for good reason. Slips and falls are common anywhere in the house, and are especially scary around stairs. Older people, in particular, are prone to injuries and mishaps; each year people 65 and older make up over 3 million trips to emergency rooms to treat injuries related to falls, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Most home fires start in kitchens, but fireplaces and woodstoves also pose a variety of risks, from clogged chimneys to smoky rooms to superheated glass doors. And for young children, the hazards can come from anywhere, and when you least expect them. Here's how to ward off those dangers.

GET GOOD LIGHTING

Trips and falls are more likely in the dark or even just in dim lighting. So make sure lights are working at the top and bottom of all stairways, plug in night lights in all halls, and make sure well-traveled paths through living rooms, dining rooms, and other shared spaces are well-lit.

STAY STABLE

That means treads on stairs and wood or tile floors, securing large rugs to the floor with nonskid pads, and avoiding throw or area rugs, which are harder to keep secure. Make sure all electric cords run along sides of room, not out in the middle of the floor. If possible, have handrails on both sides of stairs.

USE FIRE SCREENS

Nothing makes a home feel cozier than a roaring

fire—as long as it stays where it belongs. So always use a screen to cover the opening. The glass doors on some fireplaces and wood or pellet stoves can get superhot. So never touch them with bare hands. Oven mitts or welder's gloves can protect when touching handles or emptying ash bins. Another oft-forgotten chore: Get your chimney inspected and cleaned every year. And an air purifier can remove irritating particulates.

GO CORDLESS

It can take less than a minute for a small child to be strangled after getting tangled in a window cord, according to the CPSC. And those accidents are often silent. So if you have young kids in your home, use cordless window coverings. Or at least move furniture away from windows, make cords as short as possible, or tie them securely back with an attractive ribbon or sash.

OUTDOORS

LIFE IN OUR OWN BACKYARDS is supposed to be safe. But the tools we use to keep our yards tidy cause thousands of injuries and dozens of fatalities each year. And the pandemic means that more of us are using that equipment, some for the first time. Proper use means more than just limiting kids' access to powerful machines such as riding lawn mowers. It also means taking the right safety steps with the propane heaters and chimineas—portable firepits with a chimney—now showing up on so many of our patios and decks.

WARM UP SAFELY

Firepits. Whether you gather around a portable firepit, a built-in fireplace, a chiminea, or a simple hole in the ground ringed with stones, the fire should ideally be at least 20 feet from your house or other structures such as garages and fences. Don't put them under tree limbs or electrical wires, either. When the fire is done, spread out the coals and unburnt logs as thinly as possible and douse with a hose set to a wide spray till the embers go out.

Propane heaters. It can be easy to think that these stand-up heaters, now common in outdoor restaurants and patios alike, pose little danger. But their heating elements get red-hot and can burn skin or ignite flammable materials that touch the heater, such as a windblown paper napkin or clothing. And never use gas-burning models indoors; as with generators, they produce carbon monoxide. Make sure you put them on a flat, solid, noncombustible surface, so they don't tip over—or spread fire if they do.

HOW TO RUN A PORTABLE GENERATOR

Don't use one in the garage or basement, or in a semi-enclosed area, such as a porch. These machines emit carbon monoxide. The CPSC estimates that each year more than 700 people die of

carbon monoxide poisoning while using portable generators. Yet 20 percent of owners say they typically use their portable generator in a shed, in a garage, or indoors, according to one of CR's 2021 surveys. Take these steps to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning while using a generator.

- Place the generator at least 20 feet from your home.
- Always direct exhaust away from your home.
- Choose one that shuts off automatically if CO builds up to dangerous levels.
- Look for a term such as "CO Guard," "CO Protect," "CO Detect," "CO Shield," or "CO Sense" on the label.
- Make sure it meets one of two voluntary standards: ANSI/UL 2201 Certified for Carbon Monoxide Safety or ANSI/PGMA G300 Certified Safety & Performance.
- Go to [CR.org/generators0322](https://www.consumerreports.org/generators0322) to find safe and effective portable generators.

MOW CAREFULLY

Injuries related to riding mowers sent an average of 33,000 people to the emergency room each year between 2018 and 2020, according to the CPSC. Here's how to prevent those injuries.

- Read the instructions. It's important to understand how to use all the mower's controls before you hop on.
- Check terrain, looking especially for bumps, steep slopes, large holes, and rocks, all of which can overturn a machine.
- Don't mow wet grass, which can cause you to lose traction and control.
- Protect your feet. That means never trying to stabilize the machine by putting your feet on the ground, and wearing sturdy shoes, with laces tied tight.
- Practice good gas hygiene. Never remove the gas cap or add fuel while the engine is running, and let the engine cool before refueling. Don't refuel indoors or in the garage.



Keep your firepit at least 20 feet from your house and away from overhead tree limbs. And have a hose nearby to douse flames when you're finished.

How to Protect Yourself

SCAMS ARE ON THE RISE

Fraudsters are everywhere, targeting us by text, email, Facebook, and more. What to know now.

BY PENELOPE WANG

WHEN ANGELICA CHAVEZ, a 30-year-old fashion illustrator in Los Angeles, met “Weijia,” a local businessman, on a dating app last fall, she was delighted to find that they had many interests in common, including entrepreneurship and music. The two began sharing photos and texting multiple times daily through WhatsApp. “We were so alike, and he was so kind and interested in talking about our daily lives,” Chavez says.

Then Weijia casually mentioned

that he was investing in cryptocurrency, a digital-only form of currency whose value tends to be volatile. When Chavez expressed interest, he offered to help her get into the market, too.

With both trepidation and excitement, she purchased the cryptocurrency Ethereum through an app Weijia recommended. Her investment of a few hundred dollars appeared to nearly double in value within minutes, allaying any fears she had about the digital marketplace. “When I saw that, I thought ‘okay, this is real,’” Chavez says.



She continued adding to her portfolio over the next several weeks. But she was becoming frustrated with her virtual dating relationship. Every time she and Weijia discussed meeting in person, he cancelled with an excuse.

After a month, she told Weijia that she'd drop him if they didn't meet. Shortly after that, he stopped responding to her texts—and her cryptocurrency account balance, about \$20,000, vanished. "I realized I had ignored a lot of red flags, because he got me to trust him," she says.

Like Chavez, a growing number of Americans are falling victim to scams. The first three quarters of 2021 saw 2.1 million reports of fraud, putting it on a par with all of 2020, according to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). And in a November 2021 nationally representative Consumer Reports survey of 2,057 American adults, 95 percent said they had received communication in the past 30 days that they believed to be fraudulent. Nearly half of Americans reported getting six or more phony messages in a typical week.

The pandemic—and all the time people have been spending online, where scammers can target them by text, email, and social media—likely plays a role. In addition, "the scam landscape has changed," with international criminal organizations increasingly in the mix, says Kathy Stokes, director of fraud prevention programs at AARP. "They've got offices and employees, and lead lists that they buy off other scammers."

But no matter how sophisticated scammers are, there's plenty you can do to help protect yourself. Here, how to spot some top scams, what to do if you've been targeted, and how to avoid fraudsters in the future.



THE IMPOSTER SCAM

You Owe Us Money!

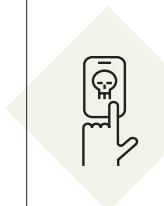
Someone from the IRS or other important-sounding government agency or business calls to alert you to a problem: You owe thousands of dollars in back taxes, a fine from Social Security, or an unpaid debt to a business. The caller may have your bank account data or partial Social Security number, making them seem more credible.

You're also told you must pay up right away or have your financial accounts frozen or face arrest. The caller directs you to use an unusual payment method, often a gift card. To avoid trouble, you follow the instructions to buy a gift card and give the caller the number on the back. The card is immediately drained of value by the scammer.

■ **WARNING SIGNS:** Government employees never call consumers about money owed or threaten arrest. Neither a government agency nor a legitimate business would request immediate payment by gift card. For back tax payments, for instance, the IRS would notify you by mail and have you pay by check or credit card via mail or its secured online site.

■ **WHAT TO DO:** Hang up. If you've already followed the caller's instructions, that gift card money is likely gone. "It's the same as paying someone with cash," Stokes says. But the FTC recommends notifying the gift card issuer right away. Also, report the theft to the police in case you can claim losses on your homeowners insurance or tax return. File a complaint at [ReportFraud.ftc.gov](https://www.reportfraud.ftc.gov) to help agencies track the scammers.

■ **BEST PRACTICES:** Always contact the government agency or business directly if you receive any unexpected calls, texts, email, or other communication.



THE ONLINE SHOPPING SCAM

Awesome Deals Here

Scrolling through Facebook or Instagram, you spot an ad for the cordless drill you've been searching for. Your click leads you to a website where you buy the tool, perhaps with a credit card or by using a debit card or peer-to-peer payment app like Zelle.

These days, you're likely to see ads on social media or Google for everything from drills to designer clothes to cars (even puppies up for adoption). But a growing number of online shoppers aren't getting what they paid for, a Better Business Bureau (BBB) study found. In your case, perhaps no drill arrives. Or when your package does appear, it contains a poor-quality tool or something entirely different, like ... a ruler.

While the last example may seem puzzling, it's increasingly common, says Bill Kresse, an associate professor of accounting at Governors State University in University Park, Ill. Some sales platforms, like Facebook Marketplace, release your payment to a seller once package delivery is confirmed, even if the item inside isn't what you ordered. Then, "the bad guys disappear into the ozone" with your money, Kresse says.

■ **WARNING SIGNS:** No refund policy, phone number, or address is clearly listed. Watch for business emails with Yahoo or Gmail addresses and

YOUR FIELD GUIDE TO COMMON CONS

THE SCAMS OUT there may differ widely, but they share at least one trait: trying to separate you from your money and/or personal information. The folks behind the frauds also have some similarities. "Scammers are very good at

building trust," says Eva Velasquez, president and CEO of the Identity Theft Resource Center, "and know how to create a sense of urgency." This quick take can help you head off trouble. *—by Octavio Blanco*

THE LOWDOWN

WARNING SIGNS



THE IMPOSTER SCAM

CONTACTS YOU BY: **Telephone, email**
MEDIAN LOSS*: **\$850**

This was 2020's most common fraud strategy. Criminal poses as a government official or company representative. Says there's a problem with your account, often that you owe money. Wants the money ASAP and may want personal info, too. Most victims were ages 50 and older.

Unexpected call from someone who claims to be from a government agency. Request from supposed government or business rep for money in hard-to-trace ways, like gift cards.



THE ONLINE SHOPPING SCAM

CONTACTS YOU BY: **Social media, websites**
MEDIAN LOSS: **\$100**

Scammer advertises great deals on enticing products, such as designer handbags, furniture, cars, even adoptable pets. Or may offer scarce items, such as masks or COVID-19 testing kits. Never delivers once you've paid. Often ensnares people 50 and younger.

Often has no clear refund policy, physical address, or phone number listed. Has a disproportionately high number of negative reviews. Business emails with Yahoo or Gmail addresses.



THE EMPLOYMENT SCAM

CONTACTS YOU BY: **Email, social media, job websites, radio/TV**
MEDIAN LOSS: **\$1,950**

Scammer impersonates employer and hires you, and often sends a paycheck, then asks you to return money, claiming they overpaid. The paycheck bounces. May steal your identity, too. Or asks you to pay for work supplies, then disappears. In 2020, more commonly reported by people under 40.

Applications ask for personal financial information and/or Social Security number. Vague job descriptions, positions that promise work from home, flexible hours. Overly fast or easy hiring process.



THE INVESTMENT SCAM

CONTACTS YOU BY: **Online ads, social media, telephone**
MEDIAN LOSS: **\$1,560**

Scammer touts a no-fail investment or insider secrets that will yield big profits, and urges you to send money right away. Then disappears with your funds. Targets people ages 20 to 49.

High-pressure sales pitches with urgency about acting fast. Guarantees that you'll make money. Requests payment in an unusual form, like cryptocurrency or wire transfer.



THE SWEEPSTAKES SCAM

CONTACTS YOU BY: **Email, letter, social media, telephone, text**
MEDIAN LOSS: **\$1,000**

Scammer says you won a prize and requests a fee—maybe for taxes on what you've won—and/or bank information to claim it, then steals that fee or raids your account. In 2020, more commonly reported by people over 50.

Being asked to shell out money or provide personal information to get your winnings, or in some cases, increase your odds of winning. Pressure to act now.

a lot of negative reviews.

■ **WHAT TO DO:** If you paid by credit card, ask a representative how to get your money back. With some other payment methods, it may be iffier. Report the theft to the platform you bought the item on, and to keep scrutiny on scammers, to ReportFraud.ftc.gov and BBB.org/scamtracker.

■ **BEST PRACTICES:** Instead of clicking on links in online ads, go to retailer websites directly, Kresse says. You can't be sure where links will take you. When shopping online, try to pay with a credit card, which offers the strongest protection. Keep a record and screenshots of purchases.



THE EMPLOYMENT SCAM

A Great Job Awaits

While job hunting, you may see positions like mystery shopper, shipping/warehouse worker, or remote assistant on social media and employment websites like Indeed.com. (That online platform was the one most often cited for employment scams in a 2020 BBB report.) But a stranger may also reach out to you about a job by text or email.

Applications may ask for your Social Security and financial account numbers. Once you're hired—usually in a lightning-fast process—your new boss asks for what may be thousands of dollars for work supplies or training, then disappears. Or right after sending your first paycheck, the employer asks for some of the money back, saying you've been overpaid accidentally. Once you return it, your paycheck bounces, leaving you on the hook for the money you sent

back plus a bounced check fee. And the job scammer may also use your information to steal from you.

■ **WARNING SIGNS:** Hiring applications shouldn't ask for Social Security or bank account numbers, nor should employers ask you to pay for training or work supplies—or request that you “refund” them part of a check they've sent you.

■ **WHAT TO DO:** If you shared personal data like your financial account numbers, freeze your credit and change account passwords right away, says Eva Velasquez, CEO of the nonprofit Identity Theft Resource Center. (IdentityTheft.gov has step-by-step identity protection plans.) Ask your bank to either flag or close the account and reverse the transaction if you've lost money.

■ **BEST PRACTICES:** Be wary of applying for shipping/warehouse or mystery shopper work, and jobs

that have vague descriptions or offer work from home or flexible opportunities, as well as “on the spot” offers, the BBB says. Check to see if a job is actually listed on the company's website, and search online for the company's name plus “reviews,” “complaints,” or “scam.”



THE INVESTMENT SCAM

Big Profits, Low Risk

You get a call from an investment adviser or broker with a can't-miss opportunity. It may be someone in your orbit (a member of your church, a virtual acquaintance from a Facebook group) or a complete



FOUR WAYS TO PREVENT A SCAM

1. Trust your gut

Scammers often urge you to act immediately. If you take some time to think about the message or offer you've gotten before acting on it, you may be able to sidestep a scam.

stranger. You're told that to get in on the investment, you need to send money through a peer-to-peer payment app like Cash App or Venmo, a wire transfer, a gift card, or cryptocurrency (as Angelica Chavez was told). But that surefire investment turns out to be phony, and because the payment method you were urged to use is hard to track, your money is gone.

■ **WARNING SIGNS:** Being pitched through a cold call is suspect, Stokes says. But no matter who approaches you, if you're asked to invest through a payment app, wire transfer, gift card, or cryptocurrency, it's a strong indication that the opportunity is bogus. Being rushed, and the promise of huge profits and low risk, are also red flags.

■ **WHAT TO DO:** If you lost money through an investment scam, you're unlikely to get it back, but you can

probably claim a loss on your taxes. And it's wise to report the theft to the payment platform that you used and to your local police department. Also file a complaint with the Securities and Exchange Commission (sec.gov/oiea/complaint.html), the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (finra.org/investors/need-help/file-a-complaint), and ReportFraud.ftc.gov, which tracks patterns of complaints.

■ **BEST PRACTICES:** Even if you know the person offering the deal, check their professional background first. Scammers are far less likely to have legitimate credentials. Go to Investor.gov to find out if an investment adviser is registered or licensed, or has a history of disciplinary actions. Do the same for brokers at BrokerCheck.finra.org. Always pay for investments in easy-to-track ways.

2. Don't respond

Ignore calls, texts, and email if you're unsure about who the sender or caller is. It's better, for instance, to simply let an unexpected phone call go to voicemail. Also, if you generally rely on caller ID, be aware that it can be falsified. And never give your personal or financial info to anyone who contacts you out of the blue. If you think that a message might have merit, get in touch with the organization yourself in a way you're sure is legitimate.

3. Check before you click

Don't click on links in email and texts if you have any uncertainty; some may put your device's security in jeopardy. Hovering your mouse over a link in an email will reveal the entire URL, which may help you determine if it's fraudulent. Case in point: An ".ru" at the end of a URL means the link you thought was to a local retailer was created in Russia.

4. Pay wisely

With peer-to-peer payment methods like Cash App, Venmo, and Zelle, for instance, it's best to use them only with people you know, says Bill Kresse, a fraud expert. Also, don't send money to anyone who sends you an unsolicited check, even if the funds appear in your account, says Steven Baker, an international investigations specialist for the Better Business Bureau. It may take weeks for a bank to realize a check is fake—which may put you in a dicey position.



THE SWEEPSTAKES SCAM

You're a Winner!

You get a text, email, or call saying you've won an iPad, a gift card, or a new car. The message, which may appear to be from a government lottery or sweepstakes, or a well-known firm (think Publishers Clearing House), tells you that you need to pay a handling charge or taxes on your winnings up front. Or maybe it says you're only a potential winner but a small fee will boost your shot at the prize.

The "sponsor" asks for a credit card number to cover these costs and, possibly, for your bank account info in order to send your winnings.

To persuade you to ante up, they even deposit a small check into your account. You hand over your credit card info to pay the fees. Your card is charged, the check bounces, and the scammer drops out of sight.

■ **WARNING SIGNS:** Do you remember entering that sweepstakes? Even if you do, legitimate sponsors won't ask for money or account information.

■ **WHAT TO DO:** Contact your bank and credit card company. Depending on the type of transaction, it's sometimes possible to get your money back. Report losses to the police and ReportFraud.ftc.gov, and file a complaint at IdentityTheft.gov if you gave the scammer personal info. For mail scams, notify the United States Postal Inspection Service (uspis.gov).

■ **BEST PRACTICES:** If you really think you may have won a prize, reach out directly to the sponsoring organization, not to email or phone numbers the scammer provided. Online, search for the organization by name along with terms like "review," "complaint," and "scam."





CR's Ultimate Stain- Removal Guide

IT'S A COMMON SCENARIO: You're enjoying wearing your favorite shirt or sinking into a comfy armchair when suddenly the mustard squeeze-bottle misfires or your coffee cup takes flight and makes one heckuva mess.

While you can't hit the rewind button, if you act quickly and appropriately, the splatters may not have a fighting chance, says Kathlyn Swantko, president of the consumer textile-information resource FabricLink.

To help you keep your home and clothes stain-free, we've gathered the smartest, simplest stain-removal advice and tools to tackle common offenders. First, some ground rules:

- **TAKE CARE OF ANY MESS ASAP.** The sooner you treat it, the easier it will be to remove.
- **MANY STAINS BENEFIT FROM BLOTTING.** Use plain white paper towels or a clean white cloth (cotton or microfiber—and dry unless otherwise noted) to dab up messes.
- **BLOT FROM THE EDGES OF THE SPILL TOWARD THE CENTER.** Do the reverse and you may spread the stain.
- **BE VERY SPARING WITH WATER** when working on upholstery fabrics to avoid ending up with a water-ring stain.
- **CHECK TAGS AND LABELS FOR LAUNDERING INFORMATION.** "Dry clean only" means the washer may ruin the fabric or trim.
- **AFTER USING A PRETREAT PRODUCT** on an item, it's okay to launder it with other items. Trying bleach? Check that the other fabrics are colorfast. If in doubt, wash the stained item separately.
- **WHEN COLORFASTNESS IS A CONCERN,** test your cleaner with a cotton swab in a small, unnoticeable area first.
- **ON HARD SURFACES,** such as stone countertops, use a nonabrasive scrubbing pad (steel wool will scratch).
- **DON'T TOSS AN ITEM IN THE DRYER** until a stain is gone; heat may lock it in.

Coffee, Tea, Wine

These beverages started as plants and get their stain power from vegetable dyes.

WASHABLE FABRICS: Work from the back of the fabric, flushing it with cold water, then apply an enzymatic laundry pretreat (see “Stain-Stopping Toolkit,” on facing page). Rub a little laundry detergent into the stain and launder using the warmest water the label recommends. Repeat until the stain disappears.

UPHOLSTERY: Blot like crazy, then splash with carbonated water; blot and repeat. No luck? Dampen with water, apply detergent solution (see “Stain-Stopping Toolkit,” on facing page), work it in with a clean sponge, and blot. Repeat until clean. Dab with water to remove detergent, and blot.

LEATHER: Blot with a damp cloth as soon as possible.

CARPET: Blot well. Mix 4 cups of water, a tablespoon of dish soap, and a quarter-cup of white vinegar, and apply with a clean sponge, soaking the spot. After 5 to 10 minutes, blot again with a clean cloth.

NATURAL STONE COUNTERTOPS (such as granite and marble, but not nonporous quartz): Make a paste of baking soda and hydrogen peroxide, says Lenny Sciarrino, president/CEO and co-founder of Granite Gold, a stone- and quartz-care company. Cover the spot and let it sit for several hours.

NON-WOOD FLOORING: Rub gently with scouring powder and a cloth dampened in hot water—or dab with 3 percent hydrogen peroxide.

Ketchup/Tomato Sauce

These foods are often doubly challenging, says Swantko, because tomatoes’ red pigment acts as a dye and any oil (in, say, pasta sauce) tends to saturate and stick to fabric fibers.

CARPET: Blot, or scrape with a butter knife to remove excess, then saturate the stain with ammonia solution (1 tablespoon of clear household ammonia to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of water) from a spray bottle; blot well. Next, apply a bit of detergent solution (see “Stain-Stopping Toolkit,” on facing page); blot well. Spritz the area with water, and blot.

Spray it again, then cover with a pad of paper or cloth towels under a weight to dry. (Got a brick? Perfect.)

WASHABLE FABRICS: Saturate the area with an enzymatic laundry pretreatment and wait a few minutes. If it’s a large stain, rub in liquid laundry detergent, then wash in cold water.

UPHOLSTERY: Blot to remove excess. Wet fabric with a small amount of water, soak for 1 minute, and blot with paper towel. Repeat until the stain is gone; blot dry. Stain still there? Dampen the area, use a sponge to work a small amount of a detergent solution (see “Stain-Stopping Toolkit,” on facing page) into the stain, and blot until it’s gone.

LEATHER: This is a tricky one. You can try the same approach as for “Mustard” (see facing page), or ask your furniture dealer or dry cleaner for advice.



PROP STYLING: MIAKO KATOH



Mustard

Turmeric, the spice in mustard, curries, and many other foods, contains curcumin, which gives the seasoning its hue. The problem: Curcumin is not water-soluble, so it's a challenge to remove.

WASHABLE FABRICS, UPHOLSTERY, AND CARPET: Scrape off the condiment first. Mix up the detergent solution (see "Stain-Stopping Toolkit," below) and work into the fabric, rinse well, and dry the item in the sun. (Curcumin is very sensitive to sunlight—nature's bleaching agent.) Another method for washable fabrics: Soak in diluted color-safe bleach for at least an hour or overnight, then launder. Repeat as needed.

LEATHER: Mix a solution of mild soap (such as Ivory) in lukewarm water, swishing

it to create suds. Apply only the suds to a sponge and wipe the area. Wipe again, with a clean cloth dampened with clear water. Dry with a soft cloth, then follow with an application of a commercial leather conditioner.

NON-WOOD FLOORING: Remove as much as you can with a detergent solution (see "Stain-Stopping Toolkit," below). If possible, let sunlight into the area for one to two days to help fade the stain. No sun? Blotting with 3 percent hydrogen peroxide may also help.



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

3 STAIN-REMOVAL MISTAKES NOT TO MAKE

1 Drying a stain

Heat can set a stain, often permanently, so check to see whether the spot has come out before you throw the item in the dryer—you may need to put it through the wash a few more times. But if you don't notice the stain in time, all may not be lost: Some people report success with repeating the pretreat/wash steps even after drying.

2 Using chlorine bleach on everything

This liquid is not safe for all fabrics. Use it on some colored items and it may help wash away the stain, but it's likely to remove the fabric's hue as well, leaving the item unsalvageable.

3 Adding too much detergent

With today's concentrated laundry detergents, a little goes a long way. Use too much and it can build up on fabrics, making them dingy. Washers have an extra rinse, rinse and spin, or even a soak cycle to safely remove residual detergent.



TO THE RESCUE

STAIN-STOPPING TOOLKIT

Speedy treatment can help prevent stains from becoming permanent. But it's hard to be quick if you don't have the right supplies. Keep these essentials at the ready to ensure you're always prepared.

Plain White Paper Towels or Cloths

Perfect for blotting up spills. There's no worry that a dye will transfer from fabric or paper and make an already bad situation worse.

Enzymatic Laundry Pretreat

"These make a huge difference. They really break down organic stains," says Jessica Ek, digital communications director at the American Cleaning

Institute. See page 45 for CR's top pick.

Cotton Swabs

These are great for testing the safety of a stain remover on fabric. A swab lets you dab the product on a small or hard-to-reach area of upholstery.

Upholstery Cleaner and/or Dry-Cleaning Liquid

Because you can't throw your sofa or dining-chair seats in the washer, a targeted

stain-lifter (Picrin is one product experts suggest) may save the day.

Acetone Nail Polish Remover

This solvent does a remarkable job on some mishaps—like makeup and super glue. (But don't use it on synthetic fabrics; it could damage them.)

Detergent Solution

Mix 1 teaspoon of a mild white or clear dishwashing

liquid (Dawn is often recommended)—no bleach—in 1 cup of warm water.

Baking Soda and Cornstarch

Each of these absorbent materials is excellent at soaking up a greasy spill.

Ammonia, Bleach, and Plain White Vinegar

These liquids can be useful in a few stain emergencies, but do not mix them.



Oil/Food Grease/ Salad Dressing

Oil-based stains are notoriously challenging—in part because oil and water don't mix. So simply rinsing won't work. Be sure to avoid heat (hot water, the dryer), which locks in these stains. The techniques here are also good for mayo, butter, and body lotion.

WASHABLE FABRICS: Blot, then use an enzymatic laundry pretreat as directed on the label. Rub in a dab of laundry detergent with your fingertip; launder in cold water. Repeat steps as needed before drying.

UPHOLSTERY: Follow the instructions on a stain-removing or dry-cleaning solvent, such as Picrin, or call in a pro.

LEATHER: An oil-based stain is likely to be absorbed by leather. You can try this method: Blot with a clean, dry cloth, then cover the area with a layer of cornstarch. Let sit overnight, then wipe it away with a fresh cloth. Repeat as necessary. Still there? A commercial leather cleaner may remove some of the color along with the stain, so ask your furniture dealer or dry cleaner for advice.

CARPET: Apply a small amount of dish detergent to the spot with a cloth, then blot dry. If that doesn't work, dab on a small amount of dry-cleaning solvent with a fresh cloth. Blot, then rinse. Not gone? Sprinkle on baking soda; vacuum once it has absorbed the stain.

NATURAL STONE COUNTERTOPS (such as granite and marble, but not nonporous quartz): In a small bowl, add baking soda to 1 to 2 tablespoons of acetone-based nail polish remover until it's the consistency of pancake batter, cover the spot with the mixture, and let it sit overnight. The acetone breaks down the oil, and the baking soda absorbs it. Repeat as necessary.

Makeup

Makeup's long-lasting pigments (from minerals, dyes, and colorants) and skin-moisturizing emollients make it tough to remove.

WASHABLE FABRICS: Blot with acetone-based nail polish remover, then try a store-bought cleaning solvent, such as Alba or Goo Gone.

UPHOLSTERY AND CARPET: Blot to remove excess. Dab the spot with a small amount of rubbing alcohol or dry-cleaning solvent (such as Picrin) and blot dry immediately. When working on upholstery, be careful not to wet the fabric or you may wind up with a water mark. When addressing a potential stain on carpet, be careful not to totally soak through with alcohol; it can damage the latex backing.

LEATHER: See "Oil/Food Grease/Salad Dressing," at left, because these are typically oil-based stains.

NON-WOOD FLOORING: Wipe up as much as you can with a paper towel first, then use fine steel wool with all-purpose detergent and water. For a no-wax finish or embossed vinyl flooring, use a plastic scouring pad instead of steel wool.



OH, GIVE UP

TWO STAINS THAT REALLY STICK

"THERE ARE A COUPLE OF STAINS that fall into the 'good luck getting it out' category," says Tom Swantko, content director of FabricLink. They are **permanent ink** and **hair dye**, which are made to add intense color and stay put. You can try specially formulated products ("there are dye strippers on the market," says Swantko), but you may also remove the original color of the fabric or surface. Consult a dry cleaner or upholstery cleaner—and don't expect success.

Water Rings

These are typically made by a wet glass left on a wood surface. If the stain remains after taking the steps here, you may have to refinish the wood surface.

WOOD SURFACES: Blot with a paper towel or cloth, wipe with a damp cloth, and dry with a soft cloth. Still see that ring? In the direction of

the wood grain, rub in a small dab of non-gel toothpaste or a liquid or cream car polish. Wipe with a clean, dry cloth, and polish if desired.



Blood

Blood is a protein stain—add heat and it can become permanent. The key to getting this tough stuff out? “Cold water and speed,” says Swantka.

WASHABLE FABRICS: Flush with cold water, then spray with enzymatic laundry pretreat. Once that has had a chance to work, massage a little laundry detergent into the spot; launder in cold water.

UPHOLSTERY: Blot to remove excess blood. Wet fabric with a minimum amount of water, wait 1 minute, then blot with paper towel. Repeat water/blot procedure until no stain shows on towel; blot dry.

LEATHER: Mix a solution of mild soap (such as Ivory) in cool water. Swish it around to create suds. Apply only the foam with a clean sponge, gently rubbing, taking care not to spread the stain. Wipe the area dry with a clean, soft cloth.

CARPET: Apply a small amount of cold water to the stain as quickly as possible and blot the area with a cotton cloth. Repeat until the stain is gone.

TO THE RESCUE

TOP-RATED CLEANING PRODUCTS

In addition to a properly stocked stain-stopping toolkit (see page 43), you'll want to have the best products and tools on hand for cleaning up potential carpet and laundry stains. Here are six recommended choices from Consumer Reports' tests.

Laundry Stain Remover

Our top pick excelled at removing everything from salad dressing to blood.

✓ **OxiClean MaxForce Spray**
36 cents per ounce
86



Laundry Detergents

CR's experts have tested dozens of laundry detergents on some of the toughest stains. These two do the best job of cleaning clothes.



✓ **Tide Plus Ultra Stain Release**
28 cents per load
84



✓ **Persil ProClean Stain Fighter**
21 cents per load
84

Carpet Cleaners

If your home has a lot of carpeting, one of these machines may be a good investment—both for regular cleaning and to help with the occasional stain mishap. These are the three top performers in our tough tests.



✓ **Bissell ProHeat 2X Lift-Off Pet**
15651 \$300
71



✓ **Hoover PowerDash Pet FH50700**
\$100
69



✓ **Bissell TurboBrush PowerClean**
2987 \$130
69

A person wearing a blue suit and brown shoes is riding a white Swift electric bike. The bike has a blue battery pack on the frame and a black chain drive. The background is a blurred city street with a crosswalk.

THE RIGHT ELECTRIC BIKE FOR YOU

Swift
Fleet
\$1,000

66

OVERALL
SCORE



Electric bikes are all the rage as many people embrace them for around-town errands, short commutes, and weekend fun. We rate several categories of e-bikes in various price ranges.

BY BENJAMIN PRESTON



THE BICYCLE BOOM of the '70s is back, but this time it has gone electric. According to

NPD Group, a firm that tracks the bicycle industry, electric bike sales have more than doubled since the pre-COVID-19 days of 2019. And their popularity is still on the rise. It's worth pointing out that prices are climbing with demand. The e-bikes in our ratings cost between \$650 (Swagtron EB5 Pro Plus) and \$2,850 (Cannondale Adventure Neo 4 and Trek Verve+ 2 Lowstep).

All e-bikes rely on an electric motor, either to assist human pedal power or to replace it altogether, depending on the class. It's little wonder e-bikes have become so popular, given how they've made cycling so much more accessible, including to people who might not have the physical ability to travel far on a conventional, leg-powered bicycle. Even for those who enjoy pedaling, e-bikes expand on the capabilities of regular bikes, making it possible to ride to work or carry heavy cargo without becoming a sweaty mess, and to simply travel farther—and up more hills—than if you had to rely on pedal power alone.

E-Bike Classes, Explained

Before you buy, consider how and where you intend to use an e-bike. As with conventional bikes, the electrified versions come in many styles, including commuters, cruisers, and mountain bikes, among others. But first you need to decide on the class, or level of assistance, you're looking for or need. An important factor will be where you live—because the presence (or lack) of bike lanes, and how your locale regulates e-bikes will affect how you can use one. A few states treat e-bikes like motorized vehicles and require a special operator's license. (To learn more about your state's rules, go to peopleforbikes.org.) More than half of states treat them as a type of bicycle, depending on top speed and how power is applied (for example, through the pedals or a hand control). Here's an explanation of each class.

CLASS 1 These e-bikes are pedal-assist. There's no throttle to get the bike going; the electric assistance works only when the rider is pedaling, and it cuts off above 20 mph. (It's possible to get even conventional bicycles moving faster than that down a steep hill.)

CLASS 2 These also have an electric motor that works up to 20 mph, either while the rider is pedaling (pedal-assist) or without any pedal power. These bikes have a thumb-operated lever or a twist grip throttle for applying power.

CLASS 3 These e-bikes have to be pedaled to move, too, and provide pedal-assist only (no throttle control) up to 28 mph. They usually have a speedometer. CR has not tested any Class 3 e-bikes because they're less safe due to their higher speed, and less likely to be allowed on bicycle paths.

CHOOSE YOUR BIKE TYPE

Once you've determined the level of assistance you need, pick the style of electric bike that's best for you. Focus on where you'll be riding: Country roads? City bike lanes? And make sure you know how e-bikes are regulated in your locale, and whether they're allowed on bicycle paths.



Swift Fleet
\$1,000

66 OVERALL
SCORE

Swagtron
EB5 Pro Plus
\$650

54 OVERALL
SCORE

COMMUTER/CRUISER

\$600-\$13,000

WHAT'S IT FOR? Commuter and cruiser e-bikes are designed to make short to moderate trips. Their sturdy frames, thicker tires, and upright riding position add to the rider's comfort and ability to see. The electric assistance allows you to get where you're going easily and comfortably.

WHO'S IT FOR? Those looking for alternatives to driving to work and around town. They're lighter (and perhaps safer) than most Vespa-style scooters, can be outfitted with luggage racks and bags for carrying groceries and laptops, and often have fenders to keep rainwater coming off the wheels from splashing onto the rider.



**Specialized
Turbo Creo SL**
not tested

ROAD

\$3,000-\$14,750

WHAT'S IT FOR? These e-bikes typically feature the same lightweight frame, narrow tires, and drop-down handlebars as a conventional, nonelectric touring bike. The assistance offered by an electric motor on these makes it possible to cover longer distances and handle steeper grades with less fatigue. (Note: Consumer Reports has not yet tested this type of e-bike.)

WHO'S IT FOR? Riders who are eager for longer, more challenging cycling but might not be physically able to—for a variety of reasons—and those who simply want to extend the distance they can ride. The more aggressive riding position may be uncomfortable for some riders, such as those prone to back or neck pain.



**Rad Power Bikes
RadWagon 4**
not tested

CARGO

\$1,300-\$7,500

WHAT'S IT FOR? With strong frames, fat tires, and robust components, cargo e-bikes are made for (relatively) heavy hauling. They can be configured with a rear-mounted seat or cargo rack (sometimes both), and a front-mounted cargo rack or, on some specialty models, a large front-end cargo box.

WHO'S IT FOR? Anyone who would prefer to transport large loads of groceries or bulky packages (or even small children, on properly equipped larger models) with something other than a car. If you choose a Class 1 cargo e-bike, you'll still get a workout while you pedal.

**Ancheer
26 Inch Electric
Mountain 500W**
\$1,010

64 OVERALL
SCORE




MOUNTAIN

\$700-\$15,000

WHAT'S IT FOR? With beefier frames, bigger tires, and—sometimes—long-travel suspension systems that soak up the impact of big bumps, typical mountain bikes are built to handle rocks, logs, and other rough terrain. The e-bike versions can help riders pedal up steep grades on loose terrain.

WHO'S IT FOR? This style of e-bike makes sense for someone who wants to experience the thrill of riding a mountain bike down steep trails but also wants a little help from an electric motor when tackling those often grueling uphill slogs. The electric assistance also can mitigate fatigue, allowing for more hill riding.

Ratings > Find Your E-Bike CR tested models in various categories and price ranges.

Brand + Model		Overall Score	Price	Test Results							Features + Specs							
				Range	Acceleration	Control response	Braking	Hill climbing	Unassisted hill climb	Unassisted cruising ease	Weight (lb.)	Battery capacity	Tire size (in.)	Number of gears	Assist levels	Motor	Removable battery	Brake type
CLASS 1 (COMMUTER/CRUISER)																		
✓	Raleigh Retroglide Royale 2.0 iE Step Over	84	\$2,650	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	54	13.4 AHrs, 500 WHrs	27	8	4	Mid-drive	●	Hydraulic disc
✓	Tern Vektron D8 Folding	83	\$2,800	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	50	11.6 AHrs, 417 WHrs	20	8	5	Mid-drive	●	Hydraulic disc
✓	Cannondale Adventure Neo 4	81	\$2,850	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	50	11 AHrs, 400 WHrs	28	9	4	Mid-drive	●	Hydraulic disc
✓	Trek Verve+ 2 Lowstep	78	\$2,850	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	52	11 AHrs, 400 WHrs	29	9	4	Mid-drive	●	Hydraulic disc
✓	Electra Townie Go 7D	74	\$1,600	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	50	8.6 AHrs, 309.6 WHrs	28	7	3	Hub	●	Cable-pull caliper
	Schwinn Wanderlust	63	\$1,000	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	50	7.8 AHrs, 281 WHrs	28	7	3	Hub	●	Cable-pull disc
	Propella Single-Speed (v4.0)	60	\$1,050	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	38	7 AHrs, 250 WHrs	28	1	5	Hub	●	Cable-pull disc
CLASS 1 (MOUNTAIN)																		
✓	Jetson Adventure	71	\$1,300	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	44	7.8 AHrs	28	21	9	Hub		Cable-pull disc
CLASS 2 (COMMUTER/CRUISER)																		
✓	Blix Aveny Skyline	81	\$1,800	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	56	12.8 AHrs, 614 WHrs	28	7	5	Hub	●	Cable-pull disc
✓	Lectric XP 2.0 Folding	71	\$1,000	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	64	10 AHrs, 480 WHrs	22	7	5	Hub	●	Cable-pull disc
	Rad Power Bikes RadRunner 1	69	\$1,500	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	65	14 AHrs, 672 WHrs	22	1	4	Hub	●	Cable-pull caliper
	Charge City	67	\$1,700	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	48	11.6 AHrs, 417 WHrs	28	7	5	Hub	●	Cable-pull disc
	Swift Fleet	66	\$1,000	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	50	10 AHrs, 468 WHrs	26	1	3	Hub	●	Cable-pull caliper
	Rad Power Bikes RadMission 1	63	\$1,200	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬆️	49	10.5 AHrs, 504 WHrs	28	1	4	Hub	●	Cable-pull disc
	Nakto Fashion	56	\$670	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	52	10 AHrs	20	1	1	Hub	●	Cable-pull caliper
	Swagtron EB5 Pro Plus	54	\$650	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	37	7.8 AHrs, 280.8 WHrs	15	1	1	Hub	●	Cable-pull caliper
CLASS 2 (MOUNTAIN)																		
	Ancheer 26 Inch 500W	64	\$1,010	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	52	12.5 AHrs, 450 WHrs	27	21	3	Hub	●	Cable-pull disc

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score is based on the performance of the bikes in all our tests. We test each model by giving riders of different size and weight equal time riding.

To test **range**, we charge the battery and ride on our hilly, 0.35-mile test track, incorporating stops and starts, turns, uphill and downhill riding, and full-speed

cruising. Instrumented tests gauge **acceleration**, braking, and **hill climbing**. Testers judge **control response**, and ease of pedaling with and without e-assist.

For **battery capacity**, "AHrs" is amp hours and "WHrs" is watt-hours. Our test loop reflects real-world conditions. See more at CR.org/cro/electric-bikes.

ROAD REPORT



NEWS & EXPERT
ADVICE TO
KEEP YOU
AHEAD OF
THE CURVE™

TIP FROM THE TEST TRACK

Snow Mode



Snow mode is designed to optimize traction on slippery snow-covered roads by reducing engine torque to control wheel spin and using the brakes to help tires gain traction if slipping is detected. On all-wheel-drive models, snow mode routes power more evenly to each corner and redistributes it as needed to help claw through snow. This mode isn't intended to be used for routine driving or traveling at high speeds. It also won't help the vehicle stop in slippery conditions, and it will never take the place of cautious driving on slippery roads. But it can help your car navigate snow-covered roads more safely.



AHEAD OF THE CURVE

Many Cars Will Lose Emergency Service Capabilities in 2022

Cars that can automatically call emergency services after a crash may lose that ability after 3G cellular networks shut down in 2022. **Some Chrysler, Dodge, Jeep, Nissan, Infiniti, Lexus, Ram, and Toyota models will be permanently unable to call.** Models from automakers including Audi, BMW, GM, Honda, and Subaru will require software or hardware updates to retain their emergency services. Some **updates need to be performed very early in the year** before the networks shut down. Contact your dealer for more information.

RECALL



Tesla

Tesla is recalling every 2017-2020 Model 3 because the cable that transmits the backup camera image to the center screen may become damaged, causing the image not to appear.

WHAT TO DO: Tesla service centers will correct the problem at no charge. For more information, vehicle owners can contact Tesla at 877-798-3752.

THE VITAL STATISTIC

28%

Estimated reduction in U.S. deaths attributable to air pollution from vehicle emissions between 2008 and 2017. "Strong emissions standards save lives. More must be done to continue to reduce the deadly and inequitable toll of vehicle pollution," says Quinta Warren, CR's associate director of sustainability policy.

Source: Published online for Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Dec. 13, 2021.

ASK OUR EXPERTS

What is adaptive suspension, and do I need it?

Typical suspension systems have a spring and shock absorber combination tuned for all driving conditions, which can compromise ride comfort and

handling. Adaptive suspension technology allows the shock absorbers to maintain a more consistent ride over a broader set of load and road surface

conditions. The ability to constantly change also means adaptive suspensions can better control ride motions and reduce body roll for handling

in corners. Adaptive suspension is nice to have, but it can be expensive to repair and ultimately is a luxury most drivers can do without.

The Cars Owners Love Most

We asked CR members how they feel about their cars, minivans, SUVs, and trucks. Let their experiences guide you to the ideal vehicle choice.

by Jon Linkov

MOST SATISFYING AUTOS OVERALL

Chevrolet Corvette	97
Mazda MX-5 Miata	89
Kia Telluride	87
Ford Mustang Mach-E	87
Tesla Model Y	87
Toyota RAV4 Prime	86
Tesla Model 3	85
Ford Mustang	84
Volkswagen ID.4	84
Hyundai Tucson	84



THE CHALLENGES OF buying a new car today are greater than ever. The global pandemic-related chip shortage is responsible for low inventory levels, high prices, and long waits for ordered vehicles to arrive. Even finding a car to test-drive has become a problem for

some shoppers. And unlike nearly every other purchase, if a car doesn't meet your expectations, it's a major hassle to return—if you can give it back at all.

But even before you head out to your local dealerships, listen to what current owners say about their vehicle choices.

Every year in our Annual Auto Surveys we gauge owner satisfaction levels by asking our members whether, given the chance, they'd buy or lease the same car they currently





LEAST SATISFYING AUTOS OVERALL

Kia Forte	47
Cadillac XT4	47
Jeep Renegade	46
Jeep Compass	46
Infiniti QX50	46
Nissan Rogue Sport	42
Infiniti Q50	40
Chevrolet Trax	37
Ford EcoSport	30
← Toyota C-HR	29

drive again. This year we received responses from owners of more than 300,000 vehicles. We also asked them how satisfied they were with specific aspects of their ownership experience, including comfort, driving, and ease of use when it comes to in-car electronics.

Using the responses, we calculated a predicted owner satisfaction score for new models. We believe the results—based on the experiences of actual car owners with vehicles up to 3 years old—provide valuable insights that can help you make a successful match with a new car.

“Cars are in short supply and difficult to obtain for a test drive, making it more important than ever to ask current owners to share their experiences,” says Jake Fisher, senior

director of auto testing at CR. “Keep in mind that while these owners might have different priorities than you when looking for a car, their overall level of satisfaction is a great way to find out if the car lived up to their expectations.”

The following pages show the results of our most recent surveys, including the 2022 models predicted to be the most and least satisfying overall, brand-level satisfaction scores, and the models and brands that stand out in five key areas.

Expectations Fulfilled

This year’s surveys reinforced a dynamic we’ve noticed in the past: Owners seem most satisfied when they have distinct expectations about their vehicles and those expectations are clearly met.

Take the Toyota Prius, which routinely lands among the top of our new- and used-car owner satisfaction lists.

Handling, acceleration, and comfort levels are merely average, but Prius buyers are looking specifically for fuel economy and reliability, and the car delivers those in spades. Similarly, vehicles such as the Chevrolet Corvette and Ford Mustang get top satisfaction scores because they consistently deliver what sports car buyers most yearn for—a potent dose of joie de vivre—even as those vehicles fall short on reliability.

By contrast, the Ford EcoSport doesn’t live up to its name—the small SUV isn’t particularly fuel-efficient nor is it that enjoyable to drive—hence its poor satisfaction scores. Likewise, Nissan’s Rogue Sport ranks as one of the least

BEST & WORST IN 7 CATEGORIES

Here we highlight the most and least satisfying models in popular vehicle categories.

We also include owner scores on five specific factors: value, comfort, styling, driving experience, and infotainment systems. You can use that info to identify models that might satisfy in ways that matter most to you, or to spot flaws on otherwise high-scoring models. (Hyundai Tucson owners, for instance, love their cars but not the in-car gadgetry.) For a full list of vehicles in all categories and their scores on each factor, go to [CR.org/satisfaction0322](https://www.crl.org/satisfaction0322).

KEY:



VALUE



COMFORT



STYLING



DRIVING



INFOTAINMENT

COMPACT SUVs

SCORE | | | | |

MOST SATISFYING

Toyota RAV4 Prime	86					
Hyundai Tucson	84					

LEAST SATISFYING

Ford EcoSport	30					
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LUXURY COMPACT SUVs

MOST SATISFYING

Porsche Macan	79					
Volvo XC40	75					

LEAST SATISFYING

Infiniti QX50	46					
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MIDSIZED 2-ROW SUVs

MOST SATISFYING

Jeep Wrangler	73					
Subaru Outback	73					

LEAST SATISFYING

Honda Passport	57					
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satisfying models, according to owners. They expressed disappointment with the infotainment system, comfort level, and overall value, along with the Rogue Sport's lack of sportiness.

Just keep in mind that the least satisfying models aren't necessarily poor choices. The Acura MDX, for example, is reliable, comfortable, and powerful. It lands in the lower end of our satisfaction rankings, so those qualities clearly didn't resonate with owners—but you might feel differently.

Our surveys also found that owners are continuing to embrace new electric vehicles and plug-in hybrids. Though they're still only a small slice of the overall market, these electrified vehicles registered strong satisfaction scores. High achievers in this group

include models from Tesla, the new Ford Mustang Mach-E and Volkswagen ID.4 EVs, and the Toyota Prius Prime and RAV4 Prime plug-in hybrids.

Takeaways

Consumers would do well to use the survey results in a few important ways:

AS A GUT CHECK: We're not trying to persuade a Rogue Sport shopper to buy a Chevrolet Corvette just because it has a better owner satisfaction score, although if that's the nudge you need, go for it. Rather, if you're considering that Rogue Sport, take into account that owners of this small SUV tend to report low levels of satisfaction—and perhaps compare it with a competitor that consistently makes its owners happier, like the Subaru Crosstrek.

TO FIND ALTERNATIVES: If the model you most desire is in short supply, satisfaction scores can help you pivot to some solid alternatives.

AS A TIEBREAKER: Maybe you've done your research and two or three different SUVs on your short list seem to fit the bill. Owner satisfaction scores from our survey might tip the balance toward one.

TO DRILL DOWN: To get the most out of our owner survey data, go to [CR.org/satisfaction0322](https://www.cars.com/cr.org/satisfaction0322). There you can focus on specific factors that are especially important to you, such as comfort and value. If one of them stands out as an exception on a vehicle—maybe the infotainment system is the one weak spot on a model that owners otherwise find deeply satisfying—make sure to weigh it during your test drive.

LUXURY MIDSIZE/ LARGE SUVs

MOST SATISFYING

BMW X7	79	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓
Porsche Cayenne	78	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓

LEAST SATISFYING

Cadillac XT6	58	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓
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MIDSIZE 3-ROW/ LARGE SUVs

MOST SATISFYING

Kia Telluride	87	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓
Hyundai Palisade	80	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓

LEAST SATISFYING

Volkswagen Atlas	57	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️
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ELECTRIC VEHICLES

MOST SATISFYING

Ford Mustang Mach-E	87					
Tesla Model Y	87					

LEAST SATISFYING

Hyundai Kona Electric	58					
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PICKUPS

MOST SATISFYING

Ford F-350	83	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️
Honda Ridgeline	81	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️

LEAST SATISFYING

Chevrolet Colorado/ GMC Canyon	50	⬇️	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️
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THE BRANDS THAT KEEP OWNERS COMING BACK

SOME AUTOMAKERS HAVE a model or two that ranks among the most satisfying vehicles, while the rest of their lineup falls short in the eyes of owners. But a handful of manufacturers consistently please buyers across all or most of their lineups. Here, we highlight those top-scoring brands that, on average, get the highest satisfaction scores.

Why does such consistency matter

if you're only buying one vehicle? Because automaker lineups aren't static: Some models barely change over the years, but many undergo redesigns every few years and others are brand-new offerings. An automaker that consistently earns high satisfaction scores across its lineup has a track record of strong redesigns and brand-new models that fulfill owner expectations.

This year Tesla again tops our brand-level satisfaction ranking, with Porsche in second place and Genesis—which returns after not having enough models to qualify last year—coming in third. Chrysler remains in fourth place and Dodge moved up three spots to rank fifth.

Like last year, Buick, Nissan, Cadillac, and Infiniti finished at

the bottom of our rankings.

This year we also analyzed the data to determine which automakers excel at specific factors such as comfort, how easy the infotainment system is to use, and perceived value. This enables buyers to better understand why owners rated certain brands as they did, and to focus on the automakers that showed strengths in areas they most care about—and skip ones with weaknesses. A buyer who highly values driving comfort, for example, may be interested to learn that Mercedes-Benz ranks third among all brands by that standard, despite its relatively low overall ranking. Jeep, meanwhile, ranks in the bottom quarter of the overall brand rankings and also comes in dead last in comfort.

OWNER SATISFACTION BY BRAND

	SCORE
1 Tesla	82
2 Porsche	80
3 Genesis	75
4 Chrysler	74
5 Dodge	74
6 Ram	73
7 BMW	72
8 Ford	71
9 Mazda	70
10 Hyundai	70
11 Toyota	69
12 Volvo	68
13 Lexus	68
14 Subaru	68
15 Lincoln	68
16 Mini	67
17 Chevrolet	67
18 GMC	67
19 Honda	66
20 Volkswagen	65
21 Audi	65
22 Mercedes-Benz	64
23 Kia	64
24 Jeep	62
25 Buick	61
26 Nissan	59
27 Acura	57
28 Cadillac	56
29 Infiniti	43



VALUE

Did owners get what they wanted relative to the purchase price?

MOST SATISFYING

Subaru	64
Genesis	63
Mazda	62
Buick	60
Chrysler	60
Hyundai	60

LEAST SATISFYING

Porsche	36
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DRIVING

Takes into account handling and acceleration.

MOST SATISFYING

Tesla	96
Porsche	95
BMW	91
Dodge	87
Audi	86
Genesis	86

LEAST SATISFYING

Jeep	62
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COMFORT

Includes cabin noise as well as the comfort of the seating and ride.

MOST SATISFYING

Lexus	88
Lincoln	86
Mercedes-Benz	85
Chrysler	83
Volvo	83
Audi	82

LEAST SATISFYING

Jeep	55
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INFOTAINMENT

Ease of using in-car electronics, including Bluetooth connections.

MOST SATISFYING

Tesla	70
Chrysler	69
Dodge	66
Lincoln	66
GMC	64
Chevrolet	64

LEAST SATISFYING

Acura	34
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STYLING

How the vehicle looks, inside and out.

MOST SATISFYING

Genesis	97
Mini	96
Porsche	96
Lincoln	91
Audi	91
Cadillac	89

LEAST SATISFYING

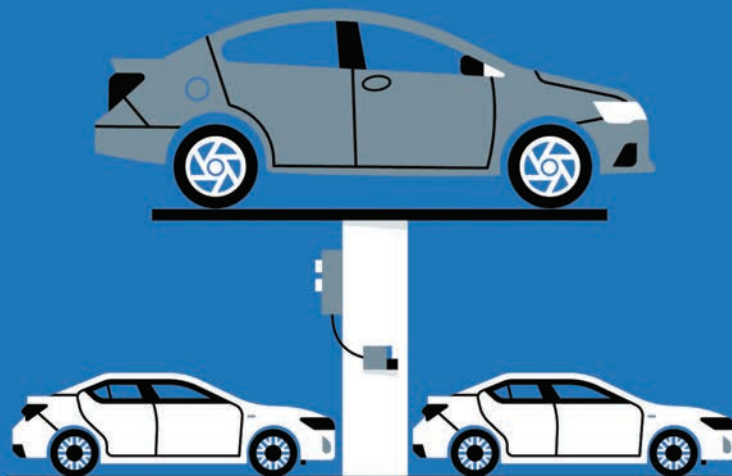
Nissan	74
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HOW WE RATE SATISFACTION

Results are from the 2021 Annual Auto Surveys involving more than 300,000 vehicles. Data from the 2019-2021 model years (plus a few 2022 models) were used provided a vehicle wasn't significantly changed over that time. Some ratings might be based on a single model year. The **owner satisfaction score** is based on the percentage of owners who responded definitely yes to the question of whether they would buy the same vehicle if they had it to do all over again (considering price, performance, reliability, comfort, enjoyment, etc.). Factor ratings and scores were determined based on the percentage of owners who said they were very satisfied. For more information, go to CR.org/satisfaction0322.



Extend the Life of Your Older Car



BECAUSE OF THE limited availability and increased cost of new and used cars right now, many people are facing a choice between paying a premium to replace their current car and spending—sometimes a lot—to keep it running. This can feel like a difficult decision, but some car repairs that used to be considered too expensive to make financial sense are now worth the investment. While shelling out for major repairs on an older car—such as replacing the engine or transmission in a gasoline-powered car or the battery pack in an electric vehicle or a hybrid—may set off alarm bells for many consumers, your car is worth a lot more now than it would be normally. That means investing in keeping it running is probably money well spent, as long as it has been well-maintained. The following advice will help you spend wisely on repairs.

DO THE MATH

THE CHALLENGE: Prices for major repairs, such as transmission replacements, vary widely from vehicle to vehicle, so deciding which are worthwhile will depend on your situation.

THE SOLUTION: You can use CR's car value estimator ([CR.org/car-value-estimator0322](https://www.cars.com/cr/car-value-estimator)) and repair estimate tool ([CR.org/carrepair0322](https://www.cars.com/cr/car-repair)) to help you decide if a major repair makes sense and whether you're getting a fair price for the work. "It's almost never a good idea to pay for repairs that cost more than your vehicle is worth," says John Ibbotson, CR's chief mechanic. For instance, if your 2007 Toyota Corolla with 150,000 miles is worth just under \$7,000 and needs a head gasket replacement costing between \$1,300 and \$1,600, the repair makes sense. A \$7,000 engine replacement, on the other hand, would be ill-advised.

REVIEW THE WARRANTY

THE CHALLENGE: Repair shops may offer you new parts, less expensive remanufactured parts (used but restored to original specifications), or even cheaper used parts that have not been restored. "Every part has a different warranty," Ibbotson says. "Sometimes factory parts have a better one, and other times remanufactured parts can be a little better. It all depends on the car's make and model, and where you're having it repaired." Which part should you choose?

THE SOLUTION: Review the terms of coverage to compare how long the warranty lasts, how many miles it covers, and whether it covers labor costs if the part fails. Ibbotson says used parts can be an economical way to keep a lower-value car running but adds that they often don't come with robust warranty protections.

KEEP A FIX-IT FUND

THE CHALLENGE: Major repairs can be costly, especially for cars no longer under warranty. There's always the possibility with an older car that a repair costing hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars could pop up. But less than 40 percent of Americans have enough money saved to pay for a \$1,000 emergency, according to a survey conducted by the consumer financial services company Bankrate. Some automotive repair chains offer financing on the work they do, but the interest rates they charge can approach 30 percent.

THE SOLUTION: Create an emergency fund of at least a couple thousand dollars, so you're prepared to pay for unanticipated repairs. If you're lucky and don't end up needing it, you can always use the money as a down payment on your next vehicle.



ROAD TEST

EXCLUSIVE RATINGS & REVIEWS
BASED ON TESTING AT CR'S
327-ACRE AUTO TEST CENTER



FIRST DRIVE

COMPACT LUXURY SUVs

Lexus NX

A Much-Improved
Small Luxury SUV

WE LIKE Fit and finish, infotainment system, ride, F Sport's handling

WE DON'T LIKE Unintuitive gear selector, tight interior, center console intrusion

POWERTRAINS 275-hp, 2.4-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder engine; 8-speed automatic; AWD. 304-hp, 2.5-liter plug-in hybrid 4-cylinder engine; eCVT; AWD

FUEL 25/36 mpg combined (EPA)

PRICE

\$47,725 NX 350 F Sport
\$56,725 NX 450h+ (as driven)

BECAUSE OF THE COVID-19 pandemic, new cars are in short supply, causing speed bumps in our testing schedule. Here we offer our first-drive impressions of the redesigned Lexus NX. Digital and All Access members can see the full review, based on two models we rented from the automaker, at [CR.org/cars](https://www.cars.com). We'll buy an NX to conduct a formal road test soon.

The new NX looks much like the previous model, but the cabin has been transformed, with a more modern instrument panel, a larger infotainment screen, and increased passenger space.

Shoppers have a choice of four powertrains, including a hybrid and plug-in hybrid. We found that the NX 350's 275-hp turbo four-cylinder provides adequate power, along with mostly smooth shifts from the eight-speed automatic. The NX 450h+

plug-in hybrid has an electric-only range up to about 37 miles, and it gives mighty quick acceleration when driven in hybrid mode. But the gas engine sounds coarse when you push it hard.

The new infotainment system uses a simple and easy-to-reach touch screen canted toward the driver. The climate-control dials look chic, but the mushy-feeling knobs are difficult to adjust with precision. The unintuitive gear selector makes it too easy to end up in Neutral when shifting from Reverse to Drive.

The NX 450h+ handles reasonably well, but the softer suspension and extra weight of the hybrid system lend it an imprecise feel through turns. The F Sport's firmer suspension keeps the body flatter through corners, giving it a more nimble character.

FCW, AEB with pedestrian detection, BSW, RCTW, and LDW come standard.



FIRST DRIVE

FULL-SIZED PICKUPS

Toyota Tundra

Powering Back
in a Big Way

WE LIKE Powertrain, ride, front seats, infotainment system

WE DON'T LIKE Climate controls, ponderous handling, no full-time four-wheel drive

POWERTRAIN 389-hp, 3.5-liter turbocharged V6 engine; 10-speed automatic transmission; four-wheel drive

FUEL 19 mpg combined (EPA)

PRICE

\$35,950-\$61,020 base price range
\$65,380 (as driven)

THESE ARE OUR first impressions of a redesigned Tundra we rented from Toyota, ahead of purchasing one for the CR test program.

The new Tundra marks the first thorough redesign of Toyota's full-sized pickup in 15 years, making major changes that will impress anyone looking for a powerful truck with all the latest amenities. (There's more to come in the spring from a hybrid version.) The new Tundra also has large towing and payload capacities, a contemporary infotainment system, and a rich roster of active safety and driver assistance features.

The new 389-hp turbo V6 produces a rich well of smooth power, and the 10-speed automatic delivers nearly imperceptible shifts. The 14-inch touch-screen infotainment display on the version we rented featured simple-to-decipher text, and

we liked the large knobs, physical buttons, and toggle switches for other controls because they're easy to operate by feel. By the same token, we didn't like that the labels for the climate system were hard to read in daylight.

Although the new Tundra rides more comfortably, thanks to a rear suspension that now uses coil springs instead of the leaf springs found in most full-sized pickups, the steering is slow and the truck lumbers through corners. Unlike most full-sized pickups, the Tundra isn't available with a selectable full-time four-wheel-drive system. When conditions get slippery, the driver has to switch it to 4WD and then remember to switch it back again on dry pavement.

FCW, AEB with pedestrian and cyclist detection, LDW, adaptive cruise control, and automatic high beams come standard on all Tundras.



MID-SIZED SUVs

Ford Bronco

Reinventing a
4x4 Classic

47

OVERALL
SCORE

THE ALL-NEW Bronco clearly has been designed to compete with the iconic Jeep Wrangler. We found it to be a superior daily driver to the Jeep in many ways, with better handling and a more comfortable ride. But Ford's retro-styled off-road machine also has longer stopping distances than we liked, dismal fuel economy, and elevated wind noise compared with other SUVs.

We tested an Outer Banks trim with the optional 310-hp turbo V6. This engine provides plenty of giddyup, including a gutsy midrange punch. The automatic upshifts smoothly, but some downshifts come with a slight jolt.

Despite a burly suspension designed with off-roading in mind, the Bronco rides reasonably well, feeling stiff and jiggly only on bumpy back roads. Handling agility isn't a strong suit, but it

ROAD-TEST SCORE 55

HIGHS Off-road ability, acceleration, character

LOWS Braking, fuel economy, wind noise, predicted reliability

POWERTRAIN 310-hp, 2.7-liter turbocharged V6 engine; 10-speed automatic transmission; four-wheel drive

FUEL 18 mpg on regular

PRICE
\$28,500–\$61,110 base price range
\$53,505 as tested

tracks better in a straight line than the wandering Wrangler, and it was predictable—albeit with low limits—when pushed on our track. It handily scaled our challenging rock hill, thanks to generous suspension travel and ground clearance, and a trail camera that makes it easy to point the front tires where you want them.

However, the Bronco's stopping distances are among the longest we've seen from any vehicle in years. It needed 149 feet to stop from 60 mph on dry pavement, and 168 feet in the wet. Those distances are longer than with some full-sized pickup trucks.

Most controls inside the rustic-themed cabin are fairly user-friendly, but the window buttons and mirror switches are placed in an awkward location on the center console.

FCW and AEB with pedestrian detection are standard.



SMALL ELECTRIC SUVs

Volkswagen ID.4

Versatile EV,
but Odd Controls

59

OVERALL
SCORE

THE ID.4 IS Volkswagen's first dedicated electric vehicle. We found it to be quick, quiet, and roomy, and it's competitively priced. But its unintuitive controls mar the experience, and the ID.4's EPA-rated 240-mile driving range lags well behind the Tesla Model Y's 330 miles.

We suggest going with the 295-hp all-wheel-drive model like the one we tested, which sprinted from 0 to 60 mph in 5.8 seconds. The 201-hp rear-wheel-drive version we rented from VW failed to deliver the zippy acceleration we've come to expect from EVs. It took us about 8.5 hours to recharge the AWD model's battery—typical for EVs. Owners get three years of free charging through VW subsidiary Electrify America.

The comfortable-riding ID.4 absorbs most road ruts nicely, especially compared with the stiffer Ford Mustang

ROAD-TEST SCORE 83

HIGHS Acceleration, ride, quietness, roomy interior, no tailpipe emissions

LOWS Controls, brake pedal feel, long charging times compared with fueling a gas car, predicted reliability

POWERTRAIN 295-hp, dual electric motors; 1-speed direct-drive transmission; all-wheel drive

RANGE 240 miles


PRICE
\$39,995–\$48,175 base price range
\$50,870 as tested

Mach-E and the Model Y, which kick bumps into the cabin like you're riding in a sports car. The VW is nimble enough through corners and acquitted itself well on our track, but there's noticeable body roll when you pick up the pace. You need to push the brake pedal down farther than with most vehicles to slow the ID.4, and the pedal has a spongy feel.

The front seats have four-way lumbar support, and the rear seat is generously sized. But VW's new infotainment layout and other controls are a mess. The screen is slow to respond and requires multiple actions for common tasks, the temperature adjustment controls aren't lit at night, and the driver doesn't have a set of dedicated controls for the rear windows. FCW, AEB with pedestrian detection, BSW, RCTW, LDW, and LKA all come standard.

Ratings > Retro vs. New Wave

The all-new Bronco marks the resurrection of one of Ford's most storied nameplates. Volkswagen's all-electric ID.4 is the German automaker's first EV.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Survey Results	Road-Test Results												Active Safety Features			
		Predicted reliability	Road-test score	Overall mpg	Seat comfort, front/rear	Usability	Noise	Ride	Fit + finish	Routine handling	Avoidance-maneuver speed, mph	Acceleration, 0-60 mph, sec.	Dry braking, 60-0 mph, ft.	Suitcases + duffels/ Cargo volume, cu. ft.	FCW	AEB, pedestrian	AEB, highway	BSW
		Owner satisfaction																

SUVs \$35,000-\$75,000

✓ Chevrolet Blazer 3.6L	82	↑	↓	83	19	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	54.5	6.4	130	34.5	S	S	0	0
✓ Lexus GX460 4.6L	81	↑	↓	70	17	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	48.0	7.5	136	36.5	S	S	S	S
✓ Nissan Murano 3.5L	81	↑	↓	77	21	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	50.5	7.7	131	33.5	S	S	S	S
✓ Ford Edge 2.0T	80	↓	↓	84	22	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	52.0	7.7	129	39.0	S	S	S	S
✓ Honda Passport 3.5L	76	↓	↓	79	21	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	53.5	6.4	135	39.0	S	S	S	S
✓ Volkswagen Atlas Cross Sport 2.0T	70	↓	↓	81	21	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	52.0	8.7	131	37.5	S	S	S	S
Toyota 4Runner 4.0L	61	↑	↑	55	18	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	48.0	7.7	131	44.5	S	S	S	0
Jeep Cherokee 2.0T	54	↓	↓	68	23	↑ / ↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	↓	53.0	7.5	129	31.0	S	—	S	S
Land Rover Defender 3.0T	49	↓	↑	61	18	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↓	49.0	6.9	147	43.0	S	S	S	S
Ford Bronco 2.7T	47	↓	↑	55	18	↑ / ↓	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓	51.5	7.0	149	40.0	S	S	S	0
Jeep Wrangler 3.6L	28	↓	↑	36	18	↓ / ↓	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓	49.0	7.3	144	41.5	0	—	0	0

ELECTRIC VEHICLES \$35,000-\$55,000

✓ Kia Niro EV E	88	↑	↑	81	112 ^{mpg}	↑ / ↓	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	52.5	6.8	135	2+2	S	S	S	S
✓ Ford Mustang Mach-E E	80	↑	↑	78	90 ^{mpg}	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑	52.0	5.3	136	29.5	S	S	S	S
✓ Tesla Model 3 E	79	↓	↑	82	130 ^{mpg}	↑ / ↓	↓	↓	↓	↑	↑	55.0	5.3	133	2+2	S	S	S	—
✓ Nissan Leaf E	78	↑	↓	73	104 ^{mpg}	↑ / ↓	↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	52.5	7.0	139	3+0	S	S	S	S
Chevrolet Bolt EUV E	63	↓	↑	80	115 ^{mpg}	↓ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	53.0	7.2	137	2+2	S	S	0	0
Chevrolet Bolt E	62	↓	↑	78	120 ^{mpg}	↓ / ↓	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	53.0	6.8	138	2+0	S	S	—	0
Hyundai Kona Electric E	61	↓	↓	76	120 ^{mpg}	↑ / ↓	↓	↑	↓	↓	↑	53.5	6.6	135	1+1	S	S	0	S
Tesla Model Y E	59	↓	↑	90	121 ^{mpg}	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑	54.5	4.7	121	25.0	S	S	S	—
Volkswagen ID.4 E	59	↓	↑	83	93 ^{mpg}	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	52.5	5.8	134	31.0	S	S	S	S
Polestar 2 E	57	↓	↑	72	92 ^{mpg}	↑ / ↓	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑	55.5	4.4	123	3+0	S	S	S	S

> Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at [CR.org/cars](https://www.cars.com). When you're ready to buy, configure the vehicle and find the best price in your area by clicking the green "View Pricing Information" button on the model's dedicated page.

HOW WE TEST: Recommended models did well in our **Overall Score**, which factors in **road-test results**, **predicted reliability**, **owner satisfaction**, and

advanced safety, which includes crash-test results and the availability of crash-prevention features, such as forward collision warning, automatic

emergency braking, pedestrian detection, and blind spot warning. A dash (—) means no such safety system is offered; 0 means that it's optional on at least some

trim levels; S means that the feature is standard on all trims. We deduct points if a model's gear selector lacks fail-safes to prevent the vehicle from rolling away.

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These Signs Bite

We've got a bone to pick with the pet products and places below



That's a Very Short Dog Walk

Perhaps not the most dog-friendly park, we'd say.
Submitted by Ryan Johnson, Austin, TX



Only the Toy Fish Is for Sale

You have to purchase the kitty separately.
Submitted by B. Hamilton, via email

A Surprising Place to Buy Dog Treats

We're wondering whether they'd be safe to eat.
Submitted by Dan Kline, New York, NY



Boneheaded Deal

Chew on this: These treats are on sale for about three times the regular price.
Submitted by Tom McNally, as seen in Grand Rapids, MI



SHARE

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