

**BIG MEDICAL BILLS?  
SOLUTIONS, P. 42**



**POWERFUL VACUUMS  
& STEAM MOPS**



**BEST USED CARS  
UNDER \$10,000**

**COVID-19 UPDATE: REDUCE YOUR RISK ON PLANES, TRAINS & AUTOMOBILES**

NOVEMBER 2020

# CR Consumer Reports®

✓ **REVIEWS & RATINGS**

- Leaf Blowers
- Air Purifiers
- Coffee Makers
- Generators
- Toasters
- Yogurts
- Hair Coloring Kits

# Your Guide to Safer Drinking Water

- How to Check Tap Water
- 45 Bottled Brands Tested
- The Facts on Filters

Why the government allows dangerous chemicals in America's water and how you can protect yourself



# 100%

**NONPROFIT • INDEPENDENT • ON YOUR SIDE SINCE 1936**

Everyday decisions are more important than ever. From navigating a health crisis to buying a car to making safe food choices, you can rely on the trusted expertise of CR. How can you help? As a nonprofit, CR relies on donations for the additional support needed to continue our work.

Learn more at [cr.org/supportcr](https://www.consumerreports.org/supportcr)





## 26 Your Guide to Safer Drinking Water

The government still allows potentially toxic chemicals in our water. But there are ways to protect yourself and your family.

**RATINGS**

## 34 The Best Way to Clean That Floor

Got furballs? Sticky kitchen tile? Dusty stairs? Look no further: Here, the right vacuum or wet mop to meet all your cleaning challenges.

**RATINGS**



## 42 Could Your Medical Bills Make You Sick?

They don't just hurt your bank account. Medical bills can also cause you to put off needed medical care and can contribute to chronic stress.



## 50 Your COVID-19 Travel Toolkit

Everything you need to know to stay as safe as possible, whether you're traveling by car, train, bus, or plane.

## PRODUCTS RATED IN THIS ISSUE



**LEAF BLOWERS**  
P. 10



**LAPTOPS**  
P. 13



**HOME HAIR COLOR KITS**  
P. 16



**COFFEE MAKERS**  
P. 18



**BMW 228i GRAN COUPE**  
P. 63



## Contents

### Going Green

Advanced technologies are improving MPG on new cars, helping you go farther on less fuel.



### 7 Building a Better World, Together

Ensuring free COVID-19 testing, removing chemicals from food, and keeping baby cereals safer.

### 8 Your Feedback

Readers' comments about our recent content.

### 20 Recalls

### 66 Index

### 67 Selling It

### ROAD REPORT

### 55 Ahead of the Curve

Auto ratings, news, and advice.

### 56 New Ways Carmakers Are Getting You More MPG

Gas-saving technologies you might find in your next car.

**RATINGS**

### 62 Track Intelligence

The best used cars and SUVs under \$10,000.

**RATINGS**

### 63 Road Test

We drive the Cadillac CT4, BMW 228i Gran Coupe, Chevrolet Trailblazer, and Volkswagen Atlas Cross Sport.

**RATINGS**

### DEPARTMENTS & COLUMNS

#### 10 What We're Testing in Our Labs ...

Nonstick and stainless steel frying pans, mirrorless cameras, generators, and more.

**RATINGS**

#### 12 Ask Our Experts

How to protect your car's paint from leaf damage, why your credit card limit may be lowered, and the reason you shouldn't sterilize your floors.

#### 13 CR Insights

The safest ways to vote in the 2020 election, how to pick a low-cost laptop, quick fixes for an annoying mask, and more.

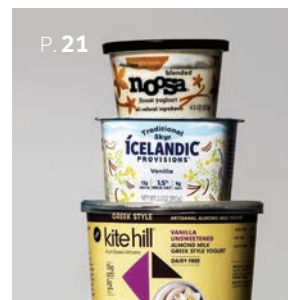
**RATINGS**

#### PRODUCT UPDATE

#### 21 Healthy Yogurts That Taste Good, Too

Our experts give the skinny on both dairy and plant-based yogurts.

**RATINGS**



### IN EVERY ISSUE

#### 6 From the President: How We Fight Misinformation

Here at CR, we're standing up for the facts and combating harmful misinformation.

### ABOUT CONSUMER REPORTS

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

products we rate. We don't accept paid advertising.

In addition to our rigorous research, investigative journalism, and consumer advocacy, we work with other organizations, including media, consumer groups, research and testing consortiums, and philanthropic partners. We also license our content and data, as well as work with business partners to offer shopping and other consumer services, and may

receive fees from these programs. We maintain a strict separation between our commercial operations and our testing and editorial operations. Our testing and editorial teams decide which products to test and review; our external business partners or other third parties do not dictate or control these decisions. Lastly, these partnerships and programs do not constitute CR's endorsement of any products or services.

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

#### HOW TO REACH US

Write to us at Consumer Reports, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY 10703, Attn.: Member Support. Or call 800-333-0663.

#### TO SEND A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Go to [CR.org/lettertoeditor](https://www.consumerreports.org/lettertoeditor).

#### FOR NEWS TIPS & STORY IDEAS

Go to [CR.org/tips](https://www.consumerreports.org/tips).

For **Selling It** send items to

[SellingIt@cro.consumerreports.org](mailto:SellingIt@cro.consumerreports.org).

See page 67 for more details.

#### ACCOUNT INFORMATION

Go to [CR.org/magazine](https://www.consumerreports.org/magazine)

or call 800-333-0663.

See page 5 for more details.

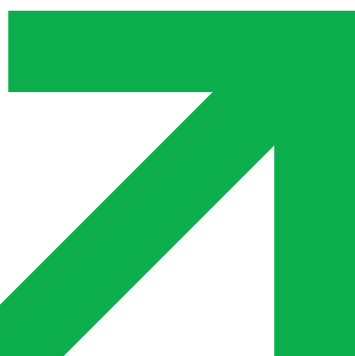
**RATINGS** Overall Scores are based on a scale of 0 to 100.

We rate products using these symbols:

🔴 POOR   🔴 FAIR   🟡 GOOD  
🟢 VERY GOOD   🟢 EXCELLENT

# A Smart Way to Give

Reduce your income taxes by making donations to CR through your Individual Retirement Account (IRA).



## IRA giving is a great tool if:

You are 72 and taking a distribution

or

You are 70½ or older and want to use your IRA to make a contribution

## Visit [CR.org/IRA](https://www.consumerreports.org/ira)

or call us at 877-275-3425 to learn more about tax-advantaged ways to give.

Consumer Reports is registered as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Contributions to Consumer Reports are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law. Our U.S. tax identification number is 13-1776434.

CRM0BASN



**Member Support** You can call us about your membership or donations at 800-333-0663.

**Or go to [CR.org/magazine](https://www.consumerreports.org/magazine) to** • Renew or pay for your current magazine • Give a gift • Change your address • Report a delivery problem • Cancel your magazine

**Or write to us:** Consumer Reports Member Support  
P.O. Box 2109, Harlan, IA 51593-0298  
Please include or copy address label from issue.  
(Allow four to six weeks for processing.)

**Price** In U.S., \$6.99 per issue, special issues \$7.99. In Canada, \$7.99 CAN per issue, special issues \$8.99 CAN (Goods and Services Tax included, GST #1270-47702). All other countries add \$10 per year to the U.S. price for shipping and handling.

**Back Issues** Single copies of previous 24 issues, \$7.95 each; previous two Buying Guides, \$14.49 each (includes shipping and handling). Please send payment to Consumer Reports, Attn.: Member Services, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY 10703. Other ways to get Consumer Reports on the go: Apple News+, Google Play, Kindle, Nook, Readly, and Zinio.

**Permissions** Reproduction of Consumer Reports in whole or in part is forbidden without prior written permission (and is never permitted for advertising purposes). For questions about noncommercial, educational/academic uses of our content, please submit requests to [CRreprints.com](https://www.consumerreports.com).

**Mailing Lists** We exchange or rent our print postal mailing list so that it can be provided to other publications, companies, and nonprofit organizations that offer products or services through direct mail. If you wish to have your name deleted from our list, please send your address label with a request for deletion from outside use to Consumer Reports, P.O. Box 2109, Harlan, IA 51593-0298. We do not exchange or rent email addresses. You can review our complete privacy policy regarding Consumer Reports information products, services, and programs at [CR.org/privacy](https://www.consumerreports.com/privacy).

**Consumer Reports** (ISSN 0010-7174) is published monthly, except twice in December, by Consumer Reports, Inc., 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY 10703. Periodicals postage paid at Yonkers, N.Y., and at other mailing offices; Canadian postage, at Mississauga, Ontario (Canadian publications registration number 2665247, agreement number 40015148). Title Consumer Reports is a federally registered trademark in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Contents of this issue copyright © 2020 by Consumer Reports, Inc. All rights reserved under international and Pan-American copyright conventions.

**CR's No Commercial Use Policy** To view the policy, go to [CR.org/nocommercialuse](https://www.consumerreports.com/nocommercialuse).

**Contributions** Consumer Reports is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that works side by side with consumers to create a fairer, safer, and healthier world. Contributions are tax-deductible in accordance with the law. Donations of commonly traded securities or real estate will be accepted and immediately converted to cash. For additional information, email [donorservices@cr.consumer.org](mailto:donorservices@cr.consumer.org). To donate, please send your tax-deductible contribution to Consumer Reports, Attn.: Donor Services, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY 10703 or go to [CR.org/donate](https://www.consumerreports.com/donate).

**Charitable Gift Annuity** Establishing a Consumer Reports Charitable Gift Annuity is an ideal way to accomplish your personal financial goals while supporting the mission of Consumer Reports. For additional information, please contact us at 877-275-3425 or [legacy@consumer.org](mailto:legacy@consumer.org).

**Consumer Reports' Staff** operates under contract between Consumer Reports and The NewsGuild of New York Local 31003, CWA.

**Members** Send address changes to Consumer Reports, P.O. Box 2109, Harlan, IA 51593-0298. If the post office alerts us that your magazines are undeliverable, we have no further obligation to fulfill your magazines unless we have a corrected address within two years.

**POSTMASTER** Send all UAA to CFS (see DMM 5071.5.2).

**NON-POSTAL AND MILITARY FACILITIES** Send address corrections to Consumer Reports, P.O. Box 2109, Harlan, IA 51593-0298.

**CANADA POST** If copies are undeliverable, return to Consumer Reports, P.O. Box 481, STN MAIN, Markham, ON L3P 0C4.



Consumer Reports is a member of Consumers International, a federation of more than 220 consumer organizations from more than 115 countries working to protect and empower consumers throughout the world. For information, go to [consumersinternational.org](https://www.consumersinternational.org).

**Please Remember CR in Your Will** For information about how to make a bequest to Consumer Reports, please contact us at 877-275-3425 or [legacy@consumer.org](mailto:legacy@consumer.org).

President and CEO Marta L. Tellado
Senior Vice President, Chief Operating Officer Leonora Wiener
Vice President, Chief Content Officer Gwendolyn Bounds

Editorial Director, Print Ellen Kunes
Deputy Editor, Special Interest Publications Amanda Lecky
Special Projects Editor Diane Umansky
Features Editor Natalie van der Meer

Design Director Matthew Lenning
Associate Design Director Mike Smith
Creative Director, Brand Young Kim
Art Directors Tammy Morton Fernandez, Ewelina Mrowiec, Nathan Sinclair
Photo Editors Lacey Browne, Emilie Harjes, Karen Shinbaum

Senior Director, Content Development Glenn Derene
Deputy Director, Content Development Christopher Kirkpatrick
Associate Directors, Content Development Scott Billings, Althea Chang
Enterprise Editor Kevin Doyle
Senior Director, Content Impact & Corporate Outreach Jen Shecter
Special Projects Joel Keehn, Director; Margot Gilman, Associate Director; Lisa L. Gill, Rachel Rabkin Peachman, Deputies; Ryan Felton, Donna Rosato, Writers
Editorial Director, Digital Erle Norton
Senior Director, Product Testing Maria Rerecich
Director, Lab Operations Lilian Kayizzi

CARS: Editors/Writers: Keith Barry, Jeff S. Bartlett, Jonathan Linkov, Mike Monticello, Benjamin Preston
Auto Test Center: Jake Fisher, Senior Director; Jennifer Stockburger, Director
Product Testing: Michael Bloch, Steve Elek, Kelly Funkhouser, John Ibbotson, Chris Jones, Anita Lam, Gene Petersen, Ryan Pszczolkowski, Mike Quincy, Gabriel Shenhar, Shawn Sinclair, Emily A. Thomas, Joe Veselak

HEALTH & FOOD: Lauren F. Friedman, Content Lead
Editors/Writers: Trisha Calvo, Kevin Loria, Catherine Roberts
Policy Lead: Brian Ronholm

HOME & APPLIANCE: Eric Hagerman, Content Lead
Editors/Writers: Daisy Chan, Mary Farrell, Paul Hope, Kimberly Janeway, Sara Morrow, Haniya Rae, Perry Santanachote, Daniel Wroclawski
Product Testing: John Galeotafiore, Emilio Gonzalez, James Nanni, Testing Leads; Peter Anzalone, John Banta, Susan Booth, Tara Casaregola, Lawrence Ciuffo, Enrique de Paz, Bernard Deitrick, Cindy Fisher, Rich Handel, Misha Kollontai, Ginny Lui, Joan Muratore, Joseph Pacella, Christopher Regan, Frank Spinelli, Dave Trezza, Michael Visconti

MONEY: Editors/Writers: Octavio Blanco, Tobie Stanger, Penelope Wang
Policy Lead: Anna Laitin

TECH: Jerry Beilinson, Content Lead
Editors/Writers: Nicholas De Leon, Bree Fowler, Thomas Germain, Christopher Raymond, Allen St. John, Kaveh Waddell, James K. Willcox
Product Testing: Richard Fisco, Testing Lead; Elias Arias, Antonette Asedillo, Steve Blair, Claudio Ciacci, Charles Davidman, Cody Feng, Henry Parra, Richard Sulin, Maurice Wynn
Policy Lead: Justin Brookman

Chief Scientific Officer James H. Dickerson
Food Safety James E. Rogers, Director; Tunde Akinleye, Amy Keating, Ellen Klosz, Sana Mujahid, Charlotte Vallaeys
Product Safety Don Huber, Director

Content Operations Robert Kanell, Director
Premedia William Breglio, Associate Director; Eugene Chin, William Hunt, Anthony Terzo

Production Nancy Crowfoot, Associate Director; Eric Norlander, Manager; Letitia Hughes, Terri Kazin, Aileen McCluskey
Copy Editing Leslie Monthan, Copy Chief; Noreen Browne, Alison France, Wendy Greenfield

Fact Checking & Research David Schipper, Associate Director; Tracy Anderman, Sarah Goralski, Christine Gordon, Karen Jacob, Jamison Pfeifer

Photography John Powers, John Walsh
Imaging Francisco Collado, Mark Linder

Chief Research Officer Kristen Purcell
Consumer Engagement Testing Charu Ahuja, Director; Samuel Chapman, Linda Greene, Dana Keester

Statistics & Data Science Michael Saccucci, Director; Kristen Dorrell, Dina Haner, Keith Newsom-Stewart

Survey Research Karen Jaffe, Simon Slater, Associate Directors; Dave Gopoian, Kendra Johnson, Debra Kalensky, Martin Lachter, Jane Manweiler, John McCowen, Adam Troy, Tian Wang, Tess Yanisch

Consumer Insight Monica Liriano, Associate Director; Selina Tedesco, Frank Yang
Member Support Sue Melfi, Director; Donna Murianka
Marketing Dawn Nelson, Senior Director
Procurement Operations Steven Schiavone, Associate Director
Administration Decarris Bryant, Dawn Yancy Elleby

VICE PRESIDENTS: Financial Planning & Analysis JoAnne Boyd; Chief Digital Officer Jason Fox; Advocacy David Friedman; Chief Intelligence Officer Esther Han; General Counsel Michael Hubner; Research, Testing & Insights Liam McCormack; Chief Human Resources Officer Rafael Pérez; Chief Marketing Officer Lauren Stanich; Chief Social Impact Officer Shar Taylor; SVP, Chief Financial Officer Eric Wayne

How We Fight Misinformation



MOST OF US are familiar with "The Boy Who Cried Wolf," a parable about a young shepherd who falsely convinces his neighbors that their sheep are under attack. But you might not know that the tale is roughly 2,600 years old—one of the legendary Aesop's Fables. And while the primary lesson of the story has been passed on for generations of children, the very fact

of its age provides another lesson, too: As long as there has been information, there has been misinformation.

Misinformation is the reason Consumer Reports was created 84 years ago, at a time when Americans were being bombarded by complex new technologies and an evolution in deceptive advertising. Product manufacturers that overpromise and questionable radio ads have given way to far more insidious forms of misinformation that threaten the integrity of our economy, our democracy, and the choices we make. Trust in the marketplace is harder than ever to come by—and the rise of social media has coincided with the weakening of trustworthy journalism, allowing conspiracy theories and alternate realities to take root.

Nowhere are the consequences of that trend more clear and devastating than in the context of COVID-19, which has led to what the World Health Organization has called an "infodemic"—the unchecked spread of sometimes deadly misinformation designed to prey on people's fears and preconceptions. There has never been a greater need for trusted, expert information than there is today, with so many lives at stake—and now is a critical time for CR to redouble our mission to advance rigor and honesty in our society. That effort will be an ongoing focus of our journalism and testing, as well as our Annual Meeting on Oct. 21—a virtual event that I hope you'll tune in to at CR.org/annualmeeting. We at CR will continue to combat harmful misinformation and stand up for evidence and facts, as we have since our earliest days.

Marta Tellado (handwritten signature)

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

## Taking Toxins Out of Food

### WHAT'S AT STAKE

Known as “forever chemicals” because they don’t break down over time, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances—PFAS, for short—are frequently used in food packaging to prevent grease and water from seeping through.

While only a few of the almost 5,000 types of PFAS have been closely studied, many have already been linked to negative health effects, including decreased fertility, weakened immune systems, increased risk of certain cancers, and low birth weight in infants.

A new report, based on analyses of samples from across the country, has found that certain packaging used at eateries such as McDonald’s and Wendy’s probably contains these chemicals—even though safer alternatives are available.

### HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

In July the New York state legislature approved a CR-backed bill that would prohibit the sale or distribution of food packaging that contains PFAS, including pizza boxes and milk cartons. If the law is signed by the governor, New York would join Washington and Maine as the first states to ban PFAS in food packaging.

CR advocates are also supporting similar measures elsewhere, at the state and national levels.

This issue of CR features a special report on drinking water, including test results showing several bottled waters—noncarbonated and carbonated—with PFAS levels above what many scientists say should be the limit.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

To learn how to limit your PFAS exposure, read this month’s cover story, on page 26, or go to [CR.org/pfas1120](http://CR.org/pfas1120).

## Ensuring Free COVID-19 Tests

### WHAT'S AT STAKE

The two federal coronavirus aid packages signed into law in March required insurers to pay for COVID-19 tests and antibody tests at no cost to consumers. The law explicitly prohibited charging copays or deductibles—for the tests themselves or for related doctors’ appointments—and set aside funds to cover tests for those without insurance.

Yet according to two recent analyses, some consumers have been hit with bills for tests, ranging from hundreds to thousands of dollars.

### HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

In response to appeals from CR advocates, more than 19,000 consumers sent almost 60,000 messages urging their members of Congress to ensure free COVID-19 testing and to end surprise medical bills for testing. CR advocates are also working with legislators to ensure that the next COVID-19 relief bill closes loopholes



UPDATES:  
SAFE SLEEP  
& PRIVACY

■ After CR’s 2019 investigation of infant inclined sleepers—which have been linked to at least 93 infant deaths—many retailers pulled them from shelves and online sites. In July, in response to CR outreach, the online marketplace Alibaba—one of the world’s largest retailers—removed these dangerous products from its platforms as well.

■ Few rules govern what direct-to-consumer genetic testing companies, such as 23andMe, can do with the genetic data they collect—so in most states it can be bought and sold without your consent. **More than 60,000 people signed a CR petition** calling for strong privacy standards.

that allow medical providers to charge consumers extra for testing and treatment.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

Go to [CR.org/covidbills1120](http://CR.org/covidbills1120) to send notes to members of Congress asking them to stop surprise medical bills for COVID-19 care and to tell us about the costs you faced.

## Making Baby Cereal Safer

### WHAT'S AT STAKE

Rice cereal is often one of a baby’s first solid foods. Some babies eat up to three servings of it per day. That’s why it’s troubling that so many rice products contain inorganic arsenic and other heavy metals, which even at low levels can have a damaging effect on the cognitive development of very young children.

### HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

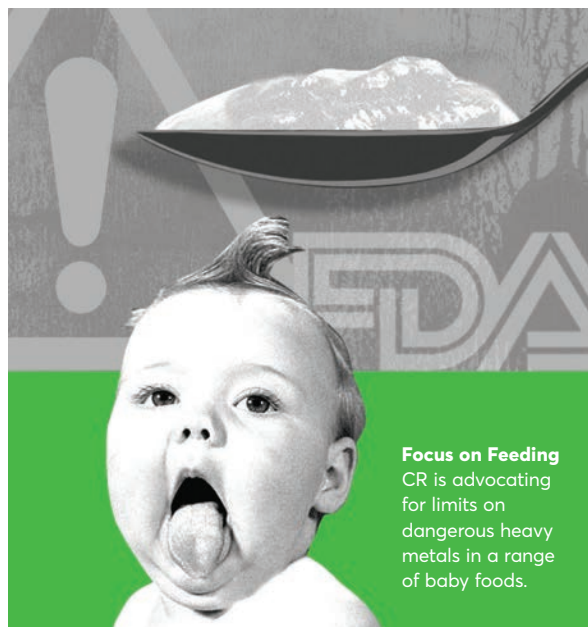
Eight years ago, CR testing found arsenic in more than 60 rice products, with particularly high amounts in infant cereal. Since then, CR has been calling on the Food and Drug Administration to regulate arsenic levels in a range of baby foods.

This August, the agency issued guidance that will limit the amount of arsenic allowed in infant rice cereals.

CR applauded the FDA’s action—but also reiterated our concern that limits are still needed on arsenic in other rice-based products, and on other heavy metals in baby food. In 2018, CR found that at least two-thirds of 50 packaged foods it tested contained worrisome levels of arsenic, cadmium, or lead.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

Parents can learn how to keep their kids safe from heavy metals at [CR.org/heavymetals1120](http://CR.org/heavymetals1120).



### Focus on Feeding

CR is advocating for limits on dangerous heavy metals in a range of baby foods.





Our September special investigation, “**A Tattered Safety Net,**” revealed that the Food and Drug Administration’s oversight of the dietary supplement industry is dangerously weak. Readers share their insights and concerns. To add your voice, go to [CR.org/supplements1120](https://www.consumerreports.org/supplements1120).

DECADES AGO when the FDA attempted to set up regulations similar to over-the-counter drugs for supplements, Congress received more letters *against* regulations for supplements. Now we have what we have: I can grind up pine cones and claim they help your prostate and I

can sell them anywhere, any way I choose!  
 –Gloria Gonzalez, Pensacola, FL

THERE IS A huge difference between someone taking vitamin C and zinc when one feels a cold coming on, and extreme cases, such as the Colorado woman your article

mentions whose husband injected her with cesium chloride for breast cancer. I am in excellent health and have used dietary supplements for decades (vitamins, Omega-3, etc.). But not all supplement manufacturers are equal. As CR points out, dosage sizes can be missing

or inaccurate, so one has to find reliable manufacturers.  
 –Eric Madis, Seattle

SHOULDN'T CR BE trumpeting the obvious, that of the \$46 billion spent annually on supplements, most either don't work as claimed or are unnecessary? And as clearly shown by Mr. Felton's article, can cause harm. The Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act of 1994 allows these companies almost free rein in manufacturing and marketing. When and *if* this law is changed, then maybe the FDA and other regulatory agencies can have some real power in protecting the public.  
 –Albert Karam, MD, Dallas

**EDITOR'S NOTE** CR agrees that many supplements have not been proved safe or effective. We believe that supplements should be required to undergo safety testing and submitted for FDA approval before being sold to the public.



MIGHTY MICE

IT WAS GOOD to see trackballs included in “Hands-on Help” (September 2020). In addition to the marble-sized-for-your-thumb models, trackballs also come in billiard-ball-sized models, like the Kensington



JOIN THE CONSUMER REPORTS BOARD

Consumer Reports is seeking dynamic, dedicated candidates with a desire to advance our mission and improve the lives of consumers by serving on our Board of Directors. Ideal candidates will bring

creativity, diversity of background and thought, experience in leadership, and a passion for empowering consumers and working to create a fair and just marketplace for all. Applications should be submitted online at

[CR.org/boardapplication](https://www.consumerreports.org/boardapplication) by Nov. 30, 2020. A committee of the Board will review applications, conduct interviews, and recommend a slate to stand for election to a three-year term of board service beginning

in October 2021. Board members are required to attend three meetings per year and participate in Board business by phone and email on an ongoing basis. No compensation is provided, but travel expenses are covered.



Expert Mouse. Virtues include not having to choose between a big pad area or making multiple passes [across a pad] with your mouse.  
—Daniel Dern, Newton Center, MA

IN AN EFFORT TO find relief from hand, arm, and shoulder aches, I tried many mouse alternatives. The only one that helped was a trackball mouse. There is a learning curve, but I have used this mouse now for many years with great success.  
—Emery Crook, Kaysville, UT

I ENJOYED YOUR REVIEW of ergonomic devices. The weight of the mouse is a factor for me. Some cheaper wireless mice are quite heavy with 2 AA batteries, and that means more wrist strain if I'm using it a lot. It's one reason why I chose a Logitech Pro Gaming mouse (lighter than any wireless mouse I've used).  
—Scott Daniel, Philadelphia

**EDITOR'S NOTE** *The Adesso iMouse E3 that we tested has optional weights that you can add or remove based on your preference for a heavier or lighter mouse.*



#### SMARTPHONE SAVINGS

GREAT ARTICLE ABOUT "How to Save up to \$1,000 a Year on Your Cell Phone Plan" (September 2020). I went to a mobile virtual network operator (MVNO) long ago and am happy. I use BOOM! Mobile and am thrilled. Rates are low, and it offers plans with several carriers. For me, getting on the Verizon network was key because it is the only provider with service at my house. Keep up the good work. I rely on CR.  
—Eric Schonenberg, New Fairfield, CT

YOUR RATINGS OF affordable smartphones included, among others, the Samsung Galaxy A50 model. I was surprised that you did not also include the Pixel 3a XL model, because you rated it equally well in the January issue. What was the reason for this?  
—G.C.M. Driessen, Brookline, MA

**EDITOR'S NOTE** *Though you may still be able to find the Pixel 3a and 3a XL in stores for a short time, Google has discontinued these models. As this issue went to press, Google released the Pixel 4a, which we hope to test and include in our smartphone ratings soon.*

I WAS SURPRISED to see that you hadn't reviewed US Mobile. I have been very satisfied with this inexpensive service. I can customize my plan, selecting the amount of minutes, text, and data that I expect to use, and am billed monthly. If I need more, I can "top up."  
—Sheila Wofsy, Suches, GA



#### A GENERATOR CALCULATOR

RE: "Home Standby Generators" (Insights, September 2020), how many watts does an average fridge, coffee maker, TV, etc., use? Is the wattage located on the appliance? I need to determine the right size of generator to save my food and keep my family entertained during power outages.  
—Carol L. Burnett, Arlington, VA

**EDITOR'S NOTE** *Check for a sticker on the underside of small appliances, which will often include the model number and wattage. If you can't find the wattage there, search the model*



#### FIGHTING FEES

Over the past few years, CR has proposed remedies to the fee epidemic that inflicts financial pain on consumers and makes price comparisons so difficult. It seems to me the best solution is simple: a regulation that states that if a consumer can't easily decline a fee, it must be embedded in the base rate. For example, if I select a \$40 hotel room and choose not to use any of the 'resort amenities,' I must be able to decline the fee and reserve the room at the advertised rate. This would apply across industries: travel, cable, etc. No more separate line items for basic costs of doing business.  
—Chris Malek, Sedona, AZ

**EDITOR'S NOTE** *CR has long advocated for fee transparency, as well as the kind of regulations you suggest. Join us in the fight to eliminate bogus fees at WhatTheFee.com. And turn to page 54 in this issue to learn how to better avoid cancellation penalty fees on airfare.*

number online, and check the owner's manual. Many generator manufacturers' websites also provide calculators to give you a general sense of what items you can power (for example, a typical fridge draws about 800 to 1200 watts to start up, but then draws only about 300 watts to continue running after that). For smaller generators, keep in mind that you may not need to power every small appliance at the same time—you could unplug your toaster, then use your blender.



#### FRIDGE FRUSTRATION

During a pandemic, it is not fun to have a fridge that breaks down. In my experience, no division responds to email. I could not reach the manufacturer to confirm parts needed for repair, nor whether local repair was certified. Many refrigerator brands are made with planned obsolescence in mind.  
—Michele Frank, New York

**EDITOR'S NOTE** *We can't speak for all manufacturers or retailers, but we can confirm that Best Buy, GE, Home Depot, Lowe's, Sears Home Services (including Kenmore), and some others are making appliance repairs during the pandemic while taking safety precautions to protect both their technicians and consumers. If you want to repair an appliance yourself, there are also online resources, such as Repair Clinic, that sell appliance parts and offer DIY repair tutorials.*



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.

## Leaf Blowers

**WE TESTED:** 46 electric and battery-powered models  
**WE TEST FOR:** A model's ability to sweep large piles of leaves, as well as loosen embedded leaves and debris from grass; noise levels; and more.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**  
Median: 73  
Range: 28-84

**Quiet but Powerful**  
Stihl BGA 57 (battery)  
\$200



**84**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

**Nice Price for Small Yards**  
Toro 51624 (corded electric)  
\$55



**81**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

**Long Warranty (5 Years)**  
Ego LB6504 (battery)  
\$300



**80**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

## Frying Pans

**WE TESTED:** 63 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** Cooking evenness, handle sturdiness, durability of nonstick coatings (withstanding steel wool), how well uncoated pans sauté, and more.

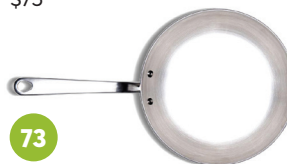
**ABOUT THE SCORES:**  
Median: 66  
Range: 42-83

**Super Nonstick Pick**  
GreenPan Levels Hard  
Anodized Stackable (10-inch)  
\$60



**78**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

**Even Cooking & Oven-Safe**  
Made In Cookware Stainless  
Steel (10-inch)  
\$75



**73**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

**Hot Bargain**  
Made By Design (Target)  
Stainless Steel (10-inch)  
\$20



**61**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

Ask Our Experts

**My spouse insists I shouldn't use cooking spray on our nonstick pan. Is he right?**



IT MAY SOUND harmless—even counterintuitive—but using a nonstick cooking spray, such as Pam or Smart Balance, can damage your pan's nonstick finish. Sprays leave a film that adheres to the nonstick surface and is tough to remove with just soap and water. Over time, that buildup of propellant reduces a pan's performance, and food may start to stick to it. Instead, try a light seasoning of butter or olive oil—which is what we use during our nonstick food-release tests, says Cindy Fisher, CR's lead cookware tester. Then we fry eggs and evaluate how easily they slide off. A pan that gets an Excellent score in this test (such as the GreenPan above) allows eggs to slide off without any assistance and without bits left behind.

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](http://CR.org).

## Affordable Air Purifiers

**WE TESTED:** 48 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** How well models removed dust and smoke from a test chamber at low and high speeds, how noisy a purifier is on high and low speeds, ease of use, and more.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**  
 Median: 52  
 Range: 18-88

**Great at Dust Removal**  
 GermGuardian AC5900WCA  
 \$220 (annual cost\*: \$231)

**64**  
 OVERALL SCORE



**Good Value for Clean Air**  
 Kenmore 83396  
 \$150 (annual cost\*: \$187)

**63**  
 OVERALL SCORE



**Quietest at High Speeds**  
 Winix 5300-2  
 \$150 (annual cost\*: \$90)

**59**  
 OVERALL SCORE



## Inverter Generators

**WE TESTED:** 21 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** Power quality and delivery, including how well they handle surges; noise; ease of use; and more. All models shown at right have carbon monoxide safety technology.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**  
 Median: 65  
 Range: 32-84

**A Powerful Deal**  
 Ryobi RYi4022X  
 (midsized)  
 \$550

**84**  
 OVERALL SCORE



**Quieter & Easy Push Start**  
 Briggs & Stratton P4500  
 (midsized)  
 \$1,000

**83**  
 OVERALL SCORE



**Quality Pick for Camping**  
 DeWalt DXGNI2200  
 (recreational)  
 \$650

**75**  
 OVERALL SCORE



## Toasters

**WE TESTED:** 68 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** How well a model produces light and dark toast, color evenness for a single slice or full batch, how simple the controls are, ease of cleaning, and more.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**  
 Median: 78  
 Range: 62-92

**Toast of the Town**  
 Breville Bit More  
 BTA720XL  
 \$80

**92**  
 OVERALL SCORE



**Long Warranty (3 Years)**  
 Cuisinart Countdown  
 Metal CPT-415  
 \$70

**87**  
 OVERALL SCORE



**Speedy Toast for a Nice Price**  
 Black+Decker Rapid Toast  
 TR3500SD  
 \$40

**83**  
 OVERALL SCORE



## Mirrorless Cameras

**WE TESTED:** 34 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** Image quality in regular, low light, and flash conditions; video quality; image stabilization; quality of the viewfinder; battery life; ease of use; and more.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**  
 Median: 81  
 Range: 71-90

**Great Flash Photos**  
 Fujifilm X-T20 with 16- to 50-mm OIS lens  
 \$800

**85**  
 OVERALL SCORE



**Best Image for Your Buck**  
 Panasonic Lumix DMC-G7K  
 with 14- to 42-mm lens  
 \$450

**81**  
 OVERALL SCORE



**Very Reliable Brand**  
 Canon Eos M50 with EF-M 15- to 45-mm IS STM lens  
 \$600

**81**  
 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 those of another. \*Annual cost combines energy and replacement filters.

**COMING NEXT MONTH** Computer monitors & more





## Can falling leaves damage my car?

Those beautiful autumn leaves can cause problems for your car. In fact, it's best to avoid parking under trees—especially if you're not driving much. Leaves find their way into a car's nooks and crannies, getting caught under wipers, and clogging air intakes and drain holes, such as those around the sunroof. Plus, wet leaves contain tree sap, which is acidic and can damage the finish on a car's paint, reports John Ibbotson, chief mechanic at the CR Auto Test Center.

If you need to clear leaves from your car, do it carefully, picking them off with your hands or by using a leaf blower with light air pressure. (Too much pressure can cause leaves to become lodged in hard-to-reach places.) To unclog sunroof drains, you may be tempted to remove debris with a wire hanger, but that can tear the

sunroof lining. Instead, use a vacuum to draw out the leaves. Pop the hood to clear leaves near the base of the windshield, where the car's heater intake system is. Then give your car a good rinse. For tree sap, dab spots with rubbing alcohol on a cloth or try a tree sap remover, such as Turtle Wax's Bug & Tar Remover, \$7 (not tested by CR). "To be safe, test any store-bought cleaner on a small spot of paint first," Ibbotson says. Waxing your car once a season also helps protect the paint.

If you can't avoid parking under trees, consider investing in a car cover. Better ones tend to cost at least \$100 and are made of multilayered material. (Cheaper, single-layer covers risk trapping moisture and scratching your car.) And don't forget that wet leaves can be just as slippery as ice, so increase your following distance on leaf-strewn roads.

### My credit card limit was just lowered. What gives?

About 70 million cardholders saw their credit card limits reduced or had their cards

canceled earlier this year, according to a survey from CompareCards, a division of LendingTree. Most of these people had their credit limits cut by \$1,000 or less, but 22 percent had their limit lowered by \$5,000 or more. And 1 in 4 cardholders say they had at least one credit card closed by their card issuer.

Lenders are probably taking these steps as a protection from an expected tidal wave of consumer defaults triggered by worsening financial hardship during the coronavirus pandemic. So even if you've had a card for years and used it responsibly, an issuer may still decide to reduce your credit. But there are a few ways to protect your credit limits, says Penelope Wang, a CR money editor.

Start by reviewing your credit report periodically for errors that may lower your credit score. The pandemic has focused more concern on credit reports, so the three major credit reporting agencies—Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion—are offering free weekly reports through April 2021. (Normally you can get a free report only once a year from each.) Go to [AnnualCreditReport.com](https://AnnualCreditReport.com).

Also, if you use your card frequently, consider making

an extra payment during the month to reduce your balance before the statement comes out, which may boost your credit score. For more tips go to [CR.org/credit1120](https://CR.org/credit1120).

### Can my steam mop kill the coronavirus?

On some steam mop packaging, you may see claims such as "Eliminates 99.9 percent of germs and bacteria." And it's true that heat and steam can kill pathogens, including the coronavirus, says Paula Cannon, PhD, professor of microbiology at Keck Medicine of USC in Los Angeles. Most pathogens die at 212° F—a temperature that CR testers have found steam mops can meet. But to be effective at killing a virus on most floors, you'd need to hold the mop in place on a surface for a few minutes at a time. And that's the catch: Steaming spots on your floor for that long can damage tile grout and crack wood floors. For more info on steam mops we've tested, turn to "The Best Way to Clean That Floor," on page 34.

If you're concerned about COVID-19, it's better to wipe your floors with an EPA-registered household disinfectant. Check our list at [CR.org/clean1120](https://CR.org/clean1120) (and follow your flooring manufacturer's care instructions).



LEARN

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

# CR Insights

IN THE KNOW

**GOOD LAPTOPS FOR LESS THAN \$700**



BIG STORAGE & RAM FOR YOUR BUCK

**Asus VivoBook 15-X512DA**  
\$599 to \$670

**60** OVERALL SCORE

AMD RYZEN 7 PROCESSOR, 512GB SSD, 12GB RAM

FINDING A GOOD bargain laptop is challenging—especially these days because of complications related to the coronavirus pandemic: Retailers have had a hard time keeping laptops on store shelves, says CR senior market analyst Min Kim Bryant. But if you know what specs to look for, you can find an affordable machine with enough computing power to take on everyday tasks like browsing the web, creating office

documents, conducting Zoom calls, and streaming video. Just remember that these workhorses aren't going to be as slim or snazzy as models that cost double the price.

Start by evaluating the processor, or the “brain” of any computer. For less than \$700, you should be able to find an Intel Core i5 or AMD Ryzen 5—midtier processors that can handle everyday tasks with ease (though they may struggle with more ambitious jobs,

such as high resolution video editing). This should be your baseline for finding a solid and dependable laptop.

Think about storage space, too. Many lower-cost laptops will have older, traditional hard disk drives (HDDs) that are large—1 terabyte (TB), or 1,000 gigabytes (GB)—but are slower than their newer counterparts, solid state drives (SSDs). If you want a faster machine, look for a model with small storage—but no less than 128GB SSD. The

trade-off is you'll need to be more prudent about what files you store on your drive.

Check the memory, also known as RAM. This is a key factor for how many applications you can run at once. Aim for 8GB for basic computing tasks. (Though the Surface Go 2, with just 4GB RAM, may be fine if you mostly browse the web and email.)

The rated models shown here are examples based on this expert guidance.\*

BEST PERFORMANCE  
**Acer Nitro 5**  
\$599 to \$670



**63** OVERALL SCORE

AMD RYZEN 5 PROCESSOR, 256GB SSD, 8GB RAM

TOUCH SCREEN WITH GOOD ERGONOMICS  
**HP 15-DY1023DX**  
\$695



**59** OVERALL SCORE

INTELCORE I5 PROCESSOR, 256GB SSD, 12GB RAM

PORTABLE PICK BUT SMALL RAM

**Microsoft Surface Go 2** \$530  
(price includes keyboard)



**55** OVERALL SCORE

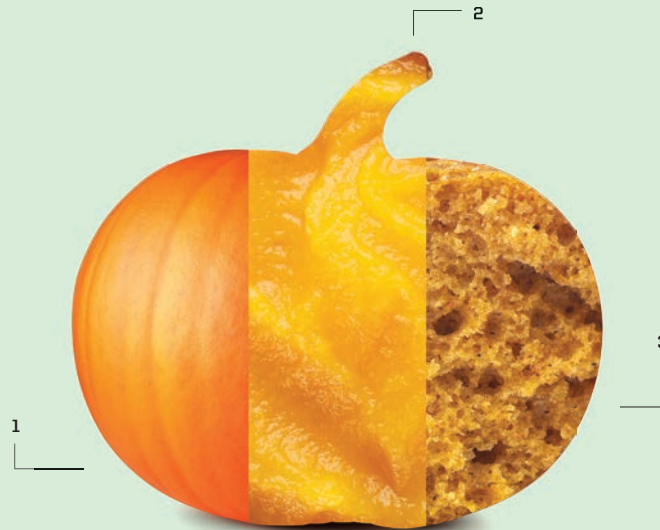
INTEL PENTIUM GOLD PROCESSOR, 64GB SSD, 4GB RAM

ILLUSTRATIONS: RODRIGO DAMATI

\*Due to limited laptop inventory, these models may change in price or availability. Digital and All Access members can go to [CR.org/laptop1120](https://www.credentialed.com/laptop1120) for the latest information.

HOW HEALTHY IS IT?

PUMPKIN EATS



1. FRESH PUMPKIN

Pumpkins, a type of squash, can be used in sweet or savory dishes—smaller varieties (sometimes called sugar pumpkins) are best for pie; larger ones used for jack-o'-lanterns tend to be bland and watery. Pumpkins offer up antioxidant carotenoids, some of which convert to vitamin A in the body. One cup cooked has nearly all the vitamin A you need daily. Fresh pumpkin has 3 grams of fiber, good amounts of potassium, and some vitamin C. You can even roast the seeds for a snack packed with healthy fats, protein, and magnesium.

2. CANNED PUMPKIN

The can may say 100 percent pumpkin, but it probably isn't—it can be a mix of pumpkin and another golden-fleshed squash, which is denser and sweeter (this swap is acceptable to the Food and Drug Administration). Even so, nutritionally, you might be better off with canned pumpkin than with fresh cooked: One cup of canned has more carotenoids and fiber (7 grams), plus about a fifth of your daily iron needs. Don't confuse canned pumpkin with pumpkin pie mix: The latter can have about 48 grams of added sugars per cup, and that's before even more sugar is added to some pie recipes.

3. PUMPKIN MUFFINS

Unless made from scratch, it's hard to know how much pumpkin a muffin contains. Any health benefit from the real pumpkin is overshadowed by the hefty amounts of white flour and sugar baked into the muffin. For example, sugar and white flour are the first ingredients listed—meaning they predominate—on the Krusteaz Pumpkin Spice Muffin Mix, with dried pumpkin flakes further down the list. A small muffin has 19 grams of sugars, zero fiber, and little vitamin A. And a Starbucks pumpkin bread slice contains 410 calories, 39 g sugars, 500 mg sodium, and 2 g fiber.

NOVEMBER IS THE BEST TIME TO BUY ...



AIR MATTRESSES



ACTION CAMCORDERS



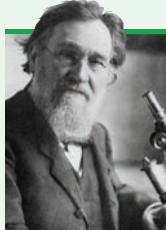
TVs

For more info, go to [CR.org/buy1120](http://CR.org/buy1120).

PHOTOS: BOTTOM LEFT TO RIGHT: CHRONICLE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO, FAGE, DANNON, YOPLAIT, CONSUMER REPORTS, CHOBANI, GETTY IMAGES, CONSUMER REPORTS

CR Time Traveler YOGURT

**Early 1900s** Russian bacteriologist Élie Metchnikoff isolates *Lactobacillus bulgaricus*, a bacterial strain used to make yogurt.



**1926** The founding family of Fage Greek yogurt opens a small dairy shop in Athens, Greece. (But the brand won't come to the U.S. until the 2000s.)



**1942** Daniel Carasso, the namesake of his family business in Europe, Danone, starts the first American yogurt company, in the Bronx, N.Y., and names it Dannon.



**1965** Farmers from six dairy co-ops, who banded together to sell yogurt nationally in France, name their collective product Yoplait. The ads feature a cow named Michonnette.

**1978** Yogurt is the fastest-growing dairy product in the U.S., and strawberry is the most popular flavor. We test 30 yogurts; Dannon, Maya, and Colombo get top marks.





CR SMART SOLUTION

# FIX YOUR MASK FRUSTRATIONS



TO HELP CONTAIN COVID-19, one of the most important things you can do is wear a mask in public, says William Schaffner, MD, a professor of medicine in the division of infectious diseases at the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine. But small annoyances can discourage mask use. Try these smart fixes for common problems.

### Glasses Getting Fogged Up

**WHY IT HAPPENS:** “The hot air from your breath escapes from the top of your mask and lands on the cooler surface of your lens,” says Marie Budev, DO, a pulmonary medicine specialist at the Cleveland Clinic.

**HOW TO FIX IT:** Look for a mask with a metal wire sewn in that goes over the bridge of your nose, and pinch it until it fits your nose shape. Another trick: Clean glasses with soap and water to help prevent fogging.

### Mask Slipping Down

**WHY IT HAPPENS:** “Faces come in all shapes and sizes, and some men’s facial hair makes getting a good fit difficult,” Schaffner says. But once you are out and about, a fitted mask is crucial so that you don’t touch your mask and risk

contaminating it or your hands.

**HOW TO FIX IT:** To make sure a mask fits you correctly, “put it on and cup your (washed) hands around the edges. Pull the mask up towards your cheeks, then down towards your chin,” Schaffner says. Adjust the ear loops so that the mask does not gap at the sides or top. It should feel a little harder to breathe in, and move in and out as you breathe. If it doesn’t, you need to tighten it.

### Difficulty Communicating

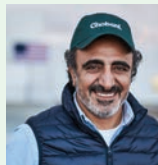
**WHY IT HAPPENS:** Even people with perfect hearing can struggle to understand others who are wearing a mask. “It’s a physical barrier that blocks sound and can cause speech to be mumbled,” says Douglas Hildrew, MD, an ear, nose, and throat specialist at the Yale School of Medicine. It also blocks visual cues, like whether a person is smiling or not.

**HOW TO FIX IT:** “People assume that they just need to speak louder, but that’s not it—slow down and speak as deliberately as possible,” Hildrew says. You can buy masks with a clear window to allow for lip-reading or learn to make a DIY version at the Hearing, Speech & Deaf Center’s site, hsdcc.org.



**1991** CR tests 40 yogurts using a 100-point sensory index and finds that Colombo whole-milk tastes best, beating popular nonfat brands.

**1981** CR’s testers compare ice cream and low-fat yogurt. We find that a half-cup of vanilla ice cream is lower in calories and sodium than the yogurt—but with three times as much fat.



**2005** Turkish-born American immigrant Hamdi Ulukaya takes out a small business loan to buy an old yogurt plant: the foundation for his new company, Chobani.

**2014** CR tests 365 Everyday Value Greek yogurt and finds it has more than five times the amount of sugar listed. As a result, Whole Foods pulls it from stores.

✓ **Siggi’s Nonfat Icelandic Skyr Yogurt Vanilla** \$1.50



**78** OVERALL SCORE

**2020** We test 22 dairy and 15 plant yogurt products to find out which are the most nutritious with the best flavor. Of the nonfat yogurts we test, the most nutritious and best-tasting is the Siggi’s cup above.



PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

**HOW WELL DO AT-HOME HAIR COLORING KITS WORK?**



WHEN MANY hair salons closed due to the pandemic, more people turned to at-home coloring. DIY hair color kits, available in drug or beauty supply stores, typically contain a coloring agent, a developer or activator that's mixed with the color and applied to hair for a set period of time before rinsing out, a conditioner, disposable gloves to shield hands from dye stains, and—of course—instructions.

We enlisted 29 participants from across the U.S. with a variety of hair textures and types. Most had brown hair, and all had some grays. Each tried one of six popular permanent color products, and each product was tested by four or five participants.

Then we asked users to score the kit they used on ease of instructions, setup (mixing up the dye), and application; their satisfaction with coverage of grays; and how well the color met their expectations (accuracy), as well as overall experience.

Most of our consumer volunteers felt they were able to do a good job coloring their hair themselves, and we didn't find any duds: All six of the tested products netted positive results, and all scored a 4 out of 5 when it came to gray coverage, color accuracy, and overall experience. Scores varied only for setup, ease of instructions, and application (shown under each product at right).

**1. Revlon Colorsilk Beautiful Color \$8**



- 5/5 INSTRUCTIONS
- 5/5 SETUP
- 4/5 APPLICATION

Our volunteers had no trouble with the directions or setting up the kit and mixing the dye. And most said they found applying the color to be easy. Two participants had trouble with the size of the gloves provided—one found them too large and the other too small. Most participants were satisfied with the product's ability to cover gray hair, although one participant said the resulting color differed from the expected result.

**2. Garnier Nutrisse Nourishing Color Creme \$9**



- 5/5 INSTRUCTIONS
- 5/5 SETUP
- 5/5 APPLICATION

In addition to the DIY dyeing basics inside this box, you'll find a packet of fruit oil to add to the dye mixture that, according to Garnier, helps the color mixture go through hair more smoothly. It received high scores across the board, and most participants were also satisfied with the gray coverage it provided, though only half of the participants were satisfied with the overall color accuracy.

**4. Madison Reed \$27 (or \$22 with membership)**



- 5/5 INSTRUCTIONS
- 4/5 SETUP
- 3/5 APPLICATION

Sold with an online subscription option, this kit has extras for its higher price: shampoo, a plastic cap to wear while the color is setting, barrier cream to keep dye away from skin, and a cleansing wipe. "The kit is awesome in presentation and contents," one person told us. Plus you can chat with a hair specialist for help. A few people noted challenges with application, but most were satisfied with the gray coverage and color.

**5. L'Oréal Excellence Crème \$8**



- 4/5 INSTRUCTIONS
- 5/5 SETUP
- 4/5 APPLICATION

This L'Oréal kit also includes a pre-color hair treatment and a comb that can be attached to the top of the developer bottle, allowing users to comb the color through their hair during application. Almost everyone reported that setting up and following the instructions was easy, and many had no trouble with the application. Participants also reported being satisfied with their color and the way the product covered their grays.

**3. Dark & Lovely Fade Resist \$8**



5/5 INSTRUCTIONS

5/5 SETUP

4/5 APPLICATION

This product is marketed to Black consumers. In addition to high scores for ease of instructions and setup, our volunteers found the application process to be pretty simple. There were mixed reviews on gray coverage: Only some participants were satisfied. "It didn't cover the gray as much as I had hoped it would," noted one person. Half said they were satisfied with the overall color accuracy.

**6. Clairol Nice'n Easy \$8**



4/5 INSTRUCTIONS

4/5 SETUP

3/5 APPLICATION

Most of our volunteers found the setup to be easy and the instructions simple to follow, though the majority also gave Clairol just middling scores when it came to applying the hair color. (Clairol told CR that it recommends using an old towel to help avoid mess and that tools like hair clips can be useful during application. See "5 Tips for DIY Hair Coloring," at right.) Most participants were pleased with the color and the gray coverage.

## 5 TIPS FOR DIY HAIR COLORING

Our volunteers were generally pleased with their hair coloring results, says Linda Greene, a test leader in CR's Consumer Experience and Usability Research program. However, they encountered some common challenges. So before you start coloring your hair, read these helpful hints to make the process easier.



### CHOOSE YOUR COLOR WISELY

Customized online products (such as Madison Reed) use detailed questionnaires to walk you through the selection process, and some let you consult a colorist online. Companies like L'Oréal Paris and Garnier have virtual try-on tools, so you can preview a few shades on your computer. In general, experts we spoke to say if you can't decide between two shades, choose the lighter one. One exception is Black hair, where experts recommend focusing on covering any gray you'd like to camouflage or going a bit darker.



### TEST THE DYE ON SKIN

All of the kits we evaluated recommend testing a small amount of dye on a patch of skin before use, to check for potential allergic reactions. But

most participants skipped this step—and a few reported irritation after coloring their hair. According to Crystal Aguh, MD, assistant professor of dermatology at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, the chemical paraphenylenediamine, commonly used in home hair color to darken hair, is a frequent cause of allergic reactions.



### THINK ABOUT EXTRA TOOLS

The kits don't always contain everything you might want. A couple of participants said they needed bowls and brushes for mixing and applying color. "I used an old plastic container for the mix," one respondent said. "Get hair clips, brush, and cape," another advised, plus cleansing wipes to clean up any dye that ends up on the skin. A shower cap is also useful to wear while the dye is setting. (The Madison Reed kit comes with a cap, plus a cleansing wipe.) Another participant put a towel down at the sink to

catch spills and noted that her towel got ruined, so it's best to use an old one that you won't mind getting stained. Watching a how-to video may also be helpful: Madison Reed and L'Oréal provide hair coloring tutorials online, for example.



### ENLIST A HELPER

A few volunteers said applying hair color to areas like the back of the head was difficult solo. "Get your husband to apply it for you. I don't know how anyone does this themselves!" one user said.



### CONSIDER A SECOND KIT FOR LONGER HAIR

Some participants said they used all the dye in the kit. Longer, thicker hair may need more dye to achieve total coverage. (At madison-reed.com, adding an extra tube to a box costs \$14.)



SAFETY UPDATE

**VOTE SAFELY  
DURING THE  
PANDEMIC**



IF YOU'RE CONCERNED that the COVID-19 pandemic will make voting in the November election difficult, rest assured that you can cast your ballot and stay safe—whether you choose to vote by mail (i.e., vote on an absentee ballot), vote early in person, or vote in person on Election Day.

**First, Check Your Voter Registration Status**

Do this even if you're already registered or have never had any trouble voting in the past: Some states have purged their voter rolls, and many of the ways that voters ordinarily register (at the DMV or at registration drives) aren't available because of the COVID-19 crisis. Go to [nass.org/can-i-vote](https://nass.org/can-i-vote). This is the best single source of links to state-by-state voter registration tools and information. (It's also the first thing that comes up if you type "Can I Vote?" into the Google search engine.) Click on "Register to Vote" or "Voter Registration Status" to choose your state for instructions.

**Mail-In or Absentee Voting**

Mail-in voting is, by its nature, the surest way to avoid long lines and minimize potential exposure to COVID-19. One expert we spoke with estimates that at least 50 percent of the votes cast in November will be by mail-in ballot. The rules and restrictions for mail-in voting vary by state—but there is no state where you can't vote by mail. To request a mail-in ballot and check state rules, go to the absentee and early voting link at the NASS "Can I Vote" page. Closely monitor deadlines and follow instructions carefully. If you don't receive your ballot in the mail on time, you can still vote in person on Election Day, though you may need to use a provisional ballot to do so.

**Early In-Person Voting**

Early voting, now available in about 40 states, is usually an effective way to avoid the crowds and long lines at polling stations on Election Day, and thus can also reduce your risk of contracting the virus. You can check your own state's early

voting rules through the NASS "Can I Vote" page.

**Voting on Election Day**

If you're planning to vote in person, you could face long lines due to social distancing and/or reduced polling locations and staff shortages. If you can, try to show up during off-peak times, such as the middle of the day. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends all voters wear a mask; maintain at least 6 feet of social distance; use hand sanitizer often, especially after touching surfaces such as doorknobs and voting machines; avoid touching your face; and wash your hands carefully afterward. Avoid spending too much time at the polling place by verifying your voter info and having all registration forms ready. Bring a black pen and a stylus for electronic voting machines, and review a sample ballot in advance at [ballotready.org](https://ballotready.org) so that you can vote and depart quickly.

For more voting info and tips, go to [CR.org/vote1120](https://CR.org/vote1120).

CR TIME SAVER

**QUICK-BREWING  
COFFEE MAKERS**

Our testers recognize the importance of speed when it comes to brewing a fresh pot—especially if you have lots of coffee drinkers at home. "We time how long it takes drip coffee makers to brew a pot of coffee (40 ounces, or about 8 coffee cups)," says Ginny Lui, one of CR's test engineers. "And for pod machines, we time how long it takes to brew the first cup, then subsequent cups." The picks here are some of the speediest models we tested that also earn top Overall Scores for coffee brewing.

FASTEST SINGLE SERVE

✓ **Nespresso Pixie Espresso Maker in Aluminum EN125S** (4-oz. cups) \$200



91 OVERALL SCORE

BREW TIME: 1 MINUTE; REPEAT CUPS: 30 SECONDS

FASTEST DRIP MACHINE

✓ **Ninja Hot and Cold Brewed System CP307** \$230



73 OVERALL SCORE

BREW TIME: 6 MINUTES (FOR HOT COFFEE)

FASTEST GRIND & BREW MACHINE

✓ **Cuisinart Next-Generation Burr Grind & Brew 12-Cup DGB-800** \$180



72 OVERALL SCORE

BREW TIME: 8 MINUTES

DIGITAL LAB UPDATE

## HOW TO SPOT MISINFORMATION ONLINE

“If you’re a person who thinks they can spot misinformation just by looking at it, you’re at risk of being fooled,” says Mike Caulfield, a digital literacy expert at Washington State University Vancouver. “That’s actually the trap.” Misinformation—ranging from unfounded political conspiracy theories to bad

info about COVID-19—can spread quickly on the social media platforms where Americans increasingly get their news and information. “What’s worse is the rules about misinformation on social media are confusing and inconsistent, and enforcement of those policies is slipshod at best,” says Bill Fitzgerald, a

privacy and technology researcher in CR’s Digital Lab. (See our chart, below right, to see how policies vary by platform.) This murkiness allows misinformation to flourish, and it makes it hard to know what to expect on each platform and to choose where to go for important information. Fortunately, there are ways to sort fact from fiction. In 2019, Caulfield developed the SIFT method, a technique to defend against misinformation. Often, people rely solely on the authentic look and

feel of a piece of media in order to gauge its reliability, he says—but you need to go deeper than that if you’re going to sniff out a social media post or online article with misinformation in it. The acronym **SIFT** will help you do just that (see below, left, for the four steps that the word represents). It’s designed with browsing the internet in mind, though Caulfield says you can also apply the steps to books you read or things you see on TV. Plus, putting SIFT into action takes only about 90 seconds, Caulfield says.

**S I F T**

**STOP** If something you read or see triggers a strong emotion for you, such as surprise, anger, or sadness, take a pause. Some posts aim to elicit a strong emotional reaction in order to override your critical thinking.

**INVESTIGATE THE SOURCE** Unfamiliar with the publication or writer in question? A quick search engine scan should help you to uncover their reputation. Can’t find anything at all about them? That’s a red flag.

**FIND BETTER COVERAGE** In addition to the source, check the claim being made by seeing whether other news outlets are also reporting it, and compare them. If something is important, multiple outlets will pick it up. Dramatic claims that you can’t find elsewhere are suspicious.

**TRACE CLAIMS, QUOTES, AND MEDIA** Some of the most insidious misinformation simply takes the truth out of context. Click on source links you see in online articles, or paste an emotive quote or sound bite into a search engine to look for the fuller quote or video—it may show you the missing context.

**WHICH PLATFORMS ALLOW FALSE INFORMATION?**

		POLITICS/ SOCIAL	HEALTH/ CORONAVIRUS	VOTING/ CENSUS	MANIPULATED MEDIA
	FACEBOOK	●	●	X	X
	INSTAGRAM	●	●	X	X
	YOUTUBE	●	●	X	●
	TWITTER	●	●	X	●
	PINTEREST	●	X	X	X
	REDDIT	●	●	●	X
	SNAPCHAT	●	X	X	X
	WHATSAPP	●	●	●	●
	TIKTOK	●	X	X	X

ALLOWED     
 SOMETIMES     
 PROHIBITED



## RECALLS

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



### FIAT CHRYSLER AUTOMOBILES

Fiat Chrysler Automobiles is recalling 160,229 Ram 1500 pickup trucks from the 2019 and 2020 model years. The trucks have adjustable pedals that may get stuck on all-weather floor mats while driving. FCA also issued a separate recall for more than 43,000 floor mats for the same reason. In a statement, FCA said it's not aware of any crashes or injuries related to this problem. FCA issued the recall after a driver reported a floor mat that interfered with the accelerator pedal while driving. That driver was able to stop the vehicle. **What to do:** Contact your local Ram dealer, who will be able to modify a vehicle's floor mats if necessary until replacements are available. Or call FCA at 800-853-1403 for details. If drivers encounter a stuck accelerator pedal in one of the recalled Ram trucks or any other vehicle, they should depress the brake pedal and not release it until the vehicle stops. Like most new vehicles, these Ram trucks are equipped with brake-throttle override technology that will bring an accelerating vehicle to a stop if the driver holds down the brake pedal, even if the accelerator is stuck.

### LITHONIA LIGHTING BRACKETS

Lithonia Lighting is recalling about 318,500 CFMK surface mount brackets because the

brackets can fail to securely surface mount the CPANL LED and fall unexpectedly, posing a risk of injury. The brackets were sold at Lowe's and other home improvement stores and online at [lowes.com](http://lowes.com) from August 2018 through June 2020 for CFMK brackets included with CPANL LEDs for \$85 to \$100. **What to do:** Stop using the LEDs surface mounted with a CFMK bracket. Contact Lithonia Lighting at 855-307-2454 or go to [lithonia.acuitybrands.com](http://lithonia.acuitybrands.com) for details and a free repair kit. You should prevent people from going into the immediate area under the lighting fixtures until the brackets are repaired.

### INTERTEX BLOWERS

Intertex is recalling about 189,000 B-Air, BlueDri, BlueDri Pro, and Soleaire blowers (air movers are often used as a water damage restoration tool to dry out floors and carpets). The utility outlets on the side of the Intertex blowers are not protected by a circuit breaker, and if the outlet becomes overloaded or short-circuits, it could overheat, posing a fire risk. The blowers were sold at Home Depot and Lowe's stores and online from January 2008 through July 2020 for \$120 to \$300. **What to do:** Stop using the convenience outlets on the side of the blower. Contact Intertex at 800-465-7300 or go to [b-air.com](http://b-air.com) for details and a free repair.

### WD-40 MILDEW STAIN REMOVER

WD-40 is recalling about 130,000 X-14 mildew stain remover bottles because pressure can build up inside the bottle and cause it to fall over and leak, posing a risk of skin irritation. The affected bottles were sold in retail stores nationwide (except in California) from March 2020 through July 2020 for \$4 to \$5.

**What to do:** Stop using the stain remover. Contact the WD-40 Company at 877-598-5726 or go to either [x14recall.expertinquiry.com](http://x14recall.expertinquiry.com) or [x14brand.com](http://x14brand.com) for details on how to dispose of the product or return it to receive a full refund.

### HASBRO SUPER SOAKER TOYS

Hasbro is recalling about 52,900 Super Soaker XP 20 and Super Soaker XP 30 toys because the sticker on the water tank of the toy contains levels of lead in the ink that exceed the federal lead content ban. Lead is toxic if ingested by young children and can cause adverse health effects. The toys were sold at Target from March 2020 to July 2020 for about \$8 (XP 20) and \$13 (XP 30).

**What to do:** Don't allow children to use this toy. Contact Hasbro at 888-664-3323 or go to [shop.hasbro.com/en-us](http://shop.hasbro.com/en-us) for details and instructions on how to return the product for a full refund.

### WILLIS ELECTRIC ARTIFICIAL CHRISTMAS TREES

Willis Electric is recalling about 99,000 Home Accents Holiday artificial Christmas trees because the tree's foot-pedal controller can overheat, posing a burn hazard. The trees were sold at Home Depot from June 2019 through

December 2019 for \$80 to \$360.

**What to do:** Stop using the foot-pedal controller, dispose of it, and contact Willis Electric at 866-210-5958 or go to [williscorporation.com](http://williscorporation.com) for details and a free replacement foot-pedal controller.

### TRIANGLE TUBE GAS BOILERS

Triangle Tube is recalling about 63,000 Prestige Solo & Prestige Excellence condensing gas boilers because flue gas can escape from the gas boilers if the vent adapter is not securely reattached to the boiler after maintenance or repair, posing a carbon monoxide poisoning hazard to consumers. The boilers were sold at wholesale distributors and installed by independent contractors nationwide from November 2011 through July 2020 for \$3,400 to \$9,700.

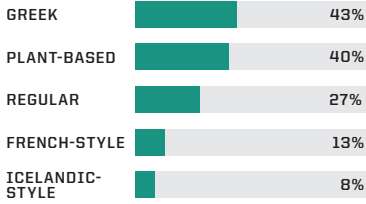
**What to do:** Immediately contact Triangle Tube at 877-574-5036 or go to [triangletube.com](http://triangletube.com) for details and to schedule a free repair. If you continue using the boiler while awaiting repair, you should have working carbon monoxide alarms on each level of your home and outside sleeping areas. If you do not have a carbon monoxide alarm, you can contact Triangle Tube to have one shipped free of charge.

### PIER 1 CANDLES

The Consumer Product Safety Commission is recalling about 30,810 Pier 1 Three-Wick Halloween candles because the candle's high flames can ignite the surface of the wax, posing fire and burn hazards. **What to do:** Do not use the candle. Dispose of it in the trash. For questions, call the CPSC hotline at 800-638-2772.



**What types of yogurt have you purchased in the past 3 months?**



Source: 2019 Mintel survey of 2,000 internet users 18 and older.

# PRODUCT UPDATE

THE LATEST RATINGS FROM OUR LABS

## Healthy Yogurts That Taste Good, Too

Skyr or Greek? Coconut or almond milk? Full fat or no fat? No worries: We've got the dirt on "gurt."

by Rachel Meltzer Warren



**INSIDE CR'S LABS**

According to our tasters, real vanilla flavor (vanilla bean or extract) is key to a quality yogurt.

PHOTO: JOHN WALSH/CONSUMER REPORTS





**Y**OGURT HAS ALWAYS had an enviable reputation as the ultimate health food, which is well-deserved. It's brimming with nutrients, and there's evidence that yogurt eaters may have an easier time staying at a healthy weight and have a lower risk of chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes and hypertension.

But not all yogurt is created equal when it comes to health-food cred. "The nutritional quality of the wide swath of yogurts out there varies considerably, as does the taste," says CR nutritionist Ellen Kłosz. So while it's never been easier to find all manner of yogurts at your local supermarket—we're talking plain, flavored, Greek, French, skyr, vegan, whole milk, nonfat, protein- or probiotic-packed—some are definitely better for you than others.

That's why CR tested 37 dairy and vegan yogurts (we stuck with vanilla-flavored for the sake of comparison) and rated them for nutrition and taste. In the dairy category, we included a number of different yogurt styles. "Our goal was to find top-tasting healthy options, and to see how plant yogurts stack up against dairy," Kłosz says. "We also took a close look at the added sugars content, now that new food-labeling regulations require that it be listed on nutrition labels."

## Yogurt Basics

The Food and Drug Administration defines yogurt as a milk product cultured (or fermented) by two specific bacterial strains—*Lactobacillus bulgaricus* and *Streptococcus thermophilus*—although other types of bacteria may be added, too. The type of milk—whether it's nonfat, low-fat, or full fat (or plant milk)—as well as the way the yogurt is made and the cultures used help determine its consistency, flavor, and texture.

In general, though, the bacteria in

yogurt convert the lactose naturally present in milk into lactic acid. This is what gives yogurt its signature tanginess. And it means that the lactose in yogurt is more easily digested than that in milk, so yogurt may be more gut-friendly for people who get gas and bloating when eating dairy foods.

**Greek or Icelandic yogurt** (known as **skyr**) is often strained, which thickens the yogurt and changes its nutrition. "Straining removes some of the carbohydrates and concentrates the protein content of what's left behind," says Debbie Petitpain, MS, RD, wellness director at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston. The dairy yogurts in our tests had 4 to 15 grams of protein per serving, with Greek and Icelandic types containing the most.

**Australian and French yogurts** are unstrained, with a thinner consistency that has more in common with typical American yogurts. The Australian yogurt brands have a creamy texture either from whole milk or a slow culturing process. French yogurts, typically made with whole milk, are "pot set," cultured in individual glass jars rather than in larger batches, which gives them a dense, creamy texture.

**Plant-based yogurts** are made from almond, cashew, coconut, oat, or soy milk with added cultures. And, as with some dairy yogurts, they may have thickening ingredients like pectin, tapioca starch, or gums.

## The Health Perks

"In its simplest form, dairy yogurt is almost a 'superfood,'" Petitpain says. The healthy probiotic bacteria in it are often assumed to be the reason. But while bacteria used to make yogurt offer benefits, we don't know how much is actually in a particular yogurt or how much you need for a health effect. Even yogurts with labels that claim they have live and active cultures may have billions when they're manufactured but

far less after they sit on a supermarket shelf or in your refrigerator. Plus, claims like "packed with probiotics" or "billions of probiotics" aren't regulated by the government. What's more, some yogurts are heated after they're made, which destroys cultures. (If this is the case, it must be noted on the label.)

Rather than just probiotics, it's the combination of nutrients in yogurt that makes it so good for you. These include protein, bone-building calcium, and blood-pressure-balancing potassium along with magnesium, which helps regulate your blood pressure, blood sugar, and heart rate.

Several studies show that yogurt, as part of a healthy diet, can help reduce the risk of certain ailments. Lowering blood pressure is probably the benefit backed by the strongest evidence. Dairy products are a key part of the DASH diet (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension), and yogurt in particular has peptides (protein fragments) that act on an enzyme in your body that regulates blood pressure, says Justin Buendia, PhD, an epidemiologist who has studied yogurt's effect on blood pressure. A 2018 study that tracked three large groups of men and women for 20 to 30 years found that eating yogurt five or more times a week (vs. less than once a month) cut hypertension risk by 16 percent.

There's research to show that yogurt can improve health in other ways. Eating 1.7 to 7 ounces of it a day was linked to a 14 to 26 percent lower risk of developing type 2 diabetes in a review of studies published in the journal *Advances in Nutrition*. Yogurt may help with weight loss and weight control, too, as well as help tame inflammation in the body, which may be a trigger for heart disease and other health problems.

So from a health perspective, which yogurt should you eat? "Plain yogurt is the best, because it has no added sugars," Kłosz says. A little

honey or maple syrup, or preferably fruit, can add sweetness. In fact, eating yogurt and fruit may offer extra health benefits, because fruit has prebiotics, which help healthy bacteria flourish.

Second best is a flavored yogurt with few added sugars or none at all. “All dairy yogurts have some sugar because they’re made from milk, which naturally contains sugar,” Petitpain says. Until this year, the amounts of natural and added sugars were listed together as total sugars on food labels. Now manufacturers are required to list added sugars separately for all foods, so it’s easier to see if problematic sweeteners have been added.

While added sugars can be a problem in yogurt, whole-milk versions, which are increasingly popular, may not be. Although they’re higher in total and saturated fat than low-fat and nonfat types, some recent research suggests that eating whole-milk dairy products, especially fermented ones like yogurt, doesn’t lead to weight gain or increase the risk of heart disease. For example, when researchers overseeing the Multi-Ethnic Study of Atherosclerosis looked at the impact of different sources of saturated fat on cardiovascular health, they

found that when it came from dairy foods, the risk was lower. And when saturated fat came from meat, it was higher. If you’re looking to cut back on calories, though, a low-fat or nonfat yogurt may be a better bet.

### Why Plant-Based Yogurts Aren’t Perfect

Sales of plant-based yogurts rose 31 percent in 2019, an irrefutable sign of its increasing popularity. But while about a third of people surveyed by the market research firm Mintel said they thought plant yogurts were healthier than dairy ones, CR’s nutritional analysis shows this isn’t the case.

“Many plant yogurts fall short in the nutrients people eat yogurt for, such as protein and calcium,” Klosz says. “To make them comparable to dairy yogurt, manufacturers would have to add them.”

Of all the plant milks used to make yogurt, soy is the highest in natural protein, comparable to dairy yogurt. Other plant-milk yogurts may contain added pea or fava bean protein. These aren’t simply the whole food dried and ground into a powder. Instead, companies extract the protein from the food in a lab. “You’re left with the protein but not the other components of the food,” Klosz says.

You can find fiber in some yogurts, too. Although that sounds like a healthy benefit, it’s added in the form of inulin, also called chicory root fiber. “It’s healthier to get protein and fiber from whole foods that contain them naturally,” Klosz says, “and the fewer additives in your yogurt, the better.”

### How They Tasted

In general, the healthier yogurts in our tests also had the best flavor and texture. Yogurts in all three fat categories—nonfat, low-fat, and full fat—and those with less added sugars came in at the top of our ratings. Also important to our testers was the quality of the vanilla flavor. “Those with real vanilla extract or bean flavor tended to have higher scores,” Klosz says.


Most plant yogurts didn’t do well at all when it came to flavor and texture. Of the 15 we sampled, the coconut-based products—particularly Oui by Yoplait and Trader Joe’s—fared best. Silk Almondmilk yogurt also pleased our taste testers.

No matter whether you go with dairy or plant-based, CR recommends choosing a yogurt with 6 grams of added sugars or less and the fewest ingredients. Check our ratings on the following pages to find the best one for you.


## WATCH OUT FOR SUGAR IN THAT CUP

Yogurt isn’t always good for you. Some brands have loads of added sugars. The plant-milk yogurts we tested tended to have more, and vanilla Kite Hill Almond Milk Yogurt, at right, was one of the sugar-filled: 17 grams in just one container. That’s the amount in 4¼ sugar cubes or 4¼ teaspoons. (Ideally, you should have no more than 12 teaspoons of added sugar a day.) Our top-rated yogurts have 6 grams of sugars or less. Fage TruBlend Low Fat Greek Yogurt has no sweeteners at all. Check ingredients lists: Some yogurts may be low in added sugars because they have low-calorie sweeteners like acesulfame-k, stevia, or sucralose. Some studies suggest that those aren’t much better for you than sugar.



Brand	Overall Score	Price	Test Results		Nutritional Information								Flavor & Texture Description		
			Nutrition score	Sensory score	Serving size (oz.)	Calories	Total fat (g)	Saturated fat (g)	Protein (g)	Carbohydrates (g)	Fiber (g)	Added sugars (g)		Calcium (%DV) <sup>1</sup>	
															
<b>DAIRY YOGURTS</b>															
✓ Icelandic Provisions 1.5% Milk Fat Traditional Skyr Yogurt Vanilla	82	\$1.75	↑	↑	5.3	130	2	1	15	13	0	6	15	Thick and creamy, like whole-milk yogurt. Tangy and slightly sweet. Real vanilla flavor.	
✓ Siggi's Whole Milk Icelandic Skyr Yogurt Vanilla	82	\$2.00	↑	↑	4.4	130	5	3	12	11	0	5	10	Rich and thick. Slight sour cream and real vanilla extract flavors. Less sweet than most.	
✓ Fage TruBlend Low Fat Greek Yogurt Vanilla	81	\$1.80	↑	↑	5.3	110	3	1.5	13	9	3	0	10	Thick, like whole-milk yogurt. A bit sour, with a hint of sweetness and vanilla.	
✓ Siggi's Nonfat Icelandic Skyr Yogurt Vanilla	78	\$1.50	↑	↑	5.3	110	0	0	15	12	0	5	10	Thick. Quite tart, with some sweetness and vanilla flavor.	
✓ 365 Everyday Value (Whole Foods) Organic Low Fat Yogurt Vanilla	72	\$0.64 <sup>2</sup>	↑	↑	6.0	110	2	1	6	19	0	9	20	Smooth and moderately sour. Slightly sweet, with mild vanilla and very slight cheesy flavor.	
✓ Stonyfield Organic 100% Grassfed Greek Whole Milk Yogurt Vanilla Bean	71	\$2.40	↑	↑	5.3	150	5	3	13	14	0	8	10	Thick and creamy. Not too sweet, with mild vanilla flavor. Slight cheesy flavor.	
✓ Brown Cow Whole Milk Yogurt Vanilla	70	\$1.00	↑	↑	5.3	150	6	3	5	19	0	9	15	Creamy and smooth, but thin texture. Sweet-sour flavors balanced with moderate vanilla and a hint of maple.	
✓ 365 Everyday Value (Whole Foods) Organic Whole Milk Greek Yogurt Vanilla	69	\$1.50	↑	↑	5.3	150	5	3	13	14	0	8	10	Smooth and thick sour cream flavor. Slightly sweet and slight vanilla flavor.	
Oui by Yoplait French Style Yogurt Vanilla	67	\$2.00	↓	↑	5.0	170	8	6	5	17	0	9	15	Very thick and creamy; slightly firm texture. Big cream flavor. Slightly sweet and sour, with slight vanilla flavor.	
Dannon Activia Lowfat Yogurt Vanilla	67	\$0.75	↑	↑	4.0	90	2	1	4	15	0	8	10	Smooth. Sweet and tangy, with fruity vanilla flavor.	
Noosa Blended Yoghurt Vanilla Bean	66	\$1.70	↓	↑	4.5	160	7	4	7	18	0	11	20	Creamy, smooth. Moderately sweet and sour. Real vanilla flavor; hint of honey.	
Chobani Less Sugar Low-Fat Greek Yogurt Madagascar Vanilla & Cinnamon	64	\$1.50	↑	↓	5.3	120	3	1.5	12	11	0	5	10	Thick. More tart than sweet. Cinnamon overpowers the vanilla flavor.	
Dannon Whole Milk Yogurt Vanilla	62	\$1.00	↓	↑	5.3	140	5	3	5	20	0	10	15	Moderately thick. Balanced sweet, sour, and vanilla flavors.	
Chobani 0% Milk Fat Greek Yogurt Vanilla Blended	62	\$2.00	↓	↑	5.3	110	0	0	12	15	0	9	10	Moderately thick. A bit chalky and bitter. Sweet, sour, and fruity vanilla flavors.	
Trader Joe's Whole Milk Greek Yogurt Vanilla Bean	60	\$1.00	↓	↑	5.3	170	6	4	11	17	0	11	10	Thick. Not too sweet; some sourness. Real vanilla flavor.	
Dannon Lowfat Yogurt Vanilla	59	\$1.00	↓	↑	5.3	140	2	1.5	7	24	0	13	20	Custardy consistency. Mild vanilla and very slight citrus flavor.	
La Yogurt Probiotic Lowfat Yogurt Vanilla	58	\$0.50	↓	↓	6.0	140	1	1	6	25	0	11	15	Smooth. Balanced sweet, sour, and fruity vanilla flavors.	
Trader Joe's Nonfat Greek Yogurt Vanilla Bean	55	\$1.70	↓	↓	5.3	130	0	0	13	17	0	11	10	Thick. On the sour side, with a sweetness that lingers. Has real vanilla flavor.	
Wallaby Organic Whole Milk Aussie Greek Yogurt Vanilla Bean	54	\$1.80	↓	↑	5.3	170	5	3.5	11	20	0	15	10	Very smooth and creamy. Tangy and on the sweet side, with hints of vanilla bean.	

Note: All yogurts had less than 100 mg sodium. <sup>1</sup> The Daily Value for calcium is 1,300 mg. <sup>2</sup> Price listed is calculated from price paid for a 32-oz. container. <sup>3</sup> Price listed is calculated from price paid for a 24-oz. container.

Brand	Overall Score	Price	Test Results		Nutritional Information								Flavor & Texture Description	
			Nutrition score	Sensory score	Serving size (oz.)	Calories	Total fat (g)	Saturated fat (g)	Protein (g)	Carbohydrates (g)	Fiber (g)	Added sugars (g)		Calcium (%DV) <sup>1</sup>
 <b>Two Good</b> Lowfat Greek Yogurt Vanilla	50	\$1.50	▲	▼	5.3	80	2	1	12	3	0	0	6	Thick. Slightly chalky and astringent. Some bitterness, and lingering sweetness overpowers dairy flavor.
<b>Yoplait</b> Original Low Fat Yogurt French Vanilla	49	\$0.75	▼	●	6.0	150	2	1.5	6	27	0	14	15	Smooth. Sweet and sour, with a fruity vanilla flavor.
<b>Liberté</b> Whole Milk Yogurt Madagascar Vanilla Bean	46	\$2.40	▼	▲	5.5	220	11	7	5	25	0	17	15	Very rich flavor and texture. Big cream flavor. Extremely sweet, dessertlike yogurt.

### PLANT-BASED YOGURT ALTERNATIVES

<b>So Delicious</b> Coconutmilk Yogurt Alternative Unsweetened Vanilla	58	\$2.00	▲	▼	5.3	70	5	4	<1	7	2	0	25	Thin. Unsweetened coconut flavor, with sour and bitter flavors that overwhelm the vanilla.
<b>Silk</b> Oat Yeah Oatmilk Yogurt Alternative Vanilla	53	\$2.50	▲	▼	5.3	80	0	0	3	17	2	9	10	Thin texture. Sour and slightly bitter, with mild oat and vanilla flavors.
<b>Good Plants</b> Almondmilk Probiotic Yogurt Alternative Vanilla	53	\$2.00	●	●	5.3	100	4	0	5	16	8	3	2	Slightly chalky and astringent. Big almond flavor. Moderately sour. Sweetness lingers.
<b>Kite Hill</b> Almond Milk Greek Yogurt Unsweetened Vanilla	52	\$2.00	▲	▼	5.3	160	10	1	11	8	4	0	10	Thick. Astringent and slightly chalky. Moderate almond flavor. Sour and bitter; no sweetness.
<b>Silk</b> Almondmilk Yogurt Alternative Unsweet Vanilla	50	\$1.50 <sup>3</sup>	▲	▼	6.0	180	15	1	6	10	6	0	10	Chalky and astringent. Moderate almond flavor. Slightly bitter and sour; no sweetness.
<b>Oui by Yoplait</b> Coconut Dairy Alternative Vanilla	48	\$2.00	▼	▲	5.0	170	10	9	1	19	0	11	0	Smooth. Moderate coconut flavor. On the sweet side, with slight sour and vanilla notes.
<b>Silk</b> Almondmilk Yogurt Alternative Vanilla	45	\$2.00	▼	▲	5.3	190	11	1	5	19	3	15	10	Smooth and creamy, but a bit chalky and astringent. Big almond flavor. Sweet and slightly sour.
<b>Stonyfield</b> Organic Soy Yogurt Vanilla	45	\$1.20	▼	●	5.3	130	3	0.5	6	20	<1	17	8	Very slightly chalky, sour, and bitter. Big soy milk flavor, slight vanilla.
<b>So Delicious</b> Coconutmilk Yogurt Alternative Vanilla	44	\$2.00	▼	●	5.3	130	4	3.5	0	22	2	15	15	Puddinglike texture. Sweet and tangy, with slight coconut and tropical flavors.
<b>Chobani</b> Coconut Blend Vanilla	44	\$1.80	▼	●	5.3	140	8	7	<1	20	2	9	0	Somewhat thin. Tangy and sweet, with a lot more coconut than vanilla flavor.
<b>Siggi's</b> Plant-Based Coconut Blend Vanilla & Cinnamon	43	\$2.00	●	▼	5.3	190	11	7	10	13	1	8	0	Thick. Astringent and moderately sour. Cinnamon flavor overpowers coconut and vanilla flavors.
<b>Silk</b> Soy Yogurt Alternative Vanilla	42	\$2.00	▼	●	5.3	140	4	0	6	21	2	16	15	Slightly chalky. Quite sour and sweet, with fruity vanilla and some soy flavor.
<b>Chobani</b> Plant-Based Oat Blend Vanilla	39	\$2.00	▼	▼	5.3	120	3	1	3	21	1	13	0	Thin. Slightly astringent and chalky. Sour, with oat and sweet, candylike flavors. Slightly bitter.
<b>Trader Joe's</b> Cultured Coconut Milk Yogurt Alternative Vanilla	37	\$1.70	▼	▲	6.0	170	8	7	<1	24	0	15	0	Smooth. Sweet coconut and very slight vanilla flavors. Slightly sour.
<b>Kite Hill</b> Almond Milk Yogurt Vanilla	32	\$2.00	▼	▼	5.3	170	9	0.5	4	22	2	17	4	Slightly astringent and chalky. Sweet with slight vanilla, almond, and fruity flavors, but very sour and slightly bitter.

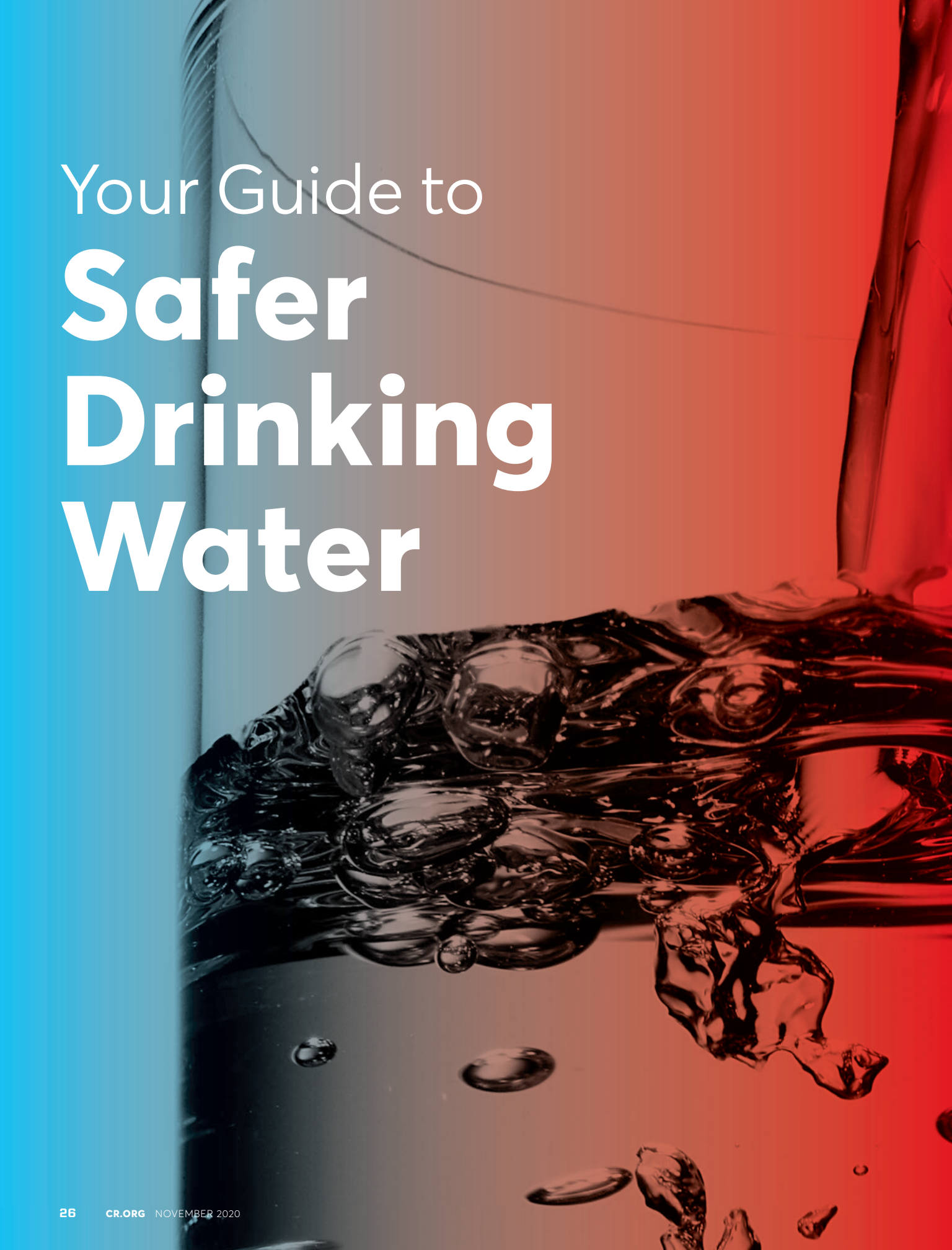
**HOW WE TEST:** CR's nutrition and food testing team rated different styles of low-fat, nonfat, whole milk, and plant-based yogurt alternatives for

nutrition and taste. The **Overall Score** is a combination of the two. The **Nutrition score** is based on values for energy density (calories per gram of food),

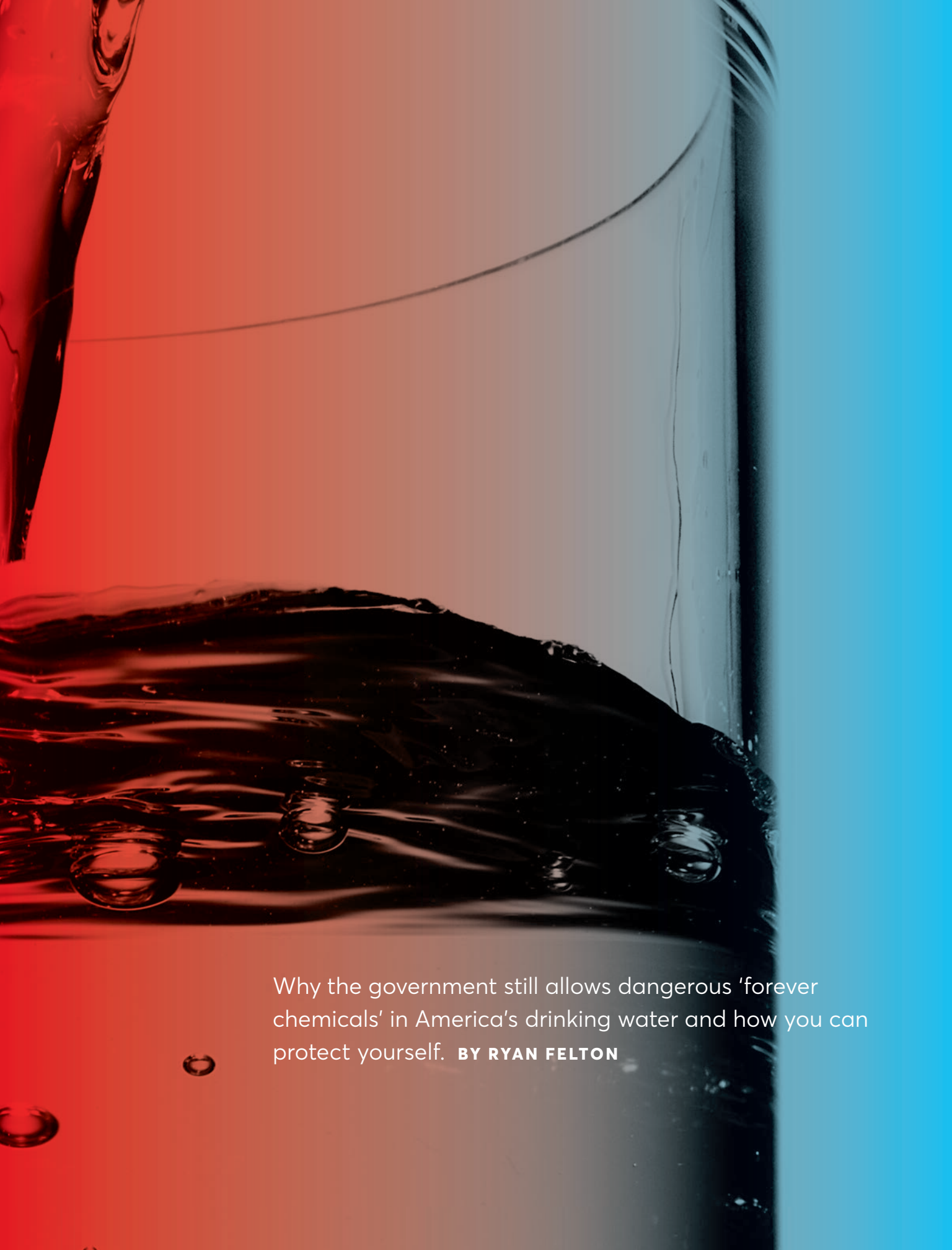
**Saturated fat**, sodium, **Added sugars**, and **Calcium**. Having few ingredients also contributed to a higher Nutrition score. Extra weighting was given for influential

nutrients, either positive or negative, relative to the particular food. The **Sensory score** is based on the results of a tasting panel of trained sensory experts.





Your Guide to  
**Safer  
Drinking  
Water**



Why the government still allows dangerous 'forever chemicals' in America's drinking water and how you can protect yourself. **BY RYAN FELTON**

**In 2014, residents of Horsham Township, Pa.,** near Philadelphia, learned that their water had been contaminated with potentially toxic chemicals linked to an array of health problems, including learning delays in children and cancer. Those residents include Frank and Lisa Penna, who allege in a lawsuit that their water was among the contaminated supplies.

Known as PFAS, for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, the chemicals in this class of approximately 5,000 substances have become notorious as much for their potential danger as for their perseverance: Because the chemical bonds that hold the compounds together don't break down easily, they last a very long time—a reality that has led to a commonly used name for the group: “forever chemicals.”

PFAS compounds are also ubiquitous, used in a range of products, from food-delivery boxes to nonstick cookware to stain-resistant clothing. But one of the most troubling routes to PFAS exposure is drinking water that has been contaminated by discharges from factories and other facilities.

Indeed, PFAS have been detected in the drinking water of more than 1,400 communities in 49 states, according to research by the PFAS Project at Northeastern University in Boston and the Environmental Working Group (EWG), an advocacy organization that estimates that 110 million people may have tap water contaminated with the chemicals.

The Environmental Protection Agency, which regulates U.S. drinking water, has been investigating PFAS since the late 1990s. It set voluntary guidelines

of 70 parts per trillion (ppt) for two of the compounds combined that are most studied and believed to be dangerous: PFOA, or perfluorooctanoic acid, and PFOS, or perfluorooctanesulfonic acid. (For context, 1 ppt is the equivalent of one grain of sand in an Olympic-sized swimming pool, according to some estimates.)

But despite the agency's 20-plus years of information gathering, it still has not issued an enforceable nationwide standard on PFAS. The agency has failed to act even as more about the risks of the chemical group has become known, and even as some scientists and environmental organizations have concluded that a far lower concentration of PFAS in water—1 ppt—is a more appropriate limit.

The EPA won't comment on a proposed 1 ppt limit, saying it would be “inappropriate to prejudice the outcome” of a regulatory process now underway.

But David Andrews, senior scientist at the EWG, says the agency should enact the stringent standard. “The scientific research supports a value of 1 ppt or lower to be health-protective,” he says.

And an examination by Consumer Reports found that while the EPA's power to regulate chemicals in water

is limited, the agency has waffled for years. “The EPA hasn't taken a science-based approach to this issue,” says Brian Ronholm, CR's director of food policy. “It's imperative for Congress to pass legislation that establishes PFAS limits in drinking water.”

That lack of a national standard has implications not just for tap water but also for bottled. That's because bottled water is overseen by the Food and Drug Administration, which regulates contaminants in bottled water after the EPA sets a limit for tap water.

CR recently tested 47 bottled waters and detected PFAS in 43 of them. Carbonated waters were more likely to contain PFAS, with several—including Topo Chico, Bubly, and Polar—showing levels above the scientist-recommended 1 ppt limit. (See “What's Really in Your Bottled Water?” on page 30.)

## A Regulatory Vacuum

Consumer watchdogs and researchers have long called for action on PFAS. “I first asked the EPA more than 19 years ago ... and we are still waiting for a comprehensive, national response,” says Robert Bilott, an attorney who led a class action lawsuit in the 2000s that accused the chemical company DuPont of contaminating drinking water in the Ohio River Valley with PFAS.

That battle, which led to a court-ordered study of 69,000 residents that found significant health risks, was depicted in the 2019 movie “Dark Waters.” DuPont, while denying any wrongdoing, agreed in 2017 to pay \$335 million to settle the dispute.

Frank and Lisa Penna, the Horsham Township couple, allege one possible explanation for the EPA's delay: The government itself is a major PFAS polluter and is avoiding substantial cleanup costs. In a 2016 lawsuit, the Pennas allege that PFAS migrated from the Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base Willow Grove, near their home, into

groundwater. Thousands of gallons of firefighting foam, which contains PFAS, had been dumped at the base during exercises over many years, they allege. The Pennas also claim that tests of their private well found PFOA and PFOS levels of 298 ppt and 701 ppt, respectively—up to 10 times the EPA’s voluntary limit.

The Pennas’ case went to trial in August. Part of the government’s defense? It can’t be held liable because PFAS remain “unregulated.”

Navy spokesperson Lt. Gabrielle Dimaapi declined to comment on the Penna case, citing ongoing litigation. But

she says the Navy has spent \$200 million investigating and responding to potential PFAS concerns and is “working collaboratively with our regulatory partners and concerned communities.”

### 40 Years of Clues

In their lawsuit, the Pennas presented documents that they say show the government knew of the possible risks of PFAS for decades before the EPA moved to curtail their use—a claim the government denies. That includes a 1974 report commissioned by the Air

Force that examined how to dispose of aqueous film forming foam (AFFF), the technical name of firefighting foam, because Air Force environmental personnel had “expressed concern for disposing of AFFFs after use.”

Air Force Lt. Ronald Kroop, who led the study, elaborated on those concerns in an August 2019 deposition: “It’s going in the ground,” he said. “That was acknowledged, accepted.” What wasn’t known—and needed to be—was the impact that might have, he attested.

At his deposition, when asked whether the study was conducted to examine the potential impacts on drinking water, Kroop said: “Directly, I cannot say yes. Indirectly, most definitely.”

The EPA was aware of Kroop’s work. In a 1980 EPA-funded study, the agency cited the Air Force’s earlier report, characterizing it as examining the “environmental problems posed by fluorochemicals,” another name for PFAS.

The following year, DuPont drew headlines when it reassigned about 50 female staffers at a West Virginia plant after learning that a PFAS compound used at the site had been linked to possible birth defects in rats.

Years later, in 1999, a former staff scientist at 3M, the company that supplied DuPont with the compound, blew the whistle on his employer for having allegedly withheld crucial information about PFAS. In a resignation letter he shared with the EPA, the employee said PFOS is “the most insidious pollutant since PCB,” referring to polychlorinated biphenyls, chemicals now banned for manufacturing purposes.

A 3M spokesperson directed CR to its website, which says the company phased out the use of PFOA and PFOS in the early 2000s but still uses replacement compounds today. The company has spent \$200 million on cleanup efforts from PFAS contamination, the website says. More information about the risks



PHOTO: KENJI AOKI/TRUNK ARCHIVE



of PFAS continued to emerge. In 1999, researchers at Oregon State University in Corvallis found PFAS compounds in groundwater below two military bases years after the military stopped using firefighting foam there.

### The Burdensome Law

Part of the problem, researchers say, is that Congress has also made it hard for the EPA to act.

It wasn't always so. When Congress passed the Safe Drinking Water Act in 1974, it granted the EPA authority to regulate drinking water. Soon after, the agency adopted standards for about two dozen contaminants, according to research by James Salzman, an environmental law professor at UCLA.

But over the next two decades, water utilities began to push back, citing the high cost of removing contaminants, and in 1996, Congress amended the Safe Drinking Water Act. The amendments "basically gutted the law," making future regulation unlikely, says Erik Olson, senior strategic director of health and food at the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), an environmental organization.

The EPA says it has issued several drinking water regulations to "strengthen public health protection" since 1996, including revisions for arsenic, bacteria, and water served on airplanes.

But since then the EPA hasn't implemented a new standard for a previously unregulated contaminant. "The agency has not been able to muster the energy or the political will to jump through all those hoops and regulate a single new chemical through that process in 24 years," Olson says.

### Regulate As a Family

Regulating PFAS presents special challenges for at least two reasons: Thousands of the compounds are

# What's Really in Your Bottled Water?



## Noncarbonated H<sub>2</sub>O

### LOWER HEAVY METAL AND PFAS LEVELS

<b>365 Everyday Value</b> (Whole Foods) Spring Water	<b>Evian</b> Natural Spring Water
<b>Absopure</b> Purified Water	<b>Fiji Water</b> Natural Artesian Water
<b>Alkaline88</b> Natural Alkaline Water	<b>Flow</b> Alkaline Spring Water
<b>Aquafina</b> Natural Purified Water	<b>Good &amp; Gather</b> (Target) Purified Drinking Water
<b>Arrowhead</b> Natural Spring Water	<b>Great Value</b> (Walmart) Natural Purified Water
<b>Boxed Water</b> Water	<b>Ice Mountain</b> Natural Spring Water
<b>Core</b> Hydration Natural Enhanced Water	<b>Just 100%</b> Spring Water
<b>Crystal Geyser</b> Natural Spring Water	<b>Just The Basics</b> (CVS) Purified Water
<b>Dasani</b> Natural Purified Water	<b>Kirkland Signature</b> (Costco) Purified Water
<b>Essentia</b> Natural Purified Alkaline Water	<b>LifeWtr</b> Natural Purified Water
	<b>Liquid Death</b> Spring Water

### TOTAL PFAS OVER 1 PPT

<b>Deer Park</b> Natural Spring Water (1.21 ppt)	<b>Tourmaline Spring</b> Sacred Living Water (4.64 ppt)
--	---

**MOST OF THE** noncarbonated products CR tested had detectable levels of PFAS, but only two—Tourmaline Spring and Deer Park—exceeded 1 part per trillion.

Tourmaline Spring says the amount of PFAS in its bottled water is below the levels set by the International Bottled Water Association, an industry group, and all states. Nestlé, which

makes Deer Park, says that its most recent testing for the brand indicated undetectable levels of PFAS.

All noncarbonated water that CR tested had heavy metal levels well below federal safety limits, with one exception: Starkey Spring Water, owned by Whole Foods. It had arsenic levels just shy of the federal limit of

CR tested 47 bottled waters, including 35 noncarbonated and 12 carbonated ones. For each product, we tested two to four samples. The tests focused on four heavy metals (arsenic, cadmium, lead, and mercury), plus 30 PFAS chemicals, which pose special concerns because they can linger in the environment almost indefinitely. The federal government has issued only voluntary guidance for PFAS, saying the combined amounts for two specific PFAS compounds should be below 70 parts per trillion. A few states have set lower limits, of 12 to 20 ppt, according to American Water Works, an industry group. The International Bottled Water Association, another group, says that it supports federal limits for PFAS and that bottled water should have PFAS levels below 5 ppt for any single compound and 10 ppt for more than one. Some experts say the cutoff for total PFAS levels should be even lower, 1 ppt.



## Carbonated H<sub>2</sub>O

### Nestlé Pure Life

Natural Purified Water

**Niagara** Natural Purified Water

**Ozarka** Natural Spring Water

**Pathwater** Purified Water

**Penta** Ultra Pure Water

**Poland Spring**

Natural Spring Water

**Saratoga** Natural Spring Water

**Smartwater**

Natural Enhanced Water

**Trader Joe's**

Alkaline Water + Electrolytes

**Waiakea** Hawaiian Volcanic Water

**Zephyrhills** Natural Spring Water

### ARSENIC OVER 3 PPB

#### Starkey Spring Water

(Whole Foods)

(9.53 ppb)

10 parts per billion and more than three times as much as CR's recommended level of 3 ppb.

The company's "highest priority is to provide customers with safe, high-quality, and refreshing spring water," Whole Foods says. "These products meet all FDA requirements and are fully compliant with FDA standards for heavy metals."

### LOWER TOTAL PFAS LEVELS

	TOTAL PFAS (PARTS PER TRILLION)
<b>Sparkling Ice</b> Black Raspberry Sparkling Water	Not detected
<b>Spindrift</b> Raspberry Lime Sparkling Water	0.19
<b>Sanpellegrino</b> Natural Sparkling Mineral Water	0.31
<b>Dasani</b> Black Cherry Sparkling Water	0.37
<b>Schweppes</b> Lemon Lime Sparkling Water Beverage	0.58

### TOTAL PFAS OVER 1 PPT

<b>Perrier</b> Natural Sparkling Mineral Water	1.1
<b>La Croix</b> Natural Sparkling Water	1.16
<b>Canada Dry</b> Lemon Lime Sparkling Seltzer Water	1.24
<b>Poland Spring</b> Zesty Lime Sparkling Water	1.66
<b>Bubly</b> Blackberry Sparkling Water	2.24
<b>Polar</b> Natural Seltzer Water	6.41
<b>Topo Chico</b> Natural Mineral Water	9.76

### ALL CARBONATED WATER

that CR tested fell below legal limits for heavy metals, and none had arsenic levels above CR's recommended maximum of 3 parts per billion. But many products had measurable amounts of PFAS. There are a few possible reasons. Phil Brown, at the PFAS Project Lab at Northeastern University in Boston, says the carbonation process could be a factor. The source water could also have more PFAS, or treatment used by some brands doesn't remove PFAS to below 1 part per trillion.

CR heard back from all companies with PFAS levels above 1 ppt, except for Bubly. La Croix and Canada Dry said levels in their products were well below current standards or requirements. Topo Chico, made by Coca-Cola and with the highest PFAS levels in CR's tests, said it would "continue to make improvements to prepare for more stringent standards in the future." Nestlé, maker of Poland Spring and Perrier, said that its recent testing did not detect PFAS and that it supports efforts to set

federal limits. LaCroix and Polar challenged how CR arrived at our total PFAS amounts. (For details on CR's methodology, go to [CR.org/watertests120](https://www.consumerreports.org/water-tests/120).)

Brian Ronholm, CR's director of food policy, says that PFAS in carbonated water highlights the need for the federal government to set science-based limits for PFAS compounds in tap and bottled drinking water. "The fact that so many brands had total PFAS below 1 ppt shows it is feasible to get to more protective levels," he says.

already in use, and manufacturers keep introducing new ones, though it's unclear whether they are any safer.

As a possible solution to those problems, researchers argued in a June letter to the journal *Environmental Science & Technology* that the government should manage PFAS as a “chemical class”—in other words, one

standard for all related compounds.

“It takes 20 years to even consider regulating one, and we’ve got thousands,” says Olson at the NRDC. “It will be literally geologic time before we see regulation of most of them.” Worsening the problem is that while some companies have stopped using PFOA and PFOS, many are

replacing them with less-studied PFAS compounds.

The FluoroCouncil, an industry group, says that these newer chemicals are safer and that regulating them as a class isn’t reasonable, because “many PFAS chemistries have very different profiles from PFOS and PFOA.”

But the letter in *Environmental*

## 4 Ways to Avoid PFAS in Your Water

**YOU CAN'T AVOID** per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) completely, says James E. Rogers, PhD, CR's director of food safety research and testing. But several steps can help. That includes choosing bottled water carefully because some have more than others. (See “What’s Really in Your Bottled Water?” on page 30.) Here’s what else you can do.



### CHECK YOUR WATER

While there are still no federal limits for PFAS chemicals in drinking water, certain states require routine testing. If you get your tap water through a public water system, you may get an annual report detailing those results. If you didn’t receive yours, call your local supplier. If you rent, call your landlord. The Environmental Protection Agency also has reports for systems with 100,000 or more people, at [epa.gov/ccr](http://epa.gov/ccr). And you can check a map created by the Environmental Working Group and Northeastern University that

shows communities with known contamination, at [ewg.org/interactive-maps/pfas\\_contamination](http://ewg.org/interactive-maps/pfas_contamination).



### TEST YOUR WATER

If your home is not on a public water system or if you need more information, get your home water tested. Many DIY kits are available, but it’s not always clear what they test for or how accurate they are. So the EPA recommends using a certified lab. To find one, go to [epa.gov/dwlabcert](http://epa.gov/dwlabcert).

CR also recently tested two home water-test services, SimpleLab and WaterCheck. Twenty-seven CR volunteers ordered the kits, collected samples from their homes, and had their water tested for heavy metals and PFAS. The volunteers also sent samples of their water collected at the same time to a CR-qualified independent lab for comparison.

Both services yielded accurate results, according to CR’s analysis. But users

said that in both cases the instructions could have been clearer and results weren’t always delivered when promised.

And while both were fairly pricey, SimpleLab’s was a better value. It cost \$129 to test for contaminants in municipal water, \$134 for well water, and an extra \$289 for PFAS testing, compared with WaterCheck’s \$190 for municipal water, \$230 for well water, and \$400 for PFAS.



### FILTER YOUR WATER

Consumers who learn that their water has high PFAS levels could install reverse osmosis filters, which often work best for removing those compounds, as well as other contaminants. But they take up a lot of space and can be pricey, some costing \$1,000 or more. Carbon filters that can be connected to faucets or installed where water enters your home can also be effective, though they might not work as well for certain compounds. For more, go to [CR.org/waterfilters1120](http://CR.org/waterfilters1120).



### CHOOSE AND USE PRODUCTS CAREFULLY

PFAS compounds are found in many products and are particularly common in a few.

That includes stain-resistant fabric. So consider choosing carpet and furniture brands that don’t use a stain-resistant or water-resistant coating, says Laurel Schaidler, a scientist at the Silent Spring Institute, which focuses on the health effects of environmental chemicals.

Fast-food packaging and microwave popcorn bags are other common sources. Says Schaidler: “I think it makes sense to minimize use” of those products.

Also be careful when cooking with nonstick pans. They shouldn’t shed PFAS when used according to manufacturer specifications, but don’t overheat them, scrape them excessively, or put them in a dishwasher if they’re not meant to be cleaned that way.

CR’s cookware ratings ([CR.org/cookware1120](http://CR.org/cookware1120)) indicate when cookware is free of one PFAS compound (PFOA), though it may contain other PFAS compounds.

Science & Technology said that replacement PFAS can be “equally environmentally persistent.”

Other research suggests that those replacements are linked to similar adverse human health effects.

The limits of the one-at-a-time approach were underscored by a June study in *Science* magazine that looked at how PFAS spread underground. EPA researchers found New Jersey soil samples contaminated by new PFAS compounds—ones that have their own mouthful of a name: CIPFPECA, or chloroperfluoropolyether carboxylate. The researchers pointed to the chemical company Solvay, which has a facility near where samples were taken, as the likely source. In an accompanying piece, other researchers trying to find out more about CIPFPECAs from state regulators said their efforts uncovered almost no useful information, which “raises more questions than answers.”

Solvay told CR that it provided toxicology reports on the compounds to New Jersey and the EPA. The company said those reports—which are not public because they contain proprietary information—show that Solvay is compliant with “applicable” regulations.

But David Andrews at the EWG compared the scenario to the dearth of information on PFAS compounds when they were first discovered. “The agency has no public health information on [CIPFPECAs] and we just seem to be in the same spot three or four more decades down the line,” he says.

### The Case for a Lower Level

Advocates and researchers who support the 1 ppt limit for PFAS in drinking water point to growing research linking even very small amounts to potential harm, as well as the compounds’ persistence in the environment.

**‘I keep asking, why the heck are we making chemicals that are never going to go away?’**

**—LINDA BIRNBAUM,**  
former director, National  
Institute for Environmental  
Health Science

One key piece of evidence is a 2013 study partly funded by the EPA and led by Harvard environmental health professor Philippe Grandjean that showed a decreased vaccine response in children exposed to PFAS. Grandjean’s paper recommended a drinking water limit for PFAS of 1 ppt.

Last year, the EWG recommended 1 ppt for all PFAS, citing Grandjean’s work along with other research associating the compounds with delayed mammary gland development in rodents.

The FluoroCouncil disagrees. “The science does not support a 1 ppt level,” the group says.

But some experts say even 1 ppt is too high. The NRDC, in a 2019 report, acknowledged that toxicity data is limited but said that a zero tolerance is needed “to provide an adequate margin of safety to protect public health from a class of chemicals that is characterized by extreme persistence, high mobility, and is associated with a multitude of different types of toxicity at very low levels of exposure.”

Jamie DeWitt, a PFAS researcher in the department of pharmacology and toxicology at East Carolina University’s Brody School of Medicine in Greenville, N.C., agrees. “We shouldn’t have these

compounds in the environment,” he says. “We shouldn’t have these compounds in our body.”

### How to Address PFAS

Consumers can take some steps to limit their exposure to PFAS, including testing their home water, filtering their water, choosing bottled waters carefully, and avoiding products that contain the compounds. (See “4 Ways to Avoid PFAS in Your Water,” on page 32.)

But consumers can’t solve the PFAS problem alone, says Alissa Cordner, co-director of the PFAS Project Lab at Northeastern University. Though industry bears some responsibility, it’s unlikely to act without government action, she says.

Ideally, the EPA should set limits on PFAS in drinking water, says CR’s Brian Ronholm. But because that could take years, Congress should mandate more immediate action, he says.

Arlene Blum, executive director of the nonprofit Green Science Policy Institute, suggests that states can act more quickly to tackle the problem. “The amount of hoops that the federal government has to go through makes it really difficult,” she says.

A few states have set PFAS limits below the EPA’s 70 ppt advisory, according to American Water Works, an industry group. In 2019, Vermont set a 20 ppt limit for five PFAS compounds combined, while New Hampshire passed limits on PFOA (12 ppt) and PFOS (15 ppt). At least nine others have proposed PFAS standards.

But Linda Birnbaum, the recently retired director of the National Institute for Environmental Health Science and now a scholar-in-residence in the department of environmental sciences and policy at Duke University, says there is an even simpler solution.

“I keep asking,” she says, “Why the heck are we making chemicals that are never going to go away?”



# THE BEST WAY TO

A lot of us are spending more time at home these days. That means more crumbs, more dust, and more pet hair from the many furry companions Americans have adopted since the pandemic began. A good vacuum is essential. After all, not just any model can handle a golden retriever's shedding or is light enough to carry up and down stairs. Which ones should be in your cleaning arsenal? At Consumer Reports, we test hundreds of uprights, canisters, corded and cordless sticks, handhelds, and robotics. On the following pages we break down what you need to know about each type. We've got guidance on carpet cleaners and steam mops, too. So choose the type of appliance that fits how you live and how you clean. Then check out the ratings to find the top performers from our tests.

by **Mary H.J. Farrell and Haniya Rae**

HANDHELD

🛒 **Black+Decker**  
**Dustbuster**  
**CHV1410L \$60**

**78** OVERALL  
SCORE



# CLEAN THAT FLOOR

BAGLESS UPRIGHT

👉 Kenmore Pet-Friendly CrossOver  
DU3017 \$180

75 OVERALL  
SCORE







## UPRIGHTS

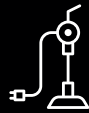
PRICE RANGE:  
\$65 TO \$1,600

**STRENGTHS:** With the full weight of the vacuum sitting over the brush roll, upright vacuums are the best at cleaning carpet because the brush pushes down into the pile, loosening and sucking up the dirt. All of our recommended uprights earn a rating of Excellent or Very Good in our carpet cleaning test. And because they stand upright, they're easy to store. Got a dog or cat? The best uprights in our ratings are great at picking up pet hair.

**WEAKNESSES:** They can weigh more than 20 pounds, so if you live in a multilevel house you may not want to lug it up and down stairs. Vacuuming the stairs themselves can be awkward because you have to balance the whole vacuum as you go. And in our tests, uprights tend to be noisier than canister vacuums.

**HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM IT:** If you use your vacuum to clean curtains and upholstery, look for one with add-on attachments for fabric as well as suction control so you can vacuum more gently. And if you have a combination of bare floors and carpeting, you'll want a brush on/off switch to avoid scattering debris on bare floors.

In our recent survey of CR members who bought nearly 98,000 nonrobotic vacuums over the last 10 years, Sebo, Soniclean, and Shark were the most reliable. Bissell, Dirt Devil, and Eureka were the least reliable brands.



## CORDED STICK VACS

PRICE RANGE: \$30 TO \$300

**STRENGTHS:** Stick vacuums are lightweight, so you can easily pull one out of the closet for a quick cleanup. Corded ones rate exceptionally well in CR's tests for performance and predicted reliability, although they still can't take the place of a full-sized vacuum, especially for cleaning carpet.

**WEAKNESSES:** Mainly one: the cord. The convenience of having a lightweight vacuum may be offset by a cord you have to maneuver around. Also, you might not get

as many attachments for cleaning things like curtains or upholstery. **HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM IT:** Stick vacs don't come with many bells and whistles. Just keep it at the ready, say, in the front of a closet, to make it easy to grab and clean.

According to our reliability survey, you can't go wrong by buying a corded Shark stick vac. Shark earns the top rating for predicted reliability and owner satisfaction. All of the other brands earn an Excellent or Very Good rating for predicted reliability.



CORDED STICK VAC

✓ Shark APEX  
UpLight Lift-Away  
DuoClean LZ601 \$275

97 OVERALL  
SCORE

# Beyond Vacuums

## STEAM MOPS

PRICE RANGE: \$50 TO \$200

**STRENGTHS:** The steam from one of these mops gets rid of muddy paw prints, sticky spilled juice, and other messes fast. But they're really only meant to be used on tile or vinyl floors. These compact machines are easy to store, and some allow you to set the temperature they heat up to.

They're convenient, but when we compared how well steam mops clean vs. a low-tech sponge mop, we found that as long as we

wet the sponge mop several times, we got similar—and sometimes better—results. That said, steam mops generally work faster and pick up dirt more readily than a sponge mop. (Sponge mops tend to push dirt around, requiring more passes to get the floor clean.)

**WEAKNESSES:** Some steam mops require you to manually pump the mop to generate steam. In our tests, the

steam rate from these mops varied widely and sometimes didn't get hot enough to clean well. You can't use them on wood floors, and you have to be careful with laminate or vinyl; if you let a steam mop sit in one place, the steam could warp the surface.

**HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM IT:** Depending on how dirty your floors are, you may need to sweep before using a steam mop so that you're not spreading dirt around.



✓ **Bissell PowerFresh Slim 2075A**  
\$150

79 OVERALL SCORE

Ⓢ **Bissell PowerFresh Deluxe 1806**  
\$90

77 OVERALL SCORE

## CARPET CLEANERS

PRICE RANGE: \$100 TO \$600

**STRENGTHS:** If you have a lot of carpet and heavy foot traffic, it may make sense to buy one of these machines rather than always renting one from a home improvement store. The best models from our tests do a good job of getting dirt and gunk out of carpet fibers by dispensing a cleaning solution and then sucking it back up. Two-tank systems with removable plastic tanks are easier to clean than one-tank systems, which may have two nonremovable

plastic bladders inside a single tank.

**WEAKNESSES:** Carpet cleaners can be very heavy, as much as 65 pounds when filled with cleaning solution and water. The weight helps push down the carpet pile, allowing the cleaning solution to get into the fibers and do its work, but it also makes the appliance cumbersome to maneuver. And brace yourself for the noise. In our tests, carpet cleaners averaged 80 decibels, which is twice as loud

as the average vacuum cleaner. So wear hearing protection, especially if you're using the machine for a prolonged period. **HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM IT:** Vacuum and spot-treat stains before using a carpet cleaner. Look for one with a long power cord so that you can move it around easier. (In our tests, cord lengths varied from 61 to 155 inches.) If you have carpeted stairs, look for a model that comes with an attachment for cleaning smaller areas.



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

71 OVERALL SCORE

Ⓢ **Hoover PowerDash Pet FH50700**  
\$100

69 OVERALL SCORE

✓ **Hoover SmartWash Automatic FH52001**  
\$250

68 OVERALL SCORE





## CORDLESS STICK VACS

PRICE RANGE:  
\$70 TO \$800

**STRENGTHS:** In our tests, the performance of cordless stick vacs keeps improving year after year. They're capable of cleaning carpet and bare floors well, and getting rid of pet hair. Just like their corded cousins, these vacuums are great at cleaning up small messes, but you don't have to worry about tripping over a cord. Plus, many cordless stick vacs can be used as hand vacs with a few quick adjustments.

**WEAKNESSES:** Batteries are a drawback with cordless stick vacuums. In our member survey, batteries losing power or dying was cited as a frequent problem. As a result, none of the cordless vacuums in our tests are eligible for a CR recommendation regardless of how well they perform in our tests. And they're not as good at cleaning carpet as a full-sized vacuum.

**HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM IT:** Try to find a model that comes with two batteries, so you can swap a fresh one in when the other runs low. For instance, the Shark ION F80 Cord-Free MultiFlex IF281 comes with two batteries, which doubles its cleaning time—24 minutes per battery. Of course, you can also get a one-battery model and pay extra for a second battery.

But don't count on the batteries lasting. Of the nine brands of cordless stick vacuums in our reliability ratings, only four earn a middling score of Good for predicted reliability. The other five rate Fair or Poor.



## ROBOTICS

PRICE RANGE: \$200 TO \$1,300

**STRENGTHS:** Want dust-free floors without having to lift a finger? Depending on the model, a robotic vacuum can learn your floor plan and clean on a schedule you set via an app. (Models without WiFi allow you to schedule a daily cleaning via a remote control or the robot's built-in control panel.) Prices have dropped significantly over the past few years. You can get a great robotic vacuum for as little as \$200. In our tests, robotics worked especially well on bare floors.

The less expensive models generally don't have WiFi connectivity. Pricier ones have more features, and some can now empty their own dustbins. When the robotic vacuum docks, it unloads what it picked up into a bag or canister.

**WEAKNESSES:** Our tests found that

robotic vacs are generally not great on carpet and they can't handle heavier soil. Some get caught on thick cords and rug tassels, and some struggle with making the transition between bare floors and carpet.

**HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM IT:** It may take a few cleanings before a robotic vacuum can map your floor. Make sure it's docked and fully charged every day so that it can complete its scheduled cleaning.

**A WORD ON OUR ROBOTIC VACUUMS**

**TESTING:** You won't find robotic vacuums ratings on pages 40 and 41 because we're updating them with the latest scores from our redesigned lab. If you're a digital member, you can go to [CR.org/robovacs1120](https://www.consumerreports.org/robovacs1120) to see all of the newest ratings.



## HANDHELDS

PRICE RANGE: \$35 TO \$200

**STRENGTHS:** If you have a young child or grandchild, you know how quickly the floor of your kitchen or car can become littered with crushed Cheerios or Goldfish. Handheld vacuums make cleanup quick and easy. They can even pick up dead bugs around the house. All but one of the models in our tests are cordless. And many of those cordless vacs have longer-lasting lithium-ion batteries, and the run times range from 9 to 30 minutes.

**WEAKNESSES:** Handheld vacuums aren't very powerful, so they're really

only for small messes. Even models that score well for cleaning carpet and bare floors are only appropriate for spot messes because the powerheads are small.

**HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM IT:** Keep your handheld vac in an accessible place so there's no obstacle to grabbing it and cleaning up the mess of the moment. But if you break a glass or plate, it's better to use a broom and dustpan so that pieces of glass or ceramic don't get stuck in your vacuum or otherwise damage it.



BAGGED CANISTER VACUUM

✓ Miele Complete C3 Alize \$700

77 OVERALL SCORE



## CANISTERS

PRICE RANGE: \$220 TO \$1,100

**STRENGTHS:** If you live in a house with stairs, a canister is a good choice. They weigh about as much as uprights, but the vacuum hose and head are separate from the canister itself, so it's much easier to vacuum stairs. (You can leave the canister on the floor or a stair.) It's easier to vacuum under furniture, too, because the vacuum head is easier to maneuver than the head of an upright vacuum. While our tests give uprights as a group the edge in carpet cleaning, there are canisters in our ratings that rival the best uprights. Many of the top performers are great for picking up pet hair, too.

**WEAKNESSES:** Because you're dragging a canister behind you

as you go, you have to be careful that it doesn't bump into your furniture or nick your walls. And they're trickier to store because the hose and body typically take up more space than an upright.

**HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM IT:**

Most canisters come with on-board attachments that you can use to clean your curtains and upholstery, and reach those cobwebs in ceiling corners. For those jobs, you'll want a model that has variable hose suction, and most of the canisters in our tests score Very Good to Excellent in that test.

Based on data from our member survey, Miele gets top marks for predicted reliability and owner satisfaction.



## EASY MAINTENANCE TIPS

Although vacuums, carpet cleaners, and steam mops are cleaning appliances, they need to be cleaned regularly themselves to run smoothly. In addition to regularly checking the filter, here's what else to do:

**CANISTERS, UPRIGHTS, STICK VACS, HANDHELDS:**

Don't wait until the bag or bin is full to empty it. If they're too full there's less airflow, which means less suction. For vacuums with a brush roll, hair and fur can get tangled up in it and keep the appliance from working properly. Check the


brush periodically and pull out any clumps or use scissors to cut them free.

**ROBOTIC VACUUMS:** Every once in a while, wipe down the bot's sensors (usually found on the front and bottom) with a dry, clean cloth to make sure they're not blocked by dirt or dust. To ensure that the vacuum doesn't stop mid-run, empty the dustbin after each cleaning. (Most stop running when the dustbin is full.) Again, clear the brush roll of hair with a pair of scissors or by using the blade that comes with some models.

**CARPET CLEANERS:**

Fully empty both the clean and dirty tanks after each use so that leftover solution doesn't corrode the machine. And only use the cleaning solution recommended for your machine. Otherwise, you might void the warranty.

**STEAM MOPS:** Depending on your model and how often you use it, you'll need to dispose of the cleaning pads regularly. Also, only use distilled water; the minerals in tap water can corrode or clog the steam mop's parts.

Brand + Model 	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results							Features						
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Carpet	Bare floors	Hose suction	Clean emissions	Handling	Pet hair	Noise	Weight (lb.)	Cord length (ft)	Manual-pile adjust	Accepts tools	Suction control	Retractable cord	Full-bag/bin indicator

### BAGLESS UPRIGHT VACUUMS

✓ Shark Navigator Powered Lift-Away NV586 (Target)	77	\$300	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	16	26					
💰 Kenmore Pet Friendly Cross-Over DU3017	75	\$180	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	17	25					
✓ Shark Rotator Powered Lift-Away Speed NV680	74	\$300	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	14	30					
✓ Dyson Ball Animal 2	74	\$450	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	17	30					
💰 Kenmore Pet Friendly CrossOver 31220	74	\$250	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	18	29					
✓ Dyson Ball Multi Floor 2	74	\$400	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	16	31					
💰 Shark Rotator Professional Lift-Away NV501	73	\$260	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	17	30					
✓ Shark APEX DuoClean Powered Lift-Away Speed AX912	73	\$350	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	16	30					
✓ Kenmore Elite Pet Friendly CrossOver Ultra 31230	72	\$350	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	18	35					
✓ Shark APEX DuoClean Zero-M Powered Lift-Away AZ1002	72	\$400	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	17	30					
💰 Shark Navigator Lift-Away NV352	72	\$200	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	14	25					
💰 Shark Navigator Professional Lift-Away NV356E	72	\$250	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	16	30					

### BAGGED UPRIGHT VACUUMS

💰 Kenmore Elite Pet Friendly 31150	77	\$350	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	↓	21	35					
✓ Miele Dynamic U1 Cat & Dog	76	\$700	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	22	40					
💰 Kenmore Pet Friendly 31140	74	\$280	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	20	29					
✓ Kirby Avalir 2	72	\$1,600	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	↓	23	29					
💰 Hoover WindTunnel Max UH30600	71	\$180	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	17	29					

### BAGLESS CANISTER VACUUMS

✓ Miele Blizzard CX1 Cat & Dog	76	\$900	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	15	21					
💰 Kenmore 22614	72	\$390	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	↓	23	24					

### BAGGED CANISTER VACUUMS

✓ Miele Complete C3 Marin	84	\$1,100	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	23	24					
✓ Miele Complete C3 Alize	77	\$700	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	17	24					
✓ Kenmore Elite Pet Friendly UltraPlush 81714	76	\$530	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	↓	25	26					
💰 Kenmore Pop-N-Go BC4026	76	\$280	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	22	26					
✓ Kenmore Elite Pet Friendly CrossOver 21814	76	\$660	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	↓	26	27					
💰 Kenmore 200 Series BC4002	76	\$220	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	↓	19	24					
💰 Kenmore Pop-N-Go UltraPlush BC4027	74	\$330	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	21	26					
💰 Kenmore 81614	74	\$400	↓	↓	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↓	↓	23	28					

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results						Features				
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Carpet	Bare floors	Edges	Noise	Pet hair	Clean emissions	Run time (min.)	Charge time (hr.)	Weight (lb.)	Battery type	Brush on/off

### CORDED STICK VACUUMS

✓ <b>Shark APEX UpLight</b> Lift-Away DuoClean LZ601	97	\$275	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	NA	NA	11.0	Corded model	
✓ <b>Shark APEX DuoClean</b> Corded ZS362	94	\$250	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	NA	NA	9.8	Corded model	
💰 <b>Dirt Devil Power Stick</b> SD12530	85	\$100	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	NA	NA	7.0	Corded model	

### CORDLESS STICK VACUUMS

<b>Tineco Pure One S11</b>	95	\$350	–	–	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	21.5	4	5.8	21.6 volt lithium ion	
<b>Tineco Pure One S11 Tango EX</b>	94	\$470	–	–	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	16.8	4	5.8	21.6 volt lithium ion	
<b>Tineco Pure One S12</b>	92	\$600	–	–	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	18.0	4	6.6	21.6 volt lithium ion	
<b>Dyson V11 Outsize</b>	90	\$800	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	40.0	5	7.9	25.2 volt lithium ion	
<b>Dyson V11 Torque Drive</b>	89	\$700	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	43.2	4	6.6	25.2 volt lithium ion	
<b>Dyson V8 Absolute</b>	89	\$450	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	21.0	5	5.6	21.6 volt lithium ion	
<b>LG CordZero A9 A906SM</b>	87	\$750	–	–	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	21.4	4	5.9	25.5 volt lithium ion (limited charge voltage 29.4)	
<b>Dyson Cyclone V10 Absolute</b>	85	\$700	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	28.9	4	5.9	25.2 volt lithium ion	
<b>Dyson Cyclone V10 Motorhead</b>	84	\$500	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	27.4	4	5.5	25.2 volt lithium ion	
<b>Dyson V7 Motorhead</b>	84	\$300	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	18.5	4	5.2	21.6 volt lithium ion	
<b>Hoover ONEPWR Blade Max</b> BH53350	80	\$350	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	26.2	4	5.6	20.0 volt lithium ion	
<b>Bissell Air Ram 1984</b>	79	\$250	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	46.5	5	7.9	22 volt lithium ion	•
<b>Shark Rocket IX140</b>	78	\$200	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	22.3	3	7.0	21.6 volt lithium ion	
<b>Black+Decker POWERSERIES</b> Extreme BSV2020P	78	\$200	↓	↓	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	20.0	5	6.9	20 volt lithium ion	•

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results					Features				
			Carpet	Bare floors	Edges	Noise	Pet hair	Run time (min.)	Charge time (hr.)	Weight (lb.)	Battery type	Clean emissions

### HANDHELD VACUUMS

✓ <b>Shark Ion W1 WV201</b>	80	\$130	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	10	3	1.4	10.8 Volt Li-ion	•
✓ <b>Black+Decker Max+ Dustbuster</b> AdvancedClean+ HHVK515J00	79	\$90	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	31	5	2.7	20 Volt Li-ion	•
💰 <b>Black+Decker Dustbuster</b> CHV1410L	78	\$60	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	9	4	2.6	16 Volt Li-ion	•

**HOW WE TEST:** The Overall Score for all vacuums except handhelds takes into account information on Predicted reliability and Owner satisfaction from our member survey. (Dashes indicate insufficient data to provide a rating.)

Full-sized vacuums (uprights and canisters) undergo our toughest tests. We sprinkle talc and sand on a medium-pile carpet for Carpet cleaning and spread sand on a linoleum floor for our Bare floors test. For Pet hair, we stomp

pet fur into a carpet. We also measure Noise and how well the vacuum contains what it sweeps up for our Emissions score. Stick vacuums are typically a secondary vacuum, so in our tests we concentrate on surface debris such as

cereal and rice. For cordless stick vacs, we also measure each model's battery run time. Handhelds are the least powerful, so we calibrate our tests for Carpet, Bare floors, Edges, and Pet hair accordingly.



# COULD YOUR MEDICAL BILLS — MAKE YOU SICK?

That debt doesn't just hurt your bank account—it can harm your health, too. What you must know now.

**BY LISA L. GILL**





FRANKLIN

100  
LG 04727792  
SERIES 2009  
A

FEDERAL RESERVE

FEDERAL RESERVE SYSTEM  
Secretary of the Treasury  
\$50

UNITED STATES  
\$20

Please contact us to provide information or when coverage is indicated below or return a copy of this slip to the employee provided.

It will take time to process your claim. We will contact you as soon as we have more information.

\$30,532.70  
\$31,532.08  
\$47,711.14  
\$1,835.01

DESCRIPTION  
Due On These Services  
SERVICE

\$30,532.70  
\$31,532.08  
\$47,711.14  
\$1,835.01



# D

**DEVIN BARRINGTON-WARD WAS** doubled over with stomach pain. His chest hurt, too. Though his family urged him to call an ambulance and he was terrified that his condition was serious, Barrington-Ward had another concern on his mind: the expense. Uninsured, he knew he couldn't afford the ambulance ride.

So his mother raced him to a hospital near his home in suburban Atlanta that day in January earlier this year. After several hours in the emergency room, where he saw numerous physicians and got a CT scan and other tests, Barrington-Ward was diagnosed with colitis. Not long after came the bill: almost \$10,000. Though his health is better today, he says he's still saddled with debt, and the side effects of that are significant.

For one thing, it means juggling priorities. He just started getting a social justice organization he founded, the Black Futurists Group, off the ground. "I'm in the critical years of my plan," says Barrington-Ward, who is 30. "I want to have a family and own a home." But now, he says, he has to balance the debt with making investments in himself, his work, and his future.

Barrington-Ward is not alone. The pain of medical debt is especially pronounced in Black and Hispanic communities, according to a June 2020 Consumer Reports nationally representative survey of 1,267 U.S. adults who had a medical bill that they had to pay out of pocket.

But it's a problem for many, and a uniquely American one. People in Canada, Australia, the U.K., and many other countries who have the misfortune of getting sick don't face the same risk of massive bills in the aftermath, according to the Commonwealth Fund, a healthcare research group. Those countries generally offer free or low-cost healthcare to all citizens.

In this country, though, illness is not so easily recovered from, at least financially. More than a quarter of American consumers have debt that's been turned over to collections, with over half of that from medical bills, according to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

The amount of medical debt sent to collection agencies was estimated to be \$81 billion, according to a 2018 study published in Health Affairs. Medical debt is also a top reason that people file for bankruptcy, according



'I want to have a family and own a home.'

**Devin Barrington-Ward**, Georgia  
*Uninsured and facing almost \$10,000 in ER bills, he had to reorder priorities.*

to a 2019 article in the American Journal of Public Health.

Even relatively small amounts of medical debt can trigger a cascade of other financial problems, according to CR's recent survey. Among the respondents: a 66-year-old Tennessee resident who said he had to dip into his grandchildren's college savings fund and a 23-year-old Montana man who had his wages garnished, both to pay medical bills that were less than \$2,000. Or there's the 57-year-old Californian who said he had to sell his truck to cover a medical bill of less than \$1,000.

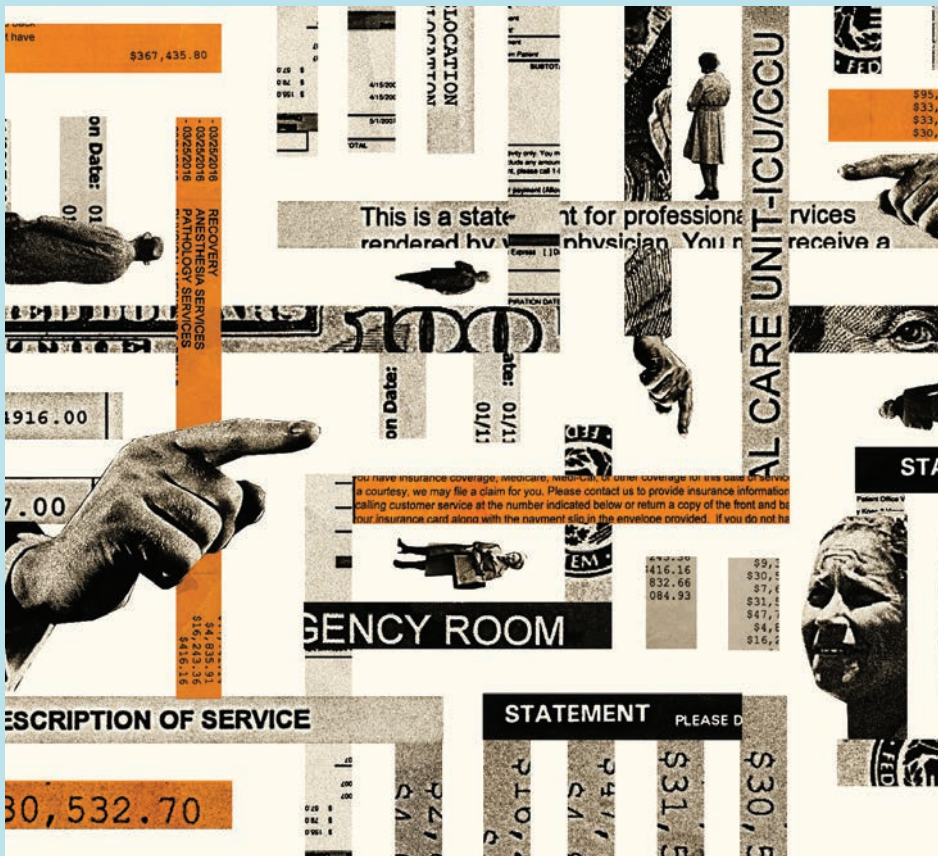
To make matters worse, medical debt can harm not only your financial health but also your physical health. One way is by causing you to delay needed medical care. In CR's survey, 41 percent of people said they put off a doctor's visit because of cost. But research shows that the emotional toll of medical bills can also harm health by triggering chronic stress, which is linked to a host of health problems and even premature death.

And the situation threatens to get much worse. The Kaiser Family Foundation, a health research group, estimated in May that up to 27 million Americans could lose their employer-based health insurance as a result of the pandemic.

"The U.S. has reached a tipping point," says Ida Rademacher, executive director of the Financial Security Program at the Aspen Institute, a research and policy organization. Even before the crisis, she says, American households were financially fragile.

Now, worsening money and health-coverage problems will coincide with the need of hospitals and medical systems to collect on their debts. "This will continue to add to levels of stress and behaviors like delaying medical care," she says.

"Millions of people are living paycheck to paycheck," says Ray Kluender, at the



## HOW TO FIGHT BIG MEDICAL BILLS

**MEDICAL DEBT CAN** appear on your credit history in as little as 180 days. You can avoid that by addressing medical bills as soon as they arrive. If you plan to take any action that could take extra time, notify the hospital or doctor's office right away and ask for a 30-day extension.

**Don't automatically pay.** Hospitals and doctor's offices may send bills to patients before they file with insurers, says Caitlin Donovan of the Patient Advocate Foundation. So if you're insured,

wait until you get an "Explanation of Benefits" from your insurer that breaks down what it will cover and what you'll owe. If you still have questions, contact your insurer.

### Get an itemized bill.

If the amount due seems high or is unaffordable, ask your insurer for an itemized list of each charge, Donovan says. Look for duplicate charges or charges for procedures, tests, or services you did not receive. Report errors to your insurer and the hospital or doctor's office.

### Compare prices.

For legitimate charges, ensure you aren't being billed too much by comparing what your doctor or hospital charged vs. industry standards. To find those amounts, go to [healthcarebluebook.org](http://healthcarebluebook.org). Report over-charges to your insurer and the hospital or doctor's office.

### Ask for an exception.

For bills not covered by your health plan, ask your doctor to contact the insurer explaining why the care was needed and should be covered. Your doctor should include your diagnosis, why other treatments were stopped, and other details from your medical history.

### Negotiate.

If you can't get an exception, see whether the hospital or doctor will lower what you owe. One approach: Offer to pay immediately. The Advisory Board, a healthcare research firm, says some providers offer sizeable discounts for paying right away.

### Request a payment plan.

Many hospitals will do this, typically charging interest rates lower than many credit cards. Not using your credit card may provide another benefit: Several states have passed laws limiting how quickly medical bills not on credit cards can be given to collection.

### Seek outside help.

Look for a medical billing specialist through the Alliance of Professional Health Advocates ([advconnection.com](http://advconnection.com)). Or consider hiring an attorney, something 23 percent of people in CR's survey said they did regarding a large medical bill.

### Apply for charitable care.

Many providers offer free or reduced rates to people who qualify because of low incomes or other reasons. Renee Morgan, 48, of Vancouver, Wash., for example, took advantage of such a program after her husband suffered a mini stroke in April 2018 and was rushed to the emergency room, putting the family \$19,000 in debt. To find a program, contact Dollar For ([dollarfor.org](http://dollarfor.org)), an organization that matches qualified individuals with debt forgiveness programs.



Harvard Business School and the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab, where he studies medical debt. “They don’t have the buffer to deal with the shock of a medical bill.”

### A Debt Like No Other

Among the types of debt a person might have, medical debt is unique. Consumers—even those with health insurance—have little control over how medical debt is incurred, says Francis Wong, a fellow at the National Bureau of Economic Research who studies how medical debt affects people’s lives.

For one thing, when it comes to buying healthcare services, you usually can’t comparison shop. “Healthcare is simply not like other consumer goods,” Wong says. “It isn’t shoppable.”

For another, as Barrington-Ward can attest, medical debt often arises not from purchases we choose to make—like buying a house or car—but from illnesses and injuries that strike us, often unexpected and unavoidable.

And having insurance doesn’t always protect against unexpected charges. People can be hit with surprise medical bills for care not covered by insurance. In CR’s survey, fully half of people, when asked to think about their most expensive bill of the past year, said they didn’t know in advance it was coming.

Retired school teacher Patricia Hedgepeth, from Lathrup Village, Mich., is one such person. Her husband became ill in 2017, and though insured through her former job, by the time he died in January of this year, the family had accrued more than \$16,000 in medical bills. “I still don’t know what any of those bills were for,” Hedgepeth says.

Big bills not covered by insurance can also arrive suddenly if you are among the tens of millions of Americans with a high-deductible health plan. Such plans require that individuals

pay at least \$1,400 out of their own pocket and families pay \$2,800 before insurance kicks in. CR’s survey found that deductibles were the most common cause of high out-of-pocket costs, with 43 percent of people saying their highest medical bill in the last 12 months was due to the requirement to meet a deductible.

And then there is the medical bill itself, a confusing list of codes for providers and services, up to half of which are wrong, duplicating charges or billing for procedures you didn’t have or doctors you didn’t see, says Caitlin Donovan, senior director of the Patient Advocate Foundation, which helps consumers fight billing problems.



‘I was expecting a bill since we didn’t have insurance, but I didn’t expect it to be so high.’

**Stacie May**, Maine  
*Money earmarked for a house down payment had to cover medical debt after a car accident instead.*

The result? Unless you catch it, you wind up spending even more on your healthcare than needed.

That’s what happened to Phyllis Vance, 59, from Indianapolis, who participated in a national panel of consumers discussing healthcare costs for CR and said she was billed erroneously for a medical service. “I had to call the billing department several times before they realized they’d made an error,” she says. “It took about a month and a half to get it cleared up.”

That doesn’t surprise Donovan. She says it takes case managers at the Patient Advocate Foundation an average of 22 phone calls to resolve each client’s billing problems. “The system is designed to make you want to give up and just pay,” she says.

### The ‘Snowball’ Effect

The effects of medical debt can quickly spread to other areas of your life.

Thomas Draper of Atlanta says that while being treated for lung cancer a decade ago, he had to switch jobs, and the insurance offered by his new employer didn’t cover the cancer hospital where his doctors work. Though his cancer is now in remission, he struggles to pay for his annual imaging tests. The stress in his home over that debt took an emotional toll, he says. “Medical bills definitely contributed to my divorce,” says Draper, who was married for 13 years until he and his ex separated three years ago.

Other consumers, too, describe lives changed and dreams deferred because of medical debt. Another CR panel member, Stacie May from Minot, Maine, spoke of money earmarked for a house down payment that went to medical debt.

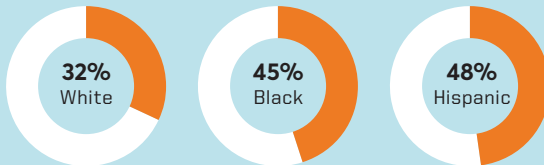
In too many cases, unmanageable medical debt causes what Rademacher calls a financial snowball effect, with one bad financial outcome leading to another, digging people into ever deeper holes.

# HOW HIGH HEALTHCARE COSTS AFFECT AMERICANS

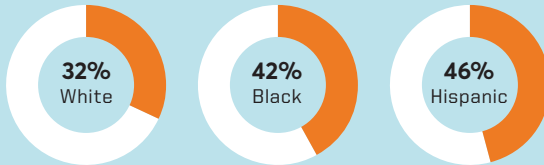
Cutting back on groceries, delaying paying other bills, even limiting their own healthcare in potentially dangerous ways—these are some measures Americans have been forced to take to deal with high medical bills, according to a CR survey of 1,267 U.S. adults who had a medical bill with out-of-pocket costs in the past year. Concerns about being able to afford medical care are especially acute among Blacks and Hispanics, the survey found.

## A BURDEN FELT UNEQUALLY

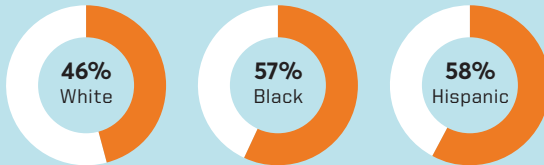
Americans who say they are very or extremely concerned about being able to pay for needed medical care



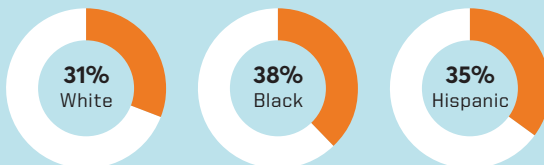
Americans who say they are very or extremely concerned about being able to afford their medical bill with the highest out-of-pocket cost



Americans who say they were surprised by their medical bill with the highest out-of-pocket cost

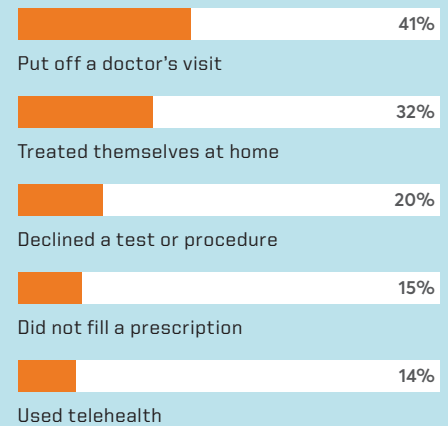


Americans who say they are very or extremely worried about their family's access to affordable health insurance



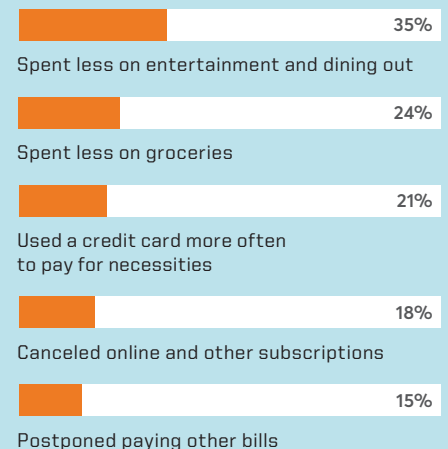
## BIG MEDICAL BILLS LEAD TO COST-CUTTING CHOICES

To save on healthcare in the last 12 months:



## THE FINANCIAL RIPPLE EFFECTS

To pay for medical care costs in the last 12 months:



One particularly painful outcome: when unpaid debt is sent to collections. That can lower a person's credit score, which can make access to future credit harder or more expensive, undermining the ability to buy a car or house, or even rent an apartment.

That's what Nikiesha Barnett of Raleigh, N.C., says happened to her last year. When she tried to sign a lease for an apartment large enough so that her mother could move in with her, she learned her credit had taken a hit because of one unpaid medical bill for less than \$1,200. "I had other bills from

the surgery that I paid, but this one was just unmanageable," she says.

Barrington-Ward, the Atlanta activist who has experienced his own problems with medical debt, says such problems hit Black Americans especially hard, worsening inequities that have undermined their ability to build wealth for generations.

The Urban Institute estimated that in 2015 almost 1 in 3 Black adults had past-due medical bills, compared with 1 in 4 for all populations combined.

That could lead to higher rates of

worry: When asked how concerned people were with being able to pay for medical care, 45 percent of Blacks and 48 percent of Hispanics said they were "extremely" or "very" concerned, compared with 32 percent of whites.

## Financial Stress Can Make You Sick

Regardless of race, medical debt is emotionally draining. And the resulting stress is more than just annoying: It can be harmful to one's health.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, research has linked high-debt stress to ulcers,



## VETERANS SADDLED WITH HIGH MEDICAL DEBT

**YOU MIGHT ASSUME** that military veterans get basically free healthcare from the Department of Veterans Affairs. But for thousands of former and current service members, medical care is still costly. In fact, collectively veterans had almost a billion dollars in medical debt in 2019, estimates Craig Antico, a founder of RIP Medical Debt, a nonprofit debt forgiveness organization. Since 2015, RIP has paid off more than \$100 million in veterans' medical bills, he says.

If a veteran's health concern isn't related to military service or hasn't resulted in their being more than 50 percent

disabled, the vet can be on the hook for copays for care received at the VA. And when the VA doesn't provide a service, it can contract with other providers, including those who provide emergency services, in which case vets may have to cover those costs themselves.

Even veterans who have other insurance may end up with big bills if they go to a non-VA emergency room for a health concern that is not service-related, says Bart Stichman, executive director of the National Veterans Legal Services Program. That's because that other insurance may require them to first meet a deductible

or pay coinsurance, and the VA had previously said it would not reimburse vets for those expenses—even though it would have covered the entire expense if the vet had no other insurance. That practice is now the subject of an ongoing lawsuit.

Even without billing errors, inability to pay has consequences. Last spring, 28-year-old Navy veteran Gary Pressley committed suicide in front of the Carl Vinson VA Medical Center in Dublin, Ga., after not being able to access medical care and his medications, according to the wrongful death claim filed by his mother, Rhonda Wilson. Billing

problems between the provider and the VA meant Pressley couldn't be seen by his doctor, a problem exacerbated by the fact that "Gary didn't make a lot of money and lacked the resources to pay separately to see his doctor or find care elsewhere," says Peter Bertling, Wilson's attorney.

To help stem a rising tide of veteran suicides, a bill passed by the Senate this year would give the VA greater resources to help provide mental healthcare to those who had been in the military, including local treatment options when needed. Another bill now in the Senate would prohibit the VA from collecting debts from veterans during the COVID-19 crisis.

If you or a family member is a veteran and needs assistance, contact the National Veterans Legal Services Program (202-265-8305 or [nvlsp.org](http://nvlsp.org)).

digestive problems, and impaired sleep. But chronic stress over money might affect health in less obvious, even more serious ways. The connection is so concerning that two regional Federal Reserve banks—in San Francisco and Atlanta—have looked at how medical debt impacts the health of U.S. citizens.

The San Francisco review, citing previously published medical research, noted that adrenaline and cortisol released by the body in response to chronic stress linked to finances can elevate blood pressure and heart rate, and impair memory and immune function.

In an even more robust 2016 analysis, the Atlanta study used credit histories to link high debt loads and debt delinquency with mortality. In other words, the bigger a person's unpaid debt, the higher their risk of dying early. Further, they found that a 100-point improvement in a person's credit score is associated with a 4 percent decline in their risk of death.

## Big Bills, Less Care

The high cost of medical care also contributes to poor health by scaring people away from needed care. In CR's survey, 20 percent of Americans who had received a medical bill with out-of-pocket costs declined to have a test or procedure because of the expense, and 15 percent didn't fill a prescription.

High deductibles pose particular barriers. A 2019 Health Affairs study of almost 600,000 low-income women found that those who developed breast cancer and had deductibles of \$1,000 or more waited an average of 8.7 months longer to start chemotherapy compared with women who had deductibles of \$500 or less.

Of course, healthcare is often put off because of a lack of any health insurance at all, a problem that impacts people of color most. And access to healthcare is worse in states



'With everything going on, it was like somebody had my back for once.'

**Thomas Draper**, Georgia  
*A cancer survivor, he got his life back on track after a nonprofit unexpectedly paid off his medical debt.*

that haven't expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, as many states in the south, which have large Black populations, have failed to do, Aspen Institute's Rademacher says.

Delaying medical care can mean getting sicker, according to a 2019 Kaiser Family Foundation survey. It found that of the half of U.S. adults who said they or a family member put off some sort of dental or other healthcare in the past year because of cost, 1 in 8 said their medical condition worsened as a result.

The high cost of healthcare is such an impediment that in January the American College of Physicians called for an end to high deductibles for low-income people and those with special needs. If there must be one, the ACP wants cost-sharing reduced or

eliminated for important services so that more people have access to care without the concern over cost.

## Getting Help

Patricia Hedgepeth, the Michigan teacher, got some assistance from the Patient Advocate Foundation. A case manager there helped her negotiate her \$16,000 bill down to \$2,500. "I'm not sure what I would have done without them," she says.

And earlier this year, both Draper, the Atlanta cancer survivor, and Barnett, the North Carolinian who struggled to find an apartment, got help from an unexpected source. They received letters from RIP Medical Debt, a nonprofit that uses donations to pay off overdue medical bills from collection agencies.

Both were told that their debt had been forgiven. "During the pandemic and everything that was going on, it was like somebody had my back for once," Draper says. Barnett, who had the delinquent bill removed from her credit report, was equally relieved. "There are no words to describe how happy I was," she says.

Though most people can't rely on RIP Medical Debt to save the day, there are a number of other solutions people can turn to now to get help. (See "How to Fight Big Medical Bills," on page 45.)

Equally important are legislative efforts to protect consumers, says Chuck Bell, programs director of advocacy at Consumer Reports. One partial solution in the works is legislation, recently introduced in Congress, called the Medical Debt Relief Act, which would keep any unpaid medical bills off a person's credit report for a year. Another is legislation to ban surprise medical bills, which Bell says is currently pending before Congress.

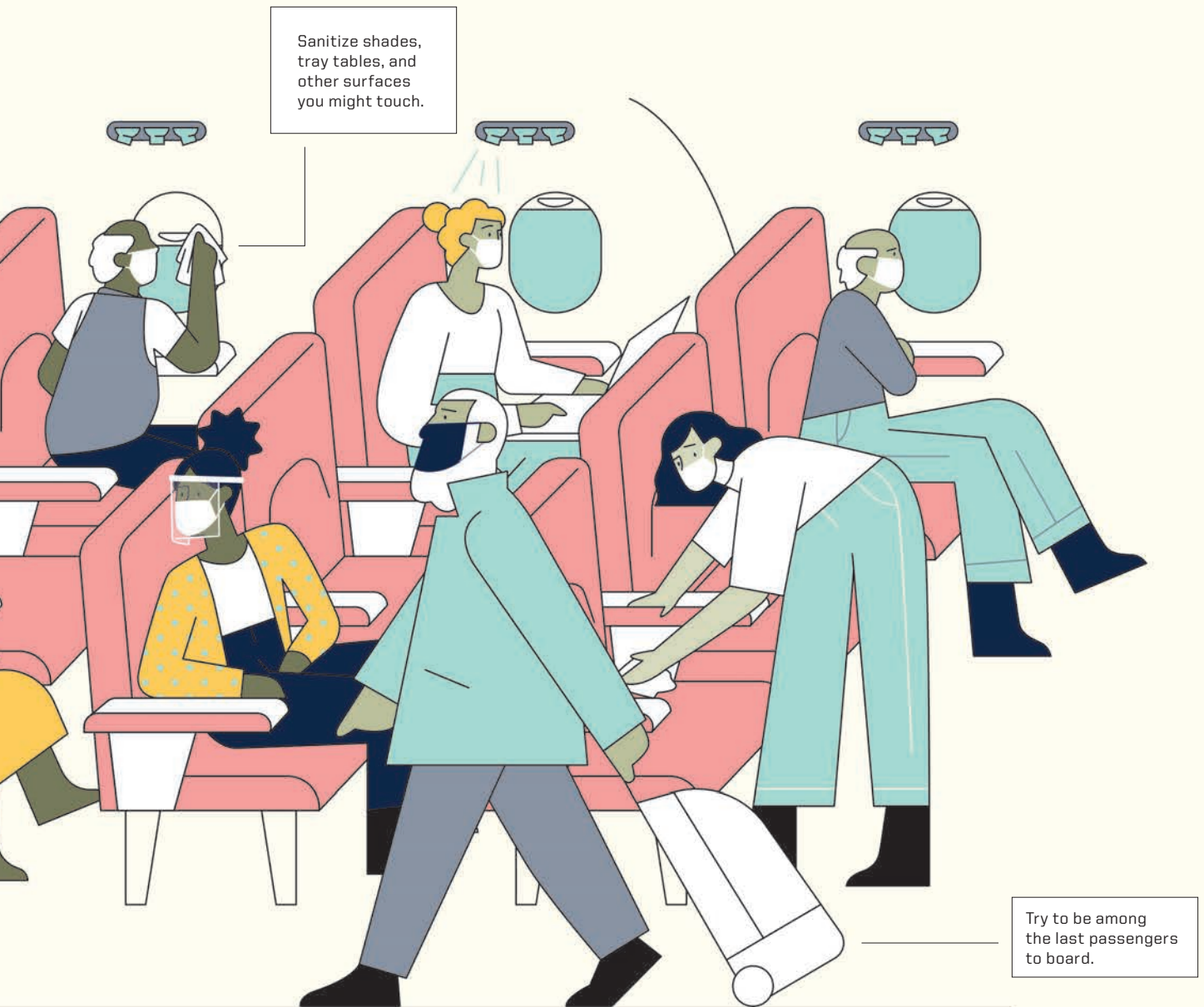
Such systemic fixes would go a long way to protect consumers, improving their financial and even physical health, Rademacher says. "No one wants to make the choice between paying down medical debt or paying their rent."





# YOUR COVID-19 TRAVEL TOOLKIT

How to protect yourself and others whether you're taking a plane, train, bus, or automobile. **BY KEVIN DOYLE**



**TRAVEL CAN BROADEN** our horizons, enrich our lives, and, especially during the holidays, reunite us with loved ones. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), travel also increases our likelihood of getting—and spreading—COVID-19.

While some Americans feel ready to take to the skies, rails, and roadways this season, the risk may be too high for others, including older people, smokers, and those with certain pre-existing conditions, says Ravina Kullar, PharmD, an infectious disease specialist and spokesperson for the

Infectious Diseases Society of America. Those not at high risk should consider the possible threat they pose to the people they're visiting, Kullar says.

In general, all travelers need to practice basic safety strategies, such as wearing a mask, maintaining physical distance, sanitizing frequently touched surfaces, and cleaning their hands often and well. (That means washing them with soap and water for a minimum of 20 seconds or using hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol.) Here, experts help you assess—and reduce—the risk of common modes of travel.

## **AIR TRAVEL**

Airplanes may seem like the perfect environment for spreading germs. But because most jets are equipped with powerful HEPA air filtration systems and cabin air is replaced with fresh air every few minutes, experts say they're probably safer than many other enclosed environments.

Even so, before booking a ticket, ask what the airline is doing to reduce passenger risk and encourage safety measures, such as mask wearing and physical distancing. Delta, for example, says it will block middle seats through

at least Jan. 6; Southwest will do the same through at least Oct. 31.

Does the airline require masks? If so, will crew members prevent someone from boarding who refuses to wear one? Also ask if the aircraft you'll be on has HEPA filters, if surfaces are wiped down between flights, and if the plane is thoroughly cleaned overnight.

For the flight, take along cleaning supplies like disinfecting wipes or cleaning solutions with at least 60 percent alcohol, hand sanitizer (up to 12 ounces is allowed), and several masks. A face shield worn in addition to a mask may help protect your eyes from potential infection and deter you from face-touching, says Maria L. Alcaide, MD, director of infectious diseases research at the University of Miami.

At the airport, put on a mask and practice physical distancing, says Aaron Glatt, MD, chair of medicine at Mount Sinai South Nassau Hospital in Oceanside, N.Y. Just before boarding, use the airport restroom, which may be safer than the airplane's. And consider waiting to be among the last to board to reduce the number of travelers passing you on the way to their seats. (To limit passenger contact, carriers like United, Delta, and JetBlue are boarding by row, starting at the back of planes.) Some experts think that a window seat may reduce risk because of its distance from passengers and crew members walking in the aisle.

Before settling in, disinfect anything you might touch: armrests, tray table,

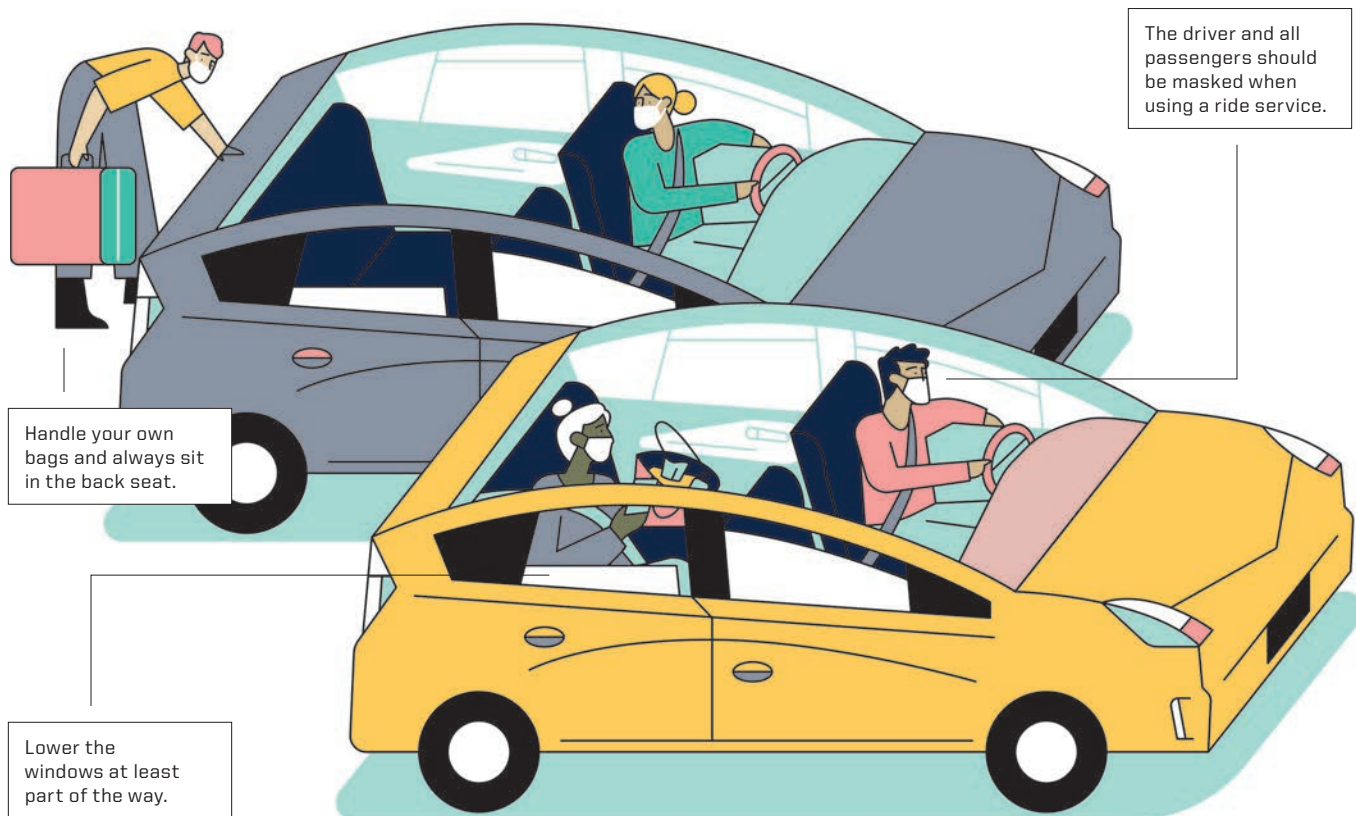
window shade, and air nozzle, then sanitize your hands. While it's safest to keep your mask on for the entire flight, Alcaide and Glatt say that removing it briefly for a snack poses a low risk.

"Try to avoid common areas, like those near bathrooms and galleys," Alcaide says. Aiming the purified air from the air vent at your face might help keep viruses at bay, too.

If you have to use the bathroom, remain masked, disinfect surfaces and knobs before touching them, and sanitize your hands after exiting.

### TRAINS

Traveling by train presents risks including being in close proximity to many others, but Amtrak has taken



Handle your own bags and always sit in the back seat.

The driver and all passengers should be masked when using a ride service.

Lower the windows at least part of the way.

measures to reduce the likelihood of coronavirus transmission. Crew and passengers must wear masks, trains are carrying fewer people, and café cars offer carryout only. “I would say Amtrak’s setup is about the best you could do,” Glatt notes.

Passengers can also put belongings on seats next to them to prevent anyone from sitting there. “This way, we’re encouraging more physical distancing,” says Jason Abrams, an Amtrak spokesperson, adding that the climate control system replaces the air in train cars every 5 minutes.

At stations and on the train, use touchless options for payments and opening doors. The CDC advises avoiding high-touch surfaces, such as those in restrooms, along with ticket machines, touch screens, turnstiles, and handrails, and cleaning your hands promptly if you can’t. Try to leave a row of seats between yourself and others. Glatt suggests disinfecting the arms of your seat, the tray table, and anything else you might touch. Clean your hands after disembarking.

For longer trips, consider a roomette, which is a private compartment with a door, individual climate control, and seats that convert into beds. “Having your own room on the train is ideal,” Glatt says.

## BUSES

Like planes and trains, buses bring people close together for extended periods. “The level of risk will depend largely on the length of time spent on the bus, how crowded it is, how the air is filtered, and whether or not everyone is wearing a mask,” Glatt says.

Ask what safety protocols the bus company you’re considering has in place. Greyhound, for instance, requires passengers to wear masks and says it will deny travel to anyone who doesn’t comply. The company also says the HVAC systems on its buses



## HOTEL, MOTEL, AIRBNB? 6 TIPS FOR SAFER STAYS

If your travel plans require you to stay overnight or longer at a hotel or motel or in a short-term rental, the following steps may reduce your chances of being exposed to COVID-19 and help you feel more at ease.

### KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT.

Home rentals like those through Airbnb and Vrbo require no interaction in lobbies or other public spaces. “It’s the same as your own home, where you can control all the exposures” once you settle in, says Jack Caravanos, DrPH, a professor of environmental public health sciences at New York University. That said, many hotels and motels now require staff and guests to wear masks in indoor public areas, offer contactless check-in and checkout, and encourage social distancing. Read reviews of anyplace you’re considering to see what past guests say about cleanliness. You can also reach out to hosts of short-term rentals to find out how they’re limiting risk, says Chekitan Dev, PhD, an expert on hospitality branding at Cornell University’s School of Hotel Administration. An evasive reply should give you pause.

### GET INFO ON CLEANING

**POLICIES.** Airbnb has a voluntary program whose participants use approved cleaning products and set up 24-hour vacancy periods between bookings. Hotels may regularly sanitize high-touch spots in rooms, and some have suspended daily housekeeping to further cut in-room transmission risks.

### BRING YOUR BEDDING.

Ravina Kullar, PhD, an epidemiologist, recommends using your own bedding at hotels and motels to ensure that it’s clean. “If I travel on business, I’ll be taking along my own sheets and pillowcases just in case,” she says. “You want to be overcautious rather than not cautious enough.”

### SANITIZE ON ARRIVAL.

Before unpacking, disinfect high-touch surfaces like those in bathrooms as well as counters, doorknobs, faucets, and light switches. Don’t forget small objects like keys or pens you may find in your hotel room. Open the windows to allow fresh air to circulate. At hotels where windows may be sealed shut, “you should at least confirm with management that the climate-control systems have been inspected recently and are regularly maintained,” Kullar says. Clean vending machine buttons and any other high-touch surfaces in public areas before using them.

### MAINTAIN PHYSICAL DISTANCE.

Minimize your time in areas that could lead to contact with strangers closer than 6 feet, including lobbies, dining and reception areas, game rooms, and fitness centers. Consider eating meals in your room or outdoors.

**AVOID ELEVATORS.** Try taking the stairs instead (ask for a room on a lower floor if that’s helpful). If you have to use an elevator, do so alone or with others from your household.



continuously refresh the air, and that buses are sanitized before and after each trip with CDC-recommended disinfectants. But Greyhound doesn't limit the number of passengers, so you could find yourself elbow-to-elbow with a stranger.

Experts recommend the same safety protocols you'd use on a train. "Be extra careful in the bathroom," Glatt says. "Keep your mask on, wipe down surfaces before touching them, and wash your hands thoroughly or use hand sanitizer after you leave." A face shield may offer additional protection.

## RENTAL CARS, TAXIS, AND MORE

"If you're renting a car and traveling alone or just with your family, I don't think there's really much to be concerned about," Glatt says, noting that many rental companies are now deep-cleaning vehicles between customers. If you want to be extra cautious, swab the steering wheel, shifter and knobs, doorframe and handles, seat-belt buckles, and other high-touch surfaces with a disinfectant wipe or cleaning solution with at least 60 percent alcohol.

Experts also recommend washing your hands before driving, and opening the windows to air out the vehicle. To avoid lines and contact with rental agents, consider programs such as Hertz Gold and Avis Preferred, which allow you to go straight to a waiting vehicle.

When refilling the gas tank, wear latex or nitrile gloves or use a paper towel to grip the pump handle and press the keys. Clean your hands afterward. At rest stops, wear a mask, clean your hands after touching any surface, and eat in your car or outside, away from other travelers.

The best ways to minimize risks in taxis and other for-hire vehicles is to make sure that you, other passengers,



## AVOID PENALTIES WHEN PLANS CHANGE

In recent months travel companies have adopted a range of policies regarding refunds, cancellations, and changes, and some are more accommodating than others, says William J. McGee, CR's aviation adviser. To protect yourself in case your plans change:

**KNOW THE RULES.** Hotels and car-rental agencies are usually fairly flexible if you cancel a reservation before their deadline. But the policies of companies such as Airbnb and Vrbo often vary from property to property, says John Breyault, vice president, public policy, telecommunications, and fraud at the National Consumers League.

**CHANGE YOUR FLIGHT RATHER THAN CANCELING IT.** In general, airlines refund the cost of a ticket only if they cancel a flight. But American, Delta, United, and other airlines are now waiving change fees on domestic flights. So instead of canceling, change your ticket.

**AVOID PAYING WHEN YOU BOOK.** Car-rental companies and hotels may offer lower rates if you pay in advance. But right now, any modest break might not be worth the added risk.

**DON'T RELY ON TRAVEL INSURANCE.** It might not cover a COVID-19-related cancellation, McGee says.

and the driver wear masks, and that the climate control system is set to draw in fresh air and the windows are open at least partly. The latter may help to rapidly dissipate the tiny particles (which can carry viruses) created when we cough or speak. "We found that opening the rear windows very quickly reduced the level of aerosol in the car running at typical city speeds," says Jack Caravanos, DrPH, a professor of environmental public health sciences at New York University's School of Global Public Health, who recently researched aerosol levels in several car models.

Uber and Lyft currently require drivers and passengers to wear masks and encourage drivers to keep cars clean. Still, it's wise to sanitize your hands after touching objects like seat-belt buckles, door handles, and window buttons, and after you get out. You should also handle your own bags and sit in the back seat, says Caravanos, whose research found that plastic barriers between the front and back seats may further cut risk. "If you're really concerned," he says, "the right rear seat, furthest from the driver, might be the best place to sit."

## CRUISES

Currently, the CDC recommends that U.S. travelers defer cruise travel because of the risk of COVID-19 transmission on ships. The State Department also advises that Americans avoid cruises in case outbreaks leave them quarantined in other countries.

While some overseas cruises have resumed, traveling from U.S. ports has been voluntarily suspended through at least Oct. 31, according to the Cruise Lines International Association, an industry group. Some lines have halted sailings for even longer. "I don't think it's going to be safe to get on a cruise any time this year," says Kullar, the infectious diseases specialist.



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

# ROAD REPORT

## TIPS FROM OUR TEST TRACK

### A Heads-Up on Headlights

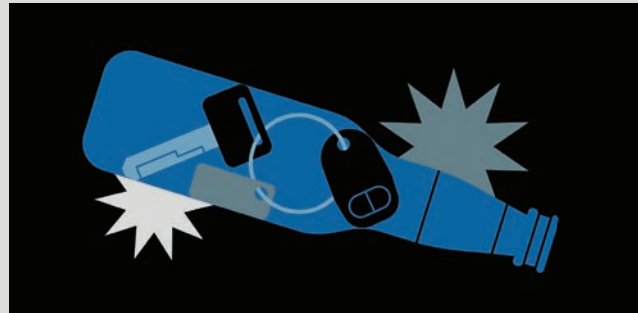


Turning on your headlights in bad weather makes your

car more visible to other motorists and is required by law in some states. But if you leave your headlights set in automatic mode, you should know that they don't always go on when you think they should. Headlights won't necessarily go on in rain or snow because they rely on light sensors to turn on and off automatically. And just because your dash lights and daytime running lights (DRL) are illuminated doesn't mean your taillights are on. A dash symbol like the one above will let you know when your low-beam headlights and taillights are on. If you aren't sure, override the auto mode and turn them on manually.

## AHEAD OF THE CURVE

### Tech That Prevents Drunk Driving Could Save Thousands of Lives



A new study from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) estimates that equipping all cars with alcohol-detection technology could save more than 9,000 lives annually. One technology being tested automatically detects a driver's blood-alcohol level by analyzing the air around them (there's no need to blow into anything) and prevents the car from moving if the driver is over the limit. "Drunk driving prevention technology can save lives and should be required in some form on all new cars," says William Wallace, CR's manager of safety policy.

## THE VITAL STATISTIC

# \$2,510

Median price increase to equip one of the 11 top-selling U.S. auto models with optional blind spot warning. CR is advocating for this and other lifesaving systems to come as standard equipment on all vehicles.

Source: CR report "A High Price on Safety."

## RECALL



### Ford Edge and Lincoln MKX

Ford announced that it will recall 488,594 Ford Edge and Lincoln MKX SUVs because of flexible front brake jounce hoses that can rupture and allow brake fluid to leak out. This can potentially cause an unsafe decrease in stopping ability. Affected Ford Edge vehicles are from model years 2015-2018; Lincoln MKX SUVs are from model years 2016-2018.

**WHAT TO DO:** Ford dealers will replace the front brake jounce hoses with new hoses made of a revised braided material free of charge. Owners may contact Ford customer service at 866-436-7332.

## ASK OUR EXPERTS

### Should I use cruise control in the rain?



Cruise control can make driving easier by holding the car at a steady speed. But when roads get slick, you're safer controlling your speed yourself. In wet conditions, when gentle brake and throttle control are needed, a human touch may be

better at that than even modern adaptive cruise control systems, particularly when responding to hydroplaning. The safest way to deal with a loss of traction is to gently let up the throttle and coast until you regain control.

# New Ways Carmakers Are Getting You More MPG

CR experts highlight gas-saving technologies you might find in your next car and explain how each can reduce fuel consumption, as well as the potential trade-offs in the driving experience.

by Benjamin Preston



**A**LTHOUGH MOST automakers say all-electric vehicles are the future, their engineers also have been busy making fuel-efficiency improvements to the gasoline-powered cars, SUVs, and trucks that most U.S. drivers still rely on. For a variety of reasons, such as consumer demand and government fuel and emissions standards, automakers have been forced to invent gas-saving innovations as they try to squeeze out incremental

improvements to fuel economy.

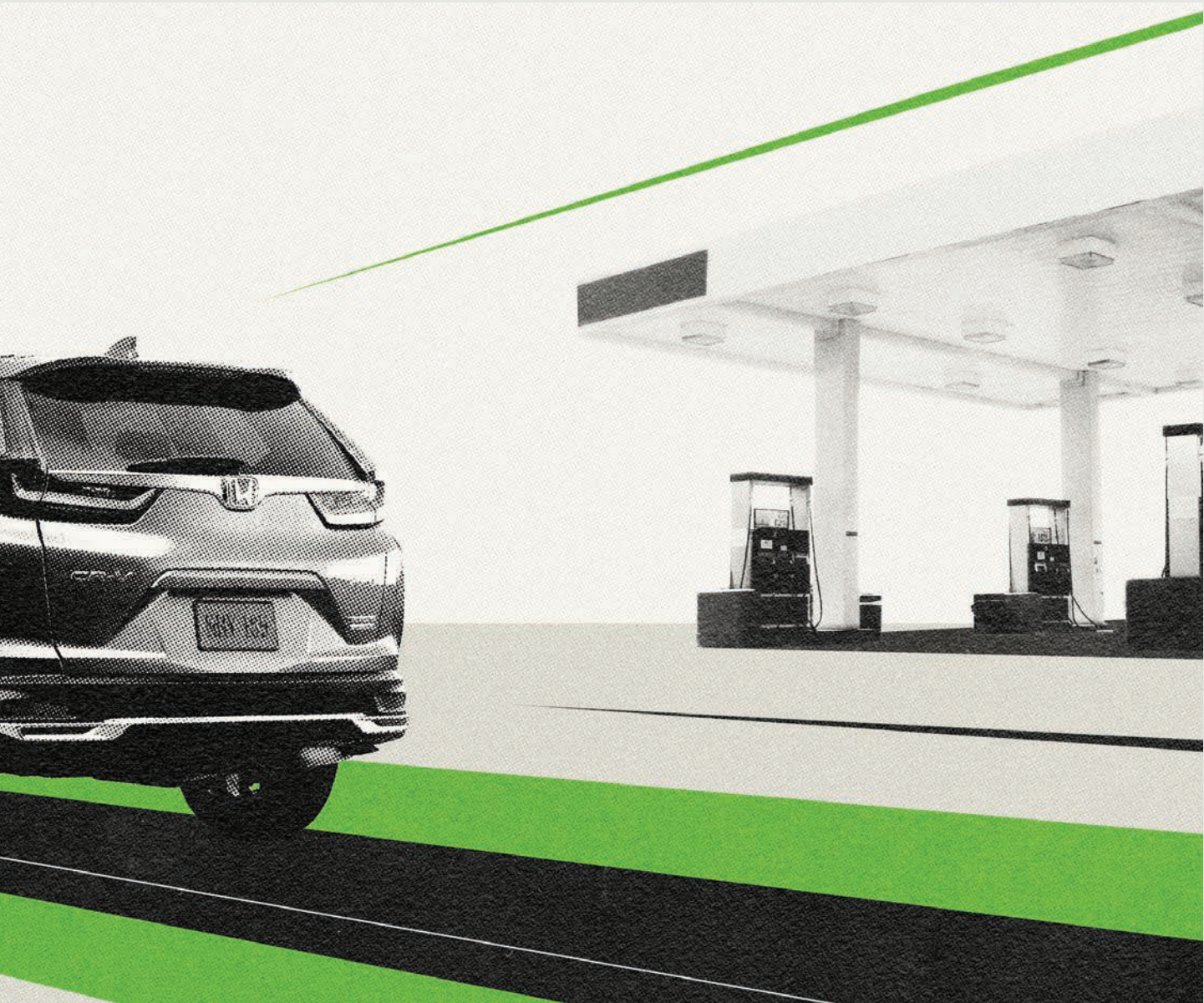
Consumers shopping for new cars now face a hodgepodge of these innovations, such as gasoline direct fuel injection, automatic transmissions with more gear ratios, turbocharged engines, and stop/start systems that shut off the engine instead of allowing it to idle. Few of these technologies significantly increase fuel efficiency or reduce tailpipe emissions on their own, but working together they can have a cumulative effect.

To help car shoppers navigate these fuel-saving features, CR talked

with manufacturers, experts, and consumers to find out exactly how each technology works, and combined those insights with observations from our own testers, who have evaluated these features in real-world driving conditions. We've found that some of these technologies, such as turbocharged engines, can end up compromising drivability and sometimes cause reliability problems.

"There are no free rides in this business," says Gabe Shenhar, associate director of CR's auto test program. "Drivers might find the stop/





start annoying, or turbo lag could make a car hesitant to accelerate. Aerodynamic styling might result in a lower, curvier car that compromises visibility and ease of access.”

In the charts and illustrations on these pages, you can discover which vehicles deliver the most miles per gallon and learn the benefits of each gas-saving technology, as well as any potential drawbacks. You can arm yourself with this information as you shop for a new or used vehicle.

Most of the highest-mpg vehicles we highlight are hybrids—meaning they

combine internal combustion engines and electric motors to save fuel. Most also have electronic continuously variable transmissions (eCVTs), which can save energy by regulating engine speed. A few of the models on our list have traditional gas-powered engines and achieve strong fuel economy without using hybrid technology.

We do not highlight any battery-only electric vehicles, called EVs, because they don’t use any gasoline and currently represent only a sliver of the U.S. new car market. Diesel-powered cars also get good fuel economy, but

they’re not on our list because they’re not necessarily cleaner burning, and the selection among U.S. passenger vehicles has dwindled.

The newest gas-saving innovations, taken together, have made it possible for a pickup truck to achieve highway fuel economy in the mid-20s, to say nothing of the many SUVs and cars that now push into the 30-plus-mpg range. The gains have shown up across the board: According to the Environmental Protection Agency, average fuel efficiency for new cars in the U.S. improved to



a record 25.1 mpg in 2018 and was projected to reach 25.5 mpg in 2019. In the process, automakers also have decreased harmful tailpipe emissions by about 1.7 percent—a new low that has environmental and public health benefits.

“When car manufacturers report an increase in mpg, it’s due to the collective use of multiple technologies,” says Bassem Ramadan, PhD, head of the mechanical engineering department at Kettering University in Flint, Mich. “There is no single technology that is or will be

the silver bullet that will dramatically improve fuel efficiency and reduce emissions at the same time.”

### What About EVs?

So why all this innovation with gas-powered engines even though electric vehicles clearly outperform all gas-powered cars when it comes to energy efficiency? The case for them is strong: EVs use no gasoline and emit zero tailpipe emissions. They can be quick and very satisfying to drive. And an exclusive CR analysis shows big savings on maintenance and operating

costs over time when compared with traditional gasoline-powered vehicles. (See “EVs Offer Big Savings Over Gas-Powered Vehicles,” on the facing page.) The answer is that EVs are not yet a solution for many drivers and are up against several obstacles that so far have held back wider adoption: Long charging times, limited (but ever-increasing) battery range, and bigger price tags. So far, there hasn’t been much market demand for EVs, which, along with plug-in hybrids, accounted for less than 2 percent of U.S. vehicle sales last year, despite the increasing

## FUEL ECONOMY REVOLUTION

**MOST VEHICLES SOLD** in the U.S. are still powered by gasoline internal combustion engines—with turbocharged models on the rise—but that is changing as more gas-electric hybrids, plug-in hybrids, and battery electrics hit the market. Here are the various technologies under the hoods of today’s most efficient vehicles.



### SMALL-DISPLACEMENT TURBO ENGINE

Turbocharging boosts power by pushing more air in, allowing the engine to burn more fuel. This generates more power from a given engine size, giving on-demand acceleration and improved fuel economy under a light load.  
**POTENTIAL DRAWBACK** Uneven acceleration, or turbo lag, when starting out.



### MILD HYBRID

Provides some electric assist to a traditional gas-powered engine but does not provide electric-only driving. The system smooths out the stop/start feature (see page 60) by keeping accessories running when the engine shuts down to save fuel.  
**POTENTIAL DRAWBACK** The name might suggest more fuel economy gains than these cars can deliver.



### HYBRID

Combines a combustion engine with an electric motor (or motors) to improve fuel economy. The engine, along with braking and coasting, automatically recharges the battery. These systems typically provide minimal electric-only driving.  
**POTENTIAL DRAWBACKS** Added weight and mechanical complexity.



### PLUG-IN HYBRID

Like a hybrid, but it has a larger battery and increased range with electric-only driving, significantly reducing fuel consumption for daily trips if charged often. The battery is recharged by plugging the car into an outlet.  
**POTENTIAL DRAWBACKS** Added weight, and large battery can steal cargo space. Need to frequently charge to get full benefit.



### ELECTRIC (EV)

A high-voltage electric motor—or multiple motors—replaces the combustion engine for propulsion, and a rechargeable battery replaces the gas tank. EVs don’t use any gasoline, and they operate quietly and cost less to run.  
**POTENTIAL DRAWBACKS** Shorter range compared with a gas-powered car, and long charging times.

popularity of the technology.

“Automakers have been slow to build EVs in part because, until recently, battery costs have been quite high,” says Chris Harto, senior transportation policy analyst at CR. “That is rapidly changing. Expect to see a lot more compelling EVs over the next few years.”

Based on a flurry of automaker announcements, it’s clear that the industry has plans to move toward more electric models. For example, BMW and Mercedes-Benz—leaders in automotive research and development—say they plan to reach 50 percent electrification across their lineups by 2030. And certain other brands, such as Volvo, have pledged to eventually have an EV option for every model they offer. Some newer automakers—notably Tesla—offer only EVs.

At the same time, Tesla and other companies have been building out national public charging networks, with a growing number of DC fast-charging stations that can make on-the-road charging more palatable for drivers.

As of 2019, there were almost 27,000 public and private charging-station locations across the U.S., with over 85,000 outlets—about double the numbers from 2015, according to the federal Alternative Fuels Data Center. Depending on the battery and charging equipment, DC fast-chargers can add 60 to 80 miles to EV range in 20 minutes, about the time it takes to eat a quick meal on the road.

“The reality is that most of the effort on internal combustion engines is starting to wind down in favor of electric development,” says Sam Abuelsamid, principal research analyst at Guidehouse Insights, a market research firm. “Much of the restructuring we’ve seen at automakers and suppliers in the last few years has involved getting rid of engineers with engine expertise in favor of more software and electrical engineers. That’s where all the major action is today.”



## EVs OFFER BIG SAVINGS OVER GAS-POWERED VEHICLES

Battery-electric plug-in vehicles (EVs) are more efficient and usually cost less to run than comparable gasoline- and hybrid-powered vehicles. For many consumers, the downside of buying an EV is the up-front purchase price. But a new CR analysis shows that EV owners save thousands on repair and maintenance costs over time compared with consumers who

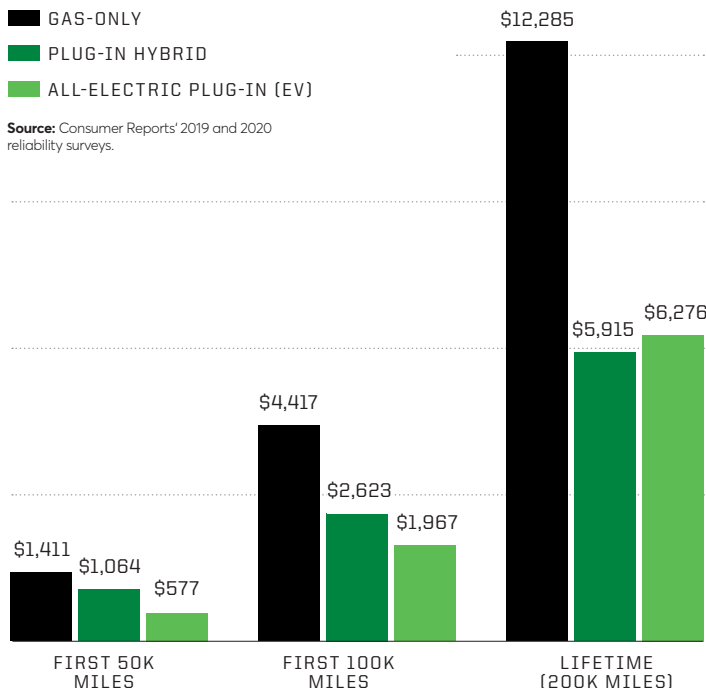
own cars with gas-powered engines. EVs require less frequent maintenance because their electric motors and other drivetrain components have fewer moving parts. As a result, manufacturers tend to offer longer factory warranties on EVs.

“With an EV, you still change the brakes, tires, and wipers, but there is no engine oil, timing belt, or head gasket,” says Gabe Shenhar, associate director of CR’s auto test program.

EV maintenance costs are likely to decrease further in the coming years. The Department of Energy is working with the auto industry to bring down the cost of batteries to less than \$80 per kilowatt-hour, from their current price of \$156 per kWh.

The chart below compares the average cost of repair and maintenance for EVs, plug-in hybrids, and traditional gas-powered cars at various stages in their life spans up to 200,000 miles.

POWER STRUGGLE: ELECTRIC VS. GAS MAINTENANCE COSTS



Source: Consumer Reports’ 2019 and 2020 reliability surveys.



## FUEL-SAVING TECH

**CR EXPERTS HIGHLIGHT** key gas-saving innovations you might find in your next car. They explain how each works, along with the potential drawbacks for your driving experience.

### 8-, 9- & 10-SPEED AUTOMATIC TRANSMISSIONS

A wider array of gears reduces engine speed during highway driving to improve efficiency and save fuel. This also can provide quicker acceleration.

**POTENTIAL DRAWBACKS**

In some cases, downshifting can feel slow, and frequent shifting at lower speeds can feel clunky.

### ACTIVE GRILLE SHUTTERS

These devices close off a portion of the grille opening and create fuel efficiency by improving aerodynamics and balancing engine cooling needs. They also help the engine warm up more quickly.

**POTENTIAL DRAWBACK**

Added complexity could affect reliability.

### AERODYNAMICS

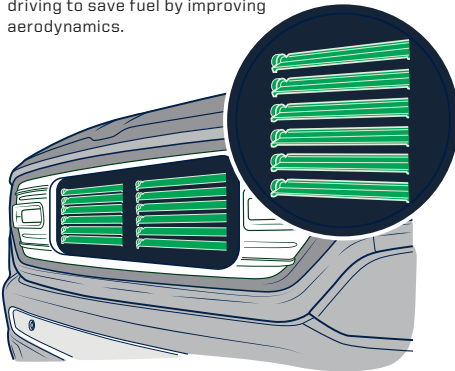
Sleeker body designs that reduce drag can improve fuel economy. Sedans are usually more aerodynamic than large, boxy SUVs and trucks. Improvements in this area can result in less wind noise and sleeker, sportier designs.

**POTENTIAL DRAWBACK**

Rakish styling can squeeze interior space and impede visibility.

### ACTIVE GRILLE SHUTTERS

The shutters depicted in the close-up image are closed during driving to save fuel by improving aerodynamics.



### CONTINUOUSLY VARIABLE TRANSMISSION (CVT)

Replaces traditional transmission gears with a setup that makes continuous adjustments to the "gear" ratio, smoothing operation and keeping the engine at optimal operating speed.

**POTENTIAL DRAWBACK**

More pronounced engine noise.

### CYLINDER DEACTIVATION

Cuts off the fuel supply to specific cylinders when full engine power is not required, improving fuel economy for larger engines.

**POTENTIAL DRAWBACK**

Some early systems can have mild vibrations when cylinders activate or deactivate.

### ELECTRIC STEERING

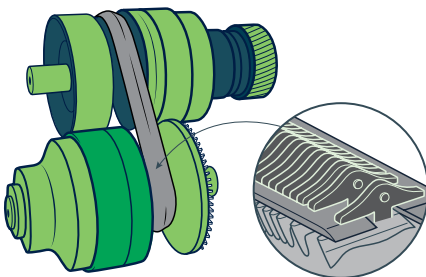
A small electric motor provides power assist to the steering mechanism in place of an engine-driven hydraulic pump. Reduced load on the engine brings down fuel consumption by about 5 percent.

**POTENTIAL DRAWBACK**

Reduced steering feedback can diminish road feel.

### CONTINUOUSLY VARIABLE TRANSMISSION (CVT)

The steel teeth in the image below are part of a special belt that expands and contracts in a CVT to replace traditional gear-shifting.



### LOW-ROLLING- RESISTANCE TIRES

Special rubber compounds and tread designs can reduce the friction generated from a rolling tire, reducing the energy needed to drive the car forward.

**POTENTIAL DRAWBACK**

The compounds in these tires can increase wet stopping distances.

### REGENERATIVE BRAKING

Found on hybrid and electric vehicles, this system converts energy from braking and coasting into electricity, which can help recharge the battery. This provides increased electric range and fuel economy (on hybrids).

**POTENTIAL DRAWBACK**

The system can affect coasting ability and brake pedal feel.

### STOP/START

The feature saves fuel by automatically shutting off the engine when the vehicle comes to a stop to avoid excessive idling at red lights or in standstill traffic. The engine restarts automatically.

**POTENTIAL DRAWBACKS**

Can cause hesitation and shudder on restart, and compromise the performance of A/C and other accessories during shutdown.

**Ratings** > **Fuel-Efficient Vehicles** Among fuel-thrifty cars, trucks, and SUVs, there are plenty of safe, reliable options.

Make + Model	Fuel Economy		Overall Score	Vehicle Characteristics					Gas-Saving Fuel Technologies		
	Overall mpg	City/highway mpg		0-60 mph, sec.	Curb weight, lb.	Engine	Horsepower	Transmission	Direct injection	Stop/start	Coefficient of drag
<b>CARS</b>											
✔ Honda Insight (hybrid)	54	44/62	77	8.7	2,975	1.5H	151	eCVT		●	0.27
Hyundai Ioniq Hybrid	52	42/60	71	9.9	3,070	1.6H	139	6 DCT	●	●	0.24
✔ Toyota Prius (hybrid)	52	43/59	79	10.3	3,080	1.8H	121	eCVT		●	0.24
✔ Toyota Corolla Hybrid	48	37/59	76	10.3	3,045	1.8H	121	eCVT		●	0.28
✔ Honda Accord Hybrid	47	40/52	82	7.4	3,360	2.0H	212	eCVT		●	0.27
✔ Toyota Camry Hybrid	47	39/53	86	7.8	3,505	2.5H	208	eCVT	●	●	0.27
Kia Niro Hybrid	43	33/52	63	9.9	3,155	1.6H	139	6 DCT	●	●	0.29
✔ Toyota Avalon Hybrid	42	32/52	93	8.3	3,680	2.5H	215	eCVT	●	●	0.27
✔ Toyota Corolla Hatchback	36	24/51	76	8.7	3,020	2.0L	168	CVT	●		0.32
✔ Kia Forte	34	22/49	66	8.3	2,805	2.0L	147	CVT			0.27
Volkswagen Jetta	34	21/54	57	9.0	3,065	1.4T	147	8 AT	●	●	0.27
<b>SUVs</b>											
✔ Lexus UX250h	37	32/42	80	8.8	3,570	2.0H	175	eCVT	●	●	0.33
✔ Toyota RAV4 Hybrid	37	32/41	75	7.8	3,745	2.5H	219	eCVT	●	●	0.32
✔ Honda CR-V Hybrid	35	32/37	75	8.5	3,675	2.0H	212	eCVT		●	0.32
✔ Toyota Highlander Hybrid	35	27/41	85	8.0	4,455	2.5H	243	eCVT	●	●	0.33
Ford Escape Hybrid	34	30/38	67	8.3	3,775	2.5H	198	eCVT		●	0.32
Honda HR-V	29	20/39	66	10.5	3,045	1.8L	141	CVT			0.32
✔ Lexus NX300h	29	23/34	78	8.9	4,165	2.5H	194	eCVT		●	0.34
✔ Lexus RX450h	29	24/33	82	7.5	4,800	3.5H	308	eCVT	●	●	0.33
✔ Subaru Crosstrek	29	20/39	85	10.2	3,190	2.0L	152	CVT	●	●	0.35
✔ Honda CR-V	28	20/37	77	8.2	3,450	1.5T	190	CVT	●	●	0.33
Kia Seltos	28	20/35	68	9.0	3,120	2.0L	146	CVT		●	0.35
✔ Mazda CX-3	28	20/36	73	9.6	2,945	2.0L	148	6 AT	●	●	0.32
✔ Subaru Forester	28	20/38	84	9.2	3,485	2.5L	182	CVT	●	●	0.34
<b>FULL-SIZED PICKUPS</b>											
Ford F-150	19	13/26	57	6.8	5,065	2.7T	325	10 AT	●	●	0.39
Chevrolet Silverado 1500	17	11/24	55	6.9	5,130	5.3L	355	8 AT	●	●	0.39
Ram 1500	17	11/24	58	7.1	5,355	5.7L	395	8 AT		●	0.36
Nissan Titan	16	11/22	58	6.7	5,770	5.6L	400	9 AT	●		0.38
Toyota Tundra	15	10/20	62	6.7	5,740	5.7L	381	6 AT			0.38

**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. Models are listed in order of overall fuel economy. Digital or All Access

members can go to [CR.org/cars](https://www.cars.com) for complete ratings.



**Key for Engines:** H hybrid; L liters; T turbo.  
**Key for Transmissions:** AT automatic transmission; CVT continuously variable transmission; eCVT electronic continuously variable transmission; DCT dual clutch transmission.





## Best Used Cars Under \$10,000



**BUYING A USED CAR** is a great way to save money, as long as the vehicle is safe and reliable. The cars and SUVs listed below can all be purchased for less than \$10,000, and they include desirable amenities and vital safety equipment. They were recommended by CR when new and have shown admirable reliability, as reported by their owners in our extensive surveys. (We have data going back to model year 2000.)

All the cars we've chosen came with standard electronic stability control, a safety system proven to save lives and now required on all new cars. These cars are all very good bets, based on our testing and owner feedback. But remember that every used vehicle has a different history. Some are better maintained than others. Always have any used car you're considering buying inspected by a mechanic, who can look for potential trouble spots.

### 2013 Honda Fit

\$8,400-\$9,925 PRICE RANGE

- RELIABILITY
- OWNER SATISFACTION

Relatively roomy, with a flip or fold rear seat, the Fit has agile handling. But its choppy, noisy ride might be fatiguing on long-distance drives. Overall fuel economy is 30 mpg.

### 2012 Mazda3

\$6,275-\$9,875 PRICE RANGE

- RELIABILITY
- OWNER SATISFACTION

The Mazda3 has nimble handling, impressive fuel economy (32 mpg), and high-quality interior materials. Rear seating is a bit tight, and road noise is somewhat pronounced.

### 2013 Toyota Corolla

\$8,825-\$9,725 PRICE RANGE

- RELIABILITY
- OWNER SATISFACTION

Along with a roomy interior, a comfortable ride, and secure—though uninspired—handling, the Corolla gets a commendable 32 mpg. Even the midtrim LE comes nicely equipped.

### 2012 Toyota Prius

\$8,850-\$10,600 PRICE RANGE

- RELIABILITY
- OWNER SATISFACTION

The Prius is ideal for its practicality and low running costs. It gets 44 mpg overall and has secure handling. Road noise and engine drone are noticeable.

### 2010 Acura TSX

\$8,825-\$10,375 PRICE RANGE

- RELIABILITY
- OWNER SATISFACTION

The TSX has a smooth and economical four-cylinder engine that delivers responsive performance. The front seats are excellent, and interior fit and finish is impressive.

### 2011 Honda Accord

\$7,525-\$9,775 PRICE RANGE

- RELIABILITY
- OWNER SATISFACTION

The Accord has a smooth and powerful four-cylinder engine, and ride and handling are very good. Generous driver visibility and a roomy back seat are other pleasing features.

### 2010 Lexus ES

\$9,100-\$9,950 PRICE RANGE

- RELIABILITY
- OWNER SATISFACTION

The ES has quick acceleration and a hushed cabin but lackluster handling. It rides very well and has big, plush front seats, though headroom is tight in the back seat.

### 2011 Toyota Camry

\$7,725-\$8,975 PRICE RANGE

- RELIABILITY
- OWNER SATISFACTION

A practical, comfortable, and reliable midsize sedan, the Camry also handles admirably. Its easy-to-use controls and good fuel economy add to its appeal.

### 2008 Toyota Highlander

\$7,700-\$10,400 PRICE RANGE

- RELIABILITY
- OWNER SATISFACTION

Quiet and roomy, this popular SUV has a comfortable ride, intuitive controls, an available third-row seat, and excellent outward visibility.

### 2009 Toyota RAV4

\$7,775-\$10,050 PRICE RANGE

- RELIABILITY
- OWNER SATISFACTION

The RAV4 has responsive handling and a fairly comfortable ride. The rear seats and cargo area are generous, but the side-swinging rear gate can be awkward to operate.



LUXURY COMPACT CARS

## Cadillac CT4

Big Thrills,  
Tight Interior

57

OVERALL  
SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 78

**HIGHS** Handling, braking, front-seat comfort, fit and finish

**LOWS** Rear-seat room and access, scant in-cabin storage

**POWERTRAIN** 237-hp, 2.0-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder engine; 8-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

**FUEL** 25 mpg on premium fuel

**PRICE**  
\$32,995-\$46,595 base price range  
\$49,215 as tested

**THIS FRESH ENTRY** into Cadillac's lineup delighted our testers by providing engaging, European-inspired driving dynamics. But we think its cramped interior and boisterous engine might deter buyers looking for a sedan with luxury accommodations and sporty performance.

The handling, steering, and braking help the CT4 perform like a top-notch sports sedan. There's hardly any body roll when pushed in turns, contributing to the tied-down feeling that rewards enthusiastic driving and makes the CT4 a delight to pilot down curvy roads. The precise steering response adds to the experience. The braking is excellent, with short stops in dry and wet conditions, better than most of its competitors.

The ride is taut, adding to the high performance, and yet the suspension does a

decent job swallowing up harsh impacts. But driving over rough road surfaces can create choppy motions.

The 2.0-liter turbo engine is responsive enough, but it lacks vigor and sounds hoarse.

While the front seats are comfortable and supportive, the cockpit is too snug, with the center console sometimes rubbing the driver's right knee. As in many recent Cadillacs, the controls are user-friendly, with the volume and tuning knobs skewed to the left, which makes them easy for the driver to reach.

The back seat is downright inhospitable for adults, with very little foot and head space. And a narrow door opening and low roof make getting in and out a challenge.

FCW and AEB with pedestrian detection is standard on all but the base trim. We think they should be standard on all trim levels.

LUXURY COMPACT CARS

## BMW 228i Gran Coupe

Small and Sporty

68

OVERALL  
SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 75

**HIGHS** Eager powertrain and handling, front-seat comfort, fit and finish

**LOWS** Access, rear seat, ride

**POWERTRAIN** 228-hp, 2.0-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder engine; 8-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

**FUEL** 27 mpg on premium fuel

**PRICE**  
\$37,500-\$45,500 base price range  
\$41,345 as tested

**THE ENTRY-LEVEL** 2 Series Gran Coupe rides on a front-wheel-drive-based platform that's less performance-oriented than most BMWs. But this new little sedan can still put a grin on a driver's face when the road gets twisty. Be aware that the ride is stiff and that the rear seat is better for carrying kids and preteens than adults.

The BMW's turbo four-cylinder feels well-matched to the car's size, delivering strong, predictable power through a responsive transmission. The engine is extremely smooth, with a subdued sound quality—two traits many turbo four-cylinders can't claim.

The firm, well-tuned suspension makes the 2 Series Gran Coupe a willing, confidence-inspiring partner on curvy roads. It was only during our avoidance maneuver—a test

that duplicates a sudden swerve to avoid an object in the road—that the car felt a bit clumsy, exposing its less-than-optimal handling balance. The suspension also transmitted too many bumps from road imperfections into the cabin.

The cabin isn't flashy or overly fancy, but most materials have a high-quality feel. That's impressive, considering this is intended to be an entry-level model. The front seats are tight yet comfortable, but the rear seat is snug even for this category. Average-sized passengers will have scant foot room and feel their head hitting the roof.

Most controls are easy to use, but some audio and climate tasks require wading through menus via a control knob or the touch screen.

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



COMPACT SUVs

## Chevrolet Trailblazer

Stylish and Economical, but Rough and Loud

**59**  
OVERALL SCORE

**THE TRAILBLAZER IS** a new entry in the growing subcompact SUV category, meant to attract an audience hungry for more affordable options. Some of its strengths include standard FCW, AEB with pedestrian detection, and LKA; BSW and RCTW can be added to all but the base trim.

We were impressed by the engine and transmission pairing, which is quick to respond to a driver's call for power. The SUV's 27 mpg overall is better than many of its smaller competitors.

In most situations the suspension effectively muted the impact from rough streets, but the ride became unsettled on undulating and poorer-quality roads. While handling is clumsy, the SUV is secure when pushed to its limits.

The tall roof and big, square door openings make it easy to get in and out of the cabin, which isn't always the case

**ROAD-TEST SCORE 66**

**HIGHS** Interior room, midrange torque, fuel economy, controls

**LOWS** Rear and side visibility, agility, front-seat comfort, cabin noise

**POWERTRAIN** 155-hp, 1.3-liter turbocharged 3-cylinder engine; 9-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

**FUEL** 27 mpg on regular fuel

**PRICE** \$19,000-\$27,000 base price range \$27,560 as tested

with small SUVs. Our testers also found that the controls, including the touch screen, were mostly easy to operate.

Chevy gave the SUV a lot of storage space between the front seats. Folding the rear seats flat expands the large cargo area, and the front passenger seat can fold flat to carry even longer items.

But the cabin is rather loud, with a pronounced rumble that comes through from the road surface. There's a vibration at low engine revs, such as when using light pressure on the gas pedal.

The squishy seats sag under the occupants' hips when the vehicle takes a corner, and the limited side and rear visibility can make backing up a guessing game.

Despite its many positives, GM's below-average brand reliability and a middling road-test score keep us from recommending the Trailblazer.

MID-SIZED SUVs

## Volkswagen Atlas Cross Sport

Loses a Row but Adds Style

**59**  
OVERALL SCORE

**ROAD-TEST SCORE 81**

**HIGHS** Interior room, access, controls

**LOWS** Too wide for tight spaces

**POWERTRAIN** 235-hp, 2.0-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder engine; 8-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

**FUEL** 21 mpg on regular fuel

**PRICE** \$30,545-\$49,795 base price range \$40,580 as tested

**THE SMALLER ATLAS** Cross Sport is VW's edgier take on the Atlas three-row SUV. This five-passenger two-row version loses some cargo volume in favor of a more angular design and look. We found it a pleasant-driving SUV that doesn't sacrifice too much functionality for its new style.

Even so, the VW's much-worse-than-average predicted reliability, based on the original Atlas, hurts its Overall Score and prevents us from recommending either SUV.

The Cross Sport's width and tall hood can make it feel cumbersome in crowded parking lots. Its sleek roofline, thick rear pillars, and wide but squat back window make for difficult rearward views. The suspension absorbs larger bumps well, but overall the ride is on the firm side.

The Cross Sport handles capably on winding roads, and the base 235-hp engine

is stronger than you might expect, scooting the VW off the line with almost no delay. And the turbo helps the engine provide just enough power at low-to-mid rpms, when you need a quick dose of acceleration. We did find that the engine gets a bit loud when it's pushed.

Despite its sleeker styling, the Cross Sport still has plenty of headroom and legroom for all passengers, and both rows of seats are comfortable and supportive. The controls are a model of clarity, especially those for the touch-screen infotainment system. Our drivers appreciated the clear display, straightforward layout, and large buttons and on-screen text. But there's less cargo room than in the three-row Atlas.

Standard advanced safety features include FCW, AEB with pedestrian detection, BSW, and RCTW.

**Ratings** > **Low Points** While the four models tested this month each have their virtues, some nettlesome shortcomings or subpar predicted reliability hurt their Overall Score.

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-manuever 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
<b>SUVs \$25,000-\$35,000</b>																				
✓ Subaru Crosstrek 2.0L	85	↑	↑	87	29	↓ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	54.5	10.2	125	27.5	0	0	0	0	0
✓ Hyundai Kona 2.0L	78	↑	↑	71	26	↑ / ↓	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	56.0	11.1	129	22.5	S	S	0	S	0
✓ Nissan Rogue Sport 2.0L	78	↑	↓	72	26	↑ / ↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	52.5	10.3	134	24.5	S	S	S	S	S
✓ Mazda CX-3 2.0L	73	↑	↓	64	28	↓ / ↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↑	53.5	9.6	135	18.0	S	S	S	S	S
Kia Seltos 2.0L	68	↓	↑	72	28	↓ / ↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	55.0	9.0	128	28.0	0	0	0	0	0
Ford EcoSport 2.0L	68	↑	↓	61	24	↓ / ↓	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	54.0	10.7	132	22.5	-	-	-	-	0
Honda HR-V 1.8L	66	↑	↓	66	29	↓ / ↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	55.0	10.5	132	32.0	0	0	0	0	-
Mazda CX-30 2.5L	61	↓	↓	64	27	↑ / ↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↑	54.0	8.7	133	21.5	S	S	S	S	0
Chevrolet Trailblazer 1.3T	59	↓	↑	66	27	↓ / ↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓	54.0	9.5	133	24.0	S	S	S	-	0
Chevrolet Trax 1.4T	53	↓	↓	55	25	↓ / ↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	54.0	10.8	130	26.0	0	-	-	-	0
Jeep Renegade 2.4L	48	↓	↓	56	24	↓ / ↓	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓	51.5	9.9	130	30.5	0	0	-	0	0
<b>SUVs \$35,000-\$45,000 (2-ROW)</b>																				
✓ Subaru Outback 2.4T	87	↑	↑	91	24	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	54.0	7.1	132	37.0	S	S	S	S	0
✓ Ford Edge 2.0T	79	↓	↓	84	22	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	52.0	7.7	129	39.0	S	S	S	S	S
✓ Hyundai Santa Fe 2.0T	78	↓	↑	80	21	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	52.0	8.7	136	35.5	S	S	S	S	0
✓ Nissan Murano 3.5L	75	↑	↓	77	21	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	50.5	7.7	131	33.5	S	S	0	S	0
✓ Jeep Grand Cherokee 3.6L	70	↓	↑	80	18	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	50.0	8.0	134	36.5	0	0	-	0	S
Chevrolet Blazer 3.6L	68	↓	↑	83	19	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	54.5	6.4	130	34.5	0	0	0	0	0
Honda Passport 3.5L	59	↓	↑	79	21	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	53.5	6.4	135	39.0	S	S	S	S	0
Volkswagen Atlas Cross Sport 2.0T	59	↓	↑	81	21	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	52.0	8.7	131	37.5	S	S	S	S	S
<b>SEDANS \$35,000-\$45,000</b>																				
✓ Genesis G70 2.0T	82	↑	↑	74	23	↑ / ↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	56.5	7.8	137	2+0	S	S	S	S	0
✓ Audi A3 2.0T	72	↑	↓	77	27	↑ / ↓	↓	↓	↓	↑	↑	53.0	8.3	124	2+1	0	0	-	0	0
BMW 228i xDrive Gran Coupe 2.0T	68	↓	↑	75	27	↑ / ↓	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑	51.0	7.2	132	2+2	S	S	S	0	S
Acura ILX 2.4L	64	↑	↓	61	28	↑ / ↓	↓	↓	↓	↑	↓	54.5	7.5	132	2+2	S	S	S	S	0
Cadillac CT4 2.0T	57	↓	↑	78	25	↑ / ↓	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	55.0	7.4	129	2+1	0	0	0	0	0
Mercedes-Benz CLA250 2.0T	57	↓	↓	65	27	↑ / ↓	↓	↓	↓	↑	↑	56.0	6.6	131	2+2	S	S	S	S	0
Mercedes-Benz A220 2.0T	56	↓	↓	64	27	↑ / ↓	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑	53.0	7.3	130	2+1	S	S	S	S	0

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

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

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

braking, pedestrian detection, and blind spot warning. - 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.



## Index

THIS INDEX LISTS ALL THE ARTICLES PUBLISHED IN THE MAGAZINE OVER THE PAST 12 MONTHS (INCLUDING THIS ISSUE). FOR INDEXES COVERING THE PAST FIVE YEARS, GO TO [CR.ORG/5YEARINDEX](https://www.consumerreports.org/5yearindex).

## A

Air fryers	Oct 20, 44
ratings	Oct 20, 54
Air purifiers	Mar 20, 13
effective for coronavirus	Jul 20, 16
Air travel	Feb 20, 42
refunds	Jul 20, 9
safety	May 20, 7
timeline	Feb 20, 14
Antibiotics in food	Feb 20, 16
Appliances	
for backyard BBQ	Jul 20, 17
countertop	Oct 20, 44
ratings	Oct 20, 52
easy-to-clean	Aug 20, 18
reliability ratings	Aug 20, 42
Arbitration	Mar 20, 38

## AUTOMOBILE RATINGS

Audi A6	Dec 19, 59
Audi Q3	Jan 20, 61
Audi Q7	Oct 20, 63
BMW 228i Gran Coupe	Nov 20, 63
Buick Encore GX	Sep 20, 64
Cadillac CT4	Nov 20, 63
Cadillac CT5	Oct 20, 63
Chevrolet Silverado	Jul 20, 64
Chevrolet Trailblazer	Nov 20, 64
Ford Escape	Feb 20, 59
Hybrid	May 20, 20
Ford Explorer	Dec 19, 59
Honda CR-V Hybrid	Jul 20, 64
Hyundai Palisade	Dec 19, 60
Hyundai Sonata	May 20, 60
Hyundai Venue	May 20, 59
Kia Seltos	Aug 20, 64
Lincoln Aviator	Jan 20, 61
Lincoln Corsair	Feb 20, 59
Mazda CX-30	Jun 20, 60
Mercedes-Benz CLA	Feb 20, 60
Mercedes-Benz GLB	Aug 20, 64
Mercedes-Benz GLS	Mar 20, 59
Nissan Leaf Plus	Dec 19, 60
Nissan Sentra	Oct 20, 64
Nissan Versa	Mar 20, 59
Subaru Legacy	Mar 20, 60
Subaru Outback	Feb 20, 60
Tesla Model Y	Sep 20, 64
Toyota Highlander	Jun 20, 60
Hybrid	Oct 20, 64
Toyota Supra	Mar 20, 60
Volkswagen Atlas Cross Sport	Nov 20, 64
Volkswagen Passat	May 20, 60

## AUTOMOBILES & AUTO EQUIPMENT

Best & worst lists	Apr 20, 13
Bicycle mounting	May 20, 16
Brand Report Card	Apr 20, 14
Buying from home	Aug 20, 56
Car care during coronavirus	Jul 20, 63
Cars for your driving style	May 20, 54
Child car seats	Feb 20, 20
ratings	Feb 20, 23
Coming in 2020	Apr 20, 34
Data collection and sharing	Jun 20, 54
Driver assistance systems	
naming standards	Apr 20, 26
risks	Jun 20, 7
Electric vehicles	Dec 19, 7; Apr 20, 28
fees	Feb 20, 14
Fire prevention	Jan 20, 16
Ford Bronco preview	Oct 20, 62
Fuel-efficiency ratings	Nov 20, 61
Gas-saving technologies	Nov 20, 56
Infotainment systems	Sep 20, 56
built-in vs. smartphone	Sep 20, 59
troubleshooting	Sep 20, 62
Insurance pricing practices	Apr 20, 21
Luxury cars	Jul 20, 58
timeline	Jul 20, 16
Profiles, 2020	Apr 20, 48
Ratings, 2020	Apr 20, 38
Reliability	Jan 20, 50; Apr 20, 86
ratings	Jan 20, 55; Apr 20, 88
Repair timeline	Mar 20, 14
Safety systems	
back seat	Oct 20, 56
repair costs	Mar 20, 54
as standard equipment	Oct 20, 7
for women	Feb 20, 52

Test drive tips	Apr 20, 99
Tires	Dec 19, 52
inflators	Aug 20, 63
ratings	Dec 19, 56
timeline	Jan 20, 14
Top Picks for 2020	Apr 20, 8
Used cars	Apr 20, 82
under \$10,000	Nov 20, 62

## B-D

Baby cereal safety	Nov 20, 7
Bidets	Aug 20, 24
ratings	Aug 20, 27
Bike helmets	Jun 20, 14
Blenders	Oct 20, 44
ratings	Oct 20, 53
Blood pressure monitors	Oct 20, 16
Botanicals	Dec 19, 26
Bread makers	Sep 20, 14
Cable TV	
fee transparency	Jan 20, 7; May 20, 7
money saving tips	Jun 20, 42
Cameras, instant print	Jul 20, 15
Cauliflower pizza crusts	Jul 20, 21
Cell phones	
ratings	Sep 20, 45
service providers	Sep 20, 38
ratings	Sep 20, 44
Cleaning tips	
car interiors	Sep 20, 63
flat-screen TVs	Feb 20, 18
laundry stains	Mar 20, 17
mattresses	Oct 20, 14
using vinegar	Sep 20, 15
Coffee, cold-brew	Aug 20, 13
Coffee makers, quick-brewing	Nov 20, 18
Complaining effectively	Jan 20, 24
Computers	
all-in-one desktop ratings	Dec 19, 25
ergonomic keyboards & mice	Sep 20, 20
ratings	Sep 20, 24
laptops	Dec 19, 23
ratings	Dec 19, 23
COVID-19	Jun 20, 7, 18
free testing	Nov 20, 7
liability immunity	Oct 20, 7
scams	Oct 20, 39
stress relief	Aug 20, 44
supplement schemes	Oct 20, 34
travel tips	Nov 20, 50
voting safely	Nov 20, 18
CR Recommended program	Jul 20, 6
Credit card strategies	Jul 20, 54
Credit freezes	Feb 20, 7
Data privacy	Mar 20, 7
children's	Dec 19, 7
health	Sep 20, 7
Zoom	Jul 20, 9
Debt collection	Aug 20, 7
Digital divide	Aug 20, 7
Dishwashers	Mar 20, 19
ratings	Mar 20, 22
DIY home projects	Aug 20, 36
Drugs	
dropped by insurance	Aug 20, 48
prices	Jan 20, 7; Jan 20, 38

## E-G

Earbuds	
Apple AirPods vs.	
Samsung Galaxy Buds	Jun 20, 17
true wireless	Aug 20, 15
E-bikes	Jun 20, 13
E-books, free	Jul 20, 21
Electric kettles	Feb 20, 15
Electric toothbrushes	Oct 20, 18
ratings	Oct 20, 22
Ergonomic keyboards & mice	Sep 20, 20
ratings	Sep 20, 24
Eyeglasses	Mar 20, 15
lens coatings	Sep 20, 28
timeline	Jun 20, 14
Fast food	
chains' antibiotic use	Feb 20, 16
healthy	May 20, 24
ratings	May 20, 31
timeline	Mar 20, 14

Fees	
cable TV	Jan 20, 7; May 20, 7
hotels	Jan 20, 7
Financial tips during coronavirus	Jul 20, 43
cash flow	Jul 20, 48
credit cards	Jul 20, 54
mortgages	Jul 20, 51
retirement savings	Jul 20, 45

## Food

antibiotics in	Feb 20, 16
coronavirus safety	Jul 20, 19
holiday treats	Dec 19, 16
labeling	Oct 20, 7
meat	Dec 19, 7
nutrition	Jan 20, 17
pesticide in	Oct 20, 24
produce health risks	Oct 20, 28
plastic in	Jun 20, 26
processed	Jan 20, 32
"Forever chemicals"	
in food packaging	Nov 20, 7
in water	Nov 20, 26
Frozen meals	Aug 20, 28
ratings	Aug 20, 34
Garbage disposals	Aug 20, 20
ratings	Aug 20, 23
Generators	
home standby	Sep 20, 16
ratings	Dec 19, 41; Sep 20, 16
safety	Dec 19, 38
Gifts for \$50 and under	Dec 19, 13
Glasses	Mar 20, 15
lens coatings	Sep 20, 28
timeline	Jun 20, 14
Grape products	Jun 20, 14
Grills	May 20, 14; Jul 20, 38
ratings	Jul 20, 41

## H-K

Hair coloring kits	Nov 20, 16
Healthcare	May 20, 34
costs	Jun 20, 36
Helmets, bike	Jun 20, 14
HVAC filters	Jun 20, 16
Inclined infant sleepers	Feb 20, 7; Sep 20, 7
Insect repellents	Jul 20, 23
ratings	Jul 20, 25
Instant print cameras	Jul 20, 15
Insurance	
drugs, dropped coverage	Aug 20, 48
health	Jun 20, 36
Kettles, electric	Feb 20, 15

## L-P

Laptops	Dec 19, 18
bargain	Nov 20, 13
ratings	Dec 19, 23
Lawn tools, battery-powered	Aug 20, 16
Luggage	Feb 20, 49
lifetime warranties	Feb 20, 47
ratings	Feb 20, 50
shipping services	Feb 20, 45
Magnets in toys	Jun 20, 7
Mask tips	Nov 20, 15
Mattresses	Feb 20, 24
ratings	Feb 20, 36
shopping for online	Feb 20, 26
Medical debt	Nov 20, 42
Misinformation online	Nov 20, 19
Mixers, stand	May 20, 18
Moldy washers	May 20, 46
Mosquito-borne diseases	Jul 20, 19
Multi-cookers	Oct 20, 44
ratings	Oct 20, 53
.Org domains	Aug 20, 7
Ovens, self-cleaning	Mar 20, 14
Password managers	Jul 20, 22
Pasta	Mar 20, 16
Patient care	May 20, 34
Pesticide in produce	Oct 20, 24
health risks	Oct 20, 28
Pillows	Feb 20, 36
ratings	Feb 20, 37
Pizza crusts, cauliflower	Jul 20, 21
Plastic	
in food	Jun 20, 26
recycling	Jun 20, 31
timeline	Jun 20, 32

Predatory lending	Feb 20, 7
Product safety secrecy	May 20, 7
Projectors	Sep 20, 13
Pumpkin nutrition	Nov 20, 14

## R-S

Radon detection	Feb 20, 16
Reading on devices	Jul 20, 20
Recall failings	Dec 19, 42
Refrigerator features	Sep 20, 46
Repainting home interiors	Sep 20, 18
Retail memberships	Dec 19, 17
Ring device user security	May 20, 17
Robocalls	Mar 20, 7; Jul 20, 9
Roofing	Jan 20, 19
ratings	Jan 20, 23
Routers	Mar 20, 46
ratings	Mar 20, 51
Samsung Galaxy Fold	Feb 20, 17
Security systems, home	
Ring user security	May 20, 17
Siding	May 20, 20
ratings	May 20, 23
Skin cancer	Jul 20, 32
Sleep aids	Feb 20, 34
Slow cookers	Oct 20, 44
ratings	Oct 20, 52
Smart speaker privacy	Oct 20, 16
Smartphones	
affordable models	Jan 20, 13
Google Assistant translator	May 20, 14
money saving tips	Jun 20, 44
ratings	Sep 20, 45
service providers	Sep 20, 38
ratings	Sep 20, 44
Smoothies	Aug 20, 17
Sprinkler controllers	May 20, 13
Stand mixers	May 20, 18
Strawberry products	Aug 20, 14
Stress relief during COVID-19	Aug 20, 44
String trimmers	Jun 20, 21
ratings	Jun 20, 24
Sunscreen	Jul 20, 26
ratings	Jul 20, 35
Supplements	Dec 19, 26
FDA oversight	Sep 20, 30
schemes	Oct 20, 34

## T-Z

Tea drinks	
labeling	Sep 20, 17
timeline	Sep 20, 14
Tech budget savings tips	Jun 20, 42
Telemicrowave	Aug 20, 17
Timeshares	Feb 20, 24
Toaster ovens	Oct 20, 44
ratings	Oct 20, 52
reliability ratings	Oct 20, 15
Toiletries timeline	Oct 20, 14
Tools timeline	Aug 20, 14
Toothbrushes, electric	Oct 20, 18
ratings	Oct 20, 22
Toy magnets	Jun 20, 7
Treadmills	Feb 20, 13
Turmeric supplements	Dec 19, 36
TV streaming	Jun 20, 52
free services	Jun 20, 49
Vacuums	Nov 20, 34
maintenance tips	Nov 20, 39
ratings	Nov 20, 40
Voting safely	Nov 20, 18
Waffle makers	Jan 20, 14
ratings	Jan 20, 14; Oct 20, 54
Washers	
mold problems	May 20, 46
ratings	May 20, 52
Water	
bottled, tested	Nov 20, 30
"forever chemicals" in	Nov 20, 26
Wireless chargers	Oct 20, 13
Work-from-home setups	Jul 20, 18
Yogurt	Nov 20, 21
ratings	Nov 20, 24
timeline	Nov 20, 14
Zoom privacy	Jul 20, 9

# Some Real Turkeys for You

Thanksgiving foul-ups aplenty—including price-challenged stuffing and very big birds

## Stove Topsy-Turvy

This isn't the stuffing good sales are made of. Submitted by Tom Dare, Lakewood, CO



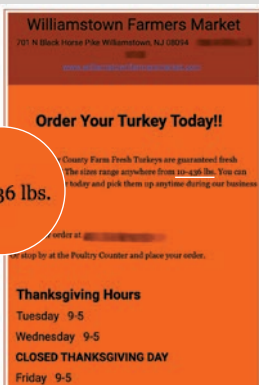
## Oh, Deer!

Better keep an eye out for the rare horned turkey this season. Submitted by Marilyn McNamara. Seen in Syracuse, NY



## Biggest Bird?

We'd like to know what they're feeding the turkeys on this farm. Submitted by Joulia Wilmer, via email



## Get Toasted in Aisle 7

For those wanting a liquid lunch, check out what's on these store shelves. Submitted by Jane Griffin, Edwardsville, IL



SHARE

Be on the lookout for goofs and glitches like these. Share them with us—by email at [SellingIt@cro.consumer.org](mailto:SellingIt@cro.consumer.org) or by mail to Selling It, Consumer Reports, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY 10703—and we might publish yours. Please include key information, such as the publication's name and date.

# Build & Buy Car Buying Service

The right tool to help you find a new car!

Save money, access our prescreened network of dealers, and see CR recommendations along the way! The deal you want is out there—in fact, car buyers save an average of \$3,189\* off MSRP when they use the Build & Buy Car Buying Service®.



**SEARCH** for the car you want and see what others paid



**LOCATE** the dealership from our prescreened network of over 15,000



**COMPARE** real pricing from participating dealers



**SAVE** and drive home your car and your savings!



See how much YOU can save at [cr.org/buildandbuy](https://www.consumerreports.org/buildandbuy)



\*Between 1/1/19 and 12/31/19, the average savings off MSRP experienced by consumers who connected with a TrueCar Certified Dealer through the Consumer Reports Auto Buying Program and who were identified as buying a new vehicle from that Certified Dealer was \$3,189. Your actual savings may vary based on multiple factors, including the vehicle you select, region, dealer, and applicable vehicle-specific manufacturer incentives, which are subject to change. The MSRP is determined by the manufacturer and may not reflect the price at which vehicles are generally sold in the dealer's trade area, as many vehicles are sold below MSRP. Each dealer sets its own pricing.