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**NEW COVID-19  
TREATMENTS** P. 36

JUNE 2021

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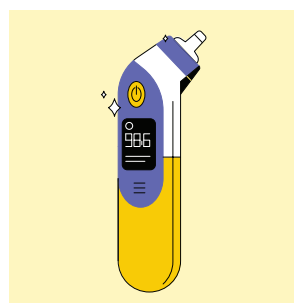




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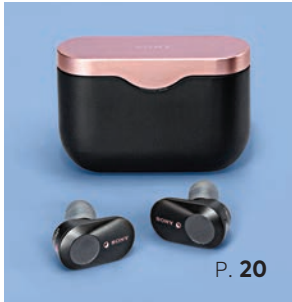
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# We're Informed by Your Lives



THE PASSAGE OF TIME has become a curious thing over the past year as we have dealt with a pandemic and its aftershocks. Some days seem to last for a week, and then a season passes as quickly as an afternoon. Like you, I am ready to spend more time outside and return to doing more normal things safely. This is also a time for us to reflect on what we have learned along the way.

At CR we have been tracking how consumers' lives have been affected over this past year. We began tracking U.S. adults' concerns about the pandemic in March 2020, surveying as many as 2,500 people each month on whether they were experiencing food shortages; still using public transportation; planning to head back to movie theaters, restaurants, and gyms; and more.

CR also tracked the specific economic repercussions consumers experienced. The takeaway is that there was a stark divide. In March 2021, about a quarter of Americans reported saving more money than they were losing. But we saw from the beginning how concerned Americans at the lower end of the economic ladder were about how the pandemic would affect their lives—and there has indeed been a disproportionate negative financial impact, in jobs and income lost, for the most vulnerable among us.

We do this rigorous research because CR is at its strongest when we hear directly from you—and when we learn what you need when it comes to information and support. We recently found, through our research, that 75 percent of consumers think they'll keep at least some of the changes they made to their lives during the COVID-19 outbreak. That could include an at-home exercise routine, getting groceries delivered, and even continuing to wear masks sometimes.

We learned some things about ourselves, like our ability to adapt to change, and the importance of looking out for one another. While recovering from the loss and stress of the past year will take time, it's good to know that you are looking—as we are—to the future.

*Marta Tellado*

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## Pushing for Safer Furniture

### WHAT'S AT STAKE

An average of two children are killed every month by a TV or piece of furniture that topples onto them, and thousands more are seriously injured every year.

This doesn't have to happen: CR's testing team has shown that it's possible to manufacture affordable furniture that isn't prone to tip-overs. But the current stability standard for dressers—one of the furniture types most likely to tip over—is voluntary, and too weak to protect children from risk.

### HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

CR has been calling for a strong, mandatory stability standard for dressers for three years. The Stop Tip-overs of Unstable, Risky Dressers on Youth (STURDY) Act, which passed the U.S. House with bipartisan support in 2019 but didn't clear the Senate, would have directed the Consumer Product Safety Commission to adopt such rules. The bill was reintroduced in February, and CR is working with parents of kids hurt or killed by tip-overs to rally support for its passage.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

Urge your members of Congress to co-sponsor the bill at [CR.org/sturdy0621](https://www.consumerreports.org/sturdy0621). And learn more about dangerous gaps in our product safety regulations on page 44.

## Guarding Your Legal Rights

### WHAT'S AT STAKE

Companies increasingly slip legal language known as arbitration clauses into their standard contracts and terms of use, stripping consumers of their right to go to court if they're harmed by a product or service. Instead, disputes

get handled in private forums where many basic legal protections don't apply and companies often have an unfair advantage. Typically, the only way for consumers to avoid arbitration agreements is to decline the product or service altogether, which is seldom a practical option.

### HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

CR is endorsing the Forced Arbitration Injustice Repeal (FAIR) Act, which passed the U.S. House in the last Congress and was reintroduced there and in the Senate this year. If passed, the law would stop the growing use of forced arbitration to shield companies when they harm consumers, workers, and small businesses. CR advocates advised congressional staffers on the bill's drafting.

It's important to note that the FAIR Act wouldn't ban arbitration, which can be a fair and efficient way to settle a dispute—if consumers choose it willingly. The law would prevent companies from imposing forced arbitration as a precondition for buying a product or using a service.



### PROGRESS UPDATE

More than a year after the nationwide COVID-19 lockdown grounded thousands of flights, **airlines are still refusing to provide full refunds** to many customers whose travel plans were affected. In March, CR wrote to the heads of 10 domestic airlines, calling on them to provide full refunds or at least extend voucher expiration dates through 2022. Later that month, American, United, and Delta pushed out their use-by dates—a good first step, though CR will continue to call for more flexibility on vouchers and full refunds across the industry. For tips on what to do if your voucher is about to expire, go to [CR.org/voucher0621](https://www.consumerreports.org/voucher0621).

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

Learn how to protect yourself from forced arbitration at [CR.org/arbitration0621](https://www.consumerreports.org/arbitration0621). And encourage Congress to pass the FAIR Act at [CR.org/fair0621](https://www.consumerreports.org/fair0621).

## Protecting Your Privacy

### WHAT'S AT STAKE

We know that online companies such as Amazon, Facebook, and Google routinely collect and monetize our personal info in ways that can put our privacy at risk. Yet no comprehensive federal law restricts what companies can do with your data, or gives you control over it.

### HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

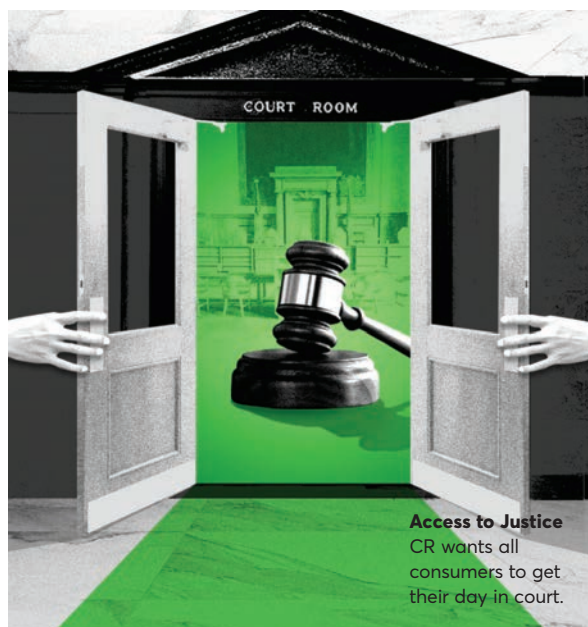
Efforts to pass such a law have stalled in recent years, so CR has focused on putting state-level protections in place. We helped pass a landmark privacy law in California, for example, and later—when we found that some companies were taking advantage of loopholes—supported a ballot initiative and worked with the state attorney general to help close them.

Virginia recently passed its own data privacy law, which extends consumers' rights to access, delete, and correct their information but doesn't make it easy for people to opt out of data sharing. So CR advocates will work with state officials to try to improve the law before it takes effect in 2023.

In addition, we published a "model" law as a template for other states looking to set strong data limits. And after CR testified before its legislature, Washington state is advancing a bill that includes some of CR's key recommendations.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

For more on what CR is doing to protect online privacy, and personalized tips on guarding your own, go to [lab.CR.org](https://www.consumerreports.org/lab).



**Access to Justice**  
CR wants all consumers to get their day in court.





April's Annual Auto Issue unveiled CR's Green Choice designation, developed with the Environmental Protection Agency, to direct you to vehicles with the cleanest emissions. Many readers embraced the initiative and asked questions about how it works. For more info, go to [CR.org/green0621](https://www.consumerreports.org/green0621).

THANK YOU for your "green leaf" Green Choice vehicle initiative. It is a great idea, and I like the way you are implementing it. As you wrote, air pollution affects almost everybody, though to different degrees. Is it also possible to do something like this with your appliance ratings?  
—Kostadin Dyulgerski, Denver

**EDITOR'S NOTE** Sustainability is a key part of our mission here at CR. We have a track record of promoting energy and fuel efficiency through ratings and policy, and we are committed

to bringing the full power of CR to address climate change and environmental concerns more broadly. Our Green Choice designation for vehicles is a big step forward, and we are currently considering how we might incorporate more sustainability information in other product categories.

I READ YOUR April auto issue with great interest. I applaud CR's efforts to highlight cleaner cars with a Green Choice designation. This helps address the challenge of having a cleaner vehicle fleet. However, the other critical component of the equation for cleaner transportation is for people to drive less, even if it is electric vehicles. Continued car dependency does

little to address the negative impact of cars on congestion and other sprawl-related costs.  
—Fernando de Aragón, Ithaca, NY

IN "Your Ride Can Make the Air Cleaner," you said: "CR research shows that owning an EV will save the typical driver \$6,000 to \$10,000 over the life of the vehicle." Does that include the cost of replacing the battery? Most drivers purchase a used car, and I assume used gas-powered cars have longer lives than used electric cars because of the cost of replacing the battery. Am I wrong?  
—Louis Lyon, Oklahoma City

**EDITOR'S NOTE** Our figures do not include the cost of battery replacement, because battery

failure in EVs is rare, much like engine or transmission failure in a gasoline- or diesel-powered vehicle is unusual. (In our 2020 reliability survey, mentions of EV battery replacements were uncommon.) That said, EV batteries degrade over time, with an average reduction in capacity of about 2 percent per year. That means that after 10 years, a car that started with a 250-mile range will have a range of about 200 miles but will be otherwise mechanically sound and less expensive to maintain than a gasoline or diesel car of equivalent age.

WITH THE NEWS about all these new electric/hybrid vehicles out now or coming soon (Volvo says it will be all-electric by 2030), has any thought been raised about where the lost gas tax revenue (both federal and state) is going to be coming from? These vehicles have weight and will contribute to the wear and tear on the roads and bridges but won't be contributing to their repair or replacement. Some thought has to be made to look at what the infrastructure situation will be several years down the road.  
—Timothy Stueve, Danville, PA

**EDITOR'S NOTE** Agreed: The money does need to come from somewhere—which is among the challenges in shifting the national fleet toward electric vehicles. The reduced miles traveled in 2020 (due partly to the pandemic) made the point clear that infrastructure revenue will need to be generated in new ways going forward. Bear in mind that EVs currently make up just 2.7 percent of annual car sales, and it will be years before they constitute 2 percent of the cars on the road. Right now, the Biden administration is looking at this and considering options.



WRITE

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

I AM ALL FOR improved technology to help clean our air, but alongside talk of making more models electric, I hear no talk about how people who have to park on public streets (without garages with charging stations in their homes/apartment buildings) are supposed to charge their cars. And given recent storms that knocked out electricity for days, what's the plan?

—J. Hunter, Portland, OR

**EDITOR'S NOTE** Access to charging stations is a major factor in choosing to purchase an EV. For now, EVs are not the right solution for everyone, but charging infrastructure is expanding—with significant investments being made along popular routes and destinations—and will serve the needs of a growing number of people. Remember: As the battery range of EVs increases, the need for frequent charging decreases. For example, some city dwellers may find charging once a week is adequate for their needs, and that might be done while running errands on the weekends.

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## SAFETY FIRST

AFTER READING April's "New Car Reviews," I am wondering why blind spot warning is not standard on all makes and models? This is always a deal breaker for me when getting a new car. With all the distracted drivers out there, it just seems like this would be a no-brainer.

—Elizabeth Velbeck, Cleveland

**EDITOR'S NOTE** CR and its members find blind spot warning to be quite helpful for monitoring blind zones at the rear flanks of a car. That is why we encourage buyers to look for this feature when shopping, and why we increase the score of cars that provide it as standard equipment. We've also pushed for automatic emergency braking with pedestrian detection—another crucial safety feature—to become standard.

I HAVE TO shake my head every time I read about gear shift selectors being "unintuitive" or taking "some getting used to." It seems that many of these weird shifters are hazardous to drivers or others on the road if fumbling is required to use them. Why doesn't CR go after manufacturers and government agencies and get these shifters standardized? There's nothing more frustrating than renting a vehicle and trying to figure out how to get it out of Park. There are knobs, buttons, etc.

—Tom Whin, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

**EDITOR'S NOTE** Our ratings do indeed reflect problems with these shifters. A good shifter should make it easy to select a gear while you keep your eyes on the road. Many electronic shifters can be difficult to use, require you to take your eyes off the road, or can be



## WHERE'S THE MINIVAN LOVE?

I noticed there is no category for minivans in your "10 Top Picks" (April 2021). I have always liked minivans except for their historically horrible gas mileage, but I just bought a Toyota Sienna, which (according to CR) will get 36 mpg. So far I am very impressed. It is easy to drive, and I love the fact that I am sitting up high. The storage space is a little quirky but vast.

—Bob Dignan, via CR.org

**EDITOR'S NOTE** The Top Picks categories change over time, following buying trends, vehicle launches, and our testing schedule. The minivan category has shrunk to just a few models, so this year we chose to focus on other, more popular auto types. But we agree that the redesigned Sienna (and all-new Kia Carnival) breathe new life into the category for 2021. However, our testers note that the Sienna had somewhat unimpressive braking performance in our tests.

confused with other controls. We also penalize vehicles with shifters that do not have adequate rollaway protection (meaning that even if you fail to engage Park, the car won't roll if you shut it off or open the door).



## FEE FRUSTRATION

REGARDING APRIL'S "Sticker Shock: The Truth About Destination Fees," these fees are not an accurate reflection of the cost of getting a vehicle to the dealership because the fees are not adjusted for location across the country. The destination fee for vehicles here in Houston should be lower because of our proximity to the Port of Houston. Yet the fee we pay is the same as our friends in Nebraska or Utah.

—Katherine Mize, Houston

I LOVED your auto issue. Mike Monticello really nailed it with all the hidden fees. Another concern: In the summer of 2019, Chevrolet rolled out the new mid-engine Corvette. I ordered my car and paid my deposit. I was told I would have the car by Thanksgiving 2019. Flash forward to 2021 and my car is still on order. The order process for an automobile is unlike any other process. It has nothing to do with time, cost, or priority.

—Robert Maroney, Coos Bay, OR

**EDITOR'S NOTE** Preordering hot new models has become the norm in recent years. And the process can feel more painful because of the impact the pandemic has had on manufacturing. We can empathize with your Corvette order: We ordered ours in fall 2019 and just received it. The good news: You're likely to find it highly entertaining.

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

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

## Android Smartphones

**WE TESTED:** 45 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** Battery life and speed of charging, quality of screen display, rear and front-facing cameras, durability of construction, ease of use, and more.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**  
Median: 72  
Range: 58-85

**Great Display & WiFi 6 Capable**  
Samsung Galaxy S10+  
(6.5" display)  
\$850

**84**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



**Long Battery Life (41.5 Hours)**  
OnePlus Nord N10 5G  
(6.5" display)  
\$300

**81**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



**Smaller & Lightweight**  
Google Pixel 5 (6" display)  
\$700

**72**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



## Exterior Paints

**WE TESTED:** 15 products  
**WE TEST FOR:** How paint looks on a vertical wall after the equivalent of three years, six years, and nine years of weathering.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**  
Median: 60  
Range: 30-75

**Best Overall**  
Behr Ultra Exterior  
(Home Depot)  
\$42

**75**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



**Great Choice for Less**  
Clark+Kensington  
Exterior (Ace)  
\$35

**75**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



**No VOCs**  
Sherwin-Williams  
Emerald Exterior  
\$72

**73**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



Ask Our Experts

**Any tips for painting my front door?**



A NICELY PAINTED front door can be an inexpensive way to boost your home's curb appeal—and choosing a bold color may even add to its sale price: A 2018 Zillow Paint Color Analysis found that homes with black doors sold for \$6,271 more than the estimated home value. CR's experts advise using a semi-gloss paint. "It yields a smooth, slightly shiny sheen, and it's easy to clean, so it will look fresh for years," says Rico de Paz, head of CR's paint testing. Pick a good weather day for the job: A temperature between 50° F and 90° F with little wind is ideal. If your door is paneled, try a 2-inch angled sash brush: Paint around the edges of the panels first. Switch to a mini-roller for flat areas and finish with the outer sections, following the wood's grain.

ILLUSTRATION: SERGE BLOCH



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

## Cordless Drills

**WE TESTED:** 35 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** Power level, speed of drilling holes and driving screws, how long it can run on a single charge, and more.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**

Median: 58  
Range: 26-85

**Powerful Pick**  
DeWalt DCD991P2  
\$300



**85**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

**Great for Lighter Work**  
Makita FD06R1  
\$140



**71**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

**Good for Heavy-Duty Jobs**  
Craftsman CMCD720D2  
\$160



**64**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

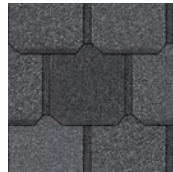
## Roofing Shingles

**WE TESTED:** 4 multilayered laminated shingles  
**WE TEST FOR:** Resistance to tearing and stretching, ability to weather the elements, how it handles impact from falling debris, and more.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**

Median: 80  
Range: 78-92

**Tip-Top Pick**  
Owens Corning  
Berkshire Collection  
\$225 per 100 sq. ft.



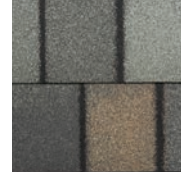
**92**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

**Wide Variety of Colors**  
CertainTeed  
Presidential Shake  
\$325 per 100 sq. ft.



**81**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

**Nice Price**  
IKO Crowne Slate  
\$180 per 100 sq. ft.



**79**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

## Jogger Strollers

**WE TESTED:** 9 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** Safety, ease of use (including unfolding and folding, and carrying), maneuverability on various terrains, like grass and dirt.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**

Median: 75  
Range: 70-84

**Excellent for Exercise**  
Thule Urban Glide 2  
\$500



**82**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

**Deal on Wheels**  
Baby Trend Expedition Jogger  
\$110



**78**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

**Sporty Pick for Two Tots**  
Baby Trend Navigator Lite  
Double Jogger  
\$240



**70**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

## Quieter Dehumidifiers

**WE TESTED:** 36 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** How close a model comes to the claimed amount of water removal, noise level during use, energy efficiency, and more.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**

Median: 69  
Range: 28-83

**Low Noise, Large Capacity**  
Honeywell TP70WKN  
\$300



**83**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

**Quiet, Medium Capacity**  
Midea MAD35C1ZWS  
\$216



**76**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

**Super-Quiet, Small Capacity**  
GE ADEW20LY (Walmart)  
\$160



**64**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

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

**COMING NEXT MONTH** Pressure Washers & More



## I saw a puddle of clear fluid under my parked car. Should I be worried?

WHEN YOU SEE even a small amount of fluid under your car, it's only natural to think the car could be leaking oil, coolant, or even brake fluid. But don't panic: If it's a warm day and you've had your air conditioning on, it might be just water. When the A/C system cools the air inside your vehicle, it also removes moisture. This moisture collects as condensation and usually drains under your car.

"Take a minute to do a quick spot check to be sure," says John Ibbotson, CR's chief mechanic. (You could let the fluid drip onto a piece of cardboard to get a closer look.) If the fluid has a smell, appears thick, or has a color to it (for example, an oily rainbow tint), it could be some kind of leak.

"If you suspect your car's puddle isn't water," he says, "have a mechanic inspect the car to avoid a pricey problem later."

### How can I keep my auto insurance costs down?

THE AMOUNT YOU PAY for coverage depends on several factors that may be beyond your control, including the state and city you live in, according to a new study by The Zebra, an insurance comparison service. For example, the average 2020 premium in Maryland was \$1,415, but in Michigan it was \$2,535. CR has also found that some insurers base their quotes on more personal factors, such as your level of education and job. To combat these practices, the best thing to do is to shop around every year, says CR finance editor Penelope Wang.

Start by contacting direct-writer insurers, such as Amica and USAA—which have their own representatives and offer competitive prices. Then go to an independent agent, who is licensed to sell insurance from

multiple companies, to find the best possible rate. (You can search for independent agents at a site such as TrustedChoice.com.) And once you find a company you like, you may be able to tweak your plan to lower the price even more: Choosing a \$1,000 comprehensive and collision deductible instead of \$500 can reduce your costs by 11 percent, according to The Zebra. If the premium exceeds 10 percent of your car's book value, consider canceling your collision and comprehensive altogether, because you could end up paying more than you'd get back in repair or replacement costs. In our ratings of more than 50 insurance companies, USAA, NJM Insurance Group, Amica, and Pemco had high overall satisfaction scores. (Digital and All Access members can see our ratings at [CR.org/insure0621](https://www.consumerreports.org/insure0621).)

### I get so many robocalls. Is there any way to stop them?

ROBOCALL FREQUENCY actually dropped in the U.S. in 2020 by 22 percent (to the lowest level in two years), according to the robocall blocking and tracking service YouMail. This decrease was probably helped by anti-spoofing technology provided by major

telecom companies (called Shaken/Stir). The COVID-19 pandemic may have also had an impact by disrupting overseas call centers where many robocalls originate. Even so, U.S. consumers still received 45.9 billion spam and telemarketing calls last year—and robocalls are rebounding to pre-pandemic levels largely because some of these foreign call centers are reopening.

You can make moves that will reduce the number of calls you're getting. If you use a major phone carrier, you may already benefit from Shaken/Stir, which helps improve the accuracy of caller ID information. In some cases you may have to activate a blocking feature yourself. (Go to [CR.org/robocall0621](https://www.consumerreports.org/robocall0621) for instructions by carrier.) Many phone settings also let you block all calls from unidentified callers. But there's a downside: It could block calls from people you want to talk to but who aren't in your contacts list, such as a doctor or delivery person. That means you have to keep updating your contact list so that you don't miss an important call.

You can also try a third-party call-blocking app. "But there are few restrictions on what these apps can do with your data," warns Maureen Mahoney, senior policy analyst at CR. "So keep in mind that you're trusting developers with your call data."



LEARN

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

# CR Insights

## IN THE KNOW

### THE MOST ACCURATE BATHROOM SCALES

STEPPING ONTO A SCALE on a regular basis to track your weight is an important way to achieve your health goals, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But it's essential that your scale be accurate—and that's not something you can easily verify on your own at home.

That's where CR's labs come in: First, we use our own calibrated scale (accurate to the hundredth of a pound) and put stackable weights on it to get a "control" reading, says Bernie Deitrick, CR's lead scale tester. Then we compare those readings with the numbers from each store-bought bathroom scale we test to assess the accuracy of each model. The weights we use mimic people who weigh 30, 60, 90, 120, 150, 180, 210, and 325 pounds, and we take several readings of each weight

to test a scale's consistency.

Then, in our "unbalanced weighing" test, our tester stands in different positions on each scale to see whether the readings change—most didn't, but one model, the Taylor Digital 7413W, varied considerably. We also check ease of use, such as battery requirements and how visible a scale's display is in the dark. Some scales, such as the Withings Body, at right, and the Fitbit Aria Air, below, also offer Bluetooth connectivity so that your weight data can be uploaded to the company's smartphone app. Though the majority of the 10 scales we tested don't have Bluetooth, we found many that were quite accurate and inexpensive—a combo that proves you don't need to spend a lot to watch your waistline.



#### SMART SCALE SUPREME

✓ **Withings Body**  
Bluetooth capable,  
\$60

**90** OVERALL  
SCORE



#### Link Your Smartphone to Your Scale

The Withings Health Mate app can keep track of weigh-in data for up to eight users.

#### EASY-TO-USE BARGAIN

✓ **WW WW26**  
\$30

**89** OVERALL  
SCORE



#### SMART PICK FOR FITBIT USERS

✓ **Fitbit Aria Air**  
Bluetooth capable, \$50

**89** OVERALL  
SCORE



#### LARGE PLATFORM & LIFETIME WARRANTY

✓ **Escali Extra Wide Platform Body Scale EW180** \$30

**89** OVERALL  
SCORE





## CR SMART SOLUTION

## 3 COMMON HEARING AID PROBLEMS & FIXES

### PROBLEM

#### Has Annoying Feedback

Hearing a screech, squeal, loud buzz, or hiss? “When sound is amplified and escapes from the ear canal, it can be fed back through an aid’s tiny microphone, causing a high-pitched squealing sound referred to as acoustic feedback,” says Angela Shoup, PhD, president of the American Academy of Audiology and professor of otolaryngology at UT Southwestern Medical Center. In a 2018 survey of CR members, more than a quarter of respondents who wore hearing aids rated feedback suppression as one of the most important features when purchasing their current hearing aid. Though newer hearing aid technology has made feedback less of a problem, users may have found that it occurred more often during the pandemic because the band on one’s face mask can rub against hearing aids, causing noise.

**THE FIX:** If you’re just noticing feedback but don’t usually have problems, you can try repositioning your hearing aid dome so that it fits in your ear better, says Douglas Hildrew, MD, FACS, medical director of the Hearing and Balance Program at Yale University School of Medicine. If that doesn’t work, ear wax may be the culprit: When you wear hearing aids, you’re more likely to experience wax buildup in your ear canal, which can trigger feedback. (The blockage increases your hearing aid’s amplification, which can cause buzzing.) If your ears are clear, your audiologist can adjust your ear mold—a more secure fit prevents sound from leaking out—or reprogram the device.

### PROBLEM

#### Makes Background Noise Louder

This is a common complaint, especially among new hearing aid users. “Many people expect

that hearing aids will only amplify the sounds they want to hear and not the other background noises around them,” says Catherine Palmer, PhD, director of audiology and hearing aids at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. But because hearing aids amplify everything, it can be hard to focus on one voice in a noisy setting like the grocery store or a restaurant.

**THE FIX:** If you’re a new user, try to be patient. The way hearing

aids work takes some time for new users to get used to, Palmer says, but usually resolves once your brain has had time to adapt to all the newly amplified noise. If background noise is still annoying you even after you’ve been using your hearing aids for a while, ask your audiologist whether he or she can adjust the device’s directional microphone settings, which can reduce sensitivity to sound behind you to allow you to focus on hearing



## CR Time Traveler PRODUCT SAFETY



**1936** CR says mineral oil nose drops—a treatment for nasal congestion—can cause pneumonia. As a result of our efforts, many hospitals across the U.S. stop using them.

**1951** We test 30 models of electric irons and find that seven can cause burns to users, earning them CR’s “Not Acceptable” rating.



**1956** CR engineers test car seat belts and discover that 26 out of 39 fail to meet even the most modest guidelines. We call for better belts and, later, for federal standards based on crash testing.

**1969** CR urges parents to avoid purchasing this portable crib, known as “The Kiddie Koop,” after two infants die, allegedly from being caught between the lid and side of the crib.



**1972** Congress passes a law creating the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC).



what's in front of you. If you still have trouble, a remote wireless microphone that clips to the lapel of the person you want to hear is a more targeted solution that you can try.

#### PROBLEM

#### The Batteries Die Unexpectedly

During the pandemic, your batteries may have drained especially quickly because you were using the aids for hours at a time to stream music or to be on virtual calls, says Tricia Ashby-Scabis, AuD, CCC-A, director of audiology practices at the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA).

**THE FIX:** Consider a hearing aid with rechargeable batteries that don't require regular removal. In our 2018 survey, more than half of CR members who wear hearing aids rated rechargeable batteries as one of the most important features. But if you're not due for a new hearing aid anytime soon, you can prolong battery life by turning off the aid when you're not using it, and leave the battery compartment door open overnight to allow any moisture that has built up to evaporate. (If the old battery needs replacing, it can be done by your audiologist.)

#### FOOD IQ™

### DIP IT GOOD: A SMARTER PICK FOR YOUR CRUDITÉS PLATTER



A COOL, CREAMY DIP can make crunching your way through a virtuous plate of sliced-up vegetables seem a lot less boring. But don't let the dip you pick cancel out those healthy intentions. We reviewed the nutritional information of more than 20 store-bought dips you might place at the center of your veggie platter and found that many of the typical ranch and french onion options have 60 to 100 calories or more in a measly 2 tablespoon serving. Plus, some of them contain less-healthy or processed ingredients that you may not want to be eating, such as carrageenan, gums, MSG, and preservatives—along with plenty of sodium. (More than half of the ranch and onion flavor dip options we looked at had 200 mg or more of sodium per serving.)

Consider buying a better-for-you but still creamy stand-in: A tub of tzatziki (a Greek-yogurt-based dip with cucumber and herbs) can have fewer processed ingredients and be lower in calories and sodium, as our example here shows.



#### Hidden Valley Thick & Creamy Dip, Classic Ranch (2 Tbsp.)

Calories.....	100
Fat.....	11 g
Sat. fat.....	1.5 g
Carbohydrates.....	2 g
Calcium.....	9 mg
Protein.....	0 g
Sodium.....	270 mg

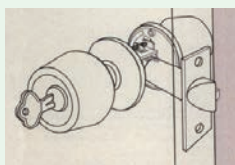


#### Esti Authentic Greek Tzatziki (2 Tbsp.)

Calories.....	29
Fat.....	2.5 g
Sat. fat.....	2 g
Carbohydrates.....	1 g
Calcium.....	27 mg
Protein.....	1 g
Sodium.....	85 mg



**1982** We ask the CPSC to investigate the fire and air pollution risks CR uncovered in kerosene heaters testing. The CPSC recommends new industry safety practices to reduce those risks.



**1990** CR's tests reveal that it takes only a solid kick to the door to break a door lock. But longer screws in the strike plate can improve the strength of some locks, we find.

**2012** Our tests find arsenic in rice and in more than 60 rice products—including infant rice cereals. CR calls on the Food and Drug Administration to set limits on the amount of arsenic allowed in these products.



**2021** CR's ongoing investigation into deaths related to infant sleepers underscores a lack of safety standards for these products, which puts consumers at risk. Turn to page 44 to learn more.

**1973** CR evaluates microwave ovens and finds that they leak radiation. We warn readers and petition to make the federal standard on microwave emissions more stringent.



## FACE-OFF

### BARGAIN TABLETS

CONSUMERS SHOPPING FOR an inexpensive tablet have plenty of options, but few may be as appealing as the Amazon Fire HD 8 and the Onn Tablet Pro 8. For less than \$100, you get an 8-inch tablet designed for lightweight tasks like browsing the web, streaming video, and reading e-books. (Not too shabby, especially considering that the lowest-priced Apple tablets start at \$330.) But what sets these two very similar-seeming tablets apart? Our testing results and insights below reveal the differences.



✓ **Amazon Fire HD 8**  
\$90

**72**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



**64**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

**Onn Tablet Pro 8**  
\$90

8"	Screen Size	8"
Fire OS 7.3	Operating System	Android 10
Amazon Appstore	App Store	Google Play app store
I	Performance	^
I	Display	I
^	Convenience	^
I	Photo and Video	v
^	Versatility	^
15.8	Battery Life—Web (hr.)	12.5
15.2	Battery Life—Video (hr.)	10.6
No	GPS	Yes
32	Internal Storage (GB)	32

#### CR'S TAKE

With a better battery life and camera than the Onn tablet, this Fire offers many great apps. But Gmail users may be frustrated to find that it's missing apps like Gmail and Google Calendar.

#### CR'S TAKE

Walmart's tablet has a speedy and smooth performance for its price—but photos aren't great and video quality is just okay. So if you plan to use the camera a lot, you may prefer the Fire.



## CR MONEY SAVER

### FREE WEEKLY CREDIT REPORTS EXTENDED INTO APRIL 2022

Changes to your credit report—which can impact your ability to get a loan or a credit card—happen almost daily, says Syed Ejaz, a financial policy analyst at CR, so checking your report regularly is a smart way to catch potential errors and stay on top of your financial health. Before the pandemic, credit bureaus (which by law must provide a single free report annually) could charge you about \$12 for each additional report you requested. But during the pandemic, the three major credit bureaus—Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion—began offering consumers free credit reports, and recently announced that they will continue to do so on a weekly basis until April 20, 2022.

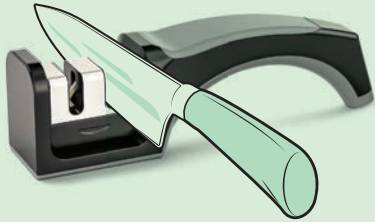
**Take action:** Obtain copies of each of your reports from all three bureaus at [annualcreditreport.com](https://annualcreditreport.com). And check out our July issue, which will contain advice on how to fix report errors, and more.



DO MORE WITH ...

## HOW TO SHARPEN YOUR KNIVES AT HOME

IF YOU HAVEN'T sharpened your kitchen knives over the past few months—or if you've never sharpened them—you might notice that it's difficult to chop an onion or slice a tomato. A dull blade is probably to blame, and it's not just frustrating, it's actually a safety risk. "A sharp knife is a safe knife," says Taryn Flynn, senior buyer of cutlery at the cookware retailer Williams-Sonoma. That may seem counterintuitive, but if the edge of your blade is sharp, it's less likely to slip—potentially into a finger—as you press down to cut. To keep knives sharp, use one of these basic at-home tools: a pull-through sharpener (the easiest tool for infrequent cooks), an electric sharpener (for those who cook a lot but want something simple), or a whetstone (for dedicated home chefs).



### PULL-THROUGH SHARPENER

**Who it's for:** Occasional cooks who want a fast, easy, and inexpensive way to sharpen.

**How it works:** The least expensive option and usually the quickest to use, pull-through sharpeners often have a D-shaped handle on one side and sharpening grooves or channels (also referred to as "stages") on

the other. You hold the sharpener steady on a counter while you pull the knife through each stage several times. The first groove sharpens the knife; additional stages use progressively finer abrasives to refine the blade. However, these may not sharpen your knives as well as an electric model or a whetstone (at right). **Price:** \$5 to \$50; high-quality models tend to start around \$15 to \$20.

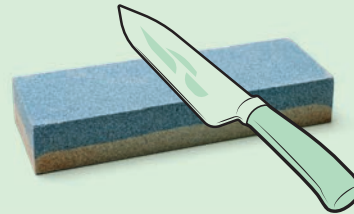


### ELECTRIC SHARPENER

**Who it's for:** Frequent cooks who don't want to spend the extra effort that other methods—such as a whetstone, below—require. **How it works:** Most electric models have slots fitted with motorized abrasive wheels that sharpen and refine both sides of a blade (but wheels wear out over time and need to be replaced). Flexible-belt

sharpeners—a newer addition to the market—use rotating abrasive belts to sharpen one side of the blade at a time; a guide helps keep your knife at the correct angle. Both types usually have at least two stages—one to shape the blade, creating the edge, and then one or two additional stages to sharpen that edge.

**Price:** \$50 to \$200 and up; high-quality models will have multiple sharpening stages.



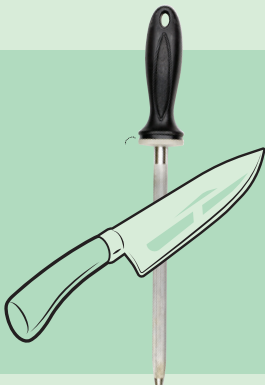
### WHETSTONE

**Who it's for:** Dedicated foodies or knife enthusiasts willing to invest the time to practice the sharpening technique.

**How it works:** The basic idea of a whetstone, also called a sharpening stone, is to stroke the knife back and forth across the stone's surface while holding it steady at a prescribed angle.

There are many types of stones, and you usually need two or three in varying abrasion levels—or a two- or three-sided single stone. Taking a sharpening class at a knife store or watching videos on your knife manufacturer's website can help. Even so, it's a skill that requires practice and one that even some professional cooks never master.

**Price:** \$30 and up; high-quality stones start around \$100.



### WHAT'S THAT ROD THAT CAME WITH MY KNIFE SET?

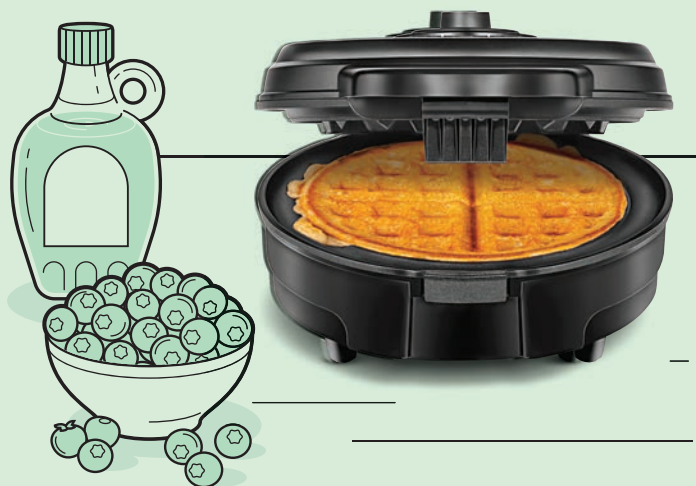
Many knife block sets include a basic honing rod, which is an important knife maintenance tool—but it's not a sharpener per se. Honing a knife after every few uses will help it perform better and extend the time it can go between sharpenings. To use one, hold the rod upright, with the handle in one hand and the tip on a cutting board. Hold the heel of the knife's blade

against the rod, at an approximately 20-degree angle, tilted away from the rod. Then draw the length of the blade from heel to tip along the rod, as if you were taking a slice off it. Repeat, alternating sides, three to five times. If you don't notice easier cutting after honing, it's probably time to use one of the methods above. **Price:** \$40 to \$100 when sold separately.

## BEST FOR \$55 OR LESS

AFFORDABLE  
FATHER'S DAY GIFTS

Searching for something that's thoughtful but not too pricey? These cool tools and gadgets all performed well in CR's tests.



## WELL-PRICED WAFFLE MAKER

**Chefman Anti-Overflow Belgian Waffle Maker** \$30

76

OVERALL  
SCORE

This countertop appliance is good at turning out caramel-colored and crispy, or blond and fluffy, waffles (depending on how you like them) and has an indicator light to alert users when waffles are ready.

## PRACTICAL PASSWORD MANAGER

73

OVERALL  
SCORE

**Bitwarden Families**  
\$40/year

Bitwarden's password manager for families can help you create and retrieve tough passwords. It's easy to use—a great gift for those who grumble about not being able to remember their log-in.

## BEST BUY EAR BUDS

71

OVERALL  
SCORE

**Shure SE112**  
\$50

Our tests found that these in-ear buds deliver very good sound quality for a great price, and will both muffle some external noise and limit the amount of sound that escapes from the earpieces.

## RECHARGEABLE TOOTHBRUSH

71

OVERALL  
SCORE

**Fairlywill FW-508**  
\$23

This affordable electric toothbrush scores better in our tests than some that cost four times as much. It has five modes and a built-in timer, and earns an Excellent rating in our rigorous cleaning tests.

## BUDGET-FRIENDLY AIR FRYER

66

OVERALL  
SCORE

**Gourmia Digital Air Fryer GAF575**  
\$55

One of the least expensive air fryers in CR's tests, the Gourmia is also among the easiest to use, snagging it a Very Good rating. It's also quieter than some other fryers we tested.

## EASY-TO-USE EXERCISE BAND

62

OVERALL  
SCORE

**Xiaomi Mi Band 5**  
\$35

A good tool for any fitness buff, this water-resistant band has an accurate step counter, comes with a wireless magnetic charging connector, and is claimed to have a generous 14 days of battery life.

## SMALL SMART SPEAKER

53

OVERALL  
SCORE

**Amazon Echo Dot (4th Gen)**  
\$50

The latest version of the Echo Dot smart speaker with Alexa features all-new styling as a small orb. This newest Echo sounds better than the old version, with slightly clearer highs and a bit more bass.

## TOP-NOTCH BEARD TRIMMER



**Philips Norelco Multigroom 7000 (MG7750/49)** \$55\*

This sleek Philips beard trimmer has a blade strong enough to cut through coarse hair. Our users also found that it is easy to handle, quick to clean, and small enough to be easily packed for travel.

## MASSIVE INSULATED MUG



**Bubba Classic 52-oz. mug**, \$23\*

A fun pick for a frequent camper, this 52-ounce insulated mug can hold enough coffee to share (but won't fit into any car cup holder we've seen). It also has a built-in bottle opener.



## RECALLS

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



### AUDI A3 VEHICLES

Audi is recalling 153,152 A3 vehicles because the passenger occupant detection system (PODS) may detect a malfunction and deactivate the airbag even when someone is sitting in the front-passenger seat. This increases the risk of injury to a front passenger in a crash. Vehicles recalled are the 2015-2020 S3 and A3 sedan, 2016-2018 A3 E-Tron, 2017-2020 RS3 sedan, and 2015-2019 A3 Cabriolet. A "passenger airbag off" warning will illuminate on the instrument panel when the airbag is not active. If the warning appears, Audi recommends not using the passenger seat and taking the vehicle to an Audi dealer as soon as possible.

**What to do:** Audi is currently still investigating the cause of the problem and has not yet determined a remedy. Audi expects to mail interim notices

informing owners of the safety risk and a second notice when the remedy is available. Audi's number for this recall is 69BY; the NHTSA campaign number is 21V-198. Call Audi customer service at 800-253-2834 for details.

### J. HUNT ACCENT TABLES

Jimco Lamps is recalling about 99,000 J. Hunt Home and J. Hunt and Co. accent tables with charging receptacles because the receptacles and/or USB ports installed in the tables can have an electrical problem that poses a shock hazard. The tables were sold at HomeGoods, T.J.Maxx, Marshalls, and other home furnishings stores and online from May 2019 through December 2020 for \$60 to \$130.

**What to do:** Stop using the charging receptacles and

ports. Contact Jimco Lamps at 833-659-0753 or go to [jhunthome.com](https://www.jhunthome.com) or [jimcolamp.com](https://www.jimcolamp.com) for details and to get a full refund or a free replacement accent table.

### HR PLATFORM BED FRAMES

Global Home Imports is recalling about 82,000 HR platform bed frames because they can collapse, posing a crush hazard that can result in severe injury or death. The frames were sold at American Furniture Warehouse, Mattress Firm, and furniture and mattress stores from April 2020 through January 2021 for about \$200.

**What to do:** Stop using the bed frame. Contact Global Home Imports at 888-550-4371 or go to [bedtech.com](https://www.bedtech.com) and click on "HR Recall" for details and to get a free repair kit with metal clips to strengthen the frame.

### HD HUDSON GARDEN SPRAYERS

HD Hudson is recalling about 64,000 illu-Mist battery-powered garden sprayers because the lithium-ion battery can overheat, posing a fire hazard. The sprayers were sold at Lowe's stores and online at Amazon from December 2019 through January 2021 for \$40 to \$50.

**What to do:** Stop using the sprayer, remove the battery tray, and look for a brown battery. If the battery is brown, remove it and the tray, and dispose of them in accordance with local laws for disposal of lithium-ion

batteries. Contact HD Hudson at 800-394-8802 or go to [hdhudson.com](https://www.hdhudson.com) for replacement details.

### REVIVE 3-WICK CANDLES

Melaleuca is recalling about 38,000 Revive 3-wick soy candles because the candles' high flames can ignite the surface of the wax, posing fire and burn hazards. The candles were sold at Melaleuca stores, catalog, and online from November 2020 through December 2020 for \$23 to \$33.

**What to do:** Stop using the candle, cut the wicks short enough to prevent the candle from being used, and discard it. Call Melaleuca at 800-742-8094 for refund details.

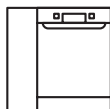
### CB2 CHESTS AND DRESSERS

CB2 is recalling about 11,000 Junction tall chests and low dressers because they are unstable if not anchored to the wall, posing tip-over and entrapment hazards to children. The furniture was sold at CB2 stores and online at [cb2.com](https://www.cb2.com) from December 2012 through July 2019 for \$700 to \$850.

**What to do:** If the chest or dresser is not properly anchored to a wall, stop using it and move the furniture to where children can't access it. Call CB2 at 800-451-8217 or go to [cb2.com](https://www.cb2.com) for details and to get a full store credit or refund.

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

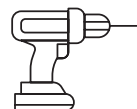
### DISHWASHERS



### INSECT REPELLENTS



### CORDLESS DRILLS

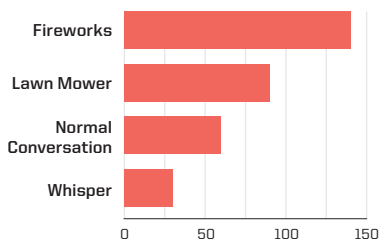


### BLENDERS





Levels of noise in decibels (dB)



Source: American Academy of Audiology.

# PRODUCT UPDATE

THE LATEST RATINGS FROM OUR LABS

## The Best Noise-Canceling Headphones for Less

Our latest tests turned up great performance at lower prices—plus smart new features for every budget.

by Thomas Germain



**ANKER**  
**SOUNDCORE**  
**LIFE Q20**  
\$50

**75** OVERALL SCORE



**SONY**  
**WF-1000XM3**  
\$230

**87** OVERALL SCORE

**CLEER**  
**ALLY PLUS**  
\$100

**70** OVERALL SCORE



**PANASONIC**  
**RZ-S500W**  
\$180

**75** OVERALL SCORE



**T**HERE ARE A lot of reasons to love noise-canceling headphones. The best models deliver great audio quality while reducing outside noise with the use of sophisticated electronics.

That can boost your enjoyment, and audiologists say it may even help protect your hearing because you won't need to crank up the volume to hear every note.

But not too long ago, choices were limited. Most noise-canceling headphones were bulky cans that fit over your ears, and the few in-ear models on the market housed electronics in an external compartment you had to slide into a pocket or wear around your neck. It was hard to get a great pair for less than \$300.

That's all changed. You can find much sleeker over-the-ear models packed with convenient new features, as well as tiny noise-canceling earbuds that fit in the palm of your hand. And prices start much lower, too.

## Improved Technology

"We're seeing more and more models that get an Excellent rating for noise cancellation, and the best pairs filter out more sound than anything we've tested in the past," says Elias Arias, the project leader for headphone testing at Consumer Reports.

All noise-canceling headphones work best on low-pitched drones like airplane noise rather than on fluctuating sounds like dogs barking. But many new models have features that make them versatile in other ways.

For instance, variable noise cancellation lets you adjust the level of sound blocking, so you can choose whether you want full isolation or just a damper on your surroundings that doesn't cut you off entirely. The Bose Noise Cancelling Headphones 700 give you 11 levels of noise cancellation to cycle through.



## REGULAR HEADPHONES MINUS THE NOISE

Some people find that headphones with noise-canceling technology can produce an uncomfortable feeling of pressure, almost like being underwater. An alternative is to look for a regular pair of headphones or earphones that simply block out a lot of sound by forming a tight seal in or around the ear.

The over-the-ear Audio-Technica ATH-M50x, \$150, can do a good job of this. But headphone fit varies a lot from one person to the next, so if you're looking for a good seal, be sure to try on headphones before you buy them, if possible. When you do, turn your head from side to side to see whether the shifting pulls the ear cups away from your head. (Check the retailer's return policy, too.)

With in-ear models, you can also try upgrading the tips to get a better fit. Companies such as Comply sell inexpensive replacements designed to block out noise.

"It's worth a try if folks want something that form-fits to the shape of the ear canal," says Elias Arias, who tests headphones for CR. "It may give better isolation and could even be more comfortable. Comply tips tend to be the go-to insert for professional musicians."

Another new feature on many models, called "monitor" or "transparency" mode, actually pipes in or amplifies the sound from your environment. Even with noise cancellation turned off entirely, any pair of headphones will physically muffle outside sounds. Monitor mode can make environmental sounds much clearer while you're enjoying audio through your headphones.

Why would you want that? Imagine you're listening to music on a walk but want to hear approaching cars, or you're catching a podcast in a cafe but still need to know when your order is called. Some models let you trigger monitor mode with a tap—almost like a mute button. You might be listening to music during a flight, for example, and briefly turn on monitor mode to hear an announcement.

Adding convenience, many new models have free smartphone apps that allow adjustments like tweaking the bass and treble or customizing what the buttons on the headphones do.

## Lower Prices

Noise-canceling headphones have always been more expensive than conventional models. Just a few years ago a decent pair that cost less than \$150 was a rare bargain. These days, you can spend one-third as much. The Anker SoundCore Life Q20, pictured on the facing page, costs just \$50 and delivers sound quality that rates Very Good and noise reduction that rates Excellent. Want something even cheaper? The Monoprice BT300ANC rates almost as well as the Anker and costs only \$45.

To be clear, those are exceptional deals. Bose's flagship noise-canceling headphones cost \$380, while Apple's new over-ear AirPods Max sell for a whopping \$550. (Regular headphones rated Excellent range from \$70 to \$350.) But in between those two price extremes are lots of other worthwhile headphones to consider.



One standout is the Sennheiser PXC 550-II, which matches the best pairs in CR's ratings with Excellent scores for audio quality and noise cancellation for as little as \$200. (Prices can fluctuate quite a bit.) The Sennheiser comes with a variety of premium features, including variable noise canceling, a monitor mode, and an auto-pause feature that kicks in when you take the headphones off.

### More Variety, Too

The biggest change in headphones over the past five years has been the explosion of true wireless models, which don't have a cable connecting the two earpieces. In fact, nearly all of the portable noise-canceling models in CR's ratings are now this type.

The best-known option is probably

the \$220 AirPods Pro, Apple's noise-canceling update to its ever-popular wireless earbuds. They do well in our tests, with sound rated Very Good and noise cancellation rated Excellent.

But other true wireless pairs perform even better. For just a bit more money you can pick up the Sony WF-1000XM3, our top portable model, which has better audio than the AirPods deliver. The Panasonic RZ-S500W gets the same rating as the AirPods for \$40 less.

Some people prefer in-ear models because they find wearing headphones over or on the ear less comfortable—especially when they're trying to sleep on a train or a plane—or because larger models can mess up their hair.

Before you decide, though, you should know about a few potential downsides to true wireless pairs. For

one thing, they can feel heavy in the ear. Also, we've found that it can sometimes be tricky to get a good fit. The ear tips must form tight seals in both ears or the noise cancellation may not work as well. (It's wise to check return policies before you buy them.)

Battery life is another factor to consider. Some over-the-ear styles can keep running for more than a day of listening time, according to their manufacturers. Just 6 hours is more common with true wireless models.

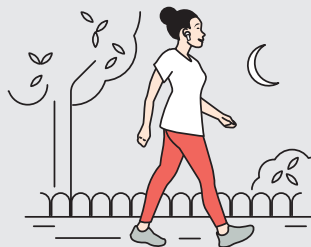
But true wireless models usually come in a case with a built-in battery that doubles as a charger. Most cases will provide at least one full charge on the go, and many can recharge your earphones multiple times before the case needs to be plugged in again.

## THE RIGHT HEADPHONES FOR ...



### A NOISY FLIGHT

Any noise-canceling headphones are a solid pick for travel. These models don't just insulate your ears; they actively counteract incoming sound waves with fancy acoustical engineering. They work best with consistent low-pitched noises. (The inspiration for the concept was supposedly a transatlantic flight.)



### AN EVENING WALK

Headphones with variable noise cancellation or a monitor mode can keep you aware of what's happening around you—whether it's traffic or other pedestrians. The two technologies work differently (see the details on page 21), but they both let you switch from full isolation to a mode where you can hear your surroundings.



### USING LOUD TOOLS

Stick with ear muffs or plugs made for hearing protection. Noise-canceling models aren't approved for protecting you from dangerously loud noises. Look for the product's Noise Reduction Rating (NRR), overseen by the Environmental Protection Agency, to see how much it will reduce outside sound.



**Ratings** ➤ **Sound Advice** These noise-canceling wireless headphones are divided into traditional models that fit on or over your ears and highly portable earphones that fit into your ear canals.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results	Features
			Sound quality	Noise reduction Monitor function (mute) Battery life (hr.)



#### WIRELESS PORTABLE HEADPHONES

📶 Sony WF-1000XM3	87	\$230	⬆️⬆️	●	6
✓ Master & Dynamic MW07 Plus	76	\$300	⬆️	⬆️	10
✓ Bose QuietComfort	75	\$280	⬆️	⬆️	6
📶 Panasonic RZ-S500W	75	\$180	⬆️	⬆️	6.5
✓ Apple AirPods Pro	75	\$220	⬆️	⬆️	4.5
📶 JBL Club Pro+ TWS	75	\$200	⬆️	⬆️	6
✓ House of Marley Redemption ANC	72	\$200	⬆️	⬆️	5
✓ Jabra Elite 85t	72	\$230	⬆️	⬆️	5.5
📶 Samsung Galaxy Buds Live	72	\$140	⬆️	⬆️	6
📶 Sony WF-SP800N	72	\$200	⬆️	⬆️	9
📶 Cleer Ally Plus	70	\$100	⬆️	⬆️	10
✓ Sennheiser Momentum True Wireless 2	70	\$250	⬆️	⬆️	7
📶 Sony WF-SP700N	69	\$180	⬆️	⬆️	3
📶 Audio-Technica ATH-ANC100BT	68	\$100	⬆️	⬆️	10
Amazon Echo Buds	65	\$90	⬆️	⬆️	up to 5
Plantronics BackBeat Go 410	65	\$60	⬆️	⬆️	8
1MORE True Wireless ANC	47	\$180	⬆️	⬆️	5

#### WIRELESS HOME/STUDIO-STYLE HEADPHONES

✓ Bose QuietComfort 35 Series II	87	\$300	⬆️⬆️	●	20
✓ Bose Noise Cancelling Headphones 700	87	\$380	⬆️⬆️	●	20
📶 Sennheiser PXC 550-II	87	\$200	⬆️⬆️	●	20
✓ Apple AirPods Max	83	\$550	⬆️	⬆️	20
✓ Shure Aonic 50	81	\$300	⬆️⬆️	●	20
📶 Razer Opus	75	\$150	⬆️	⬆️	25

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results	Features
			Sound quality	Noise reduction Monitor function (mute) Battery life (hr.)

#### WIRELESS HOME/STUDIO-STYLE HEADPHONES *Continued*

✓ Sony WH-1000XM4	75	\$350	⬆️	⬆️	30
📶 Anker SoundCore Life Q20	75	\$50	⬆️	⬆️	40
✓ Microsoft Surface Headphone 2	75	\$250	⬆️	⬆️	20
✓ Sony WH-1000XM3	75	\$350	⬆️	⬆️	30
📶 Sony WH-H910N	75	\$200	⬆️	⬆️	35
✓ Beats by Dre Beats Studio3 Wireless	73	\$350	⬆️	⬆️	22
📶 JBL LIVE 650BTNC	73	\$130	⬆️	⬆️	20
📶 Puro Sound Labs PuroPro	73	\$200	⬆️	⬆️	28
✓ Marshall Monitor II A.N.C.	72	\$320	⬆️	⬆️	30
📶 Monoprice BT-300ANC	72	\$45	⬆️	⬆️	8
✓ Beats by Dr. Dre Solo Pro	70	\$300	⬆️	⬆️	22
✓ Beyerdynamic Lagoon ANC Traveler	69	\$230	⬆️	⬆️	24.5
✓ Jabra Elite 85h	69	\$200	⬆️	⬆️	36
Phiaton 900 Legacy	66	\$225	⬆️	⬆️	43
Bowers & Wilkins PX7	66	\$400	⬆️	⬆️	30
JBL Club One	64	\$350	⬆️	⬆️	23
Sennheiser HD 450BT	64	\$200	⬆️	⬆️	30
JLab Audio Studio ANC	59	\$60	⬆️	⬆️	28
Audio-Technica QuietPoint ATH-ANC 700BT	58	\$200	⬆️	⬆️	25
Altec Lansing Whisper ANC	55	\$50	⬆️	⬆️	12
Monoprice BT-600ANC	53	\$90	⬆️	⬆️	25
Sony WH-CH710N	51	\$100	⬆️	⬆️	35
JAM Out There	44	\$60	⬆️	⬆️	17
Audio-Technica ATH-ANC500BT	42	\$100	⬆️	⬆️	20

➤ Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at [CR.org/headphones0621](https://www.consumerreports.org/headphones0621).

**HOW WE TEST:** Overall Score is based on the performance of the product in our tests. Sound quality represents the tonal

accuracy, clarity, detail, ambience, and dynamics of the audio reproduced by the headphones. Noise reduction represents

how well the headphones reduce outside sound when the active noise-cancellation feature is activated. Battery life is the

manufacturer's estimate when noise canceling and Bluetooth are in use. Price is approximate retail.

# CR'S GREAT OUTDOORS GUIDE

Fresh air with good food is a treasured rite of summer. We've got the grills, menus, music, and movie-watching gear for your backyard, the local park, and even the beach. Here's to sunny days ahead.

BY PAUL HOPE ILLUSTRATIONS BY MICHAEL KIRKHAM









# 1

## IN THE BACKYARD

**WHETHER IT'S A** sprawling expanse of grass or something closer to the size of a postage stamp, your backyard is a tried-and-true summer venue that allows you to entertain at home with less risk. The secret to the success of any food-focused backyard event is a great grill, like one of those on the following pages and in the ratings charts starting on page 34. (Tip: A folding worktable set up near the grill gives you instant counter space

to work on.) For a break from the usual burgers and hot dogs, we provide a tasty menu centered on grilled steak with a Spanish flair. (If you're cooking for more than just a few people and want everything ready at the same time, consider making brisket, which you can smoke for 6 to 16 hours a day ahead and reheat when company arrives.) To take the fun of your alfresco soiree up a notch, we show you how to host a moonlit movie screening.



## THE FOOD



### A TASTE OF SPAIN

- Pasta salad
- Grilled spice-rubbed hanger steak
- Marinated and grilled veggies
- S'mores over the campfire

This menu is built around a steak recipe adapted from “Cúrate: Authentic Spanish Food From an American Kitchen,” by Katie Button with Genevieve Ko (Flatiron Books, 2016). “The

spice rub is my way of combining Spanish and Moorish seasonings with the distinctly American dish of grilled steak,” says Button, who owns two restaurants in Asheville, N.C., with her parents and her husband, Felix Meana.

### Katie Button's Spice-Rubbed Hanger Steak

To make the spice rub: Stir 1 Tbsp. sweet smoked paprika, 1 Tbsp. unsweetened cocoa powder, 1 tsp. cumin,

½ tsp. allspice, ¼ tsp. cinnamon, and a pinch of cayenne in a small bowl. Sprinkle 1½ tsp. salt all over a 1½-lb. steak, then season with pepper. Evenly coat the steak with the spice rub.

For a medium-rare steak, grill over medium-hot heat until browned, 4 to 5 minutes per side. Transfer to a cutting board and let the steak rest for 5 minutes. Slice against the grain and serve with its own juices.

## THE FUN

**SHOWING A MOVIE** in your backyard takes just a few pieces of gear and a little setup time. To start, you'll need a portable mini projector (about \$100 to \$500). Look for one that provides 720p video resolution or greater, and at least 2,000 lumens (a measure of brightness). The brighter, the better, because you increase

the size of the projection by pulling the projector away from the screen, which dims the image. Depending on the projector, you'll typically place it between 8 and 12 feet from the screen to get a 100-inch image. You can purchase a large screen to project onto or use a white wall or a sheet pulled taut. A few mini projectors have

built-in streaming capability or support wireless mirroring of video from a smartphone. If yours doesn't, plug a streaming media player such as an Amazon Fire TV Stick or a Roku Streaming Stick+ into its HDMI port, or connect a laptop to the projector. For optimal sound, connect the projector to a Bluetooth speaker (including any

of those in this package) or a sound bar, either wirelessly or through an RCA or a minijack audio connection. Some projectors have rechargeable batteries that let you take them to a park or anywhere there's no power. For all other models, use an extension cord rated for outdoor use and place it where people won't trip over it.



#### EXPERT EVALUATION SCORE

- 4/5 PICTURE QUALITY
- 5/5 65" BRIGHTNESS
- 4/5 100" BRIGHTNESS

The **LG CineBeam PH550**  
\$419

Pricy for a mini projector, it delivers a very bright image, Bluetooth, and wireless mirroring (so you can project videos from your phone). The rechargeable battery lasts for up to 2.5 hours.



#### EXPERT EVALUATION SCORE

- 3/5 PICTURE QUALITY
- 4/5 65" BRIGHTNESS
- 3/5 100" BRIGHTNESS

**Vankyo Leisure 430** (2020 Upgraded) \$100

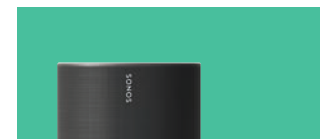
This affordable option produces a relatively bright image of a decent size. It's a bit bulky, requires an outlet, and has less-than-HD picture quality, but it should satisfy many backyard moviegoers.



**68**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

**Ultimate Ears Hyperboom**  
\$400

The Hyperboom speaker pumps out plenty of volume with impressive clarity. It's relatively large, but its vertical orientation means it doesn't take up much space on a patio or picnic table.



**63**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

**Sonos Move**  
\$400

Combining great sound with impressive versatility, the Move is the first Sonos speaker with a rechargeable battery and Bluetooth connectivity for easy pairing with a smartphone.

## THE FLAME

## GAS

\$100 to \$3,500

**SMALL** 18 or fewer burgers**MIDSIZED** 18 to 28 burgers**LARGE** 28 or more burgers**150° F to 850° F**

Typically, you can smoke meats at 180° F and get a sear at 550° F or more.

**BEST FOR GRILLING:** Anything and everything. You can fine-tune the flame for delicate fish like cod or sear pork chops and make easy work of burgers and brats.

**PROS:** The most popular type, gas grills are a cinch to light, they heat quickly, and they're easy to use. Add-ons like a rotisserie or a pizza oven (see the facing page) allow you to vary the fare. "Models that score well in our temperature-range test can cook at the broadest variety of temperatures, making them better at cooking the most diverse range of foods," says Larry Ciufio, CR's engineer in charge of grill testing.

**CONS:** You won't get smoky flavor cooking on gas. For that, you'll need to add a smoker box, which you fill with wood chips and leave on the grates.

**GRILLING TIP:** Impress your family with perfect grill marks: Halfway through the initial sear, rotate the food 90 degrees.



✓ Weber Genesis II  
E-310 \$750

78

OVERALL  
SCORE

## CHARCOAL

\$70 to \$375

**SMALL****TO MIDSIZED** 12 to 24 burgers**150° F to 550° F**

The bigger the grill, the more coal it can hold and the hotter it can get.

**BEST FOR GRILLING:** Hearty food that can stand up to smoke, like steak, lamb kebabs, swordfish, and salmon steaks.

**PROS:** You get great smoky flavor from the hot coals.

**CONS:** Cooking over charcoal is more labor intensive than gas. You'll need 20 to 30 minutes to light the coals fully (use a charcoal chimney).

**GRILLING TIP:** Barrel charcoal grills are usually wider and can cook more food at once but over a thinner coal bed, so they're better for burgers, bratwurst, and other cookout foods that are best cooked over even heat. Kettle charcoal grills tend to have deeper and narrower coal beds, which can concentrate heat for searing or, if you close the dampers, slow the rate at which coals burn for long, slow cooking. "Don't forget that briquettes burn out after about an hour," says grill master Steven Raichlen. "So you'll need to keep adding more coals."



Dyna-Glo  
DGN576DNC-D \$230

81

OVERALL  
SCORE

## KAMADO

\$300 to \$2,500

**MOSTLY****MIDSIZED** about 20 to 24 burgers**150° F to 1,000° F**

**BEST FOR GRILLING:** Food that benefits from cooking at very high temperatures, like seared steak and coal-fired pizza, or from low, sustained temperatures, like ribs and brisket.

**PROS:** Kamado grills offer unparalleled control: They can hold a steady, low temperature for extended periods and go to nearly 1,000 degrees for searing.

**CONS:** It can take an hour or more to bring coals to the right temperature—twice as long as some charcoal grills. "Make sure the coals are fully lit and glowing orange, even slightly ashed over, before starting to cook," Ciufio says.

**GRILLING TIP:** Ceramic kamado grills tend to be more sturdy and can be better insulated for superior temperature control than non-ceramic models, but they have a higher starting price and are more difficult to assemble. Use briquettes for basic cooking and lump coal for a serious sear.



Vision Kamado  
Professional  
S-T4C101 \$900

75

OVERALL  
SCORE



## PELLET

\$350 to \$2,000

MOSTLY

MIDSIZED TO

LARGE about 20 to 28 burgers

150° F to 550° F

**BEST FOR GRILLING:** Food that is easy to burn, such as pork chops or skin-on chicken, and large cuts that require cooking at a low, steady temperature, such as pork shoulder, ribs, and brisket. Pellet grills use wood pellets as fuel and are ideal if you love a smoky flavor without a lot of effort or guesswork.

**PROS:** They're simple to use, the temperature is easy to control, and the pellets impart distinct flavors depending on the type you choose. Load the hopper with wood pellets and dial in the cooking temperature on a digital thermostat, just like on an oven. More pellets are drawn automatically from the hopper to maintain the heat.

**CONS:** "Pellet grills sometimes fail to get as hot as gas grills in our tests, which makes them less adept at searing," Ciufu says.

**GRILLING TIP:** For a smokier flavor, use hickory or mesquite pellets; for a milder flavor, try pecan or oak.



Traeger Ironwood  
650 TFB65BLE  
\$1,200

83

OVERALL  
SCORE

## THE TOOLS

Paul Hope, one of CR's grill experts and a trained chef, tried out more than a dozen tools to find the ones that enhance grilling enjoyment and make it less of a chore. Here are his picks for a backyard cookout.



### KETTLEPIZZA OVEN FOR GAS GRILLS

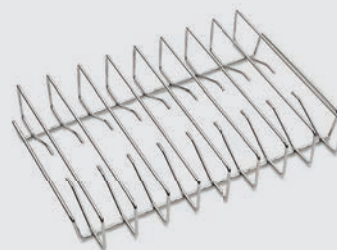
\$225 AT AMAZON

Skip the \$350 trendy freestanding pizza ovens. I've made about a dozen pizzas in this so far, and each has been amazing—the crust and cheese cook perfectly. It only works with gas grills, though.

### TRAEGER RIB RACK

\$24 AT HOMEDEPOT.COM

I'm pretty proud of my ribs, which I smoke for 6 to 8 hours. This fits eight racks (on edge) in the space of three racks laid flat. You can use it in other types of grills; just make sure it'll fit.



### SUMPRI COLOR-CODED EXTENDING S'MORES STICKS

6 FOR \$18 AT AMAZON

These s'mores sticks are color-coded, so there's no need to guess who gets which one. They also retract for easy storage.

### JOLLY GREEN BBQ GLOVES

\$29 AT AMAZON

These heat-resistant silicone gloves are far from fashionable, but they provide enough great grip to let you lift an entire hot brisket or pork shoulder.



# 2

## AT THE PARK

**PULLING OFF A FAMILY GATHERING** at a park or campground is easier than you might think. Use a portable grill for the cooking. And the wireless speakers we recommend should play for 8 to 24 hours between charges. (You can recharge most speakers using your car's USB port or an adapter in the cigarette lighter.) The **DeWalt DXGNI2200 Recreational Generator (\$650)** was exceptionally quiet in our tests, runs 4 to 10 hours, and puts out 1,700 watts—plenty for a sound bar, movie projector, laptop, fan, and even a few phone chargers. Want to keep drinks ice-cold? The **Zojirushi 16-ounce vacuum insulated mug (\$28)** got a top score for temperature retention in our tests. To protect against insects and ticks, consider **Ben's Tick & Insect Repellent Wipes (\$6)** or **Total Home Woodland Scent Insect Repellent (\$6.50)** sold at CVS. Both did very well in our testing.



## THE FOOD

### AMERICAN FARE WITH AN ITALIAN FLAIR

- Classic burgers with seeded potato buns, cheese, and condiments
- Emilia-Romagna “Elote” grilled corn with garlic, basil, and cheese
- Homemade brownies

This standard menu has a delightful twist: grilled corn with garlic, basil, and cheese—a recipe adapted for



PHOTO: STEVEN RANDAZZO

## THE FLAME

### PORTABLE

\$80 to \$420

SMALL (18 or fewer burgers)

150° F to 500° F

#### BEST FOR GRILLING:

Anything you'd cook on a regular gas grill.

**PROS:** Light and compact, many are built to be used on a tabletop. No table? Choose

one with tall legs so you don't have to cook on the ground.

**CON:** Many run on 1-pound propane cylinders, which last only 1½ to 2 hours.

**GRILLING TIP:** Take a few extra propane cylinders, or choose a model like the one at right, which takes a 20-pound tank. Telling people that they can't have a burger because you've run out of propane before everyone's been fed is a sure way to spoil a cookout.



Broil King  
Porta-Chef 320  
952654 \$300

## THE TOOLS



**OXO GOOD GRIPS  
16-INCH LOCKING TONGS**  
\$16 AT OXO.COM

Nimble and light, with a perfect grip, they work great at the beach, too.



**CDN COOKING  
THERMOMETER**  
\$15 AT BEDBATHANDBEYOND.COM

This helps make sure food is heated to a safe temperature.



**SILICONE BASTING  
BRUSHES**  
\$8 FOR 2 AT AMAZON

Use these to slather sauce or marinade on ribs and chicken.

park-friendly grilling from "How to Cook Vegetables," by the grill master Steven Raichlen (Workman Publishing, 2021). "You may hear some popcornlike crackling" as the corn cooks on the grill, he says.

#### Steven Raichlen's Emilia-Romagna "Elote" Grilled Corn

Make the garlic-basil butter in advance and place

it in a heat-safe bowl: Melt ½ stick unsalted butter in a small saucepan. Stir in one clove of minced garlic and four basil leaves cut into slivers. Cook over medium-high heat until fragrant but not brown, about 2 minutes. At the park, set your grill to high heat. Brush or scrape the grill grate clean and oil it well. Lightly brush four ears of husked corn with the

garlic-basil butter and season with salt and pepper. Arrange the ears on the grate. Grill until the kernels are darkly browned, rotating the ears every minute or so to ensure they cook evenly. Baste the corn with more garlic-basil butter as it grills and sprinkle with ¼ cup finely grated Parmesan before serving. Cooking time will be 8 to 12 minutes.

## THE FUN

**THESE SPEAKERS** present two very different approaches to making your music mobile. The **Bose SoundLink Color II** is a 1.2-pound, toss-in-your-bag accessory with powerful sonics that belie its modest size and moderate price. The controls are easy to use, and it pairs quickly with a phone through Bluetooth.

The **Braven XXL-2**, which resembles the classic beatboxes of the 1980s, is a tailgating-worthy monster machine with ample power for a sizable socially distanced party. It's a hefty 17 pounds, with much of the weight coming from a beefy battery that provides up to 18 hours of music and can even power other devices. The XXL-2 pairs strong bass and volume aplenty (a must in the great outdoors) with a refined midrange and extended highs. It will do equal justice to Motown and Mozart, and the built-in bottle opener is a handy touch.



Bose SoundLink Color II \$130



Braven  
XXL-2 \$295

61 OVERALL  
SCORE

# 3

## AT THE BEACH



**A FEAST AT THE BEACH** requires a little bit of planning, but the extra logistical lift is worth it. There's something about the combination of sunshine and swimming that makes even great food taste better. A cooler is key to safely transporting and storing the ingredients you bring and keeping drinks cold. Remember that uncooked meat, fish, and other

perishable foods you'd usually store in a refrigerator can be left out only for 1 hour on a 90-degree day. (Any longer and you run the risk of food poisoning.) Be sure to bring along a good sunscreen, too, and reapply it often.

**Equate Sport Lotion SPF 50** (\$4 at Walmart) is an affordable option that rates high in CR's sunscreen tests.

## THE FLAME

### PORTABLE



Nexgrill 820-0033 \$110



## THE FOOD

### SURF-AND-TURF ON A SKEWER

- Bacon-wrapped scallop kebabs
- Homemade potato chips (seasoned with herbs or Old Bay Seasoning)
- Orange sections or lemon bars for dessert

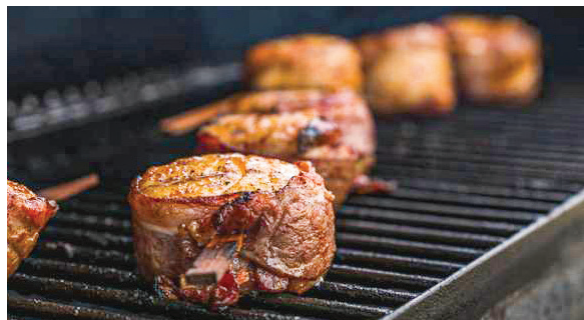
Serve up a taste of the sea with scallop kebabs that you can assemble at home and grill quickly at the beach. This

recipe is from the chef and cookbook author Kevin Curry, whose Instagram profile (@fitmencook) has 1.6 million faithful and well-fed followers. "The scallop kebabs are a great way to get out of your comfort zone and elevate your grill game," Curry says. If you're planning to grill on a portable or public grill, keep the kebabs under 40° F in a sealed plastic bag in an ice-filled cooler until

you're ready to cook them. You can also grill the scallops at home and bring them with you to eat cold.

### Kevin Curry's Bacon-Wrapped Scallop Kebabs

Prepare the scallop skewers at home: Combine 1¼ Tbsp. olive oil, 1 Tbsp. coconut sugar (available at Target and supermarkets), and 2 heaping tsp. smoked paprika to make a paste. Wrap eight jumbo scallops with a slice of bacon each. Skewer the scallops (no more than three per stick) and brush on the paprika paste. Transfer to a plastic storage bag and keep cold until you're ready to cook them at the beach. Grill over a medium fire, about 8 minutes per side, until the scallops are just cooked through and the bacon is crisp.



## THE FUN



JBL Flip 4  
\$80

57 OVERALL  
SCORE



Sony SRS-XB32  
\$150

49 OVERALL  
SCORE

**MUSIC IS A** treat at the beach until your speaker gets knocked into the water and things suddenly go very quiet. Both of these speakers are good choices for the beach and can survive a dunking but differ in price and features.

The **JBL Flip 4** is a cheap and cheerful speaker that comes in a variety of vivid colors, is small enough to be tossed into a beach bag, and does its job without much fuss. It has a claimed battery life of up to 12 hours, and the manufacturer says the entire speaker can survive being fully submerged, at least briefly. With bass that's a bit boomy

and treble that's somewhat subdued, it's not the best-sounding portable, but these flaws are minor given its ruggedness and low price.

**Sony's SRS-XB32** features LEDs that can flash to the beat of the music, with customizable colors that can be adjusted with its smartphone app. Its Party Booster feature makes percussion sounds, including a snare drum and cowbell, when you whap on different parts of the speaker. Sony claims that it has a battery life of close to 24 hours (with the lights turned off and the sound turned down) and that it's waterproof and will float.

## THE TOOLS



CUISINART  
TOOL SET  
\$28 AT AMAZON


This thoughtful kit has tongs, a spatula, and a meat fork, plus extras like kebab and corn holders, all in a neatly organized case so you don't have to wrangle a hodgepodge of tools.



CAVE TOOLS  
BBQ KEBAB  
SKEWERS AND  
RACK (sold separately)  
\$38 AT AMAZON

These reusable skewers keep even tender food (like the scallops, above left) from spinning, so that everything cooks evenly. The raised rack keeps delicate food off the grates.

**Ratings** ➤ **Summer Sizzlers** Whether you're looking for a gas, charcoal, kamado, or portable grill, our ratings will guide you to the model with the right price and performance.

Brand + Model		Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results							Features		
				Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Evenness performance	Preheat performance	Temperature range	Indirect cooking	Convenience	Sturdiness	Stainless steel grates	Coated cast-iron grates	Long-warranty burners	

MIDSIZED GAS GRILLS (ROOM FOR 18 TO 28 BURGERS)


\$ Even Embers GAS8560AS	78	\$395	—	—	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	⚠	●		●
✔ Weber Genesis II E-310	78	\$750	➤	➤	➤	⚠	➤	➤	➤	➤		●	●
✔ Weber Genesis II S-335 61006001	77	\$1,050	➤	➤	➤	⚠	➤	➤	➤	➤	●		●
✔ Weber Genesis II E-330 61012001	76	\$900	➤	➤	➤	⚠	➤	➤	➤	➤		●	●
✔ Napoleon Rogue 525 RSE525SIBPSS	76	\$1,200	➤	➤	➤	⚠	⚠	➤	➤	➤	●		●
✔ Nexgrill 720-1046 (Home Depot)	76	\$400	➤	⚠	➤	➤	➤	➤	⚠	➤		●	
✔ Weber Genesis II SE-335 61016201	76	\$1,000	➤	➤	➤	⚠	➤	➤	➤	➤	●		●
✔ Weber Summit S-470	76	\$2,100	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	●		●

LARGE GAS GRILLS (ROOM FOR 28 BURGERS OR MORE)

\$ Monument Grills 77352	84	\$540	—	—	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	⚠	●		
✔ Weber Summit E-670	80	\$2,750	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤	●		●
✔ Weber Genesis II E-410	77	\$1,000	➤	➤	➤	⚠	➤	➤	➤	➤		●	●

SMALL GAS GRILLS (ROOM FOR 18 BURGERS OR FEWER)

✔ Weber Spirit E-210 46110001	72	\$430	➤	➤	➤	⚠	⚠	➤	➤	⚠		●	●
✔ Royal Gourmet MG3000	71	\$305	—	—	➤	➤	➤	➤	⚠	⚠		●	
\$ Cuisinart GAS0256AS [Item # 576794497] (Walmart)	71	\$250	—	—	➤	➤	➤	➤	⚠	➤			●


<div>Brand + Model</div> <div></div>	Overall Score	Price	Test Results				Features		
			Convenience	Cleaning	Evenness performance	Indirect cooking	Exterior dimensions HxWxD	Exterior grill material	Grates

CHARCOAL KETTLE GRILLS

✔ Weber 22" 14402001	67	\$165	➤	➤	➤	⚠	39 x 23 x 30	Porcelain coated steel	Plated steel
Char-Broil Kettleman 16301878	58	\$140	➤	⚠	⚠	➤	39 x 28 x 29	Porcelain coated steel	Coated steel
Weber 18" 441001	58	\$90	➤	⚠	➤	⚠	36 x 18 x 21	Porcelain coated steel	Plated steel


CHARCOAL BARREL GRILLS

✔ Dyna-Glo DGN576DNC-D	81	\$230	➤	➤	➤	➤	51 x 61 x 25	Powder coated steel	Coated cast iron
Char-Broil Charcoal Grill 580 16302038	71	\$150	➤	➤	⚠	➤	44 x 48 x 28	Painted steel	Coated steel
Expert Grill 24" XG1709603411	71	\$100	➤	➤	➤	⚠	42 x 45 x 27	Powder coated steel	Cast iron

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results					Features					
			Indirect cooking	Evenness performance	Cleaning	Convenience	Temperature range	Exterior dimensions (HxWxD)	Grates	Measured cooking grid area (sq. in.)	Secondary cooking grid area (sq. in.)	Hopper size (lb.)	Timer

#### PELLET GRILLS

✓ <b>Traeger</b> Ironwood 650 TFB65BLE	83	\$1,200	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	47 x 45 x 27	Coated steel	460	235	20	●
✓ <b>Camp Chef</b> Woodwind PG24WWSS	76	\$900	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬇	49 x 50 x 30	Coated steel	410	145	22	
<b>Weber</b> SmokeFire EX6 23510001	75	\$1,200	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	47 x 54 x 30	Stainless steel	585	350	22	●


Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results				Features					
			Convenience	Cleaning	Cooking performance	Exterior dimensions (HxWxD)	Exterior grill material	Locking lid	Utensil hooks	Fold down shelf(s)		

#### NON-CERAMIC KAMADO GRILLS

<b>Broil King</b> Keg 911470	72	\$850	⬇	⬆	⬆	47 x 42 x 28	Powdered coated steel with resin shelves	●	●	Removable shelves		
<b>Weber</b> Summit Charcoal 18301001	70	\$1,500	⬆	⬆	⬆	47 x 39 x 34	Porcelain enameled steel		●			
<b>Char-Broil</b> Kamander 17302051	69	\$580	⬆	⬆	⬆	46 x 41 x 27	Powdered coated with stainless steel shelf	●			●	
<b>Char Griller</b> Akorn Kooker 56720	63	\$300	⬆	⬇	⬆	47 x 46 x 45	Powdered coated with painted steel shelves	●	●		●	

#### CERAMIC KAMADO GRILLS

✓ <b>Kamado Joe</b> Classic II 18" KJ23RHC	79	\$1,300	⬆	⬆	⬆	50 x 45 x 31	Ceramic with plastic shelves	●	●	●		
<b>Vision</b> Kamado Professional S-T4C1D1	75	\$900	⬆	⬆	⬆	46 x 51 x 31	Ceramic with wood shelves				●	

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results	Test Results						Features			
			Predicted reliability Owner satisfaction	Evenness performance	Convenience	Preheat performance	Temperature range	Indirect cooking	Coated cast-iron grates	Stainless steel grates	Measured cooking grid area (sq. in.)	Exterior dimensions (HxWxD)	Propane tank size needed

#### PORTABLE GAS GRILLS

✓ <b>Broil King</b> Porta-Chef 320 952654	74	\$300	—	—	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	●		250	40 x 39 x 20	20 lb.
💰 <b>Nexgrill</b> 820-0033	73	\$110	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬇		●	195	16 x 22 x 20	20 lb.
✓ <b>Coleman</b> RoadTrip 285	72	\$250	⬆	⬇	⬇	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	●		275	35 x 45 x 20	1 lb.

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

**HOW WE TEST:** **Overall Score** combines test results with survey data for predicted reliability and owner satisfaction. **Evenness performance** indicates temperature evenness across the cooking surface during preheat

and using the main burners' lowest and highest settings. **Preheat performance** measures how hot the cooking surface is after 10 minutes and how fast the grill reaches its max temperature. **Temperature range** reflects the

span between the lowest and highest settings using all main burners. **Indirect cooking** indicates how well a grill controls moderate heat. **Convenience** is our evaluation of basic features. **Predicted reliability** estimates the

likelihood that newly purchased models from a brand will develop problems or break within the first five years. **Owner satisfaction** reflects the proportion of CR members extremely likely to recommend the gas grill they bought.

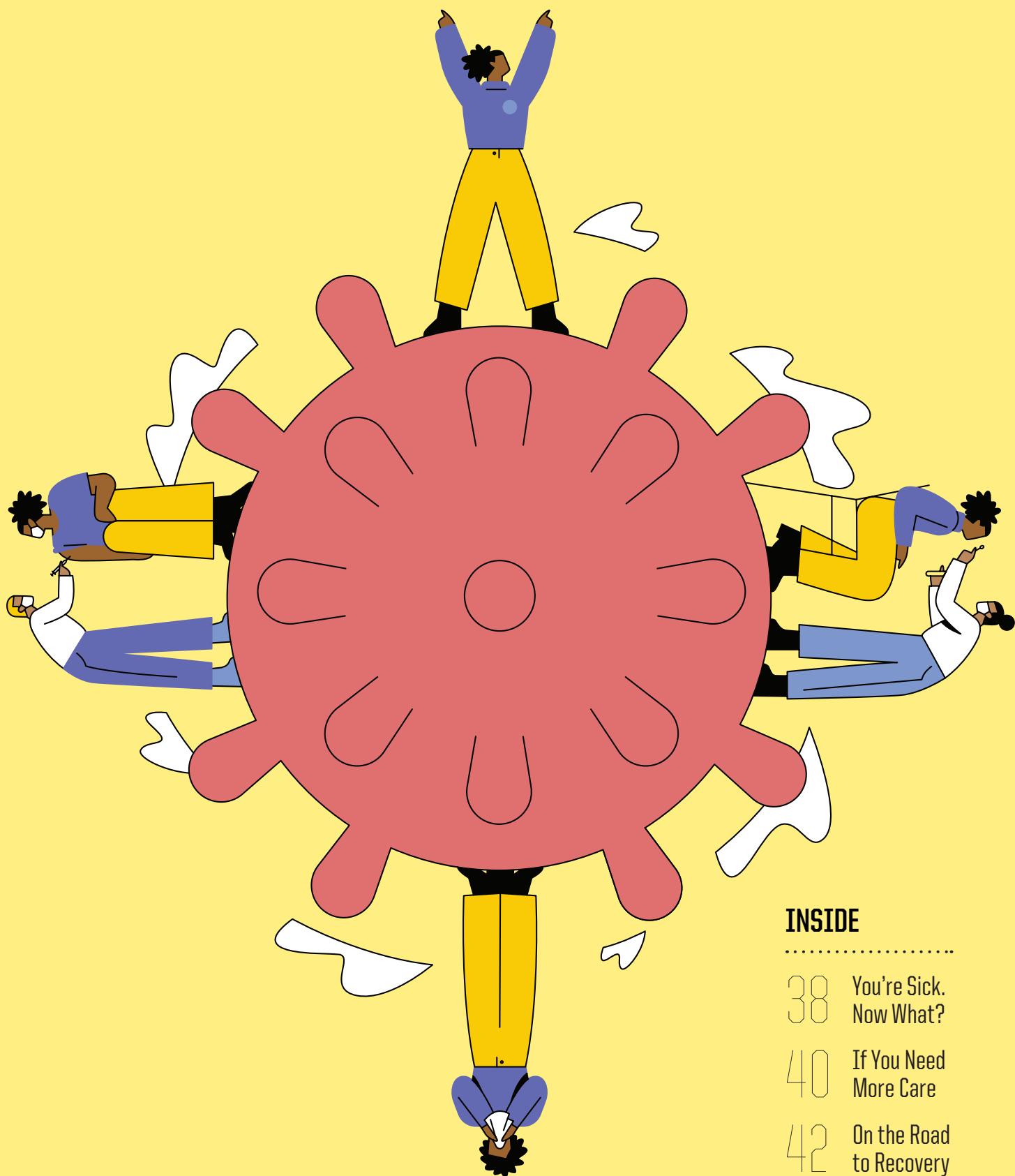


.....  
**PANDEMIC UPDATE**

# HOW TO COPE WITH COVID-19 RIGHT NOW

More than a year after the coronavirus turned our lives upside down, experts have developed effective ways to help heal those who contract COVID-19. This is the essential information you need.

**BY KEVIN LORIA** **ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOSEPH CARRINGTON**



## INSIDE

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to Recovery

# In

MID-MARCH OF 2020, soon after the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus a pandemic, U.S. hospitals began to fill with gravely ill people. As cases surged, stores, schools, and businesses went remote. Healthcare professionals across the country worked feverishly to save lives but had no road map to help them handle the new threat.

“We didn’t know how COVID-19 was spread,” recalls Pieter Cohen, MD, an internist at Harvard Medical School and author of a set of medical guidelines for doctors treating COVID-19 patients. “We had absolutely no idea what to do in terms of treatment. We were in totally uncharted territory.”

But they learned, day by day. “Remarkable advances have been made in a short period,” a group of Cleveland Clinic physicians wrote in a review of treatment studies for severe COVID-19, published recently in the journal *BMJ*.

Now vaccines, developed in record-breaking time, are widely available. Health experts know how COVID-19 spreads, and doctors have a more precise understanding of which groups are at highest risk for severe illness and the therapies that may help them avoid hospitalization. They also have effective treatments for those who are hospitalized, and have clarity on what good care looks like for people managing the illness at home.

Still, the coronavirus is likely to be with us for a while. Infection rates remain high, though the rapidly growing numbers of vaccinated people will ultimately help drive those down. And variants are emerging. Also, while most people are on the mend in a few weeks, some are ill for months or longer.

Many of us are still unsure what to do if we contract COVID-19: how to control fevers and aches, when to call doctors, and when to head to the emergency room. To help, Consumer Reports gathered the most recent evidence on how to manage and recover from an infection, whether it’s mild, moderate, or severe.



## YOU'RE SICK. NOW

With proper care, most people with mild to moderate COVID-19 recover well at home. But let your doctor know if you suspect you have it, so they can determine whether you’re at greater risk for severe illness: This includes those who are older than 65, are immunocompromised, or have preexisting conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, obesity, cancer, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.



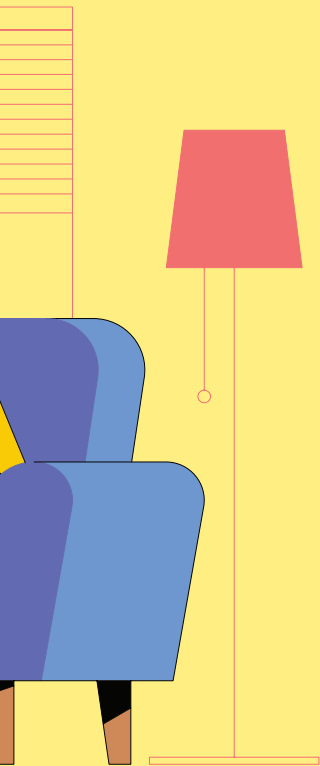
### GET TESTED

IF YOU’VE BEEN EXPOSED to someone who has or may have COVID-19, or you start to develop symptoms such as fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, or body aches (headache, loss of taste or smell,

sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea, and diarrhea are also common), isolate yourself and get a COVID-19 test.

Tests are free and available at doctor’s offices, hospitals, and pharmacies—where you can often be tested via drive-thru. Call first; you may need an appointment. PCR tests, the most accurate, usually produce results within 48 hours. With a rapid test, you’ll have an answer in minutes to hours, but it’s less precise than a PCR. Your doctor might also direct you to take an at-home test. If a test is negative





# WHAT?

but you have symptoms, talk to your doctor and continue isolating—you may need to take another test.



## USE THE RIGHT AT-HOME TREATMENTS

REST AND HYDRATION are key—drinks with electrolytes, such as Gatorade and Pedialyte,

may help if you are having trouble keeping food down. (Many people lose their appetite.) It's fine to use over-the-counter medications (see "Your COVID-19 Toolkit," on page 41) to relieve fever and aches.

COVID-19 can make you feel pretty knocked out, but some movement is important—such as walking around your home for 5 minutes every hour or two. Along with staying hydrated, this can help prevent COVID-related blood clots, which have been linked to potentially fatal strokes, says Jacqueline W. Fincher, MD, president of the American College of Physicians (ACP). Plus, movement can help you evaluate your lung function: If it's harder to breathe after a brief walk at home, contact your doctor. (See "Keep Track of Symptoms," at right, for what to check while you're sick.)

In certain cases, doctors might prescribe an infusion of monoclonal antibodies—which are similar to the antibodies your immune system makes to fight infection. These may help keep COVID-19 from worsening, according to the Infectious Diseases Society of America. Such treatments are available to those older than 65 and to younger people with more serious preexisting conditions. (Ask your doctor whether you qualify.) The IDSA recommends a "cocktail" of bamlanivimab and etesevimab for people in those groups who have mild to moderate COVID-19 and are at risk of progressing to severe disease but are not hospitalized.

Starting to feel better? You can stop isolating 10 days after you first felt ill—as long as you've been fever-free

for at least 24 hours without medication and other symptoms are improving.



## SKIP WHAT'S QUESTIONABLE

OVER THE PAST YEAR, a number of supplements and drugs have been touted as COVID-19 remedies, often with little proof. People's interest in vitamins C and D and zinc, for example, has surged. But National Institutes of Health treatment guidelines say there's no evidence any of these help with COVID-19—and taking more than the advised amounts of zinc can be harmful.

Early in the pandemic, some people hoarded the malaria drug hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil), based on the theory that it might prevent COVID-19. Later, the Food and Drug Administration reported serious adverse effects for some users, and randomized trials showed that people who received the drug had longer hospital stays and were more likely to be intubated or die.

There's no harm in taking hot showers to ease congestion or lying on your stomach to open your lungs, though there's not much evidence of benefit while ill at home. But if you're trying these strategies because you're struggling to breathe, you need to see a doctor, Cohen says.



### SMART STEPS

## Keep Track of Symptoms

It's wise to monitor yourself while sick. And if possible, do the following before contacting the doctor or urgent care, or even summoning emergency help.

### 1. TAKE YOUR TEMPERATURE

Fevers are common during COVID-19, but a lingering high fever can alert your doctor to worsening illness.

### 2. CHECK YOUR OXYGEN AND RESPIRATORY RATES

If you have a pulse oximeter, assess your blood oxygen levels (see how on page 41). For your respiratory rate, count your inhalations for a minute: About 12 to 18 times is normal; 22 or greater is high and concerning, says Jacqueline W. Fincher, MD.

### 3. RECORD OTHER KEY MEASUREMENTS

If you regularly monitor your blood pressure, blood sugar, and/or heart rate, a current reading can reveal how much stress your body is under. For people with diabetes, "a big change in blood sugar is a sign of overwhelming sickness," Fincher says.

### 4. IF YOU ARE GOING TO BE SEEN IN PERSON, WEAR A MASK

And if you can, bring your insurance info and a list of your current medications.



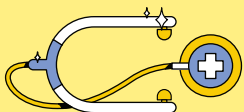
"I took acetaminophen and ibuprofen for fevers, had Gatorade, water, and Pedialyte next to the bed. My wife would leave crackers and toast next to the door. It was the basics: rest, hydration, acetaminophen, and ibuprofen."

Sean McGann, MD, Philadelphia



# IF YOU NEED MORE CARE

Some people with COVID-19 need to see a doctor or be treated in a hospital. There are now some effective therapies for these patients, and doctors know at what stage each may be particularly helpful, says Adarsh Bhimraj, MD, an infectious disease doctor at the Cleveland Clinic and lead author of a set of treatment guidelines for COVID-19. "There's a Goldilocks zone, a timing for each of these agents in the disease process," he adds.



## KNOW WHEN TO SEEK HELP

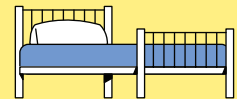
CONTACT YOUR DOCTOR or urgent care right away if you

have a fever over 102° F that won't ease with acetaminophen or ibuprofen, have a falling blood oxygen level (healthy people should be above 95 percent), or are taking more than 20 breaths a minute and/or feel increasingly short of breath. (Breathing difficulties and other problems can ebb and flow: For some people who go on to develop complications such as pneumonia, symptoms



"Having a pulse oximeter was the best suggestion someone gave me ... since I could monitor and track my oxygen levels and heart rate and share with my doctor or check before virtual visits. [The] thermometer was also helpful."

*Kristen Tjaden, Indianapolis*



## WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE HOSPITAL

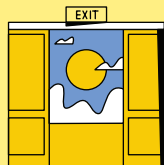
IN THE ER, you'll be checked for lung damage and other pulmonary problems, and your oxygen levels will be monitored. If you're found to need supplemental oxygen—or doctors think you might require it in the next 24 hours, perhaps because X-rays suggest pneumonia—you'll probably be admitted. The same will happen if you seem to be getting significantly sicker overall and have a risk factor for severe COVID-19, such as diabetes or heart disease.

If admitted, you'll continue to receive oxygen for as long as it's needed. Mechanical

ventilators, which essentially breathe for patients, were used extensively in hospitals early in the pandemic. Now, for most patients, doctors have less-invasive options, such as high-flow nasal cannulas that can deliver more than 10 times the oxygen of standard cannulas.

Placing people on their stomachs, known as proning, also helps curb the need for ventilators. In fact, this strategy is so effective that it has been widely adopted for those who are hospitalized with COVID-19, says Greg Martin, MD, a professor of medicine at Emory University in Atlanta and president of the Society of Critical Care Medicine.

As for medications, if you are receiving oxygen, you may also be given dexamethasone, a steroid that reduces inflammation and has been found to improve survival rates. In addition, you might be given remdesivir, an antiviral shown to shorten recovery time. If your immune system overreacts to the coronavirus, causing extreme bodywide inflammation, the IDSA recommends the monoclonal antibody tocilizumab along with steroids to help tamp down that inflammation. And now that it's known that hospitalized COVID-19 patients are at high risk for blood clots, doctors use blood thinners when needed to reduce the blood's ability to clot.

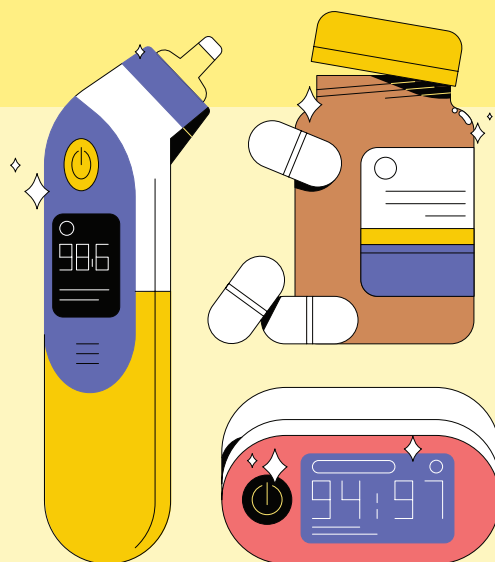


## THE LOWDOWN ON DISCHARGE

ONCE DOCTORS ARE SURE you no longer need help breathing, you'll be sent home if you can care for yourself, or to a rehabilitation facility, typically for a short stay, if the healthcare providers think you'll need more help. This may be the case if you were hospitalized for an extended time or were on a ventilator.

You could be prescribed certain medications for use at home: an inhaler to reduce the lung inflammation that can make taking full breaths challenging, for example. Many COVID-19 patients are also sent home with pulse oximeters for monitoring blood oxygen levels, McGann says.

Once home, you may need to take precautions to avoid infecting others—unless it has been at least 10 days since your symptoms started and you've gone 24 hours without a fever. Immunocompromised people may remain contagious longer, so check with doctors if you're in that group.



## Your COVID-19 Toolkit

A few tools and medications may come in handy to help you monitor or treat symptoms as you get through your illness.

**OVER-THE-COUNTER (OTC) MEDS.** For body aches and fever, experts recommend acetaminophen (Tylenol or generic) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, or generic). (Ibuprofen does not worsen COVID-19, as initially rumored.) If you have a cough, especially one that's preventing you from resting, an OTC cough suppressant may help, but it's best to get

your doctor's okay if you have a chronic health problem.

**THERMOMETER.** A persistent high fever may require a call to the doctor, so keep a thermometer handy for self-monitoring.

**PULSE OXIMETER.** This can help you monitor how well your lungs are working and know when to call the doctor. See below for advice on how to use a home pulse oximeter.

### SMART STEPS

## How to Use a Pulse Oximeter

A home pulse oximeter can be tricky to use and may be less accurate than a medical-grade device (especially if you're wearing nail polish or you have darker skin). But it may help discern low blood oxygen, a sign your lungs aren't working properly. Focus on the trend, not one reading.

**1. TEST REGULARLY** Do it every morning and evening, or as your doctor directs.

**2. MAKE SURE FINGERS ARE WARM AND DRY** Then place an index finger in the fingertip monitor, with the fingernail facing up, below heart level. Hold still until the device screen shows a blood oxygen level.

**3. CHECK THE SCREEN FOR 1 MINUTE** Normal is usually 95 percent or higher (around 90 percent for those with chronic lung disease). If a low number appears, cough three times and take three deep breaths. If the number fails to rebound or you're having trouble breathing, call your doctor.





# ON THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

Give yourself time: While most mild cases subside in two to three weeks, fatigue may linger, and more severe cases may take up to three months to resolve. Also, a significant percentage of people have health problems related to COVID-19 for many months. Experts are making progress in helping “long-haulers” but say there’s more work to do.

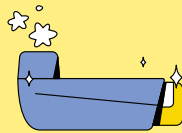


## BUILD BACK YOUR STRENGTH

AFTER COVID-19, IT’S wise to return to physical activity slowly. Don’t be surprised by weakness: Most people lose a good bit of muscle and cardiovascular strength after a couple of weeks in bed. If you’ve had COVID-19, the American College of Sports

Medicine recommends slowly resuming exercise after talking with your doctor. Try starting with an activity such as a brief walk, at a pace that allows you to hold a conversation, and ramp up as you can. You’ll probably need to go quite slowly if you were in intensive care—because each day there typically translates to at least a week of recovery, says the ACP’s Fincher. Anyone who spent a month in the hospital may require inpatient or outpatient rehab, a program of exercise that is supervised by an occupational or physical therapist. And whether your COVID-19 was mild, moderate, or

severe, stop any activity right away and call a doctor if you have chest pain or abnormal shortness of breath.

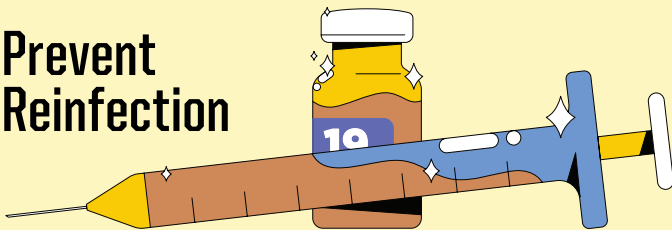


## DEAL WITH OTHER HEALTH PROBLEMS

IF YOU HAVE a condition such as asthma or diabetes, work with your doctor to make sure it’s well-controlled.

Otherwise, recovery will be far more difficult, Fincher says. And because COVID-19 can have residual effects on organs and systems such as the heart, nervous system, and lungs, tell your doctors about any new problems you notice during recovery, so you can be monitored or treated for them. For instance, if a cough won’t quit after COVID-19, your doctor might prescribe an inhaler to reduce airway or lung inflammation. Some people who develop myocarditis—the heart inflammation that can cause chest pain, heart rhythm and breathing problems, and swelling in the extremities—may need to

## Prevent Reinfection



Antibodies—infection-fighting immune system proteins—that we develop while ill with COVID-19 provide some protection against catching the disease again, but we don’t know how much protection or

how long that lasts. A Danish study published in March in The Lancet found that people younger than 65 who’d had the illness were about 80 percent less likely to be infected a second time than others. But

have a cardiologist check their heart health during recovery and prescribe medications if needed. An antiseizure drug such as gabapentin (Neurontin and others) or pregabalin (Lyrica) may be prescribed for numbness, tingling, or burning pain in the hands or feet, which are signs of nerve damage.



## REACH OUT IF SYMPTOMS LAST

IT'S NO SURPRISE that a nagging cough might persist for a while after a viral illness or that someone hospitalized with severe COVID-related pneumonia might need several months to feel fully recovered. But doctors say they've seen many people—often young and previously healthy—struggle with sometimes debilitating shortness of breath, racing heart, brain fog, extreme fatigue, or mood issues for many months after even mild to moderate COVID-19. Known as long-haul COVID, long COVID, or post-COVID syndrome, these problems affect 10 to 35 percent of people, by some estimates. “This is the shadow pandemic,” says Diana Berrent,



“I attempted to work out, but 10 minutes on the elliptical was like running a marathon. It was the same the next day. I waited a week before trying again. Finally, at two months out, I feel all better. I'm up to 35 minutes on the elliptical and no more naps.”

*Cary Fappiano,  
Watertown, Conn.*

founder of Survivor Corps, which connects people who've had COVID-19 with one another and supports research on potential treatments.

We're still learning exactly what symptoms may be part of long-haul COVID, but if you had a mild to moderate case and don't feel mostly recovered a month later, alert your doctor or look into getting checked out at a post-COVID care center.

Many medical centers are launching these outpatient facilities, where highly individualized treatments are based on each person's symptoms, says Zijian Chen, MD, medical director of the Center for Post-COVID Care at Mount Sinai in New York City. Some people might need physical therapy to build strength; pulmonary rehabilitation, which typically involves cardiovascular and breathing exercises; or an inhaler to bolster lung function. Others might require medication to normalize a rapid heart rate or speech therapy for cognitive problems. (Find a list of centers at [survivorcorps.com/pccc](https://survivorcorps.com/pccc). If you're considering such a program, check your insurance coverage.)

And note: Some people report that their long-haul symptoms have improved after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, and at least one small preliminary study suggests that's possible, but more research needs to be done.

Harvard's Pieter Cohen and other doctors who have treated long-haulers say that in most cases, they see improvement, gradual though it may be. And they are hopeful that with time, they'll be better able to help these patients. “Now that we realize this is long COVID, or post-COVID syndrome, that's the next frontier everyone is diving into,” says Emory University's Greg Martin.

people older than 65 saw only a 47 percent reduced risk of reinfection. And the March study was done mostly before the spread of coronavirus variants, some of which can more easily reinfect people. So

if you haven't yet gotten a COVID-19 vaccine, it's important to do so as soon as you can. Until you're fully vaccinated, try to stay at least 6 feet away from people outside your household and

limit your interactions to well-ventilated spaces or the outdoors. Wear a mask in public and follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance, even if you are vaccinated.



SMART STEPS

## Take Deep Breaths Again

People with COVID-19 often take rapid breaths while they are ill and may have difficulty breathing fully during recovery as well. Breathing exercises can help you retrain your body to breathe properly, says Josh Duntz, CEO of Stasis, which teaches breath work and has partnered with Mount Sinai's Center for Post-COVID Care. Long-haulers—people with long-lasting symptoms after COVID-19—who have done breathing exercises have found that they're helpful for their recovery, according to David Putrino, PhD, of the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. If you're interested, you can try the two exercises below, for 10 minutes each morning and 10 each evening. At first, do them lying on your back while relaxed. After two weeks, try them while sitting up. See how you're feeling after several weeks.

### 1. 4-6 BREATHING

Breathe in through your nose for 4 counts and exhale through your nose for 6. Your goal is six full breaths per minute.

### 2. BOX BREATHING

Breathe in for 4 counts, hold your breath for 4, exhale for 4, and hold your breath with no air in your lungs for another 4.

IS THIS

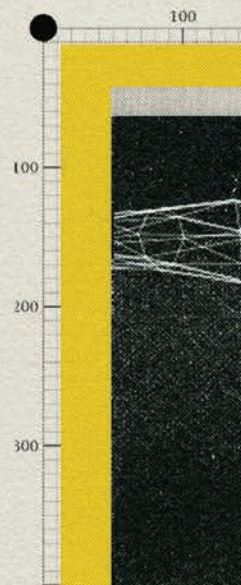
SAFE

TO BUY?

How dangerous products get (and stay) on the market.

**Plus:** Smart ways to protect yourself and your family.

by Rachel Rabkin Peachman ● Illustrations by Ben Shmulevitch







## Safety-Tested?

It's hard to tell by just looking. Products are governed by different rules, some mandatory (walk-behind lawn mowers) and some voluntary (dressers). Other products, like hoverboards, are on the market despite relevant standards not yet being final.







To go to the DockATot website is to be transported into a world of idyllic childhood. You'll see photos of its latest collection showing playrooms with flowing drapes, tasseled blankets, and ornate floral arrangements. At the center are cherubic infants nestled in plush, pillowy products resembling bassinets. "Love, luxury and timelessness are at the heart of this exclusive new collection for style-conscious parents," a description says.

The message: Chic nursery designs can be yours, too—for about \$200 to \$300.

What you wouldn't know is that the DockATot and other "in-bed sleepers," as the products have come to be known, have been linked to at least 13 infant fatalities, according to an ongoing Consumer Reports investigation of government data and lawsuits.

The products were originally marketed to parents who wanted the closeness of sharing a bed with their babies but worried about rolling onto them. And while bassinets, cribs, and many other infant sleep products have to, by law, adhere to established safety standards and be tested to prove they meet them, in-bed sleepers do not.

In fact, there has been nothing to stop the products—which have significant safety shortcomings—from making their way onto store shelves and into people's homes.

DockATot did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

## Gaps in the System

This gap in the product safety system is not unique to in-bed sleepers, or even to baby products. Products often are not required to comply with safety specifications and, for many, "there is no premarket safety testing required," says Rachel Weintraub, legislative director and general counsel for the Consumer Federation of America, an advocacy group.

Of the approximately 15,000 categories of products overseen by the Consumer Product Safety Commission, the government agency with jurisdiction over many consumer products, only about 70 are governed by what is called a mandatory standard, according to an estimate by Bob Adler, acting chairman of the CPSC.

For those 70 product categories, federal rules mandate compliance with specific safety requirements. Manufacturers must test them, usually through third-party labs. Products that fail these tests must be recalled if they're already for sale. If the manufacturer has violated the law—for instance, by failing to immediately report a noncompliant product to the CPSC—it can face penalties, such as fines and even criminal prosecution.

Products with mandatory standards include bunk beds, children's toys, automatic garage door openers, walk-behind lawn mowers, high chairs, bicycle helmets, and portable gasoline containers. There are also federal requirements for materials—including metals, plastics, and textiles—related to toxic substances, such as lead.

But most products are governed by voluntary, not mandatory, standards created by independent organizations. These groups—among them ASTM International and Underwriters Laboratories—bring together manufacturers, academics, regulators, consumers, and others to set rules for the products. (CR is a member of ASTM.)

But because these standards are voluntary, some manufacturers don't comply with the rules, leaving a hole in the safety net, Weintraub says.

In addition to products with mandatory or voluntary standards, a smaller set of products—which includes in-bed sleepers—are not covered by any specific standard. While they must adhere to certain broad, general rules—such as not containing high amounts of lead—they may be

new and different enough from other products that they don't need to conform to an existing standard, whether mandatory or voluntary.

In other words, if someone invents something substantially different from products in existing categories, they can put it on the market even if it has not been safety-tested. Manufacturers don't have to first get approval from the CPSC or any other governing body.

That is how in-bed sleepers made it to market. It's also how the Fisher-Price Rock 'n Play Sleeper and other inclined sleepers, which are now linked to 94 deaths, got to store shelves and stayed there for a decade before being recalled.

"This contradicts what many consumers



"Safety hazards don't always announce themselves."

Bob Adler, CPSC acting chairman

think—that if a product is available for sale, it has been tested and approved," Weintraub says.

Indeed, 96 percent of Americans believe products they buy for their home adhere to a required safety standard, according to a 2020 nationally representative CR survey of 2,031 adults, which asked people to focus on products that cost \$75 or more. And most people—97 percent—said they expect that manufacturers have tested their products for safety before selling them.

"It would be nice to know that every single manufacturer, whether there's a voluntary product standard or not ... [has] done some kind of reasonable testing," Adler says. But, he adds, that is not always the case—and there is no easy way for consumers to know one way or the other.

## The Problems With In-Bed Sleepers



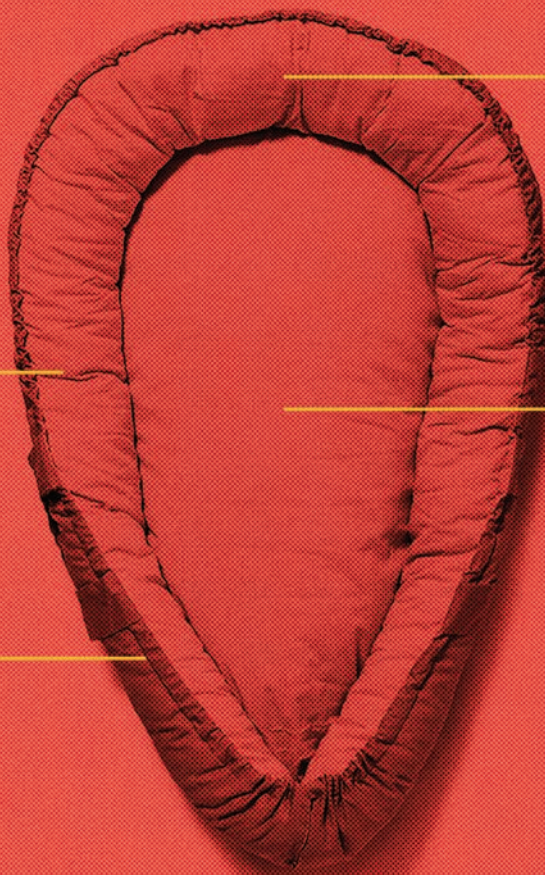
### THE WALLS ARE TOO LOW

They should be high enough so that babies can't roll out.



### THE WALLS ARE TOO PADDED

Soft walls increase the risk of suffocation if an infant rolls to the side and presses against the padding.



### IT HAS NO STAND

That makes it unstable, especially when placed on an adult mattress, which can be uneven, increasing the risk of an infant rolling out or into a soft wall.



### THE BOTTOM IS TOO SOFT

The base should be firm, to reduce the chance of suffocation if an infant rolls over.



## What's a 'Standard,' Anyway?

Nancy Cowles, executive director of Kids In Danger (KID), a consumer safety group, says there's another potential problem: Just because a voluntary standard exists doesn't mean it's strong enough. For many products, "the existing standard is less than rigorous," she says, adding that the standard-setting process tends to favor industry over consumers.

One glaring example: the voluntary standard for dressers, first set by ASTM in 2000 and updated incrementally over the years. It currently says dressers 27 inches high or taller should remain stable when a 50-pound weight is hung on an open drawer. But almost from the start, safety advocates have said the standard is not tough enough.

Indeed, despite updates to the standard over the years, 218 people died in tip-over incidents involving a dresser, chest, or bureau between 2000 and 2019. And each year, 19,900 people, on average, are treated in hospital emergency rooms for injuries related to furniture tip-overs.

Also, not all manufacturers comply with the standard; after all, it is voluntary. For years, many of Ikea's dressers did not meet the standard, and some have been linked to the deaths of several children, leading to the recall in 2016 and 2017 of 17.3 million products.

Safety advocates, including those at CR, say the voluntary dresser standard is still not strong enough. They support legislation called the Stop Tip-overs of Unstable, Risky Dressers on Youth (STURDY) Act. It would require the CPSC to create a mandatory rule tougher than the voluntary one. The bill, which passed the U.S. House of Representatives in the last session of Congress but did not make it to the Senate floor, has been reintroduced this year in both chambers and has bipartisan support.

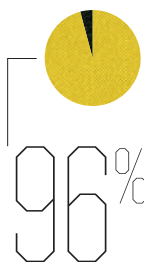
The CPSC's Adler says he could not have predicted "how lethal" dresser tip-overs could be. "It's only after you've done some appropriate safety testing that you realize there could be a problem," he says.

Another product whose dangers emerged after entering the marketplace: cords for window blinds and shades. They did not have a voluntary safety standard until 1996. Yet between 1990 and 2015 they were linked to almost 17,000 strangulations, lacerations, and other injuries, and 271 deaths among children younger than 6, according



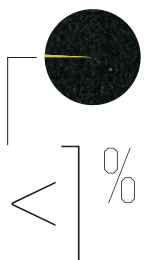
### PRODUCT TESTING

#### BELIEF



of Americans believe products they buy for their home must adhere to a required safety standard. [1]

#### REALITY



of product categories overseen by the CPSC must comply with a mandatory safety standard. [2]

[1] Based on a July 2020 CR nationally representative survey of 2,031 American adults. Respondents were asked to focus on products that cost \$75 or more. Percentage includes "agree" and "strongly agree" responses.

[2] Estimate from acting CPSC chairman Bob Adler.

to research in the journal *Pediatrics*.

Too often, Adler says, companies ask themselves whether their products simply "comply with appropriate standards, and what we need them to do is look beyond the standards to whether there's a potential for harm."

Jonathan Judge, a partner at the Chicago law firm Schiff Hardin and a CPSC regulation expert who counsels manufacturers, disputes the idea that standards are often weak and that companies don't do enough to vet their products. "The vast majority of companies really do think about this," he says. "They're not interested in having a bunch of returns or a bunch of bad publicity." He also says that when no standard exists for a new product, companies often adapt existing ones.

But that approach might not sufficiently protect consumers from risks that emerge only after a product enters the market. "Safety hazards don't always announce themselves," Adler says.

## To Market, Without Testing

Products marketed for babies and children are of particular concern because the stakes are so high.

In the case of in-bed sleepers, two products were introduced in the early 2000s by two entrepreneurial women working separately on the same goal: to create a product that babies could sleep in while lying next to their parent in bed. But the products' potential hazards were apparent almost as soon as they came to market.

Cribs and bassinets must adhere to mandatory standards that require high walls, a flat mattress, a stand, and no padding. That helps protect against suffocation and is consistent with advice from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) that babies sleep alone, on their backs, on a firm, flat surface free of soft bedding. By contrast, in-bed sleepers tend to have padding and lower, softer sidewalls. And because they have been marketed for use on an adult mattress, they do not necessarily provide a firm, flat sleep surface.

Lisa Furuland Kotsianis had no known experience in product development or child safety before she created the DockATot. Instead, she relied on her experience as a mother and her "background in art, design, and photography" to develop "category-disrupting must-haves," according to the company website.

Similarly, Farah Morton invented the Baby Delight Snuggle Nest in-bed sleeper because she “realized the bassinet she was using prevented the closeness she desired with her newborn daughter,” says a Baby Delight spokesperson, who also says Morton no longer owns the company. According to what appears to be Morton’s LinkedIn page, she developed the product “in order to provide more protection for co-sleeping newborns, opening a category that previously did not exist.”

The spokesperson, when asked whether premarket testing was done to ensure that the product was safe for infant sleep, says Morton “engaged a seasoned safety consultant at the time of the first manufacturing.”

Though DockATot recently stopped explicitly promoting its product for bed-sharing, as of this April its marketing still showed images of babies sleeping in the product and pictures suggestive of bed-sharing. No details about premarket testing for sleep safety are provided on its website.

Consumers have responded to the products enthusiastically. The Snuggle Nest has become a best seller for Baby Delight, according to a company spokesperson. And the DockATot caught on with celebrity influencers such as Molly Sims, Kourtney Kardashian, and Hilary Duff, who raved about it on social media and in other outlets.

The product’s popularity is concerning, says Ben Hoffman, MD, chairperson of the AAP Council on Injury, Violence, and Poison Prevention. “If you go back to what we know is the safest way for an infant to sleep, in-bed sleepers missed the mark on virtually all accounts,” he says. It’s also unknown, he says, whether in-bed sleepers prevent adults from rolling over and smothering infants. “Basically, the products don’t do anything we would ever expect in a safe sleep space for a baby.”

## Writing Their Own Rules

Despite Hoffman’s concerns, the makers of in-bed sleepers are now creating their own voluntary standard through ASTM. Whether the products should conform to the bassinet standard, or be sold as loungers instead of as sleep products, is among the concerns that regulators, safety advocates, and industry representatives are debating.

The discussions are taking place against the backdrop of the CPSC’s proposal of a mandatory

## 4 Products That Lack Safety Standards

We checked with five major standard-setting and accrediting organizations in the U.S. to see whether these consumer goods have an applicable safety standard. As of April 2021, they did not.

### HOVERBOARDS



Until 2016, there was no standard covering hoverboards’ electrical systems, and some caught fire and were recalled. They’re still not subject to standards governing acceleration, braking, or durability, problems consumers have complained about, though such standards are being developed.



### SNORKELS

At least one model was recalled because a piece broke off and was inhaled by a user. Recreational snorkels are not subject to specific standards, as some diving gear is.



### E-SCOOTERS

Some adult and ride-sharing e-scooters have broken or caught fire, leading to injuries and recalls. While children’s e-scooters have some safety standards, a performance standard for adult versions is only now being created.



### INFANT SLEEP HAMMOCKS

Some of these products have been linked to injuries and deaths and have been recalled. These products don’t conform to safety standards or follow safe-sleep advice that babies sleep on their back on a firm, flat surface.



rule for infant sleep products, which was developed after the high-profile recalls of infant inclined sleepers, including the Fisher-Price Rock 'n Play Sleeper. The agency's new rule would effectively ban infant sleep products that don't conform to existing mandatory standards.

After the rule was proposed, DockATot changed its messaging. As of April 2021, its website stated: "Until there is further development on a mandatory standard for all products offered for bedsharing, we will no longer promote our docks for use in bedsharing."

As of April 2021, Baby Delight continued to market the Snuggle Nest for bed-sharing. Of the three fatalities that have been linked to the Snuggle Nest, a spokesperson says that two occurred before the company acquired the product and that none were directly caused by the sleeper. The spokesperson also says the product fills a consumer need: "We know that moms co-sleep," and the product's goal "is to make that experience less risky when possible."

That argument is based on a false premise, says Nancy Cowles of KID. "There is no data we know of showing that in-bed sleepers make bed-sharing safer," she says. The AAP's Ben Hoffman says the opposite may even be true. "We know that the likelihood of infant sleep-related deaths goes up when you start deviating from best safe-sleep practices," he says. "When you've got products that facilitate dangerous sleep behaviors, that increases risk."

Further, to safety advocates, the idea of working backward to create a standard for a product that's already being sold but hasn't been safety-tested brings back bad memories of the Rock 'n Play Sleeper. "The dangers of inclined sleepers were hidden from the public for nearly a decade, and infants died," says Oriene Shin, CR policy counsel for product safety. "Manufacturers sold dangerous products by the millions, and only tried after the fact to create standards to validate their safety. Why would we want to go down that path again?"

When the Rock 'n Play Sleeper was introduced in 2009, no voluntary or mandatory standard existed for inclined sleepers. But in 2010, when the CPSC began updating standards for bassinets, cribs, and play yards to make them mandatory, it became clear that the Rock 'n Play Sleeper—with its incline and padding—would not comply.

But instead of changing its design, Fisher-Price

asked for, and was granted, an exemption. That freed manufacturers to create their own voluntary standard through ASTM—and to continue selling inclined sleepers. It was only in 2019, after CR exposed dozens of deaths connected to the sleepers, that Fisher-Price and others recalled them. Such recalls now total almost 6 million.

It is a cautionary tale, says Regina Calcaterra, a lawyer representing several families whose children died in the Rock 'n Play Sleeper. "Before the CPSC again delegates potentially lifesaving standards for infant sleep products to ASTM," and "then to manufacturers who financially benefit, CPSC commissioners should hear from the parents who are grieving," she says.

CR's Shin adds: "Manufacturers shouldn't be in charge of their own safety rules." Instead, she says, "there should be a much stronger and better-funded CPSC that can get ahead of emerging hazards and hold companies accountable from the start—including by stopping them from carving out exceptions for unproven products, like in-bed sleepers."

The CPSC's Adler says the agency is doing as much as it can with the little funding it gets, adding that he hopes Congress will increase CPSC funds. That's necessary to protect consumers, he said in a recent address. "As long as entrepreneurs dream up new products and chemists develop new concoctions, new safety hazards will always emerge."

## How to Protect Yourself

Though it's not always easy, here are some steps you can take to find out whether a product has been safety-tested or vetted.

**Read the labels.** A product's packaging, manual, or tag may reference a standard-setting or standard-certifying organization, such as ASTM or UL. That reference might note which specific standard applies to your product, such as "ASTM F2057-19" or "UL 749."

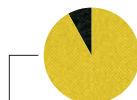
**Call the manufacturer.** If there is no label or standard shown on the product, call the company and ask what safety standards the product meets and whether a third-party lab has verified this.

**Check SaferProducts.gov.** On this CPSC website, you can learn whether a product has been recalled. And if you have an unsafe product or one that has caused harm, you can report it on the site.



### PRODUCT RECALLS

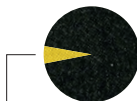
#### BELIEF



92%

of Americans say manufacturers should do all they can to get potentially dangerous recalled products out of homes. [1]

#### REALITY



6%

of recalled products, on average, are returned or refunded. [2]

[1] Based on a July 2020 CR nationally representative survey of 2,031 American adults. Respondents were asked to focus on products that cost \$75 or more. Percentage includes "agree" and "strongly agree" responses.

[2] CPSC, July 2017. Reflects portion of consumers whom the CPSC knows took part in a recall, including those who asked for a repair.



NEWS & EXPERT  
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# ROAD REPORT

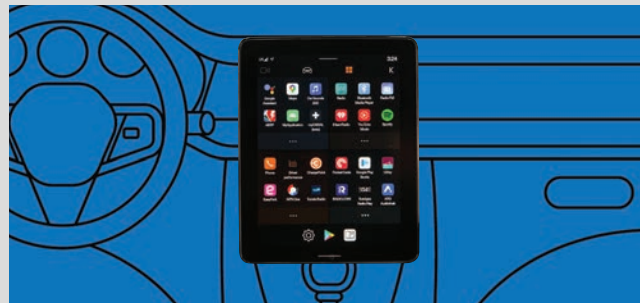
## TEST TRACK FINDING

### CR's Testing Leads to Fix on Hyundai Elantra

While evaluating the 2021 Hyundai Elantra's pedestrian detection system, we found that the compact sedan sometimes stalled after the automatic emergency braking system had stopped the car to avoid striking our pedestrian test dummy. This required the driver to shift to Park or Neutral and restart the engine. We notified Hyundai, which replicated our results in its own tests and issued a technical service bulletin (TSB) to dealers with a transmission software update to fix the problem. After taking our Elantra to a Hyundai dealer to have the TSB applied (at no charge), the engine no longer stalled during our pedestrian evaluations. If you own a 2021 Elantra, be sure to have this fixed.

## AHEAD OF THE CURVE

### Android Automotive Makes Its Dashboard Debut



The Polestar 2 hatchback from Volvo's new electric car sub-brand is the **first to use the Android Automotive** operating system. Unlike Android Auto, which pairs with your phone to provide features such as music and navigation, Android Automotive integrates and controls all of the car's electronics, including music and climate, from a menu of apps on a touch screen.

**We found it distracting and challenging to use,** but it could improve over time with over-the-air updates. Ford, General Motors, and others have announced intentions to use the system in their cars.

## THE VITAL STATISTIC

# \$576

Average monthly loan payment on a new car at the end of 2020, a record high.

Source: Experian.

## RECALL



### Ford

Ford is recalling about 2.6 million cars, SUVs, and trucks to replace driver's-side Takata airbags. A desiccant in the inflators may degrade after long-term exposure to temperature cycling and high humidity. This could cause an inflator to rupture during airbag deployment, leading to possible injury and death. Affected vehicles are from model years 2004-2012 and include the Ford Fusion, Edge, and Ranger; Mazda B-Series; Mercury Milan; and Lincoln Zephyr/MKZ and MKX.

**WHAT TO DO:** Call Ford at 800-392-3673 or Mazda at 800-222-5500 to find out whether your vehicle is affected. If so, take it as soon as possible to a dealer, who will replace the driver's-side front airbag inflator or airbag module to resolve the problem.

## ASK OUR EXPERTS

### Why does my steering wheel vibrate when I brake?



A vibrating steering wheel is usually caused by warped front brake rotors, says CR's chief mechanic, John Ibbotson. "If you feel the vibration in your seat, it's more likely

the back rotors," he says. Warped rotors can be caused by improperly torqued lug nuts, splashing through deep puddles, and letting a vehicle sit for extended

periods. Driving with warped rotors can damage brake components and increase stopping distances. Have the rotors fixed when symptoms first appear.

# How to Save Money on Car Repairs

Some cars cost a lot more than others to keep running, our exclusive survey shows. If you're shopping for a used car, here are ways to avoid a problem vehicle.

by Keith Barry

**S**HOPPING THE used car market can be a great way to save money. But some out-of-warranty models could be ticking time bombs, hiding problems with shockingly high repair costs. And although all cars eventually need maintenance and fixes, the costs can vary widely—even for different models from the same brand.

To help you avoid headaches later on, Consumer Reports analyzed estimated repair cost data from RepairPal, a CR partner that helps our members find trusted local mechanics, and identified those used models that have egregiously high costs for common repairs. We also compiled a list of the most and least expensive 10-year-old

cars to repair and maintain based on survey responses from CR members covering about 310,000 vehicles. Then we consulted expert mechanics at CR and elsewhere to learn why some cars are so expensive to keep on the road, and how to plan for those expenses.

“If you’re considering a longer-term relationship with your car, or shopping for a used car out of warranty, knowing which models might cost you more is valuable information,” says Jake Fisher, CR’s senior director of auto testing. “You might be wondering if you should keep your car after the lease is over or buy that 5- to 7-year-old luxury model that you always wanted.”

On the next pages you’ll find which vehicles cost the most and least to keep running, and how to protect yourself from pricey problems.



## **Sticker Shock**

Common repairs on certain vehicles can cost a lot more than average, often due to expensive parts or labor-intensive procedures. CR worked with our partner RepairPal to uncover some of these surprisingly costly fixes, examples of which are shown here.



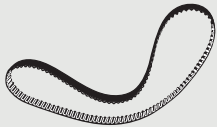


# WALLET- BUSTING FIXES

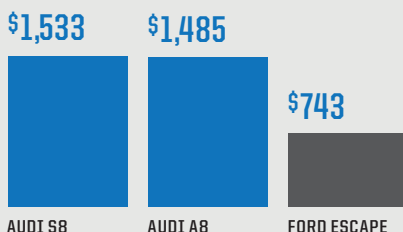
SOME VEHICLES COST much more to repair than others for the same problems. We used estimates from RepairPal, a CR partner that powers our helpful Car Repair Assistant tool online, to identify some of the cars most likely to run up big bills.

## TIMING BELT

AVERAGE COST: \$679

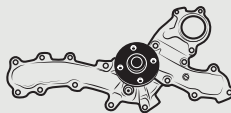


Some engines use a timing belt to keep valves and pistons moving in sync. If it fails, the engine won't run. If a timing belt breaks on a vehicle with what's called an "interference engine," the pistons and valves could collide, which could cost thousands of dollars to fix. Timing belts need to be changed regularly (the owner's manual will tell you when). Used car buyers considering a car with a timing belt should ask when it was last replaced.

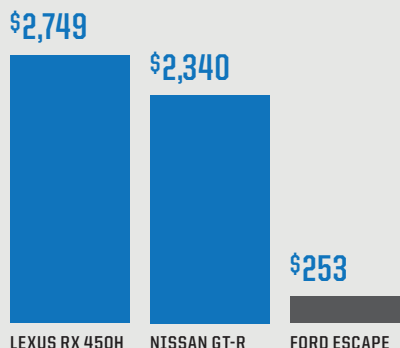


## WATER PUMP

AVERAGE COST: \$710

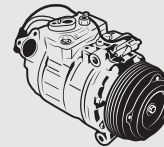


If your car's water pump fails, the engine could overheat—leaving you stranded and potentially causing further engine damage. Water pump failure is a common repair for older cars, says John Ibbotson, CR's chief auto mechanic. The Nissan GT-R is a sports car produced in low volumes, so some of its parts are costly. But the Lexus RX 450h is a mainstream SUV—and RepairPal reports that it costs over \$2,000 more to fix than average.

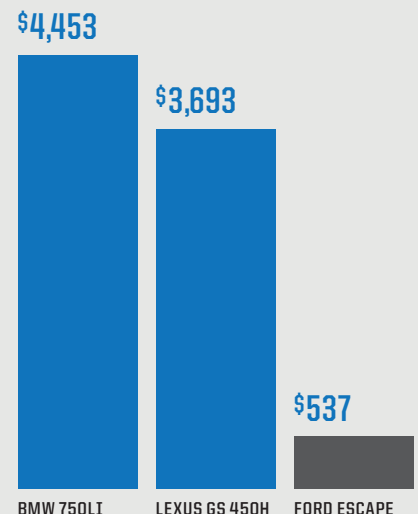


## A/C COMPRESSOR

AVERAGE COST: \$1,211



Air conditioning compressors usually last for at least 100,000 miles, says Ibbotson. But even if you can sweat out hot weather, A/C isn't just for comfort: It also helps remove fog from windows, and a broken A/C can hurt your car's resale value. So even if you get a great deal on a used luxury car like a BMW 750Li or Lexus GS 450h, it will cost you a lot more than average to keep your cool if the A/C compressor fails.

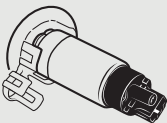


Some cars have unique parts or require expensive diagnostic equipment, and others put components in hard-to-reach places that turn a simple problem into a high-cost, hours-long repair. For each fix, we've compared the

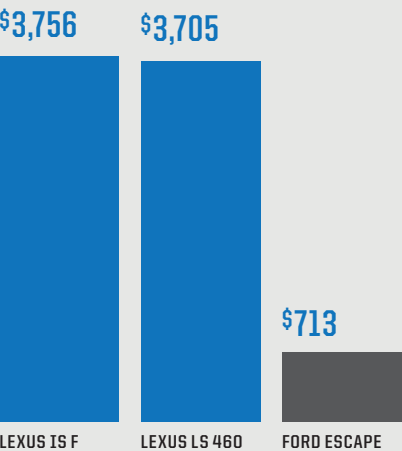
expensive outliers with the average cost of repair across all models from the past five model years. We've also included repair prices for the Ford Escape, a popular mainstream model with relatively low repair costs.

## FUEL PUMP

AVERAGE COST: \$1,135

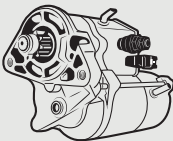


Luxury vehicles and sports cars that were produced only in low volumes often have uniquely expensive parts and repair costs. Even if those cars wear a familiar badge from a big manufacturer, it doesn't mean they share the same parts as more mainstream models. For example, Lexus vehicles tend to do well in our reliability survey. But if the fuel pump fails on the rare IS F sport sedan or the luxe, powerful LS 460, it'll cost you.

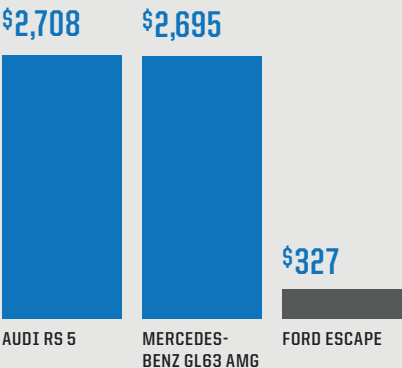


## STARTER

AVERAGE COST: \$630

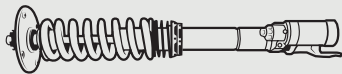


In the case of the sporty Audi RS 5, the starter is hidden away where it's impossible to access without removing other parts first—an increasingly common problem as some cars get more tightly packaged, says Jill Trotta, vice president of industry and sales at RepairPal and also an ASE-certified technician with 30 years' experience. "A lot of times I don't think there's a huge connection between the people who design the cars and the people who have to service them."

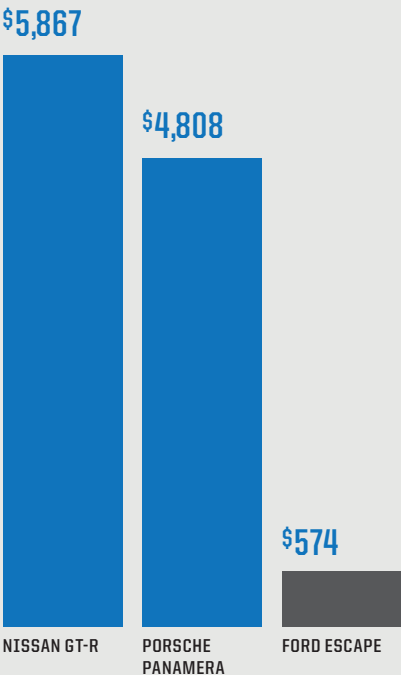


## SUSPENSION SHOCK OR STRUT

AVERAGE COST: \$937



When the odometer nears 100,000 miles, you should budget for suspension repair or replacement, says Ibbotson. It's unlikely that a performance car like the GT-R will be driven that many miles. But many luxury cars, such as the Porsche Panamera, offer an optional air suspension that could be an expensive fix. Air suspensions promise a smoother ride and more responsive handling, but they're complex systems made up of pricey parts.



# COST OF REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE

**WE ASKED OUR** members how much they spent on repairs and maintenance to keep their cars on the road over the past 12 months. Below, we show the most and least expensive 2011 models. We also compare average costs by brand based

## LEAST EXPENSIVE

2011 model year cars, trucks, and SUVs to maintain and repair



**THOUGH THE FIRST-GENERATION** Nissan Leaf EV didn't get pulses racing with driving excitement, it cost owners almost nothing to keep running, and also earned top reliability scores. Other vehicles are a better blend of low running costs, high reliability, and smile-inducing owner satisfaction.

2011 MODELS		OVERALL RELIABILITY	OWNER SATISFACTION
YEARLY COST	CURRENT USED RETAIL VALUE		
CARS UNDER \$5,000			
\$0	Nissan Leaf	⬆️	⬇️
\$200	Ford Fiesta	⬇️	⬇️
\$200	Ford Focus	⬆️	⬇️
CARS \$5,000-\$10,000			
\$200	Hyundai Genesis	⬆️	⬆️
\$245	Toyota Corolla	⬆️	⬇️
\$250	Buick LaCrosse	⬇️	⬆️
\$260	Toyota Prius	⬆️	⬆️
\$265	Lexus CT 200h	⬆️	⬇️
\$275	Buick Lucerne	⬇️	⬇️
\$300	Honda Fit	⬆️	⬇️
\$300	Kia Soul	⬇️	⬇️
\$300	Lexus ES	⬆️	⬆️
\$300	Lincoln MKZ	⬆️	⬇️
\$300	Mini Cooper	⬇️	⬇️

**\$300** Toyota Avalon ↑↑  
**\$300** Toyota Camry ↑↑

### SUVs UNDER \$10,000

**\$250** Kia Sportage ↑↓  
**\$300** Honda CR-V ↑↓

### SUVs \$10,000-\$20,000

**\$200** Chevrolet Tahoe ↑↓  
**\$300** Toyota 4Runner ↑↑

### PICKUPS UNDER \$10,000

**\$200** Ford Ranger ↑↓  
**\$200** Nissan Frontier ↑↓

### PICKUPS \$10,000-\$20,000

**\$200** Chevrolet Silverado 1500 ↓↓  
**\$200** GMC Sierra 1500 ↓↓  
**\$250** Toyota Tacoma ↑↓  
**\$250** Toyota Tundra ↑↑  
**\$275** Ford F-250 ↑↓  
**\$300** Honda Ridgeline ↑↑  
**\$300** Ram 1500 ↓↓

## MOST EXPENSIVE

2011 model year cars and SUVs to maintain and repair



**EUROPEAN LUXURY CARS** tend to cost the most to keep in good working order, so even a low-priced used model could prove expensive in the long run. About half the models on this list have subpar reliability, so fixes may be costly and frequent.

2011 MODELS		OVERALL RELIABILITY	OWNER SATISFACTION
YEARLY COST	CURRENT USED RETAIL VALUE		
CARS UNDER \$10,000			
\$1,200	BMW 5 Series	⬇️	⬇️
\$800	BMW 3 Series	⬇️	⬇️
\$550	Audi A4	⬇️	⬇️
\$500	Subaru Legacy	⬆️	⬆️
CARS \$10,000-\$20,000			
\$600	Mercedes-Benz E-Class	⬆️	⬇️
\$500	Acura TSX	⬆️	⬇️
\$500	Infiniti M	⬆️	⬆️
SUVs UNDER \$10,000			
\$700	Acura RDX	⬆️	⬇️

**\$590** Chevrolet Traverse ↓↓  
**\$530** Cadillac SRX ↓↓  
**\$505** Buick Enclave ↓↓  
**\$500** Subaru Forester ↓↓  
**\$500** Subaru Outback ↓↑

### SUVs \$10,000-\$20,000

**\$900** Chevrolet Suburban ↓↓  
**\$775** GMC Acadia ↓↓  
**\$600** Honda Pilot ↑↓  
**\$500** Acura MDX ↓↓  
**\$500** Ford Explorer ↓↓  
**\$500** Jeep Grand Cherokee ↓↓  
**\$500** Jeep Wrangler ↓↓

### MINIVANS UNDER \$10,000

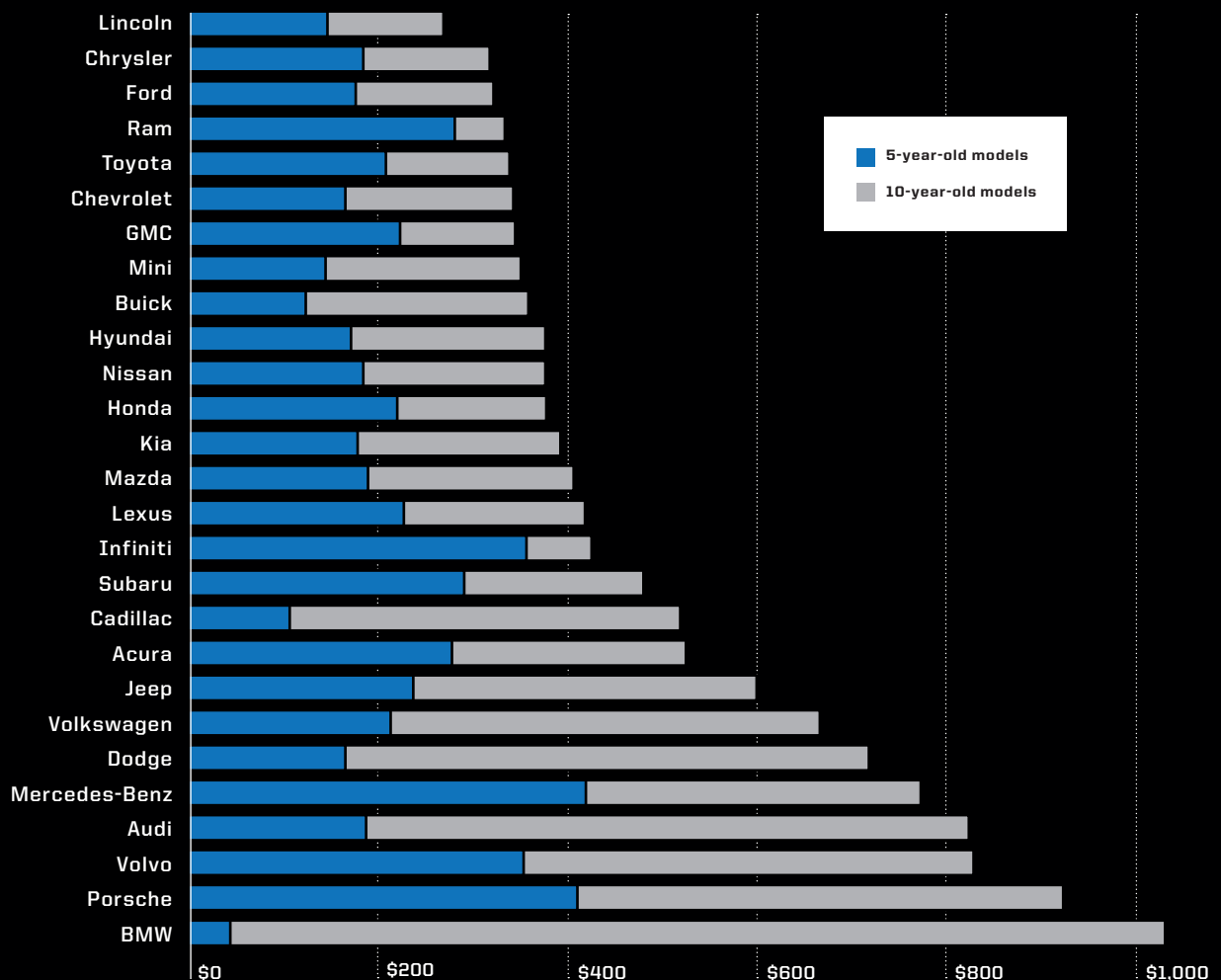
**\$750** Honda Odyssey ↓↓  
**\$500** Dodge Grand Caravan ↓↓

on 5- and 10-year-old models. In addition to new-car warranties, some automakers offer free maintenance for the first few years of ownership, but costs can sometimes skyrocket if problems appear once that

coverage ends. That's why some brands, such as BMW, can have among the lowest maintenance and repair costs at the 5-year mark and some of the highest costs for 10-year-old cars.

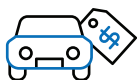
## WHAT EACH BRAND WILL COST YOU

A snapshot of one-year repair costs for 5- and 10-year-old models by brand, according to our Annual Auto Survey of CR members





# PROTECT YOURSELF FROM PRICEY REPAIRS



## SELL IT WHILE YOU'RE COVERED

If you already own one of the cars on the most-expensive-to-repair list (on page 56), it's possible that it won't need costly repairs or service. But it might be worth selling it or trading it in before the warranty period expires, just in case.



## BUY IT WITH A WARRANTY

If you're set on buying a used car that typically costs a lot to maintain, look for one with remaining warranty coverage. Certified pre-owned vehicles can sometimes cost more than non-certified cars, but they typically include extended warranty coverage. Although it usually isn't worth buying an extended warranty to cover a reliable car, a warranty plan for an unreliable vehicle may save you money if it costs less than a few fixes. Remember that you can negotiate the price for an extended

warranty just like you can a car's price, and be sure you understand what the warranty covers and where the work can be performed.



## GET A PRE-PURCHASE INSPECTION

Ask the dealer or owner whether you can take the car to an independent mechanic. If they balk, consider it a sign that they might be hiding something. A pre-purchase inspection can identify parts that are about to wear out, and can reveal past damage that even car history services like Carfax might not show. If a car you're considering needs a few fixes, negotiate a lower price up front and plan for future repairs.



## CHECK THE REPAIR RECORDS

Items like an alternator, a fuel pump, or an A/C compressor are not considered "wear items" and usually last at least 100,000 miles, says John Ibbotson,

**THE BEST WAY** to limit your auto repair expenses is to buy a reliable model. But what if you already own a car with high maintenance costs, or you have your heart set on buying a used luxury or sports car that you suspect is going to cost a lot to fix? You can ease some of the pain in your pocketbook by planning ahead for the inevitable. Here's how.

CR's chief mechanic. But if a part wore out earlier than that, it might need another replacement sooner rather than later. In general, a record of prior repairs can predict what might be needed repair-wise in the future. "In general, if a part fails at, say, 60,000 miles, you can probably plan on replacing it again at another 60,000," Ibbotson says.



## USE AN INDEPENDENT MECHANIC

Our 2018 survey results show that compared with auto repair chains and car dealerships, consumers tend to have a more satisfying experience at independent shops, where they're also more likely to get a discount. But when it comes to luxury brands or rare models with hard-to-find parts, steer clear of shops that lack the specific tools or skills to do the job, and find one that knows the ins and outs of your car. "Independent shops are your best bet when they have the tools to do the repair. Shops that specialize in a particular brand are often even better," says



## CONSIDER AFTERMARKET PARTS

Aftermarket parts may or may not be built by the original automaker. They do the same thing as the name brand but often cost less. Although the quality of aftermarket parts varies, an honest and skilled mechanic will know which to use and which ones to avoid. Some are actually better than original equipment, says RepairPal's Trotta. For example, she says some aftermarket suppliers sell suspension components that mechanics find easier to install than factory parts, so consumers pay less for labor. And some parts might be better built or have longer guarantees. "A lot of times the warranty is the same, if not better," she says. But some parts can be purchased only from the manufacturer, Ibbotson warns. "The more obscure the part, the less likely it will be available aftermarket."



# Can Tire Sealants Really Fix a Flat?



WHETHER YOU'RE ON a road trip or a trip to the store, a flat tire can take the wheels off of your plans and even be dangerous.

For many motorists, the best tools to deal with a flat tire are a phone and a roadside assistance membership. If you don't have those and are unable to replace the flat yourself, a tire sealant can let you limp along far enough to find professional help. Tire sealants are designed to plug small holes; some are also meant to refill a flat tire. They range in price from around \$10 for a bare-bones can of sealant to about \$80 for a full kit, which includes a portable inflator pump (always smart to have on hand in case of emergency). It's not a permanent fix: You should always have the tire professionally repaired or replaced as quickly as possible—typically within 100 miles or as directed in the sealant instructions. Never try to repair a hole bigger than one made by a large nail, or a cut or hole in a sidewall.

The products below are meant to plug a small hole in a tire's tread area. But our testing reveals that not all of them perform as they're supposed to. See the full test results: [CR.org/sealant0621](https://cr.org/sealant0621).

## LIQUID TIRE SEALANTS

PRICE RANGE: \$9 to \$12

Liquid tire sealants are designed to patch small tire punctures by emptying the contents of the can into the tire through the air-inflation valve. We tried the **Slime Tire Sealant Thru Core Technology**. It sealed our small 2.4-mm test hole but could not plug

the 5.8-mm puncture we made with a framing nail. Liquid tire sealants can plug a hole in a tire, but you'll still need a compressor or portable tire inflator to pump the flat tire back up. In other words, a can of sealant on its own is not going to get you back on the road.

## PRESSURIZED-CAN SEALANTS

PRICE RANGE: \$7 to \$14

These are single-use seal-and-inflate products applied through a tire's air-inflation valve. (Larger cans for pickup-truck and SUV tires cost a few dollars more.) While designed to offer more utility than liquid sealants, they did not impress in our tests. The **Fix-a-Flat** sealed

just the small, 2.4-mm hole. **Super Tech Tire Sealant & Inflator** from Walmart did not seal the large or small hole. Neither could fully inflate a truly flat tire. Pressurized cans could rupture in a hot car: Follow storage guidelines on the sealant container.

## TIRE-SEALANT KITS

PRICE RANGE: \$25 to \$80

A full kit combines a replaceable can of liquid sealant and a 12-volt air compressor. (Many new cars provide this type of kit in lieu of a spare tire.) With most kits, the compressor forces air through a container of tire sealant and into the flat tire. Unlike

pressurized-can sealants, these kits can pump a truly flat tire up to its recommended pressure and be safely stored in the car. Our team favors the simple-to-use **AirMan ResQ Pro +**, which requires no assembly and comes with a carrying case.



## ROAD TEST

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



FULL-SIZED PICKUP TRUCKS

### Ford F-150

A Few Updates and Now a Hybrid Version

XLT

55

OVERALL SCORE

HYBRID

58

OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 75 XLT/79 hybrid

**HIGHS** Quietness, cabin room, acceleration, controls, hybrid's generator, standard safety features

**LOWS** Ride, agility, high step-in

**POWERTRAIN** 325-hp, 2.7-liter turbo V6 engine/430-hp, 3.5-liter turbo V6 hybrid engine; 10-speed auto; 4WD

**FUEL** 19/20 mpg XLT/hybrid on reg.

#### PRICE

\$28,940–\$74,250 base price range  
\$55,535 XLT as tested  
\$69,935 hybrid as tested

**THE F-150 WAS** redesigned for 2021 with a mildly updated exterior, an upgraded cabin, and the first hybrid model. Yet overall, the new F-150—long America's best-selling vehicle—didn't make a significant step forward.

We purchased a Lariat hybrid and a conventional XLT. With 430 hp on tap, the hybrid is the brawniest in the F-150 lineup, delivering nearly bottomless power along with an impressive 12,400-pound tow rating. We weren't thrilled with the hybrid's occasional rough downshifts, though.

The nonhybrid XLT version with the 325-hp, 2.7-liter turbo V6 may not have the grunt of the hybrid or its towing capacity (rated at 7,700 pounds for our test truck), but it's still a gem, with loads of low-end power and timely, smooth shifting.

Although the aptly named "PowerBoost" hybrid 4WD

is rated at 24 mpg combined by the EPA's lab testing, our on-road testing resulted in 20 mpg overall, with the gas-only version at 19 mpg, identical to our 2018 tested model.

For the tested trucks, the ride is marginally less jittery than before, but the steering is still slow and the handling fairly clumsy. When pushed to their limits, however, the trucks proved very secure.

For comfort, the new F-150s are still a far cry from the plush Ram 1500. Even so, the cabins rival luxury cars for quietness. To get inside takes a big step up, but the crew-cab versions are very roomy. An optional foldaway gear selector cleverly enables a flat workspace on the center console for laptops, and Ford's infotainment system is a model of user-friendliness.

All F-150s come standard with FCW and AEB with pedestrian detection, which we applaud.

LUXURY MID-SIZED SUVs

### Genesis GV80

Oozes Luxury but Annoys With Tech

63

OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 81

**HIGHS** Acceleration, transmission, handling, braking, quietness, fit and finish

**LOWS** Controls, fuel economy

**POWERTRAIN** 375-hp, 3.5-liter turbocharged V6 engine; 8-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

**FUEL** 18 mpg on premium

#### PRICE

\$48,900–\$65,550 base price range  
\$65,775 as tested

**THE GV80 IS** the first SUV from Genesis, and it's likely to put Hyundai's luxury brand on the radar of many buyers. We found it to be quick, quiet, beautifully appointed, and a pleasure to drive. Our only misgivings—a frustrating infotainment system and subpar fuel economy—gave us pause and could be deal breakers for some shoppers.

Our testers loved the driving experience, thanks in part to our tested vehicle's up-level turbocharged V6 engine. It belts out a super-smooth 375 hp and gets up to speed lickety-split. The eight-speed automatic works in perfect harmony with the engine, providing nearly imperceptible shifts exactly when the driver needs them. But our tested all-wheel-drive model (rear-wheel drive is standard) managed just 18 mpg overall, which is a few mpg behind the GV80's direct competitors.

This planted and composed SUV eats up curvy roads. Its taut suspension and quick, well-weighted steering help it carve through the corners. The suspension is firm but not harsh, giving a ride that's just comfortable enough.

The GV80's finely crafted cabin includes matte wood, stitched leather, chrome, and plenty of padded surfaces. The front seats are wide and supportive, with thick torso bolsters. We found the rear seat a bit short on thigh support, and the optional third-row seat is tiny.

The biggest knock against the model is the infotainment system's control dial. Though stylishly designed, the dial requires such a high level of precision to use that it could distract the driver.

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

PHOTOS: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

**Ratings** ➤ **Best Seller** The Ford F-150 truck now includes a hybrid version, and a new luxury brand enters SUV-land.

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

#### SUVs \$55,000-\$75,000

✓ <b>BMW X5</b> 3.0T	84	⬆	⬆	98	23	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	52.0	6.0	129	36.5	S	S	0	S
✓ <b>Lexus RX350L</b> 3.5L	82	⬆	⬆	80	20	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	51.5	7.7	136	31.0	S	S	S	S
✓ <b>Porsche Cayenne</b> 3.0T	81	⬆	⬆	87	21	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	49.5	6.5	131	32.0	S	S	S	0
✓ <b>Lexus GX460</b> 4.6L	79	⬆	⬆	70	17	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	48.0	7.5	136	36.5	S	S	S	S
✓ <b>Buick Enclave</b> 3.6L	76	⬆	⬆	87	18	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	53.5	7.4	130	48.5	0	0	0	0
<b>Audi Q7</b> 3.0T	65	⬆	⬆	92	20	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	50.5	7.0	133	35.5	S	S	S	S
<b>Infiniti QX80</b> 5.6L	64	⬆	⬆	68	15	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	48.0	6.9	139	49.5	S	S	S	S
<b>Genesis GV80</b> 3.5T	63	⬆	⬆	81	18	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	51.5	6.0	129	39.0	S	S	S	S
<b>Volvo XC90</b> 2.0T	62	⬆	⬆	84	20	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	52.5	7.7	126	35.0	S	S	S	S
<b>Cadillac XT6</b> 3.6L	55	⬆	⬆	82	18	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	51.0	7.1	134	40.5	S	S	0	0
<b>Land Rover Range Rover Sport</b> 3.0SC	49	⬆	⬆	72	18	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	49.5	6.5	137	31.5	S	S	0	0
<b>Lincoln Aviator</b> 3.0T	45	⬆	⬆	82	19	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	52.0	6.2	138	49.0	S	S	S	S
<b>Mercedes-Benz GLE450</b> 3.0T	43	⬆	⬆	80	20	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	51.5	6.0	132	36.5	S	S	S	S

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

<b>Toyota Tundra</b> 5.7L	63	⬆	⬆	59	15	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	44.0	6.7	153	NR	S	S	S	0
<b>Ram 1500</b> 5.7L	63	⬆	⬆	83	17	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	47.5	7.1	137	NR	0	0	0	0
<b>Ram 1500</b> 3.00	63	⬆	⬆	83	23	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	47.0	8.8	138	NR	0	0	0	0
<b>Ford F-150</b> 3.5T/H	58	⬆	⬆	79	20	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	48.0	6.3	141	NR	S	S	S	0
<b>Ford F-150</b> 2.7T	55	⬆	⬆	75	19	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	47.5	6.7	143	NR	S	S	S	0
<b>Nissan Titan</b> 5.6L	55	⬆	⬆	70	16	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	49.5	6.7	131	NR	S	S	S	S
<b>Chevrolet Silverado 1500</b> 3.00	45	⬆	⬆	78	23	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	47.0	7.9	144	NR	0	0	—	0
<b>GMC Sierra 1500</b> 3.00	45	⬆	⬆	78	23	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	47.0	7.9	144	NR	0	0	—	0
<b>Chevrolet Silverado 1500</b> 5.3L	45	⬆	⬆	78	17	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	49.5	6.9	136	NR	0	0	—	0
<b>GMC Sierra 1500</b> 5.3L	45	⬆	⬆	78	17	⬆ / ⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	49.5	6.9	136	NR	0	0	—	0

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

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

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

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

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



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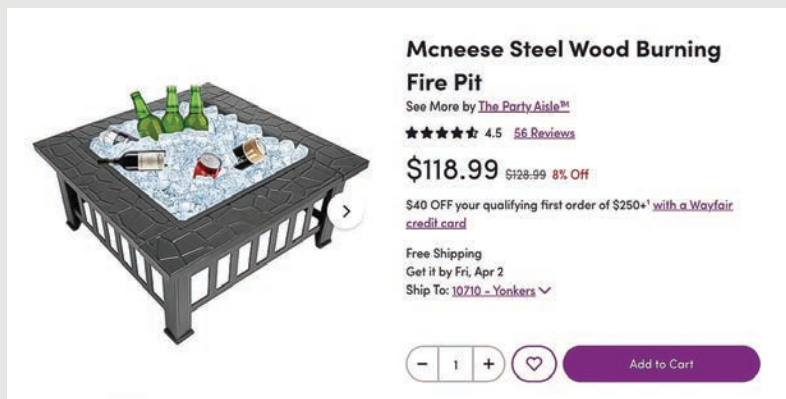
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# Not So Hot for Summer

Warm-weather products and promises you may want to skip

## A New Way to Use That Fire Pit

Not sure we'd drink to this attempt to make your fire pit do double duty on a hot day.  
*Submitted by Ari C., via email*



## We'll Pass on This Ice Cream Flavor

Does this frozen "treat" come in a cone, cup, or clamshell?  
*Submitted by Amy Moldoff, seen in Quechee, VT*



## Shady Sales Pitch

This tree may give you some cover—about 10 years from now.  
*Submitted by Gerard Clayton, via email*



## Watch Out for a Really Rough Ride

It would take one souped-up golf cart to climb these stairs.  
*Submitted by S. Lee, via email*



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