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to help you decide what's best for your health



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PHOTO: TRAVIS RATHBONE

January 2015, Vol. 80 No. 1



# GLUTEN— WITHOUT HYPE

## **The Risks of Going Gluten-Free**

The biggest trend in the food world shows no signs of slowing down. But will avoiding gluten really make you healthier?

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## **The Arsenic Connection**

Many gluten-free products are made with rice—and could increase your exposure to arsenic.

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## **Best Everyday Products**

Our exclusive testing will help you decide whether to reach for Costco paper towels or the pricier Bounty, the Target ketchup or the Heinz. Here's the ultimate shopping list of the stuff you use most often.

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## **Last-Minute Gifts**

Still shopping? We have suggestions that will please everyone—cameras for the shutterbug in your life, candies for your sweetie, tech toys for the kids, and much more.

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Plus consumer actions you can take in January.

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Here's how to make credit reports work in your favor.



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Now included with your paid magazine subscription.

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Photography by Grant Cornett

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Prop Styling by JoJo Li

**ABOUT CONSUMER REPORTS** We are the world's largest independent, non-profit, consumer-product-testing organization, based in Yonkers, N.Y. We survey millions of consumers about their experiences with products and services. We buy all of the products we rate. We don't accept paid advertising. We don't accept free test samples from manufacturers. We do not allow our name or content to be used for any promotional purposes. **HOW TO REACH US** Write to us at Consumer Reports, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY 10703-1057, Attn: Customer Service.

**TO SEND A LETTER TO THE EDITOR**, go to [ConsumerReports.org/lettertoeditor](http://ConsumerReports.org/lettertoeditor). **NEWS TIPS AND STORY IDEAS**: Go to [ConsumerReports.org/tips](http://ConsumerReports.org/tips). **E-MAIL SUBMISSIONS**: For Selling It send to [SellingIt@cro.consumer.org](mailto:SellingIt@cro.consumer.org) or call 800-666-5261. See page 63 for more details. **SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION** Go to [ConsumerReports.org/magazine](http://ConsumerReports.org/magazine) or call 800-666-5261. See page 60 for more details. **RATINGS** We rate products using these symbols: Excellent Very Good Good Fair Poor

## READER LETTERS

### Cars and Health Care Are on Your Mind

#### Things You Liked About December

**What a wonderful story** about Dr. Scheier and his family and doctors (“A Beautiful Death,” December 2014). My mom made the same decision, and we were all able to witness death with dignity.

—Dan Roney, via Facebook

**The December issue** has Selling It on the back page again, with photos just like before. Thanks for listening to us and making the page fun again!

—Peggy Teem, via Facebook

#### Questions on Car Reliability

**Why did the Jeep Grand Cherokee** have a bad reliability rating (“The Most—and Least—Reliable Cars You Can Buy,” December 2014)?

—David Schneider, North Hero, VT

**EDITOR’S NOTE** Consumer Reports’ auto experts say that our predicted-reliability Ratings for the Jeep Grand Cherokee are based on data from the 2014 model year only. That vehicle had a freshening for 2014, including a new, eight-speed automatic transmission and a diesel engine. Problems associated with almost all Grand Cherokee versions involved the infotainment system, which includes navigation, video screen, and radio. Other problems: squeaks or rattles, rough-shifting transmission (most noticeable on the V6 version), check-engine light, stalling or hesitation, and emission-control devices (diesel version).

**Your Road Report** on sporty compact cars neglects to mention whether these cars require premium gasoline (I suspect they do), a fact I would think is important to readers of a consumer-oriented publication. In my neighborhood, filling a typical 18-gallon tank with premium instead of regular costs \$10 more. Without this information, your mpg measurements are meaningless.

—John Morton, Jessup, MD

**EDITOR’S NOTE** Consumer Reports’ auto experts say that engines that have a high horsepower rating relative to their engine displacement—usually small, turbocharged ones—require premium fuel to prevent engine knocking and to attain peak horsepower. Most cars can use regular gas if the owner’s manual states “premium is recommended,” but doing so will sacrifice performance. For those vehicles that explicitly specify “premium is required,” it’s best to follow manufacturer’s instructions.

#### Other Thoughts

**I really appreciate** the new Q&A section with company CEOs. Consumer Reports is one of the only companies I would trust with an unbiased Q&A with the rehearsed and often whitewashed CEOs, and I look forward to seeing frank and direct questions like the ones presented in the November issue.

—Nicholas Fannin, Carmel, NY

**Your otherwise** well-written article, “It’s Time to Get Mad About the Outrageous Cost of Health Care” (November 2014), was disappointing in its failure to identify the biggest reason we spend \$3 trillion annually on health care in this country. Until we address the enormous price we pay for illnesses related to obesity, tobacco, alcohol and drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, and violence, it won’t matter if we spend \$10,000 or \$100,000 on any given treatment or procedure; our health care system will be bankrupted by preventable disease, much of it self-induced.

—David B. Kee Jr., M.D., via e-mail

**At my age**, the costs of health care mean a lot to my cash flow and quality of life. Your article does not mention drug ads, an expense that dramatically affects the costs of pharmaceutical products.

—James Binneboese, Austin, TX

➔ **SEND your letters for publication to**  
**ConsumerReports.org/lettertoeditor.**

## FROM THE PRESIDENT



### You’re Making Choices. We’re Here to Help.

Roughly two months into my tenure here at Consumer Reports, I’ve had time to reach some conclusions and share some observations, and the headline is that I couldn’t be more thrilled by what I’m witnessing and experiencing.

It has been both invigorating and gratifying to return to my roots as a consumer activist, surrounded as I am now by so many who are passionately committed to protecting the rights, the interests, and the safety of consumers.

One example of that commitment is this month’s cover story, “The Truth About Gluten,” which helps you make healthy choices amid all of the new gluten-free products on the market today.

As I look forward to 2015, it is my top priority as president and CEO to make sure we engage you where you are, here in print and through all of our online offerings and social-media sites, tackling tough problems head-on and helping you decode the complex problems you face in the marketplace everyday.

Rest assured, we’ll remain true to our mission and continue to cherish the trust you place in us. This coming year, and for years to come, know that “we’ve got your back” and will always be here for you and for future generations.

—Marta Tellado,  
President and CEO

# \$2,974

That’s the amount the average American household donates to charity each year. The bulk of our giving (31 percent) goes to religious institutions. And if it seems we have charity on the brain right now, that’s no surprise: The weeks between Thanksgiving and New Year’s are the givingest time of the year, when 24 percent of all donations are made.



## FROM THE EDITOR



## I Bet You Have Some Great Advice

If you're a fan of "Antiques Roadshow" on PBS, you know that the best part is when a resident of Nashville or Nashua shows up with a scratched vase that turns out to be Lalique and worth \$10,000. "Oh, my," the owner will say. "I had no idea."

The takeaway from an hour full of oh, mys: Everyone has something valuable stashed away in the attic or garage.

So, too, inside the mind and memory of every Consumer Reports reader is a valuable trove of practical wisdom ... advice, tips, and perspectives that can help others. You know important things about keeping your home, appliances, and cars in top shape, about saving time and money.

Which is why we created the Reader Tip column, on page 8. We also count on your questions for our Ask the Experts column and our new Problem Solver. And of course you write the copy for the ever-popular Selling It section.

We complement your input with Consumer Reports' expert Ratings. We have 50 labs that test products to the highest scientific standards. (Our experts also review the Reader Tip.)

Put together 140-plus experts and 4 million smart readers and you have something uniquely powerful. So keep those ideas coming!

—Ellen Kampinsky,  
Editor in Chief

### Coming in February

▼  
HOT DEALS FOR THE COLDEST MONTH OF THE YEAR:



The Smartest Cell-Phone Plans



How to Stay Safe in the Hospital



Get the Best Car for Your Money



Super Bowl-Ready TVs



Drug Label Must-Knows

## YOUR IDEAS COUNT

"I don't like it."



"I love it!"

## Give Us Your 2 Cents

Were you surprised by the findings in the gluten report on page 36? Did you find the last-minute-gifts guide useful? Tell us what you think about anything and everything in this issue of Consumer Reports.

➔ **SHARE YOUR INSIGHTS** by sending us a letter for publication—or by joining our Reader Advisory Panel. Go to [CRResearch.org/feedback](http://CRResearch.org/feedback).

## DIALOGUE

## More Ways to Keep the Conversation Going

➔ Scattered throughout every issue of the magazine are arrows in yellow circles that point you online, where we provide you with more relevant resources and help you take a stake in our advocacy efforts on behalf of all consumers. It's this back-and-forth conversation that helps define us. Here are some more stops—all from Consumer Reports—on that two-way street:

**Find the best insurance plan for you.** During open enrollment (through Feb. 15, 2015), use our exclusive interactive tool to get a personalized list of health-insurance options; go to [HealthLawHelper.org](http://HealthLawHelper.org).

**Sound off on the pending cable deal.** With the Comcast-Time Warner megamerger on the table, we're taking your concerns about cable and broadband services straight to the FCC. Get the latest info and tell us what you think at [HearUsNow.org](http://HearUsNow.org).

**Figure out the truth behind confusing food labels.** "Natural," "local," "free" and other promises sound good, but what do they really mean? Our scientists, nutritionists, and testers have read the fine print. Check our guides before you buy seafood—or baby food—at [GreenerChoices.org](http://GreenerChoices.org).

**Listen in on some smart car talk.** Tune in to this exclusive video podcast to find out what our automotive experts think about the latest models—and to get the straight story on the safety and reliability concerns that matter most. Go to [ConsumerReports.org/talkingcars](http://ConsumerReports.org/talkingcars).

**Tip off our intrepid consumer-affairs bloggers.** Find out what you need to know today about the rapidly shifting marketplace, and tell us what's on your radar, at [Consumerist.com](http://Consumerist.com).



# Your ADVOCATE

**70%** THINK 'HOLD' IS  
A FOUR-LETTER  
WORD

#### AMERICANS' TOP TAX ANNOYANCE

When IRS reps are tough  
to reach by phone.

#### TIP

If you need more than an  
auto-response, call later in the week.



people hate when  
refunds arrive late.

#### TIP

E-filing and opting for direct deposit  
is the fastest route. According to  
the IRS, it electronically transmits  
most refunds in 21 days.



FEAR AN AUDIT

#### TIP Relax.

The average audit rate  
of individuals is  
only about 1 percent.

**1 IN 4**  
**PEOPLE**

fear that filing taxes will lead to  
identity theft or other fraud.

#### TIP

Filing itself is relatively safe.  
The IRS has processed about  
133 million 2014 returns; it's  
investigating just 1,900 identity-  
theft schemes. *Never* give  
your Social Security number  
or other personal info in response  
to a phone or e-mail solicitation.



#### GRIFE-O-METER

## What Vexes Us About Taxes

We recently asked 1,016  
Americans for their top  
gripes about filing,  
then came up with  
solutions to their beefs.

INFOGRAPHIC BY MATT DORFMAN



**58%** ARE PEEVED  
WHEN  
TAX  
PROS

★  
don't disclose  
their fees  
up front.

★  
don't explain  
what they're  
doing and why.

#### TIP

Ask point-blank about all fees and  
demand that the preparer go over  
your return line by line with you.

**1 IN 6** E-FILERS

fret that their forms  
won't make it to the IRS.

#### TIP

You can check the status of  
your return 24 hours after filing  
by using the IRS2GO mobile app  
or going to [irs.gov/refunds](http://irs.gov/refunds).

#### MANY HAPPY RETURNS

Lots more advice for making  
April 15 go a little easier  
is available at  
[ConsumerReports.org/  
cro/taxes0115](http://ConsumerReports.org/cro/taxes0115).

## READER TIP

### Only You Can Prevent Dryer Fires

“According to the National Fire Protection Agency, the leading cause of home clothes-dryer fires is a failure to clean the machine. I take a used dryer sheet to wipe out the filter. Static cling quickly clears the filter of all lint.”

—Jerry Dworkin,  
Irvine, CA

**Our experts add:** Regular filter cleaning is a great start. You should also make sure that you’re properly clearing lint from inside, beneath, and around the dryer and that your appliance has the right kind of vent. For more on protecting your home from fires, go to [ConsumerReports.org/cro/dryersafety0115](http://ConsumerReports.org/cro/dryersafety0115).



**Send Your Top Tip to:**

[ConsumerReports.org/cro/readertip](http://ConsumerReports.org/cro/readertip). If we run it, we'll pay \$100!

## HEROES AND WATCHDOGS

### Seniors Protest: Cable Rates Are Too Darn High



**CABLE ISN'T A LUXURY**, argues Jan Thacher; it's a lifeline. Indeed, as broadband Internet and home phone connections are increasingly bundled into cable packages, the service is more than just a way to watch TV; it's a link to loved ones and to vital health and financial services. With the cost of cable rising at four times the rate of inflation, Thacher and others on fixed incomes fear that they'll have to cut the cord.

For years, Thacher discussed his concerns with his neighbors in Philipstown, N.Y. Last August one of them, Nina Pidala, saw the town supervisor in a supermarket parking lot and learned that the area's Cablevision contract was up for renegotiation. She and Thacher drew up a petition calling for a low, flat rate for seniors and disabled residents on fixed incomes. Just three weeks later, they delivered 500 signatures to the town board's meeting. Most

of the people who signed, Thacher says, were frustrated with the cost of cable but felt they had little recourse. Their local government, like many others, grants only one company access to utility poles and lines.

This fall Thacher and Pidala took part in a meeting with town officials and Cablevision reps. “We always welcome feedback, and are pleased to take part in this dialogue with the residents of Philipstown,” the company said in a statement.

As the conversation continues, Thacher hopes his community will be heard. “Perhaps they haven't given much thought to the elderly,” he says. “We've paid into their system the longest and we've been devoted customers—choice or not.”

➔ **KNOW A CONSUMER HERO?** Fill us in on the champions you admire most. Write to us at [heroeswatchdogs@cr.consumer.org](mailto:heroeswatchdogs@cr.consumer.org).

## GET INVOLVED

### Actions You Can Take in January

#### ➔ TELL CONGRESS TO PROTECT KIDS FROM LIQUID NICOTINE

The popularity of electronic cigarettes has jumped in the last three years, and so has the number of children sickened by liquid nicotine through either ingestion or skin contact. Consumers Union, the advocacy arm of Consumer Reports, is pushing for a federal mandate that requires childproof packaging for the nicotine. Go to [opencongress.org](http://opencongress.org) and ask your lawmakers to join the fight.

#### ➔ STOP MEDICAL BILLS FROM WRECKING YOUR CREDIT

You may be holding out for an insurance reimbursement, but unpaid medical debt can be quickly moved to a collection agency, causing a major dent in the most pristine financial records—even after the charge is settled. Turn to page 12 for tips on fixing your credit, then help us pressure Capitol Hill for real reform. Tell us about your medical debt at [ConsumersUnion.org/share-your-story](http://ConsumersUnion.org/share-your-story).

#### ➔ THE WIN: NEW RULES WILL MAKE BLINDS SAFER

About once per month, a child in the U.S. dies from being strangled with a cord from a window covering. Believing manufacturers should do more, CU and other groups successfully persuaded the Consumer Product Safety Commission to start developing rules. Learn more at [cpsc.gov](http://cpsc.gov). (Search for “Are your window coverings safe?”)



PROP STYLING: JOJO LI



## PROBLEM SOLVER

# Help! I'm Holding a Locked Phone

A reader was stuck; our expert found out why

**MOBILE PHONES AREN'T** all that mobile when it comes to switching carriers—or even owners. It may seem like a no-brainer to accept a hand-me-down phone from a friend or family member or buy a used phone, but compatibility issues and carrier locks could stand in your way. A reader recently wrote to us about a phone she purchased from an AT&T customer that wouldn't unlock. The company was “holding it hostage,” she said. “Do I have other options?”

That depends. You do have the legal right to unlock a mobile phone for use across carriers; it's something Consumers Union fights to maintain. Deep-rooted technology differences mean that some devices won't work on another carrier's network. There isn't much hope of using a Sprint phone or Verizon phone on AT&T or T-Mobile, for instance. You can probably use an AT&T phone to make calls on T-Mobile's network, but frequency-band differences might keep you from accessing its data network.

The problem stems from who owned the phone first. Many AT&T and Sprint phones—and some Verizon phones—are locked to the account of their first owner. That means you can't take a pre-owned phone to another carrier and get service until the previous owner meets his or her obligations, that is, completes the term of the contract, for example, or makes sure the account

is in “good standing” before parting company. Carriers also won't unlock a phone if it has been reported stolen.

Our reader was “burned” by unknowingly purchasing a phone from someone who hadn't met the terms of his contract. The AT&T rep we spoke with said that there's very little the carrier can—or will—promise if a phone's previous owner has unresolved matters; AT&T also said it would work with our reader to see whether there was anything it could do. If you have a similar problem, ask your carrier about its unlocking policy.

### What does that mean for consumers?

First, don't accept a pre-owned phone until you call the carrier or at least check the carrier's website to be sure that the device is compatible with your desired network. (Many smaller carriers “piggyback” on larger networks. AT&T phones are compatible with Consumer Cellular, for example.) Buying a used phone? Make sure it's from a trusted source. (Amazon has a good reputation for resolving customers' problems with member merchants.)

→ **FED UP WITH A COMPANY'S CUSTOMER SERVICE?** Contact Consumer Reports'

Problem Solver at [problemsolver@cr.consumer.org](mailto:problemsolver@cr.consumer.org).

## READER ROUNDTABLE

# Smarter Money Strategies

During this prime time for spending and receiving, you should be savvy about how you save. Need help? Here are tips from associate editor Anthony Giorgianni, who recently hosted a Facebook chat about personal finance.

### YOU DON'T HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN BANKS

Keep multiple accounts and take advantage of the benefits of each. Credit unions and online banks generally have better rates and fees. Large, well-known banks often have ATMs and branches wherever you go, plus user-friendly websites, mobile apps—even coin exchanges. (Hedge against their higher fees by meeting minimum balance requirements and opting for direct deposit.)

### SKIP THE SERVICE CONTRACT

You may be enticed by a company's pitch to cover repairs (also known as extended warranties). But our surveys show that most products become obsolete before they need fixing. You can often get the manufacturer to provide free or low-cost repairs even if the warranty has expired. If you got a gift that was purchased with a credit card, the card issuer might extend a manufacturer's warranty.

### GIVE CASH—NOT GIFT CARDS

Federal laws have increased protections for consumers, but those cards are still a hassle, especially the bank-issued ones, which can be laden with fees, both for you and the recipient. Some companies even charge a replacement fee if a card is lost or stolen. A better option? Give cash or a check.

### → YOU SET THE AGENDA FOR OUR NEXT READER ROUNDTABLE

If you had an hourlong sit-down with one of our experts, what would you want to discuss? Tell us at [readerroundtable@cr.consumer.org](mailto:readerroundtable@cr.consumer.org).





ASK OUR EXPERTS

## Will a Dyson Cut My Carpet?

**Q:** I've had a Dyson vacuum for years and love it. But when I recently shopped for a new carpet, the dealers told me that using a Dyson would void the carpet warranty because the machine actually cuts the fibers. Is that true?

—Nancy Krody, Batavia, OH

A. Carpet types vary widely. Over the years, we have heard complaints of some vacuums causing trouble with certain types, but they were never brand-specific. When we contacted Dyson about your question, a representative told us that the machines can be hard to move across thicker-pile carpeting because of their “extremely strong suction,” but that there should be no severing of fibers. (If maneuverability is a problem, some of the models have a possible workaround that involves altering the angle of the vacuum head.) Testing every vacuum on every carpet type is beyond our capabilities, but carpet manufacturers should be able to shed more light on the subject. If you're talking with a dealer, remember that there's always a risk that he or she is just speculating. Ask to see the actual warranties or contact the manufacturer directly.

## Can I Get Shingles If I Already Had Chicken Pox?

**Q:** I had chicken pox about 60 years ago, but my doc advises against the shingles vaccine. What do you think?

—Nick Walker, Aiken, SC

A. Shingles and chicken pox are caused by the same virus, varicella-zoster. The original childhood infection doesn't just disappear; instead it migrates deep into the nervous system, remaining dormant for decades until something causes its reactivation. The most common trigger? Advancing age. Immunity to the virus wanes over time, which is why we recommend the zoster vaccine for people age 60 and older (except those who are taking immunosuppressive drugs or have medical conditions that make their immune system less effective). The vaccine cuts the risk of developing shingles in half, and it's covered by Medicare Part D plans.

## Does High-Risk Health Care Mean a Hefty Cost?

**Q:** I have several serious pre-existing conditions that would have precluded my getting private insurance before the Affordable Care Act. I'm not eligible for Medicare, and now I need my own insurance. I know I can't be completely denied coverage, but is there a cap on premiums for high-risk policies?

—Roma Barnett, via e-mail

A. Under the Affordable Care Act, insurance companies are legally forbidden from charging people extra for having a pre-existing condition. In fact, when you apply for private coverage, you won't even be asked any questions about your health history. Instead, you'll be charged the same premium for your chosen health plan as anyone else your age. For one-stop shopping for health-insurance info—from choosing the right plan for your needs to making the transition to Medicare—go to [ConsumerReports.org/cro/health/health-insurance](http://ConsumerReports.org/cro/health/health-insurance).

## We're Relocating. Help Us Replace Our Beloved Bank.

**Q:** We're moving from Arkansas to South Carolina. I've been with Arvest Bank for 11 years and love it, and want to find a comparable new bank. How do I choose the right one?

—Brian Crane, via e-mail

A. Arvest doesn't serve South Carolina, but it's only natural that you'd want to find an equivalent bank. We're in the process of finalizing our Ratings of the nation's largest



banks and credit unions (look for them in an upcoming issue), but we checked Arvest's standing in the annual J.D. Power 2014 U.S. Retail Banking Satisfaction Study and found that it's top-rated. According to the study, two banks in the Southeast region, which includes South Carolina, provide satisfaction on par with Arvest: United Community Bank and First Citizens Bancorp. Both banks offer the full range of services that Arvest delivers, including online and mobile banking, which is increasingly important to on-the-go consumers. Check them out to see which one suits your needs best.

## I Saw an Ad for a Product. Why Didn't You Test It?

**Q:** In "Window Shopping" (October 2014), you listed windows from at least 10 manufacturers. We get a lot of local advertising from Window World, which claims to be "America's largest replacement window and remodeling company." If it's so large, why wasn't it even mentioned in the magazine?

—Ken McGarvey, Loudon, TN

**A.** The process of determining what to test—and later, choosing what to cover in the pages of the magazine—takes into account a variety of factors, only one of which is a company's advertising, says Mark Connelly, our senior director of product testing. We do consider a company's market share, which is why, of the 25 windows we most recently tested, you saw several Andersens and Pellas among them. (It's worth noting that Consumer Reports doesn't accept paid advertising or free test samples—and is

therefore not swayed by manufacturers.)

Our market analysts keep a lookout for promises companies make to consumers. Some manufacturers of new LED lightbulbs, for example, claim that their products will improve your sleep or keep you alert (see page 45 for more). We also track technological updates—including the iPhone 6 and the Samsung Galaxy S6 (stay tuned!)—and highly anticipated new features on beloved products, like the 2015 Mustang, which we have now at our Auto Test Center and are putting through our standard battery of 50 tests. (For a sneak peek, see page 55.) In some categories, including cars and smart phones, we're constantly testing. Others, such as windows, get our workout just once or twice per year.

Our team tracks what consumers across the U.S. are saying, especially our own subscribers. Last year, 127,887 of you wrote or called us with comments or questions about the products we test or should test. (To send in your suggestions, contact our customer service department at [ConsumerReports.org/tips](http://ConsumerReports.org/tips).) We also think hard about the real-world experience of consumers and purchase products just as you would. Which is how, to return to your question, we lost Window World. "We actually wanted to test their windows," says market analyst Mike DiLauro, "but when we sent a shopper to one of their locations to buy one, the company wouldn't sell it unless they were the ones to install it. I called the company to try a workaround, but my voice mails were not returned."

## Will I Be Taxed for Changing Retirement Funds?

**Q:** I recently changed my IRA from Ameriprise to Vanguard. If I sell the mutual funds, which are in American Funds, and put all of the money into a Vanguard target retirement fund, will that cause me to owe taxes on the sale amount? I'm 73, retired, and have been taking required minimum distributions.

—Linda Phillips, via e-mail

**A.** If you did a trustee-to-trustee transfer from Ameriprise to Vanguard—or from any one financial company to another—there are no tax consequences. Now that your IRA is at Vanguard but invested in the American Funds portfolio, you can move the assets into a Vanguard target retirement fund or any other Vanguard fund, again without tax consequences. Required minimum distributions have no bearing on the IRA transfer to a new custodian, or on the movement of IRA assets from one fund to another.



## Will My Good China Hold Up in Any Dishwasher?

**Q:** I'm about to purchase a new dishwasher and want to know which models will not harm my delicate china. (It has gold trim around the edges.) I'm mainly considering the Frigidaire Gallery FGH-D2472PF model. What do you think?

—Orah Rosenblatt, Brooklyn, NY

**A.** We don't do any tests using delicate china, says Emilio Gonzalez, our senior test program leader for appliances, but we consulted the manual for the Frigidaire model you mentioned. It says that the appliances china crystal cycle, "for lightly soiled china and crystal," uses less water than the other cycles and is of shorter duration. Always closely follow the user manual and, of course, carefully load delicate items, making sure they don't touch other dishes. The manual doesn't mention gold-trimmed china, so it wouldn't hurt to call the manufacturer to see what it recommends. And when in doubt, hand-wash.

→ **WE HAVE MORE THAN 140 EXPERTS ON CALL**

They research, test, and compare—so you don't have to! Share your toughest questions at [ConsumerReports.org/askourexperts](http://ConsumerReports.org/askourexperts) ... and watch this space for the answers.





THE EMPOWERED CONSUMER

## How Your Credit Report Can Help You—or Hurt You

An error in your files can mean that you don't get the loan or even the job you want. But a good record can boost your buying power. Here's how to fix your credit report and raise your score.

**NATHANIEL LEWIS** of Richmond, Va., dreamed of buying his first house for at least a decade. But it wasn't the vagaries of the real-estate market or his bank account that got in his way; it was his credit report. The document showed two mortgages, one closed, and 22 other credit accounts, some indicating a poor payment history—all belonging to another man with a Virginia address also named Nathaniel Lewis. To fix the mix-up, Lewis says he paid credit-repair companies almost \$1,000, to no avail. "I thought I was just stuck with it," he says.

Finally, Lewis, now 54, was referred to an attorney who's helping him get the errors corrected. But his experience illustrates the problems consumers can have when their credit reports betray them. "With so many problems on that report," he says, "I didn't know where to start to make it right."

In a data-driven world, your credit record is your reputation, and false information can have deep repercussions. Bad credit can stop a loan cold. A landlord can refuse you a lease. An insurer can raise your premium. A prospective employer can turn you away.

Given how much your credit report can affect your day-to-day life, a recent Consumer Reports nationally representative survey offers some disturbing news regarding Americans' attitudes toward these records. Only 53 percent of the 3,000 respondents said they had ever received their credit reports from one or more of the "Big Three" credit-reporting agencies or credit bureaus: Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion.

Also alarming: Of those who did check their reports, 20 percent found errors that could negatively affect their scores, including noncollectible old debt that was

still listed, incorrect account information (payment history or credit limit, for example), accounts that weren't theirs, and information about the wrong people. A 2013 Federal Trade Commission study of credit reports had similar findings. In it, 13 percent of 1,001 participants had errors, and 5 percent of the participants had errors serious enough to put them in a lower credit tier, which means they could be denied favorable interest rates and other opportunities.

### What Goes Into Your Score

Your credit report details your credit history, and your credit score is a numerical expression of those details. That three-digit number—FICO, the most widely used score, goes from 300 to 850—is part of what lenders and other potential creditors use to judge you. By one estimate, if you make a credit-card payment 30 days late, your FICO score could drop by as much as 100 points. A drop from a high score of 780 to an OK score of 680 could add an additional \$828 per year to a \$300,000, 30-year fixed mortgage, or \$24,859 over the loan's life, based on recent interest rates. (To help your credit, see "11 Steps



to Rehab Your Credit Score.”)

Errors can prevent you from getting credit altogether. Mike DiPaolo, 84, of Dunwoody, Ga., discovered that was the case when an inaccuracy supplied by a lender ended up on his credit reports. A creditor canceled his account and another reduced his line of credit. He had to sue the lender and the credit bureaus to clear his name and his record. “It took over two years to get this resolved,” DiPaolo recalls.

Identity mix-ups—called mixed files—are among the most difficult mistakes to fix. Each time you or a potential creditor want information, credit bureaus create new credit reports. They match identifiers supplied in the request with information from “furnishers” (credit-card, mortgage, car-finance, and other companies you’ve done business with). An error could appear because a credit-reporting agency or furnisher miscoded something or, much worse, because someone stole your Social Security number and ran up debts.

But errors are also a function of choices that credit-reporting agencies make. Software programmed to match, say, only part of a person’s Social Security number or city of residence can provide more data to businesses that buy credit reports on millions of American consumers. But that looser screening might then mix up two Nathaniel Lewises, scuttling a loan application.

“They’d rather give more information than less, but sometimes the extra information is not about you,” says John Soumilas, an attorney at Francis & Mailman, a consumer-law firm in Philadelphia.

## Setting the Record Straight

The path to resolving credit disputes isn’t always smooth. Two-thirds of our survey respondents who found errors attempted to fix them. (For tips, see “How to Dispute Your Credit Report,” on the next page.) More than half of them told us they ran into challenges, including being ignored, rejected, or subjected to outright lies.

Leonard Bennett, a consumer-law

# 11 Steps to Rehab Your Credit Score

Credit-scoring models are like snowflakes: There are a lot of them, and no two are exactly alike. FICO alone sells 65 versions.

Because of that variation—and because a lender might not use the same credit scores you obtain—be aware of the range of your scores, and follow their trend over time. John Ulzheimer, a credit expert at the website Credit Sesame and formerly of FICO and Equifax, recommends these other points when managing your score:

1. Pay your bills on time. Payment activity accounts for 35 percent of a FICO score and 40 percent of a VantageScore. At least pay the minimum each month rather than fall behind.
2. Check your reports by requesting one free credit report from a different reporting agency every four months through AnnualCreditReport.com. “Hard pull” credit inquiries—from a potential lender and others with permission from you—can lower your scores slightly. But there’s no penalty for checking for yourself; that’s called a “soft pull.” Credit-scoring companies consider multiple inquiries by lenders within 45 days as only one inquiry because the timing suggests that you’re shopping for interest rates for one loan, not multiple loans.
3. Don’t apply for multiple credit cards at once. Unlike applying for a mortgage, auto, or student

loan, applying for several credit cards generates multiple hard pulls. Instead, carefully read prospective cards’ terms and conditions and apply for just one.

4. Don’t cancel plastic you don’t use unless it carries an annual fee. Stick the card in a drawer instead. Part of your score depends on the ratio of the credit you use on your credit cards to the total value of your open credit lines. Eliminating a card reduces your credit line and can raise the ratio, a negative.
5. Don’t open too many new credit accounts at once. By doing so, you lower the average “age” of your accounts, which can lower your credit score.
6. Keep credit balances relatively low. Maintaining a revolving credit balance under 10 percent of your total credit line is wise, experts say. A higher ratio indicates an elevated credit risk.
7. Beware of points-driven high balances. If you charge everything on your rewards card for the points, switch to cash or a debit card for a couple of months before applying for new credit. Lenders can’t tell from your score whether you zero-out your balances every month. They’ll see your credit score, a snapshot in time, showing that you’re charging a lot relative to your credit limit, which is a negative.

8. Maintain a variety of credit types. Successfully paying an auto loan, a student loan, and credit-card bills over the same period, for instance, shows that you’re able to juggle different types of credit, a plus. That contributes 10 percent to your score.

9. Get a personal loan to pay off your credit-card debt. You can improve your credit score by paying off the score-damaging “revolving” debt of credit cards with the score-benign “installment” debt of a personal loan. And the interest rate on the loan is likely to be lower than the credit-card interest rates.

10. Pay off debt in collections. It’s always better to have zero balances on collections, but soon you might also see a much higher credit score as a result. The most current versions of VantageScore and the FICO credit score ignore collections with a zero balance.

11. Get a secured credit card after a bankruptcy. If you’ve been through one, start populating your credit report with good credit. Secured credit cards may be an effective way to rebuild your credit. A bankruptcy will have less impact on your score over time as long as you aren’t defaulting on new loans. But Chapter 7 and 13 bankruptcies stay on your credit report for 10 years.

attorney in Newport News, Va., says that he's not surprised. "Often, the agencies just have their computers verify that previously reported information is still being reported," he says. "No humans are involved."

Stuart K. Pratt, president and CEO of the Consumer Data Industry Association, a trade group, says that member companies have systems to ensure that disputes entered into their databases are properly described and that those disputes get quickly into the hands of lenders, where the discrepancies may have originated.

"Our systems also require lenders to

review consumer-submitted credit-report disputes" so that they get proper attention, Pratt maintains.

Last May Mississippi became the first state to sue a credit bureau for alleged violations of state and federal law. Among the charges—alleged by the state's attorney general, Jim Hood—are that Experian mixed the identities of consumers, reported as late or delinquent accounts that were paid on time or settled in full, failed to update its records of liens or judgments that were removed or resolved, and reported living people as dead.

Experian's response is that the lawsuit

is unsupported by facts and evidence, and that it will vigorously defend itself.

Consumers are also taking action on their own. In July 2013 Julie Miller, a 58-year-old nurse in Marion County, Ore., won a record verdict of \$18.4 million in punitive damages against Equifax. In her suit, Miller contended that the company ignored her pleas to correct a mixed-file problem that corrupted her credit file with numerous collections accounts belonging to someone else. (Last January punitive and compensatory damages were reduced to \$1.8 million.)

"She didn't want to sue anybody," says Michael Baxter, one of the attorneys who represented Miller. "She just wanted to get her credit clean."

### How to Dispute Your Credit Report

The Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) of 1970 requires credit-reporting agencies, including the "Big Three"—Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion—to correct or delete inaccurate, incomplete, or unverifiable information on your credit report, usually within 30 days.

Here are some tips for getting satisfaction:

- Communicate in writing. Never try to solve a major dispute on a credit-bureau website or by phone. And always send correspondence by registered mail or certified mail.
- Keep all documents until the dispute is resolved.
- Have your letter notarized before you send it.
- Send a copy of your complaint to the company that generated the mistake.
- Provide complete identification. Include your full name and Social Security number, and a copy of your driver's license, a utility bill, and other identification. Credit-reporting agencies will often reject a complaint because they conclude that they need more identification.
- Know your rights. Under the credit-reporting law, creditors and credit-reporting agencies must conduct meaningful and detailed investigations

of complaints. If they don't, consumers may have a claim for actual damages, statutory damages, and punitive damages.

- Complain to your state's consumer-affairs office or attorney general's office, or to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau ([help.consumerfinance.gov/app/creditreporting/ask](http://help.consumerfinance.gov/app/creditreporting/ask)). The CFPB tries to investigate all disputes. An analysis of CFPB data by the U.S. Public Interest Research Group in 2013 found that the bureau was able to get the credit-reporting agencies to provide consumers relief—either a monetary payment or a correction in a report—in 30 percent of cases.
- Consult a lawyer. If your efforts and those of government staffers aren't getting anywhere, you may have to sue. Contact a consumer-protection attorney through the National Association of Consumer Advocates ([naca.net](http://naca.net)).
- Don't do business with credit-repair companies. They'll charge you to do things you can easily do yourself. In some cases, the advice they give is downright dangerous. Nathaniel Lewis of Richmond, Va., says the companies he went to charged him almost \$1,000 but didn't get incorrect information erased from his credit records. Worse, one recommended that he declare bankruptcy, an inappropriate step.

### Change Is Coming—With Your Help

To expedite corrections on credit reports, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau has successfully pushed for changes to the computer system that shares consumer dispute information. And this year the agency is expected to issue rules that better outline credit-reporting agencies' and furnishers' responsibilities in correcting credit-report errors.

Consumers Union, the advocacy arm of Consumer Reports, supports those efforts, as well as legislation to require credit-reporting agencies to provide free "real" credit scores that lenders use (as opposed to "educational" scores) with the free annual credit reports that consumers already are entitled to get through [AnnualCreditReport.com](http://AnnualCreditReport.com).

Other useful legislation that might be reintroduced in the Senate would allow courts to stop credit-reporting agencies from giving inaccurate information and would require creditors to review and consider all documentation provided by the consumer.

Other pending bills could help credit scores by requiring the removal of paid or settled medical debt from credit reports. New versions of VantageScore and the FICO score, FICO 9, don't factor in that type of debt.

# The UPDATE

## TOP OF THE HEAP

The Troy-Bilt Vortex 2890, \$1,300, tied for best-scoring snow blower in our tests.

## FAUX SNOW

We test snow blowers with a special sawdust, which is more consistent than the frozen stuff.

## TWICE THE ACTION

This Troy-Bilt is a two-stage machine that can handle up to 2 feet of snow. It uses an auger to pull it in and an impeller to send it out the chute.



## BLOWN AWAY

Start your snow blower engines. We have all of the info you need to win at winter, starting on page 16.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GRANT CORNETT

## OUTSIDE

# WINTER SURVIVAL GUIDE: SNOW-REMOVAL STRATEGIES

**C**EASELESS COLD, merciless ice, sleet, and snow—if you loved last winter, get ready for the sequel: Polar Vortex 2. To beat it, in America's most-frigid states, you'll need a snow blower, a snow shovel, and ice melt. Why all three? Even the best snow blowers can't reach everywhere and may leave behind a thin layer of snow that's likely to turn into ice. For areas that get less-than-epic snowfall, you can get by with just a shovel and the appropriate ice melt. Our recommendations on this and the following three pages will help you find the right tools to win at winter. Then when you're ready to stomp back indoors, check out pages 20 and 21 for info on space heaters, furnaces, and humidifiers to keep your home comfy and toasty.

## Snow Blowers: How to Choose

No surprise that when choosing a snow blower, the amount and type of snow you'll be clearing will determine the right machine for you. So let the history of local snowfalls be your guide. Remember, though, that what falls from the sky is not the worst snow—it's what plows leave at the end of your driveway that's the highest and densest.

If you generally expect to deal with a foot or less of snow, you'll probably want a compact, single-stage model that runs on gas and costs around \$400 to \$600. But for up to 18 inches? Consider a compact, two-stage unit. And if you want to be ready for anything, shell out \$1,500 for the beefiest two-stage you can buy.

Two-stage gas blowers have some clear

advantages. They add an impeller to the usual auger to outdo their single-stage siblings with faster clearing, farther throwing, and more muscle for heavier, wetter snow. But for all of their power, two-stage models leave behind slightly more snow than single-stage snow blowers, are heavier and bigger, and take up more storage space.

You also need to think about the width of the blower's intake. Opting for a blower that can clear the widest-possible path sounds like a good idea, but bigger isn't necessarily better: The engine needs to be strong enough to power the wider clearing path. We tested three Power Smart models of varying path widths; all came with the same 208-cubic-centimeter engine. That engine in the 22-inch-wide Power Smart DB7659-22, \$500, gave it great throwing distance. But the same engine in the 28-inch Power Smart DB7651A-28, \$745, threw the wet sawdust we use to simulate heavy snow only a few feet during our plow-pile test.

Corded-electric snow blowers are really for only the lightest powdery snow. Their one advantage over gas-powered snow blowers is that they make less noise—though that's changing. The new gas-powered Craftsman 88694, \$900, has a muffling design that reduced noise significantly in our tests. (See "For Snow up to 24 Inches," on the facing page, and A13 on the Ratings chart.) Like the 26-inch Toro Power Max 726 OE37771, \$900, the 26-inch Craftsman doesn't require the operator to wear hearing protection for safety. But the Craftsman is significantly better overall and is the quietest gas model we've tested.



## THE FORECAST: HOT AND COLD

Predicting the weather is an iffy proposition. Exhibit A: Two leading sources, The Old Farmer's Almanac and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), are on opposite poles for how blustery and snowy winter will be.

The Old Farmer's Almanac predicts a "teeth-chatteringly cold winter," touting forecasts

that the organization calls 80 percent accurate. "Think of it as a 'refriger-nation,'" writes editor Janice Stillman. Expect "another arctic blast with above-normal snowfall throughout much of the nation."

NOAA says that for much of New England and the Southwest, warmer temperatures should prevail. Much of the

remainder of the country stands a roughly equal chance of being tolerable vs. intolerable. NOAA admits that its winter outlook can't actually predict total seasonal snow accumulations. You'll know, as will NOAA, about a week in advance.

Our advice: Start shopping for a snow blower, shovels, and ice melt now.

## Keep That Blower Going

No matter what type of machine you buy, it will require routine maintenance to help it start and make it last the 15 to 20 years you should expect.

### A FEW TIPS

- If you already own a blower and gas is left in it from last season, siphon out as much as possible, then add gas to which you've added a fuel stabilizer that's designed to handle the ethanol in gas. At the end of this season, if you prefer to leave the gas in, top it off with more stabilized gas—though it's best to run it dry.
- Take out the spark plug. If it's only a year or so old, clean its electrode and screw it back in. If you don't remember when you last replaced it, do so now; plugs today come properly gapped.
- Change the oil if you didn't do it in the spring. Ensure that it's at the recommended grade and level to protect the engine.
- For new models, at the start of the season use only fuel to which you've added stabilizer.
- Keep extra belts on hand and, for two-stage models, extra shear pins. Both tend to break while the snow blower is working its hardest.

## Blower Repair Rates

We asked readers whether their models broke. The table shows the percentage that failed, by brand, for each type.

TWO-STAGE GAS	
Troy-Bilt	11%
Toro	11%
Ariens	13%
Craftsman	14%
SINGLE-STAGE GAS	
Toro	14%
Craftsman	18%

➔ Consumer Reports Annual Product Reliability Survey of more than 9,000 subscribers who bought new gas-powered snow blowers between 2010 and 2014. Differences of fewer than 3 points aren't meaningful. Data are adjusted to eliminate differences linked to the age of the snow blower. Note that models within a brand may vary.



## Ratings: Snow Blowers

Scores in context: Of the 112 tested, the highest scored 90; the lowest, 14. Listed below are the top-scoring models in each category, in order of performance. Recommended models offer top performance and specific strengths. CR Best Buys blend value and performance, and are recommended.

☑ CR Best Buy ☑ Recommended

● Excellent ● Very Good ○ Good ○ Fair ● Poor

### A. TWO-STAGE GAS

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	WIDTH (IN.)	ENGINE SIZE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS					
							Removal Speed	Plow Piles	Distance	Surface Clean	Controls	Handling
☑	1	Cub Cadet 31AH57S	\$1,500	30	420cc	90	●	●	●	●	●	●
☑	2	Troy-Bilt Vortex 2890 31AH55Q	\$1,300	28	357cc	90	●	●	●	●	●	●
☑	3	Cub Cadet 930SWE 31AH95SU	\$1,600	30	357cc	89	●	●	●	●	●	●
☑	4	Ariens 921032	\$1,300	30	291cc	88	●	●	●	●	●	●
☑	5	Craftsman 88396	\$1,200	30	357cc	88	●	●	●	●	●	●
☑	6	Cub Cadet 31AH55T	\$1,100	26	357cc	88	●	●	●	●	●	●
☑	7	Ariens AX254 921030	\$1,000	28	254cc	87	●	●	●	●	●	●
☑	8	Troy-Bilt Storm 3090XP 31AH55Q	\$1,100	30	357cc	87	●	●	●	●	●	●
☑	9	Ariens 921013	\$1,400	30	305cc	86	●	●	●	●	●	●
☑	10	Ariens 921022	\$1,000	28	250cc	85	●	●	●	●	●	●
☑	11	Toro Power Max 828 OXE 38634	\$1,500	28	250cc	84	●	●	●	●	●	●
☑	12	Troy-Bilt Storm 2840 31AH64Q	\$900	28	277cc	81	●	●	●	●	●	●
☑	13	Craftsman 88694	\$900	26	208cc	80	●	●	●	●	●	●
☑	14	Snapper 1695964	\$1,000	27	250cc	80	●	●	●	○	●	○

### B. COMPACT TWO-STAGE GAS

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	WIDTH (IN.)	ENGINE SIZE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS					
							Removal Speed	Plow Piles	Distance	Surface Clean	Controls	Handling
☑	1	Troy-Bilt Vortex 2490 31AH54Q	\$1,100	24	277cc	82	●	●	●	●	●	●
☑	2	Craftsman 88173	\$680	24	208cc	73	●	●	○	●	●	●
☑	3	Toro Power Max 724 OE 37770	\$800	24	205cc	69	●	●	●	●	●	●
☑	4	Ariens 920021	\$800	24	208cc	68	○	●	●	●	●	●
☑	5	Sno-Tek 920402	\$600	24	208cc	66	○	●	●	●	●	●
☑	6	Honda HS724WA	\$2,200	24	196cc	65	●	○	●	●	●	●
☑	7	Craftsman 88957	\$650	24	179cc	65	○	●	○	●	●	○

### C. SINGLE-STAGE GAS

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	WIDTH (IN.)	ENGINE SIZE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS					
							Removal Speed	Plow Piles	Distance	Surface Clean	Controls	Handling
☑	1	Toro Power Clear 721E	\$570	21	212cc	71	●	●	○	●	○	●
☑	2	Toro Power Clear 621 38458	\$650	21	163cc	70	●	●	○	●	●	●
☑	3	Cub Cadet 221 LHP 31AM2T6D	\$550	21	208cc	67	○	●	●	●	●	●
☑	4	Toro Power Clear 621 38451	\$500	21	163cc	65	●	●	○	●	○	●
☑	5	Honda HS 720AS	\$700	20	187cc	64	●	●	○	●	○	●

## Pick the Right Blower for Your Needs

### FOR SNOW UP TO 24 INCHES

- **A1 Cub Cadet** \$1,500
- **A2 Troy-Bilt** \$1,300 **CR Best Buy**
- **A4 Ariens** \$1,300
- **A13 Craftsman** \$900

These two-stage models all combine an auger for scooping up snow with an impeller that hurls it out of the discharge chute. The 30-inch A1 and the 28-inch A2 come with a second impeller in front that helps power through dense plow piles, along with easy control and heated handgrips. Also worth a look is A4, a 30-inch machine at \$200 less than A1. Do your neighbors complain about your noisy snow clearing? The 26-inch A13 was noticeably quiet without sacrificing performance. Note, though, that our preliminary data show this brand to be more repair-prone than others.

### FOR SNOW UP TO 18 INCHES

- **B1 Troy-Bilt** \$1,100 **CR Best Buy**
- **B2 Craftsman** \$680 **CR Best Buy**
- **B3 Toro** \$800

Lighter-duty two-stage models have the same impeller and auger as larger models, and they're a bit easier to store—though the going is slower. B1 costs more than most others but has the same second impeller as larger units and was as effective against plow piles. Its freewheel steering, the only one in this group, makes handling excellent. For hundreds less, B2 sacrifices some throwing distance and helpful features such as single-hand controls and single-lever chute adjustment; also, our preliminary data show this brand to be more repair-prone than others. You get both the single-hand and single-lever features from the pricier B3.

### FOR SNOW UP TO ABOUT 12 INCHES

- **C1 Toro** \$570 **CR Best Buy**
- **C4 Toro** \$500 **CR Best Buy**

Single-stage gas snow blowers cost almost as much as some two-stage units, which tend to be more capable. But C1 has raised the bar for this category with impressive speed and power for plow piles; it falls short only in throwing distance. Single-stage models also are easier to store in a garage. For a bit less money, C4 offers almost as much oomph for plow piles. Our preliminary repair-history data indicate this brand is relatively reliable.

### FOR SNOW UP TO ABOUT 4 INCHES

**Get a shovel.** Using a snow blower on minimal accumulations is an exercise in frustration.



## Shovels: The Scoop on the Best Bet for You

Everyone who gets any amount of snowfall needs a shovel in their winter arsenal. Even if you own a snow blower, you're still going to have to shovel. That's because certain spaces are too narrow to maneuver a snow blower, you may find that there's no place to hurl the snow, or a dense plow pile may prove too much for a small machine. Here's what to look for in a shovel:

**DON'T CHEAP OUT.** Expect to spend \$30 to \$35 for a decent model.

**LOOK FOR THE 'D.'** A D-shaped handle is much easier to control than other types, especially if the load is unbalanced. Be sure it fits your hand while you're wearing a glove.

**THINK TWICE ABOUT ERGONOMIC VERSIONS.** They're supposed to help you bend less, but the bend makes it hard to throw snow to the

side—and will be too much for some wrists.

**FOR LIGHT SNOW: GET THE BEND.** Shovels that have a little bend in the scoop are fine for light accumulations. You shouldn't even have to lift the shovel. Just shove the white stuff to the side.

**FOR HEAVY WORK: GO WITH THE CURVE.** A deeply curved scoop, especially with supported sides, helps clear snow faster. A fiber-core handle is lighter than wood. Metal is more rigid but adds weight.

**BUY A DECK-ONLY SHOVEL.** Devote a single plastic shovel with no steel on the leading edge to clearing decks and other delicate surfaces.

And some tips on shoveling:

**PLAY IT SAFE.** Bend your knees and keep your back straight. Pace yourself.

**USE COOKING OIL SPRAY.** Spritz it on the scoop before you shovel; it helps snow slide off more easily.

## Should You Hire a Plow Guy?

With services charging an average of \$40 per storm, you're bound to wonder: Wouldn't a snow blower pay for itself?

We compared the costs of owning a snow blower (around \$875 for a gas-powered model, \$10 per year for fuel, and around \$100 per year for maintenance) with the cost for plowing; we used info from the National Weather Service on typical snowfalls. We assumed a 10-year expected snow blower lifetime, though when properly maintained, a snow blower should last twice as long.

The chart below shows how long it would take for the snow blower to pay for itself (or not). On average, if you're pulling the snow blower out of the garage about five times per year, you'll break even in about five years. If you live in milder regions, call a plow.

Any pro you hire should be licensed and insured. If a worker is injured, the contractor's policy should cover it. Also, check your liability coverage. It should protect you if you hire a neighborhood kid to shovel and he or she gets hurt or if someone left a shovel or other object in the driveway and the plow hits it. Not sure? Check with your insurer.

<b>MINNEAPOLIS</b> Payback time 1 year	<b>BOSTON</b> Payback time 3 years
<b>CHICAGO</b> Payback time 1 year	<b>WASHINGTON, D.C.</b> Payback time 4 years
<b>DETROIT</b> Payback time 1 year	<b>NASHVILLE</b> Payback time 5 years
<b>DENVER</b> Payback time 1 year	<b>SEATTLE</b> Payback time 13 years
<b>NEW YORK</b> Payback time 3 years	<b>DALLAS</b> Payback time 20 years
<b>PHILADELPHIA</b> Payback time 3 years	<b>CHARLOTTE</b> Payback time never

## THE UPDATE

### Ice Melts: Nicer Deicers

Once you've cleared the way with a snow blower, shovel, or both, what's left behind will probably freeze up because colder air usually follows a snowstorm. That means spreading out an even layer of ice melt, also known as deicer, snow melt, and other terms. But different products tend to be best for different temperatures. The chart at right lists which one to use by ambient temperature, as well as each ice melt's pros and cons. The products shown are available at home centers, hardware stores, and supermarkets. Pet-friendly products are often found in pet stores.

No matter which product you use, more isn't better. Using too much deicer can damage sidewalks and driveways, so follow application instructions. And if your concrete is less than 12 months old, use sand or gravel instead. Newly poured concrete needs time to cure and settle, and applying ice melt may weaken it.

### Ice Melts for All Situations

EFFECTIVE TEMPERATURE	TYPE	PRICE PER 50-LB. BAG	PROS	CONS
-25° F	Calcium chloride	\$10 to \$19	Fast acting; more effective than rock salt	Can damage grass and plants if overapplied
-13° F	Magnesium chloride	\$10 to \$19	Environmentally friendly; safer around pets; more effective than sodium	Can damage plants if overapplied; lethal to pets with kidney disease if ingested
10° F (better at 25° to 30° F)	Urea (carbonyl diamide)	\$10 or less	Environmentally friendly; safer around pets; inexpensive	Works better at 25° to 30° F; can damage plants if overapplied; not as effective
20° F	Rock salt (sodium chloride)	\$10 or less	Inexpensive	Can damage many paving surfaces and some plants; lethal to pets if ingested
20° F	Calcium magnesium acetate	\$20 and up	Environmentally friendly; less corrosive than chloride products	Can damage concrete
25° F	Potassium chloride	\$20 and up	Environmentally friendly; safer around pets	Can damage grass and plants if overapplied; lethal to pets with kidney disease if ingested

## Your Cold-Weather Emergency Kit

Having your heating equipment inspected prior to cold weather should help put you at ease for long winter nights. But a major storm could leave you powerless for days. Here's what to stockpile:



Water: at least 1 gallon per person per day



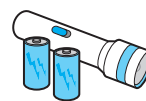
Nonperishable food: at least a three-day supply



Portable crank- or battery-operated radio



Nonprescription pain/fever medicine



Flashlight with extra batteries



First-aid supplies, including a thermometer



Whistle to signal for help



Dust mask, plastic sheeting, and duct tape



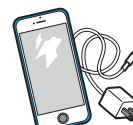
Moist towelettes, garbage bags, and plastic ties



Extra clothing and blankets for you and your family



Wrench or pliers to turn off utilities



Cell phones with chargers

## INSIDE

# WINTER SURVIVAL GUIDE: KEEPING YOUR HOME WARM AND COZY

**E**VEN IF YOU love cold weather, you want it toasty inside your home. A properly maintained furnace or boiler can give you a warm feeling in your wallet because heating your home accounts for about 40 percent of your utility bills. And with all of the time you'll be spending indoors, it's also important to take care of things you can't see or feel, such as dry air, carbon monoxide, and radon. Here's what you need to know:

## Furnace Tips: Newer Models and Lower Costs

The sad reality of heating equipment is that it tends to fail when it's working the hardest—on the coldest days. The best way to prevent that is to have your furnace or boiler checked every year by a heating contractor. That can also alert you to any potential problems and keep your system working at peak efficiency, saving you money as well as headaches. Then replace your furnace filter monthly during the heating season.

If your furnace is on its last legs, start researching a replacement now. Because the latest models are more efficient, you can save up to \$40 for every \$100 you spend on fuel compared with older models. So that pricey new model will pay for itself over time.

But there's an exception to the newer-is-cheaper rule. Think twice about buying a gas furnace from York, which broke down about twice as often as other brands, according to a survey of readers by the Consumer Reports National Research Center. Models from American Standard, Carrier, and Trane fared better with our readers, who told us about 21,132 natural-gas furnaces they bought. Reliability especially matters with furnaces because when they failed, 77 percent needed significant work. Most of those stopped working completely.

Tip: If you can, wait to get bids for a new furnace or boiler until the summer. Heating contractors aren't as busy when it's boiling outside, and they may offer a better deal.

## Space Heaters: Our Top Choices

If you merely want to take the chill off one room, a space heater can help. The best models we've tested can heat an entire room or just you as you sit in a chair. They're unlikely to save you money on your heating bills, though, because electricity is the priciest way to heat. But they're handy especially for unheated spaces, such as a sunroom.

**If your room is 80 square feet or smaller,** the models below will heat the space quickly. All except the Holmes have multiple fan speeds and a tip-over safety switch. The Dyson can oscillate and be tipped back or forward, and has a remote control. The Holmes has a ground-fault circuit interrupter plug intended to prevent electric shock, including in moist areas. It's marketed as a bathroom heater—though the manual warns against using the heater near water.

- Vornado TVH500 \$150
- Dyson AM05 \$400
- Vornado AVH2 \$100 CR Best Buy
- Holmes HFH436 \$40 CR Best Buy

**For larger rooms up to 200 square feet,** these models did best in our tests. All have remote controls. The Honeywell and Duraflame have wheels and a timer.

- Honeywell HZ-980 \$190
- Heat Surge Accent EV.2 \$300
- Duraflame 10HM4126-0107 \$230

## Furnace Repair Rates

We asked readers whether their gas furnaces needed repair. The table shows the percentage that failed.

### NATURAL GAS FURNACES

American Standard	12%
Trane	13%
Carrier	13%
Amana	15%
Rheem	16%
Bryant	16%
Goodman	16%
Lennox	16%
York	26%

➔ Consumer Reports Annual Product Reliability Survey of more than 21,000 subscribers who bought new gas furnaces between 2008 and 2014. Differences of fewer than 3 points aren't meaningful. Note that models within a brand may vary.

## Smoke, CO, and Radon

About 2,500 people die each year in residential fires and about an additional 500 from carbon monoxide poisoning. But protecting yourself isn't as simple as buying a combo smoke/CO alarm. Those we've tested have not been good at detecting all types of fire. So you need separate smoke and CO alarms.

Look for smoke alarms that use ionization and photoelectric sensors. Those are effective at detecting flaming and smoldering fires. Get one for each bedroom and at least one for each level, including the attic and basement. Alarms that use just one technology are great at detecting one type of fire and are poor at detecting the other kind. Replace smoke alarms every 10 years. The Kidde PI9010 replaces the dual-sensor smoke alarm that aced our tests.

Carbon monoxide is colorless and odorless, so there's no way to know that you're being poisoned. When any fuel-burning appliance isn't working right, it may emit CO. Place a CO detector on every living level, though not in the kitchen or near a cooking appliance, in the garage, or near the furnace or water heater. Also avoid breezy areas around fans, vents, doors, and windows, where fresh air can cause a misleadingly low reading. Replace them every five to seven years. The First Alert OneLink CO511B, \$65; First Alert CO615, \$30; and Kidde Nighthawk KN-COPP-3, \$45, all did well in our tests.

Like CO, radon is odorless and colorless. It's also the top cause of lung cancer after smoking. Long-term test kits give you a more accurate idea of average radon levels than short-term tests do because levels can vary from day to day. Winter is a good time to test because doors and windows are likely to be closed. The \$28 Accustar Long Term Alpha Track Test Kit AT-100 was accurate and reliable in our tests. Place the detector on the lowest level of your home.



# THE UPDATE

## Humidifiers: Fighting Colds and Mold

Heating air dries it out—humidity levels indoors can drop to as low as 10 percent—causing itchy eyes, scratchy throats, cracks in furniture, and loads of static electricity. Low humidity levels can even increase your risk of infection. Humidifiers can moisten the air and make your home more comfortable. But without routine cleaning, the devices can harbor mold and bacteria.

That's where the newest humidifier designs come in. More models are touting antimicrobial features

that help their tanks resist bacteria and mold growth. We're testing the effectiveness of the claims, so look for an update soon. Until then, we recommend changing the water daily and disinfecting the unit weekly.

Our tests found humidifiers starting at \$30 that offer easy use and antimicrobial features while supplying enough mist to maintain optimal indoor humidity levels of 30 to 50 percent. Most we've tested and recommend are ultrasonic models, which use a vibrating nebulizer to emit mist. On average, they are also the quietest.



## Pick the Right Humidifier for Your Space

### FOR BEDROOMS

- **A2 HoMedics** \$55
- **A3 HoMedics** \$60
- **B2 SPT** \$80

All of these humidifiers are very quiet, even at their highest settings, so they won't disturb your sleep. A2 and A3 are great for small bedrooms, and their plastic tanks have an integrated anti-mold treatment. If your bedroom is medium-sized, consider B2. It's an evaporative model with a fan that blows air over a wet wick. All work well with hard or soft water.

### FOR KIDS' ROOMS

- **A1 Crane** \$45 **CR Best Buy**
- This fun, bird-shaped unit (pictured above) doesn't sacrifice performance and is quiet. It isn't claimed to have antimicrobial features, but that isn't a problem if you empty it daily and disinfect it weekly. It's also available in other animal shapes, including a dog, duck, frog, and monkey.

### FOR LIVING OR FAMILY ROOMS

- **C1 SPT** \$75 **CR Best Buy**
- **C3 Crane** \$85
- **C5 Honeywell** \$55

C1 and C3 produce either warm or cool mist, and C3 has silver particles embedded in the plastic of the tank and basin for claimed resistance to bacteria, viruses, and mold. We're testing that claim and will report back with our findings. The warm-mist C5 is a vaporizer, which uses a heating element to produce steam. The downside: Like all warm-mist models, it costs almost 15 times more to operate than most ultrasonics, and warm-mist models can pose a burn hazard. All work well with either hard or soft water.

## Ratings: Humidifiers

Scores in context: Of the 36 tested, the highest scored 87; the lowest, 27. Listed below are the top-scoring models in three sizes, in order of performance. Recommended models offer top performance and specific strengths. CR Best Buys blend value and performance, and are recommended.

☑ CR Best Buy ☑ Recommended

● Excellent ● Very Good ○ Good ◐ Fair ● Poor

### A. SMALL ROOM (LESS THAN 300 SQ. FT.)

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	TYPE	Gallons per Day	SCORE	TEST RESULTS	FEATURES
							Output Convenience Noise Efficiency	Claimed Area Antimicrobial Claims Has Cartridge/ Filter
☑	1	<b>Crane Owl</b>	\$45	Ultrasonic	1.4	<b>87</b>	● ● ● ●	250
☑	2	<b>HoMedics UHE-CM25</b>	\$55	Ultrasonic	1.3	<b>86</b>	● ● ● ●	100 • •
☑	3	<b>HoMedics UHE-CM45</b>	\$60	Ultrasonic	1.7	<b>86</b>	● ● ● ●	100 • •
☑	4	<b>Crane Drop</b>	\$50	Ultrasonic	1.4	<b>82</b>	● ○ ● ●	250
☑	5	<b>Safety 1st Ultrasonic 360</b>	\$30	Ultrasonic	2.0	<b>81</b>	● ● ● ●	215

### B. MEDIUM ROOM (300 TO 499 SQ. FT.)

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	TYPE	Gallons per Day	SCORE	TEST RESULTS	FEATURES
							Output Convenience Noise Efficiency	Claimed Area Antimicrobial Claims Has Cartridge/ Filter
☑	1	<b>Vicks V5100NS</b>	\$50	Ultrasonic	2.1	<b>86</b>	● ● ● ●	400 •
☑	2	<b>SPT SU-9210</b> <sup>①</sup>	\$80	Evaporative	1.9	<b>79</b>	● ● ● ●	450 •
☑	3	<b>Honeywell HUT-300</b> <sup>②</sup>	\$70	Ultrasonic	1.9	<b>75</b>	● ● ● ●	400 •

### C. LARGE ROOM (500 TO 999 SQ. FT.)

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	TYPE	Gallons per Day	SCORE	TEST RESULTS	FEATURES
							Output Convenience Noise Efficiency	Claimed Area Antimicrobial Claims Has Cartridge/ Filter
☑	1	<b>SPT SU-4010</b> <sup>③</sup>	\$75	Ultrasonic	2.6	<b>86</b>	● ● ● ●	500 •
☑	2	<b>Air-O-Swiss 7135</b> <sup>① ③</sup>	\$180	Ultrasonic	3.0	<b>82</b>	● ○ ● ●	650 • •
☑	3	<b>Crane Germ Defense EE-8065</b> <sup>③</sup>	\$85	Ultrasonic	2.2	<b>80</b>	● ● ● ●	500 •
☑	4	<b>Holmes HM495</b>	\$50	Ultrasonic	2.1	<b>76</b>	● ● ● ●	500 •
☑	5	<b>Honeywell HWM-340</b> <sup>①</sup>	\$55	Vaporizer	3.3	<b>76</b>	● ● ● ●	600 •

① Includes a humidistat, which roughly indicates relative humidity. ② Output decreases noticeably when using hard water. ③ Offers cool or warm mist; output slightly higher and efficiency lower in warm-mist mode.

# The Upside—and Downside—of Outpatient Surgery

Joan Rivers' death is a reminder that you should carefully look before you book

**T**HE DEATH of Joan Rivers last fall after a common procedure to examine her digestive tract has sparked concern about outpatient surgical centers. Would the comedian be alive today if she had been treated in a hospital? That's difficult to say. But it's clear that doctors are doing more outpatient procedures—some of them complicated—and not always on the appropriate patients. So it's important to make sure that you're a good candidate before your surgery is scheduled, and to know what to look for in a facility.

The number of outpatient procedures done each year has tripled in the past three decades to about 54 million. And because of shorter-acting anesthesia and less invasive surgery, people are now going to those facilities for everything from biopsies and knee surgery to mastectomies. Among the most common procedures are cataract surgery, colonoscopy, and endoscopy, the procedure Rivers reportedly had. Many clinics are privately owned by physicians; others are affiliated with hospitals, sometimes even located on hospital grounds.

There have been some well-publicized problems, such as the hepatitis C outbreak in 2007 that was traced to a Las Vegas endoscopy clinic. But infections actually appear to be less likely in outpatient surgery clinics than in hospitals, says Claudia Steiner, M.D., a senior physician researcher at the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. That's in part because people undergoing outpatient surgery are usually healthier than hospitalized patients.

Though outpatient surgery in general seems safe, some procedures are riskier than others. For example, Steiner's research found that just one out of 1,000 people undergoing a common outpatient procedure to treat an enlarged prostate gland developed a surgical-site infection within 14 days. By comparison, six times as many people who had an abdominal hysterectomy or hernia repair developed infections during that time frame.

Your risk also depends on your anesthesia. For deep sedation, or general anesthesia, an anesthesiologist who's a physician (not a nurse) should always oversee your care, says Orly Avitzur, M.D., medical adviser to Consumer Reports.

## HOW TO CHOOSE A CENTER

It's challenging to find information about specific centers. Unlike hospitals, most outpatient surgery clinics aren't required to report infections or other complications, and they aren't inspected by a single organiza-

tion. That makes it difficult for consumers to compare facilities. Lisa McGiffert, director of the Consumer Reports Safe Patient Project, says more oversight is needed. "Private accreditors are paid to evaluate," McGiffert says. "And states have different licensing requirements."

## KEEP IN MIND THAT ...

Even a simple procedure in a good center can be a bad idea if you have a serious health problem. In that case, "you face a much higher risk of serious complications and would be better off in a hospital, which can respond to emergencies," says Consumer Reports' chief medical adviser, Marvin M. Lipman, M.D. Be leery of outpatient procedures if you have a history of:

- A bleeding disorder
- Chronic lung disease
- Congestive heart failure
- A heart attack within the past four to six months
- Serious arrhythmia
- Serious weight problems
- Uncontrolled diabetes.

## 8 Questions to Ask Your Clinic

**IS IT ACCREDITED?** Check for Medicare certification or accreditation from the Joint Commission, the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care, the American Association for Accreditation of Ambulatory Surgery Facilities, or the Healthcare Facilities Accreditation Program.

**WHO OWNS IT?** Outpatient clinics can be a profitable business, so many doctors have invested in them. But that raises ethical concerns because they might have a vested interest in doing more procedures. And just because a doctor owns a facility doesn't mean it's the best place for you. So be wary if you are referred to a clinic that's owned by your doctor.

**WHO IS THE ANESTHESIOLOGIST?** If you need general anesthesia, make sure you're under the care of someone who is board-certified.

**HOW MUCH EXPERIENCE DOES THE DOCTOR HAVE?** Look for someone who has performed your procedure at least 50 times in the past year.

**WHAT'S THE EMERGENCY PLAN?** Ask whether there's resuscitative equipment on site and whether your doctor is certified in advanced resuscitation techniques in case something goes wrong.

**HOW CLOSE IS A HOSPITAL?** Your doctor should have admitting privileges at a nearby hospital in case there is an emergency.

**WHAT'S THE INFECTION RATE?** Ask how many patients have to be hospitalized because of infections after your procedure. Your doctor should be able and willing to share that information. "The goal should be zero," says Consumer Reports' Lisa McGiffert.

**WHAT SHOULD I DO BEFORE I'M DISCHARGED?** Get the name and number of a nurse or doctor to call if you have a problem. Also ask about signs and symptoms to watch for.

## SHOP AROUND FOR OUTPATIENT SURGERY

Prices for the same procedure in the same community can vary widely among ambulatory centers, so it pays to shop around. That's especially true if you have insurance with a high co-payment or deductible. Shown here are price ranges that insurers in the Chicago area pay for two common outpatient procedures.

	LOW	AVERAGE	HIGH
Endoscopy (upper gastro-intestinal)	\$793	\$1,397	\$1,681
Cataract surgery	\$1,914	\$3,081	\$3,859

25%

Increase in U.S. household waste between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day.

1,000,000

Number of extra tons that hit the landfills.

**SPARKLY, SHINY PAPER**

It may not be recyclable. Check your town's rules—and next year, wrap in matte.

53

Percentage of Americans who have saved and reused gift wrap.

\$50

Fine for Aurora, Ill., locals whose decorations twinkle past March 18.

JAN. 6

Three Kings Day: the time, some say, to take down the tinsel.

8,471

**Miles**

Distance traveled by the average artificial Christmas tree, manufacture to disposal.

**GO (EVER)GREEN**

The National Resources Defense Council says real trees are more eco-friendly.

80%

American households that display artificial firs.

4,000+

Communities across the country that sponsor tree-recycling programs.

1/6

Fraction of electricity used by LED holiday lights, compared with conventional lights.

**DON'T TRASH**

**BROKEN LIGHTS**

To recycle them, go to [holidayleds.com](http://holidayleds.com).



THE INFORMATION

## The Day After Christmas

In the wake of any big-time party lies a big pile of waste. Here, the truth about our holiday detritus—and how you can lessen your festive footprint.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GRANT CORNETT



## MONEY SMARTS

# Should Walmart Be Your Next Bank?

Attention, shoppers: The retail giant now offers mobile checking accounts

**E**VERYONE LOVES WALMART'S power to deliver bargains. So the recent news that the mega retailer will offer smart-phone-friendly GoBank checking accounts alongside WrestleMania action figures and Ol' Roy dog food is likely to put smiles on the faces of some people, though perhaps not on traditional bankers'.

Though Walmart's aim is to tempt customers away from mainstream banks, that doesn't mean its miles of aisles will be outfitted with marble columns or steel vaults anytime soon. Rather, Walmart is just trying to get a bigger piece of the financial services action. Along with retailers such as BJ's and Costco, Walmart already markets credit cards, auto insurance, and other money products, some of which we've reviewed favorably.

GoBank, by the way, is not a full-service bank but simply a checking account. It doesn't provide other typical banking services, such

as savings or loans, nor does it have branches. GoBank exists primarily as a smart-phone app. You access money in your account by using a debit card for purchases and cash withdrawals at an impressive network of 42,000 fee-free ATMs located in kiosks in smaller local banks and retailers—not just in Walmart locations—all over the country. There are no minimum balances or overdraft fees. But when we compared GoBank head-to-head with a traditional bank's equivalent app on 15 key criteria, including the ease of depositing money and getting account information, Chase Mobile won handily, scoring 4.5 to GoBank's 3.6 on a 5-is-best scale.

That doesn't necessarily mean you should stick with a traditional bank. Today's banking services buffet gives you options that may provide savings if you shop around wisely. Walmart is a good place to start thinking about your possibilities. Use our toolkit below to get the street smarts you need for careful comparison.

## Banking at Walmart: Buy, Consider, or Shop Around?

### Checking ⇒ Consider

**Why** GoBank's \$9 monthly fee, waived if you have at least \$500 in direct deposits per month, is not unusual; 60 percent of banks offer some form of free checking. Compare GoBank with your current traditional bank's online and mobile banking app, in terms of fees, services, and more.

### Credit Cards ⇒ Skip

**Why** The Walmart MasterCard has no annual fee, but it comes with a steep 23 percent variable annual interest rate. Never settle for a choice of only one credit card, either. Shop far and wide for the best deals by using comparison websites such as CardRatings.com and LowCards.com.

### Mortgages ⇒ Shop Around

**Why** Walmart doesn't offer mortgages. Do consider Costco's First Choice Loan Service, where 10 lenders compete for your business and usually charge interest rates that are one-eighth to one-quarter percentage point lower than five major banks, according to independent surveys.

### Prepaid Cards ⇒ Buy

**Why** Walmart offers a reloadable prepaid card that we've rated highly on fee accessibility, clarity of terms, convenience, safety, and overall value. Called Bluebird and issued by American Express, it can be refilled via direct deposit.

### Savings ⇒ Shop Around

**Why** Walmart doesn't offer savings accounts. But online banks such as Ally Bank and Barclays, as well as credit unions, tend to pay higher rates on certificates of deposit and savings accounts. Shop nationally for the best deals at bankrate.com and for credit unions at mycreditunion.gov.

## RECALLS AND UPDATES



### RIDING MOWER FAILURE

About 8,500 riding mowers made by Briggs & Stratton have been recalled because of brake problems related to a failed weld. No injuries have been reported.

Six models of the Snapper Rear Engine Riding Mower are involved in the recall: 7800918, 7800920, 7800932, 7800950, 7800951, and 7800954. The mowers were sold at various stores from April 2013 through May 2014. They cost \$1,300 to \$2,000.

Consumers should immediately stop using the recalled mowers and contact an authorized Snapper service dealer for a free repair. To get more information on the affected models, call 800-935-2967 or go to [briggsandstratton.com](http://briggsandstratton.com).

### CHAIRS THAT BREAK

Dimension Industries is recalling about 18,000 sets of outdoor furniture because the chairs could break, causing a person to fall.

The sets consist of two aluminum swivel chairs with medium brown-colored stretched fabric seats and backs, a round aluminum base, and aluminum armrests, along with a rectangular table that has a tabletop made from porcelain tile.

The sets were sold at Costco stores nationwide from December 2013 through May 2014 for about \$400. No injuries have been reported. Consumers should immediately stop using the chairs and contact the distributor, Dimension Industries of Taiwan, to receive a free repair kit or a full refund. You can reach them at 800-598-6532, or go to [costco.com](http://costco.com).



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# THE BEST EVERYDAY PRODUCTS

Should you reach for the store-brand coffee or the national product? Should you buy the Costco paper towels—or the higher-priced Bounty? Depends on how you shop and what's on your must-have list. Our testing will help you decide.

**THE AMERICAN SUPERMARKET** may be having a midlife crisis. Gone are the days when a weekly outing to one store for all household needs was the norm. Not surprisingly, supermarket sales have plunged about 13 percent over the past 20 years, according to Mintel, a research company in Chicago.

Where are all of the shoppers going? To discount megastores, warehouse clubs, organic groceries, and the like. In fact, big-box shops have more than gobbled up the gap, with their food-retail sales jumping almost 14 percent in the same time frame.

With that smorgasbord of options, shoppers are taking advantage of the full buffet: hitting one store for bread and milk, another for produce, and a third for paper products. Roughly 50 percent of American shoppers say they visit at least five types of retailers, according to a 2014 report from Information Resources, a research firm in Chicago.

While you're at the megastore, it may be tempting to throw a few rolls of the house-brand toilet paper into the cart along with the pint of Ben & Jerry's—after all, store brands are an average 22 percent cheaper than national lines. But is that the smartest choice? That's where Consumer Reports comes in.

We decided to create the ultimate shopping list of the products you use most. We tested hundreds of everyday items, including food, paper goods, cleaners, and more. Quite often, store brands proved almost as good as, if not better than, their name-brand counterparts.

To find out the winners and losers, just turn the page.



PHOTO STYLING: AMY HENRY





# The Ultimate Shopping Guide

Our experts tested hundreds of items to determine the best buys for your shopping cart



## If You Shop by Store

What to get—and forget—at major retailers.

### TARGET

Store brands: Archer Farms, Market Pantry, and Up & Up

#### BEST VALUES

**Market Pantry ketchup** Rivals Heinz for flavor.

**Market Pantry mayonnaise** As creamy and balanced as Hellmann's.

**Market Pantry frozen mixed vegetables** Freshness matches that of Birds Eye.

**Archer Farms 100% pure maple syrup** Thick and full-flavored.

**Market Pantry chicken broth** Judged very good overall.

**Archer Farms jumbo cashews** Very good and tasty.

**Up & Up Full Sheet Puddle Busters paper towels** Plenty absorbent for everyday spills.

**Up & Up Aloe & Vitamin E tissues** Exceptionally soft.

**Up & Up generic drugs** Lower prices than drugstore chains.

#### OK, BUT NOTHING SPECIAL

**Up & Up HE Free & Clear laundry detergent** Did well overall but struggled against tough blood and sweat stains.

**Up & Up Dish Packs dishwasher detergent** Excellent at cleaning dishes but only so-so on pots.

#### ONES TO SKIP

**Market Pantry Classic Roast coffee** Lack of complexity put it near the bottom of our Ratings.

**Market Pantry Zesty Fat Free Italian salad dressing** Lacked fullness with watered-down impression.

**Market Pantry plain nonfat yogurt** Astringent and chalkier texture than others.

### COSTCO

Store brand: Kirkland Signature

#### BEST VALUES

**Kirkland Signature regular sliced bacon** Crispy, with a wood-smoke flavor and hint of sweetness.

**Kirkland Signature Super Premium vanilla ice cream** Big dairy flavor helped it best Breyers.

**Kirkland Signature organic chicken stock** Impressive flavors.

**Kirkland Signature maple syrup** Good flavor and value.

**Kirkland Signature Toscana extra virgin olive oil** Distinct flavor.

**Kirkland Signature real mayonnaise** About as good as Hellmann's.

**Kirkland Signature Free & Clear liquid laundry detergent** Tough on blood and grass stains, and sweat; works with all washers.

**Kirkland Signature dishwasher pacs** Impressive job cleaning.

**Kirkland Signature Premium Big Roll paper towels** Super absorbent and cheapest tested.

#### OK, BUT NOTHING SPECIAL

**Kirkland Signature toilet paper** Soft but not strong or tearable.

**Kirkland Signature facial tissues** So-so strength, but soft.

#### ONES TO SKIP

**Kirkland Signature House Blend coffee beans** Burnt, ashy notes.

**Kirkland Signature gel dishwasher detergent** Struggled to clean and resist water spots.

### WALMART AND SAM'S CLUB

Store brands: Great Value (Walmart) and Member's Mark (Sam's Club)

#### BEST VALUES

**Great Value lower-sodium bacon** Hint of sweetness and wood smoke.

**Great Value chicken broth** Very good overall flavor.

**Great Value real mayonnaise** Hellmann's-like taste and texture.

**Great Value maple syrup** Nice flavor.

**Great Value Strong & Absorbent paper towels** Absorbency, scrubbing, and strength were impressive.

**Great Value Powder Pacs dishwasher detergent** Very good at cleaning except for pots.

**Great Value all-natural vanilla-bean ice cream** Very good, if slightly gummy.

**Member's Mark Ultimate Clean laundry detergent** Very capable cleaning overall.

#### OK, BUT NOTHING SPECIAL

**Great Value plain nonfat yogurt** A bit more sour than others, and chalky texture.

**Great Value ketchup** Not quite as good as Heinz.

**Great Value With Lotion tissues** Very soft but not so strong.

#### ONE TO SKIP

**Great Value Classic Roast coffee** Harsh, with a grainy taste.

### TRADER JOE'S

Store brand: Trader Joe's

#### BEST VALUES

**Trader Joe's organic plain low-fat yogurt** Creamy texture not what you'd expect from low-fat.

**Trader Joe's organic free-range chicken broth** Very good flavors.

**Trader Joe's maple syrup** Nice thickness and flavor.

#### OK, BUT NOTHING SPECIAL

**Trader Joe's Joe** Decent coffee but somewhat astringent.

**Trader Joe's ketchup** Sweet, with low tomato taste.

#### ONES TO SKIP

**Trader Joe's mayonnaise** More sour than Hellmann's and not as tasty.

**Trader Joe's liquid laundry detergent HE** Struggled against grass, blood, and body sweat.

### WHOLE FOODS

Store brands: 365 Everyday Value and Whole Foods

#### BEST VALUES

**Allegro Organic Continental Blend ground-coffee** Complex, bold

flavors put this near the top of the Ratings.

**365 Everyday Value organic chicken broth** Judged very good overall.

**365 Everyday Value mayonnaise** Similar to Hellmann's but saltier-tasting; the product has been reformulated since our test.

**365 Everyday Value maple syrup** Judged very good.

#### OK, BUT NOTHING SPECIAL

**365 Everyday Value organic plain fat-free yogurt** Somewhat chalky texture, with a hint of lemon.

#### ONES TO SKIP

**365 Everyday Value tissues** You can find softer, stronger tissues.

**365 Everyday Value organic salad dressing** Thin and quite sour, with off-note.



## If You Shop by Price

**Starbucks House Blend ground coffee**, \$8.10, 12 ounces. Strong flavor, with chocolate and fruit traces.

**Kirkland Signature regular sliced bacon**, \$12, 64 ounces. Wood smoke and a hint of sweetness.

**Great Value all-natural vanilla-bean ice cream** (Walmart), \$3.40, 48 ounces. Very good, if slightly gummy.

**Great Value plain nonfat yogurt** (Walmart), \$3, 32 ounces. A bit more sour and chalky than others.

**Kirkland Signature Free & Clear laundry detergent** (Costco), 11 cents per load. Among the detergents that were impressive, this liquid has the lowest cost per load.

**Kirkland Signature dishwasher pacs** (Costco), 9 cents per load. Impressive at cleaning, even pots, and at resisting water spots.

**Up & Up toilet paper** (Target), 20 cents per 100 sheets. Almost as good as the top-rated Charmin Ultra Strong but half the price.

**Kirkland Signature Premium Big Roll paper towels** (Costco), \$1.47 per 100 square feet. It takes care of everyday spills.

**Great Value With Lotion tissues** (Walmart), 12 cents per 100 tissues. Soft but not so strong.



## STORE BRANDS vs. THE BEST NAME BRANDS

	Name Brand	Costco	Target	Trader Joe's	Walmart	Whole Foods
BACON	Oscar Mayer thick-cut ▼ \$5.50 • 16 OZ. SCORE: 74	Kirkland Signature regular sliced ▼ \$12 • 64 OZ. SCORE: 82	NA*	Trader Joe's Uncured Apple Smoked ▼ \$5 • 12 OZ. SCORE: 71	Great Value lower-sodium ▼ \$4.50 • 16 OZ. SCORE: 73	NA*
CHICKEN BROTH	Knorr Homestyle ▼ \$3.50 FOUR 4.66-OZ. CONTAINERS SCORE: 79	Kirkland Signature organic ▼ \$11.49 SIX 32-OZ. CONTAINERS SCORE: 73	Market Pantry ▼ \$1.87 • 32 OZ. SCORE: 72	Trader Joe's organic free-range ▼ \$1.99 • 32 OZ. SCORE: 67	Great Value ▼ \$1.88 • 32 OZ. SCORE: 63	365 Everyday Value organic ▼ \$1.99 • 32 OZ. SCORE: 62
COFFEE	Blue Bottle Three Africans whole-bean ▼ \$19 • 12 OZ. SCORE: 72	Kirkland Signature House Blend whole-bean ▼ \$10 • 32 OZ. SCORE: 43	Market Pantry Classic Roast ground ▼ \$6.20 • 33.9 OZ. SCORE: 31	Trader Joe's Joe whole-bean ▼ \$5 • 14 OZ. SCORE: 59	Great Value Classic Roast ground ▼ \$6 • 33.9 OZ. SCORE: 31	Allegro Organic Continental Blend ground ▼ \$9 • 12 OZ. SCORE: 70
PLAIN YOGURT	Dannon all-natural nonfat ▼ \$2.70 • 32 OZ. SCORE: 74	NA*	Market Pantry nonfat ▼ \$3.30 • 32 OZ. SCORE: 45	Trader Joe's organic low-fat ▼ \$3 • 32 OZ. SCORE: 85	Great Value nonfat ▼ \$3 • 32 OZ. SCORE: 58	365 Everyday Value organic fat-free ▼ \$3.50 • 32 OZ. SCORE: 58
VANILLA ICE CREAM	Ben & Jerry's ▼ \$4.10 • 16 OZ. SCORE: 98	Kirkland Signature super premium ▼ \$11 • 128 OZ. SCORE: 82	NA*	NA*	Great Value all-natural vanilla-bean ▼ \$3.45 • 48 OZ. SCORE: 70	NA*
DISHWASHER DETERGENT	Cascade Complete ActionPacs ▼ 29 CENTS/LOAD SCORE: 84	Kirkland Signature dishwasher pacs ▼ 9 CENTS/LOAD SCORE: 78	Up & Up Dish Packs ▼ 17 CENTS/LOAD SCORE: 67	NA*	Great Value powder pacs ▼ 17 CENTS/LOAD SCORE: 79	Green Mission organic dishwasher gel ▼ 23 CENTS/LOAD SCORE: 16
LAUNDRY DETERGENT	Tide Plus Ultra Stain Release ▼ 25 CENTS/LOAD SCORE: 81	Kirkland Signature Free & Clear ▼ 11 CENTS/LOAD SCORE: 70	Up & Up HE Free & Clear ▼ 12 CENTS/LOAD SCORE: 61	Trader Joe's liquid laundry HE ▼ 8 CENTS/LOAD SCORE: 31	Member's Mark Ultimate Clean (Sam's Club) ▼ 12 CENTS/LOAD SCORE: 73	NA*
PAPER TOWELS	Bounty DuraTowel ▼ \$4.04/100 SQ. FT. SCORE: 96	Kirkland Signature Premium Big Roll ▼ \$1.47/100 SQ. FT. SCORE: 61	Up & Up Full Sheet Puddle Busters ▼ \$2.31/100 SQ. FT. SCORE: 65	NA*	Great Value Strong & Absorbent ▼ \$2.09/100 SQ. FT. SCORE: 68	NA*
TOILET PAPER	Charmin Ultra Strong ▼ 41 CENTS/100 SHEETS SCORE: 71	Kirkland Signature ▼ 12 CENTS/100 SHEETS SCORE: 51	Our last tests found Up & Up toilet paper very soft. We have not yet tested the recently reformulated version.	NA*	Great Value Ultra Strong ▼ 27 CENTS/100 SHEETS SCORE: 68	NA*
TISSUES	Puffs Ultra Soft & Strong ▼ \$1.69/100 TISSUES SCORE: 87	Kirkland Signature ▼ \$1.23/100 TISSUES SCORE: 60	Up & Up Aloe & Vitamin E lotion ▼ \$1.87/100 TISSUES SCORE: 69	NA*	Great Value With Lotion ▼ \$1.12/100 TISSUES SCORE: 62	365 Everyday Value ▼ 93 CENTS/100 TISSUES SCORE: 37

Scores for all foods are based on taste only and not nutritional value. Scores in context: 81 to 100 is excellent; 61 to 80, very good; 41 to 60, good; 21 to 40, fair; 0 to 20, poor. \*\*"NA" means this store has a house brand for the category, but it was not in our most recent test.

# Insider Tips From Savvy Shoppers

Our Facebook friends and our experts share their advice for getting the best deals

## LIKE IT? GET IT NOW!

If you have a beloved product, know that it might not be there the next time you shop. Indeed, one common complaint about Costco is that favorite items suddenly disappear. “If the item has an asterisk above the Costco price, it’s being replaced by different stock,” writes our Facebook friend Gary Kulak. Also pay attention to the price itself. If it ends in “.97,” the item has been marked down and could move quickly.

## SPLIT BULK ORDERS

You might not be able to get through that 10-pound bag of carrots on your own, but there’s no reason you can’t split it, along with the cost, with a friend or relative. Warehouse-club shoppers also report big savings by upgrading to premium membership plans with cash-back rewards. “I love my annual rebate check that more than pays for my yearly membership,” says Facebook friend Susan Dunlap.

## BALANCE OUT YOUR SPENDING

“I do most of my shopping at Whole Foods and Costco,” writes Edward Zelnis, another Facebook friend. “The extra money I spend on fresh food at Whole Foods is more than offset by the money I save on everything else at Costco.”

## KNOW WHERE THE DEALS ARE

Our latest Consumer Reports supermarket survey of more than 27,000 readers found that certain chains have consistently lower prices. They include warehouse clubs Costco and Sam’s Club; and supermarkets Aldi, Fareway Stores, Market Basket (Northeast), Save-A-Lot, ShopRite, Stater Bros., Trader Joe’s, and WinCo.

## COMPARE UNIT PRICES

The shelf tags below products let you know which package size—by ounce, quart, or sheet—is the best deal, our experts say. Bigger tends to be cheaper, but not always.

## BEAT RETAILERS AT THEIR OWN GAME

Stores try lure customers with weekly specials on staples, such as soda and paper towels, and raise prices on other goods to offset these “loss leaders.” Stock up on the discounted items and pass on the overpriced stuff. Another store trick is quantity-based promotions, for example “Five cans for \$5.” You can usually just buy the one can for \$1.

## CHECK THE RETURN POLICY

“I love Costco’s return policy,” says Facebook friend Elizabeth Nieves. Many items can be returned at any time. Sam’s Club has the same policy, and it goes one better on fresh meat, seafood, bakery items, and produce, offering a 200 percent money-back guarantee if you’re not fully satisfied. Certain supermarket chains, including Bi-Lo, do the same; Hannaford backs its store brands with a twice-your-money-back guarantee—proof that retailers are putting more stock in their store brands.

## EVERYONE LOVES COMFORT FOODS

These shopping-cart staples get especially high marks

### FROZEN PIZZA

Our testers looked for a crispy crust and flavorful cheese and sauce, as well as overall nutritional value.

#### • Home Run Inn classic

\$3.99 for 7.5-ounce package  
Our top-rated pizza, the Home Run Inn has a thin, pastrylike crust loaded with stretchy cheese and fresh-tasting sauce. It’s not the most nutritious, though!

#### • Amy’s single-serve

\$4.66 for 6.2-ounce package  
Amy’s pizza is a slightly healthier for you, with an Italian-style crust and tasty—though a bit sparse—sauce.

### CHOCOLATE BARS

Our lucky sensory experts evaluated more than 20 chocolate

bars for flavor and texture, and these two were among the highest-rated:

#### • Godiva milk chocolate \$3.50

It was judged the best milk-chocolate bar, with balanced chocolate and milk flavors.

#### • Trader Joe’s 72% Cacao three-pack dark-chocolate mini bars \$1.80

Your bargain buy, these bars feature complex dark-chocolate flavor and roasted notes.

### HEALTHY CEREALS

A high-fiber, low-sugar cereal will help power you through cold winter mornings.

#### • Bob’s Red Mill Old Country Style muesli \$4 A Consumer Reports Best Buy

Our top-rated cereal combines

crunchy nuts and seeds with tender dates and raisins.

#### • Cheerios Toasted whole-grain oat \$4.20 A Consumer Reports Best Buy

This breakfast classic is still one of our favorites for its simple toasted-oat flavors.

### BAGGED POPCORN

We tested 13 cheddar-cheese and kettle-corn varieties. These are the best:

#### • Trader Joe’s White Cheddar \$1.70

Our tasters liked the balance of real cheddar-cheese and toasty corn flavors.

#### • Smartfood Kettle Corn \$4

Tender inside and crisp outside, with a nice balance of sweet and salty flavors.

## Carnivore’s Cause

Consumer Reports is concerned about the misuse of antibiotics on healthy livestock, a practice that’s making those medications less effective at treating disease in people. Our advocacy arm, Consumers Union, has been calling on supermarket chains to stop selling meat raised on antibiotics. So far, Whole Foods is the only national chain to make that commitment. To join our marketplace campaign, go to [NotinMyFood.org](http://NotinMyFood.org).

## PAPER PRODUCTS: THE REAL NECESSITIES OF LIFE

100

How many rolls of toilet paper the average person uses per year.

1890

Scott Paper introduces the first roll of toilet tissue.

3,600

Number of individual sheets we ripped, pulled, and soaked in our latest test.

1964

Charmin introduces Mr. Whipple character, famous for his line "Please don't squeeze the Charmin."



OVER OR  
UNDER?

Research by Procter & Gamble finds slight preference for placing the roll so that the paper tears over.



8 TO 44 CENTS

THE RANGE IN PRICE PER 100 SHEETS IN OUR CURRENT TOILET-PAPER RATINGS.

2  
years

RECOMMENDED  
SHELF LIFE  
FOR TOILET PAPER TO  
MAINTAIN OPTIMAL  
QUALITY.

1941

CONSUMER  
REPORTS FIRST  
TESTS TOILET  
PAPER AND FINDS  
NO SPLINTERS—A  
PROBLEM WITH  
EARLIER  
VERSIONS.

13x18

THE SIZE, IN INCHES,  
OF THE FIRST  
PAPER TOWELS.  
MANY TODAY ARE  
AROUND 11x10,  
EXCEPT SELECT-A-  
SIZE TYPES,  
WHICH TEND TO  
BE 11x7.

\$1.47  
TO  
\$4.04

The price range per 100 square feet in our current paper-towel Ratings.



52

Pounds of paper products, including napkins, paper towels, and toilet paper, that the average American uses each year.

1907

A Philadelphia schoolteacher fashions the first paper towels from copy paper because she believes that students are spreading their colds to each other by using the same cloth towel.

Did you know?

Kleenex facial tissues should be discarded in the trash and not the toilet because they are made with a strengthening additive.

50 PERCENT

HOW MUCH OF OUR AT-HOME PAPER-PRODUCT CONSUMPTION GOES TOWARD TOILET PAPER. PAPER TOWELS FOLLOW WITH 34 PERCENT.







# Last-Minute Gifts

Still shopping? How about an action cam for your sister who snowboards or red wine for the entertaining neighbors next door? From the thousands of products that we test, here are some winners for your holiday list. More, by category, on the next pages.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TREY WRIGHT

**1 Christopher Elbow Chocolate 21-piece Collection, \$42**

Artistic-looking, ultrasmooth chocolates are not your typical mainstream treats. These have unusual and bold flavor combinations such as buttery caramels with rosemary.

**2 Apple iPad Air 2 (16GB), \$500**

The latest version of this groundbreaking tablet is slimmer than ever and has the best display of any iPad yet. The iPad is finally getting the Touch ID technology that has been on iPhones since the 5s. Built in to the home button, Touch ID lets you unlock the device with your fingerprint. The camera has more megapixels than the previous iPad Air, and the mobile-data versions have a built-in SIM card.

**3 GoPro Hero4 Silver, \$400**

Here's one for the outdoors enthusiast on your shopping list. This GoPro costs \$100 more than the Hero3+ Silver, but it adds a touch-screen display and has Bluetooth and Wi-Fi capability for remote operation. It also has more manual settings and features designed to improve image quality.

**4 Amazon Fire HDX 8.9, \$380**

This tablet from Amazon packs a lot of punch at a relatively low price. It has a high-resolution display and an upgraded processor.

**5 Breville BFP800XL/A food processor, \$400**

This Breville is by far the top model on the market, with superb slicing, shredding, and grating. And it's surprisingly quiet.

**6 Bila-Haut 2012 red wine, \$13**

This French wine is full-flavored, with lots of ripe fruit and a sweet oak taste. It is fairly complex and full-bodied, and goes well with steak and other meats.

**7 Fitbit One, \$100**

For your athletic friend, this activity tracker counts steps, logs calorie intake, monitors sleep, and provides real-time results throughout the day. It syncs wirelessly to a computer or smart phone and has an indicator that can help make it easier to stick to your fitness goals.

**8 Sphero Ollie, \$100**

It looks like a soda can on wheels, but Ollie is actually an app-controlled robot. It rolls and spins quickly in all directions, and you control everything it does via a

free app on your iOS or Android smart phone (check at [gosphero.com](http://gosphero.com) to make sure that your device is compatible). Ollie is very versatile: You can race it and make it do tricks and jumps.

**9 Diamondback 510lc Spin Bike, \$800**

Smooth and polished, the Diamondback has built-in workout programs, so your recipient (or you) can get ready for race day during the long, cold winter.

**10 Samsung Galaxy Note 4, \$700 (without contract)**

Multitask much? This phablet lets you operate in up to five windows at once. Its 5.7-inch screen and stylus make it easy to check mail, download attachments, and actually get some work accomplished. (Price varies by carrier and plan.)



## Electronics

### Apple iPhone 6 and 6 Plus (each 16GB), \$650 and \$750 (without contract)

These two new phones were among the best performers in our Ratings, and they beat previous iPhones in terms of battery life. The large, 4.7-inch screen of the iPhone 6 and the 5.5-inch display of the iPhone 6 Plus earned high marks for color accuracy and contrast, as well as for readability in bright light.

### Dell XPS Convertible Laptop, \$1,100

This convertible laptop, model XPSU12-4672CRB-FBD, can be used as a regular computer or flipped over to become a tablet. In our tests, battery life was very long at 12.5 hours, and performance was excellent.

### Lenovo G50 80E3007FUS, \$350

This one's all about the price. A 15.6-inch laptop with 6.75 hours of battery life, the Lenovo is relatively light for its size at 4.9 pounds. Performance is good enough for apps such as word processing and Web browsing.

### Acer Chromebook 13, \$275

With 17 hours of battery life, the model CB5-311-T7NN goes the distance. That's 2.5 hours more than any other Chromebook. Performance is fair, which is adequate for productivity apps but slow for viewing videos.

### Canon PowerShot SX510 HS, \$200

This wireless point-and-shoot has good overall image and video quality and comes with a long, 30x optical zoom. Also

in the plus column: It shoots very good flash photos, has a very wide-angle lens, and has a dedicated video button. Differentiating it from most others in its class, this superzoom has manual controls and can manually focus. It's a great choice for amateur photographers who want to manipulate the settings.

### Nikon D3300, \$550

This very versatile entry-level SLR is packed with features and manual controls, and it's lighter than higher-end SLRs. It captures photos with very good image quality and offers very good video quality as well. It also has an excellent LCD and much longer battery life than other cameras of this type. The D3300 has a 24.2-megapixel sensor, and it can take 1080p video.

### Magellan SmartGPS 5390, \$230

This navigator has Internet connectivity via Wi-Fi, so you can get information from online sources and share data with other mobile devices. It includes Bluetooth connectivity for hands-free calling, using the unit's internal speaker, microphone, and screen. A handy guide lists the available services by exit on major highways, as well as emergency services.

### Sony PlayStation Vita, \$200

For your friend who likes to play on the road, the Vita is a great handheld gaming device with a responsive touch screen and an intuitive interface. It has sophisticated controls that provide real versatility in the way that the games can be played.

### Amazon Kindle Voyage, \$200

For the bookworm on your list, Amazon has just released a new e-book reader that is supposed to sport a brighter screen and lighter weight than the original Paperwhite model. That e-reader, which we have recommended in the past, will still be available, starting at \$120, with special offers.

### Grado Prestige SR80e headphones, \$100

These headphones provide great sound quality and retro styling at a great price. In fact, they were a CR Best Buy in our sound-lab tests. With the Grado's open-air earpieces, not only will you hear great music, but you'll also hear the doorbell or traffic noise.

### Motorola Moto 360 Smart Watch, \$250

This small, Android-based watch looks more like a regular timepiece than most others in this category. It displays weather, traffic, and other information by linking to your smart phone. You can use voice controls to send texts and perform other functions.

## Tech Toys

### Crayola Virtual Design Pro Fashion Collection, \$40; Crayola Virtual Design Pro Car Collection, \$40; ages 6 and up.

Kids can draw creations with colored pencils and markers, and scan them to create virtual worlds of fashion or cars. Download the corresponding app to your iPhone or Android phone or tablet, and the kids will see their outfits walk down a virtual runway or their cars drive in a variety of fun environments. These kits are a great hybrid of creativity and technology, and they'll be playable for a long time.

### LeapFrog LeapBand, \$40; Green, Blue, or Pink; ages 4 to 7

Children now have their own activity tracker—and this one is a lot more colorful and fun than the ones made for grown-ups. They get a cute on-screen pet they can customize and play with. The pet also issues activity challenges, such as "Pretend to ice skate!" and "Leap like a frog!" As they move, kids earn rewards that they can redeem for additional games and use to unlock more pets. Parents can personalize this device for their child—for example, they can designate "Quiet Mode" hours

when the LeapBand operates only as a watch. When the LeapBand is synced with a computer, parents can see their child's daily activity and progress over time, and load more challenges.

## Chocolate

### John & Kira's Every Flavor Collection, 56-piece Chocolate box, \$79

This big, boxed selection has ordinary flavors made extraordinary by fresh ingredients. Ultra-smooth, dark-chocolate squares flavored with coffee, raspberry, ginger, and star anise are among the offerings. The fresh taste is noteworthy: Candies infused with mint taste as if the leaves were just picked.

### Candinas 36-piece Chocolate box, \$52.50

These ultra-smooth dark and milk chocolates have exceptional hazelnut-, caramel-, and liqueur-flavored centers, with hints of fresh cream and butter.

### Norman Love Confections, 25-piece Signature Chocolate box, \$48.50

Unusual fillings, such as key lime, passion fruit, and peanut butter and jelly, are the hallmark of these smooth candies with a decorative look. The collection has some white-chocolate pieces and includes truffles, creams, nuts, and fruit purées.

## Wine

### Charles & Charles Post No. 35 2012, \$12

This wine has a fruity, woody style with intense, ripe fruit and a good tannic structure. Goes well with hearty stews and steaks.

### Bogle Essential Red 2011, \$11

This is a big wine, with intense fruit flavors balanced by noticeable wood notes. Goes well with beef and lamb.

### Piccolo Fiore Rosso di Sicilia (Whole Foods), \$8

This lighter red wine from Whole Foods is a bargain. It has cherry, raspberry, and black-currant flavors, which make it great with savory foods. You can also use it for your own holiday party as a hot mulled wine.

### Vitiano 2011, \$11

This blend has equal parts merlot, cabernet, and sangiovese grapes; the fruity notes are balanced with a nice tang. It goes well with smoked salmon, pasta, or wild game with fruit sauce.

### 14 Hands Hot to Trot White 2012, \$10

If you're heading to a dinner that features fish or other lighter fare, you can't go wrong with this bottle for the host and hostess. This white blend has a diverse array of fruity notes and ripe, peachy flavors, with enough acidity to give it some balance. And if you can't find the 2012 vintage, try another year.

## Kitchen Gadgets

### Vitamix 750 blender, \$590

The Professional Series 750 blender is a multifunction machine that can make hot soup and sauces or whip up ice cream, sorbet, and frozen drinks in seconds. The Vitamix features preset programs for making smoothies, desserts, and purées. This excellent and speedy performer also has a preset for cleaning.

### Black & Decker Fusion Blade Digital BL1820SG-P blender, \$50

Here's a great buy. The Black & Decker makes smoother smoothies with its four-function digital controls, two-tip stainless-steel blade, and a 30-second smoothie blend cycle. This two-in-one blender comes with a full-sized 48-ounce glass jar. A trade-off for the low price is average durability based on our tests.

### Dolce Gusto Esperta EDG656T Pod Coffeemaker, \$150

The "Single Serve" setting allows you to brew coffee, cappuccino, and other café-style beverages, and the automatic flow-stop technology allows you to customize brew strength and coffee size. The machine exclusively uses Nescafé Dolce Gusto capsules and is simple to operate: Choose a beverage capsule, slide it in, and the machine does the rest. It is height-adjustable and has a removable drip tray that accommodates tall glasses and travel mugs.

### Nespresso VertuoLine pod coffeemaker, \$300

This high-end appliance brews both coffee and espresso. The Nespresso uses its own capsules, which come in large for coffee and small for espresso. Both produce a rich crema. The machine offers fast heat-up time, and it tested Very Good for repeat cups. It is not compatible with other brands of capsules.

## Exercise Equipment

### Samsung Gear Fit Activity Tracker, \$150

The Gear Fit is the most creative and stylish of the Samsung smart watches. It's just as much an activity monitor as a watch. It also has an unconventional sideways display that's unlike any of the other watches we've tested. Like the other Gear watches, the Gear Fit works only with some Samsung devices.

### Concept2 Model D Rower, \$900

Our highest-rated rowing machine, the Concept2 operates smoothly and with little noise. It gets excellent marks from our testing labs for ergonomics and construction. The rower has preprogrammed workouts and games for all levels. And if you're planning to train for a rowing regatta, its electronics provide data on split times, stroke rate, and projected finish.





## GLUTEN-FREE

Gluten-free breads can be drier and more dense because gluten allows wheat bread to rise and hold its shape. It also provides texture.



## REGULAR

Regular bread often has less fat or sodium than gluten-free and is usually less expensive.





# The Truth About Gluten

The biggest trend in the food world shows no signs of slowing down. But will going gluten-free really make you healthier? Here are the six realities behind the labels.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GRANT CORNETT

**EIGHTEEN MONTHS AGO**, Ahmed Yearwood decided to go gluten-free. “A few years earlier, I’d given up processed foods and felt great,” the 41-year-old business owner recalls. “I figured cutting out gluten would make me feel even better. Everyone told me I’d have more energy and lose weight.” He lasted less than a month. “Everything was rice this and rice that—it was way too restrictive,” he says. “And I didn’t feel any different healthwise than I did before.” Yearwood reverted to his former eating habits. “Some of the grains I eat have gluten, but I still feel amazing.”

Just as fat was vilified in the 1990s and carbs have been scorned more recently, gluten—a protein found in wheat, barley, and rye—has become the latest dietary villain, blamed for everything from forgetfulness to joint pain to weight gain. Some people must avoid it because they have celiac disease—an autoimmune condition in which gluten causes potentially life-threatening intestinal damage—or gluten sensitivity. But less than 7 percent of Americans have those conditions.

According to a recent survey of more than 1,000 Americans by the Consumer Reports National Research Center, 63 percent thought that following a gluten-free diet would improve physical or mental health. About a third said they buy gluten-free products or try to avoid gluten. Among the top benefits they cited were better digestion and gastrointestinal function, healthy weight loss, increased energy, lower cholesterol, and a stronger immune system.

Yet there’s very limited research to substantiate any of those beliefs, notes Alessio Fasano, M.D., director of the Center for Celiac Research at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. Unless you have celiac disease or a true gluten sensitivity, there’s no clear medical reason to eliminate it, Fasano says. In fact, you might be doing your health a disservice. “When you cut out gluten completely, you can cut out foods that have valuable nutrients,” he says, “and you may end up adding more calories and fat into your diet.” Before you decide to ride the wave of this dietary trend, consider why it might not be a good idea.

1

## Gluten-Free Isn’t More Nutritious (And May Be Less So)

A quarter of the people in our survey thought gluten-free foods have more vitamins and minerals than other foods. But a recent Consumer Reports review of 81 products free of gluten across 12 categories revealed that they’re a mixed bag in terms of nutrition. “If you go completely gluten-free without the guidance of a nutritionist, you can develop deficiencies pretty quickly,” warns Laura Moore, R.D., a dietitian at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston. Many gluten-free foods aren’t enriched or fortified with nutrients such as folic acid and iron; the products that contain wheat flours are.

And it may come as a surprise to learn that ditching gluten often means adding sugar and fat. “Gluten adds oomph to foods—wheat, rye, and barley all have strong textures and flavors,” says Angela Lemond, a registered dietitian nutritionist

in Dallas and a spokeswoman for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Take it out of food that usually contains it and you might find that extra fat, sugar, or sodium have been used to compensate for the lack of taste. For example, the Walmart regular blueberry muffins we looked at had 340 calories, 17 grams of fat, and 24 grams of sugars. Gluten-free blueberry muffins from Whole Foods had 370 calories, 13 grams of fat, and 31 grams of sugars. Thomas' plain bagels had 270 calories and 2 grams of fat; Udi's plain gluten-free bagels had 290 calories and 9 fat grams. We found similar differences in all 12 food categories. It may not seem like much, but a few grams here and there can add up. A gluten-free bagel for breakfast and two slices of gluten-free bread at lunch means 10 to 15 additional grams of fat.

Gluten may actually be good for you. There's some evidence that the protein has beneficial effects on triglycerides and may help blood pressure. The fructan starches in wheat also support healthy bacteria in your digestive system, which in turn may reduce inflammation and promote health

in other ways. One small study found that healthy people who follow a gluten-free diet for a month have significantly lower levels of healthy bacteria.



**You'll Probably Increase Your Exposure to Arsenic**

About half of the gluten-free products Consumer Reports purchased contained rice flour or rice in another form. In 2012 we reported on our tests of more than 60 rices and packaged foods with rice (such as pasta, crackers, and infant cereal). We found measurable levels of arsenic in almost every product tested. Many of them contained worrisome levels of inorganic arsenic, a carcinogen. We've done more testing to see whether there are some types of rice we can recommend as lower in arsenic than others, and whether other grains (gluten-free ones like quinoa as well as bulgur and barley) contain significant

levels of arsenic. We've also done additional analyses of data from the Food and Drug Administration to determine arsenic levels in packaged foods that have rice. (See "Arsenic in Your Rice," on page 41.)

A 2009-10 study from the Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 17 percent of an average person's dietary exposure to inorganic arsenic comes from rice. That may be an underestimate, especially for people on a gluten-free diet. It's getting easier to find gluten-free packaged foods that don't contain rice (see "Gluten-Free Foods [With No Rice!]" That Passed Our Taste Test," on page 40), but the majority of them do. "If you don't have to give up gluten, the likelihood that you'll consume a significant amount of arsenic following a typical gluten-free diet should give you pause," says Michael Crupain, M.D., M.P.H., associate director of Consumer Safety and Sustainability at Consumer Reports. In a 2014 Spanish study, researchers estimated the arsenic intake of adults with celiac disease. They devised a daily menu that assumed someone would eat rice or a rice product high in arsenic at every meal and snack. A 128-pound woman following such a diet would get 192 micrograms of inorganic arsenic per week from rice and rice foods alone. For a man weighing 165 pounds, it would be 247 micrograms. "These levels are close to 10 times the amount of inorganic arsenic we think consumers should get in their diets on a weekly basis," Crupain says.



**You Might Gain Weight**

More than a third of Americans think that going gluten-free will help them slim down, according to our survey. But there's no evidence that doing so is a good weight-loss strategy; in fact, the opposite is often true. In a review of studies on nutrition and celiac disease published in the Journal of Medicinal Food, researchers said that a gluten-free diet "seems to increase the risk of overweight or obesity." The authors attributed that to the tendency for gluten-free foods to have more calories, sugars,

**How Foods Stack Up**

Gluten-free doesn't necessarily mean healthier

Walmart Blueberry Muffin	VS.	Whole Foods Gluten-Free Blueberry Muffin
3½ oz.	SERVING	3½ oz.
340	CALORIES	370
17	FAT (g)	13
340	SODIUM (mg)	390
1	FIBER (g)	1
24	SUGARS (g)	31
\$1	PRICE*	\$2

Bob's Red Mill Old Country Style Muesli	VS.	Bob's Red Mill Gluten-Free Muesli
¼ cup	SERVING	¼ cup
110	CALORIES	110
3	FAT (g)	3
0	SODIUM (mg)	0
4	FIBER (g)	2
5	SUGARS (g)	5
\$0.25	PRICE*	\$0.31

Thomas' Plain Bagel	VS.	Glutino Original New York Style Bagel
3½ oz.	SERVING	4 oz.
270	CALORIES	340
2	FAT (g)	7
460	SODIUM (mg)	660
2	FIBER (g)	1
7	SUGARS (g)	14
\$0.78	PRICE*	\$1.36

Nabisco Multigrain Wheat Thins	VS.	Nabisco Gluten-Free Rice Thins
14 crackers	SERVING	13 crackers
130	CALORIES	120
4	FAT (g)	2
190	SODIUM (mg)	115
3	FIBER (g)	2
3	SUGARS (g)	<1
\$0.31	PRICE*	\$0.57

\*Per serving.

and fat than their regular counterparts.

People who have celiac disease often gain weight when they go gluten-free, Fasano notes. That's because the damage gluten does to their small intestine prevents them from digesting food properly. Their digestive system heals after they have given up gluten and they're able to absorb key vitamins and nutrients from the foods they eat, including calories. In a study of 369 people with celiac disease, 42 percent of those who were overweight or obese lost weight after almost three years on a gluten-free diet, but 27 percent of them gained weight. In another study, 82 percent of those who were overweight at the start of it gained weight.

What about those who say they got rid of their belly when they ditched the wheat? There's no evidence that it was due to cutting gluten. "If people lose weight on a gluten-free diet, it might be because they're cutting calories, eating less processed food or sweets, or cutting portions of starchy foods like pasta and bread," says Samantha Heller, R.D., senior clinical nutritionist at NYU Langone Medical Center. "Instead of a cookie, they're eating an apple. Instead of pasta, they're eating a high-fiber, gluten-free whole grain like quinoa. Eating more fiber helps satiety and may aid in weight loss."

4

## You'll Pay More

Our research found that in every category except ready-to-eat cereal, the gluten-free versions were more expensive than their regular counterparts, about double the cost, and in some cases considerably more. For example, brownies made from the Duncan Hines regular mix cost about 8 cents per serving; Betty Crocker's gluten-free mix cost 28 cents per serving. The per-serving cost of Nabisco's Multigrain Wheat Thins is 31 cents; it's 57 cents for the company's gluten-free Sea Salt & Pepper Rice Thins. DiGiorno's Pizzeria Four Cheese frozen pizza is \$1.38 per serving; Freschetta's Gluten Free Thin & Crispy Four Cheese frozen pizza is \$2.50 per serving.

Why are foods without gluten more

expensive? "One factor in the price differential may be attributed to the added costs incurred by the manufacturer to meet certification and labeling regulations," explains Andrea Levario, executive director of the American Celiac Disease Alliance, a nonprofit group.

5

## You Might Miss a Serious Health Condition

If you're convinced that you have a problem with gluten, see a specialist to get a blood test to check for certain antibodies associated with celiac disease. You need to be eating gluten when the test is done to get a proper diagnosis, notes Peter Green, M.D., director of the Celiac Disease Center at Columbia University's medical school. If it's positive, then you should have an endoscopic biopsy of your small intestine to check for damage.

Your symptoms may also be a reaction to something other than gluten in your diet. "We commonly see patients who go on a gluten-free diet and feel better for a week or two," explains Joseph Murray, M.D., a gastroenterologist at the Mayo Clinic. "It may be the placebo effect or simply because they're eating less. For some, their symptoms come back, so they decide to drop another food group, and then a few weeks later, when they're still not feeling any better, they make an even more drastic change, like going completely vegan. By the time they enter my office, they're on a severely restricted diet and still have

symptoms." The reason? It often turns out their condition wasn't celiac disease or even gluten sensitivity at all, but another condition, such as irritable bowel syndrome.

Some people may benefit from something called the low-FODMAPs diet. The acronym stands for fermentable oligo-di-monosaccharides and polyols. They're the carbohydrates fructose (found in fruit and honey); lactose (in dairy); fructans (in wheat, garlic, and onions); galactans (in legumes) and polyols (sugar-free sweeteners); and stone fruit like apricots, cherries, and nectarines. The diet is complicated, however, and you might need to work with a GI specialist or nutritionist to help you figure out which foods to eat.

6

## You Might Still be Eating Gluten, Anyway

A recent study in the European Journal of Clinical Nutrition looked at 158 food products labeled gluten-free over three years. It found that about 5 percent—including some that were certified gluten-free—didn't meet the FDA's limit of less than 20 parts per million of gluten. The products were tested before the FDA's rule went into effect last summer. Still, that standard doesn't stipulate that manufacturers must test their products before making a gluten-free claim. "Cross-contamination can occur," Levario explains. "Gluten-free products may be manufactured on the same equipment used for wheat or other gluten-containing products." That can also

## Gluten-Free: The Common-Sense Version

If you must cut out gluten, be sure to do it the healthy way

**Get your grains.** Whether you're on a gluten-free diet or not, eating a variety of grains is healthy, so don't cut out whole grains. Replace wheat with amaranth, corn, millet, quinoa, teff, and the occasional serving of rice.

**Shop the grocery store perimeter.** Stick with naturally gluten-free whole foods: fruit, vegetables, lean meat and poultry, fish, most dairy, legumes, some grains, and nuts. **Read the label!** Minimize your intake of packaged

foods made with refined rice or potato flours; choose those with no-gluten, non-rice whole grains instead. Whenever you buy processed foods, keep an eye on the sugar, fat, and sodium content of the product.

happen when wheat is grown next to other grains. For example, oats are often grown in or near fields where wheat has been grown. As a result, wheat finds its way into the oat harvest and contaminates its subsequent products.

There's no way to completely protect yourself, but you can call manufacturers. "They should be transparent about what tests they use to determine whether a product is gluten-free," says the study's author, Tricia Thompson, M.S., R.D., founder of Gluten Free Watchdog. "If they insist that it's proprietary information, that should set off an alarm."

Another concern is that some products, particularly chips and energy bars, that carry a no-gluten claim contain malt, malt extract, or malt syrup, which are usually made from barley. As the study notes, "some manufactures mistakenly believe that the only criterion for labeling a food gluten-free is that it tests less than 20 ppm gluten." The FDA also stipulates that the food can't contain an ingredient derived from a gluten grain that has not been processed to remove the gluten. For people with celiac disease, inaccurate claims can be damaging. As always, it's best to read the ingredients list.

## The Meteoric Rise of Gluten-Free Marketing

Since 2012 sales of "gluten free" products have risen 63 percent, with 4,599 products introduced last year. For marketers, it's a gold mine. The label can lead to increased sales and premium pricing, says Richard George, a food marketing expert. "Perception is reality, and if consumers believe gluten-free products are better, then logic no longer matters." Here, some gluten-free items:

**Potato Chips** The No. 1 no-gluten snack. (They're naturally free of gluten.) Sales of products with the label have soared 456 percent since 2012.

**Not Just for People** Last year almost twice as many gluten-free pet foods were launched than breakfast cereals.

**Or for Eating** Beauty and hair products, and even household cleaners, carry the label.

Source: Mintel Group.

## Gluten-Free Foods (With No Rice!) That Passed Our Taste Test

Our professional tasters gave these a thumbs-up. Still, be mindful of nutrition.

### Flax 4 Life Wild Blueberry Muffin

Moist, dense, and dark brown. Flavorful and fairly complex, with oats, apple, cinnamon, and nutmeg. Denser and less cakelike than you might expect of a blueberry muffin; more like an apple-cinnamon muffin than a blueberry one.

**Nutritional Info**  
(1 muffin): 300 calories, 14 g fat, 420 mg sodium, 10 g fiber, 22 g sugars.

### Absolutely Gluten-Free Original Crackers

With nicely browned edges, this product looks and tastes like a typical water cracker. Toasted grain notes and moderate saltiness are well-balanced in this crispy and crunchy snack.

**Nutritional Info**  
(9 crackers): 60 calories, 2 g fat, 50 mg sodium, <1 g fiber, 0 g sugars.

### Maninis Papa's Pane Rustic Multigrain Bread Mix

We had to add ¼ tsp. sugar to the yeast to get good results with this mix. Moist, tender, and nutty with a flavorful crust. Better toasted.

**Nutritional Info**  
(¼ loaf): 120 calories, 4.5 g fat, 160 mg sodium, 2 g fiber, 1 g sugars.

### General Mills Corn Chex, Gluten Free

Crispy-crunchy woven squares taste of toasted corn. Straightforward taste, mild and clean.

**Nutritional Info**  
(1 cup): 120 calories, 0.5 g fat, 220 mg sodium, 2 g fiber, 3 g sugars.

### Lucy's Gluten-Free Chocolate Chip Cookies

Toasted oatmeal flavors give them more of an oatmeal-cookie taste. On the salty side, with slight-moderate sweetness; very light and crispy texture. Sodium is a bit high.

**Nutritional Info**  
(3 cookies): 130 calories, 5 g fat, 170 mg sodium, 2 g fiber, 12 g sugars.

### Bob's Red Mill Gluten-Free Pancake Mix

More browned-looking than a regular pancake. Mixed nonspecific grain flavors with toasted notes and slight sweetness. Overall, the flavor is better than the texture. Sodium was significantly higher than in similar mixes.

**Nutritional Info**  
(2 4-inch pancakes): 210 calories, 6 g fat, 700 mg sodium, 2 g fiber, 5 g sugars.

### Smart Flour Classic Cheese Pizza

Browned mozzarella cheese on a toasted, thin, crispy crust and a slightly sweet tomato sauce. Flavors are well-balanced overall. High in sodium.

**Nutritional Info**  
(½ pizza): 340 calories, 14 g fat, 830 mg sodium, 3 g fiber, 5 g sugars.

### XO Baking Company Fudge Brownie Gourmet Mix

Dense, moist; makes a fudgy rather than cakelike brownie. Calories and fat are similar to a regular mix.

**Nutritional Info**  
(1 brownie): 170 calories, 8 g fat, 95 mg sodium, 2 g fiber, 19 g sugars.

### Mission White Corn Tortillas

Light tan with brown flecks, they have a rubbery feel in the hand, but that doesn't translate to the palate. A basic corn tortilla.

**Nutritional Info**  
(2 tortillas): 100 calories, 2 g fat, 10 mg sodium, 3 g fiber, 2 g sugars.

### Live G Free Gluten-Free Penne Rigate 100% Corn Pasta (Aldi)

Mild corn flavor makes it a good substitute for regular pasta flavorwise, but it has a chalky texture. Adding sauce helped.

**Nutritional Info**  
(2 oz., dry): 190 calories, 0.5 g fat, 0 mg sodium, 2 g fiber, 1 g sugars.

### Against the Grain Gourmet Original Rolls

Slight eggy flavor; mild overall. Toasting improves texture and flavor. Relatively high in fat and sodium.

**Nutritional Info**  
(1 roll): 223 calories, 11 g fat, 272 mg sodium, 0 g fiber, 0 g sugars.

### Kind Plus Peanut Butter Dark Chocolate + Protein Bar

Lots of big pieces of nuts, with a dark-chocolate coating on the bottom and chocolate drizzle on top. Moderately sweet; a firm and chewy bar with some crunchiness from the nuts.

**Nutritional Info**  
(1 bar): 200 calories, 13 g fat, 40 mg sodium, 2.5 g fiber, 9 g sugars.

## Other Products Worth Trying

1. XO Baking Company Gluten-Free Pancake & Waffle Gourmet Mix
2. Glutino Original New York Style Bagels
3. Against the Grain Sesame Bagels
4. Maninis Classic Peasant Bread Mix Miracolo Pane

5. Kashi Organic Promise Indigo Morning breakfast cereal
6. Flax 4 Life Mini Flax Muffins, Chocolate Brownie
7. Bob's Red Mill Gluten-Free Brownie Mix
8. Mediterranean Snacks Lentil Crackers, Sea Salt
9. Against the Grain Gourmet

- Three Cheese frozen pizza
11. Sam Mills Pasta d'Oro 100% Corn Pasta Penne Rigate
12. Lärabar Peanut Butter Chocolate Chip snack bar
13. Nature Valley Roasted Nut Crunch Peanut Crunch snack bar



# Arsenic in Your Rice: The Latest

Two years after Consumer Reports released groundbreaking findings, we have new data and guidelines. They're important for everyone but especially for gluten avoiders.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GRANT CORNETT

**I**N LATE 2012 we released our original report on arsenic in rice, in which we found measurable levels in almost all of the 60 rice varieties and rice products we tested. Two of the biggest questions consumers asked us afterward: “Are there any types of rice that are lower in arsenic?” and “Do other grains, such as quinoa, contain arsenic, too?” We now have the answers.

Anyone who eats rice needs to be aware that they may be exposing themselves to inorganic arsenic (IA), a carcinogen. But people who avoid gluten need to be *especially* alert because so many gluten-free products contain rice.

Our latest tests determined that the

IA content of rice varies greatly depending on the type of rice and where it was grown. This time around we also looked at grains other than rice—gluten-free ones such as amaranth and quinoa, as well as wheat. As a whole, those grains were lower in arsenic than rice.

Arsenic has two chemical forms, inorganic and organic (which can be less toxic), and is naturally part of the minerals in the earth's crust. Arsenic also has been released into the environment though the use of pesticides and poultry fertilizer. (Chickens can be fed arsenic.) Therefore, it's in soil and water. Rice tends to absorb arsenic more readily than many other plants.

In very large amounts, arsenic can kill quickly. But of greater concern for most people is that regular exposure to small amounts can increase the risk of bladder, lung, and skin cancer, as well as heart disease and type 2 diabetes.



## What We Found

Scientists at our Food Safety and Sustainability Center tested 128 samples of basmati, jasmine, and sushi rice for arsenic. We combined the data with the results of

## A Variety of Grains

Basmati rice from California is the lowest in arsenic.

Quinoa is a low-arsenic grain that's a good source of protein.

Low-arsenic buckwheat isn't related to wheat, and it's gluten-free.



Rices from Texas are among the highest in arsenic.

Brown rices tend to have more arsenic than white rices of the same type.

Millet can cook up fluffy like rice but has far less arsenic.

our 2012 tests and data from the Food and Drug Administration’s analysis of arsenic in rice for a total of 697 samples of rice. We also looked at the IA levels in 114 samples of nonrice grains. Next, we analyzed FDA data on the IA content of 656 processed rice-containing products (many gluten-

free). Our findings and advice:

- **There’s no federal limit** for arsenic in rice or rice products. Since 2012, our food-safety experts have been calling on the FDA to set one. Meanwhile, use our point system (below) to reduce your arsenic exposure without eliminating rice.

- **White basmati rice** from California, India, and Pakistan, and sushi rice from the U.S. on average has half of the IA amount of most other types of rice.
- Our findings led us to treat those specific rices from those areas differently from other types of rice and rices grown in other regions. Based on our data, we calculated that consumers could have about twice as many weekly servings as we previously recommended if that was the only rice product someone ate. For adults, that adds up to 4½ servings per week; children could have 2¾ servings.
- **Brown rice** has 80 percent more IA on average than white rice of the same type. Arsenic accumulates in the grain’s outer layers, which are removed to make white rice. Brown has more nutrients, though, so you shouldn’t switch entirely to white. Brown basmati from California, India, or Pakistan is the best choice; it has about a third less IA than other brown rices.
- **All types of rice** (except sushi and quick cooking) with a label indicating that it’s from the U.S., Arkansas, Louisiana, or Texas had the highest levels of IA in our tests. For instance, white rices from California have 38 percent less IA than white rices from other parts of the country.
- **Organic rice** takes up arsenic the same way conventional does, so don’t rely on organic to have less arsenic.
- **The gluten-free grains** amaranth, buckwheat, millet, and polenta or grits had negligible levels of IA. Bulgur, barley, and farro, which contain gluten, also have very little arsenic.
- **Quinoa** (also gluten-free), had average IA levels comparable to those of other alternative grains. But some samples had quite a bit more. Though they were still much lower than any of the rices, those spikes illustrate the importance of varying the types of grains you eat.
- **Children should rarely eat** hot rice cereal or rice pasta. Our analysis found that those foods can have much more IA than our 2012 data showed. Just one serving of either could put kids over the maximum amount of rice they should have in a week. Rice cakes supply close to the weekly limit in one serving. Rice drinks are also high in arsenic, and children younger than 5 shouldn’t drink them instead of milk.

# The New Rice Rules: 7 Points per Week

We used our new data and analysis to assign a point value to types of rice foods. On average, we recommend getting no more than 7 points per week. Risk analysis is based on weight, so a serving of any food will give children more points than adults.

Products	Serving Size	Child Points <sup>1</sup>	Adult Points <sup>1</sup>
Infant Rice Cereal	¼ cup uncooked	1¼	NA
Rice Cereal, Hot	¼ cup uncooked	8¼	3½
Rice Cereal, Ready to Eat	1 cup	4½	2¼
Rice Drinks	1 cup	4	2
White Basmati <sup>2</sup> or Sushi Rice	¼ cup uncooked	2½	1½
All Other Rice	¼ cup uncooked	5½	3½
Rice Pasta	2 ounces uncooked	7¼	3
Rice Cakes	1 to 3 rice cakes	6¼	2½
Rice Crackers	16 to 18 crackers	2¾	1¼
Cake or Muffin Mix	2 to 3 ounces	3¾	1½
Brownie Mix	1 to 2 ounces	1¼	½
Cookies	1 to 3 cookies	1¼	¾
Rice Pudding	about ½ cup	1¼	¾
Pie- or Pizza-Crust Mix	2 ounces	2	1
Snack Bars (Cereal, Granola, or Energy)	1- to 2-ounce bar	2¾	1¼

<sup>1</sup> To afford the most protection, we used the arsenic levels at the highest end of the range in our analysis for each food. <sup>2</sup> From California, India, or Pakistan.

# Lab TESTS

## EASY DOES IT

Juicers that are a pain to operate tend not to stay busy for long. That's why ease of use is a big part of our test.

## HEY, BIG MOUTH!

The top machines feature a large feeding tube, so you won't have to spend time cutting up fruits and veggies.

## QUIET ZONE?

Some juicers are noisier than others, so make sure you get one that suits your household.

## JUICED UP

Juicers are some of the coolest appliances this year, and the Juiceman JM8000S is No. 1 in our Ratings. See page 44.

PHOTOGRAPH  
BY GRANT CORNETT





## The Juice Is Loose

Drink your veggies: These machines give your greens a whirl.

**IF 2014 WAS THE YEAR** of the blender, driven by smoothie lovers, juicers could share the spotlight in 2015. Sales have been surging as more people look to bring the juice-bar experience home. Follow the hashtag #juicing, and you'll be inundated with recipes, from conventional carrot and apple to trendy green juices (Martha Stewart starts every morning with one) packed with kale, pears, cucumbers, and the like.

Though the health benefits of juicing tend to be a little overblown—there's no substitute

for whole fruits and vegetables—a juicer can definitely add more vitamins, minerals, and disease-fighting substances to your daily diet. But only if you use it every day, of course. And there's the, er, fruit fly in the ointment. Some of the juicers we tested were so complicated to operate and hard to clean that they'd probably end up collecting dust in a dark corner of your kitchen cabinets.

But we did find capable models from the two main types. Juice extractors, also known as centrifugal juicers, use a rapidly whirling disk to cut fruit or vegetables into tiny pieces that are then spun to separate the juice from the pulp. Auger-style juicers, also called masticating or cold-press juicers, work by slowly crushing and mashing the fruits and vegetables. There are pros and cons to each, so see our juicer profiles, at right, to find the juicer that's just right for you.



Cuisinart  
CJE-1000

## The Best Juicer for Your Needs

### FOR FIRST-TIME JUICERS: EXTRACTOR-STYLE

- **A1 Juiceman** \$100
- **A2 Cuisinart** \$150

Juice extractors are easy to use, and they're generally less expensive than auger-style machines, two reasons we recommend them for juicing novices. The top-rated **A1** features a large feed tube the size of a tennis ball, which means you won't have to spend a lot of time cutting up your fruit and veggies. Plus its blades can handle hard produce, such as carrots and beets. **A2** performed almost as well, and this machine is a bit quieter, which you might appreciate if there's a baby sleeping in the next room. Because of the high speed of their cutting blades, both models turned out juice that was fairly frothy in our tests.

### FOR NUTRITION NUTS: AUGER-STYLE

- **B1 Kuvings** \$430
- **B4 Fagor** \$200

Because they slowly crush produce, the auger-style juicers we tested left behind more pulp, and that can make for a healthier, more fiber-packed juice. They're also better suited to wheatgrass and leafy vegetables. Best of the bunch is the **B1**, which features a wide feed tube and produced a nice volume of froth-free juice. **B4** has a smaller feed tube, but if you don't mind the extra prep work, its juice output was among the best of all tested models, plus it's well-priced for an auger-style juicer. Both models come with a reverse button for when produce gets jammed in their masticating augers.

### FOR MULTITASKERS

- **B3 Omega** \$330

This auger-style juicer also scored big for juice output, and it's different from other juicers in that it comes with attachments for fresh pasta, coffee beans, almond butter, and more. We cranked out a few pasta batches, and it worked as promised. Note that you have to make the dough separately, so it's not as handy as a dedicated pasta maker that mixes, kneads, and extrudes all in one.

## Ratings: Juicers

Scores in context: Of the 13 juicers tested, the highest scored 75; the lowest, 49. Recommended models offer top performance and specific strengths.

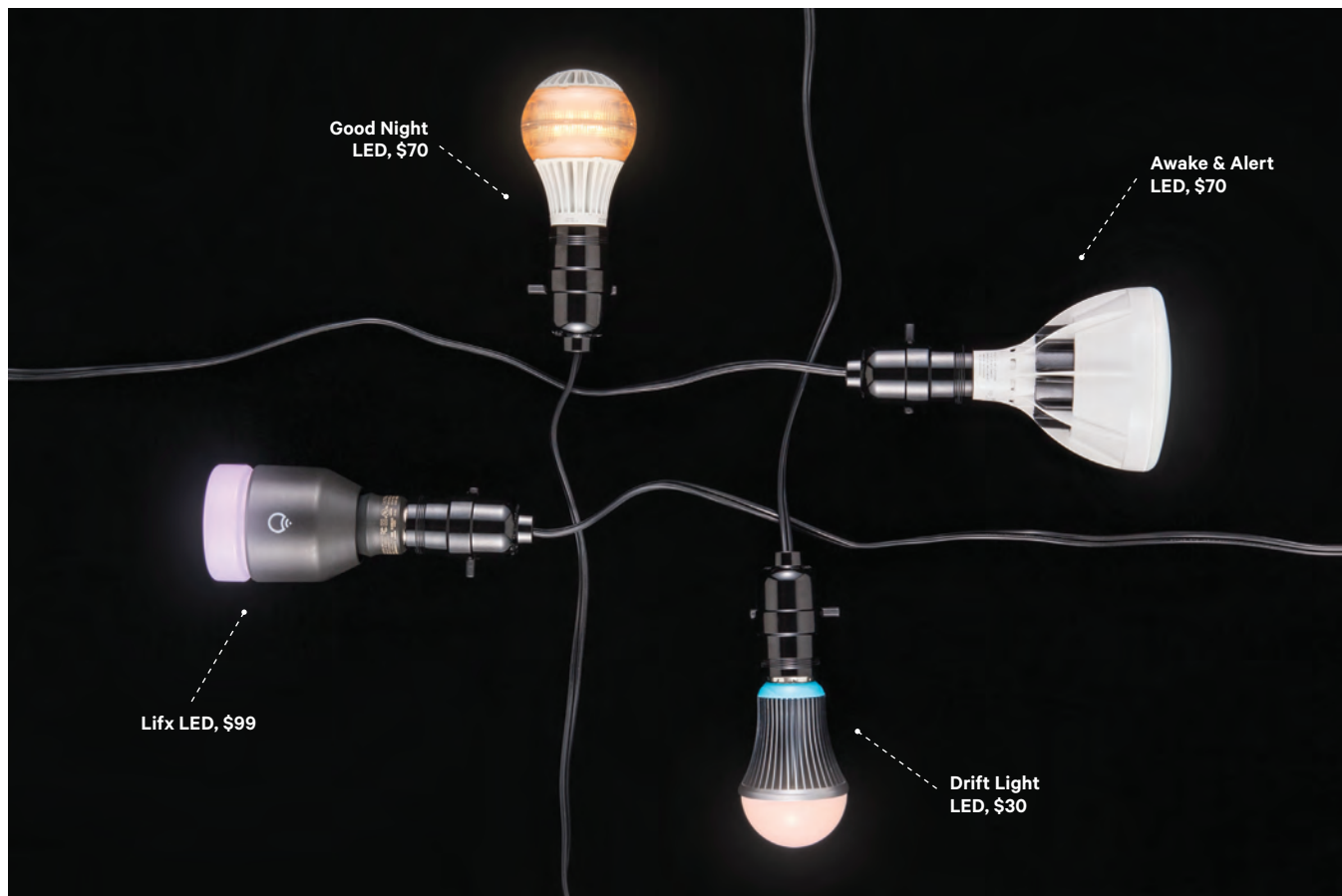
☒ Recommended ☒ Excellent ☐ Very Good ☐ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Poor

### A. EXTRACTOR

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS			
					Juice Performance	Ease of Use	Convenience Features	Noise
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	<b>Juiceman JM8000S</b>	\$100	75	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	2	<b>Cuisinart CJE-1000</b>	\$150	68	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
	3	<b>Dash Premium JB001CM</b>	\$140	68	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	4	<b>Fusion Whisper Quiet</b>	\$120	63	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
	5	<b>Bella High Power Juice Extractor</b>	\$70	58	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	6	<b>Juice Bullet NJB0801</b>	\$80	53	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
	7	<b>Oster Juice &amp; Blend 2 Go</b>	\$50	50	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	8	<b>Black &amp; Decker JE2200B</b>	\$50	49	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### B. AUGER

Rec.	Rank	BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE	TEST RESULTS			
					Juice Performance	Ease of Use	Convenience Features	Noise
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	<b>Kuvings Whole Slow B6000</b>	\$430	71	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
	2	<b>Hurom HH-Premium</b>	\$300	64	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
	3	<b>Omega NC900HDC</b>	\$330	61	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
	4	<b>Fagor Platino 967010008</b>	\$200	61	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
	5	<b>Bella NutriPro Cold Press 13695</b>	\$250	56	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>



## Lightbulbs That Want to Change Your Mood

These new LEDs claim that they'll help you sleep, boost your energy, or just help you have a good time

**BULBS USED TO BE BORING.** Light on. Light off. Dimming was about as high tech as they got. But the LEDs pictured above have the potential to be much more, thanks to semiconductor chips and electronic circuitry. Some can alter the color of the light they shine, and others are claimed to help adjust your energy levels and mood. We put their unique claims through some tests, checked with sleep and lighting experts, and looked at how good they are as standard bulbs. Plus we list the best of our fully tested regular LEDs. Just like other electronics-based products, LED prices are falling as demand and performance increase.

## Sleep Like an Astronaut

The Definitely Digital Good Night LED and the Awake & Alert LED are used to help astronauts sleep or remain alert in space, claims Lighting Science, their manufacturer. Lighting Science LEDs were used in NASA ground-based studies, and the manufacturer helped to develop the LED lighting system scheduled for installation in the International Space Station in 2016, according to NASA's Smith Johnston, M.D. But NASA won't say which LEDs it actually uses in space.

For terrestrials, the Good Night LED is promised to help you sleep because it emits less blue light than other LEDs. The amount of blue light is key here: Any light can suppress melatonin, the hormone that facilitates sleep, but human eyes are especially sensitive to blue.

As LEDs become commonplace, it helps to know that they give off more blue light than other types of bulbs, such as CFLs and incandescents, says Terry McGowan, director of engineering for the American Lighting

Association, a trade group. CFLs emit some blue light and incandescents emit little, he adds. Consumer Reports found that the Good Night LED does have significantly lower blue-light levels than other LEDs.

And while you're prepping yourself for dreamland, be sure to minimize your exposure to all sources of blue light, our health experts say. That includes powering off smart phones, TVs, and other electronics with a bright screen a few hours before turning in.

When you're not trying to sleep, the Good Night—which can substitute for a 60-watt incandescent—casts a bright, warm light that the manufacturer claims will last 25,000 hours, or about 23 years when on for 3 hours per day.

Trying to wake up? The Awake & Alert LED, on the other hand, is claimed to have elevated levels of blue light, which our tests confirmed. The 65-watt BR30 replacement LED was almost as bright as stated but gave off a light that was a bit more bluish white than the box stated. Bluish light can be unflattering.

At \$70 each, the price of those bulbs is certainly out of this world.

## How to Read a Label

**Great Value** **60** Watt Equivalent **11** Actual Watts

Tells you what wattage and type of incandescent bulb this replaces.

Lumens help you compare the brightness of any types of bulb.

Features such as dimmability and outdoor use are noted.

‘Warm’ matches the yellow light color of an incandescent.

**INCANDESCENT REPLACEMENT DIMMABLE LONG LIFE 22.8 YRS**

**Lighting Facts**

Per Bulb

<b>Brightness</b>	800 lumens
<b>Estimated Yearly Energy Cost</b>	\$1.32
Based on 3 hrs/day, 11¢/kWh. Cost depends on rates and use	
<b>Life</b>	22.8 years
Based on 3 hrs/day	
<b>Light Appearance</b>	Warm 2700 K
<b>Energy Used</b>	11 watts

**Soft White LED A19**

**save up to \$134**

Brightness 800 lumens

Estimated Energy Cost \$1.32 per year

over the lifetime of this bulb vs incandescent

## Drift Off Gradually

**SAFFRON'S DRIFT LIGHT LED**, \$30, is claimed to promote healthy sleep because its 37-minute auto-dimming feature helps your body gradually shift from light to dark. In “midnight mode” our tests found that it dimmed completely over 37 minutes. What’s so special about 37? The company says that’s the average duration of a sunset. It replaces a 40-watt general-purpose incandescent, so it’s not very bright to begin with. Our tests found that it wasn’t even as bright as claimed in “daylight mode,” and it cast a white light. Claimed life is 30,000 hours. Evidence is lacking on the benefits of gradually dimming lights in preparation for sleep, according to the researchers we interviewed. They also questioned the magic of 37 minutes because the length of twilight varies by latitude.

## LEDs to Dance To

**FEW LIGHTBULBS COME WITH** as good a backstory as the Lixf. It was created by a former rock drummer/electrician/app developer. Phil Bosua pitched the idea for his bulb in a video on crowdfunding site Kickstarter in 2012. Funders

pledged \$1.3 million in six days. Fast-forward to today, and Lixf color-changing LEDs, which connect to a Wi-Fi network and can be controlled by a smart phone, are for sale.

We installed the smart-phone app, set up the bulbs with a Wi-Fi network, and put Lixf through its paces. We easily changed the light to any color we wanted and played with some effects—the light flickered like a candle in candle mode, and the lava light cycled through intense colors. The website says that more features are coming via free app updates. But at \$99 per bulb, it’s an expensive way to light a house or even a room—and let’s face it, not every day is a party. It costs even more per bulb than the Philips Hue “smart” lightbulb system, which includes three bulbs and a controller for \$190. Hue can do many of the same things, but its bulbs were only as bright as a 40-watt bulb in our past tests.

Oh, the Lixf is a lightbulb, too. It’s dimmable, almost as bright as a 75-watt incandescent, and casts light like a floodlight. It defaults to bright white when first turned on but can be adjusted to the warm tones that it claims. Lixf claims it uses 9 to 18 watts, depending on the setting, and lasts 40,000 hours. Lixf says that it can also be connected to a Nest Thermostat. When the Nest switches to “away mode,” the Lixf bulb or bulbs turn on and off to create a lived-in look. You can still use a light switch to turn on the bulb, but what fun is that?

## CR Best Buy LEDs and CFLs

As LED prices drop, it takes less time to earn back what you paid for them. These LEDs and CFLs are all CR Best Buys that combine impressive or even superb performance and value, while using 75 to 85 percent less energy than the incandescents they replace.

They will trim your electric bill by about \$60 (for CFLs) to up to \$240 (for LEDs) per bulb over their lifetimes. Savings are greater where electricity is expensive. Hawaii has the highest rates in the country. Electricity is also expensive in Alaska, California, and New York, and in New England, according to the Department of Energy. Bragging rights go to Louisiana, which has the lowest rates.

LEDs outperform CFLs in our tests and use slightly less energy. And unlike CFLs, LEDs instantly brighten even outdoors in frigid temperatures, and turning them on and off frequently doesn’t shorten their life.

### FOR LAMPS AND CEILING FIXTURES

**These replace a 60-watt incandescent:**

- Feit Electric A19/OM/800/LED, \$9
- Philips A19 11W 60W Soft White 424382, \$12
- Great Value 60W Soft White A19 Dimmable LED (Walmart), \$10
- Cree 9.5-Watt (60W) A19 Warm White Dimmable LED, \$8.50
- Great Value 14W 60W Soft White CFL (Walmart), \$1.25

**These replace 100-watt bulbs:**

- Philips A21 19W 100W Soft White LED 432195, \$15
- Utilitech 100W Soft White CFL (Lowe’s), \$2.50
- Feit Electric Ecobulb Plus 100W CFL, \$2.33

### FOR RECESSED AND TRACK LIGHTS

**These LEDs replace 65- to 75-watt flood bulbs:**

- Great Value 65W BR30 Soft White Dimmable (Walmart), \$11
- Utilitech 13-Watt (75W) BR30 Soft White Outdoor Flood (Lowe’s), \$12
- Feit Electric BR30 Dimmable, \$9
- MaxLite 10 Watt BR30, \$11

**TIP** LEDs usually don’t burn out; they dim over time. The claimed life you see on the box is an estimate of when brightness will decrease by 30 percent. Some LEDs are supposed to be bright enough to be useful for almost 23 years when on 3 hours per day. But save your receipts. Energy Star LEDs must have at least a three-year warranty, and we’ve seen five- and 10-year warranties, too.



# Road REPORT

## WORTH IT

Pricey cars earned generally higher marks from owners—but not all luxury cars scored well.

## GREEN IS IN

Hybrid cars and electrics, such as the Tesla Model S, were tops in owner satisfaction.

## TOP BRANDS

After Tesla, the leading brands were Porsche and Audi.



## NOW, THAT'S SATISFYING

Our Annual Owner Satisfaction Survey polled subscribers on the cars that make them happy. Tesla was No. 1. See all of the winners on page 48.

## Would You Buy Your Car Again?

Our annual owner-satisfaction survey asked that question. Drivers saying yes tend to have pricey cars. But ‘fun to drive’ counts for a lot, too.

**OUR SUBSCRIBERS KNOW** what they want: *everything*. They want fun cars with a touch of luxury that do what’s expected.

That’s what we found in Consumer Reports’ annual owner-satisfaction survey, covering 350,000 vehicles from one to three years old.

We asked subscribers whether they would get the same car all over again, and to consider attributes such as styling, comfort, features, cargo space, fuel economy, maintenance and repair costs, overall value, and driving dynamics. Owners of a sporty, luxurious, or fuel-efficient hybrid or electric- or diesel-powered vehicle were most likely to answer “definitely yes.”

With a single model that checks all of those boxes, Tesla Motors has built a rabid following since the car’s 2012 launch, reflected in 98 percent of Model S owners saying they would definitely purchase it again. Not only is the Tesla roomy, comfortable, and a lot of fun to drive, but it also has low operating costs—returning the equivalent of 84 mpg (a consolation, of sorts, for the car’s \$90,000-plus price).

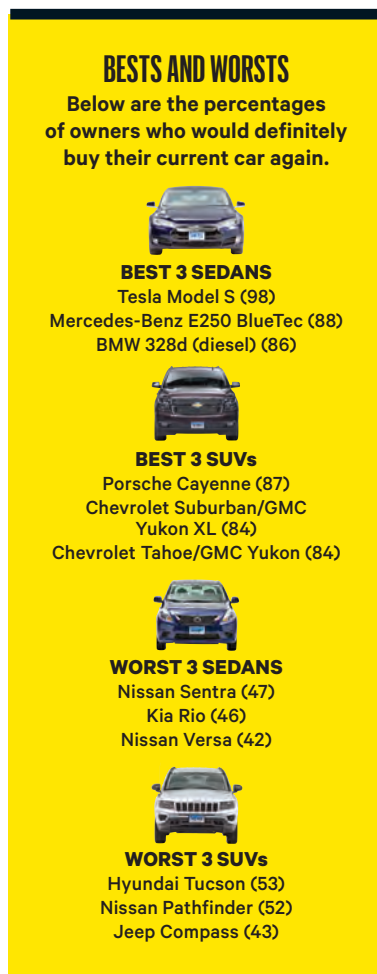
Next-most-satisfying were four sports cars: The Chevrolet Corvette and a trio of German models from Stuttgart—the Porsche Cayman, Boxster, and 911.

Rounding out the top 10 were the Mercedes-Benz E250 BlueTec diesel, Porsche Cayenne SUV, BMW 328d (another diesel), muscular Dodge Challenger V-8, and Chevrolet Volt plug-in hybrid.

The unhappy car owner is rarer than you might think: Of the 280-plus models that we rated in the survey, only four vehicles had less than 50 percent of owners who would “definitely” purchase the car again.

Across all vehicles, the average satisfaction rate was about 70 percent.

And it seems our subscribers agree with our recommendations: All but two of the top 10 vehicles are “recommended” in



Consumer Reports’ overall Ratings of cars we tested. The exceptions: the Porsche Cayman, which we haven’t tested, and the Mercedes-Benz E250 BlueTec, which doesn’t have sufficient reliability data.

When given a choice between traditional gas engines and alternative powertrains, owners rank hybrids, electric cars, and diesels as the most satisfying choices in almost every category in which they compete. The Chevrolet Volt and Toyota Prius topped our lists of compact cars, with 85 and 82 percent of buyers saying they would buy those

cars again. Among midsize sedans, the Honda Accord Hybrid and Ford Fusion Energi led the pack.

Fuel-efficient diesels also proved popular. The Mercedes-Benz E250 BlueTec diesel finished second to the Tesla among fuel-efficient cars, and 86 percent of BMW 328d buyers would buy another. Volkswagen’s Passat, Beetle, and Jetta diesel variants also ranked high in their categories. In the pickup-truck category, all of the top scorers have diesel engines.

As far as fuel economy, it’s about meeting expectations. Owners were as happy with Chevrolet Corvettes as with four-cylinder Nissan Altimas. People recognize what they are getting into; less than 10 percent of owners felt OK about their thirsty Nissan Titans and Ford heavy-duty pickups.

SUV buyers expressed a preference for spacious, capable vehicles that are pleasant to drive, easy to see out of, and as efficient as possible. That includes the Porsche Cayenne (87 percent) in luxury SUVs, Subaru Forester (83) among small SUVs, Toyota Highlander V-6 (82) in midsize SUVs, and Chevrolet Suburban and Tahoe and their GMC twins (84) in large SUVs.

You might think that more cargo space would be more satisfying. But it’s more about perceptions. The smartly packaged Tesla was considered just as satisfying as beasts of burden such as the Suburban and Yukon XL. Hybrids with batteries that rob space in the trunk were the biggest disappointments. Only 18 percent of owners were very satisfied with the space in the Honda Accord Hybrid and just 7 percent with the Ford Fusion Energi.

But it turns out that prestige can take a backseat to value. Hyundai Equus buyers felt the most satisfied, with 88 percent saying they got what they expected for the price. Corvette owners felt they were getting exotic-car performance at a relatively budget price. But those who own the Range Rover Evoque, Mini Countryman, Infiniti QX70, and various iterations of the BMW 3 Series found the least value for their money—those models satisfied barely 50 percent of owners.

# ROAD REPORT: OWNER SATISFACTION

## How Cars Compare

Luxury cars are more satisfying on the whole, our subscribers report. When we broke down owner-satisfaction results by brand, the six most satisfying makes were all luxury brands, led by Tesla. Perhaps it's no surprise, too, that

Porsche, Audi, Mercedes-Benz, Lexus, and Jaguar owners felt that they've made it and bought the car of their dreams.

The top-scoring mainstream brands were Subaru, Ram, Dodge, Chrysler, Honda,

Chevrolet, and Mazda.

Not all luxury brands proved very satisfying; Cadillac, Acura, and Infiniti all ranked in the bottom half. The least satisfying brands were Buick, Hyundai, Kia, Nissan, and Mitsubishi.

Mazda6



Chevrolet Corvette Stingray



### HYBRIDS/ELECTRIC CARS

Make & Model	Definitely Buy Again
Tesla Model S	98%
Chevrolet Volt	85
Honda Accord Hybrid*	85
Ford Fusion Energi	84
Toyota Prius	82
Lexus ES 300h Hybrid	81
Toyota Avalon Hybrid	80
Ford C-Max Energi	79
Toyota Camry Hybrid	78
Nissan Leaf	77
Toyota Prius V	77
Ford Fusion Hybrid	74
Lincoln MKZ Hybrid	74
Toyota Prius C	73
Honda CR-Z	72
Ford C-Max Hybrid	70
Toyota Prius Plug-in Hybrid	69
Honda Civic Hybrid	68
Volkswagen Jetta Hybrid	66
Lexus CT 200h	66
Hyundai Sonata Hybrid	60
Kia Optima Hybrid	56

### COMPACT CARS

Make & Model	Definitely Buy Again
Mazda3 (2.5L)*	79%
Mazda3 (2.0L)*	77
Volkswagen Beetle TDI	76
Volkswagen Jetta TDI	72
Toyota Corolla*	71
Kia Forte*	70
Dodge Dart (2.0L)	70
Honda Civic Coupe	70
Fiat 500L*	69
Volkswagen Beetle (2.0T)	68
Dodge Dart (1.4T)*	68
Subaru Impreza	68
Kia Soul*	67
Chevrolet Cruze (1.4T)	65
Honda Civic Sedan	65
Scion xB	63
Volkswagen Jetta (1.8T)*	61
Hyundai Elantra Sedan	60
Hyundai Elantra GT	57
Chevrolet Cruze (1.8L)	56
Ford Focus	54
Volkswagen Jetta (4-cyl., nonturbo)	51
Nissan Sentra	47

### SUBCOMPACT CARS

Make & Model	Definitely Buy Again
Fiat 500	64%
Chevrolet Sonic	62
Chevrolet Spark	62
Nissan Versa Note*	60
Smart ForTwo	58
Toyota Yaris	57
Hyundai Veloster	56
Mazda2	56
Hyundai Accent	55
Ford Fiesta	51
Kia Rio	46
Nissan Versa Sedan	42

### COUPES AND CONVERTIBLES

Make & Model	Definitely Buy Again
Audi S5	79%
Audi A5	77
Honda Accord Coupe (V6)	75
BMW 4 Series*	75
Honda Accord Coupe (4-cyl.)	74
Volkswagen Eos	73
Mercedes-Benz E-Class Coupe & Convertible	71
Lexus IS Convertible	70
Infiniti Q60	68
BMW 6 Series	62

### MIDSIZE CARS

Make & Model	Definitely Buy Again
Mazda6*	81%
Volkswagen Passat TDI	80
Honda Accord Sedan (4-cyl.)	76
Honda Accord Sedan (V6)	73
Ford Fusion (2.0L EcoBoost)	71
Kia Optima (turbo)	70
Ford Fusion (1.5L EcoBoost)	68
Toyota Camry	68
Volkswagen Passat (1.8T)*	65
Chevrolet Malibu (4-cyl.)	64
Kia Optima (4-cyl.)	62
Ford Fusion (4-cyl., nonturbo)	62
Nissan Altima	59
Volkswagen Passat (V6)	56

### SPORTY CARS

Make & Model	Definitely Buy Again
Chevrolet Corvette Stingray*	95%
Porsche Cayman	91
Porsche Boxster	91
Porsche 911	88
Dodge Challenger (V8)	86
Chevrolet Camaro (V8)	84
Mazda MX-5 Miata	84
Mercedes-Benz SL	80
BMW Z4	80
Audi S4	78
Fiat 500 Abarth*	74
Dodge Challenger (V6)	73
Scion FR-S	71
Subaru BRZ	71
Mercedes-Benz SLK	70
Chevrolet Camaro (V6)	70
Honda Civic Si	69
Ford Focus ST	68
Nissan 370Z	66
Hyundai Genesis Coupe	58

### LUXURY COMPACT CARS

Make & Model	Definitely Buy Again
BMW 328d (diesel)*	86%
BMW 335i	76
Lexus IS 250 Sedan*	73
Audi A4	71
Volvo S60	71
BMW 320i, 328i (AWD)	68
Lexus IS 350 Sedan*	68
Cadillac ATS (V6)	67
BMW 320i, 328i (RWD)	66
Infiniti G Sedan	65
Buick Regal	64
Buick Verano	63
Cadillac ATS (turbo)	63
Volkswagen CC	62
Mercedes-Benz CLA 250*	61
Acura ILX	57
Cadillac ATS (4-cyl.)	56
Infiniti Q50 (V6)*	54

### LUXURY MIDSIZED/ LARGE CARS

Make & Model	Definitely Buy Again
Mercedes-Benz E-Class Sedan (diesel)*	88%
Audi A7	84
Audi A8	84
Audi A6	84
Cadillac CTS (V6)*	83
Lexus LS	81
Mercedes-Benz E-Class Sedan (V8)	81
Mercedes-Benz S-Class	81
BMW 5 Series (V8)	81
Hyundai Equus	80
Lincoln MKZ (V6)	80
Porsche Panamera	80
Lexus ES (V6)	79
Mercedes-Benz CLS	78
Jaguar XJ	77
Mercedes-Benz E-Class Sedan (V6)	75
Jaguar XF	74
Lexus GS (V6)	74
Volvo S80	73
Lincoln MKZ (4-cyl., EcoBoost)	71
BMW 5 Series (6-cyl.)	70
Infiniti Q70	68
BMW 5 Series (4-cyl.)	68
BMW 7 Series	66
Lincoln MKS	66
Cadillac XTS	66
Acura RLX*	59

4

The number of hybrids and electrics that topped their categories. Those are the Toyota Prius C subcompact, the Chevrolet Volt compact, the Honda Accord Hybrid midsize sedan, and the Tesla Model S.

\*Data based on one model year only.



# ROAD REPORT: OWNER SATISFACTION

## How Cars Compare

Continued

Subaru Forester



Dodge Charger V8



### LARGE CARS

Make & Model	Definitely Buy Again
Dodge Charger (V8)	82%
Chevrolet Impala (V6)*	80
Ford Taurus SHO	78
Chrysler 300 (V8)	77
Dodge Charger (V6)	76
Chrysler 300 (V6)	75
Kia Cadenza*	71
Toyota Avalon (V6)	69
Hyundai Azera	69
Nissan Maxima	69
Chevrolet Impala (4-cyl.)*	67
Ford Taurus (FWD)	65
Buick LaCrosse (V6)	62
Buick LaCrosse (4-cyl.)	53

### LARGE SUVs

Make & Model	Definitely Buy Again
Chevrolet Suburban*	84%
GMC Yukon XL*	84
Chevrolet Tahoe*	84
GMC Yukon*	84
Dodge Durango (V8)*	81
Ford Flex (V6)	80
Ford Flex EcoBoost	72
Dodge Durango (V6)*	71
Toyota Sequoia	69
Chevrolet Traverse	66
GMC Acadia	63
Nissan Armada	57

### LUXURY COMPACT SUVs

Make & Model	Definitely Buy Again
Audi Q5 (diesel)*	84%
Mercedes-Benz GLK (diesel)	82
Audi Q5 (gas)	77
Mercedes-Benz GLK (V6)	72
BMW X3 (4-cyl.)	71
Acura RDX	70
Volvo XC60 (6-cyl.)	68
BMW X3 (6-cyl.)	68
Buick Encore	67
Cadillac SRX	66
Infiniti QX50	65
BMW X1	64
Land Rover Range Rover Evoque	63

### SMALL SUVs

Make & Model	Definitely Buy Again
Subaru Forester (nonturbo)*	83%
Subaru Forester (turbo)*	80
Jeep Cherokee (V6)*	77
Mazda CX-5 (2.5L)	76
Honda CR-V	71
Subaru XV Crosstrek	70
Nissan Rogue*	68
Mazda CX-5 (2.0L)	66
Mini Countryman	66
Ford Escape (2.0L EcoBoost)	64
Toyota RAV4	64
Volkswagen Tiguan	61
Nissan Juke	58
Jeep Cherokee (4-cyl.)*	58
Kia Sportage	57
Mitsubishi Outlander*	55
Jeep Patriot	55
Mitsubishi Outlander Sport	55
Ford Escape (1.6L EcoBoost)	54
Ford Escape (4-cyl., nonturbo)	54
Hyundai Tucson	53
Jeep Compass	43

### LUXURY MIDSIZED/ LARGE SUVs

Make & Model	Definitely Buy Again
Porsche Cayenne	87%
Lexus LX	84
Volkswagen Touareg	80
Lexus RX	78
Lexus RX Hybrid	78
Land Rover Range Rover Sport*	76
Audi Q7	76
Lexus GX	75
Acura MDX*	75
Mercedes-Benz GL-Class	73
Infiniti QX80	73
Buick Enclave	72
Mercedes-Benz M-Class	72
BMW X5 (6-cyl.)	71
Lincoln MKX	65
Infiniti QX70	61
Infiniti QX60	60

### MIDSIZED SUVs

Make & Model	Definitely Buy Again
Toyota Highlander (V6)*	82%
Jeep Grand Cherokee (diesel)*	79
Jeep Grand Cherokee (V8)*	78
Jeep Wrangler	74
Toyota Highlander Hybrid	74
Hyundai Santa Fe (V6)	73
Toyota Highlander (4-cyl.)	72
Kia Sorento (V6)*	72
Ford Explorer (V6, EcoBoost)	72
Toyota 4Runner (V6)	71
Nissan Xterra	71
Hyundai Santa Fe Sport (turbo)	70
Jeep Grand Cherokee (V6)*	70
Hyundai Santa Fe Sport (4-cyl.)	68
Honda Pilot	68
Ford Explorer (V6)	65
Ford Edge (4-cyl.)	64
Mazda CX-9	63
Ford Explorer (4-cyl.)	63
Chevrolet Equinox (V6)	61
GMC Terrain (V6)	61
Ford Edge (V6)	61
Chevrolet Equinox (4-cyl.)	60
GMC Terrain (4-cyl.)	60
Kia Sorento (4-cyl.)*	56
Dodge Journey	54
Nissan Pathfinder	52

### WAGONS

Make & Model	Definitely Buy Again
Mercedes-Benz E-Class Wagon	80%
Volvo XC70	79
Audi Allroad	79
Honda Crosstour	66
Toyota Venza (V6)	63
Toyota Venza (4-cyl.)	58

### MINIVANS

Make & Model	Definitely Buy Again
Honda Odyssey	76%
Toyota Sienna (FWD)	73
Toyota Sienna (AWD)	69
Chrysler Town & Country	65
Dodge Grand Caravan	65
Nissan Quest	64
Mazda5	63

### PICKUP TRUCKS

Make & Model	Definitely Buy Again
Ford F-250 & F-350 (diesel)	80%
Chevrolet Silverado 2500 & 3500 HD (diesel)	79
GMC Sierra 2500 & 3500 HD (diesel)	79
Ram 2500 & 3500 (diesel)	77
Ram 1500 (V8, 2WD)	77
Chevrolet Silverado 1500 (V8)*	75
GMC Sierra 1500 (V8)*	75
Ram 1500 (V8, 4WD)	74
Toyota Tundra (V8)	73
Ram 1500 (V6)	71
Toyota Tacoma (V6)	70
Toyota Tundra (V6)	68
Ram 2500 & 3500 (gas)	67
Chevrolet Silverado 1500 (V6)*	64
GMC Sierra 1500 (V6)*	64
Ford F-250 & F-350 (gas)	61
Toyota Tacoma (4-cyl.)	61
Nissan Frontier	60
Nissan Titan	57



### How the brands fared

Owner-satisfaction results based on the average score across all model lines.

Tesla 98	Lincoln 71
Porsche 87	Toyota 70
Audi 79	Land Rover 70
Mercedes-Benz 76	Fiat 69
Lexus 76	Ford 67
Jaguar 75	Volkswagen 67
Subaru 74	Scion 67
Ram 73	Jeep 67
Dodge 73	Cadillac 67
Volvo 73	Mini 66
Chrysler 72	Acura 65
Honda 72	Infiniti 64
Chevrolet 72	Buick 64
Mazda 72	Hyundai 63
BMW 71	Kia 63
GMC 71	Nissan 61
	Smart 58
	Mitsubishi 55

\*Data based on one model year only.

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## Sumptuous. Agile. These are SUVs?

In our tests, Porsche dethrones the BMW X3 as the king of luxury



**ANYONE WHO HAS HELD** that diminutive sky-blue box knows that luxury definitely can reside in small packages. So too with the blossoming “entry level” luxury SUV segment. Here, we are seeing prestige automakers race to distill their brand essence into versatile, price-sensitive vehicles. The segment is filled with zingy, small-displacement turbocharged engines; active safety systems galore; coddling cabins—and elevated ownership costs. The European brands tend to shine brightest in our tests, with the veteran BMW X3 being the best at achieving the delicate balance of sport, utility, and indulgence. Here’s how the new Porsche Macan and Lincoln MKC fared against it.



**Porsche Macan S**  
The Most Fun SUV, Ever

85

Consider the Macan a Porsche 911 that got comfortable in middle age and sprouted a passable backseat, a higher ride height, and usable cargo room. The base 340-hp, turbocharged six-cylinder engine—which slings the Macan to 60 mph in a mere 6.4 seconds—is more powerful than competitors’ optional engines. A 400-hp engine is available starting at \$73,295—so much for “entry level”—for those who need even more grunt. And though SUVs tend to miss the “sport” part of the equation when it comes to handling, the Macan is the most agile and fun-to-drive SUV we’ve driven. Its all-wheel-drive system inspires dreams of Le Mans lap records but stumbled in our avoidance-maneuver test. The interior is formally luxurious, with firmly supportive seats. For a sporty SUV, the Macan is comfortable as a daily driver. And Porsche is notorious for loading its cars with options, driving up the price quickly. But if your priority is performance, the Porsche is the answer. P.S. For newbies, it’s pronounced POR-shuh muh-CONN.

340-hp, 3.0-liter turbocharged V6

\$50,895-\$73,295 19 mpg



**BMW X3**  
German Expressionism

82

With the X3, BMW has managed to deftly balance sporty driving dynamics with an accommodating, sumptuous cabin. The base turbocharged four-cylinder engine is surprisingly energetic and returns an impressive 23 mpg overall, although it concedes some refinement compared with the optional 300-hp six cylinder. At idle, the direct-injection engine pings and tinkles like a subdued piano. The X3 suspension has an eager feel, although it can be jostling on uneven roads, and its run-flat tires are stiff. Access to the well-appointed cabin is eased with large door openings. The driving position is formally upright. Some testers found the seats to be a bit firm, but the seats’ ramrod-straight posture will prepare you for a meeting with your bank’s loan officer. Many controls can be awkward and confusing, proving German ergonomics engineers do have a sense of humor. Niggles aside, the X3 is the smart choice in a segment overflowing with attention-grabbing competitors.

240-hp, 2.0-liter turbocharged 4-cyl.

\$39,450-\$47,900 23 mpg



**Lincoln MKC**  
Merely Adequate

71

With its first small SUV, Lincoln turned to the mass-market Ford Escape for a head start, adapting its mechanicals and powertrain from the sharp-handling stablemate. But in the effort to craft a more luxurious model, Lincoln fell short on several fronts, in the end creating a compromised vehicle. Performance is ample from the upscale, 285-hp four-cylinder engine, yet acceleration is on par with less powerful competitors. At 19 mpg, fuel economy is akin to that seen with larger SUVs, and the small gas tank results in a short cruising range. A fussy, dash-mounted push-button shifter controls the six-speed automatic. The ride comfort is even more disappointing, being unsettled and rocky, despite a fancy adaptive suspension system. Any agility was lost in translation from its corporate cousin. At least the cabin is quiet, with luxurious soft-touch materials. But the Lincoln falls short, with a driver’s seat that feels askew and whose comfort is debatable. In a segment defined by excellence, the MKC is merely adequate.

285-hp, 2.3-liter turbocharged 4-cyl.

\$33,995-\$40,860 19 mpg



# ROAD REPORT: LUXURY SUVs

## OUR PICKS FROM THE ENTIRE CATEGORY

### Best Overall

**ALTHOUGH THE PORSCHE MACAN** is our top scorer, its rapidly escalating price puts it well out of the “affordable luxury” discussion. Rather, the **BMW X3** shines, with its peppy powertrain, nimble handling, comfortable cabin, and attainable entry point. The Bimmer’s stinginess with standard features—offering a seemingly necessary rearview camera only as an option—is a disappointment, though. Audi competes well with the **Q5**, defined by a polished interior and a dynamic,

well-tuned suspension that makes it fun to drive and comfortable to ride in. Mercedes-Benz’s Cubist-styled **GLK** is entertaining to drive, with a 3.5-liter V-6, responsive handling, and wicked-quick acceleration. But its appeal is hampered by a tight rear seat, challenging access, and limited cargo space. The **Volvo XC60** provides plenty of Swedish luxury touches and great seats, but its ride is stiff and uncomfortable. The **Land Rover Evoque** scored too low to be recommended.



**BMW X3**  
RATING: 82 | \$44,595\*

### Best Value



**ACURA RDX**  
RATING: 77 | \$36,605\*

**FOR THOSE LOOKING** to get the most luxury for their hard-earned dollar, the \$36,605 **Acura RDX** rises to the top with a relatively roomy package that is well equipped for the money. Beyond the modest purchase price, the RDX excels with 22 mpg overall. Though it’s based on the **Honda CR-V**, the RDX comes with a standard 273-hp V-6 that the CR-V does not offer. The RDX is a safe recommendation, and it would satisfy many would-be luxury seekers—although it makes do without many

luxury creature comforts. Other lower-priced alternatives include the **Infiniti QX50** and **Volkswagen Tiguan**. However, the Infiniti rides on an ancient platform, is tiny inside, and though its 325 hp is plenty powerful, it chugs gas. With responsive steering and confident handling, the Tiguan’s driving experience is more rewarding than that of several upmarket SUVs costing far more. The top-trim Tiguan SEL approaches the price of its Audi cousin, so why scrimp?

### Most Luxurious

**WHEN CONSIDERING** the factors of ride quality, cabin execution, and interior quiet, the **Audi Q5**, **BMW X3**, and **Mercedes-Benz GLK** rank highest. All three isolate the driver from road imperfections with bump-absorbing suspensions that still provide confidence-inspiring handling—an elusive combination, especially in high-riding SUVs. The luxurious minimalism of German design delivers comfortable seats, soft-touch materials, and clever details, but also some compli-

cated controls. Road noise and wind roar are effectively hushed for all of the German SUVs—an impressive feat for small, boxy vehicles that can get boomy inside. Base models can be sparse on trim details, though deep option rosters can outfit the SUVs regally (just check your wallet at the door). Among these leaders, the Q5 most properly channels the modernist design aesthetic that will appeal to the iPhone 6 user who hangs out for fun at Design Within Reach.



**AUDI Q5**  
RATING: 78 | \$41,075\*

### Available Soon



**LEXUS NX**  
BASE PRICE \$35,405

**DERIVED FROM** the popular **Toyota RAV4**, the **Lexus NX** is distinguished by extroverted anime styling that’s aimed at younger buyers. The base engine is a 235-hp, 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder (a Lexus first, but adopting the German and domestic doctrine), with an optional hybrid torn from the mainstream **Camry**. Those looking for a smaller cousin to the successful Lexus RX should note that the NX is sportier, edgier, and less plush. But the NX’s play to fashion

dictates that the NX concede passenger and cargo space, along with visibility. Arriving in the spring, the **Land Rover Discovery Sport** will have a turbo four-banger and boast 8 inches of ground clearance and a Terrain Response system that dials in distinct settings for weather and trail conditions. The Disco’s real trick is an added third row that allows it to squire seven Hobbits. Looking further out, Infiniti will introduce a **QX30** as a sequel to the aged **QX50**.

# ROAD REPORT: LUXURY SUVs

## Ratings: Luxury Compact SUVs

Scores in context: The highest-rated small luxury SUV score 85; the lowest, 61. Recommended models excel in overall road-test score and have

average or better predicted reliability. They also perform adequately, if included, in crash tests.

☒ Recommended

● Excellent ● Very Good ○ Good ● Fair ● Poor

### LUXURY COMPACT SUVs

Recommended	Rank	MAKE & MODEL	PRICE	RELIABILITY	SCORE	TEST RESULTS				HIGHS	LOWS
						Overall MPG	Acceleration, 0-60 MPH, Sec.	Seat Comfort Front/Rear	Cargo Volume (cu. ft.)		
	1	<b>Porsche Macan S</b>	\$63,290	new	<b>85</b>	19	6.4	●/●	29.0	Handling, powertrain, ride, acceleration, braking, front-seat comfort, fit and finish, towing capacity.	Rear visibility, modest cargo area, stingy standard in-car electronics, lots of buttons, price.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	<b>BMW X3 xDrive28i (2.0T)</b>	\$44,595	○	<b>82</b>	23	7.3	●/●	33.0	Agility, powertrain, braking, fuel economy, fit and finish.	Controls, gets expensive with common options.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	<b>Mercedes-Benz GLK350</b>	\$44,995	●	<b>79</b>	21	6.1	●/●	32.0	Acceleration, agility, visibility, front-seat comfort, fit and finish, quietness.	Tight rear access, ride can be rocky, some controls, rear access.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4	<b>Audi Q5 Premium Plus (2.0T)</b>	\$41,075	○	<b>78</b>	21	7.9	●/●	32.0	Handling, transmission, braking, fit and finish.	Controls.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	5	<b>Acura RDX</b>	\$36,605	○	<b>77</b>	22	6.6	●/●	31.5	Acceleration, fuel economy, access, controls, front-seat comfort.	Ride, at-the-limit handling, rear visibility, lacking some luxury features.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	<b>BMW X1 xDrive28i (2.0T)</b>	\$38,795	○	<b>77</b>	23	6.8	●/○	26.0	Acceleration, agility, steering feedback, transmission, fuel economy.	Ride, heavy steering effort, rear visibility, modest interior room.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7	<b>Volvo XC60 T6*</b>	\$42,245	○	<b>71</b>	17	7.4	●/○	32.5	Transmission, fit and finish, advanced safety features, IIHS crash-test results.	Ride, fuel economy, rear visibility.
	8	<b>Lincoln MKC Reserve</b>	\$46,485	new	<b>71</b>	19	7.8	●/○	30.5	Quietness, braking, nicely trimmed interior.	Unsettled ride, short on agility, fuel economy, short cruising range, controls, driving position, rear visibility.
	9	<b>Buick Encore Leather</b>	\$30,555	○	<b>69</b>	23	11.0	●/○	26.0	Ride, quietness, braking, maneuverability, fuel economy.	Poor IIHS small-overlap crash-test results, acceleration, driving position, narrow cabin, rear visibility, value.
	10	<b>Cadillac SRX Luxury</b>	\$43,085	○	<b>67</b>	18	7.1	●/●	28.5	Agility, fit and finish, front-seat comfort.	Cue controls, visibility, engine needs revs to deliver.
	11	<b>Land Rover Range Rover Evoque Pure*</b>	\$45,745	NA	<b>61</b>	21	7.2	●/○	25.5	Acceleration, fit and finish.	Emergency handling, ride, noise, visibility, driving position, cargo space.

\*Powertrain has changed since last test.

**Why certain models are not recommended.** The Lincoln MKC and Porsche Macan are too new for us to have reliability data. The Buick Encore, Cadillac SRX, and Land Rover Range Rover Evoque score too low to be recommended.

## Arriving Now: Even Smaller Luxe SUVs

Just below the compact luxury-SUV segment, a string of small hatchbacks-cum-crossovers are arriving—combining compact-car underpinnings, prestige branding, and upscale amenities. On the surface, those plebeian platypuses may appear to be parts-bin profiteering, but they do offer unique appeal in an era when shoppers are looking for more amenities while being sensitive to cost, size, and fuel-economy concerns.

The ladybug-cute subcompacts excel at urban parking, and their elevated ride height

and upright seating may appeal to older drivers seeking a model that is easy to get into and out of. But their proportions bring compromises, often seen in limited passenger and cargo space, and occasionally in ride comfort.

Testing how far down-market its brand can go is the Mercedes-Benz GLA, spun off from the less-than-laudable CLA sedan. Fortunately, the GLA is better in all ways than its source material.

BMW has been splitting its product line into genre-bending variations and led the way with the compact X1. Based on the old 3-Series platform, the sporty-handling X1

seeks to offer the best of both sedan and crossover worlds, but it clearly feels less refined and finished than its bigger brother.

Buick's take is derived from the subcompact—and unabashedly proletarian—Chevrolet Sonic. Yet the Encore boasts great maneuverability and a surprisingly more comfortable ride than many larger and higher-scoring SUVs. But the quiet, well-equipped cabin is snug, and the powertrain is meager.

Audi has just rolled out its Q3 in the U.S., a Mini-Me interpretation of the stunning Q5.

We've added the GLA and Q3 to our test fleet and will report on them soon.

LATEST FROM THE TRACK

## A Visit Into the Future. Plus: 2 Icons Get Rebooted.



### BMW's Carbon-Fiber Sci-Fi Dream Machine

Even with the Tesla sitting next to it in our garage, the BMW i8 looks like something from the imagination of Asimov or Bradbury, an otherworldly craft that has gently alighted on our tarmac.

The i8 is most definitely future think, a carbon fiber, aluminum, and thermoplastic particle accelerator—a plug-in hybrid powered by a 129-hp electric motor driving the front axle, and a turbocharged 1.5-liter, three-cylinder engine belting out a stunning 228 hp to the rear axle.

Is it the first hybrid supercar? BMW says the i8 will zip from 0 to 60 mph in 4.2 seconds. You can drive it on electricity alone for about 15 miles; as a hybrid in Comfort mode, which purrs between gas and electricity for greatest efficiency; or with full power simultaneously delivered from both power plants in Sport mode.

On the economy side, it gets the equivalent of 76 miles per gallon on electricity and 28 mpg on gas. It takes less than 4 hours to fully charge on a household outlet.

But it's the i8's design that will activate every futurist's inner Heinlein. Reach into the door cutout, squeeze the door handle, and the doors pivot out and up, around the windshield pillar. With hollow cutouts down the sides, below the taillights, and under the doorsills, the i8 is the pace car for Area 51.

Of course, every astronaut has to deal with certain creature discomforts. Entry into the capsule requires an ungainly limbo-and-backflop motion. But once inside, you're rewarded with pools of vivid cobalt light from the dash, door seams, and footwells.

For \$136,000, you ought to be impressed.

### The New Mustang Gallops—on Less Hay

It's hard to update a thoroughbred—especially when it's the symbol of affordable, red-blooded American performance. But Ford did just that with the 2015 Mustang.

The Mustang carries a lower, pinched roofline without sacrificing much head room or visibility. It offers a hint of modern sophistication without losing the homage to yesteryear. The grille gapes with an angular menace. The interior has far less hard plastic and features upgraded fabrics, knobs, and switches.

Dynamically, Ford finally addressed a half-century-old burr under the saddle: an antiquated live-axle rear suspension when other muscle cars had gone to a sophisticated independent rear-suspension design. The Mustang now competes on equal footing.

With tightening fuel-economy mandates, Ford added a new EcoBoost turbocharged four-cylinder engine, the first in 30 years for the Mustang. Faithful wranglers who fear a strangled horsepower output can hold their horses; the turbo puts out more power than last year's V6 yet earns an EPA estimate of 26 mpg.

Ford lent us a, 310-hp EcoBoost four-cylinder with a six-speed manual transmission for a couple of days, and it proved quick, agile, and satisfying.

New technology includes keyless entry, push-button start, the latest version of MyFord Touch, and an array of new electronic safety systems, such as active cruise control and blind-spot detection with cross-traffic alert.

Stay tuned for full-scale testing, especially when we get the thunderous V8 into our fleet.



### The Ford F-150: Less Weight, More Muscle

Lightweight. High-tech. Pickup truck. One of these things is not like the other.

Pickups are meant to be forged from manly, molten steel. Aluminum is meant for twee sports coupes and mom's leftover casserole. Aluminum saves a ton of weight, but it's a fickle metal on the stamping line and more expensive than steel, too.

But Ford rewrote the conventional wisdom with the redesign of its best-selling full-sized truck, the F-150.

The 2015 F-150's aluminum body weighs 700 pounds less than its steel predecessor. That from an industry that fires engineers for adding a few precious ounces to curb weight. Ford claims the crash diet should pay dividends in fuel economy as well as handling, towing, and hauling capability.

The new F-150 is rated to up to 3,270 pounds of payload with its top turbocharged 3.5-liter engine and has a tow rating upward of 12,200 pounds—all muscular figures that will earn bragging rights at the construction site. The base V6 has shrunk to 3.5 liters, again to aid fuel economy. For those who need roar under the hood, there's still a 5.0-liter V8.

Ford also introduced a turbocharged 2.7-liter V6 delivering 325 hp and 385 pound-feet of torque, the smallest engine available in a full-sized pickup, but we found it plenty powerful in our limited first drives.

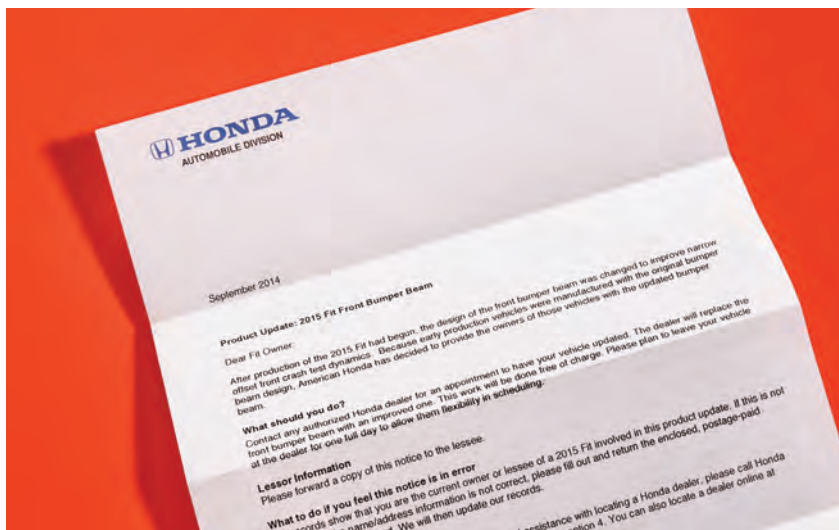
This engine could pull 7,600 pounds and had no trouble with one staff member's Airstream trailer. More important, we saw 24 mpg in preliminary testing under real-world, unloaded conditions.

The lighter weight also meant the F-150 felt almost lively on the road. A big truck that's fun to drive? Imagine that.



## Your Car Got Recalled. Now What?

First rule: Don't panic. Most recalls are fairly routine. Here's how to handle one.



**RECALL.** When you hear that ominous word in the news, it portends dire consequences. But are recalls urgencies or emergencies? What's the best way to stay informed? How long should you wait before calling your dealership? Here's what you need to know:

One big recall involves 7.8 million vehicles and counting—from BMW, GM, Honda, Toyota, and other automakers—in which air bags made by the Japanese supplier Takata are prone to explode in collisions, spraying passengers with shrapnel, sometimes with fatal results. Last year GM also recalled 2.6 million small cars for defective ignition switches that could cause the car to turn off while being driven. In 2009 and 2010 Toyota recalled more than 10 million Toyota and Lexus vehicles for problems that led to unintended acceleration. In 2014, through autumn, automakers announced more than 500 recalls affecting more than 50 million vehicles.

But many recalls are for less than perilous reasons. Sometimes they're for something as benign as a mislabeled sticker. Or durability tests find a suspension spring could wear out prematurely.

Even when a recall is issued, often

there's little likelihood that a part will actually fail. Indeed, a vast majority of affected cars will never experience the potential problems outlined in a recall notice. But automakers are taking fewer chances these days, given a more aggressive regulatory environment and plaintiff lawyers having more success in defect litigation. And no manufacturer wants to risk the same fate as Toyota, which paid a \$1.2 billion settlement to the Department of Justice for dragging its feet during its unintended-acceleration recall process.

### When to Worry

When a manufacturer initiates a recall, whether for a minor problem or a biggie, it sends a letter or e-mail to car owners instructing them to take their vehicle to a dealership to have replacement parts installed, free.

The replacement installation should go swiftly and smoothly. But sometimes the scope of a recall is so large—as in the case of the GM ignition switch—that there's a long waiting list for service or replacement parts. In that case, it could be weeks or months before a dealer can fit you in. The dealership should notify you when it has the spare parts in stock. Once an automaker alerts the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) of a recall, it has 60 days to notify owners, regardless of whether the spare parts are in stock. But you can be proactive by calling your dealership's service manager to make an appointment to service your car.

If there's a delay for a repair, the most obvious questions to ask are: Am I putting myself in danger when I drive? Or should I just park my car until it can be repaired? That's when you need to read the recall notice closely.

Check to see whether the recall involves a key operating component, such as the acceleration, brake, steering, suspension, or fuel systems. Some defects might create a nuisance but don't pose an immediate danger. If you're unsure about how to assess the risk, call your dealership.

The time to worry is when an automaker tells you to stop driving the vehicle. In that case, it should tow your car to a dealership and provide a loaner. But that situation is exceedingly rare.

In the case of the air-bag recall, there was no such order. If you're concerned about your passengers, leave the front seat empty, which will deactivate that air bag.

### COMPLAIN! IT'S YOUR RIGHT.

Most recalls are initiated by automakers, but drivers play a role, too. If you think your car has a safety defect, file a complaint right away with the automaker and the government. Provide your vehicle's make, model, year, and vehicle identification number, and write a brief description of the problem. Contact NHTSA at its website, at [safercar.gov](http://safercar.gov), or by phone (888-327-4236).

## Models Recalled for Defective Air Bags\*

### Acura

- 2003–2006 Acura MDX
- 2002–2003 Acura CL
- 2005 Acura RL
- 2002–2003 Acura TL

### BMW

- 2000–2005 BMW 3 Series Sedan
- 2000–2006 BMW 3 Series Coupe
- 2000–2005 BMW 3 Series Sports Wagon
- 2000–2006 BMW 3 Series Convertible
- 2001–2006 BMW M3 Coupe/Convertible

### Chrysler

- 2005–2008 Chrysler 300
- 2007–2008 Chrysler Aspen

### Dodge

- 2003–2008 Dodge Ram 1500
- 2005–2008 Dodge Ram 2500
- 2006–2008 Dodge Ram 3500
- 2006–2008 Dodge Ram 4500
- 2008 Dodge Ram 5500
- 2005–2008 Dodge Durango
- 2005–2008 Dodge Dakota

### Ford

- 2004 Ford Ranger
- 2005–2006 Ford GT
- 2005–2007 Ford Mustang

### General Motors

- 2003–2005 Pontiac Vibe
- 2005 Saab 9-2X

### Honda

- 2001–2007 Honda Accord
- 2001–2002 Honda Accord
- 2001–2005 Honda Civic

- 2002–2006 Honda CR-V
- 2003–2011 Honda Element
- 2002–2004 Honda Odyssey
- 2003–2007 Honda Pilot
- 2006 Honda Ridgeline
- Infiniti**
- 2001–2004 Infiniti I30/I35
- 2002–2003 Infiniti QX4
- 2003–2005 Infiniti FX35/FX45

### Lexus

- 2002–2005 Lexus SC

### Mazda

- 2003–2007 Mazda6
- 2006–2007 MazdaSpeed6
- 2004–2008 Mazda RX-8
- 2004–2005 Mazda MPV
- 2004 Mazda B-Series Truck

### Mitsubishi

- 2004–2005 Lancer
- 2006–2007 Raider

### Nissan

- 2001–2003 Nissan Maxima
- 2001–2004 Nissan Pathfinder
- 2002–2004 Nissan Sentra

### Subaru

- 2003–2005 Subaru Baja
- 2003–2005 Subaru Legacy
- 2003–2005 Subaru Outback
- 2004–2005 Subaru Impreza

### Toyota

- 2002–2005 Toyota Corolla
- 2003–2005 Toyota Corolla Matrix
- 2002–2005 Toyota Sequoia
- 2003–2005 Toyota Tundra

# ConsumerReports® TV NEWS



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CITY	STATION	CHANNEL	CITY	STATION	CHANNEL
Atlanta, GA	WGCL	46	Peoria, IL	WMBD	31
Austin, TX	KVUE	24	Philadelphia, PA	WPVI	6
Bakersfield, CA	KBAK/KBFX	29/58	Phoenix, AZ	KPNX	12
Baltimore, MD	WBFF/WNUV	45/54	Pittsburgh, PA	KDKA/WPCW	2/19
Birmingham, AL	WBRC	6	Portland, OR	KATU	2
Boise, ID	KBOI/KYUU	2/22	Raleigh, NC	WRAL/WRAZ	5/50
Cape Girardeau, MO	KFVS	12	Rapid City, SD	KOTA/KHSD	3/11
Charleston, SC	WCBD	2	Reno, NV	KRNV	4
Chicago, IL	WLS	7	Roanoke, VA	WSLS	10
Cincinnati, OH	WCPO	9	Sacramento, CA	KCRA	3
Cleveland, OH	WEWS	5	San Antonio, TX	KSAT	12
Colorado Springs, CO	KKTV	11	San Diego, CA	KNSD	7/39
Columbia, SC	WLTX	19	San Francisco, CA	KGO	7
Columbus, GA	WRBL	3	San Juan, Puerto Rico	WAPA	4
Columbus, OH	WCMH	4	Scottsbluff, NE	KDUH	4
Dallas, TX	KXAS/KXTX	5/39	Seattle, WA	KOMO	4
Denver, CO	KUSA/KTVD	9/20	Sheridan, WY	KSGW	12
Detroit, MI	WXYZ	7	South Bend, IN	WSBT	22
Eugene, OR	KEZI	9	Spokane, WA	KLEW	3
Fargo, ND	KVLY	11	Springfield, MO	KYTV/KCZ	3/15
Fort Myers, FL	WINK	11/5	St. Thomas, USVI	USVI	2
Fresno, CA	KFSN	30	Syracuse, NY	WSYR	9
Greensboro, NC	WFMY	2	Tampa, FL	WFTS	28
Harrisburg, PA	WHTM	27	Tulsa, OK	KJRH	2
Hartford, CT	WVIT	30	Washington, DC	WRC	4
Houston, TX	KTRK	13	Weslaco, TX	KRGV	5
Huntsville, AL	WAAY	31	Wichita, KS	KWCH	12
Indianapolis, IN	WXIN/WTTV	59/4	Wichita Falls, TX	KFDX	3
Jacksonville, FL	WJXT	4	Wilmington, NC	WILM	10
La Crosse, WI	WKBT	8	Yakima, WA	KIMA	29
Lansing, MI	WILX	10	Youngstown, OH	WFMJ	21
Las Vegas, NV	KSNV	3	<b>CANADIAN STATIONS</b>		
Little Rock, AR	KTHV	11	Calgary	CFCN	
Los Angeles, CA	KABC	7	Edmonton	CFRN	
Louisville, KY	WAVE	3	Halifax	CJCH/ATV	
Madison, WI	WISC	3	Kitchener	CKCO	
Medford, OR	KDRV	12	Montreal	CFCF	
Memphis, TN	WMC	5	Ottawa	CJOH	
Miami, FL	WTVJ/WSCV	6/51	Regina	CKCK	
Montgomery, AL	WSFA	12	Saskatoon	CFQC	
Nashville, TN	WTVF	5	Sudbury	CICI/MCTV	
New York, NY	WABC	7	Toronto	CFTO	
Norfolk, VA	WTKR	3	Vancouver	CIVT	
Oklahoma City, OK	KFOR	4	Victoria	CIVI	
Omaha, NE	WOWT	6	Winnipeg	CKY	
Pasco, WA	KEPR	19			

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\*\* Between 4/1/14 and 6/30/14, the average estimated savings off MSRP presented by TrueCar Certified Dealers to users of the Consumer Reports Build & Buy Car Buying Service based on users who configured virtual vehicles and subsequently purchased a new vehicle of the same make and model listed on the certificate from Certified Dealers, was \$2,990 including applicable vehicle specific manufacturer incentives. Your actual savings may vary based on multiple factors including the vehicle you select, region, dealer, and applicable vehicle specific manufacturer incentives which are subject to change. The Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price ("MSRP") is determined by the manufacturer, and may not reflect the price at which vehicles are generally sold in the dealer's trade area as not all vehicles are sold at MSRP. Each dealer sets its own pricing. Your actual purchase price is negotiated between you and the dealer. Neither TrueCar nor Consumer Reports brokers, sells or leases motor vehicles. Service not available in Canada.





CAR STRATEGIST

## Held Captive by a Keyless Car

**Q.** My daughter just bought a Nissan Rogue, only to learn that it is keyless in every sense of the word. I find this very frightening. My understanding is that if for some reason your car's key sensor doesn't work, check the battery of the remote. If that is not the problem, call the car company and you'll be towed to the nearest dealership. Are all cars going this way? —*Jean Gildersleeve, St. Petersburg, Fla.*

**A.** In two words, Jean, pretty much. Cars at all price ranges are equipped with keyless entry and ignition, which can be a real convenience—especially when your hands are full. Just walk up to the car, open the door, and press a dashboard button to start the car. As long as you're carrying the key fob in your pocket or purse, you're good to go.

But if there's a problem with the key fob's battery, you may be stuck. Many of the cars,

including your daughter's Rogue, don't have a backup ignition key in the traditional sense.

A Nissan representative told us that the battery in your daughter's key fob should last approximately two years and that you can still start the car even if the battery dies. Just hold the fob against the start button until you hear a chime, then push the start button. Other cars have similar redundant systems. Check your owner's manual or ask the dealer.

Whatever you do, don't lose the fob. Replacements for many cars can cost hundreds of dollars.

➔ **HAVE A PROBLEM WITH YOUR MECHANIC OR DEALERSHIP? SOMETHING PUZZLING YOU ABOUT YOUR CAR?** Contact CR's Car Strategist at [carstrategist@cr.consumer.org](mailto:carstrategist@cr.consumer.org).

### PUZZLING QUESTION

## Do Tires Really Go Flat in Cold Weather?

Tire pressure monitoring systems (TPMS) are a real boon to safety and convenience, and have been required on all new cars since September 2007. By triggering a dashboard light to let you know when one or more tires is low on air, TPMS can take the guesswork out of wondering whether a tire is low.

But colder temperatures mean that the air in your tires becomes more dense while the car is parked on winter nights. Getting a warning light on a chilly morning doesn't necessarily indicate a problem. Once you drive a few miles and the tires warm up, the light should turn off. If it doesn't, check the pressure with a gauge and add air, or ask your mechanic to have a look.

Even if your vehicle is equipped with TPMS, our recommendation is to use a gauge to check the pressure in all of your tires at least once per month, no matter what the weather is like.

### MECHANICS' SECRETS

## Avoiding the 30,000-Mile Rip-Off

Dealers love to tack on extra work when you get routine service on your car, and that can cost you hundreds of dollars.

We called several Chicago-area Toyota dealers to survey the cost of a Camry 30,000-mile service. Their prices varied wildly—from \$187 to a whopping \$400.

The reason is that some dealers will insist on engine flushes, filter changes, and other add-ons that you don't need. They're counting on you not to ask questions.

It's easy to avoid getting ripped off. Your owner's manual includes a maintenance schedule that lists exactly what needs to be done at various intervals, from changing the oil to replacing the timing belt.

When it's time for service, tell the dealer you want exactly what is specified in the owner's manual, and nothing else. Or take the car to a local mechanic whom you trust. You can do that without jeopardizing your warranty, as long as you keep the receipts. You might save yourself some money. Our surveys find that independent shops often charge less than franchised dealers for the same work.

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AUGUST 1940

## COLA WARS

Back when Coke came in 6-ounce bottles that cost 5 cents, shoppers had a wealth of cola choices. So in 1940, Consumers Union did blind taste tests of Coca-Cola, Pepsi-Cola, Royal Crown Cola, and the mostly forgotten brands Lime Cola and Double Cola. The bottom line? Tasters couldn't tell the difference among any of the drinks, except between Coke and Pepsi, with Pepsi being deemed sweeter.

**A STUDIED SIP:**

*In our tests, 29 tasters sampled  
each drink twice.*



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# SELLING IT

## Perhaps the Right Phrase Is 'Haute Dog ...'

You apparently get the filet mignon of frankfurters when hitting the links at this Clifton Park, N.Y., golf course.



## Save 10 Calories: Eat One at a Time

Bill Rowley of Evergreen, Colo., flagged what looks like a math miss: 90 calories for one bar, 190 calories for two. General Mills is actually following FDA rules that allow calories to be rounded up or down to the nearest 10.



Nutrition Facts			
Serving Size 2 bars (42g)			
Total Servings Per Container 6			
Amount/Serving	2 bars	1 bar	
Calories	190	90	
Fat Cal	60	30	
	% DV*	% DV*	
Fat	6g	9%	3g
	0.5g	3%	0

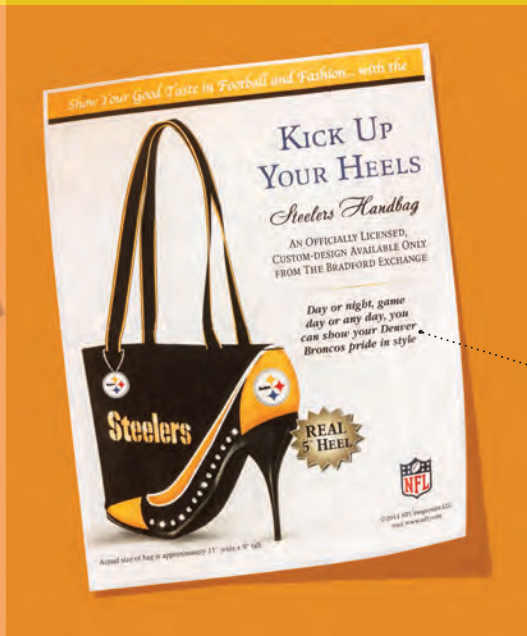
## End Time

This watch counts down the hours and minutes left in your life—a disconcerting thought, notes Ryan Murphy of Scottsbluff, Neb.



## 'Showing Broncos Pride With a Steelers Purse?'

Try again, says Dee Lawrence of Sunbury, Pa., one of several readers to send in this ad.



Day or night, game day or any day, you can show your Denver Broncos pride in style

# Ready, Aim ... Miss!

Sharp-eyed Consumer Reports readers sent us another batch of confounding marketing maneuvers. You can't make this stuff up!

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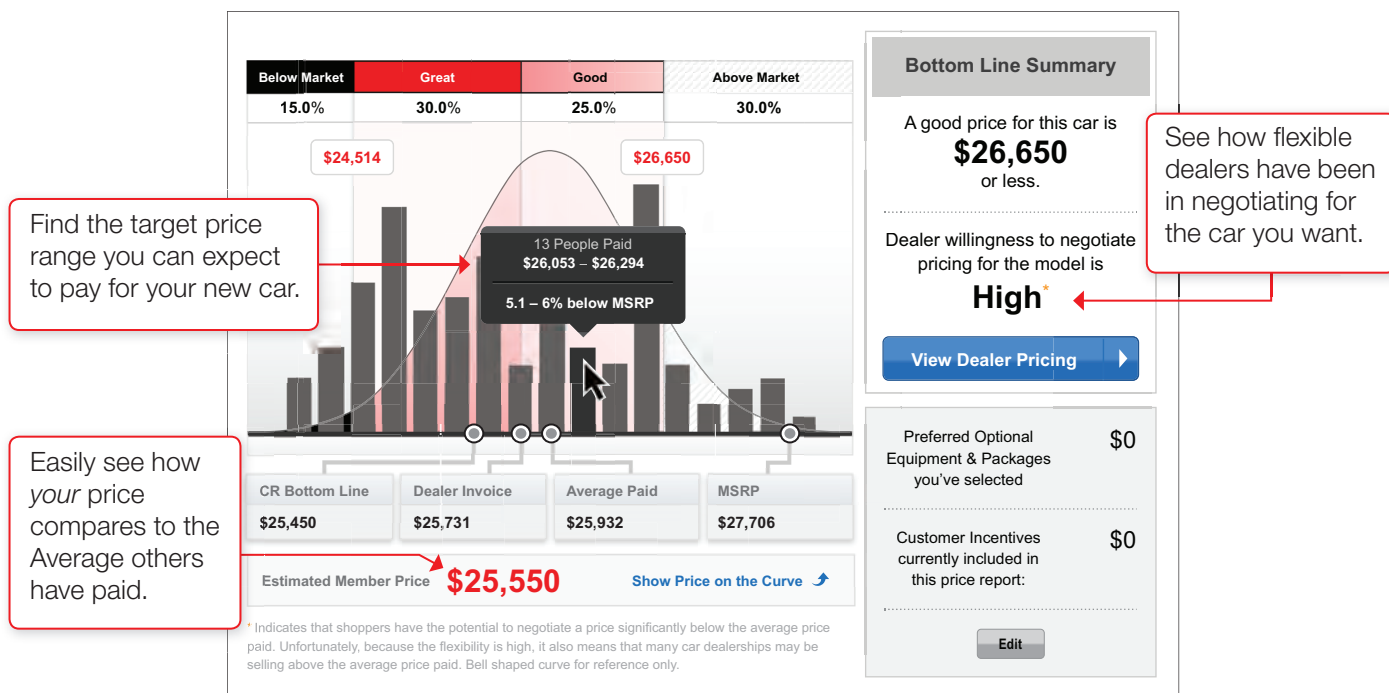
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Contact Info



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



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

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In most cases, the prices we list here are

the approximate retail in Canadian dollars; manufacturers' list prices are indicated by an asterisk (\*). Check marks identify CR Best Buys or recommended products in the U.S. Ratings. "NA" in a chart means that information wasn't available from the manufacturer. We include, in the Contact Info list on page 32D, the manufacturer's phone number and Web address in Canada so that you can call or go online to get information on a model you can't find in the stores. (Many products that aren't available in Canadian stores can be bought online.)

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## Juicers

Ten of the 13 tested extractor and auger juicers are available. **Report and Ratings, page 44**

## A. EXTRACTOR

		BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE
Rec.	Rank			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	<b>Juiceman</b> JM8000S	\$90	75
	2	<b>Cuisinart</b> CJE-1000C	\$180	68
	5	<b>Bella</b> High Power Juice Extractor	\$160	58
	6	<b>Juice Bullet</b> NJB0801	\$125	53
	7	<b>Oster</b> Juice & Blend 2 Go	\$60	50

## B. AUGER

		BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	SCORE
Rec.	Rank			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	<b>Kuvings</b> Whole Slow B6000	\$500	71
	2	<b>Hurom</b> HH-Premium	\$380	64
	3	<b>Omega</b> NC900HDC	\$390	61
	4	<b>Fagor</b> Platino 967010008	\$250	61
	5	<b>Bella</b> NutriPro Cold Press 13695	\$260	56

## Snow Blowers

Eleven of the top-scoring snow blowers are available. [Report and Ratings, pages 16-19](#)

### A. TWO-STAGE GAS

		BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	WIDTH (IN.)	ENGINE SIZE	SCORE
Rec.	Rank					
✓	1	<b>Cub Cadet</b> 31BH57TU	\$1,600	30	420cc	<b>90</b>
✓	4	<b>Ariens</b> 921032	\$1,500	30	291cc	<b>88</b>
✓	7	<b>Ariens</b> AX254 921030	\$1,400	28	254cc	<b>87</b>
✓	12	<b>Troy-Bilt</b> Storm 2840 31AH64Q	\$1,400	28	277cc	<b>81</b>

### B. COMPACT TWO-STAGE GAS

		BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	WIDTH (IN.)	ENGINE SIZE	SCORE
Rec.	Rank					
✓	3	<b>Toro</b> Power Max 724 OE 37770	\$1,000	24	205cc	<b>69</b>
✓	4	<b>Ariens</b> 920021	\$1,200	24	208cc	<b>68</b>
✓	5	<b>Sno-Tek</b> 920402	\$850	24	208cc	<b>66</b>

### C. SINGLE-STAGE GAS

		BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	WIDTH (IN.)	ENGINE SIZE	SCORE
Rec.	Rank					
✓	1	<b>Toro</b> Power Clear 38742	\$570	21	212cc	<b>71</b>
✓	2	<b>Toro</b> Power Clear 621 38458	\$650	21	163cc	<b>70</b>
✓	3	<b>Cub Cadet</b> 221 LHP 31AM2T6D	\$550	21	208cc	<b>67</b>
✓	5	<b>Honda</b> HS720CS	\$900	20	187cc	<b>64</b>

## Humidifiers

Five of the top-scoring humidifiers are available. [Report and Ratings, pages 20-21](#)

### A. SMALL ROOM (LESS THAN 300 SQ. FT.)

		BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	TYPE	Gallons Per Day	SCORE
Rec.	Rank					
✓	1	<b>Crane Owl</b>	\$64	Ultrasonic	1.4	<b>87</b>
✓	4	<b>Crane Drop</b>	\$70	Ultrasonic	1.4	<b>82</b>

### B. MEDIUM ROOM (300 TO 499 SQ. FT.)

		BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	TYPE	Gallons Per Day	SCORE
Rec.	Rank					
✓	1	<b>Vicks</b> V5100NS-CAN	\$45	Ultrasonic	2.1	<b>86</b>
✓	3	<b>Honeywell</b> HUT-300 <sup>②</sup>	\$70	Ultrasonic	1.9	<b>75</b>

### C. LARGE ROOM (500 TO 999 SQ. FT.)

		BRAND & MODEL	PRICE	TYPE	Gallons Per Day	SCORE
Rec.	Rank					
✓	5	<b>Honeywell</b> HUT-340 <sup>①</sup>	\$55	Vaporizer	3.3	<b>76</b>

<sup>①</sup> Includes a humidistat, which roughly indicates relative humidity. <sup>②</sup> Output decreases noticeably when using hard water.

## Recalls

### 2005-2011 Toyota Tacoma

Fasteners within the driver and passenger front seat on vehicles with the Access Cab configuration may loosen if the doors are forcefully closed over a long period of time. If the fasteners loosen, the seat belt may not function properly.

**Models** 26,830 vehicles.

**What to do** Have the dealer replace the fasteners or the seat belt assemblies, if necessary.

### 2013 Hyundai Santa Fe

On certain vehicles equipped with the 2.4L engine, the passenger-side axle shaft might fail. That may result in the loss of vehicle propulsion. In addition, the vehicle may roll if it's parked on a slope even though it is in the Park position.

**Models** 3,246 vehicles.

**What to do** Have the dealer replace the right front axle shaft assembly.

### 2011-2012 Chevrolet Cruze

The electric vacuum pump on vehicles equipped with the 1.4L DOHC gasoline turbo engine and 6T40 automatic transmission may not function as designed. The result may affect brake power either intermittently or fully. That may result in a crash.

**Models** 44,789 vehicles.

**What to do** The dealer will replace a microswitch in the power brake vacuum pipe assembly.

### 2006-2010 Toyota models

A control board on vehicles equipped with the Intelligent Power Module (IPM), which is part of the hybrid system inverter assembly, could fail while the vehicle is moving. Various warning lights may malfunction and illuminate on the instrument panel. The hybrid system may cease to function and may increase the risk of a crash.

**Models** 7,621 2006-2010 Highlander HV and 2006-2008 Lexus RX400H vehicles.

**What to do** Have the dealer inspect and, if necessary, replace the IPM.

### 2008-2010 BMW 5 Series

The rear lamps may malfunction (tail, brake, turn, and reverse) and may increase the risk of property damage and/or personal injury.

**Models** 5,783 vehicles.

**What to do** Have the dealer replace the rear bulb carriers with an updated design.

### 2003-2004 Honda models

A defect in the supplemental restraint system may result in the unintentional deployment of the front air bags. That may result in a vehicle crash and/or personal injury.

**Models** 28,150 2003 Acura MDX and 2003-2004 Honda Odyssey vehicles.

**What to do** Have the dealer install an electrical noise suppressor unit.

### 2009-2010 Toyota Corolla

The trunk lid may malfunction and begin to close after it has been opened. That may result in personal injury.

**Models** 144,744 vehicles.

**What to do** Owners who are not satisfied with the performance of their vehicle's trunk lid may have the trunk springs replaced under special warranty coverage.

### 2007-2011 Kia models

The stop lamp switch may fail and cause intermittent operation of the brake lights. If the brake lights fail to illuminate, that may cause a crash and result in injury.

**Models** 39,054 2007-2009 Amanti, 2009-2011 Borrego, 2009-2010 Forte, 2008-2010 Magentis, 2008-2011 Sedona, and 2011 Sportage vehicles.

**What to do** Have the dealer replace the switch.

### 2004-2009 Toyota Sienna

The vehicle transmission may shift out of Park without the brake pedal being depressed. That may result in a crash and property damage.

**Models** 56,216 vehicles.

**What to do** Have the dealer replace the shift lock solenoid.



## Autos

Report and Ratings, pages 52-54

All of the tested vehicles are available in Canada.

MAKE & MODEL	PRICE RANGE	ACCELERATION (SEC.)				FUEL ECONOMY (LITERS PER 100 KM)		
		0-50 KM/H	0-100 KM/H	80-100 KM/H	500 METERS	CITY DRIVING	HIGHWAY DRIVING	OVERALL
LUXURY COMPACT SUVs								
Porsche Macan	\$54,300–\$82,200	2.8	6.7	3.3	16.8	18.4	9.1	12.6
BMW X3	43,300–48,900	3.0	7.7	3.4	18.1	14.9	7.8	10.4
Lincoln MKC	39,940–49,650	3.0	8.2	3.5	18.5	17.7	8.8	12.1

## Contact info

How to reach manufacturers in Canada.

### Bella

866-832-4843  
sensioinc.com

### Crane

855-202-7263  
crane-canada.com

### Cub Cadet

800-668-1238  
cubcadet.ca

### Cuisinart

800-472-7606  
cuisinart.ca

### Fagor

800-207-0806  
fagoramerica.com

### Honda

888-946-6329  
honda.ca

### Honeywell

480-353-3020  
honeywell.com

### Hurom

800-321-2226  
hurom.com

### Juice Bullet

855-346-8874  
nutribullet.com

### Juiceman

800-223-8533  
juiceman.com

### Kuvings

888-682-5559  
kuvings.com

### Omega

800-633-3401  
omegajuicers.com

### Oster

800-334-0759  
oster.ca

### Toro

800-544-5364  
toro.ca

### Troy-Bilt

800-668-1238  
troybilt.ca

### Vicks

800-362-1683  
vicks.ca