

⚠ | HEALTH ALERT

THE MOLD RISK IN YOUR WASHING MACHINE

Don't Do This to Your RAW CHICKEN • 8 New Ways to Get the Best MEDICAL CARE for You



BEST CAR PICKS
for Every
Driving
Style

CR Consumer Reports®



17
CHAINS
RATED

FAST FOOD MAKEOVER

**WHICH RESTAURANTS
ARE HEALTHIEST?**



TRUSTED RATINGS

- Vinyl Siding
- Wet-Weather Tires
- Laptops
- Smart Sprinklers
- Summer Grills

MAY 2020

JOIN HOST JACK RICO AND THE EXPERTS AT CONSUMER REPORTS

Eat Better, Spend Smarter, Be Safer



Consumer 101

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IN SPANISH ON TELEMUNDO

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CR.ORG/CONSUMER101



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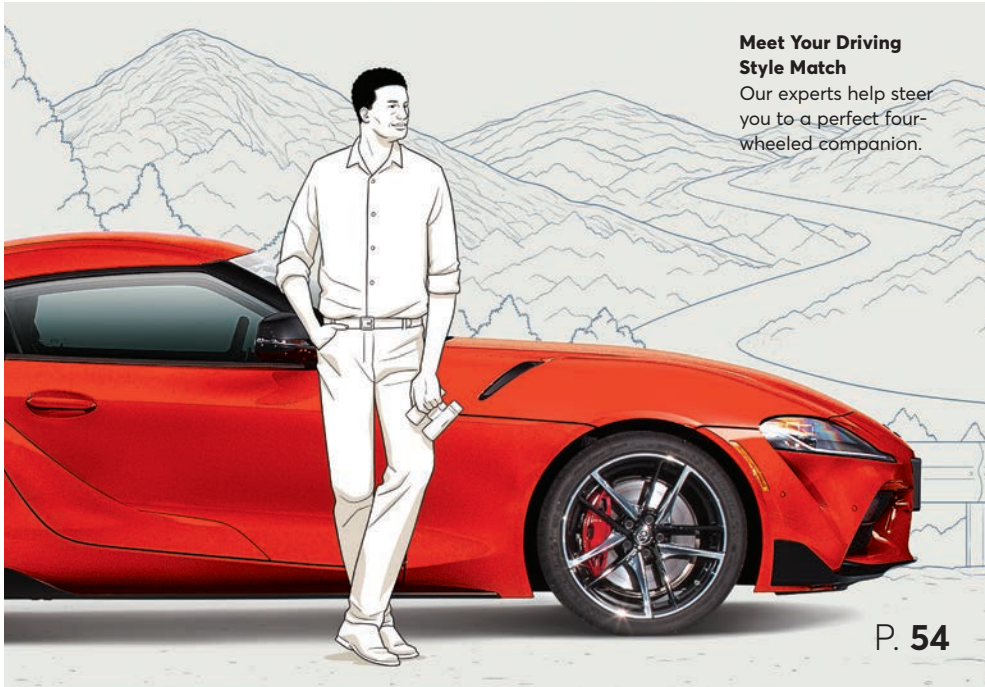
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We rate products using these symbols:

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- 🟡 FAIR
- 🟢 GOOD
- 🟢 VERY GOOD
- 🟢 EXCELLENT

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Taking Care in a Time of Crisis



AS THIS MONTH'S ISSUE goes to press, the world remains gripped by the ongoing threat of the coronavirus. Families across the country and around the world are grappling with questions: What can I do to keep my loved ones safe? Should I cancel my upcoming travel plans? How much longer will this pandemic disrupt our lives? Though not every question is answerable yet, here at CR we are working

hard to deliver the best, most scientifically rigorous guidance to help you through the uncertainties that lie ahead.

As the outbreak evolves, our coverage will as well—and you can access our insights at our coronavirus resource hub, at [CR.org/coronavirus](https://www.consumerreports.org/coronavirus). We are offering wide-ranging advice on how to prepare and protect yourself, including how to get the best possible in-home medical care if necessary. That topic is one that we're also addressing in this month's article ("More Choice, More Power," on page 34) on the ways that the medical marketplace is being transformed.

The last 10 years have seen sweeping changes to the world of healthcare, as laws, court cases, and advances in technology have redrawn the landscape around one of the most important and personal issues facing all Americans. While costs remain a major source of stress, sometimes the biggest hurdle families face is simply getting in to see a primary care physician. We take a closer look at some newer models of primary care that have begun to gain momentum, such as workplace clinics and concierge care, offering the promise of a little red-tape relief.

Knowing the benefits and drawbacks of these emerging services can go a long way toward consumers' staying healthy without breaking the bank or becoming overwhelmed by roadblocks. That's why this month we're identifying which options best fit your needs. As always, CR is here to be your trusted partner when navigating through the confusion and complexities of our healthcare system, and to meet whatever challenges lie ahead with expertise and clear advice.

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Shining Light on Hidden Fees

WHAT'S AT STAKE

CR has scored a hard-fought victory in the long-running battle over hidden fees.

The latest skirmish centers on cable TV companies, which are notorious for advertising low prices and then, after consumers sign up, adding a long list of confusing fees to monthly bills. In fact, a recent CR analysis of nearly 800 pay-TV bills sent to us by consumers around the country found that the typical cable customer pays \$450 a year in company-imposed fees—in effect, a 24 percent surcharge—on top of advertised prices.

HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

We shared our findings with members of Congress this past October, and CR senior policy counsel Jonathan Schwantes testified at a Senate hearing a few weeks later, calling for a crackdown on hidden fees and for more transparent pricing.

After the hearing, Rep. Mike Doyle, D-Penn., introduced a CR-endorsed bill that would require pay-TV companies to tell you the total price—including all charges, fees, and taxes—before you sign up for service. And in December the bill passed Congress with bipartisan support and the President signed it into law.

The measure—which also gives consumers the right to cancel without penalty within 24 hours of getting notice of the total price, and prohibits providers from charging for equipment that isn't used—will take effect this summer. Verizon already announced new prices for its FIOS TV service with no hidden fees.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Tell us your hidden fee story, and learn more on how to fight back at WhatTheFee.com.

Ending Product Safety Secrecy

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Shocking but true: The Consumer Product Safety Commission, the federal agency that oversees the safety of consumer goods, must, in most cases, ask manufacturers for permission to release information about their products—even to warn the public about life-threatening dangers. The manufacturer can even go to court to fight the release of information.

That's because of a 1981 law meant to ensure the accuracy of safety warnings and protect company reputations from undue damage. But this law, known as Section 6(b) of the Consumer Product Safety Act, ends up creating delays that often put consumers at risk.

Rep. Bobby Rush, D-Ill., has

now introduced the SHARE Information Act, which would make it harder for companies to muzzle the CPSC and help the agency alert the public to safety issues in a timely way.

HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

The bill was partly inspired by CR investigations, especially a 2019 series of articles about the Fisher-Price Rock 'n Play and other inclined sleepers that has so far led to the recall of some 5.6 million dangerous sleeper products.

In January, CR began asking consumers to urge their representatives to support the bill. By mid-February more than 16,000 had sent a message through CR's campaign. And our D.C. advocates continue to build support in Congress.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Go to CR.org/SHARE to tell your representative to support the bill.

Improving Aircraft Safety

WHAT'S AT STAKE

When it comes to air travel, there's no substitute for rigorous and consistent safety standards. And the recent fatal crashes of two Boeing 737 MAX jets have made it especially clear how critical it is that any gaps in those standards be eliminated immediately.

But U.S. airlines are increasingly outsourcing aircraft maintenance to remote corners of the world where many repair shops get far less oversight than U.S. airlines' own domestic repair facilities and rely on uncertified, poorly trained, and inadequately screened technicians. With passenger safety on the line, Congress must act to strengthen the Federal Aviation Administration's oversight of aircraft maintenance and repairs at foreign facilities—and the newly introduced Safe Aircraft Maintenance Standards Act would do that.

HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

More than a decade ago, CR highlighted the trend of airlines outsourcing maintenance to foreign repair shops. We called the practice “an accident waiting to happen” at the time, and that's still the case today. That's why we're continuing to highlight the inconsistent safety standards and have endorsed the Safe Aircraft Maintenance Standards Act, which would require that the FAA provide greater oversight to ensure aircraft and passenger safety.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Contact your representatives at congress.gov/members and encourage them to support the Safe Aircraft Maintenance Standards Act, HR 5119.



Nowhere to Hide
Pay-TV companies must now be transparent about all fees at the time consumers sign up.



Our February 2020 cover story, **“Sweet Dreams Are Made of These,”** showcased the top-performing mattresses and pillows from CR’s lab tests. To join the conversation, go to [CR.org/sweetdreams0520](https://www.consumerreports.org/sweetdreams0520).

I ENJOYED your wide-ranging mattress report, but what about the cost of a box spring? In my experience, the box spring is as expensive as the mattress. Does the manufacturer’s warranty require you to buy a box spring or, specifically, the company’s matching box spring?
 –David Wolff, South Windsor, CT

EDITOR’S NOTE Prices for a box spring usually start at a few hundred dollars. Some mattress companies have warranties that require you to buy the brand’s matching base. Others don’t, but they might specify in the mattress warranty what qualifies as a proper base and frame. So check to see whether your existing support meets the mattress company’s criteria.

THERE IS ONE REASON that I buy a new mattress every few years: They all develop a depression where I usually sleep. My CR top-rated Casper is experiencing this now. I wish you would develop a test for this. Put a 250-pound dummy on the mattress, and measure the permanent depression it leaves after about 3 months.
 –Scott Wood, Torrance, CA

EDITOR’S NOTE We do test overall mattress durability with this method: We roll a 310-pound cylinder over the mattress 30,000 times (taking about 30 hours) to simulate eight to 10 years of use. After the test, we measure changes in firmness and sagging, and assess physical damage. To help prevent sagging in one spot, remember to rotate your mattress regularly, which should help lengthen its life span.

REGARDING YOUR REVIEW of the Sleep Number mattresses: I was surprised that you did not mention potential privacy issues. My husband and I liked the idea of being able to adjust the comfort separately on both sides. However, when we found out that the mattress connects to the internet and sends information about your sleeping patterns to a remote server to detect how well you are sleeping, we decided against this mattress.
 –Gretchen Meyer, Cedarburg, WI

EDITOR’S NOTE As more of our regular household objects become connected—from TVs to robotic vacuums—you’re wise to be wary. Though we can’t speak to connected mattresses right now, you can go to [CR.org/dataprivacy](https://www.consumerreports.org/dataprivacy) for the latest on our other privacy-related testing and news.

MY HUSBAND and I have struggled to find pillows that work for each of us, so we were delighted to see the first-ever pillow ratings in the February 2020 issue. The top-rated Coop



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- CR renewal orders are mailed to our Harlan, Iowa, or Markham, Ontario, addresses.
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Home Goods pillow looked to be perfect. However, I came across this content in its FAQs: “Memory foam is temperature sensitive, so the pillow will become firm at temperatures below 65° F. If exposed to temperatures below 50° F, the pillow will feel solid. We recommend throwing the pillow in the dryer on low heat for 30 minutes to warm up.” Is this common to all shredded foam pillows, or just this particular brand?

–Cindy Forehand, Burlington, VT

EDITOR’S NOTE *Colder room temperatures can indeed have a big effect on how firm memory foam feels. But all you need to do is lie on it; your body heat will react with the foam and allow it to return to its normal firmness. Pillows that use a solid block of foam are likely to take longer to reach an acceptable temperature than pillows that use shredded foam.*

I WAS SURPRISED that the mattress evaluation and ratings took only the back and side

STAY INFORMED ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS

As we went to press, daily life around the globe was being transformed as people tried to understand how to cope with the coronavirus pandemic. The resulting disease, COVID-19, is marked by respiratory problems, and symptoms can be severe, especially in older adults and those with underlying health conditions. To help keep you and your family safe, check regularly for our updates, analysis, and advice at [CR.org/coronavirus](https://www.consumerreports.org/coronavirus).

sleepers into consideration. As a stomach sleeper, I was wondering why this position wasn’t evaluated as well.

–Jack Baum, Beverly Hills, CA

EDITOR’S NOTE *Though only 7 percent of people sleep on their stomachs, we’re looking into developing a mattress test for them. In the meantime, choose a model that performs well for side and back sleepers, and try sleeping with a thin pillow or no pillow at all.*



SAFER CARS FOR ALL

YOUR FEBRUARY 2020 article “Making Cars Safer for Women” was extremely upsetting but not news to me. I’m a 120-pound woman who’s 5 feet, 4 inches, and I’ve always realized that if I’m ever in a serious crash, I will probably be killed because seat belts don’t sit on my shoulder where they are supposed to, no matter how I try to adjust them. In fact, most things in life were designed for men, and as a result are too big for me. It’s infuriating that car manufacturers don’t care if women die. They need to hear from us; we need to tell them that despite what they may think, women are people, too.

–Pam Lynn, Connellsville, PA

NOTE TO AUTOMOBILE MANUFACTURERS: I, as the woman of the household, make the final decision as to what cars our family buys, 95 percent of which are eliminated due to how poorly the seat belts fit me. They cut across my neck, slip up to my waist from the hips, and slide across my chest.

And no, I don’t want my feet to dangle just to get a proper fit. I am disgusted that my safety is not a concern to you.

I’ve contacted the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration multiple times, and it doesn’t care either.

–Marti Fallon, Colorado Springs, CO

I WAS SHOCKED to read that the airbags fatal to females were designed to reduce injury risk for a “50th percentile male ... even if he wasn’t wearing a seat belt.” Perhaps if safety engineers operated from the premise that car occupants would be belted in, fewer women and children would suffer from overzealous airbags. After all, not fastening one’s seat belt is a choice. Being born with a male or female genotype is not.

–Julie Potluri, Cincinnati

EVERYONE WANTS SAFE, cost-effective cars, and the trade-offs are complex. Do we really want generic car safety biased toward a debatable standard, as we have had for years? Or truly mass customization, so my body type and health characteristics give me a unique fit? That would be very safe but very difficult to sell to a “matched” buyer.

–Steve Tarr, Sammamish, WA

MOST CARS AND TRUCKS don’t provide enough range of adjustment of the driver’s seat, steering wheel, and pedals. My SUV, for example, makes the seat move forward and upward together, instead of as separate adjustments. I would like to have the seat high and back. It does let the seat move fore/aft independently, but the height adjustment is on a swing arm linkage.

–Wayne Collins, Dubuque, IA



TIMESHARE TIPS

YOUR ARTICLE “Trouble in Paradise” (February 2020) mostly mentioned the downside of timeshares. The upside is that my wife and I have been members for 20 years, and have traveled to more than 40 states and several foreign countries with it, seeing all the national parks and great places. Sure, there are maintenance fees, but compare them with a second-home cost (taxes, utilities, etc.). I haven’t experienced the selling part yet, and appreciate your heads-up about it. Keep traveling!

–Tom Kanya, Essex Junction, VT

I WAS SURPRISED and disappointed that your article did not make a flat-out recommendation against purchasing a timeshare. As your article says, it can take at least 13 years before you break even on a timeshare purchase. Even achieving that goal may require you to commit to a “resort-style” vacation (no road trips, no cruises). Why would you want to be that constrained if it’s going to take 13 years to get your money’s worth? The scams are outrageous, and the companies engaged in them must be held accountable. But the real story is why these companies even exist. If thousands (tens of thousands?) of timeshare owners weren’t anxious to extricate themselves from burdensome, uneconomical timeshare contracts, there wouldn’t be companies (some legitimate, some not) offering that service.

–Harry Sheinfeld, Springfield, VA



WRITE

Go to [CR.org/lettertoeditor](https://www.consumerreports.org/lettertoeditor) to share your comments for publication.

What We're Testing in Our Labs ...

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

Hand Mixers

WE TESTED: 13 models
WE TEST FOR: How fast a mixer makes whipped cream; how proficient it is at mixing cookie dough; ease of use, including controls and beaters; noise while on the highest speed.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 71
Range: 49-82

Magnificent Mixer
Cuisinart Power Advantage HM-50 (wire beaters) \$40



82
OVERALL SCORE

Quick & Quiet
KitchenAid KHM926 (wire beaters) \$100



79
OVERALL SCORE

Digital Display for Less
Toostess Delfino DLHM-564 (center post beaters) \$35



75
OVERALL SCORE

Smart Speakers With Screens

WE TESTED: 52 models with screens and without
WE TEST FOR: Sound quality of the speaker; ease of setup and controls; and versatility, including the presence or absence of useful features.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 56
Range: 25-76

A Big Screen & Much More
Amazon Echo Show (2nd Gen) With Alexa \$180



69
OVERALL SCORE

Bold & Beautiful Display
Google Nest Hub Max With Google Assistant \$230



63
OVERALL SCORE

Low Profile & Nice Price
JBL Link View With Google Assistant \$100



61
OVERALL SCORE

Ask Our Experts

What are the benefits to getting a smart speaker with a built-in screen?



SCREENS ENHANCE smart speaker usability. Many can stream videos or display the weather, your calendar, smart thermostat controls, or web pages. Some, like the Amazon Echo Show above, have cameras for video calls and even let you text. But if you mostly stream music, forgo the screen. The sound quality isn't as good compared with the best screenless models we've tested, says Elias Arias, CR's smart speaker tester. (Sonos and Bose, for example, offer screenless models priced similarly to the three above but have better sound quality in our tests.) Some models with screens also take up more surface space and may strike you as redundant with your smartphone or tablet.

ILLUSTRATION: SERGE BLOCH

For the latest ratings of these and other product categories, readers with a Digital or All-Access membership can go to CR.org.

Bike Helmets

WE TESTED: 48 models
WE TEST FOR: The ability of a helmet to absorb impact forces in a crash, ventilation, fit adjustments, and ease of use.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
 Median: 67
 Range: 35-86

Super for Cyclers
 Giro Register MIPS
 \$60



85
 OVERALL SCORE

Top Fit for Mountain Bikers
 Kali Alchemy
 \$100



84
 OVERALL SCORE

Best for Kids
 Garneau Nino
 \$40



79
 OVERALL SCORE

Fashion Smartwatches

WE TESTED: 31 models from tech and fashion brands
WE TEST FOR: Ease of use, including accessing messages and calendar; accuracy of step-count and heart-rate monitor; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
 Median: 73
 Range: 56-86

Best Overall Performance
 Fossil Venture HR Gen 4
 \$150



72
 OVERALL SCORE

Easiest to Use & Pair
 Michael Kors Access Women's Sofie HR
 \$200



70
 OVERALL SCORE

Accurate Heart Monitor
 Kate Spade Scallop 2
 \$300



66
 OVERALL SCORE

13" Laptops With Long Battery Life

WE TESTED: 22 models
WE TEST FOR: The time it takes to deplete a fully charged battery while loading web pages, then again with just a 4K video loop; general performance; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
 Median: 67
 Range: 37-80

Great Overall Performance
 Microsoft Surface Laptop 3 (lasts 13.5 hours)
 \$1,000



72
 OVERALL SCORE

Longest-Lasting Battery
 HP Spectre Folio (lasts 18.5 hours)
 \$900



68
 OVERALL SCORE

No Touch Screen for Less
 Asus Zenbook UX331UA-AS51 (lasts 13.75 hours)
 \$800



67
 OVERALL SCORE

Wet-Weather Tires

WE TESTED: 69 all-season tires
WE TEST FOR: Stopping performance from 60 to 0 mph on a wet road, a tire's resistance to hydroplaning (skimming in standing water), on-road noise, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
 Median: 60
 Range: 45-75

King of the Wet Road
 Michelin CrossClimate + (Performance All Season)
 \$171



75
 OVERALL SCORE

Good Grip for a Nice Price
 General Altimax RT43 (All Season)
 \$86



70
 OVERALL SCORE

Excellent Wet Handling
 Goodyear Eagle Exhilarate (UHP All Season)
 \$159



68
 OVERALL SCORE

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

COMING NEXT MONTH Mattresses & More



Isn't it critical to wash chicken before you cook it?

According to a survey published in the Journal of Food Protection, 68 percent of people wash their raw chicken—but that doesn't make doing so right. "Washing raw chicken doesn't remove bacteria if it's there," says James E. Rogers, Ph.D., director of food safety research and testing at CR. "In fact, washing may increase your chances of getting food poisoning."

Why? A recent study from the Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service found that people who washed or rinsed their raw birds were leaving a trail of bacteria around the kitchen. Sixty percent had bacteria in their sink afterward, and 14 percent still had bacteria in the sink after cleaning it. Plus, 26 percent of home cooks

who washed the raw chicken also ended up transferring bacteria to a salad they were also preparing.

If there's excess juice on raw chicken that you want to remove, gently wipe it with a damp paper towel, then wash your hands with soap for a full 20 seconds. Note that the pink liquid in packaged fresh chicken, though it may look like blood, is "mostly water, which was absorbed by the chicken during the chilling process," the USDA explains. So there isn't any need to rinse it off before cooking.

"Thorough cooking is the only way to kill bacteria and make sure that meat or poultry is safe to eat," Rogers says. Poultry—whole, parts, or ground—should be cooked to 165° F, and CR advises that you use an accurate meat thermometer. (We recommend the CDN ProAccurate TCT572.)

Which is better: a whole-house water filter or one that goes under the sink?

If your goal is to have filtered water to drink and cook with,

an under-sink water filter is probably all you need. Filters certified to the NSF/ANSI 42 standard effectively remove odors and off tastes. Those certified to the NSF/ANSI 53 standard remove lead and other contaminants. If your annual water-quality report shows that you have a wide range of contaminants or bacteria in your water, an under-sink reverse osmosis water filter is your best bet.

Whole-house water filters (different from softener systems for hard water) are best for removing large sediment, such as sand and iron. (The latter can stain sinks and clothing.) These filters can also improve the taste of water, but most basic ones don't filter for the contaminants that under-sink filters do. "Some advanced whole-house purification systems can remove potential hazards such as volatile organic compounds [VOCs], pesticides, and heavy metals, but they're expensive—and can be overkill," says John Galeotafiore, associate director of product testing at CR. For example, you probably don't need filtered toilet water.

If you're worried about sediment as well as contaminants in your water, Galeotafiore recommends

pairing a basic, less expensive whole-house filter with an NSF/ANSI-certified point-of-use filter for the water you ingest.

I don't fill my gas tank until it falls below a quarter of a tank. Is that bad?

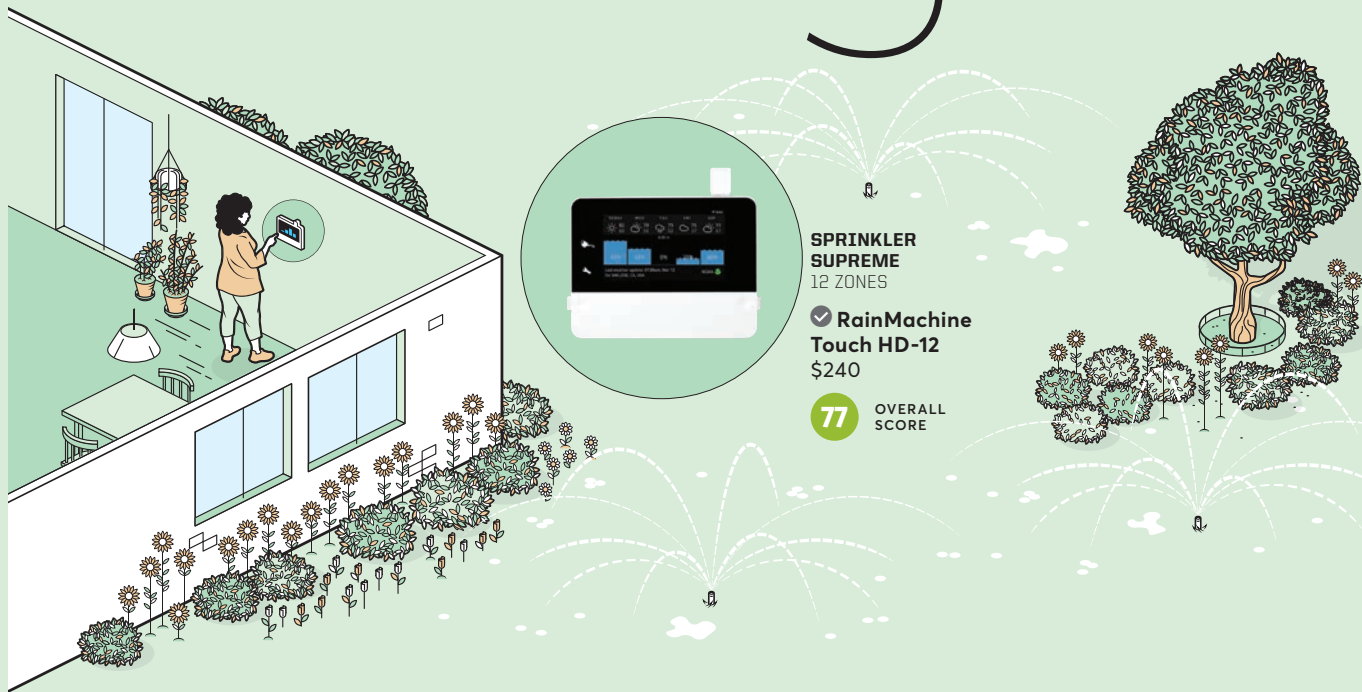
Some drivers fill up often because they worry about debris and rust from the bottom of the fuel tank getting into the engine, which could cause sediment to be sucked into the fuel injectors. Though that was once a concern with steel fuel tanks, a vast majority of today's cars have plastic fuel tanks that don't rust or break down as quickly, says John Ibbotson, chief mechanic for CR. (Plus, the fuel pump pulls gas into the engine from the bottom of the tank, so if debris were a problem, it would surface long before the fuel level gets low.) And though it's true that over time, gas left in your tank loses octane and creates residue, it won't be a problem if you use your car regularly and buy Top Tier gas, which causes less buildup.

Even so, don't habitually run on fumes (which can wear down your fuel pump). And even if you're a gas-tank-half-full kind of driver, don't top off after the nozzle clicks off at the gas station; doing so can damage your car's vapor recovery system. Besides, most cars give you a generous buffer of 40 to 50 miles at a moderate speed before you're truly out of gas.



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

CR Insights



SPRINKLER SUPREME
12 ZONES
✓ RainMachine Touch HD-12
\$240
77 OVERALL SCORE

IN THE KNOW

A SMARTER WAY TO WATER YOUR LAWN

JUST AS SMART thermostats have revolutionized the way homes are heated and cooled through automation, smart sprinkler controllers aim to change the way you care for

your lawn. These devices, which cost \$100 to \$300 and replace the existing programmable timer on your sprinkler system, use WiFi to pull weather data from the internet to determine watering schedules. So instead of just being on a timer, your sprinkler can also follow the forecast, saving you water—and money—if it starts raining. Plus, if you buy a WaterSense certified model (the EPA’s label for watering efficiency and conservation), it can save

the average U.S. home almost 7,600 gallons of water per year.

“Smart sprinklers are helpful but can be intimidating at first, due to complicated wiring and app controls,” says Larry Ciuffo, a CR test engineer. In our tests of seven WaterSense certified systems, we evaluate how easy it is to wire the controller to the sprinkler system’s water valves, how simple the controls are to use, and whether the device is weatherproof (shockingly, some aren’t).

We also track whether a model had trouble connecting to the internet. To gauge a system’s weather responsiveness, we collect actual rainfall data, using it to evaluate how much sprinklers overwater or underwater. “Some make more frequent adjustments than others, thanks to more sophisticated sets of weather data,” Ciuffo says. The RainMachine, above, was the only model to earn an Excellent rating in that test.

ILLUSTRATIONS: RODRIGO DAMATI

3 MORE SMART PICKS



BIG-LAWN BARGAIN
12 ZONES
Orbit B-Hyve 57950
\$110

69
OVERALL SCORE



EASY WIFI SETUP
8 ZONES
Rachio 8ZULW-C
\$230

68
OVERALL SCORE



INTUITIVE CONTROLS
8 ZONES
Rain Bird ST8-2.0
\$185

62
OVERALL SCORE

COOL PRODUCT
FEATURE OF THE MONTH

AN INSTANT
TRANSLATOR
ON YOUR
SMARTPHONE



Need to conquer a language barrier quickly? Google has added an “interpreter mode” to its Google Assistant—a digital assistant similar to Amazon’s Alexa—that will help you chat with someone who speaks a different language from your own by automatically translating your speech or texts. (Google Assistant is built into Google-supported Android phones and can be downloaded as an app on iPhones.) It’s a handy feature whether you’re asking for directions or warning a waiter about a food allergy. Currently, the interpreter mode works with

44 languages, including Italian and Thai.

To use it, just open the app and say, “Hey, Google, help me speak Spanish” or “Okay, Google, be my Dutch interpreter.” Then Google Assistant will listen to words and phrases in English (or any other language you select) and speak them back to you in the language you requested. It will also generate auto responses that you and the person you’re speaking with can tap to help speed the conversation along, or in some languages, you can choose to communicate entirely via text.

FOOD IQ™

WHICH GRILL
MAKES
THE TASTIEST
FOOD?

ALL GRILLS TYPICALLY use one of three sources of fuel for heat—charcoal, propane gas, or wood pellets. Charcoal loyalists insist the coals impart a distinct flavor that’s unmatched by gas. Gas grill enthusiasts feel that gas grills offer better control than charcoal, so you don’t scorch food or overcook it. Other backyard chefs argue pellet grills offer the best of both worlds—the wood pellets they burn impart a flavor reminiscent of charcoal, while a digital thermostat provides superior control.

OUR TASTE TEST: To help settle the debate, CR decided to have a little grill-off. We cooked identically prepared foods on three high-scoring grills: a gas,

PHOTOS, BOTTOM (LEFT TO RIGHT): EVERETT COLLECTION/SHUTTERSTOCK; BURGER KING; DOMINO'S; WENDY'S; CONSUMER REPORTS; SAM KAPLAN

CR Time Traveler FAST FOOD

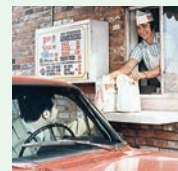
1948 The original McDonald's opens in San Bernardino, Calif., introducing its “speedee service system” with a limited menu of 15-cent hamburgers, shakes, and fries.



1954 Burger King is founded in Miami.



1960 Tom Monaghan and his brother buy a Michigan pizza store called Domi-Nick's for \$900; five years later Tom renames it “Domino's Pizza, Inc.”



1975 Fast-food chains serve up \$10 billion worth of meals a year. CR tests meals from eight chains and finds that nearly all are more than 1,000 calories. But, we warn, the biggest nutritional booby traps are the shakes and colas.

1970 After founding Wendy's in 1969, Dave Thomas introduces the first modern drive-thru “pick-up window.” The concept is so new that customers need instructions on how to talk through the speaker.





GAS

✓ **Fuego Premium
3 Burners F36S**
\$2,000

71

OVERALL
SCORE



PELLET

**Louisiana
Grills LG900**
\$900

74

OVERALL
SCORE



CHARCOAL

✓ **Dyna-Glo
DGN576DNC-D**
\$220

81

OVERALL
SCORE

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

a charcoal, and a pellet (see models above). On each, we cooked boneless skinless chicken thighs and sliced zucchini, all prepped with just a small amount of oil and salt, so as not to mask any flavors imparted by the different types of grills.

Next, we asked 113 staffers to sample either food—or both if they were hungry—without

knowing which grill each came from. We asked them to state their preferences, as well as to guess which foods were cooked on each grill.

THE RESULTS: It was almost an even split, but the gas grill had a slight edge in our taste test for chicken, getting 36 percent of the vote. The pellet grill was a close second, with 34 percent; charcoal

came in at 30 percent. Of the 31 folks who tried zucchini, almost two-thirds favored the gas grill. That's surprising, because charcoal and pellet grills are designed to impart a distinct flavor to food. One possible explanation is that gas-grilled foods might be the most familiar-tasting—gas grills account for the lion's share of all grills sold.

Another surprise: Only about a third of CR staffers correctly paired their food to the grill that cooked it—though even that may have been due to chance. So if you're not firmly in one camp or the other, our experts say to choose your grill based on ease of use, cost, and construction, rather than on any flavor promise.



1984 Our sensory consultants taste-test burgers, chocolate shakes, and fries at 10 popular fast-food chains. Kentucky Fried Chicken and Roy Rogers get top scores.

1979 A reader tells CR that her McDonald's pie had only 1½ cherries. We investigate and find that the pies have five cherries on average—slim pickings compared with the package, which shows more than 100. The pies appear to flout an FDA regulation that frozen cherry pies must contain at least 25.



1991 CR labs do nutrition and taste tests on breakfast foods from McDonald's, Hardee's, and Burger King. We say to pass on BK's French Toast Sticks—which pack triple the fat and 150 more calories than Hardee's pancake and bacon platter (above).

2016 We urge McDonald's, KFC, and Subway to make a commitment to stop serving meat from animals raised on antibiotics used in human medicine. CR continues to push for better policies today.

Sweetgreen

↑ OVERALL
RATING



2020 CR rates the healthfulness of 17 chain restaurants. Turn to page 24 for our full story, "Fast Food Gets a Makeover."

CR MONEY SAVER

THE BETTER WAY TO HAUL A BIKE

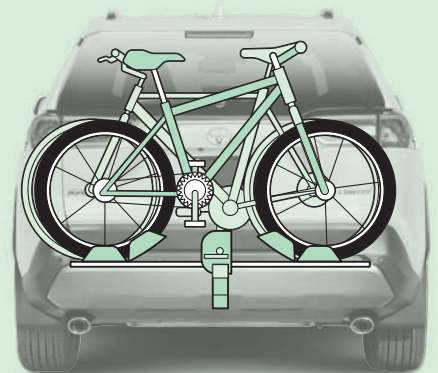
ROOF AND TRAILER-HITCH racks are great at toting your gear for a weekend adventure, but those mounts can change the aerodynamics as well as the weight of your vehicle—costing you additional gas money.

To find out just how much of an impact they have, our experts measured how different car racks—when empty and when loaded with two adult-sized bicycles—affected the fuel economy of a sedan (2019 Nissan Altima) and a small SUV (2019 Toyota RAV4) going 65 mph.

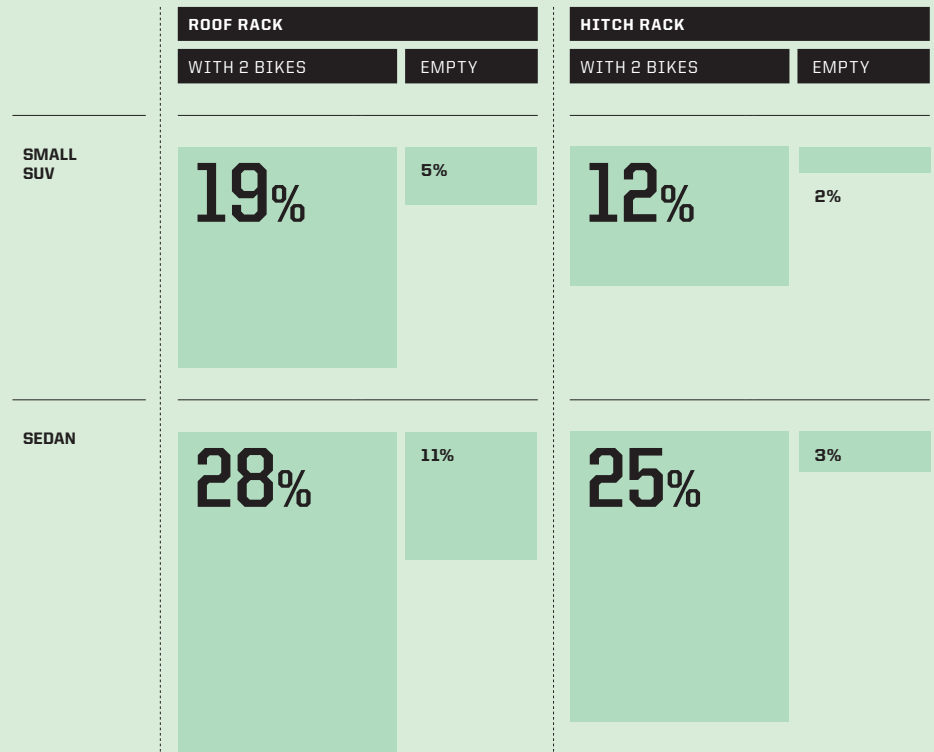
For the sedan, our tests revealed that the fuel economy took a significant hit with a loaded bike rack (much more than the SUV’s)—and even the empty roof rack exacted a large fuel economy penalty. Only the empty hitch rack had a negligible impact.

The RAV4 SUV, on the other hand, was less affected by either rack type, but the hitch was still the clear winner.

A hitch rack is also easier to remove—which will help encourage you to take it off when you don’t need it, and save fuel no matter what vehicle you drive.



REDUCTION IN MPG



MAY IS THE BEST TIME TO BUY ...



GRILLS



STROLLERS



KITCHEN RANGES

CR TIME-SAVER

EMPTY YOUR VACUUM WITH EASE

After you're done vacuuming, some bagless models present a secondary chore: clawing out the debris and dust bunnies that get stuck up inside the dirt bin. Bissell's AirRam 1984—a cordless stick vacuum that excels in many of our lab tests, including those for carpet, bare floors, and pet hair—has a simple feature to help speed up that task: a sliding lever that pushes out the debris from inside its detachable bin. This quiet machine also did well in our edge cleaning tests, though the large swivel head isn't as easy to maneuver as other stick vacs.



✓ Bissell
AirRam 1984
\$250

88 OVERALL SCORE



PRIVACY UPDATE

ARE RING DOORBELLS LEAVING YOU VULNERABLE?

AT THE END of 2019, Ring announced that thousands of its Ring doorbell and security cameras could be vulnerable to hackers. The company warned that usernames and passwords for many accounts could have been acquired by criminals, who could then access Ring smartphone apps and view live camera feeds, phone numbers, and more. In one highly publicized incident, a hacker reportedly accessed the Ring account of a Mississippi family, taking control of a security camera to harass an 8-year-old girl who was alone in her room.

To help address security and privacy, Ring recently rolled out updates, including a new privacy dashboard on its mobile app that will let users manage their connected devices to ensure that hackers and other unauthorized users do not have access.

Ring also recently enabled mandatory two-factor authentication (2FA) for new

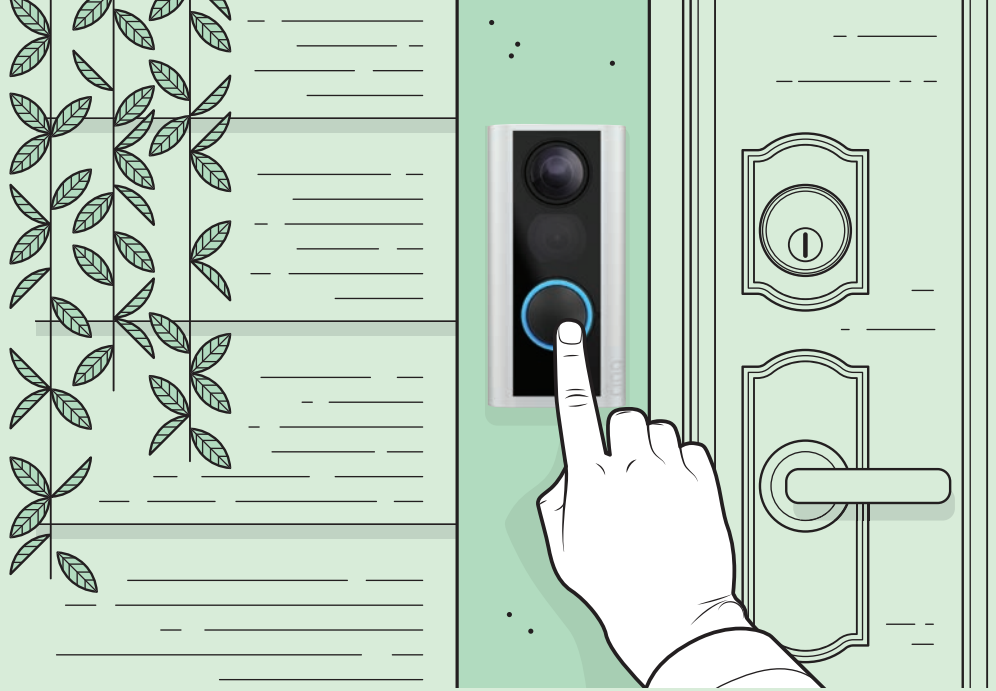
accounts and devices. Two-factor is a CR-recommended security mechanism that typically requires users to input a secondary, temporary password when logging in. That way, if someone else tries to log in as you, they may still be blocked from accessing your account.

“We’re glad to see Ring make these changes that allow consumers more control over their data,” says Katie McInnis, a policy counsel at CR. “However, in order to more fully protect consumers, Ring should also take other heightened security measures.”

CR is urging all video doorbell makers to take a number of specific steps, McInnis says. For instance, companies should adopt measures to guard against hackers entering large numbers of usernames and passwords to try accessing customer accounts. In a reply to CR, Ring told us it is taking such steps.

DIY PRIVACY PROTECTION

If you already have a Ring, change your password and enable 2FA on your account as soon as possible. For help creating a strong password, you can go to [CR.org/password0520](https://www.consumerreports.org/password0520). You can also opt out of having local police request your security camera footage in the app settings.





MIX MASTER

✓ KitchenAid Classic K45SS \$200

81 OVERALL SCORE

PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

OUTSTANDING STAND MIXERS

WITH THE ABILITY to power through thick batters and stiff doughs, a good stand mixer can be a home baker's best friend. Ready to meet your mixing match? "There are two main factors to consider," says Cindy Fisher, who oversees our stand mixer tests in CR's labs. "Think about what types of tasks you plan to use it for, and how much space you have

to store it—particularly the height of your cabinets, as many models are over a foot tall." For snug spaces, consider the Bosch and Hamilton Beach models below, among the shortest we tested.

If you make a lot of thick doughs (think bread or maybe oatmeal raisin cookies), look for a stand mixer that has the heft to handle tough jobs

without "walking" across the counter from the effort—our top five rated models all weigh between 19 and 31 pounds. And don't be too swayed by wattage: Our tests showed that a 250-watt mixer (such as the KitchenAid Classic, above) can perform the same or better than some models that boast twice that. To help make your choice, use our ratings below.

	✓ KitchenAid Professional 6500 Design Series	✓ KitchenAid Classic (250-watt) K45SS(WH)	KitchenAid Artisan KSM150P5(WWH)	KitchenAid Classic Plus KSM75WH	Smeg 5-Quart SMF01RUIS	Kenmore Elite B9208	Hamilton Beach Eclectrics 6322(L)	Kenmore Elite 417601 Dvation	Cuisinart Precision Master SM-35	Bosch Universal Plus MUM6N1DUC	Hamilton Beach 63326	Bodum Bistro 11991
OVERALL SCORE	82	81	79	79	79	78	78	77	76	76	73	73
PRICE	\$480	\$200	\$300	\$200	\$460	\$175	\$180	\$300	\$180	\$400	\$80	\$285
WHIPPING TIME	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️
MIXING	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️
KNEADING	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️
NOISE	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️
BOWL SIZE (QT.)	6.0	4.5	5.0	4.0	5.0	5.0	4.5	5.0	4.0	5.0	4.0	5.0
HEIGHT (IN.)	16.3	14	14	13.8	14.8	14	15	13	13	11	11.5	13
WARRANTY (YR.)	1	1	1	1	1	5	3	1	3	1	1	2
WATTAGE	400	250	325	275	600	400	400	500	350	800	300	700
WEIGHT	31	23	23	22.3	19	18.9	17	30	12	11.6	9	16

HOW WE TEST: Whipping time is how long it takes the mixer to whip a half-pint of heavy cream into airy peaks, and whether

the ingredients are properly whipped. Mixing is assessed by making chocolate chip cookie dough. For kneading, we add

blue and yellow food coloring to plain dough and time how long it takes the mixer to turn the dough an even green. Noise is judged

on a model's highest speed. Overall Score is based mainly on performance; convenience and noise are also considered.



RECALLS

TO STAY INFORMED ABOUT RECALLS FOR YOUR VEHICLES, READERS WITH MEMBERSHIP CAN USE OUR FREE CAR RECALL TRACKER AT CR.ORG/MORE.



TOYOTA
CAMRY

TOYOTA AND LEXUS VEHICLES

Toyota and Lexus are recalling about 696,000 vehicles of certain 2018 and 2019 Toyota and Lexus models because their fuel pump could stop working, which could lead to a sudden stall while driving. The problem increases the risk of a crash, especially when the vehicle is traveling at a high speed. If a fuel pump fails, a driver may notice that the vehicle's engine starts running rough and that warning lights may appear on the dashboard. The engine might not restart if it stalls. The recall includes 2018-2019 Lexus GS 350, GX 460, IS 300, LC 500, LS 500, LX 570, RC 300, RC 350, and RX 350; certain 2019 model year Lexus ES 350, GS 200t, GS 300, NX 300, and RX 350L; certain 2018-2019 model year Toyota 4Runner, Camry, Highlander, Land Cruiser, Sequoia, Sienna, Tacoma, and Tundra; and certain 2019 model year Toyota Avalon and Corolla vehicles.

What to do: Owners can contact Toyota customer service at 800-331-4331 or Lexus customer service at 800-255-3987. The automakers' numbers for this recall are 20TB02 and 20TA02 for Toyota vehicles and 20LB01 and 20LA01 for Lexus vehicles.

FORD VEHICLES

Ford is recalling 600,166 2006-2010 Ford Fusion, 2006-2010 Lincoln Zephyr/MKZ, and 2006-2010 Mercury Milan vehicles because in some of them, a normally closed valve inside the hydraulic control unit (HCU) may be stuck open, which may result in extended brake pedal travel, potentially increasing the risk of a crash.

What to do: Owners will be notified by mail and instructed to take their vehicle to a Ford or Lincoln dealer for an inspection of their ABS module assembly. Ford's number for this recall is 19S54.

GM VEHICLES

GM is recalling 463,995 2019 Chevrolet Silverado 1500, Cadillac CT6, and GMC Sierra 1500 vehicles because a software error can, in rare cases, disable the vehicle's electronic stability control (ESC) and antilock brake system (ABS) for one ignition cycle. If this occurs, the vehicle diagnostics will not illuminate the ESC and ABS lamps. If the driver is unaware that ESC and ABS are not functioning, there may be an increased risk of a crash.

What to do: The dealer will reflash the electronic brake control module. GM's number for this recall is N192268090.

THOMPSON'S WATERSEAL AEROSOL CANS

The Thompson's Company is recalling about 852,000 WaterSeal Waterproofing Wood Protector and Masonry Protector in aerosol cans because the contents can react with the package, causing rust to form along the can seam, which could spread to other areas of the can and create pinhole leaks. Leaking propellant poses a fire hazard when it comes into contact with sources of ignition. Leaking sealer can also result in property damage. The products were sold at Lowe's, Walmart, Menards, Home Depot, and other stores nationwide from February 2014 through September 2019 for about \$8.

What to do: Stop using the waterproofing and discard it in accordance with local requirements. Call Thompson's at 888-304-3769 or go to thompsonswaterseal.com for details and a full refund.

GRACO ROCKING SEATS

Graco is recalling about 111,000 Little Lounger rocking seats because infant fatalities have been reported with other manufacturers' inclined sleep products after infants rolled from their back to their stomach or side, or under other circumstances. The seats were sold at Target, Babies "R" Us, and other stores nationwide and online from 2013 through 2018 for about \$80.

What to do: Stop using the rocking seat. Contact Graco at 800-345-4109 or go to gracobaby.com for details and to get a cash refund or a voucher.

STIHL PRESSURE WASHERS

Stihl is recalling about 16,400 pressure washers because the nozzle can disconnect from the spray wand when under pressure during use, posing an injury hazard. The pressure washers were sold at Stihl dealers nationwide from May 2019 through October 2019 for about \$180.

What to do: Stop using the pressure washer. Contact Stihl at 844-978-1291 or go to an authorized Stihl servicing dealer to receive a free replacement spray wand.

YAMAHA PORTABLE GENERATORS

Yamaha is recalling about 10,100 2018 and 2019 EF2000iS portable generators because the fuel tank can leak gasoline, posing fire and burn hazards. The generators were sold at Yamaha Motorsports dealers from June 2018 through October 2019 for about \$900.

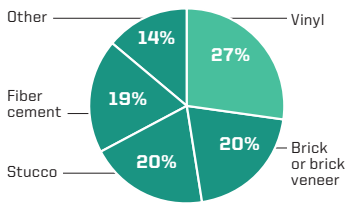
What to do: Stop using the generator and contact a Yamaha Power Products dealer to schedule a free repair. Call Yamaha at 866-788-7398 or go to yamahamotorsports.com for details.

PIER 1 DESK CHAIRS

Pier 1 is recalling about 6,000 desk chairs because the legs can break, posing fall and injury hazards. The chairs were sold at Pier 1 stores nationwide and online at pier1.com from May 2019 through November 2019 for \$260 to \$450.

What to do: Stop using the chair. Call Pier 1 at 855-513-5140 or go to pier1.com to get a free repair kit.

Siding material used on houses started, completed, or sold in 2018.



Source: U.S. Census: Survey of Construction.

PRODUCT UPDATE

THE LATEST RATINGS FROM OUR LABS

What's New in Siding

Our first tests of vinyl siding in more than a decade reveal the brands that offer the most protection at the best price.

by **Tobie Stanger**



✓ **Aside**
Charter Oak
Clapboard vinyl
 siding \$95 per
 100 square feet

69



INSIDE
 CR'S LABS

Rich Handel, a CR test project leader, evaluates the impact resistance of vinyl siding.

THE BEAUTY OF vinyl siding is more than skin-deep. It can boost a home's curb appeal, last 50 years or more with little maintenance, and protect a house from costly damage caused by moisture and insects.

Vinyl is also one of the most affordable siding choices, which may be why it's the most popular. The average cost nationwide to install vinyl siding on a house is \$14,359, according to Remodeling magazine's 2020 Cost vs. Value study. Fiber cement siding, an alternative to vinyl that's growing in popularity, costs \$17,008, on average. Siding pros tell us that wood will set you back even more.

Adding to vinyl's appeal is the fact that it practically pays for itself. Homeowners who install it will recoup about 75 percent of the cost when they sell their property, according to the Remodeling magazine study. In terms of maintenance, few materials can match the ease of vinyl. Upkeep is as simple as an occasional power wash or spritz with a garden hose.

Like the aluminum siding it has overtaken in popularity, vinyl will never be mistaken for wood upon close inspection. But manufacturers are increasingly creating new textured and overlapping styles to create a more woodlike appearance.

Siding Findings

Our recent tests of 11 siding products is the first we've done in more than a decade. We evaluated eight vinyl products made entirely of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) and three alternative products made of a combination of PVC foam and other materials. Here are the highlights of our findings:

Colorfast siding generally costs more. We subjected light-colored siding samples to 1,000 hours of ultraviolet light about twice the strength of sunlight. The three alternative sidings held their color admirably. But they're pricey, at \$300 to \$390 per 100 square



VINYL SIDING AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Vinyl, otherwise known as polyvinyl chloride (PVC), can pose a danger to human health and the environment under extreme conditions. For instance, when it's burned in a high-temperature fire, some of its toxic components, such as chlorine gas and the carcinogen dioxin, are released into the environment. In general, though, any harm vinyl siding may pose to people or the environment is small. "Most of the risk is to PVC production workers not following proper protection guidelines," says Michael Hansen, a senior scientist at Consumer Reports.

What's more, siding that ends up in a landfill tends not to degrade, so there's little likelihood that its components will leach into soil or water, says Dwight Patterson, an associate professor of chemistry at Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro. And while vinyl that burns can release toxins, vinyl siding in a landfill would have to be at or near the surface to burn at

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 22]

feet ("per square" in siding-speak). Among the eight all-vinyl products, only one—Georgia-Pacific Forest Ridge, at \$120 per square and exclusive to Lowe's—held its color well. All of the other products we tested showed a noticeable change in color when compared with new samples after our color change test.

Features make a difference. For fewer seams and a more uniform look on your house, choose panels longer than the typical 12 to 13 feet. Vinyl siding that's folded over at the top in what's called a "double hem" attaches more securely to exterior walls than siding without that feature. And the foam backing on some vinyl siding products could help to insulate your house, says Rich Handel, CR's test project leader for siding.

Alternative siding holds up better in the cold than vinyl. Temperature can affect the impact resistance of siding, so we tested the samples at 70° F and 0° F. In cold testing, the alternative sidings showed mediocre resistance to damage related to winter weather. All-vinyl siding fared worse. The results suggest that if your house routinely gets battered in the winter by wind-blown branches or other heavy objects, you might want to stick with wood or fiber cement siding. (Tests of fiber cement siding were underway in our labs at press time. Results will be posted on CR.org when they're available.)

Our top-rated vinyl siding holds up well in most climates. Alside Charter Oak offers a winning combination of performance and price. At \$95 per square, it's the only Best Buy in our siding ratings. It excels in our evaluations of rigidity—lying flatter and straighter on the surface—as well as in wind resistance and assaults by heavy objects at a moderate temperature. Its colorfastness is acceptable.

The only alternative siding we recommend, Celect Cellular Composite by Royal 7-inch Clapboard, is the

top-performing siding in our ratings overall and has an appearance closer to real wood than the vinyl products. But at \$390, it's more than four times the price of Alside.

How to Choose an Installer

Siding can refresh a house's appearance, but it can also create an eyesore by buckling or warping if it's improperly installed. Even worse, shoddy installation can allow moisture to find its way to the bones of the home, where it could cause mold or rot, compromising the house's structural integrity.

To increase the chances of finding a capable contractor who will do the job right—and be available to fix any problems that might arise—look for siding installers who have been working in your area for at least five years, and check their references.

Contractors certified by the Vinyl Siding Institute (VSI) have been trained in the best installation practices and can be found through VSI's website (vinylsiding.org). The websites of some vinyl siding manufacturers also have search engines to help you find reputable local installers.

Ray McArdle, general manager of Norandex, a siding maker in Beloit, Wis., suggests going to local siding distributors to ask for installer recommendations. "These businesses sell to local contractors and know who does quality work," McArdle says.

As with any contractor, check local and state licenses, Better Business Bureau ratings, and certificates of insurance. (Lowe's says all of its third-party installers meet insurance and licensing guidelines. Home Depot no longer offers siding installation services.)

Where Not to Skimp

You might be tempted to save money by placing a new layer of siding over an old one, but removing old siding



[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21]

a temperature high enough to release those toxins, Patterson notes.

Still, recycling vinyl siding is a more environmentally sound choice than dumping it in a landfill. "It's better to reprocess it into a new product," Patterson says.

To recycle old panels and new scrap from your siding project, try these steps:

Ask the contractor to recycle. He or she can make money—typically pennies per pound—and avoid municipal dump fees. If your local solid-waste management department doesn't offer vinyl siding recycling, the Vinyl Institute's directory, at vinylinfo.org/recycling-directory, provides a list of other options.

Recycle it yourself.

Uninsulated vinyl siding isn't heavy, says Fred Gorski, manager of Northwest Polymers, which recycles vinyl in Molalla, Ore. At about 6 ounces per square foot, enough siding to cover 200 square feet would weigh 75 pounds, an easy load to transport in a pickup truck. Material that's dirty, old, or brittle may be rejected, Gorski warns. Keep in mind, too, that the nearest recycler may be a long drive away.

and starting from scratch is generally a better approach. "Removing the old layer will reveal any damaged sheathing that might need repair," Handel says, adding that putting a new layer over an old one might make your house look weird. "Windows and doors could appear inset."

If you expect to replace windows in the next few years, a good time to do so is when you're re-siding, says Mark Mackmiller, a design-and-build contractor in Eden Prairie, Minn. "Unless you plan to use replacement windows—where you put a frame inside a frame—you're going to have to remove siding anyway when you install new windows," he says.

Five Ways to Save

Installers might encourage you to switch to a more expensive product than the one you're considering or suggest unnecessary extras to bolster their bottom line. These five tips will help you keep costs down.


Compare apples to apples.

Request all-inclusive price estimates for materials, labor for teardown and installation, and disposal. Ask the installer to explain the company's workmanship warranty. Examples we found online ranged from one year to a "lifetime," and didn't always detail what they covered. Most warranties for the siding in our ratings protect against product defects for the first homeowner's lifetime; for a second owner, the warranty is typically 50 years, prorated from the time of installation.

Keep it light. Siding in darker colors is a current trend, but you can save \$12 to \$15 per square by choosing lighter hues, McArdle says.

Keep it simple. Scalloped edges, cedarlike shake, and barnlike board and batten are usually more expensive than traditional straight-edged panels, McArdle says. Mixing patterns can cost more because of the extra labor

Ratings > **Siding-by-Siding Comparison** Our tests predict how well vinyl and alternative siding will stand up to weather and other assaults to protect your home.

Brand + Product	Overall Score	Price	Test Results					Features		
			Warm impact	Cold impact	Wind	Color change	Rigidity	Foam-backed	Longer lengths	Double hem
										
VINYL SIDING										
Alside Charter Oak Clapboard	69	\$95	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑			
Norandex Polar Wall Plus! D4 Clapboard	68	\$205	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑			
Revere Sovereign Select Double 4" Clapboard	65	\$125	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑			
Georgia-Pacific Compass (Lowe's)	58	\$135	↓	↓	↑	↓	↑			
Georgia-Pacific Forest Ridge (Lowe's)	55	\$120	↓	↓	↑	↑	↓			
CertainTeed Mainstreet Double 4" Woodgrain Clapboard	54	\$95	↓	↓	↑	↓	↑			
Royal Estate D450	52	\$100	↓	↓	↑	↓	↑			
Royal Royal Crest D450	43	\$75	↓	↓	↓	↓	↑			

ALTERNATIVE SIDING										
Select Cellular Composite by Royal 7" Clapboard	87	\$390	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑			
Everlast 6 7/8" Plank	79	\$300	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑			
Exterior Portfolio Portsmouth 8' S7 Cedar Shingles	76	\$325	↑	↓	↑	↑	↓			

HOW WE TEST: For Warm and Cold impact, at both 70° F and 0° F we release a weight from increasing heights to strike the siding where

clapboards or shingles overlap in order to evaluate resistance to impact. Wind gauges a siding's ability to stay attached to a house wall in winds

exceeding 150 mph. We subject panels to accelerated weathering with UV light, then measure Color change. The greater a panel's Rigidity, or stiffness, the less

"wavy" and more woodlike it will appear on a wall. Overall Score is based on the performance of the product in all of our tests. Price is per 100 square feet.

involved, says Mark Parlee, a building consultant in Des Moines, Iowa. "It requires complicated detailing to properly transition the two or more styles together in a watertight manner," he explains. **Negotiate.** Even if the installation price is firm, you can ask the siding company to offer an upgrade or other enticements. (A siding rep who provided an estimate to a CR staffer threw in free gutters and leaders/downspouts.) **Shop for financing.** You might find better financing terms from banks or

credit unions than from a contractor or retailer. Lowe's seven-year "fixed pay financing," for example, has a fixed annual percentage rate (APR) of 7.99 percent. But in late winter we looked online and found PenFed Credit Union offering an APR of 6.49 percent on a seven-year personal loan with no origination fees. For a loan of \$15,000, your savings with PenFed would be \$928 over seven years. (To be eligible, you must join PenFed and maintain a \$5 savings balance.) Tapping your home equity may be even less costly.

How to Make It Last
Siding is not waterproof. When properly installed, any water that gets under the siding should drain, and the underlying sheathing and framing should dry. But water driven behind siding from pressure washing may remain. "Surfaces that stay wet can become moldy or rot," says Jim Nanni, CR's associate director for testing. "To prevent that, don't spray directly into gaps," he advises. You can also clean siding with soapy water and a soft-bristle brush on a pole, then rinse the surface with a gentle spray.



NOODLES & COMPANY

Cauliflower Rigatoni in Light Onion Cream Sauce

Low-carb cauliflower replaces some of the flour in the pasta, and the dish comes with three types of veggies.



CORELIFE EATERY

BBQ Ranch Chicken

This chain's rice bowls feature purple rice, which offers healthy anthocyanins, the same compounds found in blueberries.



FRESHII

Metaboost Wrap

This meal folds in many key food groups: vegetables, fruit, legumes, and whole grains.



OLIVE GARDEN

Zoodles Primavera

This veggie-heavy dish comes in a light cream sauce, but it can be made even healthier if you ask for marinara instead.

FAST FOOD GETS A MAKEOVER

More than one-third of American adults eat fast food on any given day. Chains—old and new—are making over their menus to provide healthier fare. We rated 17 of them to see which ones really deliver.

by Jessica Branch • Photographs by Sam Kaplan

APPLEBEE'S

Top Sirloin (6 oz.), Steamed Broccoli, and a Baked Potato
Red meat is best eaten only occasionally and if you choose small portions, lean cuts, and healthy sides.



R

REMEMBER WHEN THE HEALTHIER offerings at restaurants—a burger without the bun, or steamed fish and vegetables without the sauce—could be found only at the bottom of the menu, hidden like a dirty secret? In some places—especially fast-food chains—there weren’t even enough healthy options to merit that sad little diet corner. Instead, they just offered a side salad.

Well, times have changed. According to the National Restaurant Association’s 2020 Culinary Forecast, healthy menu options are becoming the main event. Sure, you can still order double bacon cheeseburgers and fettuccine Alfredo. But more restaurants are serving customized grain bowls, locally grown organic produce, and vegetarian entrées. Some offer meals geared toward the latest diet trend, be it keto or Whole30, while others have built their advertising campaigns around the

elimination of artificial ingredients or their gluten-free options. No wonder two-thirds of Americans say it’s easier than ever to eat healthy in restaurants, according to the research firm Mintel.

But a few words of caution: CR has found that not all “healthier” fast-food offerings are truly lower in calories, fat, and sodium, or based on whole foods like grains and legumes—things that are actually good for you.

“Eliminating artificial ingredients or adding a plant protein—like tofu—to a menu are good first steps,” says Amy Keating, R.D., a Consumer Reports nutritionist. “But you can’t assume that a dish that presents as healthy necessarily is.”

To help you separate the healthier choices from the not-so-good ones, CR’s nutritionists evaluated the menus from 17 chain restaurants to determine which ones offer nutritious choices. We found that you can usually trust the calorie counts on menus, and that some places really do offer very healthy options. What’s more, we discovered that you can make healthy choices—or at least healthier ones—even at places that sell the most bacon-wrapped, deep-fried food.

How We Rated Restaurants

With 79 percent of Americans trying to eat healthier when they dine out, Mintel says, older chains, such as McDonald’s and Olive Garden, are under pressure to deliver better options. There has also been a rise in fast-casual chains that have built their brands around health, whole foods, and sustainability, such as Sweetgreen

and True Food Kitchen. In choosing restaurants to evaluate, we considered a mix of the old guard and the new.

“Different chains have different takes on the health trend,” Keating says. “We wanted to look at so-called burger or pasta places to see how they’ve reshaped their menus. But we also wanted to see how well healthy-minded diners could eat at places that advertise fresh ingredients, like Panera Bread and Chipotle, as well as at restaurants where health is the founding principal, like CoreLife Eatery.”

For our ratings, we did more than just look at whether you could get a healthy meal at a particular chain. We assessed how closely the menu aligned with the U.S. Dietary Guidelines, and considered how easy it was to make a healthier choice. Each restaurant has an overall rating that incorporates the following considerations:

- Healthy dishes should be featured front and center, and in a positive way. If there are just one or two good-for-you options, or if the ability to customize dishes by making healthy swaps is limited, a consumer is less likely to order a healthier meal, especially if there’s a wide variety of more exciting but less than ideal nutritional choices.

- We gave higher scores to places that didn’t serve soda and had alternatives, such as seltzer or flavored drinks with at least 25 percent less sugar than soda but weren’t sweetened with sugar substitutes such as aspartame or stevia. Places where soda is the default drink got the lowest scores. “At some restaurants, the serving size for sugary drinks was as high as 42 ounces,” Keating says.

(Facing page, from top)

Chipotle

3 Crispy Corn Tacos With Chicken, Pinto Beans, Fajita Veggies, and Salsa
Building your own dish here means you have more control over the ingredients.

The Cheesecake Factory

Tuscan Chicken
Served over plenty of fresh veggies and whole-grain farro, this is one of the few dishes on the menu offering whole grains.

Chopt

Palm Beach Salad With Shrimp and Black Beans
Dressing can add calories and sodium, so get it on the side and use only what you need.



“And many offered free refills. That just encourages overconsumption of calories and sugars.”

■ Can you get whole grains, like 100 percent whole-grain bread, quinoa, or brown rice? “At least half of the grains you eat should be whole grains, and the more the better,” says Keating. Whole grains were harder to find than we would like. At some chains, they were limited to the bun or bread choice, and what was available wasn’t necessarily 100 percent whole grain.

■ The restaurant should make it easy for you to get veggies and fruit. You should be able to choose from a wide variety of them, and they should be a central part of entrées rather than just garnishes or side salads that are easy to ignore.

■ Are sodium and saturated fat levels sky-high or can you find a reasonable number of appetizing choices that have less than 1,000 mg of sodium and 10 grams of saturated fat or less? “In looking at our ratings,” Keating says, “you can see that sodium is a big issue, and there’s a lot of room for improvement, even in the healthiest of restaurants.”

■ Menus should include healthful protein options, such as fish, legumes, nuts, and tofu, as opposed to processed or fatty meats like cold cuts or bacon.

Can You Trust the Counts?

The Food and Drug Administration requires larger chains to provide calorie counts on menus and supply other nutritional information. This makes it easier for consumers to make more informed choices. But that works only if consumers read the info and can rely on it being accurate. “We’re starting to see some data that people who pay attention do consume slightly fewer calories,” says Joanne Guthrie, Ph.D., R.D., senior research nutritionist and co-author of a Department of Agriculture report, “America’s Eating Habits: Food Away From Home.”

“But it’s still early to know for sure what the long-term effects might be,” she says.

In a recent nationally representative Consumer Reports survey of 1,013 American adults, 17 percent of those who noticed calorie counts on menus at fast-food and fast-casual chains said the numbers always influenced what they ordered, and 38 percent said it sometimes did. Forty-five percent said they rarely checked the nutrition info—if ever—with 26 percent of those folks saying they simply didn’t trust the numbers.

To tackle the trust issue, we decided to check to see if consumers were right to be skeptical. (In fact, the FDA doesn’t typically test to see whether those numbers are accurate.) For our tests, we bought 52 different dishes from multiple locations of 13 different chains. Then we had the dishes tested in a lab to determine if the calorie and sodium values matched the information each chain supplies to the public. The FDA considers nutrition counts on packaged food to be accurate if they’re plus or minus 20 percent of what’s listed. But the agency doesn’t have similar guidelines for restaurant food. So in our analysis, we used the ones for packaged food.

The good news for consumers is that we found calorie counts to be generally on target or close. Only three dishes averaged more than 20 percent of the calories listed on the nutritional information: Panda Express’ Broccoli Beef with white rice and its String Bean Chicken Breast with brown rice, and Freshii’s Oaxaca Bowl with chicken. The average ranged from 150 to 200 calories per dish.

But sodium was problematic. We knew from our menu evaluation that sodium levels were often off the charts, but our lab tests also showed that the numbers weren’t always accurate. Average sodium levels were 20 percent or more above what the restaurant claimed in 14 dishes from seven

Not All

YOU’RE STANDING

in front of a menu board, trying to pick a healthy lunch. “Aha!” you say. “That mac and cheese has fewer calories than a grain bowl. I’m going to treat myself.”

Not so fast. “Calories count, but where those calories come from is perhaps more important,” says Amy Keating, R.D., a CR nutritionist.

You have to consider what types of foods you’re getting for those calories. Do the meals provide what we need to eat more of, such as vegetables, whole grains, legumes, healthy fats, nuts, and seafood, and not so much sodium, sugars, and saturated fats?

The satiety factor in a meal is important too, she says. Is the dish made up of whole foods that will keep you fuller longer, or are you getting little food for your calorie investment? “In some cases, the higher-calorie meal—if it’s one with healthier ingredients—might be a better choice,” Keating adds. **To illustrate how to make a better choice, we compared three menu options from Panera Bread. ↗**

Calories Are Created Equal



BBQ CHICKEN MAC & CHEESE

(SMALL)

570	CALORIES
34	TOTAL FAT (g)
18	SAT FAT (g)
42	CARBS (g)
14	SUGARS (g)
2	FIBER (g)
23	PROTEIN (g)
1,390	SODIUM (mg)

THE CALORIES are respectably low, but the portion is tiny—just about 1 cup. Plus the calories come mostly from refined-flour pasta and cheese sauce packed with saturated fat. The cheese, barbecue sauce, and smoked chicken breast contribute lots of sodium, and the frizzled onions are the only vegetable in this dish. You're not getting much bang for your nutritional buck here.



NAPA ALMOND CHICKEN SALAD SANDWICH

630	CALORIES
31	TOTAL FAT (g)
4.5	SAT FAT (g)
62	CARBS (g)
12	SUGARS (g)
5	FIBER (g)
29	PROTEIN (g)
670	SODIUM (mg)

ON THE PLUS side, this sandwich has chicken breast rather than processed cold cuts, and it also contains some fruit and veggies—grapes, celery, lettuce, and tomato—as well as nuts. It's even relatively low in sodium. But the mayo-style dressing contributes a lot of fat (albeit unsaturated) and few nutrients. And the "rustic" bread is made with mostly low-fiber white flour.



BAJA GRAIN BOWL

680	CALORIES
34	TOTAL FAT (g)
7	SAT FAT (g)
81	CARBS (g)
10	SUGARS (g)
13	FIBER (g)
18	PROTEIN (g)
1,260	SODIUM (mg)

WHILE THIS DISH has the most calories, they're worthwhile. You're getting plenty of nutrients in this vegetarian meal, and the combo of ingredients is likely to keep you feeling full. Whole grains (brown rice and quinoa), beans, and Greek yogurt supply protein, an array of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and fiber. The avocado provides healthy fats, and the tomatoes and corn deliver nutritionally, too. The only downside is the 1,260 mg of sodium.



restaurants: Chopt (2), Freshii (3), Olive Garden (1), Panda Express (3), Panera Bread (1), Subway (3), and Starbucks (1). Overages ranged from about 150 mg to more than 1,500 mg. One example: According to Freshii’s information, the Superfood Soup with added steak has 1,390 mg. “Our tests averaged 2,932 mg—more than you should have in a single day [2,300 mg],” Keating says. On the flip side, in a few cases sodium levels were actually 29 to 75 percent lower than what was listed.

6 Habits for Healthier Meals

Here are some strategies to help you dodge menu minefields.

Plan what you’ll eat by looking at the full nutritional info online before you go. Once there, your chances of being led astray by hunger are higher.

(Clockwise from top)

Panda Express

String Bean Chicken Breast

You have a choice of sides here, so stick with brown rice or extra vegetables instead of fried rice or chow mein noodles.

Starbucks

Eggs & Cheese Protein Box

Protein boxes offer a quick and easy way to get a mix of healthy whole foods.

Sweetgreen

Fish Taco Bowl

Steelhead trout (similar to salmon) provides healthy omega-3 fats, something most people don’t get enough of.

Order what you love—but get it healthier. Ask to have your favorite fish dish steamed or broiled rather than fried, and request sauce on the side.

Be realistic about your willpower.

It’s smarter to not get the fries at all than to try eating just a few.

Skip soft drinks. They contain a lot of sugar or sugar substitutes, neither of which offer any nutrition. Instead, try water, seltzer, or unsweetened tea.

Don’t add salt. “Restaurant foods—even a plain grilled chicken breast—are often already high in sodium,” Keating says. Condiments like ketchup, soy sauce, salad dressings, and barbecue sauce are also salty, so use them sparingly.

Consider ordering smaller. “More places are offering half-portions, or what they call café sizes,” says Guthrie.

CHAIN RATINGS & REVIEWS

OVERALL RATING



CORELIFE EATERY



SWEETGREEN



CHOPT



TRUE FOOD KITCHEN



FRESHII

BEVERAGES



WHOLE GRAINS



FRUIT & VEGETABLES



SODIUM



SATURATED FAT



THIS CHAIN says its mission is to deliver food that tastes good and is good for you. Bowls—grain, broth, or greens—and “power plates” are the main menu items. They’re replete with a wide variety of vegetables, grains, and legumes; some include tuna, chicken, or grass-fed beef. Most of the dishes have less than 1,000 mg of sodium and less than 10 grams of saturated fat. Beverages are mostly organic teas or fruit-based drinks. Some have added sugars, but usually less than in soda, and servings are capped at 12 ounces.

SWEETGREEN IS arguably the place that popularized the build-your-own-bowl trend. Vegan ingredients include red, orange, and dark-green veggies, whole grains, and legumes (some organic). There’s tofu, hummus, and falafel. Eggs, cheese, fish, and chicken are also options, but not red or processed meat. About half of the dishes have less than 1,000 mg of sodium, and all of them have less than 10 grams of saturated fat. Drinks are 12 ounces and are mostly tea and fruit or vegetable juices. Some have added sugars, but far less than soda.

THE BASE of your bowl here can be cauliflower rice or quinoa, and you’ve got plenty of vegetable choices, including six types of greens. If you like, your fixings can be rolled into a whole-grain wrap. Destination Salads highlight various cuisines, and some are tailored to different diet plans, such as the Spicy Bowl30 (Whole30). About half of the featured items have less than 1,000 mg of sodium and 80 percent have less than 10 grams of saturated fat. When making your own salad or bowl, steer clear of the panko fried chicken and Niman Ranch smoked bacon.

FOUNDED BY the integrative medicine guru Andrew Weil, M.D., True Food Kitchen serves dishes that aim to fight inflammation, which is at the root of many diseases. The result is that almost everything served, even the carnivore options, are heavy on vegetables and whole grains. (Pizza is the exception.) There’s a wide selection, and the menu has an eclectic, “world kitchen” feel. Saturated fat is low. Sodium levels for entrées range from an acceptable 600 mg to over 2,000 mg. Nonalcoholic drinks include Sparkling Antioxidant Tea and Honey Lemonade.

YOU’LL GET a hefty dose of several types of veggies with any choice on this menu. Quinoa and brown rice are available, and wraps are whole-wheat tortillas. But the rice noodles aren’t whole grain and there’s no fish to be found. Sodium in bowls, wraps, and salads is mostly under 1,000 mg before you add an optional protein, which ranges from 90 mg to 370 mg of sodium. Soups are higher in sodium. Saturated fat is low. The cold-pressed juices have no added sugars, and there are flavored sparkling seltzers, but soda is still on the menu.

CHAIN RATINGS & REVIEWS

OVERALL RATING	CHIPOTLE	PANERA BREAD	STARBUCKS	PANDA EXPRESS	NOODLES & COMPANY	CHICK-FIL-A
BEVERAGES	↓	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓
WHOLE GRAINS	↓	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓
FRUIT & VEGETABLES	↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓
SODIUM	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
SATURATED FAT	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑
	<p>FINDING A veggie-packed whole-grain dish here takes some work but can be done. Choose brown rice over white and corn tortillas instead of flour. And include the fajita vegetables, black or pinto beans, sofritas, leafy greens, and vegetable salsas. Sodium adds up quickly; on average, the proteins and salsas have 400 mg, the beans, 210 mg. Opt for a bowl; the flour tortilla burrito has 600 mg of sodium. Skip sour cream, cheese, and carnitas to trim saturated fat.</p>	<p>AMID THE baked goods and mac and cheese, you'll find salads and grain bowls, some healthy sandwiches, and plenty of ways to include fruit. You can ask for whole-grain bread for any sandwich, but your choices aren't 100 percent whole grain. Salads are lowest in sodium; soups are highest. Most dishes come with a side: Choose fruit or a sprouted grain roll over chips or a baguette slice. Fruit teas and lemonades are lower in added sugars than soda.</p>	<p>WHOLE GRAINS are limited to the chicken and quinoa bowl and the chicken tabbouleh salad. Only two sandwiches are served on multigrain bread (but not 100 percent whole grain), and you can't swap it for the refined-flour breads on other sandwiches. For vegetables and fruit, stick with the salads or the protein boxes; these also tend to be lowest in sodium. Many of the coffee drinks here are loaded with sugar.</p>	<p>MOST ENTRÉES include vegetables (and one is tofu-based), have brown rice as a side, or get an extra serving of vegetables like Super Greens (broccoli, kale, and cabbage). Wok Smart entrées have 300 calories or less but they aren't so sodium "smart," with up to 1,130 mg in some. Choose a "bowl" (an entrée and brown rice) to keep sodium under 1,000 mg and saturated fat below 10 grams. No-sugar drink options are limited to water or brewed tea.</p>	<p>CHOOSE WITH care before you order. Salads, Asian noodle dishes, and zucchini noodles are heavier on veggies and lower in saturated fat than the other dishes. There's cauliflower pasta but no whole-grain. Veggies can be added to other dishes for an extra cost. Tofu can be swapped for meat but isn't a feature in any dish. Most dishes have over 1,000 mg of sodium, but you can cut it if you opt for a small order.</p>	<p>AVOID THE breaded and fried options. The Grilled Chicken sandwich comes on a multigrain bun (not 100 percent whole grain), which you can get with other sandwiches for 30 cents more. And grilled chicken is lower in sodium, too. Vegetables are limited to salads, including a side kale salad. The Market Salad has some fruit, and there's also a fruit cup. Dipping sauces and salad dressings can add sodium and sugars. Overall, menu items are low in saturated fat.</p>



SUBWAY



THIS CHAIN is centered on mostly processed meat, and with the exception of a veggie patty served in some locations, there are no plant proteins. Vegetables come in salads and as sandwich toppings, and you can get whole-grain (but not 100 percent) bread. Most salads and 6-inch sandwiches have less than 1,000 mg of sodium. Adding mustard or mayo will raise the sodium count of a sandwich a little.



THE CHEESECAKE FACTORY



ORDER FROM the SkinnyLicious menu. (If we looked only at this menu, our overall rating would be Good.) The dishes have 590 calories or less; nearly all have less than 10 grams of saturated fat; there are lots of vegetables to choose from; and a green salad, not fries, is the side for burgers and sandwiches. Most entrées have over 1,000 mg of sodium, however. The regular menu also has a wide variety of vegetable options. But two-thirds of the dishes have 2,300 mg of sodium (the daily limit) or more, and saturated fat averages 30 grams.



OLIVE GARDEN



UNLIMITED BREADSTICKS and Never Ending pastas encourage gorging, and most dishes are packed with calories, fat, and sodium. On the upside, you can get whole-grain linguini or zucchini noodles, and unlimited salad. And the Mediterranean items are reasonable in calories and saturated fat, but some are high in sodium. If you must have a pasta, split it with a friend; most are 780 to 1,620 calories.



MCDONALD'S



NOT SURPRISINGLY, there aren't many vegetables or legumes here and no whole grains other than oatmeal. Salads are probably the way to go, but even they have more than 1,000 mg of sodium (with dressing). Stick with a simple sandwich (hamburger, Filet-O-Fish, or McChicken) or a small order of McNuggets, and a side salad. Skip the 32-ounce sodas, and note that even a small milkshake can have about the same amount of calories and saturated fat as a Big Mac.



APPLEBEE'S



YOU CAN find veggies in dishes such as a stir-fry or a bowl with grilled shrimp or chicken, and there are several fish choices. For sides, stick with steamed broccoli or garlicky green beans. You can sub a salad for fries in some dishes for an additional 99 cents. The menu is devoid of whole grains except for a cranberry pecan rice/quinoa blend. More than half of the entrées have 2,300 to 4,000 mg sodium and are high in saturated fat.



DOMINO'S PIZZA



THERE ARE no whole grains or legumes here, and to get a decent serving of veggies, you'd have to eat a lot of salad or an unhealthy number of slices of a veggie-topped pizza. Many pastas are in a cream or meat sauce. Your best bet is to build your own pizza, skipping the processed meat toppings, piling on the vegetable toppings, and asking for half the cheese. Then stick with a slice or two, and round out your meal with a salad. Your drink choices are soda or bottled water.

OVERALL RATING

BEVERAGES

WHOLE GRAINS

FRUIT & VEGETABLES

SODIUM

SATURATED FAT



More Choice, More Power



ALTERNATIVES TO TRADITIONAL MEDICAL CARE—INCLUDING ON-DEMAND HOUSE CALLS, VIRTUAL DOCTOR VISITS, AND WORKPLACE HEALTH CLINICS—ARE ON THE RISE. WHICH ONE IS BEST FOR YOU?

BY DONNA ROSATO
ILLUSTRATIONS BY LINCOLN AGNEW



ELIZABETH MACIEL GREW frustrated that she couldn't get a same-day appointment with her daughter's pediatrician when, smack in the middle of flu season, the 3-year-old woke up with a high fever and bad cough. So the 39-year-old from Hayward, Calif., turned to an app-based service called Heal, which connected her with a physician within 2 hours. Better yet, the doctor came to her house. "I never had to get my daughter dressed or deal with taking my other kids to the doctor's office," Maciel says.

Ilya Ginzburg, 34, had a different experience. After moving to San Francisco for a new job, Ginzburg, who has high blood pressure, struggled to find a primary care doctor despite having a list of physicians from his insurer. Some no longer accepted his plan. Others weren't taking new patients. A few had simply closed up shop. His solution: One Medical, a network of primary care clinics that guarantees same- or next-day appointments and offers virtual visits. "I found a doctor who I can trust who knows me," he says.

For Gary Blankenship, a 70-year-old retired truck driver in Lynchburg, Va., one big problem was long waits in his doctor's office, made worse by stiff chairs that were hard on his bad back. So Blankenship was thrilled when his doctor went solo, opening a new type of practice known as direct primary care, which offers a variety of perks, including no long waits and 24/7 availability. "It's almost like having a private doctor, like wealthy people and movie stars have," Blankenship says.

As those examples illustrate, finding a primary care provider—someone who helps oversee all your healthcare needs and doesn't just treat common issues, such as the flu and sprains—can be hard. At the same time, out-of-pocket costs for doctor visits are rising, leaving some consumers more hesitant to make those appointments.

Partly as a result, Americans are turning to alternative models of primary care. Options include full-service walk-in health clinics in big-box stores, such as Walmart, or at drugstores, like CVS; apps that offer real-time video chats with a healthcare provider; and high-end concierge practices at large university medical centers.

The big question: Can these options provide convenient, affordable ways for you to get the quality of care you need?

Why Primary Care Is Key

It used to be that people typically relied on a go-to doctor who took care of all their general medical needs, knew their health histories well, recommended specialists, and checked on them if they were hospitalized.

And that kind of care remains essential, says Margot Savoy, M.D., a family physician in Philadelphia and a member of the American Academy of Family Physicians' board of directors. These providers can not only give physical exams and vaccines, administer or order screening tests, and deal with problems such as infections and minor injuries but also help manage chronic conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure.

Importantly, they also coordinate the care you receive from other healthcare providers, such as, say, a cardiologist if you have heart problems. "A primary care doctor should be the quarterback for your health team," Savoy says.

That care usually comes from a doctor trained in internal medicine, family practice, pediatrics, or geriatrics. (These physicians can be M.D.s or D.O.s—doctors of osteopathic medicine, whose medical education

WHY DID YOU SKIP GOING TO THE DOCTOR FOR AN ISSUE THAT NEEDED MEDICAL CARE?

EVEN THOUGH MORE AMERICANS THAN EVER have health insurance, almost half of people who say they've avoided necessary care identified financial concerns as a leading reason, according to a recent nationally representative Consumer Reports survey.

45%



COST

30%



TIME

25%



HARD TO GET AN APPOINTMENT

25%



YOU KNOW WHAT THEY ARE GOING TO SAY

25%



NO INSURANCE

24%



INCONVENIENT

17%



AFRAID TO GET BAD NEWS

13%



NO REGULAR DOCTOR

10%



EMBARRASSMENT

8%



DON'T TRUST DOCTORS

7%



DOCTORS MAKE YOU FEEL BAD ABOUT YOURSELF

Source:
Consumer Reports 2019 nationally representative survey of 3,030 U.S. adults.

includes special training in muscle and skeletal issues.) Some people regularly see a specialist, such as an OB-GYN, but they typically can't offer the same breadth of care as a primary care provider.

Fewer M.D.s, Broader Needs

And yet getting time with a primary care provider is becoming harder, for several reasons.

A smaller percentage of medical school graduates are choosing primary care, opting for more lucrative specialties. Those who remain carry ever-larger patient loads—each typically has 1,200 to 1,900 patients and sees an average of 20 each day. That, combined with growing administrative tasks and ever-changing regulatory requirements, is causing many primary care doctors to report burnout. In one study, doctors reported devoting almost half their day

to administrative chores and only one-quarter to seeing patients.

Thanks also to the growing number of older people in the U.S.—who are especially likely to require regular, comprehensive care—the need for primary care providers is growing. The Association of American Medical Colleges predicts a shortage of up to 55,200 primary care physicians nationwide by 2032.

Worryingly, there has already been a steep decline in the number of people getting regular primary care. Among people with private health insurance, appointments with primary care providers dropped 24 percent between 2008 and 2016, while appointments with specialists remained the same, according to a recent study in the journal *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

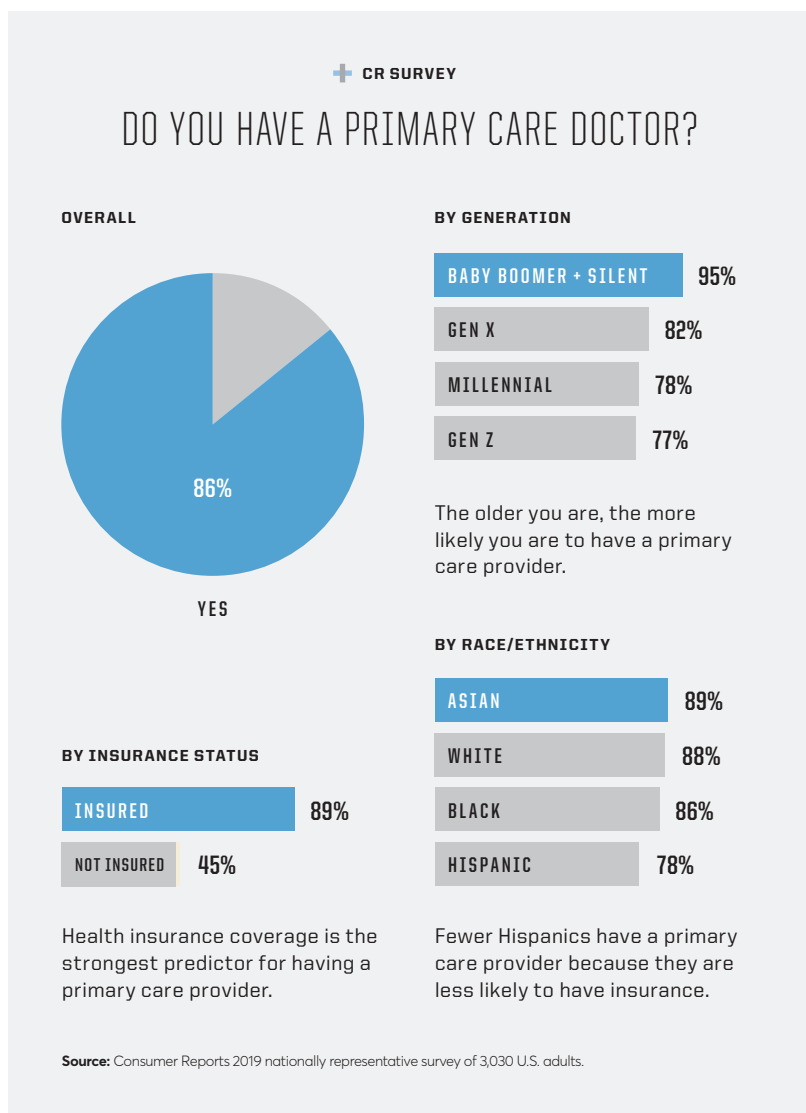
Two big reasons Americans don't get the care they need: cost and convenience, as shown on the chart on page 37. But some of that decline may also be generational. Gen Zers, millennials, and Gen Xers are less likely to have a primary care doctor than older generations, according to a 2019 Consumer Reports nationally representative survey of 3,030 adults.

The Search for Alternatives

Many experts welcome the new avenues for primary care.

"Innovation in primary care is a good thing," says Ishani Ganguli, M.D., at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, lead author of the recent *Annals of Internal Medicine* study on the decline in appointments with primary care doctors. "We need to make primary care more convenient and accessible because it's clear that people who get regular primary care have better health," she adds.

Consumers are also embracing these newer options, says Kaveh Safavi, M.D., a senior managing director for consulting firm Accenture's





WHY OLDER ADULTS NEED SPECIAL CARE

If you're 65 or older, you may need more than a regular primary care physician can provide. About a third of people in this age group would be better off seeing a geriatrician—a physician who has extra training in the health problems of older adults, according to the American Geriatrics Society (AGS).

Older adults who use a

geriatrician are less likely to end up in the hospital, research suggests, possibly because those doctors pay more attention to health concerns that matter most as you age, such as staying strong, maintaining a healthy appetite, and avoiding potentially risky medications.

Geriatricians are usually licensed in internal or family

medicine and have completed an additional year or two of training focused on older people. They can be medical doctors (M.D.s) or doctors of osteopathic medicine (D.O.s), physicians whose training emphasizes hands-on care and treating the whole person, not just symptoms.

But finding a geriatrician isn't easy. There are now roughly 7,300 geriatricians in the U.S., though nearly 35,000 will be needed by 2025, according to the AGS.

"There aren't enough of us to go around, so our efforts need to be toward training all health professionals to have the skill set they need for older adults," says Annette Medina-Walpole, M.D., chief of the division of geriatrics and aging at the University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry in New York.

To that end, some researchers are exploring new ways of caring for older adults. A program at the University of Rochester allows primary care physicians to consult with geriatricians online about, for example, how to care for dementia patients. And the hospital at Oregon Health & Science University in Portland now has a system that automatically adjusts the medication dosage for patients older than 75.

If you're searching for senior-friendly care for yourself or someone else, consider these questions.

Do you need a geriatrician?

Not all older adults do. They are most useful for people 75 and older who take several drugs and have multiple health problems. Another sign: if caregivers are feeling considerable stress and strain.

How can you find a geriatrician? Ask your regular doctor for a referral, check with Medicare or your private

insurer for geriatricians in your network, or search by state at HealthinAging.org, run by the AGS.

What if you can't find, or don't really need, a geriatrician?

It's still important to have a provider who is sensitive to elder-care concerns, so talk with current—or prospective—doctors about their familiarity with caring for older people. It's key for them to understand that the kind of care you want may change as you age.

While mammograms and screening for colon cancer, for example, are recommended until age 75, a frail 70-year-old may opt to skip them and a healthy 78-year-old may want to continue, says Elizabeth Eckstrom, M.D., in the division of general internal medicine and geriatrics at the Oregon Health & Science University School of Medicine. You'll want someone who's not just pushing you toward aggressive care "but rather helping you focus on quality of life and what matters to you," she adds.

Your doctor should also bring up topics such as memory concerns, incontinence, and fall prevention.

Where else can you find help?

You may be able to get a one-time geriatric consultation at an academic health center in your area. Or contact the Administration on Aging (800-677-1116 or eldercare.acl.gov/public) to find a geriatric care manager, often a social worker or nurse with experience in senior issues, who can help you unearth senior-appropriate healthcare options and put together a care plan.

And remember, Eckstrom says, that the best care comes when everyone on your health team, "whether it's your pharmacist, nurse, even an ER doctor, has a good understanding of older adults."

global healthcare business.

For instance, almost half the respondents in a 2019 Accenture survey on consumer digital health trends say they have used a walk-in or retail clinic, and 29 percent have tried some form of virtual care. And 18 percent have used on-demand healthcare services, such as the one Elizabeth Maciel used.

But sorting through the old and the new to find the one that's right for you may feel overwhelming.

Take cost. Because many of the new services accept health insurance similar to the way a traditional medical practice does, if you have coverage your out-of-pocket expenses could be about the same. Some don't accept insurance and charge flat fees instead. That cuts the provider's administrative costs and could be more affordable for some people with high deductibles or no insurance.

But in some cases, these alternatives come at a premium. Ilya Ginzburg, for example, spends \$199 per year for his One Medical membership, on top of paying for his regular health insurance. Gary Blankenship pays an \$80 monthly fee to his doctor, along with the cost of his Medicare premiums.

Both consider the added convenience valuable enough to justify the extra cost. "If I have a problem, my doctor will either see me right away or call in a prescription if I need one," Blankenship says. "It's well worth it."

Ultimately, the right choice is going to vary from person to person. "What's best for you is going to depend on your financial situation, insurance coverage, and healthcare needs," says Ganguli at Brigham and Women's Hospital.

To help you find the option, or combination, that's best for you, we took a close look at how primary care practices are changing and the growing number of alternatives, we reviewed the research, and we spoke with experts and patients.

8 PLACES TO GET YOUR PRIMARY CARE

How to choose the one that is right for you



TRADITIONAL PRIMARY CARE

About a third of the 700,000 practicing doctors in the U.S. are primary care providers. They often work in group practices or are affiliated with a larger healthcare system. The practices tend to be open during normal office hours, but with a doctor on call at other times.

Some are trying to reinvent themselves by offering extended hours, weekend appointments, online booking, email access to a doctor, and follow-up care via computer or smartphone, says Kaveh Safavi, M.D., a senior managing director for consulting firm Accenture's global healthcare business.

Practices are also hiring nondoctor providers, such as physician assistants (P.A.s) and nurse practitioners (N.P.s), to take on some of the workload. Physician assistants work under a supervising physician and can often do many of the same things as M.D.s and D.O.s, such as physical exams, ordering X-rays, and prescribing medication. Nurse practitioners must

be registered nurses before they go on to get advanced training. In some cases, they can practice on their own and, like P.A.s, prescribe drugs and diagnose and treat common health problems.

Still, even if doctors have the technology and desire to provide more convenient services, administrative burdens remain, Safavi says. "Doctors only have so much time in a day," he says.

While private insurers, Medicare, and Medicaid may now cover the cost of e-visits, doctors aren't always reimbursed at the same rate for those visits, giving doctors less incentive to provide them. Just 17 percent of primary care doctors say they practice some form of telemedicine, a 2018 survey by the nonprofit Physicians Foundation found.

HOW YOU PAY: Most accept insurance, but depending on your plan, you may owe deductibles (what you pay out of pocket before insurance kicks in), copays (a flat fee with each appointment, typically about \$25), and coinsurance (a percentage, typically 18 percent for people insured through work, of the cost of the medical services you get).

CONSIDER FOR: Routine and preventive care, problems

that need attention but aren't emergencies, managing chronic health problems, and coordinating with your other providers. **WATCH OUT FOR:** Long waits for appointments and limited time with your doctor.



URGENT CARE CLINICS

These stand-alone facilities, often part of privately owned chains or run by hospitals, are staffed by doctors, P.A.s, and N.P.s, and handle problems from colds and the flu to sprains and asthma. The nearly 10,000

urgent care clinics in the U.S.—up from 6,100 in 2013—also usually offer on-site lab tests and diagnostic imaging, such as X-rays. And some are open seven days a week.

HOW YOU PAY: Many take insurance, so you may have deductibles, copays, and coinsurance. The average out-of-pocket cost of an urgent care visit for someone with insurance ranges from \$155 to \$190, according to the Urgent Care Association.

CONSIDER FOR: Problems that need to be treated right away but aren't severe enough to require the emergency room.

That's how Sue Krikorian, a 64-year-old retiree in Tampa, Fla., uses these services. "Although I go to

my primary care for yearly physicals, I prefer our local urgent care center when I am ill," Krikorian says. "I can make an appointment at urgent care and get in there the same day."

Recently, unsure of the cause of a cough, a headache, and fatigue, Krikorian booked an appointment on a nearby clinic's website. Within 2 hours she had seen a doctor and received an upper respiratory infection diagnosis. "They even looked up where it was least expensive to fill my prescription and printed out a coupon for me," she says.

WATCH OUT FOR: Possible lack of coordination with a primary care doctor and unnecessary prescriptions, particularly

antibiotics. A September 2018 study in the journal *JAMA Internal Medicine* found that inappropriate prescribing of those drugs for viral respiratory infections—at 46 percent of visits—was higher in urgent care clinics than at doctor's offices or walk-in clinics.

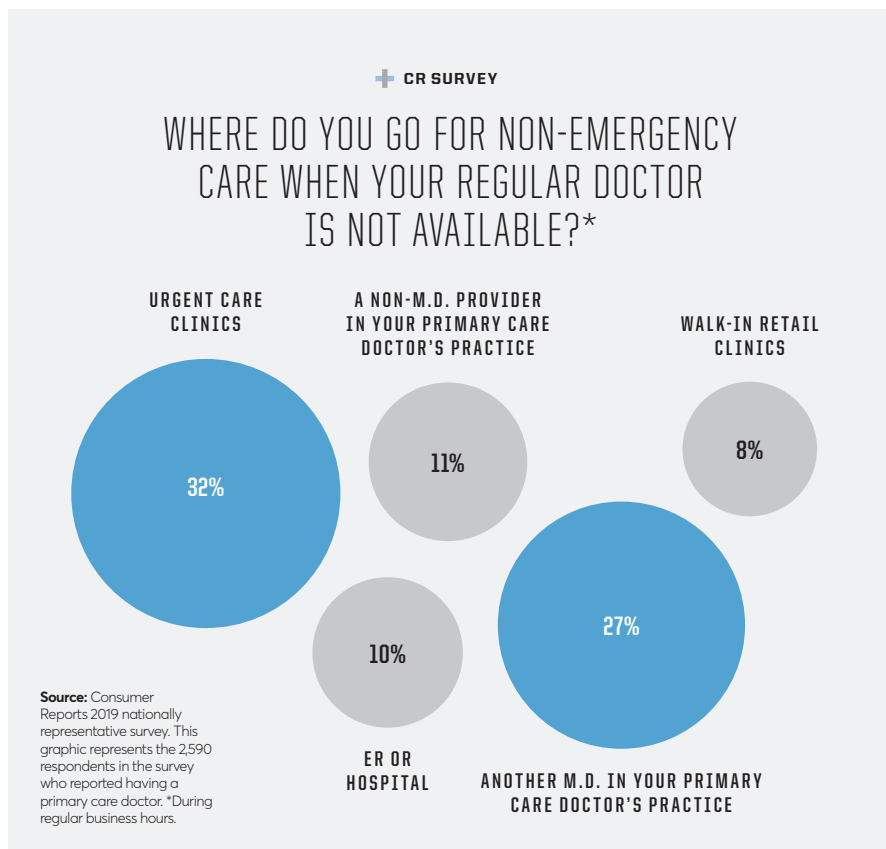


RETAIL WALK-IN CLINICS

The roughly 2,700 health clinics located in chain pharmacies, supermarkets, and retail stores—up from 1,200 in 2010, according to the Convenient Care Association—offer no-appointment-needed treatment. Staffed mainly by P.A.s and N.P.s, they're typically open every day and have become a common source of care for nearly a quarter of Americans with no primary care doctor, CR's survey found.

Some of these clinics, such as the MinuteClinics in more than 1,000 Target locations and CVS drugstores, have been around since the early 2000s. What's new is that CVS and several other retailers are expanding the services they offer. CVS recently launched more than 50 of a planned 1,500 HealthHubs, where consumers can get nutrition counseling, attend wellness classes, and receive help managing chronic conditions, such as type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure, as well as vaccines and treatment for problems like colds and the flu.

Anthony G. Green, 51, considers himself a regular at the CVS HealthHub in Marietta, Ga., consulting with the store's "care concierge" on everything from diabetes





screenings to product recommendations. The pastor says he appreciates knowing he can drop in and have his blood pressure checked between appointments with his usual doctor.

Several other retailers are also offering a more robust roster of services. Walmart runs two stand-alone Walmart Health clinics in Georgia, with more expected later this year. The company says you can choose to see the same physician at each visit, so you can develop a

relationship with a provider.

Walgreens is ramping up its options, too. In partnership with the VillageMD chain of primary care practices, the company recently opened a clinic near Houston with plans to open more in the future.

HOW YOU PAY: These accept insurance, so you may still have deductibles, copays, and coinsurance. For people without insurance, some offer a menu of services for a flat fee. At Walmart Health centers, you can get

checkups for \$30, office visits for \$40, cholesterol tests for \$10, and stitches for about \$115, as well as dental exams for \$50.

CONSIDER FOR: Routine or simple but nonurgent medical needs, such as vaccines; treatment for colds, strep throat, cuts, and rashes; and simple screenings such as blood pressure and cholesterol tests.

WATCH OUT FOR: Limited services and in some cases lack of coordination with your regular providers.



DIRECT PRIMARY CARE

Instead of accepting health insurance, the estimated 1,200 direct primary care, or DPC, practices across the nation charge patients a flat fee for the promise of easy access to care. Usually solo or small group practices, they can offer unlimited office visits; preventive screenings and wellness exams; diagnostic



tests; minor urgent services, such as stitches; and wellness programs, like weight management and nutritional counseling.

Doctors, not just patients, appreciate the extra time they can spend with patients in this kind of practice. Andrew J. Anderson, D.O., the doctor Gary Blankenship sees in Lynchburg, Va., says in his former practice he had 2,400 patients, seeing 20 a day and spending less than 10 minutes with each.

Now he has 400, sees seven to eight a day, and can spend more than 30 minutes with each.

"I can catch things that might have not come up before," he says. For example, he recently found a mass on the neck of a patient who'd followed him from his former practice. "She told me she had the lump for a while but didn't bring it up ... because it was on her B list of things to talk about and there wasn't time," he says.

HOW YOU PAY: DPCs charge a flat fee—\$80 per month, on average—that covers primary care services, including screenings, physicals, office visits, and urgent care needs. But you'll still need health insurance to cover medical needs that go beyond primary care, such as specialist treatments, hospitalizations, and emergency services.

CONSIDER FOR: People with a chronic medical condition that requires frequent primary care doctor visits or who have a high-deductible health plan and would have to pay thousands of dollars out of pocket before their coverage kicks in.

WATCH OUT FOR: In addition to the cost of insurance, the money you spend on DPC fees typically won't count toward your deductible.



CONCIERGE CARE

These practices are similar to direct primary care but are aimed at those willing to spend more for luxury care. That includes same-day appointments, quick answers to calls or texts, and sometimes access to top doctors at prestigious medical centers, or perks

such as body composition analysis and coaching by personal trainers.

High-end concierge practices have been around for a few decades, but only about 20,000 physicians practice in them, according to *Concierge Medicine Today*, a trade publication. Several major medical centers—including Cleveland Clinic Florida in Weston; Duke Health in Durham, N.C.; and Stanford Health Care in California—have added concierge services. Cleveland Clinic Florida's program even offers use of the clinic's private fleet of land and air ambulances in an emergency for an additional fee.

HOW YOU PAY: The annual fee, which is not covered by insurance, averages about \$2,000 but can be 10 times that amount in practices with very few patients, says Thomas LaGrelus, M.D., president of the American College of Private Physicians, which represents concierge physicians. Many will also bill your insurer for the care they provide. And you still need insurance to cover hospitalizations, emergency care, and services that the concierge practice doesn't provide.

BEST FOR: People willing to pay for very personalized care, extensive time with their doctor, and a host of wellness amenities.

WATCH OUT FOR: Possibly offering screening tests that most generally healthy people don't need. For example, the Food and Drug Administration cautions against full-body screening CT scans, which some concierge practices offer, because they can expose people to significant radiation and often cause false positives.



HIGH-TECH HYBRIDS

These are companies that have both virtual and in-person care, with a traditional office visit, a video chat, or an app that performs an initial diagnosis, and a phone or in-person follow-up as needed. These hybrids are primarily in major metropolitan areas and are often housed in modern spaces that look more like a spa than a doctor's office.

Some have venture capital backing and celebrity investors. For example, investors in Forward, founded in 2016 and based in San Francisco, include former Google CEO Eric Schmidt, actor Ashton Kutcher, and NBA star Kevin Durant.

Like direct primary care, Forward accepts no insurance. Instead, it charges \$149 per month for unlimited doctor visits and 24/7 remote access to its physicians. It emphasizes preventive care, including genetic testing and immediate blood test results. Forward is still small, with five locations around Los Angeles and San Francisco, two in New York City, and one in Washington, D.C.

Some hybrids, such as Carbon Health, based in California, accept many insurance plans, in which case you pay for each visit as you would at a traditional provider—with out-of-pocket costs for copays, coinsurance, and deductibles. If your insurance isn't accepted or you don't have insurance, Carbon has flat-fee services. A new patient physical, for example, costs \$199.

And sick visits cost \$195 plus additional charges, depending on what's ordered, such as \$50 for a strep test and \$150 for an X-ray. Carbon has 14 locations, all in California and Nevada.

One Medical, the provider that Ilya Ginzburg uses in San Francisco, has 70 clinics in nine cities. It accepts insurance and charges its nearly 400,000 members an annual fee of \$199 for its services, which include women's health, nutrition counseling, and sports medicine, as well as routine medical care. Some 6,000 employers cover the membership fee for workers.

HOW YOU PAY: It varies, with some accepting insurance and others offering flat-fee or membership options.

CONSIDER FOR: People who want the option of seeing a doctor in person but are also comfortable getting care remotely and managing their care with an app or online.

WATCH OUT FOR: You'll still need separate coverage for hospital, emergency, and other care.



WORKPLACE HEALTH CLINICS

Located in or near workplaces, employer-sponsored medical clinics offer care from doctors, N.P.s, and P.A.s. They often also have pharmacy services, physical therapy, and programs to help you stop smoking, lose weight, or eat better. Open to employees who are covered by company insurance, and sometimes their dependents, most are managed by private vendors

or local health systems. About a third of companies with 5,000 or more employees have opened such a facility, according to the National Association of Worksite Health Centers.

Some big-name companies are getting into it, too. Apple has opened Wellness Centers for workers in the San Francisco Bay Area. And last year, Amazon launched Amazon Care, with health services via video or chat, and office or in-home follow-ups for employees in

HOW TO MAKE SURE YOUR DOCTOR TREATS YOU WELL

While most people say they have a good relationship with their doctors, that's not always the case, according to a nationally representative Consumer Reports survey of 3,030 U.S. adults. Five percent cite a lack of professionalism and respect. And more—17 percent—say doctors don't always put the patient's interests first, and that includes putting them ahead of profits.

Plus, 11 percent of people feel their doctors don't listen and don't genuinely consider what they say before offering a treatment plan. That's backed up by other research: In a 2018 analysis, barely one-third of physicians asked patients why they were visiting, and 67 percent of those doctors interrupted patients—some after 11 seconds or less.

Members of certain groups in the CR survey have additional concerns. For instance, more than 10 percent of those who are black, overweight, or LGBTQ feel they've received inadequate care because of those characteristics. As one overweight CR respondent wrote, "I'm treated like less than human and not worth the time to get myself healthy."

One possible reason: implicit bias, in which a doctor makes judgments and decisions based on certain traits, says Kevin Fiscella, M.D., co-director of the Center for Communication and Disparities Research at the University of Rochester Medical Center in New York. Because this bias is unconscious, it's hard to fix. But experts advise the following if you're unhappy with

Washington state.

HOW YOU PAY: These clinics accept employer-sponsored insurance, so deductibles, copays, and coinsurance apply. Some employers offer lower copays or premiums to people who use these facilities.

CONSIDER FOR: Routine and preventive care. Janine McClung, 49, an account executive at an insurance broker firm in Kansas City, Mo., has used her workplace clinic since 2018 and says she has lost 36 pounds and been able to drop her

medications for high blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar. She credits the easy access to her healthcare providers there for motivating her to exercise regularly, deal with lingering problems such as her plantar fasciitis, and plan healthy meals. McClung texts her blood pressure, weight, and heart rate weekly to a P.A. at the clinic and gets feedback quickly.

WATCH OUT FOR: Privacy concerns because colleagues may see when you visit a doctor.

DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU HAVE RECEIVED INADEQUATE CARE FROM YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER BECAUSE OF YOUR ...

something your provider says, does, or fails to do.

Express concern clearly and calmly.

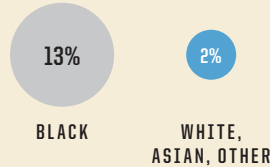
"If a patient feels that a physician is viewing them in a certain way that is concerning to them, then they should call it out," says Robert McLean, M.D., president of the American College of Physicians. "You're giving the doctor benefit of the doubt that they're not trying to be offensive but at the same time letting them know they need to be more sensitive."

Ask for clarification. It may seem odd, for instance, for a doctor to suggest an HIV test to a gay patient who comes in complaining of a respiratory infection. But swollen glands, sore throat, and fever can indicate HIV infection, Fiscella says. Asking why a provider recommends a test or treatment can clear things up.

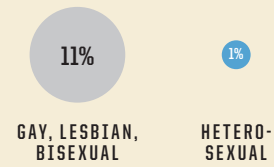
Persist. If your doctor brushes off concerns—saying pain is simply part of aging, for example—keep pushing. "If you say gently but forcefully, 'this is affecting my quality of life and I want to explore other options,' that should trigger the doctor to slow down," Fiscella says.

Know when to move on. If those steps don't help, it may be time to seek a new physician.

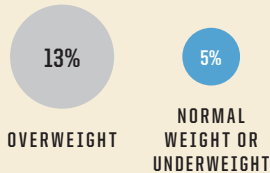
RACE



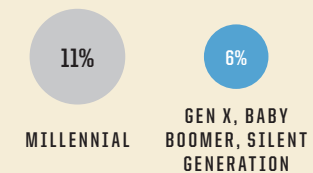
SEXUAL ORIENTATION



WEIGHT



AGE



GENDER IDENTITY



Source: Consumer Reports 2019 nationally representative survey of 3,030 U.S. adults.



THE NEW HOUSE CALL

Home-based primary care, which was once the norm, is making a comeback. That resurgence is fueled in part by advances such as portable X-ray machines and apps that can make a smartphone function like an ultrasound machine, and by a realization that treating people at home can be cost-effective, especially if it means catching problems

early, says Brent Feorene, executive director of the American Academy of Home Care Medicine.

While home visits are still primarily for people with health problems that make it hard to travel to a doctor's office, convenience may also be a factor. Take Debbie Carini, 60, of San Francisco, who uses Heal, an app-based service that provides house calls on demand, for her regular care. "It was a big hassle to go to the doctor and wait up to an hour in a room full of

sick people," she says.

And through Remedy, an on-demand medical service based in Texas, users can choose between video visits and in-person care at home. If you request the latter, the company says it will send a healthcare provider to your home in about 2 hours.

HOW YOU PAY: Some insurers cover this kind of home medical care, but you may still have to pay a copay, coinsurance, or a deductible, depending on your plan. Some services

may also have a one-time fee, such as the \$49 "dispatch" charge from Remedy for sending a doctor to your home. If you don't have insurance, some also offer a flat fee for services. Remedy, for example, charges \$199 for a house call if you don't have insurance, and Heal charges \$159 for a home visit.

CONSIDER FOR: People with health problems that make it difficult to get to a doctor for regular care or who simply want to be seen at home.

WATCH OUT FOR: Limits on range of care available at home.

FRONT-LOAD WASHERS EXCEL AT CLEANING CLOTHES. BUT AN UNSETTLING NUMBER OF THEM DEVELOP MOLD. WE INVESTIGATE WHY SOME MACHINES BECOME A BREEDING GROUND AND SOME DON'T—AND WHETHER THE INDUSTRY CAN FIND A UNIVERSAL SOLUTION.

by Kimberly Janeway

NANCY WILLIAMS NEVER wanted to be in a relationship with her washing machine. Ever since she got a fancy front-loader, she's come to realize just how high-maintenance an appliance can be. "It's like a pet in the family," Williams says. "It requires so much more attention than I'm used to."

First it developed what she describes as "a funky smell—like a sour smell." Then her clean laundry started picking up the foul odor. By the second year, Williams noticed



black slime spreading in the detergent dispenser and along the rubber door gasket. “Textbook mold,” she says.

To fend off the fungus, Williams tasks herself with certain steps manufacturers recommend that go beyond the chore of doing laundry. She occasionally cleans the detergent dispenser, regularly wipes down the door gasket, and keeps the door ajar between loads to air out the wash drum. Still, it comes. “I do a little to try to remove the mold, best I can,” she says. “I’ve resigned myself I can’t

keep it away without lots of effort.”

Williams, a university administrator who lives in Asheville, N.C., isn’t the only one who has become fed up with her front-load washer because of mold, odors, and, in some cases, ruined laundry. Consumer complaints go back two decades and aren’t limited to any one brand. Five appliance manufacturers have settled class-action lawsuits over mold-related problems covering roughly 11.5 million front-loaders—almost the number of machines

shipped in the last five years—though they did not admit any wrongdoing. Over the years they’ve continually added to the user’s maintenance responsibilities in instruction manuals and more recently amended their products’ terms of use to severely limit consumers’ right to sue.

Some in the appliance industry see moldy front-loaders largely as a thing of the past. “It was an industry issue for a decade, and LG has been aggressively redesigning over that time,” says John Taylor,

The Mystery & the Menace

LG's senior vice president of public affairs. "So it's much less of an issue now," he says.

Perhaps, but for plenty of owners mold is still a very real concern. Consumer Reports doesn't test for mold in our washing machine lab (there are too many variables that could foster mold, from the room's humidity and airflow to consumer habits, such as washing in cold water), but it does show up consistently in our member surveys. Indeed, 17 percent of people who own a front-load washer say it had mold or mildew, compared with just 3 percent of those who own top-load washers. That's according to a survey of 94,473 CR members who bought a new washing machine between 2009 and 2019; the problem rate for front-loaders has held fairly steady since we started asking members about mold in 2014.

As a class, front-load washers have been marketed as innovative, stylish, and efficient, with some selling for as much as \$2,000. They're also the highest-performing machines in CR's tests. The popularity of front-loaders has been part of a trend of laundry machines migrating out of the basement and into dedicated laundry rooms on upper floors. But some have brought with them a messy downside that runs counter to the primary

function of the device itself. As Williams says, "If you have to clean the cleaner, I'm thinking that's a problem."

Over the years, manufacturers have made design changes to their front-loaders by tilting the washer drum, adding holes to the door gasket, and installing catches to keep the door ajar—all efforts to drain water and allow moisture to evaporate. The latest attempt at a fix comes from GE Appliances. It recently rolled out its new UltraFresh line of front-loaders, which claims to eliminate the maintenance steps of wiping down the gasket and leaving the door ajar. "Take your washer from funky to fresh," promises the tagline.

But after years of consumer complaints and lawsuits, as well as evolving guidance and technical tweaks from manufacturers, the inevitable question arises: Can anything really be done to stop mold and other microbes from growing in a type of machine that may be inherently prone to promoting it?

Tiny Spores, Big Headaches

Mold is a tricky problem to pin down. The source can be difficult to identify, and mold is notoriously hard to get rid of. It can also be more than a mere nuisance for people who are allergic

to it. "Mold that grows in washing machines can be problematic even when the machine is not in use," says Melanie Carver, a spokesperson for the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America. "Mold can trigger allergic symptoms—including sneezing, itching, runny nose, and congestion—and can also be an irritant to the airways."

Molds and bacteria can occur together, though their odor may help you tell them apart in the laundry room. "Some molds and bacteria produce and release microbial VOCs [volatile organic compounds]—it depends on the species," says De-Wei Li, Ph.D., a research mycologist for the state of Connecticut. "The stinky smell is often from bacteria, and musty smell is from molds."

But how does mold find its way into your washing machine in the first place? It very well may have started with you—or on you. Mold spores can be found almost anywhere, indoors and out, and you and your clothing are a movable feast.

"Dirty laundry is a major source of mold spores in the washer," says Li, who conducted lab work on washer mold earlier in his career. "You wear the clothes, do your routine, and bits of food, soil, and airborne fungi can land on your clothes."

Into the washer the dirty laundry goes, along with all its microscopic spores. Residual detergent or fabric softener, leftover lint, pocketed tissues, matted hair, and any other organic material can provide the necessary food source. Add the all-important ingredient of lingering moisture, and before long mold can flourish in the intricate folds of the door gasket, spread among the compartments of the detergent dispenser, or develop in the void between the wash tub and the outer tub that encases it. The front-loader presents a moist, friendly environment for mold and bacteria to grow.

'MANUFACTURERS MIGHT BE ASKING TOO MUCH OF CONSUMERS WHEN IT COMES TO FRONT-LOAD WASHING MACHINES. THESE APPLIANCES MUST DO A BETTER JOB OF CREATING AN INHOSPITABLE ENVIRONMENT FOR MICROBES TO GROW.'

—James Dickerson, CR's chief scientific officer

“Residual moisture left behind after the wash cycle is the biggest contributor to odor-causing bacteria in front-loaders,” says Ken Rudolph, senior director of product management for clothes care at GE. “The front-loader is a closed system. The gasket seals it and the water and moisture stay in, unlike top-loaders.”

That’s why manufacturers recommend leaving the door open or ajar between loads—and why it’s significant that GE claims consumers can skip that step with its new UltraFresh vent system. “Maintenance steps are important, but not everybody has time to read the manual,” says Rudolph. “What we learned in our research—most weren’t doing it or weren’t aware.”

(For this article, CR also asked for interviews on the subject of mold in front-loaders with Bosch, Electrolux, Kenmore, Samsung, and Whirlpool, all of whom either declined or did not respond to our specific questions.)

But mold doesn’t just love to hide out where the water pools. “One issue is the front-loader’s outer tub, which you don’t see and can’t access,” says Jim Nanni, who’s been overseeing testing of major appliances at CR for 15 years. “In a top-loader, the outer containment tub is often filled with water, in some cases almost to the top. Front-load washers might have a few inches of water at the bottom of the outer tub. But the whole tub isn’t submerged in water, so lint, dirt, and residue from detergents and fabric softeners can build up near the top from the spray of the spinning inner tub.”

More food for mold.

A Move to the Front

CR first reviewed a front-loading washer in the March 1940 issue of the magazine. The Bendix Model S was “almost entirely automatic” and, as our tests found, good at cleaning and gentle on fabrics. We also noted that



GE ULTRAFRESH CLAIM CHECK

GE says its new UltraFresh front-loaders are designed to protect against mold and odor-causing bacteria, allowing you to skip the steps of wiping down the gasket and leaving the door open. One key to this is a novel vent setting meant to eliminate excess moisture by using the drum as a fan once it's emptied.

So CR's testers installed the GE washer inside an environmental chamber set to 70° F and 50 percent relative humidity. After washing an 8-pound cotton load, they removed the damp laundry, placed a humidity sensor inside, closed the door, and monitored conditions for six days. They ran one trial with the vent on and one with it off. Findings show that the vent lowered the humidity inside the washer to match the room. With the vent off, internal humidity stayed above 90 percent during the trial. “The UltraFresh vent does reduce humidity levels in the drum,” says CR test engineer Richard Handel. “We don't know how this will impact mold growth.” For that, only time will tell.

GE GFW850SPNRS
\$1,000
(shown above)

74

OVERALL
SCORE

the machine vibrated so much that it had to be bolted to the floor. It sold for \$149.50, a premium price at the time—about \$2,755 in today’s dollars.

The rise of the modern front-loader dates back to the 1990s, when manufacturers were facing new efficiency standards set by the Department of Energy. Compact front-loaders were already popular in Europe, but manufacturers needed to adapt the design for the U.S. market, increasing their capacities to allow Americans to do larger loads.

In 1997, CR tested the Frigidaire FWT445GE front-loader, a pioneer of the high-efficiency trend. We found that the \$800 washer was superb, earning top ratings in washing, as well as for water and energy efficiency. The \$1,100 Maytag Neptune front-loader came out that same year, and though CR’s tests revealed that it was mediocre at cleaning, it was also more efficient than any of the 25 top-loaders we tested. However, front-loaders didn’t catch on right away.

“The price was a factor, as consumers were asked to pay two to three times what they would spend on an agitator top-loader,” says Mark Allwood, a CR senior market analyst who has covered the laundry appliance industry for two decades. “Americans were unfamiliar with front-loaders and the technology behind them, plus it would take a few years before any styling was added to these white boxes.”

Lori Baumgartner was given a free Maytag Neptune in 1997 as part of a five-month study the DOE and Maytag had teamed up do to in Bern, Kan. “I loved it, it was great, and it saved a lot of water,” says Baumgartner. “It was a lot quieter than my [agitator top-loader]. When it spun out, there wasn’t much moisture in the laundry, so it dried quicker.”

Her only complaint?

“Mold,” she says. “I had to clean out

the rubber part with bleach. I learned to keep the door open between loads. If there's a little bit of moisture, that's where I noticed mold growing."

The New Normal

Over time, sales increased. By 2009 front-loaders made up 38 percent of the washing machine market, according to shipment data from the Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers (AHAM). And as more manufacturers got into the U.S. front-loader business, including LG and Samsung, major retailers gave them additional floor space, where they stood in dazzling contrast to the boxy white top-loaders.

Front-loaders became more feature-rich, driven by technology and sophisticated sensors. Many of these washers could calibrate just how much water and detergent a load needed, and they had specialty cycles meant for jeans, bedding, and more.

The design of the front-loader is intended to minimize water usage and gently tumble clothes clean with concentrated detergent and minimal suds. "The tub rotates like a Ferris wheel through a puddle of water at the bottom and lifts the laundry up toward the top so that it can splash down into the water," says Richard Handel, lead tester of laundry appliances for CR. "That action forces the concentrated detergent solution to flow through the fabrics." Then the high-speed spin cycle extracts much of the water, cutting dryer time and saving more energy.

As front-loaders got more sophisticated, they became even more efficient in response to the DOE's ever-more-stringent standards. And as the machines evolved, they changed the way Americans wash their clothes. One big shift was away from hot water. "Heating the water requires more energy than running a washer's motor," says CR's Nanni.

In fact, the "normal" settings on

high-efficiency washing machines—including front-loaders and HE top-loaders—default to temperatures 15 to 20 degrees cooler than traditional top-loaders from the 1990s, according to Laura Goodman, a senior scientist in fabric care at Procter & Gamble. P&G is the largest seller of detergents in the U.S., and according to its data, between 1996 and 2015 the percentage of cold-water loads in U.S. households increased from 30 to 48 percent.

As wash cycles got cooler, the chemistry of detergents had to change in order for them to clean effectively.

Cold water may clean clothes with these detergents, but it doesn't kill mold and other microbes. "Hot water can suppress the growth of fungi and even kill some of them, depending on the temperature and duration," Li says. To help compensate, many washers now offer a "tub clean" cycle, which runs the empty washer on a hot-water setting to clean the tub of residue. (Some recommend using bleach or a tub-cleaning product such as Affresh during the cycle.) According to LG's Taylor, the company recommends running the tub-clean cycle every 30 loads. But not all machines automatically remind users to run this cycle.

What's It Going to Take?

The upshot is that the job of keeping mold at bay falls largely to the consumer. Manufacturers instruct owners of front-loaders not to use too much detergent, to regularly wipe down and clean the gasket, and to leave the door open between loads, among other steps.

"Any appliance that routinely comes in contact with dirt and water is going to require regular cleaning and maintenance," says James Dickerson, chief scientific officer for Consumer Reports. "However, manufacturers might be asking too much of consumers when it comes to front-load washing

machines. These appliances must do a better job of creating an inhospitable environment for mold spores, bacteria, and other microbes to grow."

Because even an aggressive cleaning strategy may not help. In a 2016 survey of more than 67,000 CR members, we found that when people do take steps to fight mold, it doesn't guarantee that it won't develop. Another CR survey in 2018 found that only 30 percent of members who reported incidence of mold said they had been able to eradicate it.

So what explains why mold appears in some front-loaders and not in others? "There are so many factors about both the machine and the environment it's in that could contribute to mold growth," says Nanni. "It may be impossible to eliminate the potential for mold through consumer maintenance, or even by manufacturers redesigning the machine itself."

But for consumers stuck with a stinky, slimy laundry machine, it doesn't matter exactly how the microbes got there. According to a survey commissioned by GE, half of all front-loader owners move back to top-loaders because of odors and the maintenance required. By 2019, front-loaders' slice of the market had fallen to 27 percent of washers shipped to stores, according to AHAM.

And that has an impact beyond the laundry room. "We are concerned about the environmental implications associated with the trend away from more energy- and water-efficient front-loaders," says Ann Bailey, products program manager for Energy Star.

Still a Lot to Like

If it weren't for the mold, the front-load washer design offers a lot of advantages. The washing performance is typically superb: The majority of front-load washers in CR's rankings earn an Excellent rating in our

washing performance test, and they dominate our list of recommended models (see the ratings chart on page 52). “As a class, they outperform both high-efficiency and agitator top-loaders in our tests,” says Handel. “Front-loaders are typically gentler on fabrics, while using less water and extracting more of it.” Front-loaders are also quieter than top-loaders, and when space is tight, most can be stacked with their matching dryer. Prices have come down, too.

But thanks to the DOE standards, all types of washing machines are far more efficient than that pioneering Frigidaire. Today, according to data from CR’s labs, the average top-load agitator uses 20 gallons of water per load, and the average front-loader uses 10. That’s down from almost 43 gallons for a top-loader 25 years ago.

But the upside may not make up for the trade-offs, and at least one manufacturer has started warning consumers about them. Samsung spells out on its website that “one of the biggest complaints about front-loading washers is that over time mold can build up around the door’s rubber gasket. To combat this, front-loading washers require a lot more maintenance than top-loading washers.”

For people like Nancy Williams, it’s all a bit too much when you’re just trying to get your clothes clean. After her first front-loader died, she went to complain about the mold at the store where she bought it and walked away with a new front-loader at half price. Second chances and all that.

But the satisfaction of getting a deal was quickly overshadowed—by more creeping black slime. The brand-new washer developed mold and odors, too. And now she’s done. “I’ll ride out this machine until I can’t take it anymore,” Williams says. “Then I’ll replace it with an old-fashioned machine that I don’t have to pamper.”

HOW TO MINIMIZE MOLD IN YOUR WASHER

There’s no guarantee that you can prevent mold from developing in a front-load washer. Therefore, your best bet is to follow your manual’s instructions. Here’s what manufacturers and repair technicians recommend doing.

1_ **Combat residue.**

It feeds mold. Skip fabric softener—which may produce residue—and use only high-efficiency (HE) detergents. (Regular detergent is too sudsy for water-efficient washers and will leave behind soap scum.) According to Samsung, HE powder detergent is less likely to build up than liquid detergent. “And don’t use too much detergent,” warns Shawn Beguesse, a technician for Appliance Doctor in New York City. “The excess builds up, and eventually you’ll see a film” in the dispenser drawer.

2_ **Remove your clean laundry ASAP.**

Transfer wet clothes to the dryer as soon as the cycle ends to keep moisture from lingering.

3_ **Wipe the door and gasket.**

Use a rag to dry the inside of the door. Gently pull back the gasket, wipe it clean, then dry. And be on the lookout for socks and such that get stuck here, because they can become moldy.

4_ **Leave the door open.**

Keep it ajar or wide open between loads to allow moisture

to escape. If young children are present, lock the door to your laundry room.

5_ **Mind the detergent drawer.**

Remove it and clean on a routine basis. Rinse the drawer with water, wipe away the soap buildup, then let it dry. Between loads, wipe it dry or leave the drawer open so that it can air out.

6_ **Run a tub-clean cycle regularly.**

The recommended frequency varies—some brands say monthly or every 50 wash loads. If your washer doesn’t have that feature, Beguesse suggests running the sanitary cycle or simply a hot-water cycle and using a washer cleaner with bleach, such as Tide Washing Machine Cleaner, monthly.

7_ **Ensure that the machine is level.**

Wash water will not drain properly if your washer isn’t perfectly level, so check it every so often. If you need to make adjustments, extend one foot at a time and check front-to-back and side-to-side with a level before tightening the lock nuts on the feet.

8_ **Check the drain hose.**

It shouldn’t be too long and should be inserted only 6 to 8 inches into your home’s drain pipe. More than that, and it can siphon foul-smelling water back into the washer, where it can sit.

Ratings > **Laundry List** Price, capacity, and performance vary by washer type—and each has its pros and cons. In our tests for washing, efficiency, and more, front-loaders generally fare better than top-loaders, though we can't test which machines are more likely to develop mold. Below are washers that score high enough to earn our recommendation.

Brand & Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results							Features	
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Washing performance	Energy efficiency	Water efficiency	Gentleness	Noise	Vibration	Cycle time (min.)	Claimed capacity (cu. ft.)	Dimensions (in.)



FRONT-LOADER

✓ LG WM3900HWA	86	\$850	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	85	4.5	39x27x31
Ⓢ LG WM3500CW	86	\$650	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	105	4.5	39x27x31
✓ LG WM9000HVA	85	\$1,300	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	105	5.2	41x29x35
✓ LG Signature WM9500HKA	84	\$1,820	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	120	5.8	41x30x34
✓ LG WM3700HWA	84	\$900	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	95	4.5	39x27x31
✓ LG WM3997HWA	83	\$1,800	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	100	4.3	39x27x32
✓ Speed Queen FF7005WN	82	\$1,900	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	75	3.5	41x27x31
✓ Kenmore 41562	82	\$900	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	85	4.5	39x27x31
✓ Maytag MHW6630HW	82	\$750	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	95	4.8	39x27x33
✓ LG WM8100HVA	82	\$1,350	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	95	5.2	41x29x32
Ⓢ Kenmore 41362	81	\$750	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	105	4.5	39x27x31
✓ Maytag MHW8630HC	81	\$1,200	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	95	5	39x27x33
✓ Kenmore Elite 41982	81	\$1,100	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	105	5.2	41x29x35
Ⓢ Maytag MHW5630HW	81	\$700	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	100	4.5	39x27x32
Ⓢ Samsung WF45R6300AW	81	\$650	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	80	4.5	39x27x32
✓ Electrolux EFLS627UTT	81	\$950	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	85	4.4	39x27x32
✓ Samsung WF50K7500AW	81	\$1,165	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	100	5	39x27x35

TOP-LOADER HE (HIGH-EFFICIENCY)

✓ LG WT7900HBA	81	\$1,000	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	70	5.5	45x27x30
Ⓢ LG WT7100CW	81	\$650	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	75	4.5	45x27x30
✓ Kenmore Elite 31552	74	\$1,000	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	75	5.2	45x27x29

TOP-LOADER AGITATOR

✓ Maytag MVWB965HC	70	\$1,260	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	80	6	44x29x30
✓ Maytag MVWB865GW	64	\$650	↓	↓	↓	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	70	5.2	43x27x28
✓ GE GTW465ASNWW	64	\$655	↓	↓	↓	↓	↑	↓	↓	↑	35	4.5	44x27x27

> All-Access and Digital members can find the latest, complete ratings at [CR.org/washerratings](https://www.crisil.com/washerratings).

HOW WE TEST: Washing performance reflects the degree of color change in stained fabric swatches added to a load of mixed cottons, using the washer's normal cycle on the heaviest soil setting. **Energy efficiency** indicates the energy needed to heat the water, run the washer, and remove the water left in the clothes after the spin cycle

completes. Machines that require less water earn higher scores for **Water efficiency**. For our **Gentleness** test, we count frayed threads on fabric swatches after washing and air-drying. Our score for **Noise** reflects panelists' judgments during fill, wash, drain, and spin phases. The vibrations a washer transmits to a suspended

wood floor are captured in the **Vibration** score. **Cycle time** is for the normal cycle on the heaviest soil setting, rounded to the nearest 5 minutes. **Claimed capacity** is what the manufacturer states. **Overall Score** combines test results with survey data for predicted reliability and owner satisfaction. **Predicted reliability**

estimates the likelihood that newly purchased models from a given brand, not under service contract, will develop problems or break within the first five years. **Owner satisfaction** reflects the proportion of CR members who are extremely likely to recommend the washer they bought. **Price** is approximate retail.



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ROAD REPORT

DASHBOARD DECODER

What Does This Icon Mean?

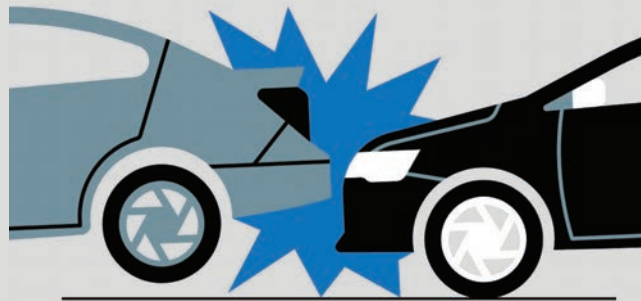


- COVER YOUR MOUTH WHEN COUGHING
- CAR KARAOKE ENGAGED
- VOICE COMMAND
- BREATHALYZER IS ON

The voice command button (choice 3) can let you make a call, request directions, or control audio functions hands-free. A long press of the button can also activate the assistant on a Bluetooth-paired phone, which can do many of the same things and is easier for some people to use.

ASK OUR EXPERTS

Will automatic emergency braking (AEB) completely stop my car?



Not always. Automatic emergency braking systems operate at different speeds. At 25 mph or less, many AEB systems will **bring a car to a stop** before it hits another vehicle. Some systems will stop a car traveling at higher speeds, but even if they don't stop a car completely they will often **slow it down significantly**, improving the chances that occupants of both vehicles will avoid injury. No system is a substitute for a driver braking, so it's important to always remain alert and apply the brakes whenever necessary.

THE VITAL STATISTIC

96%

Percentage of electric vehicle owners who say they would buy or lease an EV again the next time they're in the market for a new car.

Source: American Automobile Association.

RECALL



Toyota

Toyota is recalling about 2.9 million vehicles with airbags that might not deploy in a crash. The models involved are 2011 through 2019 Corolla sedans, 2011 through 2013 Matrix hatchbacks, 2012 through 2018 Avalon sedans, and 2013 through 2018 Avalon Hybrid sedans.

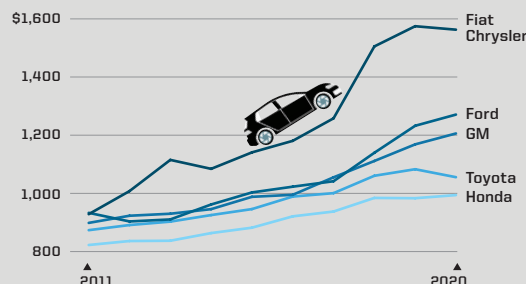
What to do: Toyota dealers will inspect the system and install a component to prevent a malfunction in the event of a crash. The campaign number from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration for this recall is 20V024. Owners can call Toyota's customer service at 888-270-9371.

TRENDS

A New-Car Fee Climbs

Automakers say that the destination charge covers the cost of shipping cars to dealerships. This fee is typically non-negotiable, raises the overall price, and has gone up an average of 30 percent since 2011—far above inflation. Consumer Reports now highlights destination charges on the new-car model pages at CR.org/cars.

AVERAGE DESTINATION CHARGES OF THE FIVE LARGEST AUTOMAKERS IN THE U.S.



Meet Your Driving Style Match

You'll be happier behind the wheel if you choose a vehicle well-suited to your driving personality. Our car experts play matchmaker for you.

by **Jaclyn Trop**



ASK ANYONE, “What kind of driver are you?” and most are quick to answer. One might say that he’s a defensive driver who feels pride at keeping a safe distance from the back bumper of other cars on freeways. Another might describe herself as a performance lover who sneers at any car that doesn’t grab

the road with gusto.

But even though most drivers fall into one of a few categories of driving styles (or personalities), many don’t know how to choose a car that best matches their style. The result can be a less than ideal driving experience. “Driving a vehicle that’s optimized to meet your needs can be much

more enjoyable than driving one that is not,” says Jake Fisher, CR’s senior director of auto testing.

With that in mind, our experts chose a short list of cars that we believe are an ideal match for each of several distinct driving styles. We highlight one for your top consideration and list several

other choices, in alphabetical order, that also match up well. Note that three of the 20 (the Ford F-150, Jeep Wrangler, and Toyota 4Runner) did not merit a CR recommendation for the 2020 model year, though they each scored high in owner satisfaction. You can see their full scores at [CR.org/cars](https://www.consumerreports.org/cars) or in the April issue of the magazine.

PHOTO: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

PERFORMANCE DRIVER

TOYOTA SUPRA
\$49,990-\$55,250

80 OVERALL SCORE

TOYOTA SUPRA

\$49,990-\$55,250 | **27** MPG
80 OVERALL SCORE | **91** ROAD TEST
1 PREDICTED RELIABILITY | **2** OWNER SATISFACTION

The Toyota Supra is a fun-loving sports car with catlike reflexes, Fisher says. "It responds like an extension of your arm." Returning to the market after more than two decades, the two-seater is powered by a 3.0-liter turbo six-cylinder engine sourced from BMW and a smooth-shifting eight-speed automatic transmission. Steering-wheel-mounted paddle shifters keep the driver engaged, and the car's Sport mode amps the throttle response and exhaust noise. The effect is a playful car that delivers lively performance. "There might be faster performance cars out there," Fisher says, "but the Supra is all about the quick reaction when you turn or accelerate. It's incredibly nimble."

HYUNDAI VELOSTER

\$18,800-\$28,350 | **29** MPG
80 OVERALL SCORE | **83** ROAD TEST
2 PREDICTED RELIABILITY | **2** OWNER SATISFACTION

Opt for the Hyundai Veloster's 1.6-liter turbo version for full-bodied power on demand. The sporty coupe feels nimble and handles hairpin turns with ease.

MAZDA CX-5

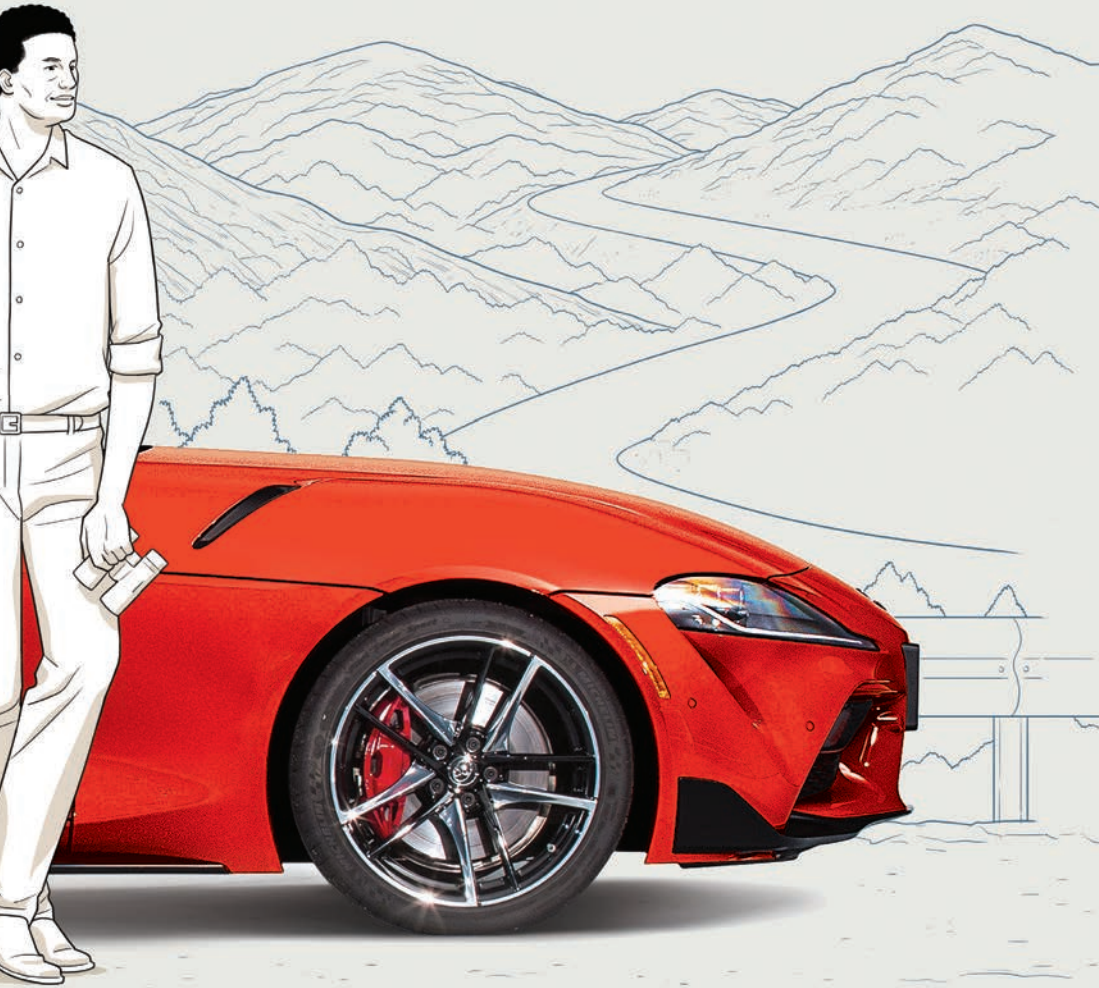
\$25,190-\$37,155 | **24** MPG
84 OVERALL SCORE | **80** ROAD TEST
2 PREDICTED RELIABILITY | **2** OWNER SATISFACTION

As one of our top-rated compact SUVs, the small but mighty CX-5 has responsive, carlike handling. The top Signature trim can be outfitted with a spirited turbocharged 2.5-liter engine.

MAZDA MX-5 MIATA

\$26,580-\$34,750 | **34** MPG
86 OVERALL SCORE | **80** ROAD TEST
2 PREDICTED RELIABILITY | **2** OWNER SATISFACTION

A perennial favorite among auto enthusiasts, the Mazda MX-5 Miata is a nimble convertible with a six-speed manual transmission that's fun to drive. The roadster boasts robust handling, especially on back roads.





PERFORMANCE DRIVER

FAVORING CARS that give them a sense of merging body and machine, drivers in this group love to feel the road and dive into curves. Their preferred habitat is twisty back byways. Driving for them is a form of entertainment that can be heightened by the sense of control a stick shift provides, as well as suspension and steering that communicate the road through all senses. Doug Tabbutt, a car salesman and self-professed performance driver from Cleveland, could commute to work in his Porsche 911 in 8 minutes. Instead, he chooses a longer, more circuitous route so that he can enjoy navigating its many twists and curves.

DEFENSIVE DRIVER


EVERYONE SHOULD drive defensively, of course, ever aware of the surroundings and prepared to respond to the surprise moves of other motorists. But this group takes that level of vigilance up a notch, and for that we salute these drivers. Jonathan Baran of San Francisco typifies this style. He says he used to be an “assertive” driver, but becoming a father and experiencing a car crash in 2018 changed his approach to driving. “Now I’m on the lookout for the people who are in too much of a hurry or who have their heads down checking their phones at 45 mph.” The vehicles that will please this group have excellent outward visibility, lots of standard advanced safety systems, and user-friendly controls that won’t distract from driving. They also must be reliable and large enough to protect occupants in a crash but nimble enough to be able to scoot out of trouble when merging into high-speed traffic.

KIA TELLURIDE

\$31,890-\$43,790 | **21** MPG
92 OVERALL SCORE | **97** ROAD TEST
 PREDICTED RELIABILITY |  OWNER SATISFACTION

The three-row Kia Telluride SUV has a slew of standard safety systems and a roomy cabin that seats up to eight. Its size and high score in our emergency handling tests make it an appealing choice for safety-conscious drivers with families, Fisher says. All Telluride models come with advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS), including forward collision warning (FCW), automatic emergency braking (AEB) with pedestrian detection, and blind spot warning (BSW). The Telluride’s beefy 291-hp V6 engine provides enough power to merge and pass safely on the highway.

SUBARU FORESTER

\$24,495-\$34,595 | **28** MPG
84 OVERALL SCORE | **90** ROAD TEST
 PREDICTED RELIABILITY |  OWNER SATISFACTION

The Subaru Forester is a small SUV with outstanding safety ratings. All models come with Subaru’s EyeSight, a suite of ADAS features, such as lane departure warning (LDW), lane keeping assist (LKA), FCW, and AEB.

SUBARU OUTBACK

\$26,645-\$39,695 | **24** MPG
87 OVERALL SCORE | **91** ROAD TEST
 PREDICTED RELIABILITY |  OWNER SATISFACTION

Subaru’s new and improved Outback comes with the brand’s EyeSight package. Rear cross traffic warning (RCTW) and BSW are available on the Premium trim and standard on higher trims.

TOYOTA CAMRY



\$24,425-\$35,130 | **32** MPG
84 OVERALL SCORE | **86** ROAD TEST
 PREDICTED RELIABILITY |  OWNER SATISFACTION

The Toyota Camry midsize sedan is a stalwart that stands out for its secure handling and comfortable ride. New for 2020, the Camry will be available with all-wheel drive (AWD) to give greater confidence in tackling foul weather conditions. All models come with FCW and AEB. Buyers can also opt for BSW.

ROUGH-AND- TUMBLE DRIVER



THESE ADVENTUROUS types could be considered the extroverts of the road. You can recognize many of them by their customized vehicles—outfitted with tough-looking tires and lifted suspensions, even if their aggressive rides are used mostly for daily commutes. On weekends or during vacations, however, these drivers spurn pavement, preferring to explore obscure trails, even if over sand, rocks, mud, or snow. After a weekend of mudding, Rough-and-Tumble drivers might not wash their truck before driving it to work on Monday: The mud, like the truck, is a badge of honor. Some of these drivers are less extreme, needing just enough road clearance and off-roading toughness to take them to hard-to-reach hiking trails or a fishing or picnic spot deep in the woods.

JEEP WRANGLER

\$28,295-\$42,125 | **18** MPG
28 OVERALL SCORE | **36** ROAD TEST
 PREDICTED RELIABILITY |  OWNER SATISFACTION

The Jeep Wrangler is the poster child for off-road prowess. “If the Supra is a set of sneakers, this is a pair of work boots,” Fisher says. “It projects an attitude of ‘I can go anywhere. I can get through whatever comes at me.’” Available in two- and four-door configurations, the Wrangler boasts solid construction, protective skid plates, and a choice of engines. The Wrangler is noisy at highway speeds, but it will take you as far off-road as you want to go. The Wrangler’s owner satisfaction score is extremely high each year, according to CR member surveys. It doesn’t seem to matter much to owners that its predicted reliability and Overall Score are so low that CR does not recommend it.



FORD F-150

\$28,495-\$70,910 | **19** MPG
57 OVERALL SCORE | **74** ROAD TEST
 PREDICTED RELIABILITY |  OWNER SATISFACTION

The best-selling pickup truck is a capable workhorse built to withstand grueling drives. It has



a lightweight aluminum body and robust turbocharged powertrains that provide strong acceleration yet good fuel economy. These traits, combined with clever towing features, make the F-150 a great choice for hauling power-sports toys out for fun-filled weekend adventures.

SUBARU CROSSTREK

\$22,145-\$35,145 | **29** MPG
85 OVERALL SCORE | **87** ROAD TEST
 PREDICTED RELIABILITY |  OWNER SATISFACTION

The Subaru Crosstrek comes standard with all-wheel drive—rare for the segment. This little Subaru may have a small footprint, but it can hold its own off the beaten path.

TOYOTA 4RUNNER

\$36,120-\$49,865 | **18** MPG
65 OVERALL SCORE | **55** ROAD TEST
 PREDICTED RELIABILITY |  OWNER SATISFACTION

The tough Toyota 4Runner boasts generous ground clearance, underbody skid plates, and a four-wheel-drive system that can crawl up challenging terrain. The 4Runner has a reputation for strong reliability, adding to its appeal, and now many key ADAS features come standard.

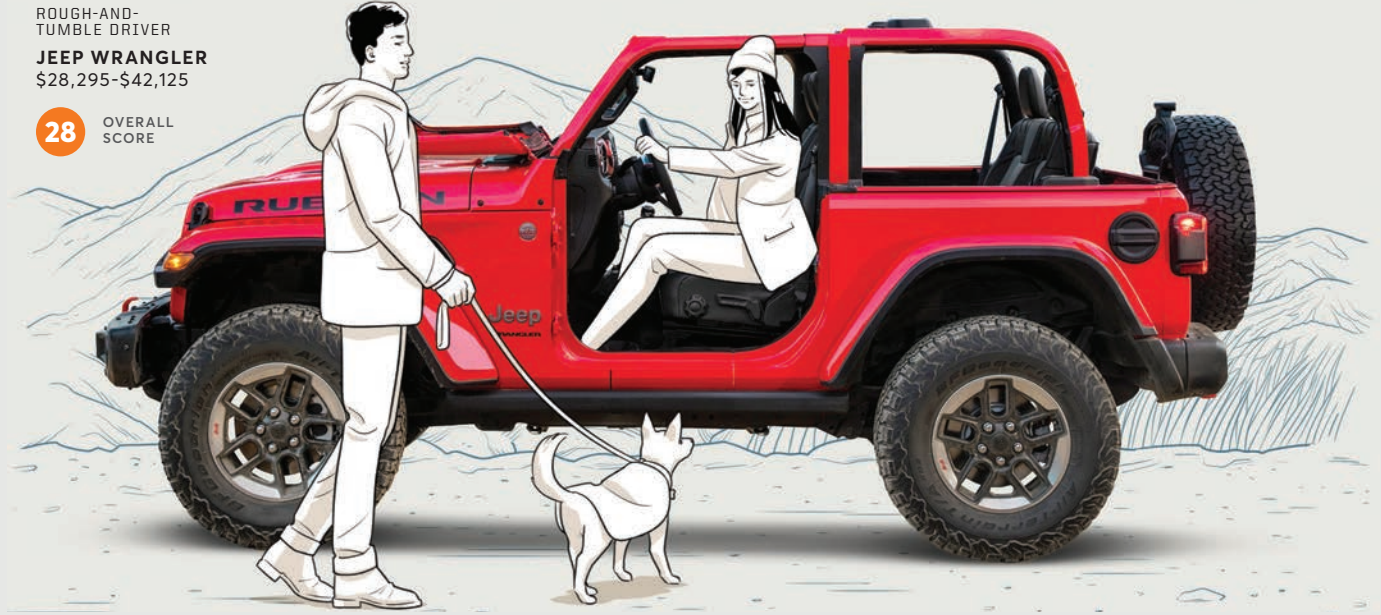


POWER DRIVER
FORD MUSTANG GT
 \$35,630-\$45,130

72 OVERALL SCORE

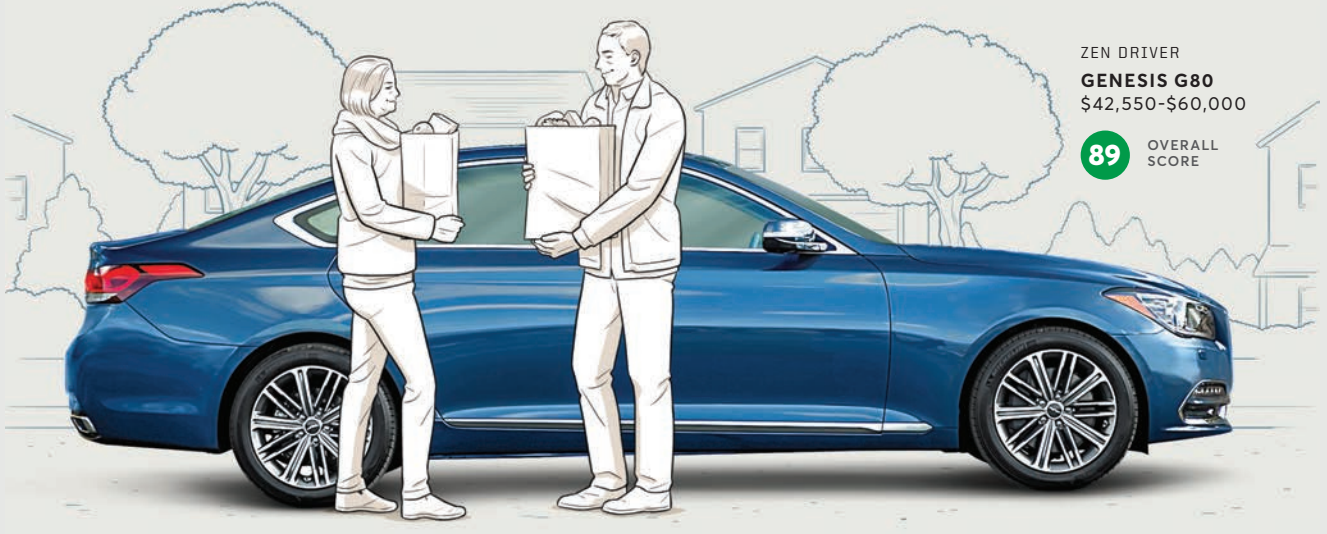
ROUGH-AND-TUMBLE DRIVER
JEEP WRANGLER
 \$28,295-\$42,125

28 OVERALL SCORE



ZEN DRIVER
GENESIS G80
 \$42,550-\$60,000



89 OVERALL SCORE



POWER DRIVER



POWER DRIVERS ARE the stars of their own drag racing events, and few things for them are as satisfying as the feel of being pushed back into their seats as the car takes off beneath them. Some Power Drivers crave the sound of their gas-powered engines revving high over smooth pavement. That often means a V8, but it's not required for a robust exhaust note. Other Power Drivers—some behind the wheel of silent electric vehicles engineered for bursts of speed—don't need the noise. They want to be under the green light the moment it changes, leaving other cars and drivers behind. (We don't begrudge anyone the thrill of quick acceleration, as long the driver operates the vehicle safely and obeys the laws of the road.) For the Power Driver group, the thrill is more about the muscle of straightaway speed than it is about the finesse.

FORD MUSTANG GT

\$35,630-\$45,130 | 19 MPG
72 OVERALL SCORE | **84** ROAD TEST
 PREDICTED RELIABILITY |  OWNER SATISFACTION

This Mustang is a modern muscle car with "a big engine, lots of noise, and lots of power," Fisher says. "It's loud and in your face." The two-door sports coupe and convertible harness 460 hp from a 5.0-liter V8, and the 10-speed automatic transmission cycles through gears swiftly. (It's also available with a stick shift.) The GT that we tested roared from 0 to 60 mph in 4.9 seconds. A throaty exhaust comes with Sport mode, but in regular driving you won't wake up the neighborhood. To the delight of the Power Driver, the GT has readily available thrust anytime, anywhere, and in any gear.



DODGE CHARGER

\$28,895-\$69,645 | 20 MPG
73 OVERALL SCORE | **85** ROAD TEST
 PREDICTED RELIABILITY |  OWNER SATISFACTION

As the only four-door American muscle car on the market, the Dodge Charger is also a practical family-sized daily driver. The sporty sedan offers an impressive



array of V6 and V8 powertrains, culminating with the Hellcat's 707-hp, supercharged V8. The Charger R/T that we tested ran 0 to 60 mph in 6.1 seconds, accompanied by a hearty V8 rumble.

TESLA MODEL 3

\$39,990-\$56,990 | 130 MPGE
80 OVERALL SCORE | **82** ROAD TEST
 PREDICTED RELIABILITY |  OWNER SATISFACTION

The Tesla Model 3's mild exterior belies its powerful acceleration and agile handling. A high-performance version of the all-electric sedan can zoom from 0 to 60 mph in just over 3 seconds.

TESLA MODEL S


\$79,990-\$99,990 | 102 MPGE
83 OVERALL SCORE | **97** ROAD TEST
 PREDICTED RELIABILITY |  OWNER SATISFACTION

The all-electric Model S is a sleek luxury sedan with powerful chops. Its high-performance edition rockets to 60 mph from a standstill in 2.4 seconds.

ZEN DRIVER



THOSE WHO FIT into this category see their cars as a place to escape the noise and jostling of daily life. They appreciate plush, quiet interiors that isolate them from the outside world. Unlike Power Drivers, members of this group aren't bothered if they never hear much of anything from their car's engine, and actually prefer not to. Other priorities include a comfortable ride, supportive seats, and a luxurious interior ambience that makes them feel pampered.

TOYOTA AVALON

\$35,875-\$43,300 | 42 MPG
93 OVERALL SCORE | **93** ROAD TEST
 PREDICTED RELIABILITY |  OWNER SATISFACTION



Drivers who prize comfort will value the Avalon's quiet, roomy cabin, Fisher says. "The vibe is relaxed. It says 'I just want to chill.'" The cabin provides plush seating and lots of head- and legroom for five passengers. All models come with Toyota's easy-to-use infotainment system, the Amazon Alexa in-car app, and Apple CarPlay, which puts a wide range of entertainment options at your fingertips. (Android Auto is not available.)

GENESIS G80

\$42,550-\$60,000 | 20 MPG
89 OVERALL SCORE | **89** ROAD TEST
 PREDICTED RELIABILITY |  OWNER SATISFACTION



The Genesis G80 competes with German and Japanese luxury cars that cost thousands more. Affordable luxury includes standard seat heaters and leather upholstery, plus generous interior room and easy-to-use controls.

LEXUS ES

\$39,900-\$45,610 | 25 MPG
87 OVERALL SCORE | **84** ROAD TEST
 PREDICTED RELIABILITY |  OWNER SATISFACTION

Recently redesigned, the Lexus ES sedan prizes peace and quiet. Apple CarPlay and newly standard Android Auto make it easier to stream audiobooks and podcasts.

LINCOLN CONTINENTAL

\$46,305-\$75,470 | 20 MPG
80 OVERALL SCORE | **83** ROAD TEST
 PREDICTED RELIABILITY |  OWNER SATISFACTION

Lincoln's flagship sedan cocoons passengers from the outside world in a spacious cabin trimmed with high-quality materials. The rear seats are especially roomy.

—Additional reporting by Benjamin Preston



ROAD TEST

WE CONDUCT 50+ TESTS ON EACH VEHICLE AT OUR 327-ACRE AUTO TEST CENTER. FOR COMPLETE ROAD TESTS, ALL-ACCESS MEMBERS CAN GO TO [CR.ORG/CARS](https://www.cars.com).



SUVs

Ford Escape Hybrid

Electric Assist Gives a Needed Boost

67

OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 82

HIGHS Agility, short stopping distance, controls, fuel economy

LOWS No auto-up windows

POWERTRAIN 198-hp, 2.5-liter 4-cylinder hybrid engine; continuously variable transmission; all-wheel drive

FUEL 34 mpg on regular fuel

PRICE \$28,255-\$34,900 base price range \$34,240 as tested

HATCHBACKS

Hyundai Venue

Best for In-Town Tooling Around

63

OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 61

HIGHS Controls, fuel economy, braking

LOWS Ride, noise, fit and finish, seat belt anchors aren't adjustable

POWERTRAIN 121-hp, 1.6-liter 4-cylinder engine; continuously variable transmission; front-wheel drive

FUEL 32 mpg on regular fuel

PRICE \$17,350-\$22,050 base price range \$20,720 as tested

THE HYBRID VERSION of the new Escape offers a quieter, more refined driving experience than its non-hybrid sibling. It also delivers 34 mpg overall—8 mpg more than the 1.5-liter turbo SE version but still 3 mpg shy of the Toyota RAV4 Hybrid.

A responsive electric drivetrain gives the Escape Hybrid smooth acceleration at low speeds, and it's free of the annoying vibration we felt with the 1.5-liter, three-cylinder engine in the regular Escape we tested. It's not all roses, though: The hybrid's CVT can make the four-cylinder engine rev quite high when pushed, such as when accelerating to merge.

The Hybrid shares the same handling agility that impressed us with the regular version, making it as lively and enjoyable to drive on curvy roads. It also shares the regular Escape's firm ride; the

driver and passengers will feel bumps in the road.

Inside, the ambience is more spartan than you'd expect in a vehicle at this price. (The lack of auto-up windows is a cheap omission.) Our tested SUV's optional faux-leather seats were more comfortable and supportive than the standard cloth ones, but the woefully underpadded center armrest can quickly become uncomfortable.

Stopping distance is relatively short, but the brakes can feel grabby at first, especially at low speeds. We're happy that all trims come with FCW, AEB with pedestrian detection, BSW, RCTW, and LKA safety features.

If you're going to buy an Escape, the Hybrid's superior drivability, impressive fuel economy, and only slightly higher price make it an easy choice over the turbocharged 1.5-liter engine we tested.

THE TINY FRONT-WHEEL-DRIVE Venue is a subcompact hatchback in SUV clothing. It boasts a low starting price, good forward visibility, standard advanced safety features, and straightforward climate and audio controls. Plus, the interior feels roomier than the car's dimensions might suggest.

But the Venue's thoughtful design and well-tailored appearance can't hide its budget-conscious underpinnings. The spongy-feeling seats lack support, the armrests are too firm, and there's too much engine and wind noise. The front seat belt might rub on a passenger's neck because it can't be adjusted for height.

The driving experience also varies widely depending on what you ask from the car. It's best suited for around-town driving because of easy maneuverability and

an engine and transmission combination that responds quickly to driver inputs.

The Hyundai's flaws become even more apparent on the highway. The engine sounds stressed when merging or passing, and the stiff suspension transmits bumps and jolts into the cabin even on roads that look smooth. The Venue performed well in our accident avoidance maneuver test, but the steering feels dull. Despite its SUV looks, all-wheel drive isn't available.

AEB with pedestrian detection comes standard. LKA is also standard, but the system isn't particularly effective at keeping the car in its lane.

Higher trim levels or special editions may look stylish, but buyers shouldn't let themselves be fooled: This low-priced car drives the same no matter how it's packaged.



SEDANS

Hyundai Sonata

Stylish, Safe, and Fuel-Efficient

77

OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 81

HIGHS Fuel economy, trusty handling, braking, available tech features

LOWS Ride, gear selector

POWERTRAIN 191-hp, 2.5-liter 4-cylinder engine; 8-speed automatic transmission; front-wheel drive

FUEL 31 mpg on regular fuel

PRICE \$23,600-\$33,500 base price range \$26,670 as tested

THE REDESIGNED SONATA stands out among staid mid-sized sedans with its sleek profile. Even so, in CR's road-test results it trails the category's perennial leaders—the Honda Accord, Subaru Legacy, and Toyota Camry.

The Sonata is fairly roomy, with good driver visibility in spite of its rakish lines. The driving position isn't quite as upright as in most sedans, but the power-seat adjustments let drivers of all sizes get comfortable behind the wheel. Seat support is fine on shorter jaunts, but it fades on longer trips, contributing to fatigue. And the hard center console can rub uncomfortably against the driver's right knee.

The controls are a mixed bag. The infotainment system's controls are well-designed, but the push-button gear selector can't be operated without looking away from the road. It's also tricky to use.

The stiff ride transmits road impacts in a more pronounced way than in rival sedans. The Sonata is quite capable when driven briskly, and it negotiated our accident avoidance course with impressive speed.

The standard 191-hp, 2.5-liter four-cylinder is coupled with an eight-speed automatic transmission, providing unobtrusive, predictable power and strong fuel economy. We don't see a need to upgrade to the available turbocharged engine.

Standard advanced safety features include FCW, AEB with pedestrian detection, and LKA, which does a good job keeping the Sonata centered in its lane. There is an optional self-parking feature that can drive the car straight into and out of a tight perpendicular parking spot, sparing you from door dings and struggling to climb in.

SEDANS

Volkswagen Passat

Clunky & Dull, But Safety Is Standard

73

OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 77

HIGHS Controls, rear seat, visibility

LOWS Abrupt acceleration from a stop, handling limits

POWERTRAIN 174-hp, 2.0-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder engine; 6-speed automatic transmission; front-wheel drive

FUEL 28 mpg on regular fuel

PRICE \$22,995-\$31,095 base price range \$28,080 as tested

THE 2020 PASSAT looks a lot like the model it's replacing, amounting to more of a freshening of the previous generation than a total redesign.

With this car, Volkswagen hopes to attract buyers looking for a roomy mid-sized sedan with tame styling. But that could be a tough sell because many competitors have pivoted to more shapely designed sedans that also deliver better performance and fuel economy.

Unlike many new Volkswagens, the Passat is still based on an older, less sophisticated platform, which is apparent once you drive it. The ride has an underlying firmness, and the suspension transmits some roughness from the road into the cabin, though it capably absorbs the big bumps.

Handling is a bit dull in everyday driving. And when

the Passat is pushed to its limits, such as when you're trying to avoid an obstacle in the road, the tail slides too much before the electronic stability control tames it.

The four-cylinder turbo engine delivers sufficient power, but its 28 mpg overall trails most of the competition. In addition, the Passat is unpleasantly abrupt when taking off from a stop, such as when merging into traffic from a standstill.

The car's strengths include its easy-to-use infotainment system and intuitive controls that are within close reach of the driver. Also, the VW's boxy styling affords excellent visibility, easy cabin access, a spacious rear seat, and a vast trunk. We also like that FCW, AEB with pedestrian detection, BSW, and RCTW come standard.

Ratings > **Affordable Options** Many of the hatchbacks, sedans, and SUVs here are available for less than \$35,000 and come with standard advanced driver assistance systems.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Survey Results		Road-Test Results											Advanced Safety					
		Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	Seat comfort, front/rear	Usability	Noise	Ride	Fit+finish	Routine handling	Avoidance-maneuver speed, mph	Acceleration 0-60 mph, sec.	DRY braking 60-0 mph, ft.	Suitcases + duffels/ Cargo volume, cu. ft.	FCW	AEB, city	AEB, pedestrian	AEB, highway	BSW
HATCHBACKS \$25,000 & UNDER																				
✓ Kia Soul 2.0L	81	↑	↑	76	28	↑ / ↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	55.0	8.8	120	1+1	0	0	0	0	0
✓ Hyundai Elantra GT 2.0L	81	↑	↑	79	28	↑ / ↓	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	54.5	8.7	127	2+2	0	0	0	0	0
✓ Honda Fit 1.5L	71	↑	↓	67	33	↑ / ↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	55.0	10.0	132	2+2	0	0	0	0	-
Hyundai Venue 1.6L	63	↓	↑	61	32	↓ / ↓	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	55.5	8.9	125	2+2	S	S	S	S	0
Nissan Kicks 1.6L	61	↓	↓	64	32	↓ / ↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓	51.5	10.5	137	3+0	S	S	S	S	S
Toyota C-HR 2.0L	61	↓	↓	64	29	↓ / ↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	52.5	11.2	131	2+0	S	S	S	S	0
SEDANS \$25,000-\$35,000																				
✓ Subaru Legacy 2.5L	87	↑	↑	89	28	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	54.5	8.9	131	4+1	S	S	S	S	0
✓ Toyota Camry 2.5L	84	↑	↑	86	32	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	53.5	8.0	126	3+1	S	S	S	S	0
✓ Nissan Altima 2.5L	84	↑	↓	81	31	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	53.5	7.6	131	4+0	S	S	0	S	0
✓ Honda Accord 1.5T	82	↓	↑	89	31	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	54.5	7.7	135	4+1	S	S	S	S	0
✓ Mazda6 2.5L	80	↑	↑	79	28	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	54.0	9.2	133	3+2	S	S	S	S	S
✓ Hyundai Sonata 2.5L	77	↓	↑	81	31	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	56.0	7.5	127	3+2	S	S	S	S	0
✓ Volkswagen Passat 2.0T	73	↓	↑	77	28	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	52.0	7.9	130	3+1	S	S	S	S	S
✓ Ford Fusion 1.5T	72	↓	↑	81	24	↓ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	52.5	9.2	125	3+2	S	S	S	S	S
Chevrolet Malibu 1.5T	57	↓	↓	80	29	↓ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	53.0	8.4	130	3+2	0	0	0	0	0
SUVs \$25,000-\$35,000																				
✓ Subaru Forester 2.5L	84	↓	↑	90	28	↑ / ↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	53.0	9.2	130	36.5	S	S	S	S	0
✓ Mazda CX-5 2.5L	84	↑	↑	80	24	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	54.0	8.6	133	30.5	S	S	S	S	S
✓ Honda CR-V 1.5T	77	↓	↑	82	28	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	52.0	8.2	137	36.0	S	S	S	S	0
✓ Chevrolet Equinox 1.5T	76	↑	↓	78	25	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	53.0	9.6	132	32.0	S	S	S	-	0
✓ Nissan Rogue 2.5L	75	↑	↓	74	24	↓ / ↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	↓	54.0	9.5	134	31.5	S	S	S	S	S
✓ Kia Sportage 2.4L	75	↓	↓	78	23	↑ / ↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	52.5	9.6	128	29.5	S	S	S	S	0
✓ Toyota RAV4 Hybrid 2.5H	75	↓	↓	76	37	↑ / ↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	52.0	7.8	139	30.5	S	S	S	S	0
✓ Toyota RAV4 2.5L	72	↓	↓	72	27	↑ / ↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	54.0	8.3	131	30.5	S	S	S	S	0
Ford Escape Hybrid 2.5H	67	↓	↑	82	34	↓ / ↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	51.0	8.3	128	30.5	S	S	S	S	S
Hyundai Tucson 2.4L	67	↓	↓	75	22	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	52.5	9.6	130	29.5	S	S	0	S	0
Ford Escape 1.5T	62	↓	↑	73	26	↓ / ↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	53.0	8.9	128	30.5	S	S	S	S	S
Volkswagen Tiguan 2.0T	61	↓	↓	84	25	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	52.0	10.3	131	33.0	S	S	S	S	S

HOW WE TEST: Recommended models did well in our Overall Score, which factors in Road-Test Results, Predicted reliability, Owner satisfaction, and

Advanced Safety, which includes crash-test results and the availability of crash prevention features, such as forward collision warning, automatic emergency

braking, pedestrian detection, and blind spot warning. - means no such safety system is offered; 0 means it's available but not as standard equipment; S means

it's standard on all trims. We deduct points if a model's gear selector lacks fail-safes. Digital or All-Access members can go to [CR.org/cars](https://www.cars.com) for complete ratings.

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Food for Thought

These oddball ads are tough to swallow

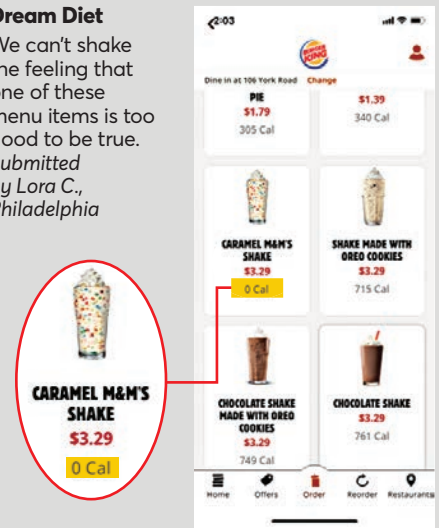
A Raw Deal

Sushi so fresh it might swim off the shelves?
Submitted by Jonathan A., via email



Dream Diet

We can't shake the feeling that one of these menu items is too good to be true.
Submitted by Lora C., Philadelphia



The Diner Who Knew Too Much

So if you know about this ad, you can forget about getting the discount.
Submitted by Jerry Galbreath, Enid, OK

Uninformed personnel



Sour Grapes

The perfect bottle for your least favorite friend?
Submitted by Sandra Kenny, Cedar Grove, NJ

It never ceases to disappoint



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