

**IMPORTANT ADVICE
FOR CAR BUYERS P. 54**

**AIR CONDITIONERS:
KEEP COOL—SPEND LESS**

**TOP-RATED
INSECT REPELLENTS**

CR Consumer Reports®

AUGUST 2022

✓ **RATINGS & REVIEWS**

Washing Machines

Printers

Blood Pressure
Monitors

Exterior Paints

Chest Freezers

Cameras



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ABOUT CONSUMER REPORTS

Consumer Reports is an independent, nonprofit organization founded in 1936 that works side by side with consumers to create a safe, fair, and transparent marketplace. To achieve our mission, we test thousands of products and services in our labs each year and survey hundreds of thousands of consumers about their experiences with products and services. We pay for all the

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RATINGS Overall Scores are based on a scale of 0 to 100. We rate products using these symbols:

✓ POOR ✗ FAIR ⚡ GOOD
🌟 VERY GOOD 🏆 EXCELLENT

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More Travel, Less Worry



OVER THE NEXT few months, millions of Americans will head off on vacation. While travel is a balm for the soul, it also presents challenges: rising gas prices (and other pressures of inflation), canceled flights, and evolving COVID-19 risks and protocols. That's why CR pays close attention to your concerns. Whether making the roads safer or the skies truly friendlier, our job is to get you the

trusted guidance and savings you deserve.

CR has long advocated for auto safety features, and our surveys show how much consumers appreciate and value these technologies: Sixty-four percent of you like your blind spot warning systems, for example. So we continue to work with companies to make more safety features standard on all new vehicles. Safety should not be a luxury!

We've also heard you tell us that airline service has declined since the pandemic began. That's why CR organized consumers to call for a federal Airline Passenger Bill of Rights. It would set clear rules for how airlines must treat passengers, from compensating them for canceled flights to allowing families with young children to sit together without paying extra fees.

CR is also committed to delivering actionable advice for improving your travel experience. Gone are the days when my father would hand over a \$5 bill at the gas pump to get us where we needed to go. With gas prices at an all-time high, driving cross-country or even to a local beach might give you pause, which is why we've published tips on saving money at the gas pump. But cost isn't the only travel challenge, so this month's issue also offers expert advice on how to travel more safely and plan for ever-changing circumstances.

From consumer-powered advocacy to trusted practical advice, together we can create a marketplace that prioritizes consumers wherever they go.

Marta Tellado

Marta L. Tellado,
President and CEO
Follow me on Twitter
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President and CEO Marta L. Tellado

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Enterprise Kevin Doyle, Editor; Perry Santanachote, Writer/Reporter

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Editorial Director, Digital Erle Norton

Senior Director, Product Testing Maria Rerecich

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Stanger, Daniel Wroclawski **Product Testing:** John Galeotafiore, Jason Holmes,

James Nanni, Testing Leads; John Banta, Sarah Bogdan, Susan Booth, Tara Casaregola,

Lawrence Ciufo, Bernard Deitrick, Cindy Fisher, Paolo Fu, Kathleen Haleviah, Rich

Handel, Misha Kollontai, Ginny Lui, Joan Muratore, Joseph Pacella, Christopher

Regan, Frank Spinelli, Dave Trezza **Market Analysts:** Mark Allwood, Kelly Moomey,

Courtney Pennicooke, Antonella Pomilla, Marion Wilson-Spencer

MONEY: Editor/Writer: Penelope Wang **Policy Lead:** Delicia Hand

TECH: Jerry Beilinson, Content Lead **Editors/Writers:** Octavio Blanco, Nicholas De Leon, Thomas Germain, Yael Grauer, Melanie Pinola, Chris Raymond, Allen St. John, Kaveh Waddell, James K. Willcox **Product Testing:** Richard Fisco, Glen Rockford, Michael Visconti, Testing Leads; Elias Arias, Antonette Asedillo, Steve Blair, Claudio Ciacci, Charles Davidman, Bill Fitzgerald, Fred Garcia, Henry Parra, Richard Sulin, Maurice Wynn **Market Analysts:** Min Kim Bryant, Cesar Carroll, Odalys Grieco, Nish Suvarnakar **Policy Lead:** Justin Brookman

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Food Safety James E. Rogers, Director; Tunde Akinleye, Amy Keating, Sana Mujahid

Product Safety Ashita Kapoor, Associate Director; Juan A. Arguello

Content Operations Robert Kanell, Director

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Photography John Powers, John Walsh

Imaging Francisco Collado, Mark Linder

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Consumer Engagement Testing Charu Ahuja, Director; Linda Greene, Dana Keester,

Paul Ritchey

Statistics & Data Science Jody Porrazzo, Director; Debasmita Das, Kristen Dorrell,

Dina Haner, Keith Newsom-Stewart

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Protecting Your Private Life

Consumers are constantly being tracked by digital surveillance, online and off. The information collected gets bundled into detailed dossiers of our most personal characteristics, including health conditions, political views, and sexual preferences, and then is sold to companies that use it to target advertising and build opaque algorithms that can determine things like whether or not you'll be offered affordable insurance.

In response, CR has been fighting state-by-state to give consumers more control over their personal data—and in April, Connecticut became the fifth state (after California, Virginia, Colorado, and Utah) to extend privacy rights to consumers.

Based in part on model legislation developed by CR, and the result of more than a year of collaboration between our advocates and state lawmakers, the Connecticut law gives consumers the right to access, correct, delete, and stop the sale of their personal data. And it contains several important provisions that have been missing from other state privacy laws, including: a requirement that companies honor browser privacy signals, so consumers can opt out of all data sales in a

single step; a prohibition against "dark pattern" user interfaces that can deceive consumers into sharing more personal data than they intend; and strong rules for safeguarding consumer data.

Wherever you live, you can take simple steps to protect your own information; learn how by using CR's Security Planner at securityplanner.cr.org.

96%

of Americans agree that more should be done to ensure that companies protect the privacy of consumers.

Source: Consumer Reports nationally representative survey of 5,085 adult U.S. residents fielded February 2020



CALL TO ACTION

Last year, a U.S. Supreme Court ruling eliminated the authority of the Federal Trade Commission to go to court to seek monetary damages from perpetrators of fraud, illegal scams, and other deceptive practices. For decades, the FTC had used that authority to strip wrongdoers of ill-gotten gains and to then refund victims—to the tune of \$11.2 billion since October 2016. So CR organized a coalition letter urging key legislators to back the Consumer Protection Remedies Act, which would restore the FTC's authority. You can support the bill by contacting your senators at Senate.gov.



Making Infant Sleep Safer

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Parents need to be able to trust that the baby products they find on sale are safe.

Unfortunately, that's not always the case. Two dangerous categories of infant sleep products—inclined sleepers and crib bumper pads—have been linked to nearly 200 deaths.

HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

CR has long worked to expose the problem of unsafe infant sleep products, and rid the market of them. Since 2019, our investigations have linked inclined sleepers, such as the Fisher-Price Rock 'n Play, to at least 94 deaths, and in-bed sleepers to 12 more. These

revelations helped prompt the Consumer Product Safety Commission, in 2021, to issue a rule prohibiting certain products that don't align with expert safe sleep recommendations. The rule was scheduled to take effect on June 23, 2022.

Some members of Congress, determined to prevent future infant deaths, also wanted to take action—and to include crib bumpers, which hadn't yet been addressed by the CPSC. The result was the CR-endorsed Safe Sleep for Babies Act, a bill to fully ban both inclined sleepers and crib bumpers. The bill passed the House last year, and was approved in the Senate and signed by President Biden in May. It will soon be illegal for anyone to manufacture or sell these dangerous products.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Make sure infants sleep alone, on their backs, on a firm, flat surface in a crib, bassinet, or play yard, with no extra padding or loose objects like blankets, pillows, or toys. And read CR's Guide to a Safe and Sound Baby Nursery at CR.org/nursery.



Our June 2022 article **“Boost Your Brain Power At Any Age”** revealed the newest strategies that help keep your memory sharp and enhance your thinking skills. Our readers shared their own tips. To add your voice, go to CR.org/brainboost.

I ENJOYED YOUR great article on brainpower. I have to say that my wife and I follow most of those suggestions and practices. One important thing not in your article is the benefits of music—playing an instrument, singing, or just listening to music. My wife and I are both around 80 years old and full-time musicians. We know that music has a lot to do with our continued success and the fact that we are still working full-time!

—Mario Tacca, Cortlandt, NY

EDITOR'S NOTE You're absolutely right. In fact, there has been a good deal of research on the likely brain benefits of playing a musical instrument, including findings published in 2021 that suggest making music is associated with brain resilience and may improve memory issues. Other research suggests listening to music may boost cognitive skills.

I WAS PLEASED to see that the writer gave good counsel about many ordinary risk factors to be considered and also recommended to “be careful with supplements” as they have no benefits for most people. I was dismayed, however, to see that red meat and full-fat dairy were listed

under “junk food.” They may be unhealthy, but they are not junk food. Thank you for continuing a very strong record of excellent articles about health and healthcare.

—Jeffrey Sneider, MD, FACP, Syracuse, NY

EDITOR'S NOTE It's true that red meat and full-fat dairy products aren't “junk food” in the same way that a highly processed bag of potato chips is, but it's still smart to limit your consumption of them. Research suggests that consuming a lot of saturated fat, which is typically found in those foods, may have a negative effect on cognition.

TO THIS PHYSICIAN, your article on boosting brain

power was commendable for its emphasis on good health practices that individuals should follow to prevent mental decline. You also correctly warned against taking unproven supplements that are mostly of little or no value. But you included tuna along with salmon and sardines as high-fat fish that should be eaten often. Tuna is high in mercury. Add the fact that tuna is not farmed like salmon and is increasingly threatened, and it becomes a far less attractive fish despite its versatility and portability in cans.

—Lawrence Bonchek, Lancaster, PA

EDITOR'S NOTE We agree that it's smart to consider your mercury intake, and take into account sustainable fishing practices. Still, canned tuna is an easy way for many people to eat fish. You can safely eat 2-3 4-ounce servings of canned light tuna per week, according to the Food and Drug Administration (children are the exception). If you choose albacore, the FDA recommends only one weekly serving and no other fish that week. Go to CR.org/seafood to learn more about the differences between seafood choices. We also suggest going to seafoodwatch.org, the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch website, which has a great deal of info on sustainable seafood.



DEALING WITH MEDICAL BILLS

I APPRECIATED INFORMATION provided in “The Remedy for Big Medical Bills” in the June 2022 issue, such as the shocking fact that even though 90 percent of Americans have some type



WRITE

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

of health insurance, medical debt is actually increasing! This is an incredible commentary on our bloated, fragmented, profit-oriented healthcare system where even public programs like Medicare are being taken over by private insurance companies. The only real remedy for big medical bills would be a universal, single-payer health program. We can't shop our way out of this problem with consumer choice remedies.

—Dave Fogarty, Walla Walla, WA

I ENJOYED YOUR story on how to lower your medical bills, but there's one that you didn't note. Social Security has a program called "Extra Help" that makes your prescription drugs cheaper. You sign up on their website (ssa.gov/benefits/medicare/prescriptionhelp.html). It will tell you if you're eligible or not. Depending on your income, your meds could be much cheaper. My husband pays \$9.85 for brand-name drugs and \$3.95 for generics. Mine isn't quite that good, but it knocks \$300/mo. off. I would

urge everyone who's eligible to sign up for it!

—Tracy Brom, Carbon Hill, AL

I APPRECIATED THE article on lowering medical bills. One medical bill saver: Engaging in a healthy lifestyle can save many dollars. [Many] chronic and expensive diseases today (including heart disease, diabetes and even cancer) are lifestyle related. A lifestyle change is not as radical to me as bypass surgery, insulin injections, or, worse, amputation of a toe or foot. And it's much less expensive.

—Beverly Smith, Hot Springs, AR



PLANT-BASED MEATS

IN THE ARTICLE "Meat Lovers' Guide to Plant-Based Meat" (June 2022), I was curious why there was no mention of cholesterol values pros or cons.

—Jack Watts II, Beaufort, SC

EDITOR'S NOTE THE products we reviewed are all made from plants, and plant foods have no cholesterol. And we did include the amount of saturated fat in products; that has a bigger effect on blood cholesterol levels than does the amount of cholesterol in the food itself.

I JUST READ the article about plant-based meats. Why was there no mention of the serious consequences of [eating] animal meats, like salmonella, E. coli, antibiotic resistance and the slaughtering of billions of defenseless animals? How many illnesses and deaths from bad meat yearly? There's so much more to this issue.

—L. Jones, Englewood, FL



CAN I USE SOAP ON A CAST-IRON PAN?

Re: "Best Pots and Pans," (June 2022): The idea of not washing cast-iron pans needs to be laid to rest. That being said, what do you wash it with? I think these pans should be washed with pure soap and a nylon pad. (You won't believe what comes off.) Afterward, coat the pan with canola, sunflower, or palm oil and heat until smoking. Let it cool, rub with a light coat of oil and put it away.

—Gregory Sarafin, Center Moriches, NY

EDITOR'S NOTE: That's generally good advice. Some cast-iron cookware manufacturers, such as Lodge, say you can use a small amount of a mild dish soap to clean cast iron. But be sparing in the amount you use: Too much soap can strip the "seasoning" from your pan. And always dry it completely with a lint-free cloth or paper towel before seasoning it with oil.

EDITOR'S NOTE Our article focused mainly on the nutritional makeup of these products. It's true that meat and poultry carry bacteria that can make you sick. For more information on this important topic, turn to "Is Our Meat Safe To Eat?" on page 30.



SMARTPHONES & WATER

RE: "GET A Great Smartphone for Less" (June 2022): Please explain the difference between waterproof vs water resistant. A phone is just water resistant for like a splash and [for] less than a certain amount of time. So you still shouldn't go tubing down the river with it in your pocket or take it into the shower with you.

—@Eddieatx, via Instagram

EDITOR'S NOTE When it comes to electronic devices there is no such thing as waterproof (meaning that no water gets in under any circumstances). Smartphones that are water-resistant fend off water—but only for a specific amount of time and level of immersion, which may vary depending on the model. Many smartphones we test, for example, have an IPx7 water-resistance rating—which indicates that the smartphone is rated to keep water out for 30 minutes when submerged at a 1-meter depth. To test water-resistance ratings, we turn the phone on, submerge it to the stated depth for the stated time, and then assess its functionality. While most models do survive our "dunk" test, don't swim laps with your phone and expect it to still work afterward.

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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.

CR Best Buy Cameras

WE TESTED: 48 mirrorless models

WE TEST FOR: Image quality in normal and low light, viewfinder and video quality, battery life, ease of use, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:

Median: 82
Range: 70-92

EXCELLENT FLASH PHOTOS

Nikon Z 50
w/ 16-50mm
\$1,000

85

OVERALL
SCORE



SWIVELING LCD SCREEN

Panasonic Lumix DC-G95
w/ 12-60mm
\$1,000

82

OVERALL
SCORE



GOOD DEAL

Canon EOS M200
w/ 15-45mm IS STM
\$550

80

OVERALL
SCORE



Blood Pressure Monitors

WE TESTED: 24 models

WE TEST FOR: The accuracy of a model's blood pressure reading, comfort of the arm band, clarity of the display, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:

Median: 76
Range: 19-86

BEST OVERALL

Omron Platinum BP5450
(Amazon)
\$81

86

OVERALL
SCORE



GREAT VALUE

Omron Silver BP5250
(Amazon)
\$50

85

OVERALL
SCORE



BARGAIN BUY,
BUT FEWER FEATURES

Rite Aid Deluxe Automatic BP3AR1-4DRITE
\$37

80

OVERALL
SCORE



Ask Our Experts

Is it better to take my blood pressure in the morning or evening?



THE TIME OF day you do a reading is less important than measuring your pressure consistently at the time you choose. “The body has natural cycles where blood pressure may rise or fall some depending on the time of day,” says Nicholas Ruthmann, MD, a staff cardiologist in the Heart, Vascular & Thoracic Institute at Cleveland Clinic. So by taking readings at the same time of day, you’ll be comparing “apples to apples.” If you take it in the morning, aim for 30 to 60 minutes after you wake—and before you’ve eaten breakfast and taken any medications (which can affect blood pressure levels). If you choose evening, take it an hour after dinner, when relaxed.

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).

Exterior Paints

WE TESTED: 20 models
WE TEST FOR: How well a paint resists mildew, and the appearance of paint, including how well it resists cracking, fading, and dirt, over years of weathering.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 57
Range: 29-75

BEST OVERALL
Behr Marquee Exterior
(Home Depot)
\$61

75
OVERALL
SCORE



LONG-LASTING
Clark+ Kensington Exterior (Ace)
\$47

75
OVERALL
SCORE



WALLET-FRIENDLY PICK
Behr Premium Plus Exterior
(Home Depot)
\$31

72
OVERALL
SCORE



Agitator Washing Machines

WE TESTED: 34 models
WE TEST FOR: How well a model's normal cycle cleans a load of mixed cotton items, its energy and water efficiency, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 62
Range: 27-79

QUIET & ECO-FRIENDLY
LG WT7405CW
\$980

79
OVERALL
SCORE



EXCELLENT WASHING PERFORMANCE
Samsung WA51A5505AW
\$825

74
OVERALL
SCORE



BUDGET BUY
GE Profile PTW605BSRWS
\$725

65
OVERALL
SCORE



Printers

WE TESTED: 25 black and white all-in-one models
WE TEST FOR: Speed and quality of printing text and graphics, cost of ink toner per year, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 65
Range: 57-73

VALUE PICK
Canon imageCLASS MF264dw
\$200

71
OVERALL
SCORE



GOOD FOR PRINTING GRAPHICS
Canon imageClass MF267dw
\$250

71
OVERALL
SCORE



A RELIABLE BRAND
Brother MFC-L2690DW
\$155

69
OVERALL
SCORE



Chest Freezers

WE TESTED: 27 models
WE TEST FOR: Temperature uniformity, accuracy of thermostat control, energy efficiency, noise, organization features, usable storage space, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 73
Range: 19-91

EXCELLENT FOR SMALL SPACES
GE FCM5SKWW (5 cu. ft.)
\$340

81
OVERALL
SCORE



LARGE CAPACITY WITH USEFUL ORGANIZING BINS
Frigidaire FFCL1542AW (14.8 cu. ft.)
\$720

78
OVERALL
SCORE



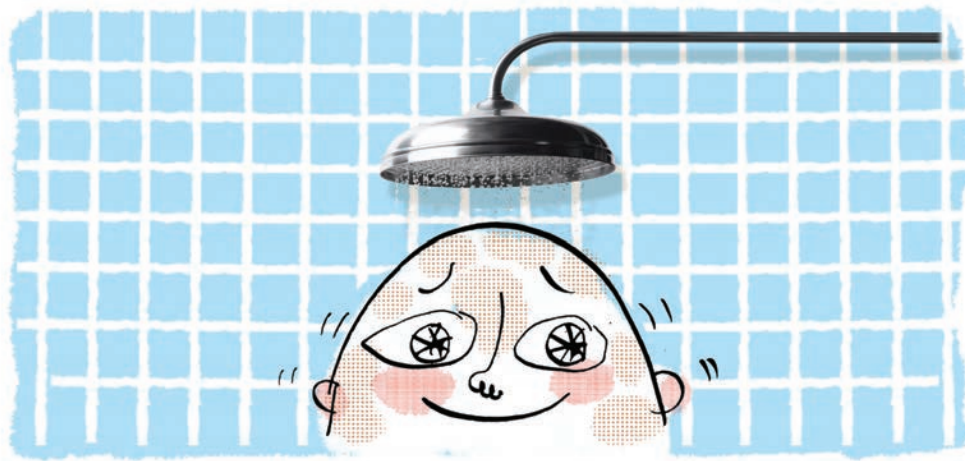
MIDSIZED FOR A NICE PRICE
Amana AQC0902GRW (9 cu. ft.)
\$490

74
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 Microwaves & More



What's the best way to treat a sunburn?

SUNBURNED SKIN CAN be painful—but there are proven ways to make your skin feel better while it heals.

First, take a shower with lukewarm water, which will help cool skin that is warm or hot to the touch. When you get out of the shower, liberally apply moisturizer while your skin is still damp. Try one that contains pure aloe vera (or lists it as the first or second ingredient), which is a natural anti-inflammatory used to soothe burns. Avoid using after-sun sprays, such as those containing benzocaine or other anesthetics. While they might offer instant pain relief, they can irritate skin or cause an allergic reaction. Also skip petroleum jelly products, which can trap heat instead of cooling your burn. Take ibuprofen or aspirin to

help reduce swelling, redness, and discomfort. And drink more water than usual: A sunburn draws fluid to the skin's surface and away from the rest of the body, which can make you dehydrated.

It's also smart to stay out of the sun until your burn heals because your skin is at risk for even more damage if you expose it again to UV rays. And try to be diligent about sun protection in the future: Repeated burns accelerate the aging of your skin and increase your risk of developing skin cancer. For more advice on how to stay cool and safe this summer, turn to page 22.

Should I pay for AppleCare+ coverage on my new iPhone?

IN GENERAL, THE higher the price of your device, the more it might make sense to pay for coverage, says CR tech editor Melanie Pinola. Apple's iPhone 13 models can cost as much as \$1,599—and repairs for them are pricey, too. Without AppleCare+ coverage, replacing a cracked screen on your

out-of-warranty 13 Pro Max will cost you \$329. Damage any other part of that same phone and an Apple repair will cost you \$599. With the basic AppleCare+ plan, which costs \$199 up front for the 13 Pro Max, you'll pay \$29 for a screen or back-glass replacement and \$99 for other types of damage. This plan, which provides two years of coverage from date of purchase, allows for two instances of accidental damage for each 12-month period and includes battery replacement if it retains less than 80 percent of its original capacity.

Of course, if you use a phone case (and aren't prone to dropping your phone), you may be fine without the coverage. If you're still on the fence, check out our breakdown of the fees based on the model of iPhone you have, at [CR.org/iphonefix](https://www.consumerreports.org/iphonefix).

I've heard that sourdough bread is healthier than other types of bread. True?

IF YOU HAVE a sensitive stomach or a digestive issue such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), sourdough may be a better choice. Sourdough starts out as a mixture of flour and water that's been left to ferment

for several days (creating what's known as a sourdough "starter"). The wild yeasts and bacteria in that starter grow and produce carbon dioxide, acids, and other compounds, which make the dough rise and give the bread its characteristic sour flavor. Sourdough's long fermentation and rising time causes changes in the dough that may make it easier to digest than regular bread for those with IBS, or who experience gas, bloating, and other problems after eating certain carbohydrates. "Traditional wheat bread, leavened with baker's yeast, contains high levels of fructans, which can be a trigger in many people with IBS," says Kate Scarlata, a registered dietitian specializing in digestive health. Sourdough, however, may have as much as 92 percent less fructan as other breads. Sourdough is also a bit lower in gluten than other breads, so people with mild gluten sensitivities may be better able to tolerate it.

But don't count on sourdough to provide gut-friendly probiotics, says Willow Jarosh, a registered dietitian in private practice in New York City. "Although it's a fermented food like yogurt or kimchi, the probiotic bacteria in sourdough bread is killed during baking, so it doesn't provide healthy bacteria to your system."



LEARN

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

Refresh Your Outdoor Space

New advice and product picks for making your yard, patio, or porch more inviting this season.



GUARD AGAINST BUGS

Newair AF-600 All-Metal 18" Oscillating Outdoor Misting Fan
\$200

Enjoy your space even as dusk falls. That's when mosquitoes are active, so use an insect repellent (see page 45 for our ratings). Also, turn on an oscillating outdoor fan, like the one above. Our tests found that fans reduce mosquito landings by 45 to 65 percent on those sitting nearby.

GRILL ANYWHERE

✓ **Nexgrill**
820-0033

\$110

70 OVERALL SCORE

Have a small outdoor space but still want to barbecue? You don't need a full-sized grill to make great burgers and dogs. This Nexgrill is compact enough to fit on a tabletop, is nicely priced, and does well in our performance testing. A 1-pound propane tank adapter, sold separately, makes it fully portable.



SET THE MOOD

✓ **JBL**
Xtreme 3
\$320

60 OVERALL SCORE

A portable, water-resistant outdoor speaker, such as this JBL, makes it easy to play your favorite music without worrying about rain damage. It's also one of the top portable models in our tests, with good sound, easy Bluetooth pairing, and a detachable shoulder strap for carrying convenience.



RELAX IN THE SHADE

Seasons Sentry Rectangle Market Umbrella
\$165 at Costco

Many patio umbrellas, such as this Seasons Sentry model, are made of Sunbrella fabric—a durable acrylic that is colorfast and mold- and mildew-resistant. To keep it in tip-top shape, Sunbrella suggests using a soft brush to remove dirt and debris from the fabric once a month.

PROTECT A WOODEN DECK

✓ **Behr Premium Solid Color Waterproofing Stain & Sealer**
(Home Depot) \$47

82 OVERALL SCORE

Staining a deck will help it look great for at least three years and extend its life, too. This Behr wood stain is the best in our ratings.

CR MONEY SAVER

Secrets of Modern Thrift Shopping



THRIFT SHOPPING has really grown in popularity: According to a 2021 report by thredUp, an online thrift store, sales of secondhand clothing are expected to double by 2025. But getting a great deal for lightly (or never) worn clothes has changed with the rise of online thrift and resale websites. It can take more know-how and patience to find what you want. We're here to help.

TRY THESE SITES

For the widest selection of styles, browse peer-to-peer selling sites, such as Depop, eBay, Etsy, Poshmark, and thredUp. For more curated collections of vintage clothing, check out sites

such as Fashion Constellate, Ruby Lane, and Thrilling.

USE FILTERS WISELY

Search filters are your best friends. Many sites allow you to sift through their massive

inventory by brand, size, price, color, and even the condition of the item. Employing these tools will reduce your need to scroll through an endless sea of products. Many sites also allow you to set up alerts for a specific item. For example, if you're looking for a size 8 blue dress from J.Crew, you'll be notified about new listings matching that description.

LEARN SELLER LINGO

There are a few key terms that many sellers use across thrift websites. "NWT" means an item should be "new with tags," indicating that it was probably never worn. "NWOT" means "new without tags," so the item should be in like-new condition but will not have its tags attached. If you search using these terms, you could get brand-new or like-new products for far less than retail prices. For example, the NWT Salvatore Ferragamo bag shown here has a retail value of \$1,250—but was listed on thredUp for \$366 (about a 70 percent discount). You can also look for phrases such as "mint condition" or "like-new condition." But always check the photos carefully, and be wary of listings that show only

the manufacturer images rather than the actual item being sold. You can also message the seller to request more photos to help you assess an item's condition.

FACTOR IN SHIPPING COSTS

Sites such as eBay have sellers from all over the world, but shipping tends to be cheaper and faster if you order goods from a vendor in the U.S. Often, you can filter to see only items shipping from the U.S. Some sites let sellers dictate the shipping price, while others charge a flat fee, but you may be able to score a discount by asking the seller for the fee directly. Some sites also offer free shipping when you spend over a certain amount.

CHECK SELLER REVIEWS AND RETURN POLICIES

Before buying, read through a seller's ratings to see what other shoppers have experienced. Some sites leave returns up to the seller; others, including Poshmark, don't accept returns unless an item fails to arrive or isn't what was described in the listing. And some websites, such as thredUp, allow returns within 14 days but charge a restocking fee for each item.

PHOTO, LEFT: THREDUP

CR Time Traveler BEAT THE HEAT

What Should a Good Sunburn Preventive Do?

1938 We test 33 "sunburn preventives" and find many to be inadequate. Madame Carree and Vale Florida Sun-Tan Oil were the least effective.



1945 Due to a wartime rayon shortage, women use leg makeup that looks like stockings. We test 39 brands and find that many show sweat streaks in the heat.

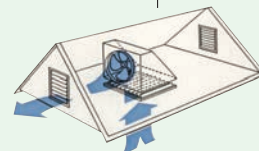


1950 "Getting a tan has become a major American summertime pursuit," CR says. We warn that skin cancer from sun exposure is not as uncommon as once thought.



1960 CR reports a boom in residential pools: Some 50,000 were built in 1959 alone. But ownership can be a pricey headache, we caution.

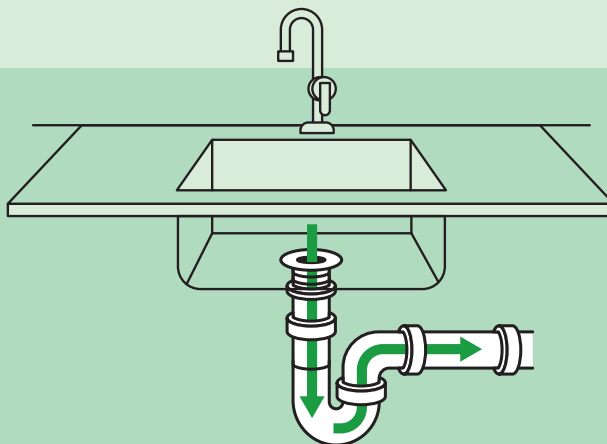
1974 We suggest installing an attic fan to cool your house, rather than an air conditioner, to save on electricity bills.



CR SMART SOLUTION

Surefire Fixes for Clogged Drains

WHETHER CAUSED by grease in your kitchen sink or hair in your bathtub, clogs can cause trouble for your pipes (such as water backups and pipe breakage) if they aren't properly cleared. But before you call a plumber, try these DIY declogging remedies.



Plunger

It's tempting to jump straight to a chemical declogger, but to protect your pipes, try a plunger first (especially with a toilet, because chemicals can crack the porcelain). Use a flange plunger on a toilet clog because it has a rubber flap on the bottom to create a better seal for suction. Basic cup plungers work best for sink and tub drains. While plungers are a first line of defense, they may only partially clear pipes. Still clogged? Move on to one of the next options.

Snake

Such as **Ridgid Kwik-Spin+ Drain Cleaning Snake Auger** or **Husky Drain Auger Snake**

COST: From about \$30 to \$60

Snakes are effective at removing leftover sludge a plunger might leave behind. They feature a metal cable that you feed into a pipe. A corkscrew-shaped spring on the end hooks into clogs, allowing you to pull all the material out. Wear safety glasses and gloves while using a snake because standing water and debris can splash up from the drain.

Caustic Cleaner

Such as **Drano Liquid** or **Thrift** (granules)

COST: From about \$5 to \$20

Especially effective on grease blockages that you might find in a sink, these products can contain corrosive chemical ingredients like lye (sodium hydroxide) and potash (a type of potassium salt), which work quickly (in about 30 minutes). Caustic cleaners may be too corrosive for toilet pipes, which tend to be more fragile. They can also cause chemical burns on skin, so use with caution.

Oxidizing Cleaner

Such as **Liquid-Plumr Industrial Strength Gel** or **Zep 10 Minute Hair Clog Remover**

COST: From about \$10

In general, these chemical-based cleaners are most helpful at removing organic materials such as hair and food, and are less effective on grease. They work in about 30 minutes and contain ingredients like bleach, and peroxides that strip electrons away from organic matter to loosen the obstruction.

Enzymatic Cleaner

Such as **Green Gobbler** or **Bio-Clean**

COST: From about \$12 to \$70

These cleaners might not be as fast-acting (or as effective) as the other cleaners, but they're safer for your pipes and more eco-friendly. They may need to be left in the clogged drain for several hours or even overnight. If you have a septic system, these can even be beneficial, adding bacteria that aid in breaking down waste.



1989 We test air conditioners in a lab that simulates a hot summer day and has 68 sensors to monitor cool air distribution. An Emerson Quiet Kool aces almost all our tests.



1993 CR looks at the billion dollar sports drink industry and finds many exaggerated promises. Of the ingredients in sports drinks—water, carbohydrates, and sodium—only water is truly hydrating.

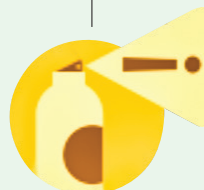
2017 For the fifth year in a row, CR's testing shows that some sunscreens fail to provide the SPF on the label. Out of 58 products, we find 20 tested at less than half their stated SPF.



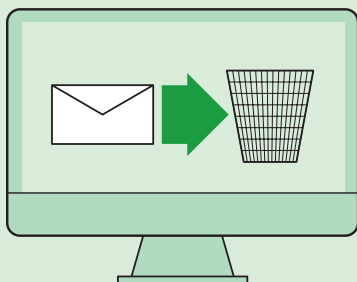
\$ Midea MAW12V1QWT U-shaped \$500

90
OVERALL
SCORE

1978 We review a cooler chest for "avant-garde picnickers": a portable fridge that plugs into a car's cigarette lighter. It works, but it's costly—\$169—and heavier than a normal cooler.



2022 Need a new A/C? Our latest testing of large room models reveals that the Midea is the best of the best—and very reasonably priced for its size.



TECH UPDATE

HOW TO DELETE UNWANTED EMAILS

IF YOU CREATED your email account more than a few years ago, your inbox is probably full to bursting. But there are some quick ways to purge emails. CR tech reporter Nicholas De Leon tells you how to trim a Gmail account down to size.

1 DELETE YOUR BIGGEST FILES

Go to one.google.com, sign in to your Gmail account, and click on the box that says “Clean up space.” Doing so takes you to a tool called the Storage Manager, which shows you lists of the emails, photos, and documents that take up the most storage across your account. These might include long-forgotten emails with large PDF attachments or images from years ago that you no longer need. “As you browse through and delete some of these very large items, you’ll free up hundreds of megabytes of space in minutes,” De Leon says.

2 SEARCH FOR LARGE BATCHES OF EMAILS

Next, start deleting large quantities of smaller emails. In your Gmail inbox, click on the search bar at the top of the page and type in a term that’s likely to yield many unwanted emails, such as the name of a company you have lots of promotions from. You can also try common phrases such as “Grubhub delivery.” When you hit Enter, the results should list every email that contains that phrase. Now you can

easily select large batches of emails for deletion. However, be aware that Google advises users to not delete more than 1,000 emails at once: Doing so might cause errors. Instead, select a few hundred emails at a time for deletion.

3 TARGET ANCIENT EMAILS

Purging your oldest emails is another easy way to free up space. Use Gmail’s filtering tool (an icon on the top right of your screen) to help you delete emails from years ago. In the calendar field, type in “Before: YYYY/MM/DD.” For example, you could input “Before: 2017/01/01.” Once you hit search, you should see only emails received before that date. Start deleting!

4 EMPTY YOUR TRASH

Now that you’ve moved emails to your trash folder, it’s time to empty it. Messages in your trash are auto-deleted after 30 days, but to free up storage right away, open the trash folder and click on “Empty Trash now.” To see how much storage space you’ve freed up, check the usage bar in the bottom left corner of your inbox window.

COUNTERTOP INTELLIGENCE

The Best Tools for Cool Drinks

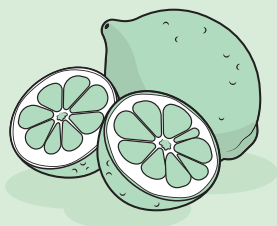


82 OVERALL SCORE

▲ BREW IT

New coffee machines do a lot more than just brew hot coffee: The **Ninja Specialty CM401**, \$170, for example, offers an over-ice brew mode for iced coffees, lattes, macchiatos, and other specialty brews. In our lab tests it’s excellent at brewing, and its glass carafe is easy to handle. This model, which is recommended by CR, is loaded with features, including a built-in milk frother, brew-strength control, and six brew sizes for everything from travel mugs to carafes, making it one of the most versatile models we’ve tested.

These kitchen basics make it much easier to enjoy a terrific chilled drink on a hot day.



▼ SQUEEZE IT

Lemonade is a classic summer beverage, but the store-bought kind can be loaded with added sugars. (In fact, sugary drinks are the leading source of added sugars in Americans' diets.) Instead, try squeezing some lemon into iced water or seltzer: It will add a zing of citrus flavor without the calories and added sugars. Our staff has evaluated nine manual citrus squeezers, and this **Chef'n FreshForce Citrus Juicer**, \$21, comes out on top. It's easy to grip, thanks to the nylon handles, and juice doesn't spray out from the sides as much as it does with the others. Two small legs at the base keep the juicer upright while it rests on the counter.



◀ BLEND IT

Making smoothies is an easy way to front-load your day with fruits and vegetables (and use up leftover produce that may be just slightly past its peak freshness). But with a blender that's not up to the task, you'll be left with chunks of ice or berries. In our lab, we put blenders through two tests that evaluate smoothies for their creaminess and thickness, says Larry Ciufu, who oversees CR's blender testing. The blender shown here, **Breville's The Q BBL820SHY1BUS1**, \$399, aces both tests and is recommended by CR.

79 OVERALL SCORE

► FREEZE IT

Even though many fridges have icemakers, the humble ice cube tray can still play an important role. Iced coffee lovers, for example, can turn leftover coffee into ice cubes—so when they melt in your iced coffee, it won't become watery. An easy-release tray with flexible silicone bottoms, such as this **Doqaus** (shown here with green silicone bottoms, not tested), makes popping ice cubes into your glass easier (\$14 for four trays). You might also want to use ice trays to make ice that's clearer than what may come out of an icemaker: Try boiling the water before pouring it in and freezing it. This may decrease the amount of cloudiness in the center of cubes.



OUTSIDE THE LABS

Want a Lighter Wallet?

REMEMBER THE “SEINFELD” episode called “The Costanza Wallet,” named for George Costanza’s big receipt-coupon-napkin-stuffed billfold that ultimately exploded? Maybe yours isn’t quite that packed, but you could still probably benefit from a slimmer wallet. Believe it or not, sitting on a chunky wallet that has been stuck in your back pocket may increase your risk of back pain and symptoms of sciatic nerve compression in your lower back, such as numbness. With the advent of smartphones, some of what’s in that wallet—photos of loved ones, rewards cards, and receipts—can be removed permanently and replaced with digital versions.

Enter new “skinny” wallets, which offer a slimmed-down redesign of traditional bifold or trifold ones—with clever space-saving organizers that fan out your credit cards at the push of a button. CR evaluated 11 skinny wallets to find out which offer the best compact features and still hold your essentials. Our top picks, shown here, impressed us with their capacity and ease of use—and all have some sort of radio frequency identification protection, a security feature that protects your tap-to-use credit cards from hacking.



EDITOR'S CHOICE

Ekster Senate Cardholder \$79

SPECS: 2.3 x 4.1 x 0.3 inches

This cardholder, shown above, is made of aluminum covered in leather and has an elastic cash strap that holds your cash on the outside. A switch on the bottom of the wallet pops a set of credit cards out from the top, arrayed in a fan so that you can see them all quickly and grab what you need.



BEST BUDGET WALLET

Vulkit VC-104r From \$17

SPECS: 2.4 x 4.25 x 0.5 inches

With a pop-up cardholder design similar to the Ekster's, this Vulkit has one big advantage going for it: price. Vulkit offers a wide range of colors, too. The biggest difference from the others here is that the Vulkit has a stretchy nylon front pocket for folded bills or coins. A drawback: The lever to pop your cards up juts out from the bottom of the wallet, making it more likely to catch on a loose thread or the edge of a pocket.



A WALLET YOU CAN TRACK DOWN

Nimalist AirTag Wallet \$40

SPECS: 2.1 x 3.3 x 0.2 inches (AirTag sold separately)

Nimalist's soft leather cardholder incorporates Apple's tracking device into its design so that you can always find a misplaced billfold. AirTags have a bulky shape, though, so the Nimalist looks like it has an elevator button on its front. But if you tend to lose track of your wallet, the convenience might outweigh its odd shape. Also, it's one of the slimmest we tried—with thin pockets that hold up to 12 cards and a center slot that easily holds 10 folded bills.

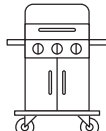
For more wallet reviews, go to [CR.org/slimwallet](https://www.crisp.org/slimwallet).

AUGUST
IS THE
BEST TIME
TO BUY ...

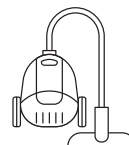
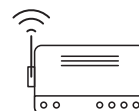
COMPUTERS



GRILLS



VACUUMS


WIRELESS
ROUTERS




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 MUSTANG VEHICLES

Ford is recalling over 25,000 Mustang coupes and convertibles from the 2019 and 2020 model years with manual transmissions and 5.0-liter engines (built from Jan. 18, 2018, through Dec. 16, 2020) because their backup cameras, reverse lights, and active safety features might not work properly. The problems are due to a software issue. In addition to an inoperable backup camera and reverse lights, drivers may also notice a warning light on the dashboard showing which functions are not available, including traction control, forward collision warning (FCW), blind spot warning (BSW) and cross traffic indicator. The absence of these features may increase the risk of a crash.

What to do: Ford will mail recall notices to owners of affected vehicles; owners may also contact Ford at 866-436-7332. NHTSA campaign number: 22V382. Ford's own number for this recall is 22S37. Ford dealerships will update the vehicle software, free of charge.

ELECTROLUX AND FRIGIDAIRE REFRIGERATORS

Electrolux is recalling about 367,500 refrigerators because of the icemaker: Parts of it can

break off and end up in the ice bucket with the ice that has been made, posing a choking hazard if consumed. The recall involves 13 models of Frigidaire refrigerators and one Electrolux model refrigerator. Go to icemakerrecall.com to find out whether your model is affected; the brand name, model, and serial number for each unit is on a label on the right panel in the interior of the refrigerator compartment. At the time of reporting, the company has received 185 reports of the ice level detectors breaking. The refrigerators were sold at Lowe's, Home Depot, and appliance stores nationwide, and online at frigidaire.com, from April 2020 through March 2022 for between \$1,200 and \$4,300.

What to do: Stop using the recalled refrigerator icemaker and empty the ice bucket. Contact Electrolux to schedule a technician to replace (free of charge) the icemaker with one that has a polypropylene ice level detector. Call 833-840-5926 or email IceMakerRecall@electrolux.com.

GE REFRIGERATORS

GE Appliances is recalling about 155,000 French-door refrigerators with bottom-freezers. The company says the freezer handle can detach

when a person tries to open the freezer drawer, posing a fall hazard. This recall involves six models of 36-inch-wide GE-brand French-door refrigerators with bottom freezers in fingerprint-resistant stainless steel, which were manufactured from February 2020 through August 2021. The brand name, model, and serial number for each unit are printed on a label located on the top of the left side of the interior of the refrigerator compartment. Models include the GFE26JYMKFFS, GFE26JYMNFFS, GNE27EYMKFFS, GNE27EYMNFFS, GNE27JYMKFFS, and GNE27JYMNFFS (with serial numbers beginning with AS, DR, DS, FR, FS, GR, GS, HR, HS, LR, LS, MR, MS, RR, SR, TR, VR, or ZR). These models were sold at Best Buy, Home Depot, Lowe's, and other home improvement and home appliance stores nationwide, and online at bestbuy.com and lowes.com from February 2020 through January 2022 for between \$1,900 and \$2,500.

What to do: Call GE at 888-345-4671 or go to geappliances.com/ge/recall/bottom-freezer-refrigerator-2022 for more information and to schedule a free in-home service call to have the freezer's handle-mounting fasteners replaced and the handle reinstalled. GE can also relay instructions for safe use pending a repair.

HEMPVANA PAIN RELIEF PRODUCTS

Telebrands is recalling about 183,000 Hempvana products—Ultra Strength Pain Relief Cream With Lidocaine, Ultra Strength Pain Relief Cream Night With Lidocaine, Ultra Strength Pain Relief Cream Turmeric With Lidocaine, and Pain Relieving Hand & Body Lotion With Lidocaine—because the packaging of the products

is not child-resistant, posing a risk of poisoning if the contents are swallowed or placed on the skin of young children. The products were sold online at altmeyers.com, amazon.com, bedbathhome.com, boscovs.com, cvs.com, ebay.com, hempvana.com, fredmeyer.com, hamricks.com, hannaford.com, riteaid.com, safeway.com, and walmart.com, and at AltMeyer's, Boscov's, CVS, Fred Meyer, Hamrick's, Hannaford, Rite Aid, Safeway, and Walmart stores nationwide from April 2021 through January 2022 for about \$20.

What to do: Stop using the recalled products, and store them in a safe location out of reach of young children. Call Telebrands at 855-306-1424 for information on how to safely dispose of the recalled products and how to receive a full refund or a free child-resistant closure for the jar products. In addition, Telebrands is providing a \$15 digital coupon code good toward the purchase of any Hempvana products at hempvana.com.

BESTAR WALL BEDS

The Consumer Product Safety Commission and Bestar, of Canada, announced a recall of about 129,000 wall beds because of serious impact and crushing hazards. This recall involves the Audrea, Cielo, Edge, Lumina, Nebula, Novello, Orion, Pur, and Versatile full- and queen-size wall beds sold online at amazon.com, costco.com, cymax.com, and wayfair.com from June 2014 through March 2022 for between \$1,650 and \$2,200.

What to do: Stop using the wall bed. Call Bestar at 888-912-8458 for more information on getting a free inspection, and potential reimbursement of up to \$414 for a professional reinstallation, depending on the bed model.

PRODUCT UPDATE



THE LATEST
RATINGS FROM
OUR LABS

Top-Rated Dairy-Free Ice Cream

We tested 14 products made with plant-based milks, olive or coconut oil, even avocado. Just how healthy are these, and do they taste good?

by Sally Wadyka



Oatly Non-Dairy
Chocolate

53 OVERALL
SCORE

NadaMoo Dairy-Free
Organic Chocolate

60 OVERALL
SCORE

Breyers Non-Dairy
Chocolate Chocolate Chip

53 OVERALL
SCORE

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troll through a grocery store's freezer aisle and you'll see that "vegan" ice cream is no longer a fad—there are nearly as many options as there are traditional dairy ice creams.

"With plant milks on the rise, it was only a matter of time before plant-based ice cream was going to be popular," says Amy Keating, RD, a nutritionist at Consumer Reports. Sales, which are currently \$458 million a year, have grown 41 percent since 2018, according to the Plant Based Foods Association—and are expected to keep climbing.

CR recently reviewed 14 popular chocolate nondairy frozen desserts for nutrition and taste, and came up with a list of features to look for to get the perfect creamy, cool treat.

Consider the Base

In dairy ice cream, the base is milk, cream, or both. In nondairy frozen desserts, plant products take the lead. That includes almond, cashew, coconut, or oat milk; olive, coconut, or other oil; or even avocados. The base nearly always affects the taste of the dessert, our testers found.

"Some, like almond milk and olive oil, were more neutral, but milk, coconut milk, and coconut oil were noticeable enough to come through the strong chocolate flavors," Keating says. "And if we had tested vanilla, the base flavors may have been more pronounced."

That's not necessarily a bad thing. For instance, coconut and oat flavors paired nicely with the chocolate. "But if you don't like the base flavor, you may not like the ice cream," Keating says.

While our testers found several tasty nondairy frozen desserts, two stood out: Häagen-Dazs Chocolate Salted Fudge Truffle, made with coconut oil and other oils, and Van Leeuwen Chocolate Fudge Brownie, made with cashew milk, coconut oil, and cream.

But make no mistake: Even the

tastiest nondairy treats don't taste like ice cream. "Calling it 'ice cream' can set up an expectation that plant-based desserts can't truly live up to," says Robert F. Roberts, PhD, head of the food science department at Penn State University. "Manufacturers can make a very good product, but because plant-based proteins don't work the same way as milk proteins, it's not 'ice cream.'"

Check the Sugar and Saturated Fat

No one scoops up a bowl of ice cream thinking it's a healthy snack, and making it vegan really doesn't change that, says D. Julian McClements, PhD, a professor of food science at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

For one thing, both plant-based frozen desserts and dairy ice cream can have a lot of sugar. Sugar lowers the freezing point and keeps the desserts from getting too hard.

"Real ice cream gets some of that sugar naturally from the lactose in dairy, but nondairy versions have no lactose and may have to add more sugar to get the same results," Roberts says. For example, Häagen-Dazs Double Belgian Chocolate Chip dairy ice cream has 29 grams of added sugars in two-thirds of a cup. Its Non-Dairy Chocolate Salted Fudge Truffle has 37 grams—a full 2 teaspoons more.

And although these desserts are plant-based, they can be surprisingly high in calories and saturated fat. Nine of the ones we tested have 220 calories or more in two-thirds of a cup. And five have 10 to 21 grams of saturated fat per serving, as much or more than what's typical for dense, premium dairy chocolate ice creams. For example, Van Leeuwen Chocolate Fudge Brownie French Ice Cream has 330 calories and 12 grams of saturated fat per serving vs. 580 calories and 21 grams in its nondairy version.

Several of the products have a more reasonable 6 to 8 grams of saturated fat per serving. Those based on

healthier unsaturated fats can have even less. Cado, for example, is made with avocado and has just 2 grams of saturated fat, and olive-oil-based Wildgood has 1.5 grams.

The products with the best balance of nutrition and flavor were Breyers Non-Dairy Chocolate Chocolate Chip and Oatly Non-Dairy Chocolate. They earned a Very Good rating for flavor and were lower in calories, saturated fat, and added sugars than many of the others—more in line with regular ice cream and less than what's typical for rich, dense premium ice cream. NadaMoo Dairy-Free Organic Chocolate got the top nutrition rating and a Good for flavor.

"The nondairy desserts that scored the highest for taste—Häagen-Dazs and Van Leeuwen—got low ratings for nutrition, but both are very rich," Keating says. "A little goes a long way, so have one-third of a cup and cut your calorie, fat, and sugar intake in half."

Better for the Planet?

Considerable research shows that plant-based products are better for the environment than animal-based ones, McClements says. Dairy cows and milk processing produce about triple the greenhouse gases as plant-milk production. It's still unclear whether one kind of plant milk is more planet-friendly than another, but almond and rice milks have raised concerns because the crops require large amounts of water.

Compare Prices

Vegan ice creams can be expensive. Do you always get what you pay for? Yes and no. One of the best-tasting ones, Van Leeuwen, costs \$8 per pint. But not far behind in flavor is the least pricey of them all: Breyers Non-Dairy Chocolate Chocolate Chip, at \$5 for 1.5 quarts, which comes out to just \$1.67 a pint. On the other hand, two frozen desserts with low taste scores cost considerably more: Nick's, at \$7 per pint, and Cado's, at \$8 per pint.

HERE'S THE SCOOP

Think vegan frozen desserts save you calories? Not so much. The ones CR tested range from 90 to 580 calories per $\frac{2}{3}$ -cup serving. Regular dairy ice cream, in general, has 150 to 200 calories per serving, and premium ice cream can have about 250 to 300 or more.

That's because the calorie count depends on several factors. One is the base, such as whole or skim milk in ice cream and coconut milk or olive oil in vegan desserts. How much air gets churned into the product matters, too. Premium ice creams and premium frozen desserts tend to have less air and thus more calories. Another consideration: added sugars. Vegan desserts often have as much or more than dairy ice creams, unless they use no- or low-cal sugar substitutes, such as erythritol or stevia.



60

OVERALL SCORE



SENSORY SCORE



NUTRITION SCORE

NadaMoo Dairy-Free Organic Chocolate
\$7.00, 1 pint

BASE: Coconut milk. Big coconut and cocoa flavors. Smooth texture, but slightly gummy.

CAL: 170 SAT. FAT: 8 g ADDED SUGARS: 2 g
FIBER: 7 g PROTEIN: 1 g SODIUM: 50 mg

42

OVERALL SCORE



SENSORY SCORE



NUTRITION SCORE



Forager Project Organic Dairy-Free Bittersweet Chocolate
\$7.00, 14 fl. oz.

BASE: Cashew milk. Bittersweet chocolate flavor; slightly sweet. Slightly icy and hard; lacks creaminess.

CAL: 240 SAT. FAT: 10 g ADDED SUGARS: 23 g
FIBER: 3 g PROTEIN: 2 g SODIUM: 120 mg

40

OVERALL SCORE



SENSORY SCORE



NUTRITION SCORE



Ben & Jerry's Non-Dairy Chocolate Fudge Brownie
\$5.50, 1 pint

BASE: Almond milk. Rich dark chocolate with some almond-milk flavor and chewy, fudgy brownie pieces. Dense.

CAL: 290 SAT. FAT: 8 g ADDED SUGARS: 26 g
FIBER: 2 g PROTEIN: 4 g SODIUM: 60 mg

54

OVERALL SCORE



SENSORY SCORE



NUTRITION SCORE



Cado Non-Dairy Avocado Deep Dark Chocolate
\$8.00, 1 pint

BASE: Avocado. Tastes mostly sweet, with little chocolate flavor. Smooth and slightly gummy texture.

CAL: 220 SAT. FAT: 2 g ADDED SUGARS: 16 g
FIBER: 2 g PROTEIN: 1 g SODIUM: 100 mg

50

OVERALL SCORE



SENSORY SCORE



NUTRITION SCORE



Nick's Vegan Choklad Choklad
\$7.00, 1 pint

BASE: Mixed oils and sugar. Overly sweet. Chocolate flavor has a strong cherry note. The chocolate pieces are slightly bitter. Icy texture.

CAL: 90 SAT. FAT: 6 g ADDED SUGARS: 0 g
FIBER: 6 g PROTEIN: 3 g SODIUM: 60 mg

34

OVERALL SCORE



SENSORY SCORE



NUTRITION SCORE



So Delicious Dairy-Free Wondermilk Chocolate Cocoa Chip
\$5.50, 1 pint

BASE: Sugar and mixed oils. Decent chocolate flavor, but fairly strong nutty/seedy flavor. Dense, creamy, and smooth.

CAL: 240 SAT. FAT: 10 g ADDED SUGARS: 23 g
FIBER: 2 g PROTEIN: 3 g SODIUM: 70 mg

53

OVERALL
SCORE

 SENSORY
SCORE


 NUTRITION
SCORE


Oatly Non-Dairy Chocolate

\$5.50, 1 pint

BASE: Oat milk. Mild chocolate flavor with an underlying nutty taste from the oat milk. Smooth texture.

CAL: 200 SAT. FAT: 7 g ADDED SUGARS: 18 g
FIBER: 1 g PROTEIN: 2 g SODIUM: 45 mg

53

OVERALL
SCORE

 SENSORY
SCORE


 NUTRITION
SCORE


Breyers Non-Dairy Chocolate Chocolate Chip

\$5.00, 1.5 quart

BASE: Almond milk. Big chocolate flavor with sparse semi-sweet chunks. Not so creamy; similar to low-fat ice cream.

CAL: 170 SAT. FAT: 6 g ADDED SUGARS: 20 g
FIBER: 3 g PROTEIN: 2 g SODIUM: 10 mg

51

OVERALL
SCORE

 SENSORY
SCORE


 NUTRITION
SCORE


Cosmic Bliss Organic Dairy-Free Dark Chocolate

\$7.00, 14 fl. oz.

BASE: Coconut milk. Big coconut and rich dark chocolate flavor. Not too sweet. Creamy smooth texture.

CAL: 230 SAT. FAT: 15 g ADDED SUGARS: 15 g
FIBER: 2 g PROTEIN: 2 g SODIUM: 105 mg



WHAT'S WITH ALL THE ADDITIVES?

You can make ice cream at home with just a few ingredients: milk, cream, sugar, and something for flavor, like vanilla or cocoa. A few dairy ice creams sold in grocery stores have a similar ingredients list. But frozen desserts—dairy and nondairy—often contain additives, such as a variety of gums (guar, locust bean), starches and fibers (corn, chicory root), sugar substitutes (allulose, erythritol), and proteins (fava bean, pea).

In dairy ice cream, some of those ingredients, particularly the gums, are added to increase shelf life or to keep sugar crystals from freezing, says Robert F. Roberts, PhD, a food scientist. "But nondairy desserts may need these and other additives to help the product behave more like ice cream," he says.

For example, casein, a protein found naturally in milk, helps make dairy ice cream thick and creamy. In plant-based ice creams, gums, starches, soy lecithin, and mono- and diglycerides often play that role.

In other products, plant proteins and fiber may also enter the mix to improve the product's overall texture. But don't think that these necessarily provide the same health benefit as getting those nutrients from whole foods.

49

OVERALL
SCORE

 SENSORY
SCORE


 NUTRITION
SCORE


Häagen-Dazs Non-Dairy Chocolate Salted Fudge Truffle

\$5.50, 14 fl. oz.

BASE: Sugar and mixed oils. Rich flavor, plus chocolate swirls and slightly salty truffle chunks. Dense and creamy.

CAL: 360 SAT. FAT: 6 g ADDED SUGARS: 37 g
FIBER: 5 g PROTEIN: 3 g SODIUM: 180 mg

47

OVERALL
SCORE

 SENSORY
SCORE


 NUTRITION
SCORE


Planet Oat Non-Dairy Chocolate

\$6.00, 1 pint

BASE: Oat milk. Mild cocoa flavor and not too sweet. Oat milk flavor comes through. Slightly creamy.

CAL: 220 SAT. FAT: 9 g ADDED SUGARS: 16 g
FIBER: 2 g PROTEIN: 2 g SODIUM: 55 mg

43

OVERALL
SCORE

 SENSORY
SCORE


 NUTRITION
SCORE


Wildgood Non-Dairy Chocolate

\$6.00, 1 pint

BASE: Sugar and olive oil. Sweet and salty chocolate flavor with caramel note. Somewhat dense and creamy.

CAL: 190 SAT. FAT: 1.5 g ADDED SUGARS: 26 g
FIBER: 0 g PROTEIN: 2 g SODIUM: 190 mg

31

OVERALL
SCORE

 SENSORY
SCORE


 NUTRITION
SCORE


Brave Robot Animal-Free Ice Cream A Lot of Chocolate

\$6.00, 14 fl. oz.

BASE: Nonanimal whey protein,* mixed oils, and sugar. Big chocolate flavor. Slightly creamy.

CAL: 350 SAT. FAT: 15 g ADDED SUGARS: 26 g
FIBER: 3 g PROTEIN: 4 g SODIUM: 170 mg

29

OVERALL
SCORE

 SENSORY
SCORE


 NUTRITION
SCORE


Van Leeuwen Non-Dairy Chocolate Fudge Brownie

\$8.00, 14 fl. oz.

BASE: Cashew milk and coconut cream. Rich, fudgy chocolate flavor, with some coconut. Dense and creamy.

CAL: 580 SAT. FAT: 21 g ADDED SUGARS: 46 g
FIBER: 6 g PROTEIN: 6 g SODIUM: 400 mg

HOW WE TEST: CR tested 14 chocolate nondairy desserts. Half of the products were plain chocolate flavor. For brands that didn't offer plain chocolate, we tested their chocolate flavor that included other ingredients, such as chocolate or brownie pieces. The nutrition score is based on calories, saturated fat, added sugars, and other nutrients. We also considered the ingredients and whether they were organic as part of the score. The sensory score is based on the objective evaluation of sensory experts who blind-tasted the products. Each product received a rating for taste and nutrition, and the Overall Score is based on a combination of the two.

*The company notes that the product contains milk allergens.

CR'S ULTIMATE HEAT SURVIVAL GUIDE

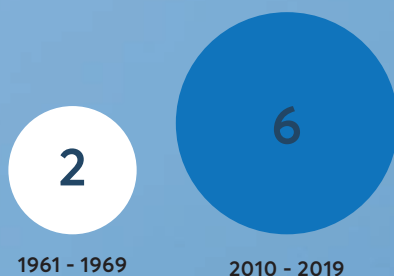
With temperatures rising,
we've gathered the best ways
to stay comfortable and
safe—both inside and out—
even on scorching hot days.

by Janet Siroto

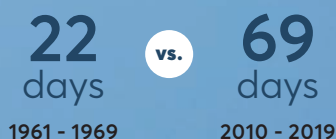




On average, there are more heat waves each year in the U.S. than there used to be ...



... and heat wave seasons are getting longer.



Source: Data is from the Environmental Protection Agency and reflects the average length of a heat wave season and the average annual number of heat waves in 50 U.S. metropolitan areas between 1961 and 2019. The definition of a heat wave is abnormally hot and possibly humid weather for a time of year and area that typically lasts more than two days.



UNLESS YOU'VE BEEN living in a deep, cool cave somewhere, you're probably aware that our world—or at least many parts of it—is getting hotter. In the U.S., little has been more emblematic of these rising temperatures than June 2021's string of 110-degree days in the Pacific Northwest, where temperatures are typically in the 70s at that time of year. Almost 200 people perished, and there's some suggestion that the number was grossly underreported.

Nationally and globally, the drumbeat of high-heat advisories is quickening. "It's definitive that we are already seeing an increase in the frequency, intensity, and duration of heat waves," says Kristie L. Ebi, PhD, MPH, a climate researcher and professor at the Center for Health and the Global Environment at the University of Washington in Seattle. "The projections are that this will continue across the U.S."

At this point, heat—often in tandem with the high humidity that can hike the risk of dangerous conditions such as heatstroke—kills up to 1,300 Americans annually. It sickens tens of thousands more, often the very young, the very old, the already ill, and the poor.

Even if your locale doesn't experience a record-shattering heat wave, you may well notice that it's simply hotter and more humid than it used to be.

Climate change due to greenhouse gas emissions from cars, factories, and anything else that burns fossil fuels is largely at fault. The cooling industry is a factor, too. It accounts for about 10 percent of global emissions of carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas that contributes to climate change.

And as we try to stay cool in the warming environment, the demand for air conditioning is going up, projected to triple globally by 2050. This will further hike emissions from the power plants that supply electricity to run our A/Cs.

Global action to control these emissions is critical, as is the continued development of more efficient cooling methods. But right now, you can take steps to find relief from the heat without driving up your energy costs or exacting a high toll on the environment. We've gathered the expert advice that will help you stay safe and comfortable at home and during outdoor activities when the temperatures soar.



On steamy summer days, close blinds, drapes, and shades to block the sun's glare and heat, and turn on a ceiling fan to help you feel cooler.

KEEP YOUR HOME COMFORTABLE

A COOL ROOM may be the best place to be during heat waves—especially during the middle of the day when temperatures tend to be at their highest. Some simple actions, like swapping heat-emitting incandescent bulbs for LEDs or CFLs and routinely cleaning or replacing your A/C filters, can help you stay chill without ramping up your energy use (and bills). If you can't cool your home sufficiently, and especially if you're sweating profusely and/or feeling confused, try to find a nearby cooling center, which can provide a much needed respite from the heat, by calling your local health department or area officials.

Stop Heat From Building Up

SEAL HOT AIR OUT To keep sweltering outdoor air from making its way into your home, caulk and weather strip doors and windows. Unsure when your attic insulation was last replaced or whether it's adequate? A certified or licensed contractor can evaluate it.

BLOCK THE SUN Close blinds, drapes, and shades, especially when the sun is hitting them. "Doing so will minimize the intake of heat that you'd just have to get rid of later," says Wendell Porter, PhD, senior lecturer emeritus in agricultural and biological engineering at the University of Florida in Gainesville. Stick-on reflective/solar-blocking window film or mesh solar window screens also cut heat and glare.

BE APPLIANCE WISE During the day's heat, avoid running your clothes dryer or oven, and use the cold-water setting on your washing machine and the air-dry setting on your dishwasher. For cooking, a multi-cooker, microwave, and/or toaster oven won't heat up the kitchen the way your oven will.

CONSIDER BIGGER STEPS Planting deciduous trees on the south side of your house provides shade in summer. Painting the exterior a light color will reflect heat instead of absorbing it. "Cool roof" coating materials can shed heat but are best in warmer climates, where you need less "heat gain" from the sun in the winter.

Try Low-Tech Cooling Tactics

FLIP A FAN ON Ceiling, portable, and window fans stir up breezes that speed sweat evaporation, which will help you feel cooler. A ceiling fan, for instance, can make the temperature feel up to 4 degrees chillier, says the Department of Energy. In the past, groups such as the World Health Organization have cautioned that electric fans can't cool us adequately when temperatures are above 95° F. But research that was published in The Lancet Planetary Health in 2021 found that fans can offer relief 95 percent of the time when the temperature is between 98.6° F and 102.2° F. Window fans typically pull outside air in and circulate it, so they may be most effective at night.

CHILL OUT AT NIGHT Natural, breathable bedding fabrics such as cotton and linen allow sweat to dissipate instead of locking it in the way synthetic fibers like polyester and nylon may. People who sleep hot might consider a mattress cooling pad or a mattress that retains less heat on hot nights. (For more information, go to [CR.org/coolermattress](https://www.consumerreports.org/coolermattress).)

Optimize Your A/C

POSITION IT PROPERLY Place window units in north-facing or shaded windows. A unit pounded by the sun will have to work much harder to cool the room. Keep heat-emitting objects such as computers, TVs, and lamps out of the line of the unit's airflow for the same reason.

GIVE IT SOME TLC Vacuum window unit filters every couple of weeks, wash the filters with warm water and soap at least every two months, and replace the filters when they're worn. For a whole-house system, a licensed, certified A/C contractor can check it every year to make sure your A/C or heat pump system is running well.

UP YOUR EFFICIENCY To reduce your A/C usage and still stay comfortable, use fans at the same time. "Set the thermostat 1 or 2 degrees higher than you would otherwise with a fan on," Porter says. "Each degree higher your A/C is set toward 78° F can save up to 4 percent on your energy costs." A WiFi-enabled smart thermostat, which allows you to manage your central A/C via smartphone, may let you set different temperatures for different rooms and times of the day. Some newer WiFi-enabled window A/Cs are also "smart" and can be controlled by a smartphone or tablet.

BUY SMART Air conditioners with the Energy Star label are the most energy-wise and planet-friendly. Also, check for a high seasonal energy

efficiency ratio (SEER), which tells you how efficient a central A/C system is. "Right now, the minimum rating is 14 SEER, and some go up to 21," says Don Brandt, a recently retired HVAC sales engineer who spent 39 years at Trane Technologies. "The higher the rating, the more you're likely to spend, but the better the unit is and the more you will save every year."

CHECK A/C ALTERNATIVES

Evaporative coolers, which are best for a dry climate, chill outdoor air before it's directed into your home. Another option is an energy-efficient electric heat pump, which provides cool air in the summer and heat in winter. Get more info on these at [CR.org/heatpumps](https://www.consumerreports.org/heatpumps).

Heat Warnings, Decoded

What do all those terms about hot weather signify? Find their meanings here, but keep in mind that definitions may vary by area.

Excessive heat outlook

A heat wave is possible within three to seven days.

Excessive heat watch

Conditions are ripe for a heat wave within one to three days.

Heat advisory*

A maximum heat index temperature of 100° F or more, with nighttime temperatures of 75° F or higher, is expected within 12 hours and to last at least two days.

Excessive heat warning*

Extremely dangerous heat conditions: A maximum heat index temperature of 105° F

or more for at least two days, with nighttime temps 75° F or higher expected within 12 hours.

Heat index

A measure of how hot it feels outside based on temperature and humidity. The latter is key: The more humid the air is, the longer it takes for sweat to evaporate and help you cool down.

Heat wave (or excessive or extreme heat)

Abnormally hot (and possibly humid) weather for the time of year and area that typically lasts more than two days.

*It's important to prepare for these high heat situations, according to the National Weather Service, by ensuring, for instance, that you'll have a place to stay cool and access to plenty of liquids to help you stay hydrated. To get forecasts for your area, go to [weather.gov](https://www.weather.gov) and type in your ZIP code.

TAKE SMART STEPS WHEN YOU'RE OUTSIDE

WHETHER YOU'RE MOWING the lawn or taking a power walk, be especially careful when being physically active during summer's heat. "On very hot and humid days, your body's ability to dissipate heat declines," says Thomas A. Waters, MD, FACEP, an emergency medicine physician at the Cleveland Clinic. "Don't think you can just push through it." Here's what else the experts advise.

Avoid Hot Spots

DRESS TO COOL Loose, light, pale-colored clothing in breathable natural fibers like cotton and linen reflect

heat instead of absorbing it and permit perspiration to evaporate, cooling you down. But for exercise or outdoor physical work in the heat, activewear that's moisture-wicking (look for the term on clothing tags) is a good choice, says Mike Szymanski, director of education at the University of Connecticut's Korey Stringer Institute. The clothing has tiny capillarylike structures that pull sweat away from the skin to the fabric's surface, cooling you down.

PREVENT SUNBURN A burn can increase the likelihood of dehydration and heat illness, so be diligent about protection, even on cloudy days. Seek shade between 10 or 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. when possible, Szymanski says. When you're in the sun, wear a wide-brimmed hat and apply sunscreen with an SPF of

at least 30; SPF 50 is better. Reapply every 2 hours and immediately after swimming or sweating.

WATCH OUT FOR HOT-CAR HAZARDS

A car's interior can heat up by 40 degrees within an hour, which can lead to dangerous or even deadly temperatures. Never leave anyone—especially children, who heat up far faster than adults—or pets unattended inside a vehicle. Note: New cars from more than 15 manufacturers offer back-seat occupancy reminders to reduce the risk that someone will be left in a vehicle on a hot day. These will become standard in most cars by 2025. Tesla's Dog mode feature can keep the vehicle's HVAC operating when it's parked.

Taking a dip on a day that's very hot provides a double dose of relief. You feel cooler while you're swimming, and the evaporation of water on your skin afterward will cool you even more.

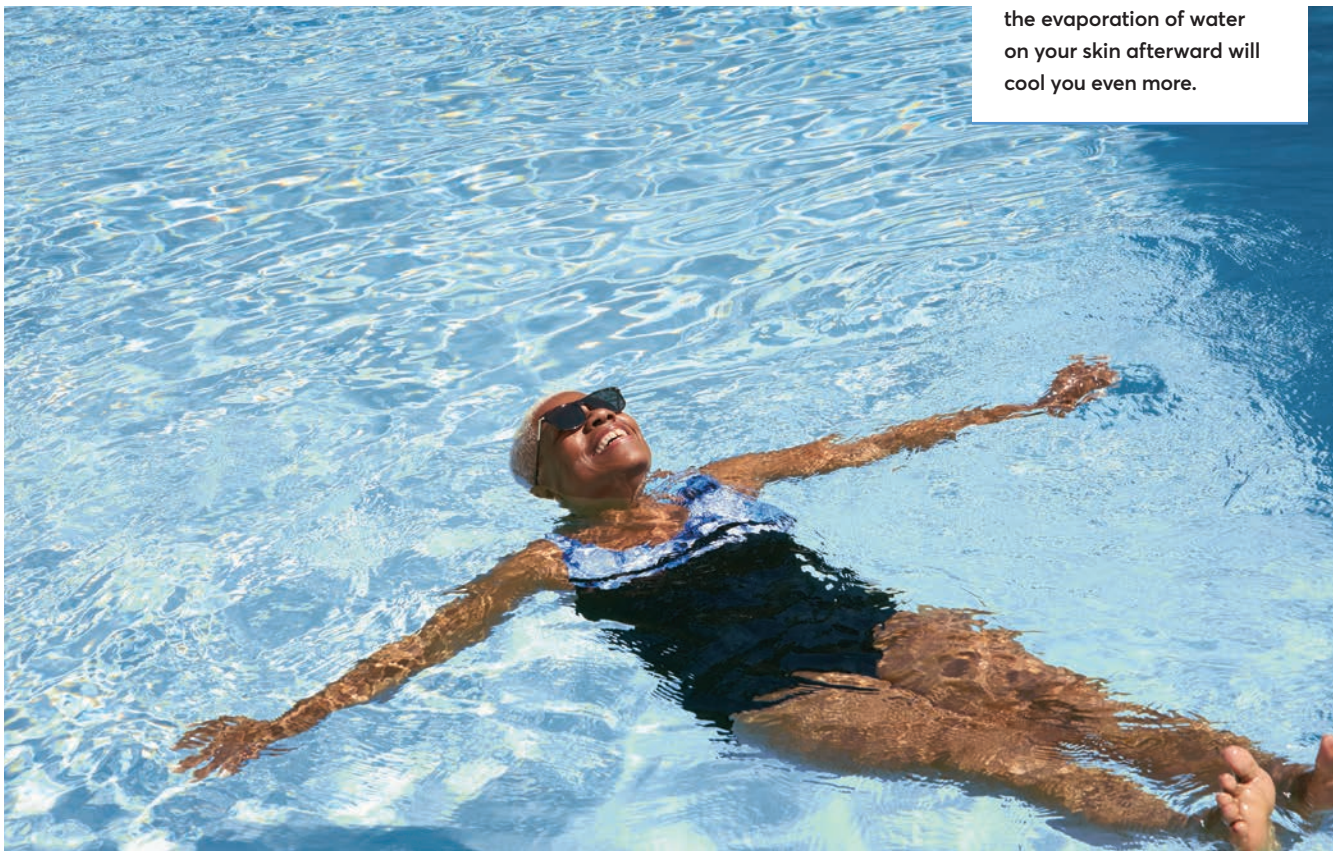


PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Harness the Cooling Power of Water

DRINK UP Many of us don't drink enough liquids when temperatures climb, and dehydration can hike the risk of dangerous heatstroke. "When you know heat is coming, you need to drink more than you think you need to," says Wayne C. McCormick, MD, MPH, a physician at the University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle. How much liquid you really need to take in depends on several factors, such as the weather, your activity level, and even the particular medications you're taking.

But a cup of liquid every 90 minutes while you're awake is a good start. If you're outside in the heat working or exercising, ramp that up to a cup every half an hour. And if you aren't urinating much (say, only every 4 hours), drink more. (Thirst isn't really a reliable indicator because by the time you feel thirsty, you're already somewhat dehydrated.)

Do you find it hard to hydrate as much as you probably should? Set alerts on your phone as a reminder. Sipping small amounts of liquids throughout the day, adding slices of citrus to a pitcher of water, and eating high-water foods such as fruit can also help you get enough liquid when the heat is on.

Alcohol is dehydrating, so keep consumption low when it's hot. Caffeinated drinks can act as diuretics, but the impact isn't significant enough to negate their hydrating power, says Gordon Giesbrecht, PhD, who runs the Laboratory for Exercise and Environmental Medicine at the University of Manitoba in Canada.

TRY A BETTER WATER BOTTLE Cool liquids feel good going down, and research shows they can also help reduce your core body temperature. (Water that's cool—50 to 60 degrees—but not ice-cold is optimal for hydration, Szymanski says. But if

When Heat Makes You Sick

Know the signs of heat-related illness and the steps to take if you experience them

Heat Cramps

Marked by muscle spasms or pain and possible heavy sweating during intense physical activity. Stop, get to a cool place, and drink water or a beverage with electrolytes. Get medical help right away if you have heart problems, you're on a low-sodium diet, or your cramps last longer than an hour.

Heat Exhaustion

This can progress to heatstroke if not addressed. Signs may include heavy sweating, fatigue, weakness, a cold, clammy feeling, a pale appearance; a fast but weak pulse, nausea or vomiting, muscle cramps, a headache, and even fainting. Cease physical activity, get to a cool place, use a wet cloth or take a cool bath to lower body temperature, and sip water. Get medical help right away if you vomit or symptoms worsen or last more than an hour.

Heatstroke


This can be fatal if not addressed, so call 911 ASAP in the case of confusion or agitation, fainting, and an inability to sweat. While awaiting help, rest in an air-conditioned room or get into a cool shower or bath. Don't drink anything.

super-cold beverages are what get you drinking enough liquids, go for it.) Heading out and about? Consider an insulated water bottle. Klean Kanteen, Stanley, Coleman, MIRA, and Hydro Flask, among others, lay claim to keeping water refreshingly cool for at least 24 hours. For walking, hiking, and cycling, consider a hydration backpack, which has a water pouch and built-in straw to let you sip on the go.

REPLACE WHAT SWEAT STEALS If you're seriously sweating through a heat wave, working outside, or exercising in the heat, snag something with electrolytes. These substances, which include sodium and potassium, are key to helping you to retain fluids and ward off dehydration while sweating. Sports drinks contain electrolytes, as do a number of hydration supplements—powders and tablets you can add to plain water. Hydration supplements you may see include LMNT, Hydrant, Nuun, and Skratch Labs Sport Hydration Drink Mix.

LIVE THE LIFE AQUATIC Taking a dip on a blistering-hot day delivers a double dose of relief. You feel cooler while swimming, and the evaporation of the water on your skin afterward will chill you further. Taking a cool bath or shower, wiping a damp cloth over your skin, spritzing yourself with cool water from a mister, or dunking your hat in water before putting it back on your head can lower your body temperature, too. For a quick chill, place a cool, damp cloth on pulse points like your armpits, forehead, and the back of your neck. This helps cool the blood circulating throughout your body. But be cautious about ice baths or using ice packs on pulse points for prolonged periods, Waters says. You may cool yourself too much, causing you to shiver, which is your body's attempt to generate heat—the opposite of what you want.

Ratings ➤ **Chill Out** Our testers put in a lot of sweat equity to find you the coolest A/Cs on the market.

| Brand + Model | Overall Score | Price | Survey Results | Test Results | | | | | Features | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------------|----------|-------------|----------|-----|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|----------------|--|----------------|------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
|  | | | Predicted reliability | Comfort | Indoor noise, low | Indoor noise, high | Brownout | Ease of use | Btu/hr. | EER | Min. window width (in.) | Max. window width (in.) | Weight (lb.) | Remote control | Electronic control with built-in timer | Auto fan speed | Dirty filter indicator | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | Owner satisfaction | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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WINDOW AIR CONDITIONERS 5,000 TO 6,500 BTU/HR. (COOLS 100-250 SQ. FT.)

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|----|-------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-------|------|------|-------|----|---|---|---|---|
| 💰 Frigidaire FFRE063WAE | 75 | \$240 | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | 6,000 | 12.1 | 24.5 | 38 | 45 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✔️ Friedrich KCQ06A10A | 74 | \$900 | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | 6,000 | 12.2 | 25.0 | 41.5 | 70 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✔️ Frigidaire FHW063WB1 | 73 | \$270 | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | 6,000 | 12.1 | 24.0 | 38.5 | 44 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✔️ LG LW6019ER | 73 | \$280 | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | 6,000 | 12.4 | 23.0 | 36.75 | 56 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| 💰 Midea MAW06R1YWT | 73 | \$220 | — | — | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | 6,000 | 12.1 | 23.5 | 38.5 | 45 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| Emerson Quiet Kool EARC6RE1 | 69 | \$290 | — | — | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | 6,000 | 12.1 | 24.0 | 38.5 | 44 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| Friedrich CCF06A10A | 66 | \$370 | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | 6,000 | 12.1 | 24.0 | 37.5 | 48 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| GE Profile PHC06LY | 61 | \$350 | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | 6,150 | 11.5 | 26.5 | 37.5 | 59 | ● | ● | ● | ● |

WINDOW AIR CONDITIONERS 7,000 TO 8,500 BTU/HR. (COOLS 250-350 SQ. FT.)

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|----------------------------------|----|---------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-------|------|------|------|----|---|---|---|---|
| ✔️ Frigidaire Gallery GHWQ083WC1 | 87 | \$480 | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | 8,000 | 15 | 24.0 | 38.0 | 57 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| 💰 Midea MAW08V1QWT U-shaped | 86 | \$360 | — | — | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | 8,000 | 15 | 22 | 36 | 56 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✔️ Friedrich KCS08A10A | 81 | \$1,150 | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | 8,000 | 12.1 | 26 | 41 | 98 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✔️ Friedrich Kuhl KCQ08A10A | 80 | \$1029 | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | 8,000 | 12.1 | 25 | 43 | 72 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| Friedrich CCF08A10A | 74 | \$450 | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | 8,000 | 12 | 24.5 | 39.5 | 51 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| Whirlpool WHAW081BW | 69 | \$315 | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | 8,000 | 12.1 | 24 | 39 | 51 | ● | ● | ● | ● |

WINDOW AIR CONDITIONERS 9,800 TO 12,500 BTU/HR. (COOLS 350-550 SQ. FT.)

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|----------------------------------|----|---------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|--------|------|------|------|-----|---|---|---|---|
| 💰 Midea MAW12V1QWT U-shaped | 90 | \$500 | — | — | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | 12,000 | 15 | 22 | 36 | 59 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✔️ Frigidaire Gallery GHWQ103WC1 | 89 | \$530 | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | 10,000 | 15 | 24 | 38 | 58 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✔️ Frigidaire Gallery GHWQ123WC1 | 87 | \$580 | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | 12,000 | 15 | 24 | 38 | 61 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✔️ LG LW1216ER | 82 | \$435 | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | 12,000 | 12.1 | 28 | 41 | 85 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✔️ Friedrich KCS12A10A | 74 | \$1,350 | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | 12,000 | 12 | 26 | 41 | 116 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| ✔️ Whirlpool WHAW101BW | 74 | \$340 | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | 10,000 | 12.1 | 25 | 38 | 64 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| Friedrich CCF12A10A | 73 | \$600 | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | 12,000 | 12 | 25.5 | 37.5 | 73 | ● | ● | ● | ● |

| PREDICTED RELIABILITY AND OWNER SATISFACTION OF CENTRAL AIR CONDITIONER SYSTEMS | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|-------|-----------|--------|-------------------|--------|---------|--------|-------|------|---------|
| | Trane | Armstrong | Ducane | American Standard | Bryant | Carrier | Lennox | Rheem | Ruud | Payayne |
| PREDICTED RELIABILITY | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ |
| OWNER SATISFACTION | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ |

| Brand + Model | Overall Score | Price | Survey Results | Test Results | | | | Features | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------|---------------|-------|-----------------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------------|----------|-------------|---------|-----|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|----------------|--|----------------|------------------------|
| | | | Predicted reliability | Comfort | Indoor noise, low | Indoor noise, high | Brownout | Ease of use | Btu/hr. | EER | Min. window width (in.) | Max. window width (in.) | Weight (lb.) | Remote control | Electronic control with built-in timer | Auto fan speed | Dirty filter indicator |

WINDOW AIR CONDITIONERS 9,800 TO 12,500 BTU/HR. (COOLS 350-550 SQ. FT.) *Continued*

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|----|---------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|--------|------|-------|-------|-----|---|---|---|---|
| Amana AMAP101BW | 73 | \$420 | ⬆️ | ⬇️ | ⬆️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | 10,000 | 12.1 | 25 | 38 | 64 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| Friedrich CCW12B10A | 72 | \$700 | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | 12,000 | 12 | 24.25 | 38.25 | 82 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| Friedrich KCS10A10A | 71 | \$1,300 | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | 10,000 | 12.1 | 26 | 41 | 110 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| Haier QHNG10AA (Target) | 71 | \$370 | ⬆️ | ⬇️ | ⬆️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | 10,000 | 11.4 | 24 | 37.5 | 60 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| Frigidaire FFRE123WAE | 70 | \$440 | ⬆️ | ⬇️ | ⬆️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬆️ | 12,000 | 12 | 24.5 | 38 | 67 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| Toshiba RAC-WK1011ESCWU (Home Depot) | 70 | \$379 | — | — | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | 10,000 | 12 | 24 | 37.5 | 61 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| Toshiba RAC-WK1212ESCWRU | 69 | \$450 | — | — | ⬆️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬆️ | 12,000 | 11.1 | 23 | 37.5 | 67 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| GE AHTK10AA (Home Depot) | 64 | \$380 | ⬆️ | ⬇️ | ⬆️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬆️ | 10,000 | 11.4 | 24 | 37.5 | 61 | ● | ● | ● | ● |

PORTABLE AIR CONDITIONERS 9,000 TO 15,500 BTU/HR.

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|----|-------|----|----|----|----|----|----|--|--------|--|--|--|----|---|---|---|---|
| Frigidaire Gallery GHPC132AB1 | 73 | \$574 | ⬆️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | ⬆️ | | 13,000 | | | | 79 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| Frigidaire FHPC132AB1 | 71 | \$520 | ⬆️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬆️ | ⬇️ | ⬆️ | | 13,000 | | | | 75 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| Amazon Basics MPPDB-09CRN1-BCG5 | 68 | \$446 | — | — | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬆️ | | 14,000 | | | | 74 | ● | ● | ● | |
| LG LP1419IVSM | 68 | \$700 | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬆️ | ⬇️ | ⬆️ | | 14,000 | | | | 71 | ● | ● | | |
| Honeywell HJ5CESWK0 | 67 | \$700 | ⬆️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬆️ | | 15,000 | | | | 73 | ● | ● | | |
| Honeywell HJ2CESWK8 | 67 | \$560 | ⬆️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬆️ | | 12,000 | | | | 71 | ● | ● | | |
| Whirlpool WHAP131BWC | 66 | \$455 | — | — | ⬇️ | ⬆️ | ⬇️ | ⬆️ | | 13,000 | | | | 75 | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| Whynter ARC-12SDH | 66 | \$550 | ⬆️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬆️ | | 12,000 | | | | 71 | ● | ● | | |
| Whynter ARC-14SH | 65 | \$566 | ⬆️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬆️ | | 14,000 | | | | 80 | ● | ● | | |

➤ Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at [CR.org/ACs](https://www.consumerreports.org/ACs).

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score combines our test results with brand-level ratings of predicted reliability and owner satisfaction from CR's annual member survey. **Predicted reliability** is based on estimated problem rates for newly purchased window

air conditioners not covered by an extended warranty or service contract within the first five years of ownership. **Owner satisfaction** is based on the proportion of members who are extremely likely to recommend their air conditioner brand to friends and

family. **Comfort** reflects how quickly an air conditioner on its high-fan setting cools a room sized for the particular unit and how accurate it comes to meeting a temperature set point. **Noise** judges how loud the unit is running on both the low-cool and

high-cool settings using a sound meter. **Brownout** gauges the unit's ability to run and restart during extreme heat and low voltage. **Ease of use** evaluates the ease of installation and shows how intuitive the controls are to operate. **Price** is approximate retail.

| Arcoaire | Amana | Day & Night | Frigidaire | Heil | Maytag | Tempstar | Coleman | Goodman | Luxaire | York |
|----------|-------|-------------|------------|------|--------|----------|---------|---------|---------|------|
| ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ |
| ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ | ⬇️ |



Is Our Meat Safe to Eat?



CR tested 351 packages of ground meat and found dangerous bacteria in almost a third of the chicken samples we bought, deadly bacteria in ground beef, and worrisome gaps in the way meat is regulated in this country. With grilling season in full swing, here's what you need to know.

by Lisa L. Gill ■ Photography by the Kaplans

Americans love meat—especially ground meat.

We shape it into burgers, meatballs, and meatloaf; stir it into chili and pasta sauce; and stuff it into peppers, lasagna, and tacos. Americans like it so much that in 2021 alone, we purchased more than \$13 billion worth of ground beef, turkey, pork, and chicken.

But our love of ground meat comes at a price: It's a leading cause of food poisoning. Since 2018, 11 outbreaks of illness have been traced back to raw meat, sickening a reported 1,264 people—and at least eight of them involved ground meat, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

To assess the current state of the nation's ground meat supply, Consumer Reports recently tested 351 packages of ground beef, pork, chicken, and turkey purchased at stores throughout the country. What we found was alarming.

Almost a third of the ground chicken packages we tested contained salmonella. We also found those bacteria in a few samples of ground beef, pork, and turkey. Particularly worrisome: Every single strain of salmonella was resistant to at least one antibiotic (see “Why Superbugs Are in Your Meat,” on page 36).

CR also found a strain of *E. coli* in a sample of ground beef that is so dangerous that we immediately alerted the Department of Agriculture to our findings, triggering a recall of more than 28,000 pounds of the meat from major grocery chains in seven Western states.

“That bacteria should not have been in the meat, period,” says James E. Rogers, PhD, director of food safety research and testing at CR, and a former official at the USDA. “There is a zero-tolerance policy for that bacteria, and for good reason: It's hard to treat, and can kill.”

Together, the findings highlight serious flaws in the way meat is produced in this country, and huge gaps in how the government ensures meat safety. “Right now, preventing illness caused by contaminated meat falls too heavily on the shoulders of consumers, not on industry or regulators,” Rogers says. “It shouldn't be that way, and doesn't have to be.”

RISKY STUFF

Ground meat is more likely than whole cuts, such as steaks and chicken breasts, to make you sick for several reasons.

It starts at the processing plant, where the meat from multiple animals is ground together. “Even if the meat from just one animal is contaminated with harmful bacteria, such as *E. coli* or salmonella, it potentially can get distributed into many, many pounds of ground meat,” Rogers says.

Plus, when a steak or chicken breast is contaminated, the bacteria are usually on the surface, where they can be easily killed when cooked. But in ground meat the bacteria get mixed throughout. Serve up a medium-rare burger or an undercooked chicken meatball and you may put people at risk of becoming seriously ill.

In addition, as you make a patty or roll a meatball, “you may handle ground meat more than a whole cut,” Rogers says. “So there are more opportunities for bacteria to spread from your hands and prep surfaces to other foods.”

E. COLI IN BEEF

CR's finding of *E. coli* in a package of Kroger-branded ground beef purchased at a grocery store in Seattle triggered a rapid recall of products sold at several chains across the West and Southwest. The action happened so quickly for one main reason: The particular strain CR found—*E. coli* O157:H7—is one that the USDA takes very seriously.

That's because it produces a toxin, called shiga toxin, that can harm the intestines, often causing painful, bloody diarrhea and, in 5 to 10 percent of cases, potentially fatal kidney damage.

The USDA has taken an aggressive approach toward that strain of *E. coli* in ground beef since the 1990s, after a notorious outbreak linked to undercooked hamburgers at Jack in the

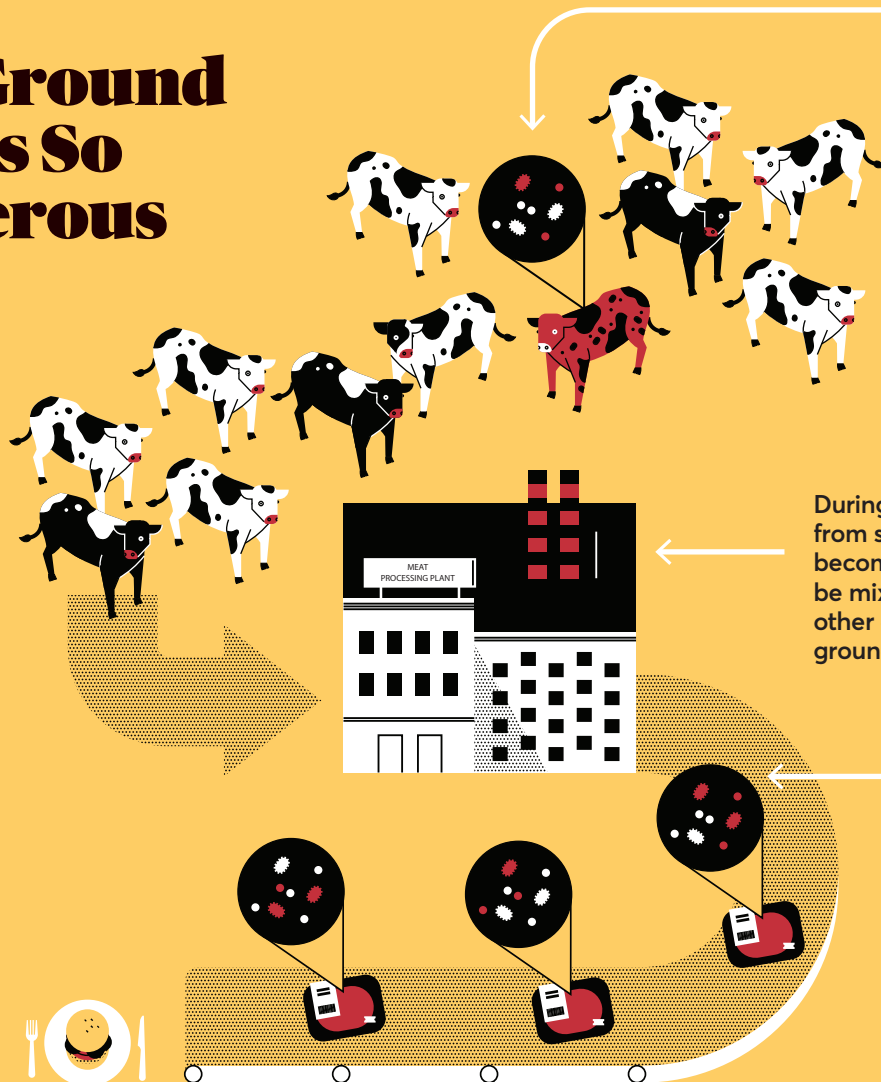
Why Ground Meat Is So Dangerous

Because the bacteria are mixed through the meat—it's usually only on the surface of steaks or chicken parts—the meat needs to be cooked extra-carefully to get hot enough to kill the bacteria in the middle.

All animals heading to slaughter carry some bacteria in their guts. But some animals have more—and more dangerous strains—than others.

During processing, meat from some animals may become contaminated, and be mixed with meat from other animals when making ground meat ...

... so bad bacteria can spread to multiple packages.



Box restaurants. More than 600 people became ill, and four children died, prompting the agency to declare O157:H7 and, later, six related strains of shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* as adulterants. As a result, ground beef (or products that contain it) with those bacteria cannot be legally sold, and manufacturers must recall meat that could be contaminated, even if no illnesses are clearly linked to it.

As CR's tests found, dangerous *E. coli* strains still do sometimes show up in ground beef. The recall this year prompted by our tests was one

of 23 such recalls since 2018. And some people—about 265,000 a year—continue to be sickened by the strains.

Still, the agency's aggressive approach has helped, says Bill Marler, a Seattle attorney who focuses on food safety cases and represented consumers sickened in the Jack in the Box outbreak. Faced with the expense and bad publicity that comes with recalls, he says, ground meat producers invested heavily in improved testing and production methods.

"The result is that *E. coli* O157 cases essentially were cut in half," he says.

SALMONELLA IN CHICKEN

While the USDA has taken a hard stance on shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* in ground beef, that's not the case for salmonella in chicken or turkey.

"That's problematic," says Brian Ronholm, director of food policy at CR. "The agency needs to treat those bacteria, especially in chicken, with a far greater sense of urgency."

Salmonella is widespread in

chickens, in part because of the often crowded and filthy conditions in which they are raised. Nearly 1.35 million people get sick from the bacteria every year, about five times as many as with harmful *E. coli*. About a fifth of those come from chicken and turkey, including ground versions.

Reducing those numbers has been a stated public health goal for more than a decade. Yet “the large number of people sickened by salmonella hasn’t changed in years,” says Mitzi Baum, CEO at Stop Foodborne Illness, a food safety advocacy group.

And the USDA, far from declaring zero tolerance for the bacteria, actually allows poultry producers to sell meat that may be contaminated with the bacteria. The agency does require poultry processors to regularly test for salmonella. But a plant is allowed to have salmonella in up to 9.8 percent of whole birds it tests, 15.4 percent of parts, and 25 percent of ground chicken. And if producers exceed those levels, they are only given what amounts to a warning, not told to stop selling the meat.

CR found salmonella in 23 of the 75 samples we tested—almost a third of them. Nine of the 25 products from Perdue, a leading producer of ground chicken with the most samples in our tests, had salmonella. Samples from Trader Joe’s and Wholesome Pantry, which source their ground chicken from Perdue, also had positive samples, as did some from Isernio’s, Walmart, and Whole Foods.

Overall, no single brand stood out as being statistically better or worse than another. There was even no difference between ground meat from organic chicken and meat from conventionally raised birds.

“The message: Salmonella in ground chicken is more common than it should be,” says Rogers at CR. “This is not an isolated or contained problem.”

LEGAL BUT DANGEROUS

If salmonella in chicken is so dangerous and so common, why doesn’t the USDA treat it as aggressively as it does shiga toxin-producing *E. coli*?

For one thing, lawsuits brought by the meat industry have made it hard for the agency to declare salmonella an adulterant. And the argument—which courts have upheld—surprisingly centers on how Americans like their beef and chicken cooked.

Congress has said that substances can be considered adulterants in food only if they would “ordinarily” cause a person injury. The courts have determined that it is perfectly ordinary for people to eat beef on the rare side, below the temperature that kills all the *E. coli*—which means any of the bacteria in the meat are adulterants. By contrast, it is not typical to eat undercooked chicken. So in theory, anyway, salmonella would ordinarily

be killed before people eat it. That may be why salmonella is not considered an adulterant in chicken.

But that reasoning is flawed, Baum says, and puts the onus on people to handle chicken with extreme care in their kitchens, not on producers to safely raise and package meat. “It makes the consumer the last safety check in the food,” she says, “and that is an unknown risk for the consumer.”

FIXING A BROKEN SYSTEM

CR shared our ground chicken test results with all the producers who had at least one sample test positive for salmonella, and asked what steps they take to reduce salmonella contamination.

Perdue, which has partnered with CR and other food safety groups to push for a more rigorous approach to ensuring meat safety, says that in a recent spot check it did of 312 samples, only 17, or 5.4 percent, were positive for salmonella. That’s far lower than the 36 percent of Perdue samples with the bacteria in CR’s tests.

Perdue and several other producers say they are taking steps to reduce salmonella in their products.

Tricia Moriarty, a spokesperson for Walmart, says the company began a “salmonella interventions program” in 2014. “While no system will eliminate all salmonella bacteria, our program has significantly reduced the amount” in the products it gets from suppliers, she says. Whole Foods says that it has a quality assurance team that assesses salmonella reports from the USDA and that “if a processing plant is not meeting our expectations, we investigate to determine root cause and a corrective action plan.” And Wholesome Pantry

“Salmonella in ground chicken is more common than it should be. This is not an isolated or contained problem.”

JAMES E. ROGERS, director of food safety research and testing at Consumer Reports

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 38]

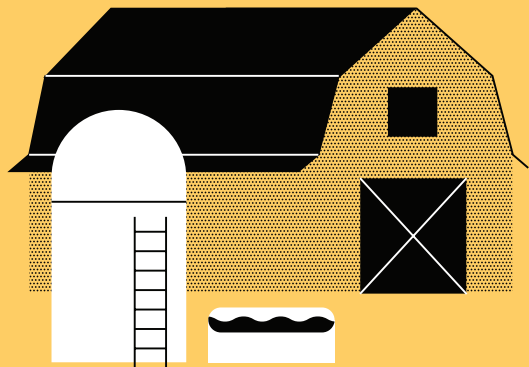


Salmonella:

WIDESPREAD IN CHICKEN

Why Superbugs Are in Your Meat

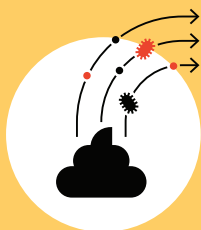
CR found antibiotic-resistant bacteria in many of the ground meat samples we tested. Here's how they got there, why they're a problem, and what can you do to help.



Healthy animals are often given antibiotics in their food or water. Bacteria in their intestines react with the antibiotics. Some of the bacteria are killed, but a few survive and multiply.



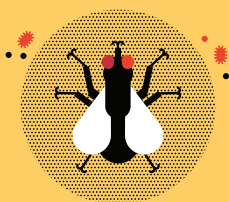
Animals excrete antibiotic-resistant bacteria in manure, and the bacteria spread in several ways.



Via air, when bacteria are carried by the wind.



Via water, when waste seeps into groundwater.



Via flies, which carry bacteria they have picked up on the farm.



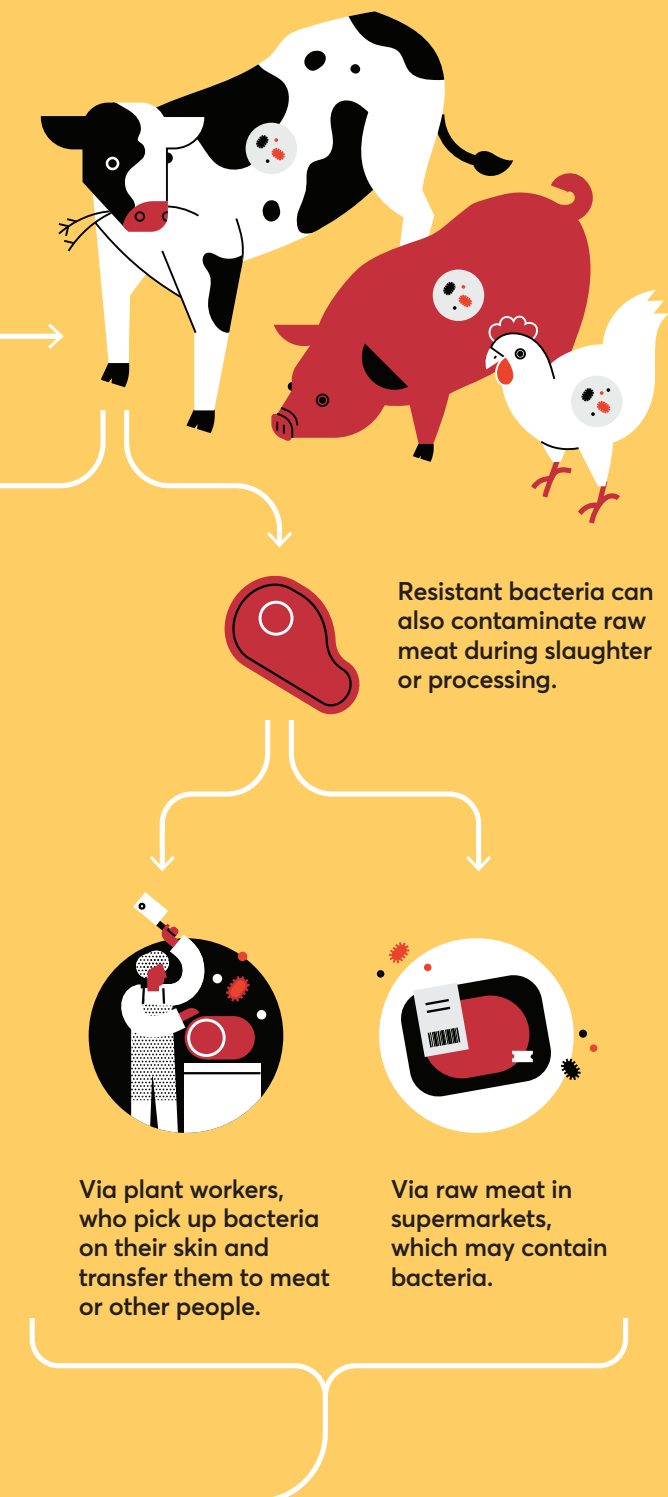
Via farmworkers, who pick up the bacteria on their skin and spread them when they come into contact with other people.



Via soil, when animal waste is used to fertilize crops.



People become ill with antibiotic-resistant infections.



CR FOUND SALMONELLA in 23 of the 75 samples of ground chicken we tested. All the salmonella was resistant to at least one antibiotic, and 78 percent were resistant to multiple drugs. We also found antibiotic-resistant bacteria in some samples of ground beef, pork, and turkey. In fact, a salmonella strain found in a ground pork sample was resistant to 12 antibiotics, the most in our tests.

That's concerning for several reasons. For one, people could get sick if they consume undercooked meat contaminated with those bacteria, or if they handle it and then touch their mouth. And because the bacteria are resistant to antibiotics, the infections can be harder to treat. More than 212,000 people each year are sickened by antibiotic-resistant salmonella in food, and 70 die, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

CR's findings also highlight how misuse of antibiotics on farms contributes to the spread of these superbugs.

"If an animal is sick and needs antibiotics, it should get them," says Brian Ronholm, director of food policy at CR. "But meat producers often give animals low doses to prevent illness. That's one way bacteria evolve to become immune to antibiotics."

Some producers have agreed to reduce their use of the drugs, and many products have labels saying that meat comes from animals raised without antibiotics. That's a positive step, says Lance Price, PhD, director of the Antibiotic Resistance Action Center at George Washington University, but it doesn't completely solve the problem.

In CR's tests, 18 of the chicken samples contaminated with antibiotic-resistant bacteria came from birds that were raised without the drugs.

Why? "Even if they're raised without antibiotics, animals can pick up drug-resistant strains in the environment," Price says.

And the crowded, filthy conditions in which chickens

and other animals are often raised can make fertile breeding grounds for bacteria.

If meat from animals raised without antibiotics can still be contaminated with antibiotic-resistant bacteria, is it worth choosing products with "no antibiotics" labels?

Yes, Ronholm says. "That supports producers who are at least trying to help solve the problem," he says.

It's important to know, though, that such labels might not always be accurate. Price recently led a study involving 699 cattle supposedly raised under a No Antibiotics Ever program, which is regulated by the Department of Agriculture. It found traces of at least one antibiotic in the urine of 15 percent of the cattle.

Here are some ways to increase the chance that the meat you buy really is raised without antibiotics.

→ **For all meat, look for the USDA Organic seal.** To earn that, producers must be inspected at least annually, and are subject to surprise visits to ensure that they comply with guidelines.

→ **For poultry, look for a USDA Process Verified Program shield.** Producers who seek that label submit to administrative audits and on-site inspections to make sure feed does not contain antibiotics.

→ **For beef, look for the American Grassfed label.** Part of the seal's requirements are that the cattle aren't given antibiotics.

says the company holds “our suppliers to strict industry standards.”

Tom Super, senior vice president of communications at the National Chicken Council, an industry group, says that such steps have helped improve meat safety and that some risk is inescapable. “Any raw agricultural product, including fresh fruit, vegetables, meat, and poultry, is susceptible to naturally occurring bacteria,” he says. “No legislation or regulation can keep bacteria from existing.”

But independent food safety experts say larger, more systemic changes are needed.

Lance Price, PhD, director of the Antibiotic Resistance Action Center at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., says the best solution would be to reduce the number of chickens that carry salmonella in the first place and for the agency to declare the bacteria to be adulterants. That would require companies to recall any product that tests positive for the bacteria, instead of waiting for outbreaks when people get sick, he says.

But he also acknowledges that such steps are unlikely, at least in the short term. Instead, he, along with CR’s Ronholm and other safety advocates, says the USDA should focus on sharply reducing the percentage of chicken samples allowed to test positive for salmonella.

In addition, the agency should focus on the most problematic strains of salmonella. Last year CR, along with the Center for Science in the Public Interest and other food safety groups, petitioned the USDA, urging it to reduce the salmonella strains that pose the biggest threat to human health. The agency identified three strains to focus on: infantis, typhimurium, and enteritidis.

In CR’s test, 91 percent of the salmonella detected in ground chicken was from those three strains.

The groups also say the USDA needs more authority to inspect facilities that breed and raise poultry and, when a plant is found to have high salmonella rates, to quickly shutter its operations.

Sandra Eskin, deputy undersecretary for food safety at the USDA, says, “The results of Consumer Reports’ sampling project underscores why [the agency] is rethinking our existing strategy so that it is more effective in reducing salmonella infections” from poultry. She says the agency is gathering recommendations from independent food safety experts and working with industry to develop pilot projects “to test-drive different control strategies.”

When it comes to shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* strains, Ronholm says they should be addressed aggressively wherever they are found. He says that those strains are now considered adulterants only in ground beef and mechanically tenderized beef. (Those are cuts of meat pierced by a machine to make them more tender, a process that can drive bacteria from the surface into the meat.)

HANDLE WITH CARE

Until industry and the government take stronger steps to limit salmonella, *E. coli*, and other bacteria in meat, the best way to prevent foodborne illness remains practicing scrupulous kitchen hygiene. Here are some tips, from shopping to prep to storing leftovers.

■ **At the grocery store, keep raw meats in a disposable bag, separated from other foods.** This can reduce the chance of a contaminated package coming into contact with other foods, especially uncooked foods that are consumed raw, such as fruits and salads.

■ **In the fridge, store raw meat in a bag or bowl.** That keeps juices from leaking onto other surfaces or foods.

■ **Don’t rely on how the meat looks or smells.** You can’t tell whether meat or poultry contain harmful bacteria. Use ground meat within two days of purchase. Or freeze it, either in its original package or repackaged. Either way, wrap it in foil or plastic wrap, or put it in a freezer bag or an airtight container.

■ **Thaw frozen meat in the refrigerator.** That’s to keep meat cooled to below 40° F as it thaws, a temperature that impedes the growth of bacteria. Setting it out on the counter can accelerate that growth. Once the meat is thawed, use it within a day or two for ground meat or any type of poultry, and within three to five days for cuts of beef or pork.

■ **Don’t rinse raw meat.** Doing so is more likely to spread any bacteria around the sink or counter than it is to remove bacteria. If you like, pat the meat with a paper towel first instead.

■ **When preparing, wash, wash, wash.** Wash your hands in hot soapy water before you start prepping, then after every time you touch raw meat, and again when you’re finished. And wash any knives used on meat before cutting other foods.

■ **Use dedicated cutting boards.** That means one for raw meat, and another for fruits and vegetables.

■ **Get a meat thermometer ... and use it.** You can’t gauge whether meat is fully cooked by how it looks. Instead, check the internal temperature with a thermometer. Ground beef and pork are safe when cooked to 160° F. Poultry—ground, whole, and parts—should be cooked to 165° F; beef roasts and steaks, and pork roasts and chops, to 145° F.

■ **Refrigerate leftovers promptly.** Cooked food shouldn’t be left out longer than 2 hours after it’s removed from the stove, oven, or grill. (One hour is the limit if you’re outside and the temperature is 90° F or higher.)



How to Make Safer Burgers

Keep Them Chilled

Don't take meat out of the fridge until you're ready to make patties. Then refrigerate the patties until just before grilling. That helps prevent any bacteria that may be in the meat from multiplying—and can help your patty

hold together during cooking. Tip: When forming patties, make a slight indentation in the top of each with your thumb to keep shrinkage to a minimum.

Avoid Charring

When meat is charred, carcinogenic compounds can form. Cooking on indirect heat can minimize that problem. Fire up one side of the grill and cook on the other. Turning frequently helps, too.

Don't Press Down

That drains the flavorful juices from the meat. Rest cooked patties on a clean plate or platter for at least 5 minutes before serving, so the juices stay locked in.

Cook Them Well

You might think you like a hamburger on the rare side, but ground beef has to get to 160° F to kill bacteria. Use a meat thermometer—you can't judge doneness by color.

what's really in your insect repellent

Deet. Picaridin. Oil of lemon eucalyptus.

What are these things anyway? Where do they come from? Which work best and which are safe? Here's what we've found after years of testing and hundreds of bites.

by Catherine Roberts

S

SCIENTISTS ARE ALWAYS looking for better ways to foil bugs that leave itchy welts in their wake. Despite the many tools being studied, from tick-killing fungus to genetically modified mosquitoes, bug repellent is still “the first line of defense,” says Mustapha Debboun, PhD, a medical and veterinary entomologist. “It’s a personal protection measure that any individual can take into their own hands.”

It’s an important one, too. In the U.S., the mosquito-borne West Nile virus is thought to have infected nearly 7 million people since it first appeared in New York in 1999, and every year close to half a million people get Lyme disease after a tick bite.

But not all repellents provide equal protection, which is why CR tests how well each one blocks real bugs from biting real people. Our brave participants place repellent-covered arms inside cages filled with 200 disease-free mosquitoes. Then we measure how long it takes the bugs to start biting. And it turns out that what matters most is not the brand or type of repellent (spray, lotion, or wipe) but the active ingredient and its concentration.

The list of products we recommend changes slightly from year to year, but insect repellents whose active ingredient is deet, at concentrations of 25 to 30 percent, reliably earn our recommendation, as do many (but not all) 15 percent deet sprays. We’ve also found that some (but again, not all) repellents with 30 percent oil of lemon eucalyptus (OLE) and 20 percent picaridin provide long-lasting protection.

But what exactly are these ingredients? And why do some products work better than others with the same active ingredients? Here, answers to those questions and more.



Q What's so great about deet?

When it comes to active ingredients that can ward off bugs, it's hard to beat deet. It's "broad spectrum," meaning it works on a wide variety of bugs, including mosquitoes, ticks, and flies. When scientists are testing the effectiveness of new insect repellent ingredients, they compare them to deet to see how they measure up.

Deet was discovered in the 1940s essentially by "brute force," as Matthew DeGennaro, PhD, an associate professor in the department of biological sciences at Florida International University puts it. The U.S. military and the Department of Agriculture jointly screened more than 6,000 different compounds looking for ones that would repel mosquitoes. A chemical closely related to deet was found to be highly effective, then refined slightly to reduce its tendency to irritate skin. Thus N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide, or deet, was born and eventually registered for use in consumer products in 1957.

Though scientists found out long ago that deet works, they still don't know exactly why. Theories abound. Deet may mask the odor of humans, confuse

the odor-sensing abilities of mosquitoes, or simply compel them to move away, perhaps because it resembles a natural substance they've evolved to avoid. But it may be more than just odor at work. Even mosquitoes bred without the ability to sense the smell of deet appear to sense the chemical with their legs when they land on it, and fly away without biting, according to a 2019 study published in the journal *Current Biology*.

It's also possible that deet is so effective against mosquitoes because it's working on more than one and maybe several levels at the same time, says Chris Potter, PhD, an associate professor of neuroscience at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine who specializes in insects' sense of smell.

Why deet also repels ticks is even less understood, though the mechanisms are likely different than with mosquitoes. Ticks don't have the same odor-sensing body parts as mosquitoes. Instead they have a sensory mechanism unique to ticks called the Haller's organ, which we still know very little about, according to Bryan Cassone, PhD, an associate professor of biology at Brandon University in Manitoba, Canada. But scientists think it's the main

way ticks sense their surroundings.

One thing we do know: Ticks, which generally hitch a ride as you pass them in brush or tall grasses, are less likely to attach themselves to your skin if they sense deet, and they'll avoid spots on your skin where deet is. That's one reason it's important to apply repellent carefully to all exposed skin when you want to avoid ticks, Cassone says.

Q Okay, deet works. But is it safe?

Deet has been available to consumers for more than 60 years, and it's estimated that people use it millions of times each year. In all that time, scientists have found only a few cases of harm potentially linked to it.

A 1998 Environmental Protection Agency analysis investigating health effects of deet, for example, found that since 1960, the estimated incidence of seizures with a possible connection to deet exposure was 1 per 100 million users. A 2007 EPA chemical summary report on deet reported that many of these instances of adverse neurological effects were linked with ingestion or "repeated dermal exposure or accidental ingestion of DEET that were

why natural repellents don't work as well

THE BOTTOM RUNGS of CR's insect repellent ratings are filled mostly with so-called "natural" insect repellents, meaning those whose active ingredients are essential oils. Lemongrass oil, cedarwood oil, citronella oil, and peppermint oil are among the common ingredients.

It's not that these ingredients don't work. After all, they come from plants that have been repelling insects "for millions of years," says Joel Coats, PhD, a distinguished

professor emeritus of entomology and toxicology at Iowa State University. But there's a problem: The molecules that make up many of these essential oils, known as terpenes, are small and light. So although "they're very effective repellents," according to Coats, they evaporate quickly from skin, which means they don't last very long, sometimes for only an hour.

Also, the quality or potency of

essential oils is highly variable and unpredictable, says Aaron Gross, PhD, an assistant professor of toxicology and physiology in the department of entomology at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. And while essential oils might seem safer, some people can be hypersensitive or even allergic to them.

Research is ongoing to discover or develop plant-based repellents that will evaporate less quickly. And a few more



✓ Ben's Tick & Insect Repellent Wilderness Formula Pump \$6

95 OVERALL SCORE

TIPS FOR APPLYING REPELLENT

APPLY BUG SPRAY TO EXPOSED SKIN AND CLOTHES

Never apply it under your clothing because it could cause skin irritation. Before spraying on clothes, test it out on a small piece of fabric to make sure it won't cause damage.

LEAVE NO SPOTS UNSPRAYED

Mosquitoes and ticks are good at finding unprotected skin. To protect your face—and to apply repellents to children—first spray your hands, then rub on your face or on your child. A thin film of repellent is sufficient. Wash your hands after applying to avoid getting any repellent in your mouth or eyes.

REAPPLY AS DIRECTED

Check the product label for a suggested time frame, which may range anywhere from 2 to 8 hours. A good guideline is to reapply it when you notice mosquitoes are biting again, but some repellents may have limits on a maximum number of applications per day. So reading the label for additional guidance is wise.

not consistent with label directions.” In other words, deet may pose some risk if it’s ingested or used improperly. Keep repellents well out of kids’ reach.

And high concentrations aren’t necessary. CR tests deet repellents in concentrations only up to 30 percent. More than that just isn’t needed to get long-lasting protection.

When you use deet-powered repellent as directed, it poses very little risk. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends it as a safe option for adults, children older than 2 months, and even people who are pregnant.

Still, no chemical is without risks, and deet needs to be used properly

effective plant-based repellents are already on the market. PMD, which gives oil of lemon eucalyptus (OLE) its potency, is a terpenelike compound. So is a tomato-derived active ingredient, 2-undecanone, which, like OLE, is registered with the EPA as an effective repellent ingredient. (It’s hard to find products with this ingredient on the U.S. market, and Consumer Reports doesn’t have one in our ratings.)

There’s also a new active ingredient called nootkatone, which is derived from grapefruit skin and Alaska yellow cedar trees. It was registered with the EPA in 2020 and is what’s called a sesquiterpene, a heavier terpene molecule. It’s so new, in fact, that there aren’t any commercial insect repellents on the market that contain it yet. But the EPA’s data suggests it should have good efficacy against biting bugs.

how the naturals stack up

Babyganics Natural Insect Repellent
\$10

12 OVERALL SCORE



Greenerways Organic Bug Repellent
\$9

7 OVERALL SCORE



Hello Bello Mosquito Repellent
\$8

4 OVERALL SCORE



in order to be safe. According to the National Pesticide Information Center (NPIC), you should avoid applying deet underneath your clothes (use it only on exposed skin and on the outside of clothing), wash it off your skin at the end of the day, and try not to reapply it too frequently. Neglecting those tips could lead to you getting a higher dose of deet than intended. Plus, deet can degrade certain synthetic materials like plastic, so it shouldn't be applied to some types of clothing.

You may also be worried about the long-term risks of exposure to deet. According to a 2008 fact sheet by the NPIC, "researchers have not found any evidence that deet causes cancer in animals or humans," and there's no clear evidence of other long-term risks of topical use despite the availability of deet for decades.

Q What are OLE and picaridin?

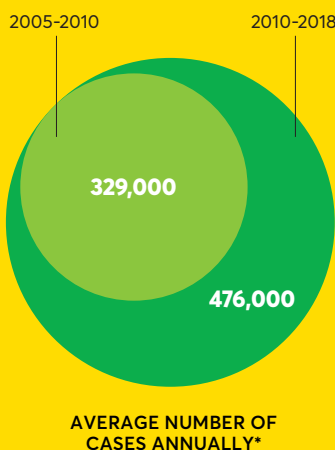
OLE was brought to the attention of U.S. scientists in the 1990s, when they learned that a Chinese product called Quwenling was repelling mosquitoes much better than other plant-based products. One of its major components is the chemical p-Menthane-3,8-diol, or PMD, which gives OLE its repellency.

The name "oil of lemon eucalyptus" is something of a misnomer. The Australian plant it comes from, *Corymbia citriodora* (or lemon-scented gum), used to be considered part of the *Eucalyptus* genus but isn't anymore. And unlike lemon eucalyptus oil, OLE isn't a true essential oil because it's refined and concentrated. In short, it's not exactly what it sounds like, though it's indeed a naturally derived ingredient that's often very effective.

Picaridin, also called icaridin, is a chemical that was developed by Bayer AG in the 1980s and 1990s. Its structure is similar to piperidine, a chemical

the rise of Lyme

IN THE U.S., the range of the black-legged tick (which transmits Lyme disease) has grown over the past two decades, due in part to a changing climate, increased suburbanization, reforestation in the Northeast, and other reasons. Early symptoms of Lyme often include a bull's-eye rash (in 70 to 80 percent of cases) and a fever. Untreated, symptoms can progress to arthritis, nerve pain, and heart palpitations. Today, cases of Lyme—which gets its name from the Connecticut town where it was first identified—are found in nearly every state.



that occurs naturally in certain pepper plants. It has been available to U.S. consumers since 2005 and is especially popular as an insect repellent in Europe and Australia.

Q Are OLE and picaridin safe?

Compared with deet, less is known about OLE and picaridin, but evidence suggests that they're safe when used according to the label.

OLE is classified as a biopesticide by the EPA, which means it's a naturally occurring substance considered to be a lower risk than more conventional

pest-control chemicals. The main risk appears to be that it can be harmful if it gets in your eyes. It also shouldn't be used on children younger than 3; its safety has not been well studied in young children.

Picaridin carries a small risk of skin irritation, but this appears to be rare. Any possible long-term effects of these two ingredients have largely been unstudied.


Q Why do repellents with the same active ingredients sometimes perform differently?

Our testing can't tell us why some repellents with the same labeled active ingredient last for a long time while others don't. In part, that's because—unlike with cosmetics or other personal care products—manufacturers of EPA-registered repellents aren't required to disclose all of the ingredients. It could be that some of the nonactive ingredients in a given repellent are affecting how well they perform.

Academic researchers are limited in their ability to study commercial insect repellent formulations, says Zain Syed, PhD, an associate professor in the department of entomology at the University of Kentucky. Manufacturers are reluctant to provide their formulas to researchers for testing—they consider them to be trade secrets—so independent scientific studies of insect repellents can't test how a repellent's nonactive ingredients may be contributing to its efficacy.

That's one advantage of CR's insect repellent testing: We perform our tests with the same products that you buy on store shelves. So even though we don't know all of the ingredients in a product, we can see how well it works in comparison with other products on the market.

Ratings ➤ **Bug Off** Our recommended repellents, listed below, kept mosquitoes from biting for at least 5 hours—and sometimes up to 8. Testers put their arms into cages containing hundreds of mosquitoes. Itchy yet?

| Brand + Product | Overall Score | Cost Per Ounce | | | Test Results | |
|---|---------------|----------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
|  | | | Concentration of active ingredient | Claims to protect against ticks | Protection against mosquitoes and ticks | Resists damage to materials |

DEET

| | | | | | | |
|--|----|--------|-----|---|---|---|
| ✓ Ben's Tick & Insect Repellent Wipes | 96 | \$4.17 | 30% | ● | ⬆ | ⬇ |
| ✓ Ben's Tick & Insect Repellent Wilderness Formula Pump | 95 | \$1.76 | 30% | ● | ⬆ | ⬇ |
| 💰 3M Ultrathon Insect Repellent8 Aerosol | 94 | \$1.83 | 25% | ● | ⬆ | ⬇ |
| ✓ Off Sportsmen Deep Woods Insect Repellent 3 Aerosol | 93 | \$1.67 | 30% | ● | ⬆ | ⬇ |
| 💰 Ben's Tick & Insect Repellent Wilderness Formula Aerosol | 88 | \$1.33 | 30% | ● | ⬆ | ⬇ |
| ✓ Cutter Backwoods Insect Repellent Pump | 88 | \$1.33 | 25% | ● | ⬆ | ⬇ |
| ✓ Coleman Insect Repellent Ultra Dry Formula Aerosol | 86 | \$2.25 | 25% | ● | ⬆ | ⬇ |
| ✓ Off Deep Woods Insect Repellent VIII Dry Aerosol | 86 | \$1.50 | 25% | ● | ⬆ | ⬇ |
| ✓ Sawyer Ultra 30 Insect Repellent Lotion | 84 | \$3.67 | 30% | ● | ⬆ | ⬇ |
| 💰 Repel Insect Repellent Sportsmen Formula Dry Aerosol | 76 | \$1.38 | 25% | ● | ⬆ | ⬇ |
| ✓ Cutter Sport Insect Repellent Aerosol | 73 | \$1.33 | 15% | ● | ⬆ | ⬇ |
| ✓ Repel Insect Repellent Scented Family Formula Aerosol | 70 | \$0.62 | 15% | ● | ⬆ | ⬇ |
| ✓ Cutter Backwoods Dry Insect Repellent Aerosol | 69 | \$1.50 | 25% | ● | ⬆ | ⬇ |
| ✓ Repel Insect Repellent Mosquito Wipes | 65 | \$2.67 | 30% | ● | ⬆ | ⬆ |
| ✓ Off Deep Woods Insect Repellent Towelettes | 64 | \$8.11 | 25% | ● | ⬆ | ⬆ |

PICARIDIN

| | | | | | | |
|--|----|--------|-----|---|---|---|
| ✓ Sawyer Premium Insect Repellent Pump | 83 | \$3.00 | 20% | ● | ⬆ | ⬇ |
| ✓ Off Family Care Insect Repellent VIII with Picaridin Aerosol | 70 | \$1.20 | 10% | | ⬆ | ⬇ |
| ✓ Natrapel Tick & Insect Repellent Aerosol | 69 | \$1.67 | 20% | ● | ⬆ | ⬇ |
| ✓ Off Defense Insect Repellent I with Picaridin Aerosol | 66 | \$2.60 | 20% | ● | ⬆ | ⬇ |

OIL OF LEMON EUCALYPTUS

| | | | | | | |
|--|----|--------|-----|--|---|---|
| ✓ Repel Lemon Eucalyptus Insect Repellent2 Pump | 90 | \$1.25 | 30% | | ⬆ | ⬆ |
| ✓ Cutter Lemon Eucalyptus Insect Repellent Aerosol | 82 | \$2.25 | 30% | | ⬆ | ⬇ |
| ✓ Natrapel Lemon Eucalyptus Insect Repellent Pump | 72 | \$2.06 | 30% | | ⬆ | ⬇ |
| ✓ Natrapel Lemon Eucalyptus Insect Repellent Aerosol | 69 | \$2.00 | 30% | | ⬆ | ⬆ |

➤ Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at [CR.org/insectrepellents](https://www.consumerreports.org/insectrepellents).

HOW WE TEST: We apply a standard dose of repellent to participants' arms, which they place in a cage of disease-free mosquitoes 30 minutes

and 1 hour after application, then hourly until they receive two bites in one 5-minute session or one bite in each of two consecutive sessions. We no

longer test against ticks. In the past, we found that repellents that did well against mosquitoes also worked against ticks, but our current tests

can't tell us how long a product will keep ticks at bay.



Travel Made Easier

READY TO SEE THE WORLD AGAIN? PLANNING
A TRIP IS EXCITING AND, THESE DAYS,
A LITTLE COMPLICATED. CR'S GUIDE TO SMARTER,
SAFER TRAVEL IS THE COMPANION YOU
NEED TO MAKE YOUR DREAM
VACATION A STRESS-FREE REALITY.



BY BARBARA PETERSON



ENJOY THE JOURNEY

Whether you're setting off for a Norwegian fjord, a Caribbean beach, or someplace else entirely, smart planning—from ensuring access to an airport lounge to picking the right carry-on—can ease the trip itself.

After two-plus years of stay-at-home orders

and endless Zoom calls, Americans apparently can't wait to get out of Dodge. More than 87 percent currently have travel plans, with nearly 30 percent planning to travel outside the U.S., according to a recent survey from market research firm Destination Analysts.

"Consumer confidence is high, and there is strong pent-up demand," says Peter Vlitaz, executive vice president of partner relations at the Internova Travel Group, a travel services company. Also spurring this wanderlust is the recent easing of COVID-19 restrictions: As of mid-June, it was becoming increasingly possible to travel internationally without having to worry about requirements such as predeparture testing. That appears to be blunting the negative impact from a rise in prices for air and road travel.

With more destinations opening up, for many the biggest travel decision has evolved from "Where can I go?" to "Where should I go first?" Here's how to make that exciting decision—and how to plan the hassle-free, COVID-smart, completely amazing vacation you've been putting off for so long.

4 Ways to Save on Flights

It's a tough time to get a good deal on a ticket, thanks to surging fuel prices, among other factors. Prices are up a hefty 33 percent since last year. Still, these travel-pro tricks can help you find the best deals.

PLANNING & BOOKING

FIND YOUR DREAM DESTINATION

Jazz and jambalaya in New Orleans. Whale watching in Maine. Grizzlies and glaciers in Alaska. If you don't want the effort of international travel, you can slake your travel thirst right here in the U.S. And just outside the borders, you'll find Aztec ruins, mountain lakes, and white-sand beaches in Mexico, Canada, and the Caribbean.

And then there's Europe—or beyond. Whether you're dreaming of seeing the Vatican or river-cruising down the Nile, your options range far wider than they have for the past two years.

To find out which countries are open to U.S. travelers, check the State Department's website, at travel.state.gov. One caveat: Ever-changing COVID-19 regulations mean this is probably not the time for destination-hopping. Save yourself some stress and put off the multicountry tour for another year.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Two U.S. government sites rank foreign countries by risk: The State Department issues travel advisories ranging from Exercise Normal Precautions to Do Not Travel, and the Centers

BOOK AHEAD AND BE FLEXIBLE There is no secret formula for getting great fares, says Scott Wainner, CEO of Fareness, a travel search and booking app that also tracks airfare trends. "But if you can look at least a couple of weeks ahead, you'll start to get the best prices," he says. And look at dates on either side of your ideal travel days. A shift of just a couple of days could help you save.

for Disease Control and Prevention issues recommendations at [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov). Wherever you go, travel with proof of vaccination and COVID-19 test results (if necessary). Download any apps your destination country uses for uploading documents and contact tracing.

● GET EXPERT HELP

Even if you've been booking by yourself online, the complexity of pandemic travel can make a travel agent (aka travel adviser) invaluable, says Erika Richter, spokesperson for the American Society of Travel Advisors. For a price—that might start at under \$100 and go up based on the specifics and complexity of the trip, according to Richter—your agent will do the planning and booking, and offer support during the entire trip.

These days, it's smart to turn to "destination specialists," agents who have deep knowledge of the location you're heading to. They'll know which hotels, restaurants, and tours previous clients loved (or hated) and set up bespoke experiences—a private tour of a French château, an after-hours museum visit, or an intimate dinner hosted by a local chef. Find a travel adviser using the locator provided by the ASTA at travelsense.org. Travel expert Wendy Perrin offers a curated list of destination experts (the "Wow List") at [wendyperrin.com](https://www.wendyperrin.com).

You can always book your own trip, but researching online can be a time suck. If it's a simple point-to-

point jaunt—say, a weekend in Vegas or a week at Disney—booking through a site like Expedia or directly with the airline or hotel should be perfectly fine. You could also use the budget-friendly services of BJ's Wholesale Club, Costco, or Sam's Club if you're a member.

● CONSIDER A TOUR

The beauty of a prearranged tour is that once you've chosen and paid for the trip, all you have to do is show up and enjoy it. The tour operators handle all the arrangements: transportation, hotels, meals, sights, and more.

Your options can include group tours, such as the Adventures Abroad eight-day tour of Portugal in a group of up to 18 (from \$2,242 per person, plus airfare) and private tours with personalized itineraries, like Kensington Tours' eight-day trip through Norway and the fjords (starting at \$5,880 per person, plus airfare). The extra cost of the latter gets you an experience tailored to your interests, and (at Kensington, at least) your choice of travel dates—plus, you won't be grouped with strangers.

Most tours require prepayment in full, with cancellation penalties, so do your research before paying up. A travel agent can help with booking the tour and by vouching for the operator's reputation. It's a good idea to book with a tour company that is a member of the United States Tour Operators Association, says Diana Hechler, president of D. Tours

Make It Accessible

Just because you're not able to climb the Alps doesn't mean you wouldn't love to marvel at their beauty in person, right? You can, with the know-how of a travel adviser or tour operator that caters to the needs of older adults or those with mobility issues or other special needs. The ASTA's [TravelSense.org](https://travelsense.org) website can help here, too. To find an adviser, click the button at the top right, then choose "Senior/Mature Adult" or "Accessible/Special Needs" under the "Choose Your Journey Type" dropdown menu. Many tour operators offer accessible packages, including Adventures Abroad, Easy Access Travel, ElderTreks, Road Scholar, Senior Cycling, Travel For All, and Wheel the World.

Travel in Larchmont, N.Y. And ask these questions.

■ Is the departure date guaranteed?

Advertised departure dates can change. Some companies promise to honor a tour even if only a few people sign up; others may switch dates or consolidate departures.

■ **How active is it?** There's a tour for every fitness level and interest. Even sporty trips have a lot of variety: Backroads offers both a challenging four-day bike trip through Aspen's glacial valleys and an "easygoing" e-bike tour of Washington's Whidbey, Orcas, and San Juan islands, for example. You can use the activity level filter if you're browsing tours on an operator's website.

■ **Can I go solo?** Almost all tours and cruises add a single surcharge,

SHOP AROUND Many carriers—from American Airlines to British Airways to Emirates—give you the option of locking in a fare for one or more days before you buy the ticket, either free or for a small fee. You can use the extra time to make sure you're not missing out on a better deal.

TRY A PACKAGE If your travel plans include a hotel stay, consider booking an air and hotel package through the airline or another booking site: The fare you'll get is often lower than what you'd pay if you booked the ticket separately. BJ's Wholesale Club and Costco offer a variety of packages for members, typically with significant savings.

USE PRICE ALERTS If your travel dates are flexible, set up a price alert to be notified when the fare drops on a given route. You can do this on many fare comparison and booking sites, and on apps including Hopper and Kayak.

typically 20 percent or more, above the per-person, double-occupancy price. Some small group tours—Road Scholar’s Rejuvenation Retreat for Women in Soquel, Calif., is one—are designed for solo travelers.

● CRUISE CAREFULLY

Most cruise lines require negative COVID-19 tests before boarding—and during the voyage. To see a color status dashboard that profiles ships by vaccination rates and reported cases, go to cdc.gov/quarantine/cruise.

Smaller ships, such as those used for the riverboat cruises offered through operators like Avalon Waterways and Viking, can be safer than those with 2,000-plus passengers, Hechler says. The trade-off for potentially reduced COVID-19 exposure is price: Large cruises can offer lower rates based on their economies of scale. A Viking eight-day Châteaux, Rivers & Wine float through France (from \$2,499, plus airfare) may have at most 190 passengers—but you won’t find a swimming pool onboard; a six-day tour of the Eastern Caribbean from Miami aboard the 2,124-passenger Carnival Spirit (from \$905 for two, plus airfare), offers multiple eateries, pools, a spa, and even a mini-golf course.

● PICK THE RIGHT FLIGHTS

Given the uncertainty of pandemic travel, it may be worth paying more for fully refundable tickets. (Airlines might not allow changes on basic economy tickets at all.) And know that baggage and seat selection fees (around \$30 one way) can also drive up the price of “bargain” economy tickets.

Reduce travel-day stress by booking early departures (delays tend to cascade as the day wears on) and nonstop flights—or allowing plenty of time between connections. And download the airline’s app, so you can check in early for your flight, receive change alerts, and track checked bags.

TAILOR YOUR TRIP

Want to learn to cook in Southeast Asia? Cruise along the Rhine? The best travel agents, tours, and cruises will help you find the right fit for your travel style.



DURING YOUR TRIP

● PREBOOK AIRPORT TRANSFERS

You can, of course, drive your car to your home airport and park for the duration of the trip—but if you factor in the driving time, the stress of sitting in traffic and the fact that most airport parking is miles away from the terminal, it might not be worth the money you save. In many areas you will find a range of shuttle vans or private cars to and from the airport. If you are landing in a foreign airport,

you can often book a ride in advance and pay in U.S. dollars. At many major international airports, you can save money (\$50 or more per person) by taking an airport bus to a downtown city depot, where you can catch a cab or other local transportation to your final stop.

● CHECK IN FASTER

Long lines are back at airport security and customs checkpoints, but you can avoid the queue. Enroll in the Department of Homeland Security’s TSA PreCheck program, the express lane service for vetted travelers at U.S. airports, or the more comprehensive Global Entry, which gets you through immigration and customs in minutes.



TSA PreCheck costs \$85 for five years; Global Entry costs \$100 and includes TSA PreCheck membership, also for five years. New members can apply by filling out a form at ttp.dhs.gov and arranging an in-person interview; often at an international airport or, for TSA PreCheck, at Staples and IndentoGo locations around the country.

Clear, a private-sector benefit using biometric identifiers, such as facial scans, has opened lanes at 43 U.S. airports, where users cut to the head of the line at security checkpoints; membership costs \$189 a year (or less if you're a member of Delta or United's frequent flyer program or have an American Express Platinum card).

● EASE AIRPORT TIME

At some airports—Denver and Dallas Fort Worth, for example—getting from curb to gate involves a lengthy trek. Even with moving walkways you'll be logging a lot of steps. You don't have to

have serious mobility issues to request in-airport assistance, such as a ride on a cart or in a wheelchair. Most airlines will let you arrange this free of charge during the booking process.

You can also arrange for a private airport concierge at certain airports. The services these companies provide vary, as do the prices. Global Airport Concierge, for example, offers 13 types of services at over 700 airports worldwide, including Meet and Assist for \$75 and lounge facilitation for \$35, as well as baggage handling and more.

Layover between flights? You could spend it vying for a cramped seat at your next gate and craning your neck at the departures board every few minutes—or if you're flying on American Airlines or one of the company's partner airlines, you could relax in style at an American Airlines Admirals Club. There, you'll find made-to-order scrambled eggs at breakfast and a slider bar at lunch (as well as other food, wine, and drinks), free digital newspapers and magazines, shower suites, and a personal travel concierge to help you if your plans hit a snafu. Other airline lounges—for Air France, Delta, Virgin Atlantic, and others—offer similar perks, or better. And you won't necessarily need a business-class ticket to gain entry.

Some airline clubs may let you purchase a day pass for around \$60; ask your airline about the price. Or go to escapelounges.com to book a day pass, \$40 to \$45, at a Centurion Lounge (run by American Express at 40-plus locations worldwide). Another option is an annual membership in Priority Pass, a network of more than 1,300 clubs at airports around the world (from \$99 per year, plus daily pass fees). Travel credit cards such as the American Express Platinum, Capital One Venture X, Chase Sapphire Reserve, and some airline credit cards also offer access to airport lounges.

Is Travel Insurance Worth It?

Yes—if your journey will cost you more than you can afford to lose.

But there's no one-size-fits-all policy. Options range from à la carte protection—flight protection or medical-only coverage, for example—to comprehensive plans that will cover a wide range of issues. Premiums range from 4 to 10 percent of the total trip tab, so that \$5,000 trip could cost you as much as \$500 to insure, says Stan Sandberg, co-founder and co-CEO of the comparison site TravellInsurance.com.

If you get COVID-19 before traveling,

you should be covered if you have to postpone or cancel, and under some policies, a positive COVID-19 test (both test and diagnosis must be confirmed by a doctor) is accepted as proof of illness even if you're symptom-free. If you test positive while traveling, trip interruption coverage will reimburse you for your unused prepaid costs, and trip delay coverage will cover additional expenses, including hotels and meals (with limits), if you must quarantine.

For other pandemic-related reasons,

such as a country suddenly closing its borders, you're not covered unless you buy a "cancel for any reason" policy. These typically cost 40 to 60 percent more than standard plans and may cover only up to 75 percent of your total expenses.

Aggregators like Insure My Trip, Squaremouth, and TravellInsurance.

com can help you compare dozens of policies based on search parameters. Take advantage of the typical 10- to 14-day "free look" window for backing out of a contract to check the fine print. Look out for excluded reasons for canceling that deny coverage, such as preexisting medical conditions, or war or civil unrest at your destination.

Ratings ➤ **Roll Call** The best hard-sided carry-on bags will stow all your stuff with ease, stand up to years of use, and make it easy to roll through an airport in style.

3 Handy Carry-Ons

Rolling suitcases are easy to maneuver through an airport. But make sure you don't have to check yours by choosing one that will fit in the overhead compartment. Most airlines require that carry-on bags be no larger than 22 inches high, 14 inches wide, or 9 inches deep. As you shop, CR's pros say, make sure the telescopic handle feels comfortable in your hand and doesn't rattle as you pull the bag, and the wheels roll and spin smoothly. Also consider the weight: There might not always be somebody to help lift bags into overhead compartments.



CR'S TOP PICK

✓ **Samsonite Outline Pro Carry-On Spinner**
\$170, 7.2 pounds

80 OVERALL SCORE



BEST BUDGET BET

💰 **Made By Design (Target) Hardside 20" Carry-On Spinner Suitcase**
\$80, 7.2 pounds

78 OVERALL SCORE



LIGHTWEIGHT AND EXPANDABLE

✓ **TravelPro Maxlite 5 Expandable Carry-On Hardside Spinner**
\$170, 6.3 pounds

76 OVERALL SCORE

| Brand + Model | | Overall Score | Price | Test Results | | | | | | | Features + Specs | | | |
|------------------|---|---------------|-------|--------------|-------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|--------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------|------------|------|
| | | | | Usability | Impact resistance | Carrying and pulling | Construction quality | Ergonomics and design | Safety | Standard interior volume (L) | Overall dimensions (WxDxH, in.) | Weight (lb.) | Expandable | Lock |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| CARRY-ON LUGGAGE | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ✓ | Samsonite Outline Pro Carry-On Spinner | 80 | \$170 | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 38.4 | 15.4x9.8x22.8 | 7.2 | • | • |
| 💰 | Made By Design (Target) Hardside 20" Carry-On Spinner Suitcase | 78 | \$80 | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 41.6 | 14.6x10.2x21.5 | 7.2 | • | |
| ✓ | TravelPro Maxlite 5 Expandable Carry-On Hardside Spinner | 76 | \$170 | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 42.9 | 15.4x10x23.2 | 6.3 | • | • |
| ✓ | Amazon Basics 21-Inch Hardside Spinner | 75 | \$110 | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 40.6 | 14.8x9.4x21.7 | 7.1 | • | |
| | Monos Carry-On | 70 | \$275 | ⬇ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 37.4 | 14.4x9.1x22 | 7.4 | | • |
| | Tumi Latitude Continental Carry-On | 69 | \$800 | ⬇ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 42.0 | 16.1x8.9x22 | 6.8 | | • |
| | American Tourister Wavebreaker 20" Spinner | 68 | \$70 | ⬇ | ⬆ | ⬇ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 33.7 | 15.7x8.3x21.9 | 5.7 | | |
| | Away The Carry-On | 67 | \$225 | ⬇ | ⬆ | ⬇ | ⬆ | ⬇ | ⬆ | 39.1 | 14.4x8.9x21.9 | 7.4 | | • |
| | Briggs & Riley The Torq Collection International Carry-On Spinner | 67 | \$550 | ⬇ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 22.9 | 13.6x8.7x21.5 | 7.2 | | • |
| | Hartmann 21" Vigor Carry-On Spinner | 65 | \$500 | ⬇ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 43.3 | 15.7x9.8x23.8 | 7.9 | | • |
| | Delsey St. Tropez 21" Hardside Carry-On Spinner | 65 | \$480 | ⬆ | ⬇ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 44.2 | 15.7x10.2x23.2 | 7.9 | • | • |
| | Calpak Trnk Carry-On | 61 | \$195 | ⬆ | ⬇ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬇ | ⬆ | 39.8 | 15.7x8.9x22.0 | 7.1 | • | • |

HOW WE TEST: The **Overall Score** is based on usability, carrying and pulling, impact resistance, ergonomics, construction quality, and safety. **Usability** is an evaluation of the ease of opening, closing, and loading, as well as the function of internal zippers

and straps used to properly secure items, and the use and function of the telescopic handle. **Impact resistance** tests the ability to resist damage from being dropped or pulled, or having other items dropped onto the luggage. **Carrying and pulling** measures how a

piece of luggage performs when carried by the top or side handle and pulled over a variety of surfaces. **Construction quality** evaluates the quality and performance of seams, zippers, straps, and hinges, and assesses weather resistance. **Ergonomics and design**

looks at the ease of using the lock, reparability, noise, and stability. **Safety** determines how safe luggage is when considering sharp edges and handle pinch points. **Overall dimensions** include any protrusions, such as wheels and handles.

ROAD REPORT



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

FIRST
DRIVE



Toyota bZ4X

The bZ4X is the first dedicated electric vehicle from Toyota. Designed in partnership with Subaru, it is the mirror image of the Solterra. Size-wise, the SUV fits in between the RAV4 and Venza. It has 201 hp (front-wheel drive) to 214 hp (all-wheel drive), and a driving range of between 222 and 252 miles—less than many new EVs.

CR'S TAKE: The bZ4X is pleasant to drive, with responsive handling and a comfortable ride. A modest 6.6-kW onboard charger (11 kW is the current norm) will slow home charging.

BASE PRICE RANGE

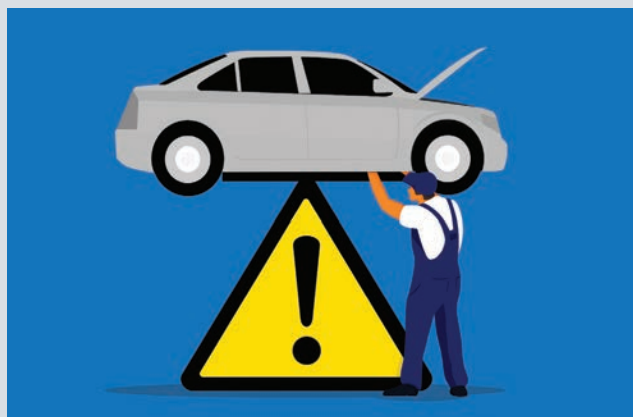
\$42,000–\$48,780

DESTINATION CHARGE \$1,215

PRICE AS DRIVEN \$44,140

AHEAD OF THE CURVE

A New Way to Track Safety Recalls



Is your car subject to an urgent recall because it's unsafe to drive? It's easy to find out now that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has upgraded its car recall page ([NHTSA.gov/recalls](https://www.nhtsa.gov/recalls)). Search for your car and the recall tool will tell you if it has an open “do not drive” or fire risk recall—as well as the actions you should take until the car is repaired. CR members can also use our Car Recall Tracker ([CR.org/carrecalls](https://www.carrecalls.org)) to check for recalls and receive text notifications.

THE VITAL STATISTIC

19.8%

The drop in fatal car crashes in Utah (comparing 2016 to 2019) after it became the first—and only—state to lower the impaired driving legal limit from a .08% blood alcohol level to .05%. In a 2022 study, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says the law encouraged Utah drivers to take steps to avoid impaired driving.

RECALL



Ford

Ford is recalling about 253,000 Explorer SUVs from the 2020–2022 model years, including hybrid and ST versions. A key bolt in the drivetrain could break and cause the vehicle to roll away even when it is in Park.

WHAT TO DO: Dealerships will update the vehicle software, at no charge, so that the electronic parking brake will automatically engage when the gear selector is in Park. This will prevent a rollaway if the failure occurs. For more information, contact Ford at 866-436-7332.



MONEY SAVER

Where to Find the Best Rental Car Rates

Enterprise took the prize for least expensive among eight major rental car companies in a March 2022 NerdWallet study that priced 7-day rentals of small sedans at metro areas with the nation's 10 biggest

airports. Looking at average prices, the Enterprise deal (\$480) for the sample week was the least expensive, followed by Budget (\$542) and Hertz (\$552). National had the highest rate (\$695). For the

best deal on a rental car, start with the companies that did well in this study, but always shop around. And don't forget to use discounts such as those offered through AAA, AARP, or other membership groups.

The 7 Essential Questions Every Car Buyer Should Ask

What to know before you head to a showroom, and what to ask once you're there.

by Keith Barry

F

inding the right car and then negotiating the best price can be a whirlwind experience. So what do people who have recently purchased a new car wish they had considered more carefully? We asked CR followers on social media and got a whole host of suggestions, including

learning the cost of maintenance, trying out the back seat, and much more. Then we turned to the pros at our Auto Test Center—who, in addition to their expertise, anonymously purchase 40 to 50 vehicles a year for Consumer Reports to test—for the advice that they give family and friends.

“It’s more important than ever to do your homework before purchasing a car or truck,” says Jake Fisher, senior director of auto testing for CR. “With record prices, people are holding onto their cars longer than ever, so the decision you make should be one you’re going to be happy with.”

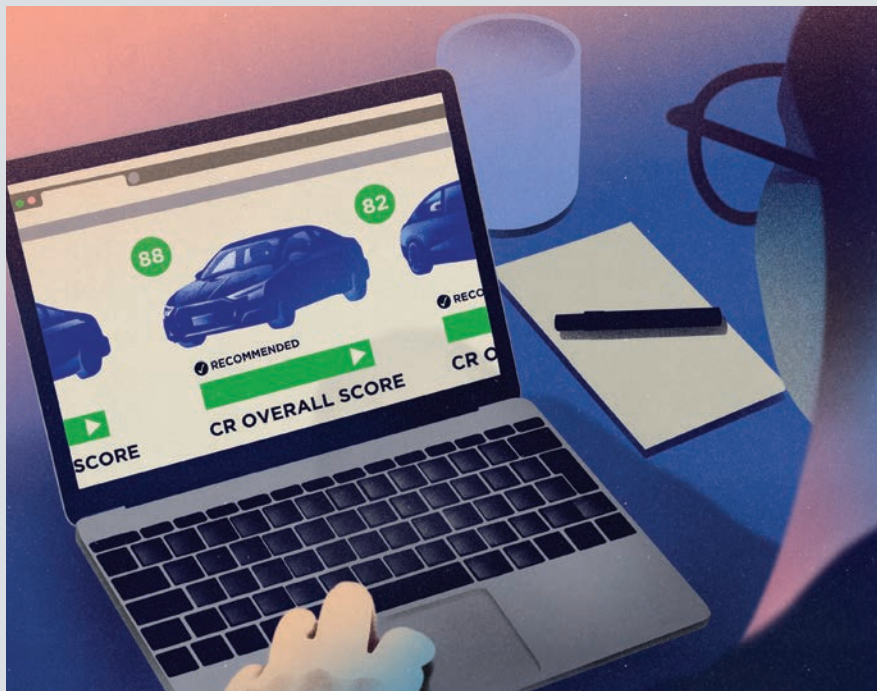
Between readers’ experiences and our know-how, we can prepare you for anything that might come your way the next time you want to buy a car. Ready to gain some car-buying superpowers? Read on.







WHAT TO FIND OUT BEFORE YOU GO TO A DEALERSHIP



■ Which safety systems are included

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Even though active safety systems prevent crashes, they aren't always included as standard equipment. Some may be grouped into different option packages. Automakers often give them baffling names, too: Audi calls its automatic emergency braking (AEB) system "pre sense front" and "pre sense city," while Volvo calls its "City Safety."

STEPS TO TAKE

- **Start your research online.**
Go to [CR.org/cars](https://www.crb.org/cars) to find vehicles

that have systems you're interested in and whether they're standard or optional. Then go to automaker websites to build and price the option packages and trim levels you'll need to get the safety features you want.

■ Double-check once you find the exact car you want.

"Call the dealership and ask a salesperson which features are on the specific car you plan to buy," says Kelly Funkhouser, manager for vehicle technology at CR. "Then cross-check

the window sticker to make sure the features you want are listed."

■ Plan for a safety test drive.

Write down a list of the safety-related questions that matter to you so that you remember to get answers once you're at the showroom. Does the car have AEB? How clear is the backup camera image? What kind of alert do you get if you engage the turn signal when a car is in your blind spot? Can you customize the sensitivity of these systems?



WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT USED CARS

Because every used car is different, buyers face more potential pitfalls than they do when purchasing a new vehicle. Here are three things to keep in mind during your search.

■ THE LENGTH OF THE WARRANTY.

Ask if there's any original warranty coverage left on the car and, if so, how long it will last and for which

■ Whether your next car will be gas-only, hybrid, or electric

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Though hybrids and EVs cost more up front, “cleaner cars cost a lot less to operate, especially when gas prices are high,” says Chris Harto, senior energy policy analyst at CR. As you budget how much you can afford to pay for a new vehicle, it can help to know what your savings on operating costs might look like.

STEPS TO TAKE

■ Hybrids can earn back their higher cost in as little as two years.

“For many Americans, the monthly fuel savings can offset a slightly higher monthly payment, saving money from day one,” Harto says.

■ Plug-in hybrids save the most if you take short car trips.

That’s because they have an electric-only range that’s usually between 20 and 50 miles. Beyond that, the gas engine kicks in. So check the window sticker to see what kind of mpg you’ll be getting when the car is in hybrid mode.

■ EVs offer serious savings.

CR’s analysis shows that with gas at \$5 per gallon, an EV SUV will save drivers \$2,600 a year on fuel and maintenance costs. Also, your EV purchase may be eligible for tax incentives. Go to [CR.org/evsavings](https://www.consumerreports.org/evsavings) to check.



■ Whether it has essential “extras”

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Some vehicles are specifically designed to do certain tasks, such as towing a camper or driving off-road. You need to know what the car you plan to buy is capable of before you head to the dealership, or you could make an expensive mistake. Paying extra for capabilities you don’t need is a waste of money.

STEPS TO TAKE

■ Know how much it can tow.

Even vehicles that look exactly the same on the outside can have a towing capacity that varies by thousands of pounds, says John Ibbotson, CR’s chief mechanic. Much depends on option packages, trim levels, and engine choices. Calculate how much you need

to tow before you buy, and make sure the vehicle you’re choosing will be up to the task. Check the car’s manual and ask a salesperson to help you.

■ Think about the road conditions you’ll encounter.

Rugged four-wheel-drive trucks and SUVs are impressive machines great for taking off the beaten path. But if it’s just inclement weather you’re worried about, you probably don’t need such a robust vehicle—or its added weight and lower gas mileage. An all-wheel-drive system—or even a front- or rear-wheel-drive vehicle with winter tires for cold weather and snow—should do the trick, says Ryan Pszczolkowski, tire program manager at CR.

components. If you want more coverage, consider buying a certified pre-owned car, which typically has additional years of warranty coverage direct from the manufacturer.

■ IF IT HAS BEEN IN A CRASH.

A car that’s been fixed after a serious crash can have a lower resale value, and hidden safety and performance issues. Not all crashes show up on a vehicle

history report, so look for areas of the body where the paint doesn’t match the rest of the car, crooked headlamps and trim pieces, and uneven gaps between body panels.

■ IF IT NEEDS NEW TIRES.

Are the tires the right size, speed rating, and load rating for the vehicle? Tires (including the spare) older than 10 years should be replaced.



**FIND
THIS OUT
AT THE
DEALERSHIP**



■ How much maintenance will cost

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

A lot of new cars come with some complimentary maintenance, including free oil changes and tire rotations. But others don't, and you'll need to factor in the cost of keeping your new car on the road.

STEPS TO TAKE

- **Get it in writing.** Find out what—if anything—is free. Are oil changes covered? Tire rotations? Are there limits to how many times you can bring your car in? How long is the coverage?
- **Get the recommended maintenance schedule.** You can find it in the owner's manual or on the manufacturer's website. Gone are the days of needing yearly tune-ups and oil changes every 3,000 miles. "Newer cars need these services less often," Ibbotson says. "But it's just as or even more important to do these maintenance tasks on time."
- **Find out if you have to get your car serviced at a particular dealership.** If complimentary maintenance is provided by the automaker, you can go to any dealership for your brand. If it's a perk from your specific dealer, you may have to return there.
- **Be wary of package deals.** If free maintenance isn't included, some dealerships will try to sell you a basic maintenance package for one up-front price. Do the math based on the service intervals listed in the owner's manual. You might be better off paying à la carte or going to an independent shop you trust.



WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE FINANCE OFFICE

You might think that the hard part is over after you've agreed on a price. But now it's time to sign the official paperwork. That usually takes place in the finance and

insurance (F&I) office, even if you're not taking a loan. It's also where the dealership will try to sell you on extras, which add to the cost of your vehicle.

■ If there's enough seating and storage

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Automakers love to boast about how many cubic feet of passenger and cargo space a vehicle has. But numbers won't tell you whether a car's sloping roofline will cramp rear passengers' headroom, or if a small trunk opening will make it hard to load your gear.

STEPS TO TAKE

■ Check out the rear seats by sitting in them.

See how easy they are to get in and out of, and if there are any obvious problems with head- and legroom. If there's a third row, find out if it's big enough for the passengers you expect to sit back there.

■ Try out the trunk.

If there's a specific item you absolutely need to fit—say, a folding wheelchair, an empty pet carrier, or a stroller—take the item to the dealership with you and try it for yourself. Is it easy to lift and load?

■ Be smart about car seats.

If you have small children, bring your car seats to see how easy they are to install securely. Some second rows can fit three car seats across, but in others, a single car seat might impinge on the neighboring passenger's space. "All car seats are different, so the best way to find out what fits is to bring your own," says Emily Thomas, manager for auto safety at CR.

■ How the infotainment tech works for you

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

As cars become more technologically advanced, drivers face a greater learning curve to master various systems. Don't get stuck with a system that's frustrating to use. Get familiar with the tech on your test drive.

STEPS TO TAKE

■ **Check the basics.** Can you figure out the buttons, menus, and settings? "Systems that are easy to learn in the beginning tend to be less frustrating in the long run," Funkhouser says.

■ Don't make any assumptions about the technology the car comes with.

Many cars have done away with CD players, older-style USB-A charging ports, and even AM radio tuners.

■ **Double-check the options list on the car you're buying.** Because of the ongoing microchip shortage, some automakers are deleting features that usually come on certain cars, such as satellite radio and parking assistance. "You can't always rely on a website or brochure to know what will be included anymore," Fisher says. "If a feature is important to you, confirm that it's listed on the window sticker." You may not be able to add it later.

■ **If you have questions later, will there be someone to help you?** Some dealerships will help with pairing your phone and other tech tasks.

■ Whether to wait for what you want

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Do you like the car you test-drove but wish it had different options, more safety features, or a different exterior color? In today's lean car market, it can be difficult to get exactly what you want, so sometimes it's better to wait.

STEPS TO TAKE

■ **Shop around.** "If you can't find the exact car you want locally, try expanding your search," says Gabe Shenhar, who supervises car buying for CR's auto-testing program. "A dealership in another area may be able to ship it to you." Have the dealer email you a picture of the window sticker. Scrutinize it to make sure the car has every item you want. "Negotiate the price and complete as much paperwork over the phone or email as you can," Shenhar says. "Then you only have to arrive at the dealership to take delivery and sign some papers."

■ **Put in a custom order.** If you have the time, it may be worth ordering a new car exactly the way you want it, especially if you're looking for a particularly popular model that's in short supply on dealer lots. Just be aware that the wait could be a few months or more, depending on the vehicle. So make a plan. For example, if your lease is running out, ask the dealer if you can extend it until your new car is ready.

■ GET THE "OUT THE DOOR" PRICE BEFORE YOU SIGN.

Taxes and fees can add thousands to the starting price of a new vehicle, and many of these charges aren't

negotiable. Don't get caught off guard. Ask the salesperson to itemize these numbers clearly from the start, so you can keep track of what you're paying and get the best deal.

■ DO THE MATH.

Before you sign anything, bring a calculator and check the dealership's numbers. You might find an error that would have cost you hundreds.

■ DON'T BUY EXTRAS YOU HADN'T PLANNED ON.

You can almost always add extended warranties or tire protection after the fact if you decide you want them.



The Good News About EVs



WITH GAS PRICES soaring, it's no wonder that interest in electric vehicles is, too. EV sales rose 76% in the first quarter of 2022, compared with the same period in 2021, according to Cox Automotive.

More than a third of Americans would consider an EV if they were planning to buy or lease right now. Among their reasons: It costs less to charge an EV than to refuel a gas car (33%); lower lifetime costs (31%); and lower maintenance costs (28%), according to a 2022 nationally representative CR survey of over 8,000 U.S. adults—the largest in CR's history—funded by a grant from the environment-focused philanthropic group Breakthrough Energy.

Respondents also shared ownership barriers, including where to charge an EV; how far a charge will take the car; and the overall cost of ownership. Below, we address those reservations.

EV STICKER SHOCK

Of Americans who said cost-related factors were holding them back from getting an EV, nearly 6 in 10 said purchase price was the biggest barrier. Many new EVs cost \$45,000 and up, but prices for the Chevrolet Bolt and Bolt EUV, Hyundai Kona, and Nissan Leaf have dropped. The 2023 Chevy Bolt now starts at \$26,595. Nearly half of Americans (46%) are unaware that there are incentives available. "Tax rebates and other incentives can reduce the purchase price by thousands of dollars," says Quinta Warren, PhD, CR's associate director of sustainability policy. Check for applicable incentives at [CR.org/EVsavings](https://www.consumerreports.org/EVsavings).

COST OF OWNERSHIP

Just over half of Americans who weren't already committed to buying an EV said the costs of buying, owning, and maintaining it would prevent them from leasing or purchasing one. However, a 2020 study by CR revealed that EV owners spend around half as much on maintenance and repair over the vehicle's typical lifetime as gas-only car owners do. And for good reasons: EVs have fewer moving parts and fluids that need to be changed. Even the brakes tend to last longer. Plus the cost of powering the car is also far lower, especially now. "EVs are less expensive to own than traditional cars, even when factoring the higher purchase price," Warren says.

CHARGING AN EV

About 6 in 10 Americans who weren't already committed to purchasing an EV say that concerns about where to charge it and how far that charge will take them have been holding them back from buying. The good news: There are now more than 48,000 U.S. public charging locations and more on the way.

CR has found good wall-mounted home charging units for \$500 to \$700. Installing one costs from \$492 to \$1,191, according to HomeAdvisor.

EV range is commonly around 250 miles (far more than most people typically drive each day). Experienced EV owners consider range to be much less of an issue.

HYBRID SAVINGS

For those not ready for a full-on EV, hybrids can be a smart alternative and save owners a lot on gas. A hybrid combines a gasoline engine with an electric assist, allowing the powertrain to optimize its operation for maximum fuel economy. With a regular hybrid, the engine and brakes generate electricity, so you never need to plug in the car. Trading in a 2017 Chevrolet Equinox V6 for a 2022 Toyota RAV4 hybrid (another small SUV) could save \$1,775 a year in fuel costs, based on our tests and gas at \$5/gal. That's almost \$9,000 over five years. Moving to a pricier Toyota RAV4 Prime plug-in hybrid would yield even greater savings.



ROAD TEST

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



ELECTRIC SUVs

✓Kia EV6

Snazzy Styling With
Fast Charging Ability

79

OVERALL
SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 90

HIGHS Acceleration, quietness, braking, handling, no tailpipe emissions, rapid DC fast-charging

LOWS Poor outward visibility, awkward exterior door handles

POWERTRAIN 320-hp, dual electric motors; 1-speed direct-drive; AWD

RANGE 274 miles

PRICE \$40,900–\$55,900 base price + \$1,255 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested \$52,840

THE EV6 STANDS out as one of the best electric vehicles we've tested, just as we found with the Hyundai Ioniq 5, its mechanically similar corporate cousin. The EV6 is invigorating to drive, and sleek inside and out. Drivers might also appreciate the car's maximum 235-kW acceptance rate that allows for quick DC fast-charging in public venues.

Owners can benefit from the car's 10.9-kW onboard charger that makes for quicker at-home charging than most EVs using a 240-volt home charger installed on a 48-amp circuit, similar to an outlet for your dryer.

The EV6 has an EPA-rated driving range of 274 miles, which is slightly longer than most competitors. Front and rear electric motors make for brisk, effortless, and nearly silent acceleration. Handling is taut and agile; the car's sporty demeanor stems from

the low-mounted battery pack and power distribution biased to the rear wheels. Although the suspension is firm, it soaks up most bumps pretty well.

Curvy styling and a shorter wheelbase make for a tighter rear seat and less cargo volume compared with the Ioniq 5. Side and rear views are diminished by the sloping roofline, thick rear pillars, and small back window.

The infotainment touch screen operates intuitively, but the split-use controls for climate and audio are annoying—you have to press a tiny “button” to switch back and forth. The flush exterior door handles are also awkward—instead of extending automatically so you can pull them, you need to push the handle on one end and then pull on the other.

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



SMALL SUVs

✓Kia Sportage

Long on Looks,
Short on Sport

72

OVERALL
SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 78

HIGHS Roomy interior, easy to get in and out of

LOWS Lackluster acceleration

POWERTRAIN 187-hp, 2.5-liter 4-cylinder engine; 8-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

FUEL 25 mpg on regular

PRICE \$25,990–\$36,790 base price + \$1,255 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested \$31,220

THE REDESIGNED SPORTAGE is one of the roomiest small SUVs, and it packs a lot of desirable features that buyers are sure to appreciate. But it's a bit boring to drive, has some odd controls, and isn't as appealing overall as the similar Hyundai Tucson.

The dull feeling is due mostly to the powertrain. The engine makes a respectable 187 hp, but it's abrupt off the line, and then lackluster—okay, downright slow—after that. The transmission can be hesitant to downshift, and the gear changes aren't particularly smooth. In spite of its tepid performance, it's not all that fuel-efficient. At 25 mpg overall, the Kia is 2 to 3 mpg behind segment leaders.

At least the Sportage takes to corners with a capable, relatively nimble nature. The firm suspension does a decent job absorbing most bumps, with only the occasional

impact punching through on rougher roads. The hybrid version we're also testing looks to be quicker, quieter, and smoother-riding.

Most drivers liked the front seat's side bolstering, though some found it narrow. The best seats in this house may be in the second row, thanks to generous head- and legroom, and good leg support. We also appreciated the USB ports built into the front seatbacks.

The Sportage has annoying split-use climate and audio controls like the Kia EV6, requiring toggling between the systems. We also don't like the digital tachometer, which displays “1.5” instead of 1,500, without any reference scale.

FCW, AEB with pedestrian and cyclist detection, LDW, and LKA are standard. BSW and RCTW aren't available on the base LX, but come standard on higher trims.



FULL-SIZED PICKUP TRUCKS

✓ Toyota Tundra

Big Changes Result
in Small Gains

71

OVERALL
SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 71

HIGHS Acceleration, roomy cabin, towing capacity, composite bed

LOWS Agility, braking, no auto 4WD mode, high step-in

POWERTRAIN 389-hp, 3.5-liter turbocharged V6 engine; 10-speed automatic transmission; 4WD

FUEL 17 mpg on regular

PRICE \$35,950–\$74,230 base price + \$1,695 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested \$53,393

THE NEW TUNDRA is powerful, quick, and roomy, and an improvement over its predecessor. But despite this first full redesign in 15 years, it's now merely on a par with its rivals rather than a step above them. After testing it, we feel the Tundra doesn't "out-truck" its Ford, GM, and Ram rivals. Even so, its Overall Score is boosted by Toyota's solid reliability.

The Tundra, however, hits a home run with its silky-smooth powertrain. The twin-turbo V6 has tons of power in any gear and at any rpm, and the 10-speed automatic upshifts more imperceptibly than many luxury cars. But its 17 mpg overall is no match for the 19 mpg the Ford F-150's 2.7-liter turbo V6 manages. Unlike most full-sized pickups, the Tundra isn't available with automatic 4WD, which means that the driver needs to remember to shift into 4WD

in slippery conditions.

The rear suspension uses coil springs, replacing the leaf springs used on most full-sized pickups. A similar swap made for a much more comfortable ride in the Ram 1500, but the Tundra's ride is merely tolerable—it still exhibits the rear-end jiggle on rougher roads that plagues most pickups. It also remains clumsy through corners, and stopping distances are on the long side, even for a truck.

The spacious interior has a huge rear seat, and the wide front seats should suit body types of all sizes. We like the cabin's robust vibe, large knobs, and traditional gear selector. But it's a long reach for the driver to the right side of the infotainment screen.

FCW, AEB with pedestrian and cyclist detection, and LDW come standard. BSW and RCTW are unavailable on the base SR trim.



SMALL SUVs

Nissan Rogue

Smaller Engine Isn't
More Fuel-Efficient

64

OVERALL
SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 82

HIGHS Access, controls, agility

LOWS Annoying idle vibration, low dashboard air vents

POWERTRAIN 201-hp, 1.5-liter 3-cylinder turbocharged engine; continuously variable transmission; all-wheel drive

FUEL 25 mpg on regular

PRICE \$27,150–\$38,430 base price + \$1,225 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested \$34,905

EVEN THOUGH THE Rogue was redesigned for 2021, we're testing it again. Why? Because Nissan has replaced the 2.5-liter four-cylinder engine with a 1.5-liter turbocharged three-cylinder for 2022. We found positives and negatives with the new engine, but ultimately it proved no more fuel-efficient, garnering the same 25 mpg overall in our testing.

The turbo three-cylinder feels a lot more willing than you'd think for such a small engine. It gets the Rogue off the line without hesitation, and it's endowed with richer midrange torque than the outgoing engine. We like that the continuously variable transmission mimics the shifts of a traditional automatic at times, but it also exhibits the "rubberbanding" sensation that often plagues the genre, with the revs rising and falling too often. The engine's unique gravelly sound appealed to


some of our drivers; others, not so much. We all agreed that the engine vibrates excessively at idle.

We were also at odds with the front seats, which feature puffed-up ridges on the seatback that dug into some drivers' backs. Others said the seat was very comfortable, revealing how critical it is to take a test drive before buying.

Otherwise, the Rogue remains pretty much identical to the 2021 version. It handles well, with quick turn-in response and minimal body lean, and it did better this time through our avoidance maneuver. The suspension is quite firm, to the point that passengers will be aware of the rough road beneath.

FCW, AEB with pedestrian detection, BSW, RCTW, and LDW are standard. The second-tier SV trim that we tested gets LKA.

Ratings ➤ **Small SUVs and a Big Truck** The Kia EV6, Kia Sportage, and Toyota Tundra garner recommendations. The Nissan Rogue's new 3-cylinder turbo doesn't gain fuel efficiency.

| 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. | Cargo volume, cu. ft. | FCW | AEB, pedestrian | AEB, highway | BSW |

SUVs \$25,000-\$35,000

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|----|---|---|----|----|-------|---|---|---|---|---|------|------|-----|------|---|---|---|---|
| ✓ Subaru Forester 2.5L | 90 | ⬆ | ⬆ | 90 | 28 | ⬆ / ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 53.0 | 9.2 | 130 | 36.5 | S | S | S | 0 |
| ✓ Hyundai Tucson 2.5L | 89 | ⬆ | ⬆ | 86 | 26 | ⬆ / ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 53.0 | 9.6 | 130 | 38.5 | S | S | 0 | S |
| ✓ Honda CR-V 1.5T | 84 | ⬆ | ⬆ | 82 | 28 | ⬆ / ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 52.0 | 8.2 | 137 | 36.0 | S | S | S | 0 |
| ✓ Ford Bronco Sport 1.5T | 82 | ⬆ | ⬆ | 75 | 25 | ⬆ / ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 53.5 | 8.9 | 126 | 30.5 | S | S | S | S |
| ✓ Mazda CX-5 2.5L | 82 | ⬆ | ⬆ | 78 | 24 | ⬆ / ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 54.0 | 8.6 | 133 | 30.5 | S | S | S | S |
| ✓ Chevrolet Equinox 1.5T | 74 | ⬆ | ⬆ | 78 | 25 | ⬆ / ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 53.0 | 9.6 | 132 | 32.0 | S | S | — | 0 |
| ✓ Kia Sportage 2.5L | 72 | ⬆ | ⬆ | 78 | 25 | ⬆ / ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 55.5 | 10.0 | 134 | 38.0 | S | S | S | 0 |
| ✓ Toyota RAV4 2.5L | 65 | ⬆ | ⬆ | 72 | 27 | ⬆ / ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 54.0 | 8.3 | 131 | 30.5 | S | S | S | 0 |
| Nissan Rogue 1.5T | 64 | ⬆ | ⬆ | 82 | 25 | ⬆ / ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 56.0 | 9.1 | 134 | 36.5 | S | S | S | S |
| Mitsubishi Outlander 2.5L | 57 | ⬆ | ⬆ | 71 | 25 | ⬆ / ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 51.0 | 9.8 | 133 | 32.0 | S | S | S | S |
| Volkswagen Tiguan 2.0T | 56 | ⬆ | ⬆ | 84 | 25 | ⬆ / ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 52.0 | 10.3 | 131 | 33.0 | S | S | S | S |
| Ford Escape 1.5T | 55 | ⬆ | ⬆ | 73 | 26 | ⬆ / ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 53.0 | 8.9 | 128 | 30.5 | S | S | S | S |
| Jeep Compass 2.4L | 45 | ⬆ | ⬆ | 56 | 24 | ⬆ / ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 53.5 | 9.8 | 137 | 27.5 | S | S | S | S |

ELECTRIC SUVs \$45,000-\$65,000

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|----|---|---|----|------------------|-------|---|---|---|---|---|------|-----|-----|------|---|---|---|---|
| ✓ Ford Mustang Mach-E | 82 | ⬆ | ⬆ | 78 | 90 ^h | ⬆ / ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 52.0 | 5.3 | 136 | 29.5 | S | S | S | S |
| ✓ Hyundai Ioniq 5 | 80 | ⬆ | ⬆ | 91 | 98 ^h | ⬆ / ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 53.0 | 4.7 | 131 | 28.5 | S | S | S | S |
| ✓ Kia EV6 | 79 | ⬆ | ⬆ | 90 | 105 ^h | ⬆ / ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 54.5 | 4.7 | 126 | 26.5 | S | S | S | S |
| Tesla Model Y | 59 | ⬆ | ⬆ | 90 | 121 ^h | ⬆ / ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 54.5 | 4.7 | 121 | 25.0 | S | S | S | — |
| Volkswagen ID.4 | 59 | ⬆ | ⬆ | 83 | 93 ^h | ⬆ / ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 52.5 | 5.8 | 134 | 31.0 | S | S | S | S |

FULL-SIZED PICKUP TRUCKS \$45,000-\$65,000

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|----|---|---|----|----|-------|---|---|---|---|---|------|-----|-----|----|---|---|---|---|
| ✓ Ram 1500 5.7L | 75 | ⬆ | ⬆ | 83 | 17 | ⬆ / ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 47.5 | 7.1 | 137 | NR | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ✓ Toyota Tundra 3.5T | 71 | ⬆ | ⬆ | 71 | 17 | ⬆ / ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 48.0 | 6.3 | 140 | NR | S | S | S | 0 |
| Ford F-150 2.7T | 60 | ⬆ | ⬆ | 75 | 19 | ⬆ / ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 47.5 | 6.7 | 143 | NR | S | S | S | 0 |
| Nissan Titan 5.6L | 55 | ⬆ | ⬆ | 70 | 16 | ⬆ / ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 49.5 | 6.7 | 131 | NR | S | S | S | S |
| Chevrolet Silverado 1500 5.3L | 46 | ⬆ | ⬆ | 78 | 17 | ⬆ / ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 49.5 | 6.9 | 136 | NR | S | S | 0 | 0 |
| GMC Sierra 1500 5.3L | 46 | ⬆ | ⬆ | 78 | 17 | ⬆ / ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | ⬆ | 49.5 | 6.9 | 136 | NR | S | S | 0 | 0 |

➤ 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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Think You're Ready to Travel?

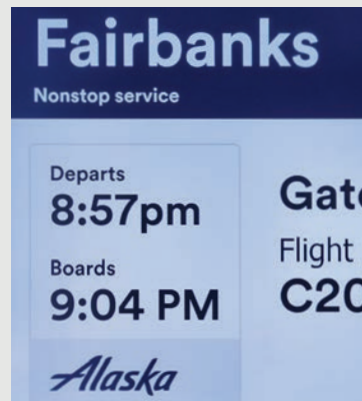
You may want to stay at home if this is what awaits you on the road.



Who Needs Choices Anyway?

This hotel vending machine makes it super-easy to decide what to drink.

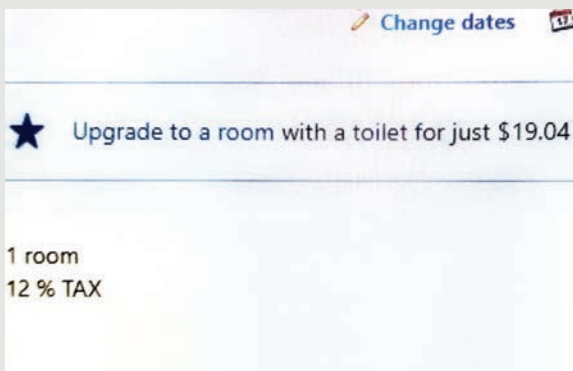
Submitted by Kari Elsila and Maple Buescher, as seen in a Massachusetts hotel



Everyone Missed This Flight

It's usually a good idea to post a boarding time that comes before departure.

Submitted by Charlie Kronvall, as seen in Seattle



Who Could Pass Up This Deal?

And for another \$20, we've got a bed for you, too.

Submitted by Liz Burden, via email

8 popular things to do nearby



Laguna Beach Backroads Electric Bike Tour

0.9 mi away
5.0/5 (1)

US\$ 580,688

*Get a lower price by selecting multiple travelers

About this property

Bike Tour for Billionaires

For this price, someone else should do the pedaling.

Submitted by Rodney Falk, via email



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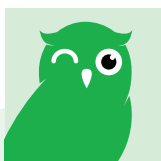
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