



OCTOBER 2021

# CR Consumer Reports®

✓ REVIEWS & RATINGS

Coffee Makers  
Smoke Alarms  
Electric Toothbrushes  
Laptops  
Dishwashers  
Humidifiers  
Toaster Ovens  
At-Home Weights

## OUR NEW GUIDE TO SMARTER SHOPPING

HOW TO NAVIGATE  
SHORTAGES &  
PRICE HIKES



WHEN TO BUY IN  
STORES OR ONLINE

GET BIGGER DISCOUNTS,  
BETTER SERVICE

LOOK FOR OUR  
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CR's guide to handling the shortages and price hikes happening these days.

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

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

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

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We rate products using these symbols:

❌ POOR    ⚡ FAIR    ⚡ GOOD  
✅ VERY GOOD    ⚡ EXCELLENT





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# Adapting to the Changes



THERE ARE THINGS we did before the pandemic that we may never do in the same way again, including shopping. We've seen an acceleration in online purchasing that doesn't look to be slowing, and many walk-in stores are evolving to do more delivery or curbside pickups as consumer routines change.

For a brief moment this past summer, with vaccinations on the rise,

it seemed like casual browsing in stores might be a welcome change. But the Delta variant has reminded us that we aren't out of the woods yet.

We've also witnessed some economic fallout in the marketplace, as the labor and supply-chain disruptions of the past 18 months have led to shortages of goods ranging from dishwashers to used cars. We tend to think of online options as limitless, but a recent nationally representative CR survey found that almost all Americans (90 percent) had felt some sort of economic impact when shopping for goods or services in the previous three months, including higher-than-expected prices (68 percent), and shortages (60 percent) and delays (58 percent) for products.

We don't know how long the pandemic or its economic consequences will continue, but we will be here to make sure you have the tools to shop smartly and safely, in person and online. One great example is this month's cover story on how to navigate the altered marketplace, on page 26. And look for the CR Recommended logo wherever you shop, sign up for the latest at [CR.org/newsletters](https://www.consumerreports.org/newsletters), and check out ad-free [CR.org](https://www.consumerreports.org) whenever you need independent, trusted guidance.

*Marta Tellado*

**Marta L. Tellado,**  
President and CEO  
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The Consumer Reports 2021 Annual Meeting will be held online on the evening of Oct. 20, 2021. If you are a paid member of CR, please go to [CR.org/annualmeeting](https://www.consumerreports.org/annualmeeting) for registration information, and please watch your email for an electronic ballot to vote on the current CR Board of Directors slate. If you haven't provided your email address, you can do so by calling us at 800-333-0663 or by going to [CR.org/myaccount](https://www.consumerreports.org/myaccount).

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## Cleaning Up Fast Food

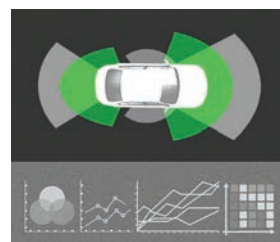
Despite modest improvements from Applebee's, IHOP, and Wendy's—and top marks for Chipotle and Panera—most national fast-food eateries received failing grades on the latest Chain Reaction report, a project by CR and five partner organizations tracking antibiotic use in the raising of beef used by restaurant chains. The routine overuse of antibiotics in animals raised for food has enabled the evolution of bacteria that are largely impervious to the drugs. You can see all the grades below, and read the full 2021 report at [CR.org/chainreaction1021](https://CR.org/chainreaction1021).

2021 Chain Reaction VI Beef Scorecard	
A	CHIPOTLE
A-	Panera
C	Wendy's, McDonald's, SUBWAY
D	TACO BELL, Applebee's, IHOP
F	Burger King, Starbucks, Dunkin', SONIC, Olive Garden, Panda Express, DQ, Jack in the Box, PIZZA HUT, Little Caesars, Arby's



CALL TO ACTION

It has become increasingly clear that broadband service is not a luxury but a necessity. Yet it remains inaccessible to too many Americans. You can help change that by participating in Consumer Reports' Let's Broadband Together initiative, in which consumers nationwide are testing their internet speeds and sharing copies of their internet bills. The information will shed light on industry practices and help us make high-speed internet service accessible to everyone. More than 30,000 consumers have joined the effort already, but to win the fight for fair internet, we need to hear from more of you. Please go to [BroadbandTogether.org](https://BroadbandTogether.org) to help.



## More Data for Safer Roads

### WHAT'S AT STAKE

Many new cars come with active driving assistance systems, which combine speed control and automatic steering. Intended to support drivers by relieving fatigue and stress on long trips or in stop-and-go traffic, these systems don't make a car "self-driving." But they can sometimes increase the risk of driver inattention, so the government needs to ensure that they're developed and rolled out safely.

### HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

To do that, CR has long argued, regulators need more robust crash data, especially for incidents involving tech-

nologies that automate part of the task of driving.

After a string of high-profile car crashes involving systems such as Tesla's Autopilot, progress is finally being made: In June the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration ordered companies to report all serious crashes that happen during or after use of a driving automation system.

The order applies to all cars that can automate driving functions such as steering, acceleration, and braking. Though no truly self-driving cars are yet being sold to consumers, the order applies to those now being used for testing, ride-hailing, and delivery.

The move is encouraging. With the new data, NHTSA can more readily track safety trends, identify risks, and develop smart, strong performance standards.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

Sign CR's petition telling automakers to make proven safety features standard on all their vehicles, at [CR.org/autosafety1021](https://CR.org/autosafety1021).





Our August cover story, “**Better Internet for Less Money,**” shared smart fixes for common broadband problems, as well as ways to lower your rates and increase your plan’s speed. Readers wrote in with their WiFi woes and solutions. To add your voice, go to [CR.org/wifi1021](https://www.consumerreports.org/wifi1021).

I ENJOYED your August 2021 report on WiFi problems. After doing some of the checks mentioned in the article, I found that my issue was with my laptop’s WiFi card. My desktop computer was getting 225 mps via WiFi, while the laptop in the same room was getting 25 mps. —James Webber, Granbury, TX

XFINITY/COMCAST PRICES are high in the stores—and even over the phone. Signing up on the internet as a new customer is the cheapest. So every two years, when our

guaranteed-rate contract expires, my wife and I switch accounts. If the account is in my name, I cancel and then she signs up as a new customer. (We have our own modem and router, so there’s no equipment to turn in.) Our current \$59.99 a month for internet expires soon, so we’ll play the game again until Xfinity starts giving existing customers better deals. —Cliff Dunaway, via CR.org

YOUR INTERNET INSIGHTS were thorough and educational. I wanted more insight into 5G home hot spots. I’ve used a Verizon 4G hot spot during cable outages for email. But now with 5G speeds greater than cable, I see a future of no cable or satellite

required and no wiring. How say your experts? —Dave Thomas, Cincinnati

**EDITOR’S NOTE** *There are a number of options that may eventually replace wired internet connections to the home. These include 5G, as you’ve noted; fixed wireless, which uses broadcast towers to transmit the signal; and low-earth satellite internet from companies such as Starlink from SpaceX. We’ll continue to keep tabs on these options as they develop.*

ONE OF THE MAJOR problems with internet access is what works out to a de facto monopoly in most markets for most ISPs. We live in the capital city of a northeastern state that

is close to a number of colleges, including two engineering schools, and several research facilities. Despite all of that infrastructure and all of that need for internet access, there is one, and only one, carrier for our area: Spectrum. The service that we get is fine, for the most part. It is not exorbitantly expensive, as far as I can tell. I have tried to get service with other providers, or even a quote, and all of them have provided the same answer, that they do not [service our area]. —Michael Stimac, Albany, NY

THE REAL SOLUTION to affordable broadband in the home is to make it a utility, administered by local governments. While some states prohibit that by law, many other states allow it, and it can encourage competition. The city of Ammon, Idaho, provides the infrastructure for multiple providers to offer internet services, dramatically lowering costs. Ammon offers symmetrical 1 gigabit per second fiber to the home for about \$49.50 a month. Pay the actual cost to bring it to your home up front, which varies (a couple of thousand dollars), and the cost could be \$23 per month less! CR should back these initiatives, and I encourage your members to promote and support them locally. Learn more at [muninetworks.org](https://muninetworks.org). —Mark Hamill, Florence, MA

**EDITOR’S NOTE** *CR supports the idea of municipal broadband services, in which a town or city offers its own internet plans to residents, sometimes in partnership with a private company. These city-run services may provide fast connections in neighborhoods where none are available from other ISPs. You’re also correct: This policy can introduce competition—as well as lower prices—in markets that currently lack it.*



WRITE

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

REGARDING how to test your speed: The statement “first run a test with a computer that’s physically plugged into your router using an Ethernet cord” is correct, but a better way is to run a test with a computer that is physically plugged into your modem, to eliminate the router as a factor. Run the test before you have a problem and record it so that you have a baseline on what the speeds are supposed to be.

—Michael Lee, Los Angeles

**EDITOR’S NOTE** You’re correct: If you have a separate modem and router, plugging your computer directly into the modem can be a good way to test your speed. Many people, however, have a modem/router, which is one device that handles both functions.



## BROKEN APPLIANCES

IN “FIX IT OR DITCH IT?” (August 2021), you state: “But dishwashers that cost \$500 and under can get your dishes just as clean.” It would be nice if you covered these lower-priced models in your ratings. Not everyone wants or needs high-end, top-performance models.

—Nancy Martsch, Los Angeles

**EDITOR’S NOTE** We know that finding high-performing yet affordable appliances can be difficult. That’s why, in our monthly “What We’re Testing” section (on pages 10 and 11), we often highlight affordable product picks to help consumers find a great model that fits their budget. This issue’s roundup includes a \$500 energy-efficient dishwasher made by Whirlpool.

YOUR FLOWCHART about appliances not working didn’t address whether the item you are considering replacing is easily recyclable or whether it contains chemicals or compounds that are bad for the environment. Some items are fairly easy to recycle. Often this is not the case with electronics, and if an item’s price is such that it can easily be repaired and the energy use of the item isn’t high, repairing might be the thing to do.

—Leo Griffin, Seattle

**EDITOR’S NOTE** You make an important point: As consumers, we need to be increasingly mindful of what products are made out of—and where they end up. We’re looking into research on the chemicals and compounds you mention. And this month, CR’s experts took a close look at the life cycle of plastic products—and what you can do to limit their harm. Turn to “The Big Problem With Plastic,” on page 42.



## CAR SAFETY

RE: YOUR TIP on rollaway prevention (“What’s Next in Car Safety?” August 2021): I worry about built-in car technology that cannot be easily disabled. The idea that a car should automatically shift into Park when the engine is turned off sounds good until your car breaks down in the middle of a road and you have to push it to get it out of traffic. How do you do that if it is locked in Park?

—Joanne Scherr, Altadena, CA

**EDITOR’S NOTE** Most cars that automatically shift into Park when the engine is shut off



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can be easily shifted into Neutral for the type of situation you describe.

I LIVED IN the Netherlands for a decade, so I was interested in your article regarding the danger to cyclists of “dooring.” Years ago the Dutch came up with a “low-tech” solution that is actively promoted through driver education. It’s called “reach right.” Drivers are taught to use their right hand to reach for the door handle. Doing so forces the driver to look over their shoulder and to, more likely, spot an oncoming cyclist. Simple. Effective.

—Jack Segal, Traverse City, MI

IN YOUR AUGUST ISSUE, one quick safety fix that concerns me is vehicles that have lighted dashes—anytime the car is running—but don’t have automatic headlights! Just about every night, I see a modern vehicle with dash lights beaming bright but with only daytime running lights on, or no outside lights on at all! A simple, sensible regulation could remedy that.

—Paul Mittermaier, Germantown, WI

**EDITOR’S NOTE** Additional light from the cabin or from well-lit roads can give drivers a false sense that headlights are on. While automatic headlights—those that turn on in low-light conditions—are increasingly common, they are not required in the U.S. and aren’t a solution if the “auto” mode isn’t selected. Canada has introduced a regulation requiring all new vehicles to have one of the following: taillights that come on automatically with daytime running lights; headlights, taillights, and side marker lights that turn on automatically in the dark; or a dashboard that stays dark if headlights are not turned on.

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

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

## Smoke Alarms & CO Detectors

**WE TESTED:** 40 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** How models respond to smoke, fire, and carbon monoxide.

### ABOUT THE SCORES:

#### SMOKE ALARMS

Median: 53; Range: 46-91

#### CO DETECTORS

Median: 80; Range: 70-93

#### COMBO

Median: 67; Range: 56-89

**BEST DUAL SENSOR SMOKE ALARM**

**First Alert 3120B**  
\$30

91

OVERALL  
SCORE



**BEST CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTOR**

**First Alert CO615**  
\$30

91

OVERALL  
SCORE



**BEST COMBO SMOKE/ CARBON MONOXIDE DETECTOR**

**Universal Security Instruments MIC3510SB**  
\$50

89

OVERALL  
SCORE



## Coffee Makers

**WE TESTED:** 103 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** Brew performance; ease of filling the reservoir, changing filters, and cleaning; how well the carafe pours coffee; and more.

### ABOUT THE SCORES:

Median: 69  
Range: 34-91

**BEST BREW OVERALL**  
**Cuisinart DCC-T20**  
(touch-screen 14-cup)  
\$130

91

OVERALL  
SCORE



**SPEEDY BREWING FOR LESS**  
**Bella Pro Series 90061**  
(14-cup)  
\$90

82

OVERALL  
SCORE



**DRIP COFFEE & ESPRESSO MAKER**  
**Mr. Coffee Occasions BVMC-O-CT** (10-cup)  
\$230

63

OVERALL  
SCORE



## Ask Our Experts

**Is there more caffeine in an espresso shot than in a cup of coffee?**



NO. OUNCE FOR OUNCE, espresso has more caffeine: 63 mg of caffeine in 1 ounce (roughly the amount in a shot), according to Department of Agriculture nutrition data. Regular coffee, by contrast, has about 12 mg of caffeine in every ounce, on average.

But who stops at 1 ounce of coffee? If you drink an 8-ounce mug of your home brew, you're getting about 95 mg of caffeine or more. (And at Starbucks, an 8-ounce cup of its Pike Place medium-roast coffee has 155 mg.) So if you're looking to cut down on your caffeine intake, replacing your cup of brewed coffee with just a single shot of espresso is a good option—as long as you stick to drinking just one shot.



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).

## Bleach-Free Dishwasher Detergents

**WE TESTED:** 11 products  
**WE TEST FOR:** How well the detergent cleans baked-on food from glass dishes, how well it reduces mineral deposits, and more.

### ABOUT THE SCORES:

Median: 79  
Range: 50-91

EXCELLENT CLEANING POWER  
**Cascade Free & Clear Action Pacs**  
\$0.31 per load

**87**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



RESISTS WATER SPOTS  
**Seventh Generation Ultra Power Plus Packs**  
\$0.28 per load

**83**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



AFFORDABLE GEL OPTION  
**Cascade Gel with Dawn**  
\$0.08 per load

**54**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



## Energy-Efficient Dishwashers

**WE TESTED:** 68 24-inch models  
**WE TEST FOR:** How well a model's normal cycle cleans a full load of dishes with baked-on food, drying performance, energy use, noise during use, and more.

### ABOUT THE SCORES:

Median: 69  
Range: 48-89

GREAT VALUE & SHORT CYCLE  
**Bosch Ascenta SHX3AR75UC**  
(95-min. cycle)  
\$700

**89**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



SMART CONTROLS & SUPER-QUIET  
**Thermador DWHD660WFP**  
(155-min. cycle)  
\$1,800

**84**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



BARGAIN BUY  
**Whirlpool WDF130PAHW**  
(160-min. cycle)  
\$500

**65**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



## 12- to 14-Inch Laptops

**WE TESTED:** 50 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** Ability to run large applications and games smoothly, quality of display, ergonomics, battery life, and more.

### ABOUT THE SCORES:

Median: 65  
Range: 35-81

LIGHTWEIGHT 14-INCH WITH GREAT PERFORMANCE  
**LG Gram 14 (2021)**  
\$1,050

**79**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



13-INCH TOUCH SCREEN & CONVERTS INTO A TABLET  
**Samsung Galaxy Book Flex2 Alpha**  
\$900

**77**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



13-INCH WITH LONG BATTERY LIFE  
**Asus ZenBook UX325EA-DS51**  
\$750

**72**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



## Electric Toothbrushes

**WE TESTED:** 13 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** Ability to clean plaque (using the TWQH Plaque Index), ease of use, battery performance, noise when in use, and more.

### ABOUT THE SCORES:

Median: 66  
Range: 49-83

SUPERIOR CLEANING WITH SMARTPHONE APP TRACKER  
**Oral-B iO 7 Series**  
\$200

**83**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



EXCELLENT CLEANING FOR LESS  
**Philips Sonicare ProtectiveClean 6100**  
\$110

**77**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



QUIET & A BARGAIN PRICE BUT NOT RECHARGEABLE  
**Quip Starter Set (plastic)**  
\$25

**60**  
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 **WiFi Routers & More**



## What's the easiest way to turn off a smoke detector when it's had a false alarm?

WHEN YOU'RE CERTAIN there's no fire and you're not in danger, that loud, high-pitched alarm from your smoke detector quickly becomes annoying, and it can be tricky to make it stop. A false alarm may happen when you burn cookies, for example, and the smoke triggers your detector down the hall. Or it could be the result of a system malfunction caused by dust, humidity, electrical problems, or even spiders crawling inside the alarm, says Bernie Deitrick, a CR senior test engineer.

To quiet yours quickly, press and hold the reset button on the sounding unit. If you have hardwired smoke alarms, all the connected units will sound, Deitrick says, so you may need to press reset on each detector until you find the initiating

unit. (On Kidde models, the initiating unit will flash red or green at least once every second while in alarm mode.)

If that doesn't work, take down the smoke alarm(s) and remove the batteries. If it has a lithium battery that you can't remove, put it inside your freezer to muffle the noise until it stops. (Kidde says it can take 8 minutes before an alarm stops on its own.) For interconnected alarms, you may need to flip your circuit breaker, or disconnect all the alarms and remove their batteries, if possible. Once you've silenced the alarm, clean the unit by blowing compressed air through the gap on the side, then replace the batteries before putting the alarm back up. See page 10 for CR's top tested models.

### Are there any banks that don't charge overdraft fees?

THEY DO EXIST, and it's a good thing: Almost 1 in 10 customers routinely spends

more than they have in their checking account, incurring overdraft fees averaging about \$34 each time. But some banks offer more flexible low- or no-fee alternatives. For example, Ally Bank has eliminated overdraft fees on all its accounts. PNC Bank offers a Low Cash Mode feature, which provides grace periods and other fee-minimizing options. And a growing number of banks, including Wells Fargo and Citibank, and credit unions offer Bank On checking accounts, which have no overdraft fees.

So shop around—and keep in mind that some offerings are more consumer-friendly than others. Ally Bank gives you at least six business days to restore a positive balance to your account. Others are slightly less generous: PNC Bank's Low Cash Mode feature gives customers at least 24 hours to bring up their balances; otherwise, a \$36 fee is assessed once a day.

"Even if overdraft fees are waived, banks can also levy fees in other ways," says Syed Ejaz, a policy analyst at CR. You could be charged ATM fees and returned-check fees. So be sure to look closely at account fee disclosures before signing up.

### Will taking melatonin help prevent COVID-19?

THE SLEEP SUPPLEMENT Americans have spent the most on is melatonin, a hormone naturally produced by the body that governs our sleep-wake cycle. In 2020 melatonin sales grew a staggering 42.5 percent, to \$687 million, according to Nutrition Business Journal, perhaps driven not only by the desire for shut-eye but also by reports suggesting that it may help protect against COVID-19. But whether it works against the virus is unclear. One study found that it was associated with a 28 percent reduced risk of testing positive for the virus, and other preliminary research suggests that it might help people with severe COVID-19 symptoms. (We do know, however, that COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective, so if you want to protect yourself and your family, they remain your best bet.)

Research on the effectiveness of melatonin as a sleep aid is mixed. The short-term use of this supplement is generally considered safe, although some people report side effects such as headaches, dizziness, and nausea. Talk to your doctor before taking melatonin—especially if you use any other medications. This supplement can interfere with other drugs, making some—such as certain blood thinning medications—less effective.



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



## BEST FOR SMALL ROOMS

✓ **Babymoov Hygro Plus**  
Approx. 215 sq. ft.,\*  
cool mist, \$80

**95** OVERALL SCORE



## BEST FOR MEDIUM-SIZED ROOMS

✓ **Honeywell HUL430**  
Approx. 400 sq. ft.,  
cool mist, \$70



**92** OVERALL SCORE

## BEST FOR LARGE ROOMS

💰 **SPT SU-4010**  
Approx. 500 sq. ft.,  
warm & cool mist, \$75



**79** OVERALL SCORE

## BEST FOR EXTRA-LARGE ROOMS (BUT NOISY)

💰 **Honeywell HEV685W**  
Approx. 1,300 sq. ft.,  
cool mist, \$145



**66** OVERALL SCORE

## IN THE KNOW

## Choose a Great Humidifier for Winter

THE RIGHT HUMIDIFIER can help restore balance to dry winter air, as well as hydrate dry skin and unstuff sinuses. But finding a good one can be tricky: Humidifiers aren't the kind of appliances that are easy to sample in a store. Here, our experts help to demystify your humidifier options.

**Warm Mist vs. Cool Mist**  
“Vaporizing” models use a heating element to boil water and put out a warm mist.

Though often less expensive up front, warm mist models use more energy than cool mist ones. Another drawback: Warm mist can cause your nasal passages to swell and make breathing more difficult, according to the Food and Drug Administration—not ideal if you have a cold. (But a cool mist humidifier can help shrink swollen nasal passages.) CR also advises not using a warm mist humidifier in your child's room because the hot water is a burn risk.

## Ultrasonic vs. Evaporative

There are two types of cool mist humidifiers: ultrasonic and evaporative. Many of the top-rated models in our ratings for small, medium, and large rooms (including those shown here) are ultrasonic. These use a nebulizer—a small vibrating piece called a diaphragm—to create a cool mist. Evaporative models, such as the Honeywell HEV685W model at right, use a fan to blow air through a wet wick, and the air cools as it picks up moisture from the wick. (Replace the wick every few months.) As a result of the fan, evaporative models can be noisier than ultrasonic ones.

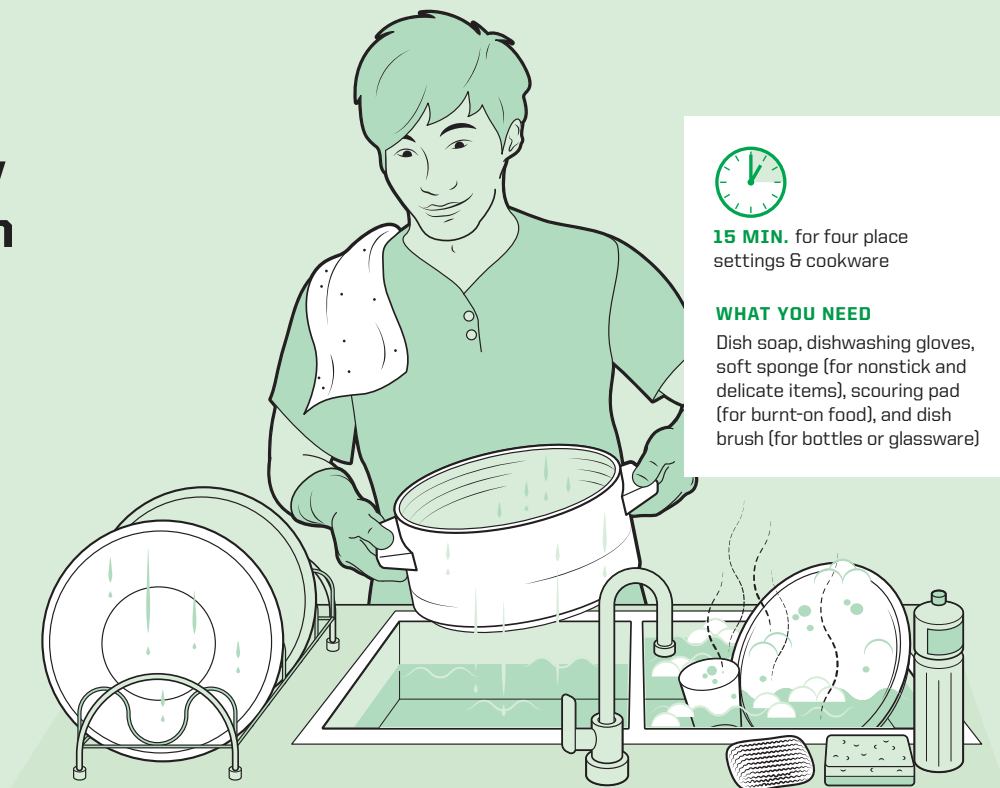
\*Square footage amounts are the manufacturers' claims. For optimal performance, choose a square footage that aligns closely to the size of the room in which you intend to locate your humidifier.



## CR SMART SOLUTION

# The Best Way to Hand-Wash Your Dishes

CLEANING POTS, PANS, and glassware that aren't dishwasher-safe can feel like a chore if you're just turning on the tap and scrubbing away. You'll also waste hot water: A 2020 dishwashing study by the University of Michigan found that running the tap uses up to three times as much water and twice as much energy compared with the "two-basin" technique shown here. This method is more energy efficient than using an Energy Star certified dishwasher—and gets your dishes cleaner.



**15 MIN.** for four place settings & cookware

## WHAT YOU NEED

Dish soap, dishwashing gloves, soft sponge (for nonstick and delicate items), scouring pad (for burnt-on food), and dish brush (for bottles or glassware)

### STEP 1

In a two-basin sink, fill one side (the garbage disposal side, if you have one) with hot water and a few squirts of dish soap. Fill the other basin with clean, cool water. If you have only one basin, use a plastic tub as your second.

### STEP 2

Place dirty dishes (with the exception of sharp knives) in the hot water to soak, then scrub them clean with a sponge in the soapy basin. Do this in batches, starting with the least soiled items and working up to pots.

### STEP 3

Dip scrubbed items in the clean water to remove the suds. If the clean-water basin gets too sudsy, replace some of the water with more clean water from the faucet as needed.

### STEP 4

Place clean dishes in a drying rack, leaving enough space between them for air to circulate. Towel off glassware and metal right away to avoid spotting or rusting.

Need a new dishwasher? Turn to "What We're Testing," on page 11, for three highly rated, energy-efficient choices.

PHOTOS: BOTTOM LEFT TO RIGHT: WONDER BREAD; CHILlicothe CONSTITUTION-TRIBUNE; CONSUMER REPORTS; KING'S HAWAIIAN; CONSUMER REPORTS; LA BREA BAKERY; CONSUMER REPORTS

## CR Time Traveler BREAD



**1921** Wonder Bread hits U.S. stores. The brand's name and distinctive wrapper are inspired by founder Elmer Cline's own sense of "wonder" at the International Balloon Race in Indianapolis.

**1928** A bread-slicing machine invented by Otto Frederick Rohwedder creates the first presliced bread sold to consumers, under the brand Kleen Maid.



**1936** CR tests 16 white breads and finds that many don't taste good. Silvercup, marketed as "The World's Finest" rates only Fair for taste. The best we tried? A brand called Grandmother's.

**1943** The FDA's flour-enrichment standards include adding nutrients such as vitamins A and B, riboflavin, and iron to packaged white bread.



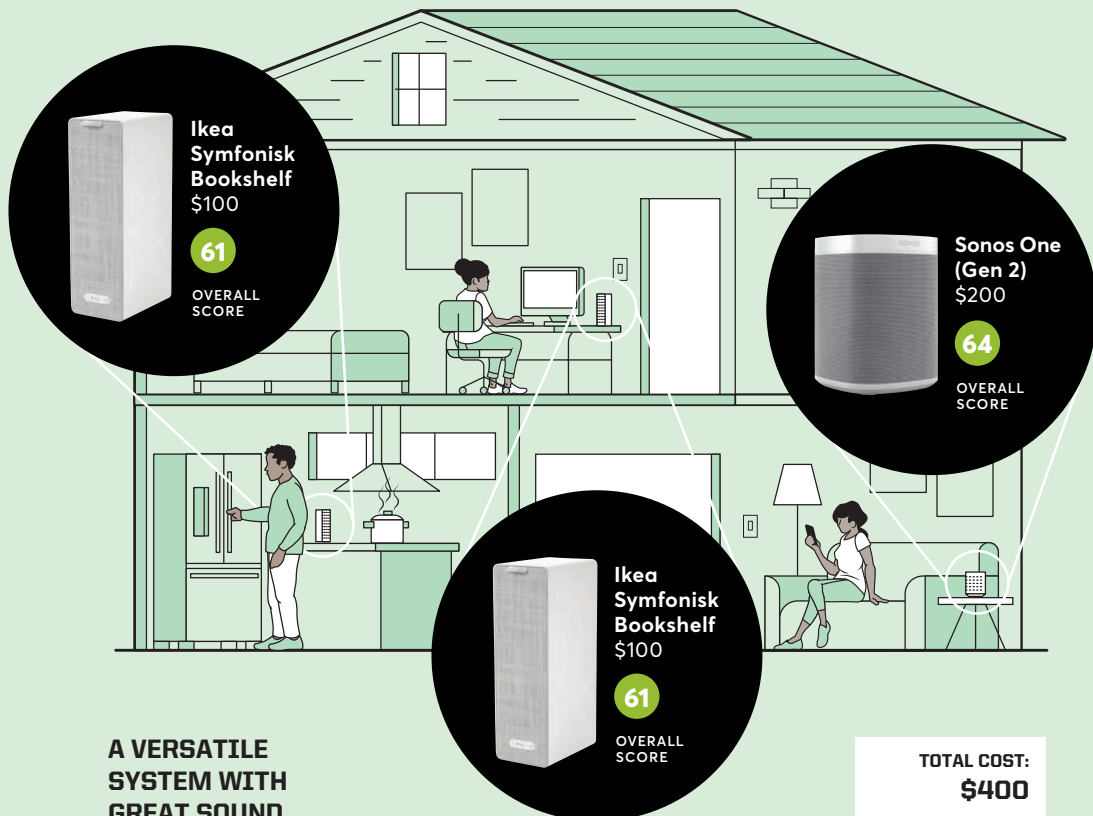
**1950** A new type of "sweet bread" emerges when Robert R. Taira opens a bakery in Hawaii, selling what is later called King's Hawaiian Sweet Bread.

## TECH UPDATE

# Create a Multiroom Sound System

AUDIO SYSTEMS placed throughout your house once cost thousands of dollars to install. But now you can connect several stand-alone wireless speakers on your own for surprisingly little money. With the right set, you can use your smartphone to play a favorite song on 12 speakers scattered around your home, or simply stream NPR on a single kitchen speaker while you cook.

Many brands offer speakers with multiroom functionality—including Apple, Denon, Sonos, and more—each controlled by a corresponding smartphone app. Start by researching those that CR's tests found to have good sound quality and ease of use. Also make sure they fit into your home's existing tech ecosystem (for example, if you already own an Apple HomePod smart speaker, it makes sense to add a few Apple speakers to it).



## A VERSATILE SYSTEM WITH GREAT SOUND

We put together an example setup, above, using compatible Sonos speakers to get you started. The **Sonos One** is a smart speaker that supports Amazon's Alexa and Google Assistant, as well as Apple's AirPlay 2. It gives detailed sound on vocals and instrumentals, but it won't give you the

bass of a larger speaker. Adding two Sonos-compatible **Ikea speakers**, which also rate Very Good for overall sound quality, is an affordable way to extend your system into multiple rooms. All three speakers can be easily controlled by the Sonos app and are compatible with many other Sonos models.

For more wireless speaker ratings, Digital and All Access members can go to [CR.org/speaker1021](https://www.consumerreports.org/speaker1021).

**1964** We test the Mixboy, a handheld blender that includes a pair of dough hooks for making breadlike doughs.



**1993** Consumer breadmaker sales reach 1.5 million units this year. After testing 17 models, CR says the Trillium Breadman is best.



**2010** Even the best toaster oven takes longer than a regular toaster to crisp bread. This \$40 Hamilton Beach rates better than a \$120 Kenmore oven.



✓ **Dave's Killer Bread Organic Powerseed**  
\$5

**84**  
OVERALL SCORE



**1982** CR rates 39 breads. Arnold Brick Oven 100% Whole Wheat gets top marks for nutrition and its "moist molasses-sweet grainy texture."



**1995** Nancy Silverton distributes La Brea Bakery "par-baked" breads across the U.S. They're partially baked and flash frozen, then baking is finished later.



**2021** After testing 56 breads, our experts find seven that offer Excellent nutrition, including the Powerseed bread, above.



## ESCOVITCH SNAPPER RECIPE

makes 2 servings

### For the Red Snapper

2 to 3 medium-sized red snapper, cleaned and scaled  
3 limes or lemons  
¼ cup canola oil  
½ tsp. garlic powder  
½ tsp. onion powder  
¼ tsp. dry parsley flakes  
¼ tsp. fresh thyme leaves  
½ tsp. black pepper  
1 tsp. all-purpose seasoning  
Salt to taste

### For Escovitch Dressing

1 large onion, julienned (cut into short, thin strips)  
½ medium carrot, julienned  
¼ green pepper, julienned  
¼ red pepper, julienned  
½ cup vinegar  
1 cup olive oil  
10 allspice berries/pimiento  
1 sprig of thyme  
1 Scotch Bonnet pepper, diced  
Salt to taste

### Directions

1. Cut three diagonal slits on each side of the fish. Rinse fish with cold water and squeeze juice of one lime all over and inside the fish. To clean, rub the inside of the lime all over the fish. Rinse again with cold water, drain off any excess water, then place the fish in a bowl.\* Squeeze the juice of two limes over the fish and set aside.
2. In a separate bowl, mix oil and all dry seasonings together with a fork. Using your hands or a brush, season the fish all over, making sure to rub inside as well as slits. Let marinate for 2 hours or overnight.
3. Preheat the toaster oven to 400° F. Place fish on parchment paper on the middle rack and bake for 8 to 10 minutes per side.
4. In an oven-safe dish, create escovitch dressing by mixing together the onion, carrot, green and red peppers, vinegar, olive oil, pimiento, thyme, Scotch Bonnet, and salt. Bake in toaster oven at 400° F for 8 minutes.
5. Place escovitch dressing next to or on top of snapper.

\*The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services' FoodSafety.gov website warns against washing meat before cooking, but in West Indian kitchens, meats are typically cleaned with lime juice, lemon juice, and/or vinegar. The lime/lemon juice is added to the rinsing water and then the flesh of the fruit is used to give the meat a gentle scrub. Always wash your hands after handling raw foods.



**“You may not think to use a toaster oven to bake fish, but it’s a great tool: It eliminates the extra calories compared to frying—and the cleanup is easier, too.”**

**CHEF NADEGE FLEURIMOND**

### COUNTERTOP INTELLIGENCE

## Make a Meal in Your Toaster Oven

YOUR TOASTER OVEN can do so much more than just toast breads and reheat leftovers. It can help you prepare a whole meal, especially if you’re cooking for just one or two people. And you can get a lot more creative than pizza or chicken. Chef Nadege Fleurimond employs her toaster oven to whip up one of her favorite meals: escovitch snapper.

This delicious fish dish is typically made in Jamaican kitchens, usually prepared by deep frying an unbattered snapper. But Chef Fleurimond’s recipe for baking it in a toaster oven is lower in calories than deep frying. Plus, a toaster oven tends to preheat faster than a full-sized oven does. “The fish gets its yummiest of flavors from the star of this recipe, the escovitch dressing,” she says, which is a spicy blend that includes onions, carrots, and peppers.

### NEED A NEW TOASTER OVEN?

Both of these models earned an Excellent rating in our rigorous baking tests.

#### LARGE & EASY TO USE

✓ **Hamilton Beach Professional Digital 31240**  
\$170

**66** OVERALL SCORE



#### COMPACT BARGAIN

✓ **Black+Decker 4-Slice TO1755SB**  
\$50

**65** OVERALL SCORE







#### ROAD SMARTS

## STAY SAFE DURING DEER SEASON

Insurance claims for collisions with animals rise significantly in the autumn, when daylight time grows shorter. To minimize the possibility of a dangerous encounter:

- **Stay vigilant at dawn and dusk**, when visibility is reduced for drivers and deer are most active.
- **Always buckle up.** The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety reports that many people killed in animal-vehicle collisions weren't wearing their seat belts.
- **Use your high beams at night** (when traffic permits).
- **If you see a deer on the side of the road, slow down.** If one crosses the road in front of your car, proceed slowly with caution because deer travel in groups, so there's a good chance more deer will follow.
- **If a deer runs out in front of your vehicle, don't try to swerve around it:** Its actions are unpredictable, and you could lose control of your car. Instead, brake as quickly and safely as you can.

For more deer safety tips, go to [CR.org/deer1021](http://CR.org/deer1021).

#### PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

## Adjustable At-Home Weights

ADJUSTABLE DUMBBELLS sit in a cradle and—with a switch of a lever, dial, or pin—let you quickly and easily change the amount of weight you'll be lifting. For example, you may want to switch from 5 pounds to 10 pounds as you move through different exercises.

Our testing of seven compact sets from popular brands found that some adjustable dumbbells can be less easy to use than others, and not every set is right for beginners. Here's what to look for.

**The range of pounds and increments.** “The right set of dumbbells for you depends on the range of weights you'll need to achieve your fitness goals,” says Bernie Deitrick, who oversees exercise equipment testing at CR. Beginners may be fine with a set that tops out at 25 pounds, while those used to lifting heavier weights at the gym will probably prefer a set with a wider range of weight settings.

**The ease of adjustment.** Some sets require multiple steps or the use of both hands to switch the amount of weight you're using, which makes handling more cumbersome. The Core Home Fitness set, below, earned an Excellent rating in our Ease of Use test because the weights can be adjusted using just one hand.



**\$ Core Home Fitness Adjustable Dumbbell Set**  
10 settings up to 50 lb.,  
\$350 for a pair

83

OVERALL  
SCORE



#### VERSATILE PICK

✓ **Bowflex SelectTech 552**  
15 settings up to 52.5 lb.,  
\$400 for a pair



77

OVERALL  
SCORE

#### GOOD FOR BEGINNERS

**\$ Flybird Adjustable Dumbbell**  
5 settings up to 25 lb.,  
\$200 for a pair



72

OVERALL  
SCORE

## FOOD IQ™

### WHAT DOES 100 CALORIES LOOK LIKE?

You don't need to be a kid to love Halloween treats: Almost a third of adults say they grab some of their favorite sweets for themselves around Halloween, according to a 2020 National Confectioners Association poll. But it can be easy to overindulge. "You can fool yourself into thinking those 'fun-size' packages are small, so you can eat a lot of them," says Amy Keating, RD, a CR nutritionist. Use our visual guide to see exactly what 100 calories of your favorite candy looks like. (An important note: On days when you do indulge, try to limit other sugary foods, Keating says, because you get from 2 to 5 teaspoons of added sugars in 100 calories of these sweet treats.)

To see what 100 calories of even more Halloween treats looks like, go to [CR.org/candy1021](https://www.crd.org/candy1021).

1.5

**3 Musketeers**  
(FUN SIZE)



13.6

**Brach's  
Candy Corn**



2.3

**Hershey's  
Miniatures**



4.3

**Jolly  
Rancher**



22.8

**M&M's**



2.1

**Peepe  
Pumpkins**



1.25

**Reese's Peanut  
Butter Cups**  
(SNACK SIZE)



24.6

**Skittles**



1.25

**Snickers**  
(FUN SIZE)



11

**Sour  
Patch Kids**



5

**Starburst**



5

**Tootsie  
Pops Minis**





## 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).



### SUBARU VEHICLES

Subaru is recalling 165,000 of its vehicles because a fuel pump may fail, causing the engine to suddenly stall. If this happens while the vehicle is in motion, it could cause a crash. The models involved are 2019-2020 Ascent SUVs, 2018-2019 BRZ coupes, 2018 Forester SUVs, 2018-2020 Impreza hatchbacks and sedans, 2018-2020 Legacy sedans, 2018-2020 Outback SUVs, and 2018-2019 WRX sedans. Before a stall occurs, drivers may notice that the engine is shaking or making unusually loud noises—or see that the check-engine light is illuminated on the dashboard. In some cases, the vehicle may not start. A Subaru spokesperson told CR that there have been no crashes or injuries related to this recall. **What to do:** Owners of affected vehicles should receive a recall notice in September 2021. They may also contact Subaru customer service at 844-373-6614. Dealers will replace the low-pressure fuel pump free of charge.

### HARBOR FREIGHT TOOLS PROPANE HEATERS

Harbor Freight Tools is recalling about 350,000 One Stop Gardens 15,000 Btu and 30,000 Btu tank top propane heaters because in windy weather the flame can be directed to the rear of the unit, which can melt the “tip switch” safety shutoff feature there. This poses a risk that the heater will not turn off if it tips over, therefore making it a burn hazard. The heaters were sold at Harbor Freight Tools stores and online at [harborfreight.com](https://harborfreight.com) from December 2015 through April 2021 for about \$45 for the 15,000 Btu model and about \$75 for the 30,000 Btu model.

**What to do:** Stop using the heater and return it to a Harbor Freight Tools store for a full refund in the form of a gift card. Call 800-444-3353 or go to [harborfreight.com](https://harborfreight.com) for details.

### UPPABABY RUMBLESEAT ADAPTERS

UPPABaby is recalling about 86,000 adapters included with

RumbleSeats because the adapters can detach, posing a fall hazard to the child in the RumbleSeat.

The adapters were included with RumbleSeats sold at juvenile specialty stores from October 2014 through July 2019 for \$180 to \$200.

**What to do:** If you own a RumbleSeat accessory manufactured between September 2014 and July 2019, you will be provided with a replacement RumbleSeat adapter. In the meantime, stop using the adapter, especially if it does not have a yellow tab, and call 844-823-3132 or go to [uppababy.com](https://uppababy.com) to confirm that your RumbleSeat accessory adapter is included in the recall. You can also fill out the form on the UPPABaby website to receive a free replacement adapter set.

### DISNEY RATTLE SETS

Walgreens is recalling about 54,000 Disney Baby Winnie the Pooh rattle sets because the feet can detach, posing a choking hazard to young children. The rattle sets were sold at Walgreens from September 2019 through January 2020 for about \$10.

**What to do:** Do not let children play with the rattle. Contact Walgreens at 800-925-4733 or go to [walgreens.com](https://walgreens.com) for details and to get a full refund.

### LOHI TECH ESPRESSO MACHINES

LoHi Tech is recalling about 24,900 Sowtech Espresso Machines with glass carafes because the carafe can break while in use, posing a

burn hazard. The machines were sold at Amazon and lohi-direct.com from March 2017 through October 2020 for about \$60.

**What to do:** Stop using the machine and call LoHi Tech at 888-613-3170 or go to [amz-lohitech.com](https://amz-lohitech.com) for details on a free replacement metal carafe.

### ECHO GENERATORS

Echo is recalling about 3,700 Echo EGi-2300 generators because the unit can overheat, posing fire and burn hazards. The 2,300-watt generators were sold at independent Echo outdoor power equipment dealers and online at [homedepot.com](https://homedepot.com) from February 2020 through June 2021 for about \$850.

**What to do:** Stop using the generator and contact Echo at 800-432-3246 or go to [echo-usa.com](https://echo-usa.com) for details and instructions on how to get a free repair.

### BOOPH CHILDREN'S NIGHTGOWNS

Booph is recalling about 4,900 children's nightgowns because they fail to meet the federal flammability standards for children's sleepwear, posing a risk of burn injuries. The nightgowns were sold at Amazon from March 2020 through June 2021 for \$9 to \$16.

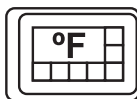
**What to do:** Stop using the nightgown. Call Booph at 833-866-6743 or go to [chjbooph.com](https://chjbooph.com) for details on returning the nightgown for a full refund.

OCTOBER  
IS THE  
BEST TIME  
TO BUY ...

### MATTRESSES



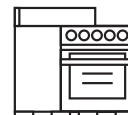
### THERMOSTATS



### CHAINSAWS



### RANGES





# PRODUCT UPDATE



THE LATEST  
RATINGS FROM  
OUR LABS

## Get the Best Vacuum for Your Home

The trick to making fast work of dirty floors is finding the perfect match for your cleaning needs. We can help you choose.

by **Mary H.J. Farrell**



### Robotic

PRICE RANGE  
**\$180 TO \$1,000**  
WEIGHT RANGE  
**5 TO 9 POUNDS**  
AVERAGE CAPACITY  
**2 CUPS**

Some of these hands-free vacs perform well in our pet-hair tests, but they lack the power to tackle deep-down dirt.

### Stick

PRICE RANGE  
**\$70 TO \$900**  
WEIGHT RANGE  
**6 TO 11 POUNDS**  
AVERAGE CAPACITY  
**3 CUPS**

Lightweight and versatile, these are ideal for small spaces or as a second vac for stairs and areas with hard floors.

### Canister

PRICE RANGE  
**\$220 TO \$1,300**  
WEIGHT RANGE  
**15 TO 36 POUNDS**  
AVERAGE CAPACITY  
**8 CUPS**

The top models in our ratings ace our bare-floor tests, and they're better for cleaning stairs than uprights are.

### Upright

PRICE RANGE  
**\$65 TO \$1,600**  
WEIGHT RANGE  
**9 TO 23 POUNDS**  
AVERAGE CAPACITY  
**10 CUPS**

If you have carpet, an upright is your best bet for getting deep-down dirt, and pet hair, too.

**A** **AMERICANS SPEND** a lot of time cleaning. In the second half of 2020, we devoted around 11 hours, on average, each month to the job, according to the American Time Use Survey from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. That doesn't include the time spent on cleanup after meal preparation, or doing laundry, either.

The CR members we've surveyed spend an average of 4 hours a month vacuuming.

A goal, then, is to free up some of those hours, so you can spend more time doing what you'd actually enjoy—reading or exercising, for example.

Learning to vacuum more efficiently could help. You'll need the right machine, of course—and the best choices vary,

depending on the size and configuration of your home and whether you have pets or allergies. So use the recommendations below and our ratings on page 24 to find your fit. Then follow our pro tips on page 23 to vacuum better (and faster)—and you'll end up with clean floors, plus a little extra time in your day to spend walking with a friend or watching a good movie ... or anything other than vacuuming.



## BEST FOR Carpet

Carpet can be trickier to deal with than bare floors because the dirt gets embedded in the fibers, where it's harder to see—and to reach. An upright vacuum does the best job of getting down to the problem. That's because the entire weight of the machine sits atop the brush roll, pushing it deep into the carpet

fibers—where it grabs particles of dirt and flicks them (along with dust, pet hair, and pollen) up into the vacuum bag or bin. Prefer a canister-style? The best in our tests tackle carpet dirt with aplomb: Many earn Very Good scores in our carpet cleaning tests. Stick vacs, on the other hand, are better suited to hard floors.

### BAGGED UPRIGHT

✓ **Miele Dynamic U1 Cat & Dog**  
\$700

**76**  
OVERALL SCORE



### BAGLESS UPRIGHT

✓ **Kenmore Pet Friendly CrossOver DU3017**  
\$230

**75**  
OVERALL SCORE



### BAGGED CANISTER

✓ **Kenmore Pop-N-Go BC4026**  
\$280

**76**  
OVERALL SCORE



## BEST FOR Hard Floors

Hard surfaces have one advantage over carpet: Dirt and dust sit on top, where they're easier to attack. The trick is in capturing that surface debris without just throwing it around—and, if you have hardwood, avoiding damage. Solve both problems by choosing a vacuum with an on/off switch for the brush

roll (most have them), so you're not kicking up grit or risking scratches. Full-sized upright and canister vacs are good choices for hard flooring. If you want something lightweight, or you don't have any carpet or area rugs, one of our top-rated cordless stick vacuums could be your main machine.

### BAGGED UPRIGHT

✓ **Kenmore Elite Pet Friendly 31150**  
\$350

**77**  
OVERALL SCORE



### BAGGED CANISTER

✓ **Miele Complete C3 Marin**  
\$1,100

**84**  
OVERALL SCORE



### CORDLESS STICK

**Tineco Pure One S11**  
\$350

**96**  
OVERALL SCORE





## PRODUCT UPDATE



### BEST FOR Multilevel Homes

Stairs come with special cleaning challenges, not the least of which is strain on your back. Your best bet is a canister vacuum that's on the lighter side, like the model at right, or an upright that

converts to a canister. The two-part design lets you set the heaviest part on the floor while you use the hose and vacuum head to clean the stairs. It's also less likely to tip and tumble than a traditional upright. You'll still have to carry it from floor to floor if it's your only vacuum, but the compact body is easier to transport than an upright style. Or, for uncarpeted stairs, consider a lightweight cordless stick vacuum.

#### BAGGED CANISTER

✓ **Miele Complete C3 Alize**  
\$700

**77**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



#### CORDLESS STICK

**Samsung Jet Light VS70 VS15T7031R4/AA**  
\$280

**91**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



### BEST FOR Small Spaces

Just because you live in cozy quarters doesn't mean you have less dirt (sorry!). You still need a vacuum with plenty of power; you just don't want it to hog valuable storage real estate. If you have

carpet or rugs, or furry pets, your best option is a full-sized upright model, which can fit neatly into a closet, without an awkward canister hose snaking all over the place. Just look for a streamlined upright, like the one at right. Otherwise, go with an easy-to-stow stick, like the LG CordZero A9 A906SM, \$750, or a robotic model (see at right). Or—if you're really pressed for space—a handheld, like the Shark Ion W1 WV201, \$119.

#### BAGLESS UPRIGHT

✓ **Shark Navigator Powered Lift-Away NV586**  
\$300

**78**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



#### ROBOTIC

✓ **Samsung Powerbot R7040**  
\$450

**71**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



### BEST FOR Allergy Sufferers

The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology recommends vacuuming weekly to reduce allergens. When choosing a vacuum, pick one with a HEPA filter, which can

capture irritants such as pet dander, dust, and pollen. It's also smart to choose a vacuum that collects dirt in a disposable bag, helping you avoid the dust cloud that escapes when you empty and clean the collection bin of a bagless model. And look for one with a high score in our emissions test (see ratings on page 24). These models keep more dirt and dust contained inside the machine during operation.

#### BAGGED UPRIGHT

✓ **Kenmore Intuition BU4023**  
\$200

**69**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



#### BAGGED CANISTER

✓ **Kenmore Elite Pet Friendly Ultra Plush 81714**  
\$530

**76**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



### BEST FOR Pet Hair

Got tumbleweeds of pet hair under your couch, or mats of fur pressed into your rug? Don't just pick a vacuum with "pet," "dog," or "cat" in the name and call it a day: These don't all live up to their promising

monikers. To find the best pet-hair removers, our testers take 5 grams of long, feathery Maine coon cat fur and scatter, stomp, and smash it into medium-pile carpet. Then they make multiple passes with the test vacuum to see how much of the hair it picks up. Vacuums that earn an Excellent score collect all the fur in a bag or bin. Average vacs leave visible patches behind, or fur becomes entangled in the brush roll.

#### BAGGED UPRIGHT

✓ **Kenmore Pet Friendly 31140**  
\$280

**74**  
OVERALL  
SCORE



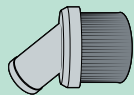
#### BAGGED UPRIGHT

✓ **Hoover WindTunnel Max UH30600**  
\$180

**70**  
OVERALL  
SCORE

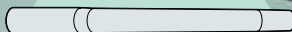






#### DUST BRUSH

Attach to a hose or an extension wand for gentle cleaning, such as around frames.



#### EXTENSION WAND

Use this to get at hard-to-reach areas: ceiling corners, door frames, and behind and under furniture.



#### UPHOLSTERY BRUSH

Use its tough bristles to remove pilling and dust from sofas, chairs, and more.



#### CREVICE TOOL

Because it's so thin, it can fit into narrow dirt traps, like between couch cushions.



#### AIRFLOW BRUSH

Smaller than the main powerhead, it's ideal for maneuvering between furniture pieces.

## MAKE FAST WORK OF FLOORS (AND MORE)

1

### START AT THE TOP.

If you're cleaning an entire room, start from the ceiling and move down: cobwebs in the corner first, dust bunnies under the couch last. That way, your final step will be to vacuum up all the dirt or dust you knocked onto the floor from surfaces such as windowsills and picture frames—and you won't waste time cleaning the floor twice.

2

### DON'T FORGET FURNITURE AND DÉCOR.

Use your machine's dust brush attachment to gently clean books and shelves, and the upholstery attachment on furnishings and curtains. Twice a year, strip the bedding off your mattress, then go over the entire surface with the upholstery brush attachment. Use the crevice attachment for seams and corners, where dust, dirt, dead skin, and other icky stuff can collect.

3

### MAKE SEVERAL PASSES ON THE FLOORS.

In our tests we make 16 passes over carpet in different directions. But if you don't have the patience for that, Susan Booth, who leads our vacuum testing, says, "My advice is to vacuum over the same area at least two to three times to give the vacuum a chance to pick up anything in its path."

4

### ADJUST FOR DEEPER DIRT.


The carpet pile-height adjustment allows you to raise or lower the brush roll. "For normal vacuuming use the height indicated in the manual for the type of carpet being cleaned," says John Galeotafiore, who oversees CR's tests of home products. "For an unusually dirty area, drop the setting lower for deeper cleaning. But don't do that too often since a lower setting could make the carpet wear faster."


5

### CLEAN YOUR MACHINE, TOO.

Don't wait until the vacuum's dirt collection bag or bin is completely full to empty it. "In tests we typically find that when the bag or bin loads up with dirt, the vacuum's performance drops," Galeotafiore says. "Change the bag when it's about three-fourths full, and empty the bin after each use." Also, check the brush roll and remove any tangles of hair or other debris that could prevent it from turning properly.

**Ratings** ➤ **Clean Living** The top vacuums in our tests can make taming your worst dust bunnies and dirt tracks—and even those corner cobwebs—faster and easier, whether you live in a sprawling house or a small studio.

Brand + Model		Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results							Features + Specs									
				Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Carpet	Bare floors	Pet hair	Hose suction	Handling	Clean emissions	Noise	Weight (lb.)	Cord length (ft.)	Brush on/off	Easy on/off	Manual pile adjust	Suction control	Full-bag/bin indicator	HEPA filter		
BAGLESS UPRIGHT																						
✓	Shark Navigator Powered Lift-Away NV586 (Target)	78	\$300	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	16	26	•			•	•	•		
✓	Shark Vertex DuoClean AZ2002	75	\$420	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	17	30		•		•	•	•		
💰	Kenmore Pet Friendly CrossOver DU3017	75	\$230	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	17	25	•			•	•	•		
✓	Dyson Ball Animal 2	74	\$450	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	17	30	•				•	•		
💰	Kenmore Pet-Friendly CrossOver 31220	74	\$250	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	18	29	•			•	•	•		
✓	Dyson Ball Multi Floor 2	74	\$400	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	16	31	•				•	•		
💰	Shark Rotator Professional Lift-Away NV501	74	\$260	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	17	30	•			•	•	•		
✓	Kenmore AllergenSeal DU2012	73	\$130	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	15	30	•			•	•	•		
✓	Shark Apex DuoClean Zero-M Powered Lift-Away AZ1002	73	\$400	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	17	30		•			•	•		
💰	Shark Navigator Lift-Away NV352	73	\$200	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	14	25	•			•	•	•		
BAGGED UPRIGHT																						
💰	Kenmore Elite Pet Friendly 31150	77	\$350	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	21	35	•	•	•	•	•	•		
✓	Miele Dynamic U1 Cat & Dog	76	\$700	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	22	40	•	•		•	•	•		
💰	Kenmore Pet Friendly 31140	74	\$280	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	20	29	•	•	•	•	•	•		
✓	Kirby Avalir 2	73	\$1,600	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬇	23	29	•	•	•	•				
💰	Hoover WindTunnel Max UH30600	70	\$180	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	17	29	•	•	•		•	•		
💰	Kenmore Intuition BU4023	69	\$200	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	14	30	•			•	•	•		
BAGLESS CANISTER																						
✓	Miele Blizzard CX1 Cat & Dog	77	\$900	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	15	21	•	•	•		•	•		
💰	Kenmore 22614	72	\$390	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬆	23	24	•	•	•	•	•	•		
✓	Rainbow SRX Cleaning System	71	\$1,300	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬆	36	24	•			•		•		
	Dyson Ball Multi Floor	61	\$400	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	17	21	•	•		•	•	•		
	Dyson Big Ball Multi Floor	56	\$400	⬆	⬆	⬇	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	17	21		•		•	•	•		
BAGGED CANISTER																						
✓	Miele Complete C3 Marin	84	\$1,100	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	23	24	•	•	•	•	•	•		
✓	Miele Complete C3 Alize	77	\$700	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	17	24	NA	•		•	•	•		
✓	Kenmore Elite Pet Friendly Ultra Plush 81714	76	\$530	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	25	26	•	•	•		•	•		
💰	Kenmore Pop-N-Go BC4026	76	\$280	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	22	26	•	•	•		•	•		
💰	Kenmore 200 Series BC4002	76	\$220	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	19	24	•	•	•	•		•		


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

#### CORDESS STICK\*

<b>Tineco</b> Pure One S11	96	\$350	—	—	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	22	4	5.8	21.6-volt lithium-ion	
<b>Tineco</b> Pure One S11 Tango EX	95	\$470	—	—	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	17	4	5.8	21.6-volt lithium-ion	
<b>Tineco</b> Pure One S12	93	\$600	—	—	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	18	4	6.6	21.6-volt lithium-ion	
<b>LG</b> A9 Kompressor	92	\$600	—	—	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	29	4	6.0	Lithium-ion	
<b>LG</b> CordZero A9 A906SM	92	\$750	—	—	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	21	4	5.9	25.5-volt lithium-ion	
<b>Samsung</b> Jet Light VS70 VS15T7031R4/AA	91	\$280	—	—	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	22	4	5.7	Lithium-ion	
<b>Samsung</b> Jet 90 Complete VS20R9046T3/AA	90	\$650	—	—	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	27	4	6.2	Lithium-ion	

#### CORDED STICK

✓ <b>Shark</b> Apex UpLight Lift-Away DuoClean LZ601	96	\$275	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆			11.0		28
✓ <b>Shark</b> Apex DuoClean Corded ZS362	94	\$250	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆			9.8		30
✓ <b>Bissell</b> Pet Hair Eraser Slim 2897 (Walmart)	87	\$150	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆			9.3		27
💰 <b>Dirt Devil</b> Power Stick SD12530	83	\$100	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆			7.2		26
<b>Shark</b> Rocket Zero-M Ultra-Light ZS352	82	\$220	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆			8.8		29

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results	Test Results							Features + Specs					
			Predicted reliability Owner satisfaction	Carpet	Bare floors	Edges	Pet hair	Noise	Navigation	Ease of use	Data privacy	Data security	Pattern	Clearance (in.)	WiFi/cellular connectivity	Run time (min.)

#### ROBOTIC

✓ <b>iRobot</b> Roomba S9+	83	\$950	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	Grid	3.5	•	110
💰 <b>Eufy</b> 11S	72	\$220	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	Random	2.9		110
✓ <b>iRobot</b> Roomba i3+	72	\$600	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	Grid	3.6	•	70
✓ <b>iRobot</b> Roomba 960	71	\$600	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	Grid	3.8	•	70
✓ <b>Samsung</b> Powerbot R7040	71	\$450	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	Grid	4.0	•	70

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

**HOW WE TEST:** Overall Score combines test results with survey data for predicted reliability and owner satisfaction. Predicted reliability estimates the likelihood that newly purchased models from a given brand, not under service contract, will break within the first five years.

Owner satisfaction reflects the proportion of CR members who are extremely likely to recommend the vacuum they bought. In cases where we have insufficient survey data to provide a brand-level rating, as indicated by a gray dash (—), we give the model weighted average reliability and

satisfaction scores. Full-sized vacuums (uprights and canisters) undergo our toughest tests. We sprinkle talc and sand on a medium-pile carpet for carpet cleaning and spread sand on a linoleum floor for our test on bare floors. For pet hair, we stomp pet fur into a carpet. We also measure noise and how well

the vacuum contains what it sweeps up for our clean emissions score. Stick vacuums are typically a secondary vacuum, so in our tests we concentrate on surface debris, such as cereal and rice. For cordless stick vacs, we also measure each model's battery run time. Price is approximate retail.

\*Consumer Reports does not currently recommend any cordless stick vacuums because of the generally high incidence of problems reported by our members. The problems can include batteries that diminish in power over time or die completely. Such problems are particularly acute by the fifth year of ownership.



# HOW TO BE A **SMARTER SHOPPER** RIGHT NOW

We're heading back to stores but we're also buying online more than ever. While shortages, price spikes, and delays can be frustrating, there are easy ways to find what you need for the right price ... and even have fun while you're at it.

**BY BETH BRAVERMAN**  
**ILLUSTRATIONS BY ERIC HEINZ**

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**Before You**  
**Start Shopping,**  
**Ask This ...**

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**Heading Out**  
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**34**  
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**Online**







# If you're in the mood to spend, you're not alone.

“In the first half of 2021, we saw a return of optimism and spending,” says Tamara Charm, who works for the global management consulting firm McKinsey as an agile consumer insights leader.

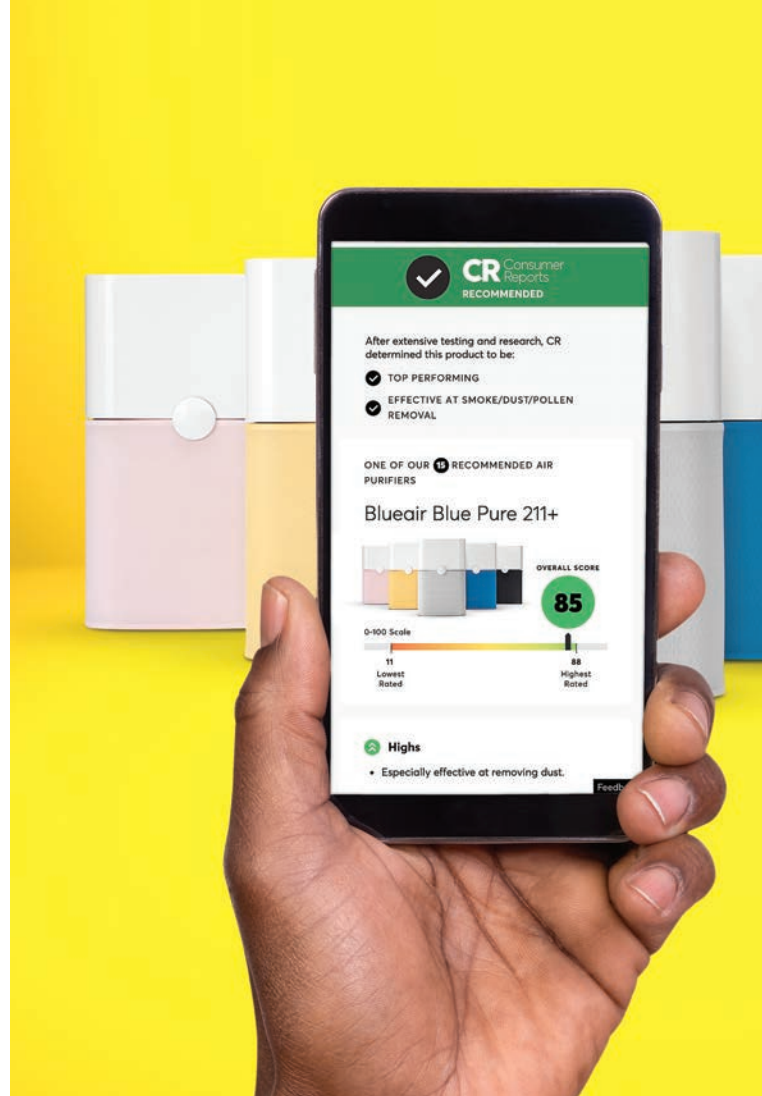
And yet the way we're buying reflects the many long-term changes brought on by the pandemic. E-commerce sales (long on the upswing) jumped 32 percent in 2020, more than double the growth rate in 2019, according to the market research firm Mintel. Even as shoppers venture back into walk-in stores now that vaccines have eased restrictions, online sales remain strong. The experience of having nearly everything delivered to one's door has probably changed some shopping habits for good.

In a February 2021 Consumer Reports nationally representative survey of more than 2,500 Americans, more than three-quarters (76 percent) said that “shopping is a better experience today because the internet makes it easier to get whatever I want, whenever I want it.”

It's hard to argue with convenience. “People are generally still working from home at least part of the time, and have more flexibility to order online and be home for deliveries,” says Greg Daco, chief U.S. economist at Oxford Economics.

But despite the convenience factor—or the enthusiasm for going into stores again—the process of shopping, whether it's for a Halloween costume or an outdoor fire pit, comes with new complications due to price inflation, product shortages, and shipping delays. Plus, the endless options available online can make it difficult to find just what you need.

The best way to shop today depends on what you're buying, what you want to spend, and when you need it. Read on for our expert guide to get the right stuff at the right price.



## BEFORE YOU START SHOPPING, ASK THIS...



### What Do You Want?

Follow the path that Samantha Gordon, CR's deals editor, recently took when she moved into a new house and needed, well, everything. “I searched online for things like ‘best coffee maker,’” she says.

When you do that, your search engine will come up with links to online content offering reviews and opinions on products (for example, CR's own “Best Coffee Makers of 2021”), as well as listings from retailers. Use the articles to learn about the types of products available—say, drip vs. pod-style machines. Then you can drill down to specific ones from there.



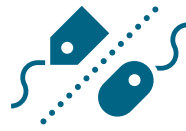
## How CR Can Help

**Shop on CR.org:** Shop and compare prices at a wide variety of carefully selected retailers.

**Shopping newsletters:** Get the latest shopping tips and deals delivered straight to your inbox. Sign up at [CR.org/newsletters](https://www.crdaily.com/newsletters).

**CR Recommended:** Look for the CR Recommended mark as you shop in stores and online to immediately know which products have earned our top ratings.

**Get advice 24/7:** As a print member, you can upgrade to an All Access membership with digital access to 8,500+ ratings and reviews, CR Savings deals and discounts, and personalized buying advice for the special rate of \$25. Go to [CR.org/specialoffer](https://www.crdaily.com/specialoffer).



### Shop In-Store or Online?

Nearly half of consumers said they missed the ability to touch and try products on the spot during lockdowns, and 35 percent said they missed the social aspect of shopping, according to a study by Mood Media in June. For more reasons you might want to go to a store, see page 32. And consider:

**1 | Size.** The bigger the item, the more important it might be to see it in person—and to check the return policy, says Julie Ramhold, a consumer analyst at the shopping comparison site DealNews. “The only thing worse than getting stuck with an item you can’t use is getting stuck with one that’s also heavy and awkward, and has to be removed by someone else.”

**2 | Price.** If you know what you want and you’re just looking for a good deal, go online. Take pet food: You’ll find enticing discounts from online retailers, and you can get even better prices through loyalty programs. Plus, there’s no lugging heavy bags of chow to and from your car.

### Does It Fit Your Needs?

Set a budget for yourself and eliminate anything outside its limits. By reading multiple reviews, you’ll get a sense of price ranges and which brands are best. Keep in mind, however, that not all reviews are authentic. (A study by the review analysis

site Fakespot pegged the percentage of fake reviews on Amazon at about 30 percent.) If you’re not familiar with a brand, read the comments about it in social media posts, where people might talk about quality and customer service. And check the return policy so that you don’t get stuck with a stinker.

#### STICKY SITUATION

**I found a set of cookware online that I like. But I’ve never heard of the brand and I’m afraid the great reviews are fake. Is it safe to buy?** An influx of overly positive or negative reviews posted within a week or two could mean they’re not legit, says Saoud Khalifah, founder of the review analysis site Fakespot. Other red flags include spelling errors and repetitive language in multiple reviews. See if you can find video reviews; they tend to be harder to fake, say Khalifah and CR’s deals editor, Samantha Gordon.



## BUY IT BETTER

### Mattresses

**SHOP SMART** If you can, head to a store to lie down on mattresses for 5 to 10 minutes in each position you sleep in. If you’re shopping online, that may not be an option. In that case, be sure to check the return policy before you buy.

**GET A DEAL** Mattress prices have risen. Still, there’s a holiday sale around every corner (like Black Friday in November), says Kelly Moomey, a CR market analyst.



INNERSPRING MATTRESS  
**\$ DENVER MATTRESS DOCTOR’S CHOICE PLUSH \$750**

**82** OVERALL SCORE

### TVs

**SHOP SMART** When it comes to judging picture quality, in-store lighting and settings can be misleading. Instead, shop online using CR’s ratings to guide you. Use them even if you’re buying in a store so that you can get a new set on the same day, or if you want to make sure the set you want isn’t too big (or small) for your needs.

**GET A DEAL** Sale season starts in September. If you can wait, you might score a Black Friday deal.



65" TELEVISION  
**✓ LG 65NANO90UPA \$1,350**

**71** OVERALL SCORE



## BUY IT BETTER

### Lawn Tools

**SHOP SMART** Holding a leaf blower or string trimmer can give you a sense of its weight and maneuverability. But because they're sold indoors, you won't be able to feel the vibration or hear their roar when powered up. You'll find more options and a wider range of prices online.

**GET A DEAL** Leaf blowers go on sale in September and October. You'll find the best string-trimmer prices starting in March.



PLUG-IN ELECTRIC  
HANDHELD LEAF BLOWER

**\$ TORO 51624 LEAF  
BLOWER \$55**

**81** OVERALL  
SCORE

### Appliances

**SHOP SMART** Browse online and be flexible. (Many stores still have limited stock and probably will into 2022.) Pick a reliable brand, and then focus on the most important functions and performance, not the exact model, CR's analysts say.

**GET A DEAL** Prices are higher now for many appliances. Experts suggest shopping at independent retailers; they often can match the prices of big-box stores.



24" DISHWASHER

**✓ BOSCH 300 DLX  
SERIES SHS863WD5N  
\$770**

**85** OVERALL  
SCORE

## SET YOURSELF UP TO SAVE



### What's Different

When McKinsey asked consumers about what they planned to splurge on this year, Tamara Charm expected them to say travel and dining. They did say that, but also that they looked forward to buying electronics, home goods, cosmetics, and more. "Folks are excited to spend as life gets back to normal," she says.

But when it comes to the cost of consumer goods, things aren't exactly normal. A combination of high demand for everything from lumber to outdoor furniture—and supply-chain shortages for those very same products—has driven prices up and available deals down. Appliance retailers, for one, are offering smaller discounts and fewer promotions, industry experts say.

Still, stores are angling

for your business, and online tools make it easier to compare prices, so you're not doomed to overpay as long as you shop carefully.



### Save More In-Store

Because so many walk-in stores also have websites (or compete with e-commerce stores), the internet is your key to getting in-person deals. So check the online price of anything you're considering buying in a store, and ask the retailer to match it. (In CR's member surveys, most shoppers who try to negotiate say they're successful.) If you can't get a better price, ask for something else—delivery or assembly thrown in free, for example. Some retailers, such as Petco, Kohl's, and Walmart, are offering discounts, rebates, or incentives to shoppers who "buy online, pick up in store" (also called BOPUS).

### Find the Best Deals Online

**1 | Use sites to save.**

Search Google Shopping, PriceGrabber, or Shopzilla as well as CR.org to see



### STICKY SITUATION

**I saw the smartphone I wanted at a great price, but it's refurbished, not new. Should I go for it?** The savings can be significant. On Apple's website, for example, we recently found a refurbished iPhone XR with 128 gigabytes of storage for \$469. And you're likely to be happy with your buy. In CR's Spring 2018 survey of over 3,000 members with refurbished smartphones, a majority told us they were highly satisfied with theirs. Look for a certified pre-owned phone—with a warranty—that you can return.





**BUY NOW**

## Be Smart About Secondhand



If you've ever wandered through a flea market, you've already dipped your toe into the secondhand marketplace.

The used-clothing market alone could more than double by 2025, growing at a rate 11 times faster than the broader retail clothing sector, according to the secondhand fashion retailer ThredUp.

New online options like Depop and Tradesy have joined stalwarts like Facebook Marketplace and eBay. And traditional retailers have gotten into the game, too, with companies like Macy's and Patagonia offering pre-owned items, and others like Apple and KitchenAid selling returned products they refurbish to work like new.

"In the past, buying secondhand was looked down upon as something people did when they didn't have money to shop new, but now it's seen as trendy," says Elizabeth Basa, owner of Family Tree Resale, a Chicago-based store that also offers online thrift shopping. It's also good for the planet, not to mention your wallet. You can save about 80 percent by buying used, she says. Try these tips for savvy shopping:

**Think "local" for large items.** Basa suggests looking at local thrift stores and sites like Facebook Marketplace for furniture and appliances so that you don't have to ship them.

**Shop sites that authenticate.** Browsing for designer clothing? Sites like Poshmark and The RealReal authenticate items, so you can be confident you're not buying a fake.

**Check seller reviews and policies.** For higher-end purchases, buy only from online sellers who have a substantial record of positive feedback and reviews. And check their return policies; some are very strict.

prices across retailers. CR's shopping pros also look for deals at websites like DealNews, GottaDeal, and DealsPlus, where you can sign up for alerts for products you're interested in, often by category.

**2 | Add to your cart.** If you're signed in at a website and leave an item in your cart without checking out, some retailers might send you an email with a discount code to encourage you to buy.

**3 | Join a loyalty program.** Signing up for one may get you early access to coupons, sales, and promotions, plus rewards on what you buy.

**4 | Get social.** Retailers often post exclusive promotions on their Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter feeds, and reward customers who "like" or follow them with alerts for discounts, incentives, and giveaways.



# HEADING OUT TO A STORE

## What's Different

Walk-in stores today don't look quite the same as they did in 2019. Thousands didn't make it through the pandemic. At those that have survived, you can expect not only ubiquitous hand-sanitizing stations but also potentially fewer salespeople due to a post-pandemic labor crunch.

"The service that you find in a store right now might not be what you were accustomed to pre-pandemic," says Audrey Guskey, PhD, an associate professor of marketing at Duquesne University and an expert on consumer trends.

Depending on what you're purchasing, you might also find less available stock. Supply-chain shortages in semiconductors, electronics, lumber, and foam affect many categories, including laptops and furniture.



## Shop In-Store Strategically

Beyond the appeal of retail therapy—an afternoon spent with a friend hitting favorite shops and coffee spots at the mall or strolling down Main Street—there are certain times when a physical store



### STICKY SITUATION

**Stores often offer a discount on your first purchase if you sign up for their credit card at checkout. Is that a good way to save?**

It can be. Just know that retail cards also typically have higher interest rates, lower credit limits, and lower rewards than general interest cards, says Kimberly Palmer, a personal finance expert with NerdWallet. Before you sign up, do the math to see if the discount is worth it. Also: Applying will typically generate a "hard inquiry" on your credit report, which can temporarily hurt your credit score.

is the best place to find what you need.

#### 1 | When comfort is key.

If you'll spend a lot of time sitting or lying on a piece of furniture—like a sofa or mattress—it's worth heading to a store to try before you buy. Ditto for anything

where ergonomics are important, like a keyboard, fitness equipment, and musical instruments.

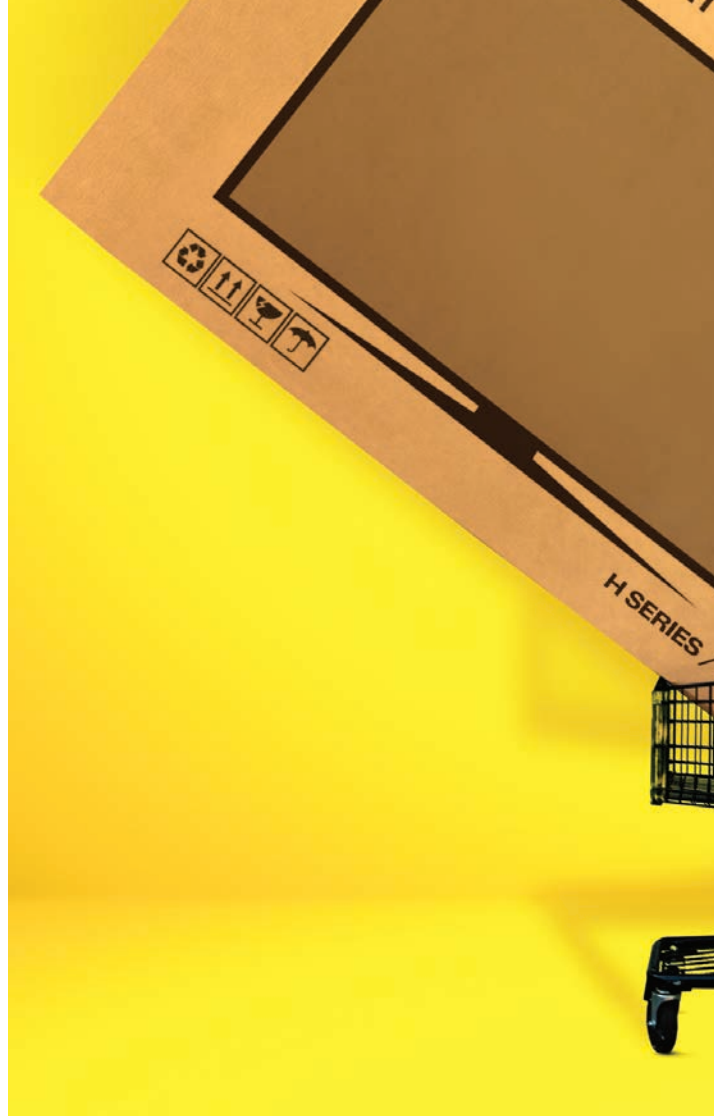
With clothing, it's an "it depends" situation. You can find just about anything online and it's usually easy to return. But if fit is really important—say, for running shoes or evening wear—you might want the help of a store associate or the convenience of in-house tailoring.

**2 | If color or scale really matter.** Computer screens and photography can distort the way colors appear and make it difficult to judge size. So if you really want to

make sure a new rug will match your curtains or that a new chair doesn't dwarf your side table, you might want to see it in person, especially if it's something large and difficult to return. And measure your space and existing furnishings before you go.

#### 3 | Because you want a curated selection.

Going to a store with a limited number of carefully chosen options can help simplify your choices. And the owner or an experienced salesperson of a specialty shop may be able to offer advice for your specific needs.





## STICKY SITUATION

**I saw the TV I want at an electronics store in the mall, but I found it for less online from a different retailer. Is it a no-brainer to order it online?**

First, check that lower online price. Note the shipping costs and return policy, and see what's included, like unboxing or basic setup. Then ask the store if it can match the online price. If it can't, you'll have to weigh price vs. supporting an independent retailer that may offer benefits like individual advice and a curated selection—if not rock-bottom prices.



## BUY IT BETTER

### Laptops

**SHOP SMART** Avoid a return by shopping in person so that you can evaluate the comfort of the keyboard—both its size and how well you like the “clickiness,” CR's tech pros say.

**GET A DEAL** Save with a model that's a year or two old, a particularly good idea if your needs barely exceed browsing the web, using Microsoft Office, and making video calls, none of which require the latest and greatest processors.



15"-16" LAPTOP

**\$** **LENOVO IDEAPAD 5 15ITL05** \$550

**73** OVERALL  
SCORE

### Headphones

**SHOP SMART** A bad fit can affect performance and comfort. Some stores let you try on headphones. That's usually not true for in-ear models though, so buy from a retailer with a good return policy.

**GET A DEAL** Look beyond the big names. We've found superb low-priced models from lesser-known companies such as 1More and Monoprice. Or save big with refurbished headphones from Amazon, Best Buy, or Walmart.



NOISE-CANCELING  
OVER-EAR HEADPHONES

**\$** **MONOPRICE BT-300ANC** \$45

**74** OVERALL  
SCORE



## Use Your Time Wisely

It's still a good practice to limit your time in public places, where you may be more likely to be exposed to COVID-19. Before you head to a store:

### CHECK INVENTORY ONLINE

With many retailers, you can look online to see whether an item is in stock at your local store. If a store doesn't offer this option, call ahead to check. If you'll need help once you're there, ask for an appointment to avoid a wait.

### DOWNLOAD THE RETAILER'S APP

Target's app, for example, can direct you to the right aisle to find a product in the store. Walmart's app allows you to scan items while you're shopping and then check yourself out, avoiding potentially long lines at registers.



## BUY IT BETTER

### Exercise Equipment

**SHOP SMART** Test it in person to evaluate the fit, construction quality, and controls.

**GET A DEAL** Save by buying used, but not from a commercial gym (the machines get too much use). Inspect a treadmill belt for wear; try all the speeds and the incline. Check the warranty and that there's no safety recall for the model.



FOLDING  
TREADMILL

**\$ HORIZON 7.0AT  
TREADMILL \$1,000**

**85** OVERALL  
SCORE

### Furniture

**SHOP SMART** Check CR's ratings of furniture retailers ([CR.org/furniture1021](https://www.consumerreports.org/furniture1021)) to pick one with the best combination of selection, price, and service. Shortages mean shipping times are longer than usual at some retailers.

**GET A DEAL** Browse the secondhand marketplace for steals on nearly new furniture. Try to see any used upholstered items in person to be sure they're intact and don't have smoke or pet odors.



ROOM & BOARD  
BODEN CHAIR  
\$1,299 AND UP

**93** OVERALL  
SCORE\*

\*Overall Score is for Room & Board based on results from our Spring 2020 survey, in which CR members rated their satisfaction with purchases made at walk-in furniture retailers in the past two years.

## SHOPPING ONLINE



### What's Different

Retail giants like Amazon, Kmart, and Walmart now host third-party or "marketplace" sellers, independent retailers who often have their own shipping and return policies that may differ from those of the main platform. Fake reviews have proliferated

everywhere. And even the search process has become less than straightforward.

Keep in mind that items labeled "sponsored" mean that a company paid to get its products listed at the top of the results page. And the "Amazon's Choice" label, another example, doesn't mean that someone from Amazon reviewed it, but rather that an algorithm found it ranked well in terms of reviews, pricing, and availability to ship quickly.



### Find It Faster

**1 | Use your tabs.** Try what Julie Ramhold, a consumer analyst, does: Type an item into your search engine, then click through to one of the retailers that comes up. Find the product you like best and keep that page open. Go to a new tab and repeat the





process at another retailer. That way, you can compare.

## 2 | Filter for your needs.

Retailers typically have a side or top panel where you can choose to limit your search by factors like brand, size, color, and average customer review rating.

**3 | Set a timer.** If you're prone to decision paralysis, Bob Sullivan, author of "Gotcha Capitalism" (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018) suggests setting a timer to go off a few minutes after you've started searching. "Just stopping and doing something else can help you make a choice," he says.

### STICKY SITUATION

**I need a new kitchen range. I don't want to buy the wrong thing, but I'm worried about COVID-19 and I'm limiting time in stores. Should I buy a new one online?** If you're picking a similar model from a reliable brand (see our ratings at [CR.org/ranges1021](https://www.consumerreports.org/ranges1021)), buying online makes sense. If you're considering a new type—say, an induction model when you've always had gas—you might want to see it and get personal advice. Some independent retailers also offer repair service, which could help down the line.



## Coping With Customer Service

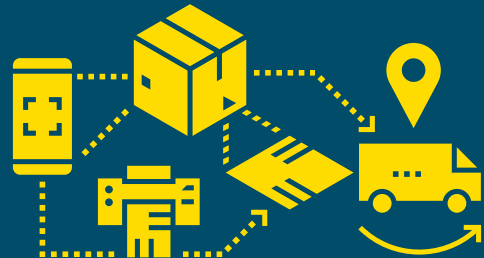
Many retailers now use artificial intelligence customer service "chatbots" (essentially, robots with whom you can instant message for assistance). If you'd rather talk to a person, ask the chatbot for a phone number you can call. Or check the website GetHuman, an online directory with customer service guides and phone numbers for thousands of national and international companies.

If that's not getting you anywhere, switch to social media—but that doesn't mean publicly airing your grievance. Direct messaging a company's social media account is often the quickest path to a response.

Always be sure you understand the shipping and return policies before you buy, including the return window, whether you need a receipt or proof of purchase, and if you'll have to pay a restocking fee.

Don't assume that third-party sellers have the same return and shipping policies as the main site. Look for the "sold by" label on the item you're buying and click through to the seller's storefront to check its policies. Also read customer reviews for the seller and the products it offers. Tread carefully if there's a lot of negative feedback.

## Happier Returns



### FLEXIBLE RETURN POLICIES

**Amazon** You have 30 days to return most new, unopened items. Amazon provides shipping labels for mail-in returns, or you can take items to tens of thousands of drop-off locations.

**Costco** There's no time limit on most returns, but electronics and major appliances must be returned within 90 days of receipt.

**Home Depot** Return most new, unopened items within 90 days. No receipt? Bring the item and your ID to a store within 30 days. The company can look up your purchase if you paid with a debit or credit card or by check.

**Target** You have up to 90 days to return most items. Return shipping is free, or bring online purchases to any store. Target may deny returns that have been opened or damaged, or those without a receipt.

### STRICTER RETURN POLICIES

**Apple** It gives you just 14 days to return an item or get a refund, whether it's purchased through Apple online or in an Apple store.

**Best Buy** It has a meager 15-day window for returning most items, requires proof of purchase, and has a 15 percent restocking fee on certain items.

**Kmart** You have 30 days for most returns with a receipt but just seven for upholstered furniture, mattresses, and bed frames. Seasonal holiday items can't be returned once the holiday has passed, and there are no extended return windows for holiday gifts.

# Bread That's Really Good for You

Staff of life or a carb-laden calorie bomb? We bust common myths and review a lot of packaged sliced loaves to help you find the nutritional superstars.

**by Jennifer Cook**





## FIND A HEALTHIER LOAF...

### TOO MUCH SUGAR?

Look beyond the “no high fructose corn syrup” claims for other sources of added sugars, such as cane sugar or honey. Some breads, such as Arnold Organic 22 Grains and Seeds, have 4 grams or more per slice, but 2 grams or less is best.

### THE SODIUM COUNT

Breads without salt can taste bland, but some have more than they need for flavor (and bread is a top source of sodium in the U.S. diet). Choose those with about 150 mg or less a slice. Schmidt Old Tyme 100% Whole Wheat has just 110 mg.

### NUTS AND SEEDS ARE GOOD, TOO

As long as the bread you choose is all whole grain, getting one with nuts and seeds, like Dave’s Killer Bread Organic Powerseed, can mean nice extras: healthy fats and a bit more fiber.

### GOT WHOLE GRAINS?

Breads that have a whole grain such as whole-wheat flour or sprouted wheat mentioned first in their ingredients list—like 365 Whole Foods Market Organic Ancient Grains—usually have no refined grains.

### THE WRONG KIND OF FIBER?

Many brands tout their fiber. But more than 2 or 3 grams a slice may mean processed fiber has been added, which may not be as good for you. Pepperidge Farms Whole Grain 100% Whole Wheat has 4 grams, some from sugarcane fiber.



# F

**FOR MANY AMERICANS**, eating bread may feel like a guilty pleasure. They worry that it's loaded with carbs and low in nutrients—sure to spark weight gain—and will put them on the road to a variety of health problems.

With all of these notions about bread floating around, you may not know if the concerns are valid or overblown. Bottom line: If you enjoy bread, “you don’t have to avoid it,” says Amy Keating, RD, a CR nutritionist.

Selecting a healthy loaf from the array in the supermarket—one packed with whole grains and low in added sugars and sodium—isn’t as easy as it should be, though. CR experts saw that firsthand in their recent review of the nutrition, ingredients, and labeling on 56 popular packaged sliced breads.

Our nutrition pros expected that unraveling the terms on bread labels would be challenging. But even they were surprised at just how often a product was less healthy than it first seemed. And CR evaluated only those that, at least at an initial glance, would

appear to be nutritious, such as 12-grain and multigrain breads.

“Less than half the breads we looked at that were labeled multigrain, oat, or made with whole grain, for instance, contained only whole-grain flours,” Keating says. “And even all-whole-grain breads can be surprising sources of added sugars, sodium, and additives that you may want to eat less of.”

This all may seem confusing enough to make you want to give up these grain goods altogether. No need. We’re separating the myths from the truth when it comes to bread. Read on below, then flip the page for ratings of some products you may find on store shelves.

## MYTH

### Bread is just empty calories.

Grains have three parts: the endosperm, bran, and germ. White flour is made just from the endosperm, while whole wheat contains them all. And many of a grain’s nutrients are in the latter two components.

White bread does offer some protein, and most commercial loaves are made from flour enriched with B vitamins and iron. Bread that’s primarily whole

grain, however, has a lot more going for it. In addition to B vitamins and iron, it supplies vitamin E, minerals such as zinc and magnesium, flavonoids and other antioxidants, protein, and fiber.

Most adults should have six servings of grains a day, according to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. At least half of these should be whole grains.

But on average we eat less than one daily helping of whole grains, which is a reason whole-grain bread can have a place as part of a healthy diet, Keating says: “Giving up bread would mean eliminating one of easiest ways to work whole grains into your diet.”

## MYTH

### Eating bread leads to weight gain.

Bread isn’t particularly high in calories. About half the products we looked at had 80 to 110 calories per slice, and the fiber in whole-grain bread is filling.

But some evidence suggests that white bread may widen the waistline, possibly due to its meager fiber—1 gram or less per slice compared with 2 or more in whole-grain bread—and its potentially appetite-stimulating effects on blood sugar. A 2014 study



## IS HOMEMADE BREAD HEALTHIER?

Producing a loaf of freshly baked bread can be satisfying and healthy—and it requires few ingredients. “You can make a delicious bread with just flour, yeast, water, and a little salt, so you avoid the sugars and additives found in some packaged breads,” says Amy Keating, a CR nutritionist.

Whole-grain flour will give you the biggest nutritional

bang, so “look for a recipe where at least half—and preferably all—the flour is whole grain,” Keating says.

For optimal results, pick a recipe that was created with whole grains rather than trying to swap out the flours in a recipe for white bread. Otherwise, you may need to alter the amount of yeast and liquids. A recipe that lists

ingredients by weight instead of volume also leads to a better outcome. (Use a digital kitchen scale.)

If mixing and kneading aren’t your thing, consider a bread machine. With these, you simply dump in your ingredients and, in 3 to 4 hours, your loaf is ready. This Zojirushi model was the top performer in CR’s recent test of three bread makers.



**ZOJIRUSHI HOME BAKERY  
MAESTRO BB-SSC10 \$360**

CONTROLS	■ 5/5	NOISE	■ 4/5
SETUP	■ 5/5	CLEANING	■ 4/5

in the journal BMC Public Health that followed people for an average of five years found that those who ate a lot of white bread—six slices a day vs. three or fewer a week—were more likely to be overweight or obese. And a 2015 review in the British Journal of Nutrition linked white bread with excess belly fat.

Whole-grain bread appears to be less likely to spur weight gain. For instance, a study in The Journal of Nutrition of more than 3,000 middle-aged and older adults found that those who ate three or more whole-grain servings a day—primarily whole-wheat bread and cold cereal—had smaller waist-size increases as they aged than those who got less than a half serving. Still other studies have linked diets that included whole-grain bread either with a lower body mass index and less likelihood of being overweight or with no increase or decrease in BMI, weight, or waist size.

#### MYTH

### It's best to avoid all grains, even whole.

Some trendy diet plans hold that grains in general are responsible not just for excess weight but also for diabetes, dementia, and a host of other ills. But a large body of research shows that whole grains, including bread, cut the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers. Whole grains may also tame inflammation and boost healthy gut bacteria and immune system function.

Gluten is another reason some say to shy away from certain grains. Found in wheat, rye, and barley, this protein can cause problems for the approximately 7 percent of Americans with celiac disease or gluten sensitivity. But for others, there's very little evidence that avoiding it has health benefits.

And gluten-free bread may not be a healthier choice. "Most gluten-free flours and products are not enriched,

## BEHIND THE GRAIN CLAIMS

### How to make sense of confusing label lingo

100% whole grain,  
100% whole wheat

**WHAT IT MEANS** All grains are whole; none are refined.

Made with whole grains, made with whole wheat

**WHAT IT MEANS** These breads have some whole grains, but there's no set amount. So quite a bit of the grains may be refined.

Multigrain/15 grain

**WHAT IT MEANS** These contain a mix of grains, but all aren't necessarily whole. After all, white flour counts as a grain.

Ancient grains

**WHAT IT MEANS** Often used for breads with grains bred the way they were years ago, such as amaranth, spelt, or kamut. These are whole grains, but breads that use this term may still contain refined grains.

Wheat

**WHAT IT MEANS** This simply tells you the type of grain used in the bread, not whether the wheat used is whole or refined.

Honey wheat

**WHAT IT MEANS** Unless accompanied by a 100% whole-grain claim, this bread is probably made mostly with white flour.

which means they will be lower in nutrients compared to even white breads," says Nicola McKeown, PhD, a nutrition epidemiologist at the Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University. Gluten-free breads are also likely to be lower in fiber than whole wheat, though it depends on the flour used to make them, she adds.

#### MYTH

### Multigrain, whole grain, and whole wheat are the same.


Not necessarily. "It doesn't make sense, but multigrain, made with whole grain, and similar terms can mean one thing on one loaf and something else on another; the terms aren't regulated," CR's Keating says. "They imply that the bread is all whole grain, but there could actually be very little whole grains in there. It's very misleading."

Case in point: A study published in 2020 in the journal Public Health Nutrition found that based on packaging claims, nearly half the participants overestimated the amount of whole grain in breads and crackers primarily made with refined grains.

"In our bread review, we found the only claims that you can count on to mean a bread has no refined flours are '100 percent whole grain' or '100 percent whole wheat,'" Keating says. (See "Behind the Grain Claims," at left, for definitions.)

If you're checking labels, many breads note the number of grams of whole grains in a slice (16 grams is considered a serving). "The more whole grains, the better. But it's not the only criteria for a healthy bread," Keating says. "Loaves with the highest scores in our ratings also had 2 grams or less of added sugars and 150 mg or less of sodium per slice, and few additives, such as preservatives or dough conditioners."

**Ratings** ➤ **What's in a Loaf?** Whole grain is the claim consumers look for most often. But our ratings show that many whole-grain breads differ from each other nutritionally even if their names sound the same.

Product	Nutrition Score	Nutritional Information Per Slice									
		Slice size (g)	Whole grains (g)	Calories	Total fat (g)	Saturated fat (g)	Carbs (g)	Fiber (g)	Added sugars (g)	Protein (g)	Sodium (mg)
											
✓ <b>Food For Life</b> Organic Flourless Sprouted Grain Ezekiel 4:9	93	34	19	80	0.5	0	15	3	0	5	75
✓ <b>Food For Life</b> Organic Flourless 7 Sprouted Grains	93	34	21	80	0.5	0	15	3	0	4	80
✓ <b>365 Whole Foods Market</b> Organic Ancient Grains	86	32	16	80	1	0	13	2	1	4	110
✓ <b>Nature's Own</b> 100% Whole Wheat	84	26	13	60	0.5	0	11	2	<1	4	110
✓ <b>Dave's Killer Bread</b> Organic Powerseed	84	42	19	100	2.5	0	18	4	1	5	135
✓ <b>Great Value (Walmart)</b> Organic Thin-Sliced Multi-Grain & Seeds	83	28	14	60	1	0	13	3	2	2	90
✓ <b>Trader Joe's</b> Organic Sprouted Wheat Multigrain	81	34	NA	90	0.5	0	16	2	1	5	160
✓ <b>Koeplinger's</b> 100% Whole Wheat	79	31	16	80	1	0	15	2	2	3	115
✓ <b>Arnold/Brownberry/Oroweat</b> Whole Grains Health Nut	78	43	21	110	2.5	0	20	3	2	5	150
✓ <b>Nature's Own</b> 100% Whole Grain	75	28	13	70	1.5	0	13	2	2	4	125
✓ <b>Schmidt</b> Old Tyme 100% Whole Wheat	75	25	14	70	1	0	12	2	1	3	110
✓ <b>Wonder</b> 100% Whole Wheat	75	25	13	60	0.5	0	11	2	0	4	105
✓ <b>Nature's Own</b> Life 100% Whole Grain Sugar Free	72	25	11	50	1	0	9	1	0	4	125
✓ <b>Nature's Own</b> 100% Whole Wheat With Honey	72	22.5	11	50	0.75	0	10	1.5	1	3	75
✓ <b>Great Grains Bakery</b> Multigrain Flax Seeds & Omega-3	72	45	15	120	1.5	0	24	5	1	5	170
✓ <b>Sara Lee</b> 100% Whole Wheat	71	26	13	60	1	0	12	2	1	3	115
✓ <b>Arnold/Brownberry/Oroweat</b> Whole Grains 100% Whole Wheat	70	43	23	110	2	0	21	3	3	4	160
✓ <b>Arnold/Brownberry/Oroweat</b> Whole Grains Healthy Multi-Grain	69	43	19	110	2	0	20	3	2	5	160
✓ <b>Canyon Bakehouse</b> Gluten Free 7-Grain	68	34	14	90	1.5	0	17	1	2	2	110
✓ <b>Aunt Millie's</b> Homestyle 100% Whole Wheat	68	34	19	90	1	0	16	2	3	3	140
✓ <b>Butternut Bread</b> 100% Whole Wheat	67	28.5	15	70	1	0	13	1.5	2	3.5	135
✓ <b>Stroehmann</b> Dutch Country 100% Whole Wheat	66	38	19	90	1	0	18	2	2	4	150
✓ <b>Arnold/Brownberry/Oroweat</b> Whole Grains 12 Grain	65	43	18	110	3	0	19	3	2	5	180
✓ <b>Freihofer's</b> Country 100% Whole Wheat	65	36	18	90	1	0	17	2	2	4	170
✓ <b>Pepperidge Farm</b> Whole Grain 15 Grain	64	49	26	130	2.5	0.5	22	3	3	6	130
<b>Dave's Killer Bread</b> Organic 21 Whole Grains and Seeds	63	45	22	110	1.5	0	22	5	5	5	170
<b>Arnold/Brownberry/Oroweat</b> Organic 22 Grains & Seeds	62	48	20	140	3	0	22	4	4	6	230
<b>Pepperidge Farm</b> Whole Grain Honey Wheat	61	49	26	140	2	0.5	24	3	4	6	125
<b>Pepperidge Farm</b> Whole Grain Oatmeal	61	49	26.5	130	2	0.5	23	3	4	6	135
<b>Pepperidge Farm</b> Whole Grain 100% Whole Wheat	61	49	27	130	2	0.5	23	4	4	6	120



Product	Nutrition Score	Nutritional Information Per Slice									
		Slice size (g)	Whole grains (g)	Calories	Total fat (g)	Saturated fat (g)	Carbs (g)	Fiber (g)	Added sugars (g)	Protein (g)	Sodium (mg)
<b>Lewis Bake Shop</b> Healthy Life 100% Whole Wheat	61	20.5	6.5	35	0.5	0	8	2.5	1.5	2.5	75
<b>Arnold/Brownberry/Oroweat</b> Whole Grains Oatnut	61	43	13	120	2.5	0	21	2	3	4	150
<b>Aunt Millie's</b> Live Light Whole Grain	59	23.5	8	40	<1	0	9.5	3.5	0.5	2	90
<b>Aunt Millie's</b> Homestyle Cracked Wheat With Whole Grain	58	34	11	90	1	0	17	2	2	3	150
<b>Sara Lee</b> Delightful Honey Whole Wheat	58	22	8	45	0.5	0	9	2	<1	3	110
<b>Canyon Bakehouse</b> Gluten Free Ancient Grain	58	28	8	70	1.5	0	13	1	2	2	90
<b>Sara Lee</b> Delightful Healthy Multi-Grain	57	22	8	45	0.5	0	9	2	<1	3	95
<b>Franz</b> San Juan Island Nine Grain	56	40	9	110	1.5	0	19	2	3	5	120
<b>Dave's Killer Bread</b> Organic Good Seed	56	45	14	120	3	0	23	3	5	5	160
<b>Martin's</b> 100% Whole Wheat Potato	56	35	12	80	1.5	0	14	2	2	4	105
<b>Wholesome Harvest</b> 9 Grain & Seed	48	43	8	110	2.5	0	18	1	2	4	190
<b>Favorite Day (Target)</b> Sliced Multigrain	48	40	NA	110	2.5	0	20	1	1	4	160
<b>Milton's</b> Original Multi-Grain	47	43	NA	120	1	0	25	3	3	5	140
<b>The Rustik Oven</b> Hearty Grains & Seed	47	57	NA	150	3.5	0	24	3	0	5	250
<b>Sara Lee</b> White Made With Whole Grain	44	28.5	4.5	70	1	0	13	1	1	3	120
<b>Bunny Bread</b> Original Whole Grain White	43	28.5	5	70	0.75	0	13	1	2	2.5	135
<b>Lewis Bake Shop</b> 12 Grain 1/2 Loaf	43	28	5	80	1.5	0	13	1	2	3	135
<b>Udi's</b> Gluten Free Whole Grain	43	24.5	4.5	70	2	0	11	0.5	1.5	1.5	135
<b>Pepperidge Farm</b> Light Style 7 Grain	42	19	NA	45	0	0	9	1	1	2	95
<b>Schar</b> Gluten Free Artisan Baker Multigrain	42	31	NA	80	1	0	16	2.5	2	1	100
<b>Country Hearth</b> Dakota Style 12 Grain	40	34	5	100	<1	0	18	1	2	3	190
<b>Lewis Bake Shop</b> Nutty Oat 1/2 Loaf	40	28	1	70	1.5	0	12	1	2	3	105
<b>Hillbilly</b> Old Fashion Multigrain	39	26	0.75	60	1	0	13	1	1	2	120
<b>Sunbeam</b> Whole Grain White	38	28	1	70	1	0	14	1	2	2	135
<b>Nature's Own</b> Perfectly Crafted Thick Sliced Multigrain	33	42	2	110	2	0	21	<1	3	4	220
<b>Pepperidge Farm</b> Farmhouse Homestyle Oat	33	49	NA	130	2	0.5	25	1	4	4	210

**HOW WE TEST:** Using nutrition information on the product package or provided from the manufacturer, CR's nutrition experts calculated a nutrition score for each bread based on the following: Proportion

of **whole grains**; the higher, the better. (Accounts for 40 percent of the score.) **Fiber, sodium, and added sugar** counts per slice, with higher fiber from natural sources and less sodium and added sugars contributing positively to the

score. (Accounts for 40 percent of the score.) Number and type of **additives**; the fewer, the better. (Accounts for 20 percent of the score.) Organic breads received extra points. To receive an excellent score, a bread had to meet all

the following criteria: completely whole grain, at least 2 grams of fiber per slice, 160 mg sodium or less, 2 grams of added sugars or less, and minimal additives.

# THE BIG PROBLEM WITH PLASTIC

Think that all of what you toss in the recycling bin actually gets recycled? Think again. Consumer Reports reveals where most of the plastic you throw away ends up and explains what you can do to limit its environmental harm.

**BY KEVIN LORIA**

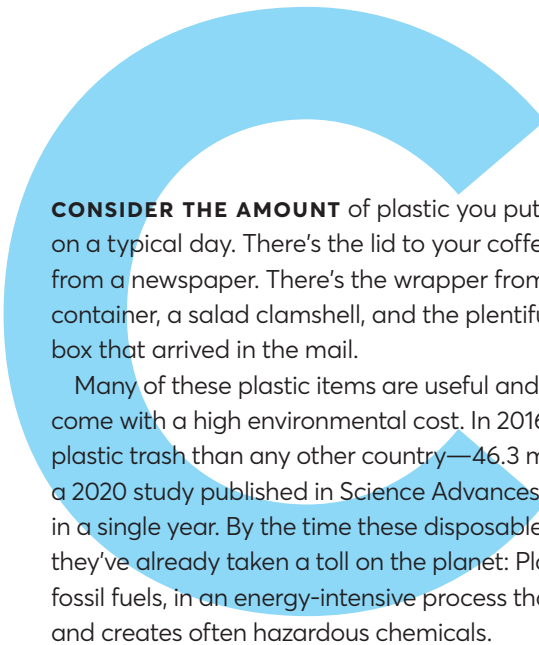
**ILLUSTRATIONS BY SPOOKY POOKA**











**CONSIDER THE AMOUNT** of plastic you put into the trash or recycling on a typical day. There's the lid to your coffee cup, and perhaps a bag from a newspaper. There's the wrapper from a granola bar, a yogurt container, a salad clamshell, and the plentiful packaging from inside a box that arrived in the mail.

Many of these plastic items are useful and convenient, but they also come with a high environmental cost. In 2016, the U.S. generated more plastic trash than any other country—46.3 million tons of it, according to a 2020 study published in *Science Advances*. That's 287 pounds per person in a single year. By the time these disposable products are in your hands, they've already taken a toll on the planet: Plastics are mostly made from fossil fuels, in an energy-intensive process that emits greenhouse gases and creates often hazardous chemicals.

And then there's what happens when you throw them away.

If you're like most people, you probably assume that when you toss plastic into the recycling bin it will be processed and turned into something new. The truth is that only a fraction of plastic is actually recycled. According to the most recent data estimates available from the Environmental Protection Agency, just 8.7 percent of the plastic that was discarded in the U.S. in 2018 was recycled.

The popular perception that plastic is easily and widely recycled has been shaped by decades of carefully calculated messaging designed and paid for by the petroleum and gas companies that make most of that plastic in the first place, and the beverage companies that depend on plastic to bottle their products.

"Recycling is sold as a means of not worrying about the problem," says Judith Enck, a former regional administrator at the EPA, now a visiting professor at Bennington College in Vermont and president of Beyond Plastics, a group focused on ending plastics pollution. The companies paying for the ads that frame recycling as an easy solution to a potentially devastating environmental problem know that recycling cannot keep up with the flood of new plastic, Enck says.

One of four things happens to plastic after you're done with it. If it's not recycled—and it's usually not—it is landfilled, incinerated, or littered. The EPA estimates that in 2018, about 16 percent of U.S. plastic waste was

incinerated. A relatively small amount was littered. Most of the rest ended up in landfills—including a lot of the plastic people dutifully put into recycling bins.

Over decades or even centuries, much of that littered and landfilled plastic breaks down into tiny particles known as microplastics, which contaminate our food, the air, and water. They also accumulate in our bodies, potentially increasing our risk of chronic inflammation and other ills.

Experts say that while cutting back on plastic use is a worthy individual goal (see "How to Quit Plastic," on page 46), the only way to stem the rising tide of plastic is for companies to make less of it and for recycling programs to be retooled so that more of what we throw away is actually turned into something useful.

There's little to suggest this will happen anytime soon. Plastic production is expected to more than double by 2050, and even if it doesn't, the plastic trash that people continue to throw away will still have to go somewhere.

## The Truth About Plastic Recycling

Dedicated bins for plastic waste are a common sight, and plastic recycling is widely promoted. So why does only a fraction of the plastic we toss actually get recycled?

One reason is that most plastic isn't easily recyclable, says Jan Dell, a chemical engineer who heads up The Last Beach Cleanup, a nonprofit focused on plastic pollution. Plastic products are often made of mixtures of many chemicals, which can stymie recycling processes by making it harder to isolate a base material that can be recovered and reused.

Perhaps the most important reason is that there is very little financial incentive to recycle: It's far less expensive to manufacture most types of plastic from scratch than it is to recycle old plastic into something new. The least recyclable plastic products include many labeled with the numbers 3 through 7 in the recycling triangle, as well as the majority of plastic bags and packaging film.

Certain types of plastic, however, are economically viable and relatively easy to recycle, and even in high demand. These include PET plastic bottles, like the ones soda and water are sold in, and HDPE milk jugs (respectively labeled with a number 1 or 2 inside the recycling triangle). But just 29 percent of the plastic used in these jugs and bottles was recycled in 2018.

According to guidelines from the Federal Trade Commission, at least 60 percent of Americans should have access to a program that recycles a particular item before it can be labeled as recyclable without some language noting that access to recycling may be limited. But these guidelines are rarely followed, according to a 2020 report from Greenpeace. (The FTC did not respond to a request for comment.)

[ CONT. ON PAGE 48 ]

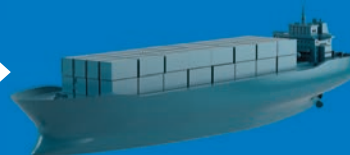
# WHERE YOUR PLASTIC GOES

In 2018, the U.S. generated more than 35 million tons of plastic waste. Less than 10 percent of it was recycled.



## Sorted at a Material Recovery Facility

Recyclable material is packed into “bales” to sell to recycling mills. Contaminated or non-recyclable plastic is sent to a landfill or incinerator.



## Shipped Abroad

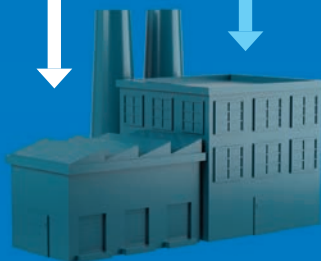
Until 2018, a significant share of the plastic the EPA counted as recycled was sent abroad, where its fate was uncertain. Many countries have recently stopped accepting U.S. waste.



## Recycled

8.7%

In 2018, 8.7 percent of plastic was recycled. Much was used to make items that can't be recycled again and will end up in landfills or incinerated.



## Incinerated

15.8%

Incineration produces energy, but it also generates toxic emissions and greenhouse gases. In 2018, 15.8 percent of plastic trash was incinerated.



## Landfilled

75.5%

Most plastic waste—75.5 percent in 2018—ends up in landfills, where it can break down over time, creating microplastics that end up in the air, water, and soil.

# HOW TO QUIT PLASTIC

Ways to reduce this kind of waste—and its environmental impact—right now

BY PERRY SANTANACHOTE

**LIKE GOING ON A DIET**, the first step in reducing the amount of single-use plastic we discard is to understand how much we really consume. Judith Enck, president of Beyond Plastics, a nationwide anti-plastic campaign, suggests looking at the plastic we throw away on a daily basis for an honest assessment of our consumption and for clues to how we can make the most impact. “I saw that I used a lot of Keurig pods, so I switched to using a French press,” Enck says. “My husband is a big orange juice drinker, so now we use frozen concentrated juice,” to avoid plastic jugs and cartons.

You don’t need to become an eco-warrior overnight. “Take it one product at a time and work your way up,” says Deb Singer, the leader of the plastic bag ban at Whole Foods and co-founder of BRINGiT reusable shopping bags. “Starting with one thing makes it more palatable to make other changes.”

In addition to personal actions, you can push for producer responsibility laws that slow the flow of plastic at its source. “With plastic pollution, the tap is overrunning,” says Mariana Del Valle Prieto Cervantes, water equity and ocean program manager for GreenLatinos. “We have to turn off the tap before we can clean up this mess.”

## Bags

# 5,000,000,000,000

PLASTIC BAGS ARE USED WORLDWIDE EVERY YEAR



### DO FIRST

► **Bring your own** reusable bags and refuse plastic ones. BRINGiT makes eco-friendly compostable cellulose bags, but just about any reusable bag is better than a single-use plastic bag. Each reusable bag could

cancel out hundreds to thousands of plastic bags.

► **Use mesh cloth bags** for your produce and try to avoid fruits and vegetables packed in plastic wrap or clamshells.

### DO MORE

► **Kick your zipper food-storage bag habit.** Use reusable silicone or paper-based bags instead.

► **Avoid plastic poop bags for your dog's waste.** Use paper-based alternatives or a pooper scooper if you have a yard.

► **Stop using trash bags.** If you compost food waste, use a garbage disposal, and recycle aluminum and glass products, what's left should be innocuous enough to go straight into the trash bin.

## Food Containers

37%

THE U.S. ACCOUNTED FOR 37 PERCENT OF THE WORLD'S FOOD SERVICE DISPOSABLES IN 2010

### DO FIRST

► **Bring your own** empty containers to restaurants for leftovers.

► **Cut back on takeout.** Dine in at restaurants and cook at home more often. If ordering delivery, request that condiment packets, cutlery, and straws be excluded.

► **Avoid foods wrapped in plastic.** At a supermarket deli, ask for your order to be wrapped in

paper (or BYO container). If you do buy something in a plastic container, get only the packaging marked 1 or 2 on the bottom, Enck says. “Those can actually be recycled.”

### DO MORE

► **Avoid prepackaged foods.** Bring empty containers from home to fill up with pasta, grains, and nuts. If what you need isn't available in bulk, opt for a brand that uses paper, glass, or metal packaging.

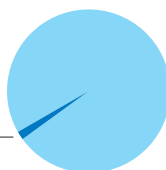


# Beverages



## 21-34 BILLION

PLASTIC BEVERAGE BOTTLES  
END UP IN THE OCEAN EACH YEAR



1.84%

STARBUCKS  
BEVERAGES  
SERVED IN A  
REUSABLE  
CUP IN 2013

### DO FIRST

#### ► Don't buy drinks in plastic bottles.

Pick something that comes in aluminum, which can be infinitely recycled. "It's pretty easy to switch from buying your soda in plastic bottles to buying it in cans," Del Valle Prieto Cervantes says.

► Bring a reusable coffee cup, travel mug, or glass jar to the coffee shop. (Know how many ounces it holds so that you can be charged accordingly.) "If you forget your

cup, ask for your order to be made 'for here' in a mug," says Dagny Tucker, founder of Vessel, a reusable coffee cup return system operating in Berkley, Calif., and Boulder, Colo. If you must use a throwaway cup, at least decline the lid.

### DO MORE

► Carry a reusable water bottle and refill it with tap water. Using a reusable water bottle instead of buying and recycling water bottles can reduce your global warming

impact by as much as 98 percent.

► Use your own glass, metal, or silicone straw. Or just use your lips to sip!

► Make your own sparkling water with a soda maker. It'll also save you money in the long run.

► Avoid plastic tea bags. Those fancy pyramid-shaped tea bags release microplastics into your brew and can wind up in landfills. Choose loose leaf or paper bags instead.

# Wraps & Films

## 196 MILLION

NUMBER OF AMERICANS WHO REPORTED  
USING AT LEAST ONE ROLL OF PLASTIC WRAP  
IN THE LAST SIX MONTHS (2020)

### DO FIRST

► Stop using plastic wrap. Use stretchy silicone covers, beeswax wraps, or aluminum foil to wrap foods. Or simply put the food in a bowl and cover it with a plate.

► Shop local instead of ordering online. "If I'm ordering something online, I add a note requesting they not use plastic packaging. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't," says Del Valle Prieto Cervantes.

### DO MORE

► Shop the frozen food aisle sparingly. Just about everything you find there is wrapped in plastic, even if the exterior packaging is cardboard.

► Buy in bulk or bake it yourself. Purchasing fewer snack packs or individually wrapped foods—such as chips, cookies, and granola bars—will help reduce plastic waste.

# Cleaning & Personal Care



## 158,100,000

AMERICANS USED  
DISPOSABLE RAZORS IN 2020

### DO FIRST

► Stop buying products packaged in plastic. Buy soap, shampoo, detergents, and cleaning products packaged in paper, glass, or aluminum.

► Ditch plastic razors. Use a metal razor with replaceable blades instead.

► Opt for natural sponges instead of synthetic sponges.

► Avoid exfoliating scrubs and toothpastes with microbeads, which are tiny plastic balls.

### DO MORE

► Stop using sanitizing and flushable wipes. These are often made of plastic fibers that clog sewers and don't degrade in landfills.

► Consider using cloth diapers. To reduce environmental impact, get them secondhand, wash them with full loads, and air-dry if possible.

► Avoid plastic tampons and pads. Use all-cotton pads and tampons with cardboard applicators and paper wrapping, or a menstrual cup or period underwear.

Only numbers 1 and 2 bottles and jugs are recycled consistently; labeling other items as “check locally” inside a recycling triangle is just greenwashing, Dell says—a way for a company to imply that something will be recycled when it will almost certainly end up in a landfill.

Well-intentioned consumers are also partly responsible for the low plastic recycling rate. “Wishcycling,” or tossing every type of plastic into the recycling bin and hoping for the best, can make separating out useful material more difficult and actually reduce the amount of plastic that is recycled, says Jeff Donlevy, the general manager at a California recycling facility who has been in the industry for more than 25 years. This can lead to recyclable plastic ending up in

more difficult, so more ultimately ends up discarded rather than recycled, says Brandon Wright, vice president of communications for the National Waste & Recycling Association.

On the bright side, most discarded plastic bottles are collected and recycled in states that require people to pay a bottle deposit. But only 10 states currently have such laws.

## Burning Questions

Until 2018, the U.S. shipped as much as half of its plastic recycling abroad, mostly to China and Hong Kong (where it was not always recycled). Tired of dealing with contaminated plastic bales that were largely waste, China in 2018 stopped taking all but the most pristinely sorted plastic. Other

furans, two types of toxic chemicals that can spread through the air and contaminate food, water, and soil. Over time, inhaling these chemicals can increase cancer risk, according to Marilyn Howarth, MD, an occupational and environmental medicine physician at the University of Pennsylvania.

What’s more, incinerators are often situated in poorer communities that already have a high burden of air pollution from sources such as heavy industry and transportation. Residents of these areas face health concerns, including cardiovascular disease, childhood asthma, exposure to carcinogenic pollutants, and preterm births, according to a 2019 report published by the New School’s Tishman Environment and Design Center, with support from the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA). About 4.4 million people in the U.S. live within a 3-mile radius of an incinerator, according to that report.

The plastics industry has proposed alternatives to incinerators and landfills. One breaks down plastic into a type of fuel; others use a chemical process to separate plastic into its component chemicals, which could then be used to make new plastic products. But these alternatives are not likely to solve the plastic problem anytime soon.

One assessment of an advanced plastic-to-fuel recycling process, commissioned by a plastic bag company, found that in some cases it could emit more greenhouse gases than landfilling or an incineration process.

In a statement, the American Chemistry Council, an industry group representing plastics manufacturers, said it expected such facilities—which are still relatively new—to operate more efficiently over time. Experts say that recycling with a chemical process is not economically viable because making new, virgin plastic from oil and gas is still much cheaper. “It fundamentally doesn’t work,” Enck says.

## “Consumers really can change the market. Plastic companies are looking into better recycling methods because it is such an important consumer issue.”

landfills and incinerators.

In theory, sorting plastics and depositing only readily recyclable types into the recycling bin would help fix this problem. (According to a May 2021 nationally representative survey of 2,079 U.S. adults by CR, 65 percent of Americans say they typically separate plastics for recycling.) But U.S. recycling trends have worked against this type of careful sorting. Many municipalities have switched to single-stream recycling, in which aluminum cans, glass bottles, plastic jugs, and paper and cardboard all get dumped into the same bin. That can make things easier for the consumer, but it also makes sorting out the recyclable plastic

countries quickly followed suit. With fewer offshore disposal options, more and more plastic is piling up in the U.S., where it is landfilled or routed to municipal solid waste incinerators that burn non-recyclable plastics along with other trash to generate electricity.

Because it generates power, incineration can sometimes be framed as a form of renewable energy or reuse (the EPA describes it as “combustion with energy recovery”). But it is not clean energy.

Incineration of plastic in these facilities has led to a slight increase in greenhouse gas emissions in recent years, according to EPA data. Burning plastic also creates dioxins and

## A Cleaner Future?

From an environmental perspective, the biggest benefit of increasing the plastic recycling rate is not keeping plastic out of landfills or incinerators. “The value of recycling is displacing virgin production, because the amount of pollution generated when producing virgin materials is much greater than that generated when using recovered materials,” says Reid Lifset, associate director of industrial environmental management at the Yale School of the Environment.

Legislative changes and consumer pressure could certainly create more of a market for at least some of the plastic that is now going straight into incinerators and landfills, says Wright, of the National Waste & Recycling Association. A legal requirement or company commitment to use more recycled material in plastic products, including those made of less frequently recycled plastics, could create incentives for manufacturers to make more recyclable products and for recycling facilities to do a better job sorting, processing, and actually recycling that material.

For example, the high demand for the type 1 plastic used in PET beverage bottles is largely due to consumers pressuring beverage companies to improve recycling processes and lawmakers requiring them to use a certain percentage of recycled plastic in their products. A California law passed last year, for instance, requires beverage bottles to be made of 15 percent recycled plastic. That will increase to 25 percent by 2025 and 50 percent by 2030. Requirements like these “force manufacturers to change the makeup of their products, to use more recyclable plastic or more environmentally friendly materials,” says Shanika Whitehurst, associate director of product sustainability, research, and testing at CR.



“Consumers really can change and push a market,” says Shelie Miller, PhD, a professor at the University of Michigan School for Environment and Sustainability. “Plastic companies are actively looking into better recycling methods and how to design plastics to be more easily recyclable because they know this is such an important consumer issue.” The American Chemistry Council recently said it supports a national standard that would require all plastic packaging to contain at least 30 percent recyclable material by 2030.

Another part of the solution, according to Enck, Lifset, and others, is extended producer responsibility (EPR), which would require plastic makers and sellers to be responsible in some way for the life cycle of their products, including cleanup after they are sold. EPR usually involves producers either implementing collection programs themselves or funding local collection programs to ensure more products are recycled. An EPR system in British Columbia, for example, increased the share of plastic waste collected for recycling from 42 percent in 2018 to 52 percent in 2020.

In 2021, Maine became the first state in the U.S. to pass EPR legislation addressing packaging waste. The law will levy fees on companies that create

or use packaging; fees will be lower for practices with less environmental impact, like using more recyclable materials. The fees will be used to fund local recycling efforts. Oregon passed an EPR law soon after Maine, and six other states have EPR bills in the works.

Enck says another worthy goal is eliminating single-use plastics, like plastic bags and polystyrene foam. But for such a change to have a positive impact, the items that replace them have to actually be reused—and often, says the University of Michigan’s Miller. “Someone who goes to the grocery store and forgets to bring reusable bags and every time buys a new reusable bag is creating a more [harmful] single-use item,” she says.

That suggests the real shift consumers need to make: More than just avoiding plastic, we need to evaluate our behavior and move away from unnecessary consumption and living a throwaway lifestyle. “If we’re really honest, any solution will require us to analyze our own consumption to try to understand what we’re consuming and why, and whether there are ways to reduce our individual consumption,” Miller says. She acknowledges that’s a tall order for a lot of people. It’s much easier to say “I can consume anything I want. I’ll just recycle it.”



# TRAVELING MADE **EASIER**

Understaffed hotels, airline delays and cancellations, and car rental shortages may be common now, but our insider advice can help make your trips this fall go smoothly.

BY PENELOPE WANG ILLUSTRATIONS BY R. KIKUO JOHNSON



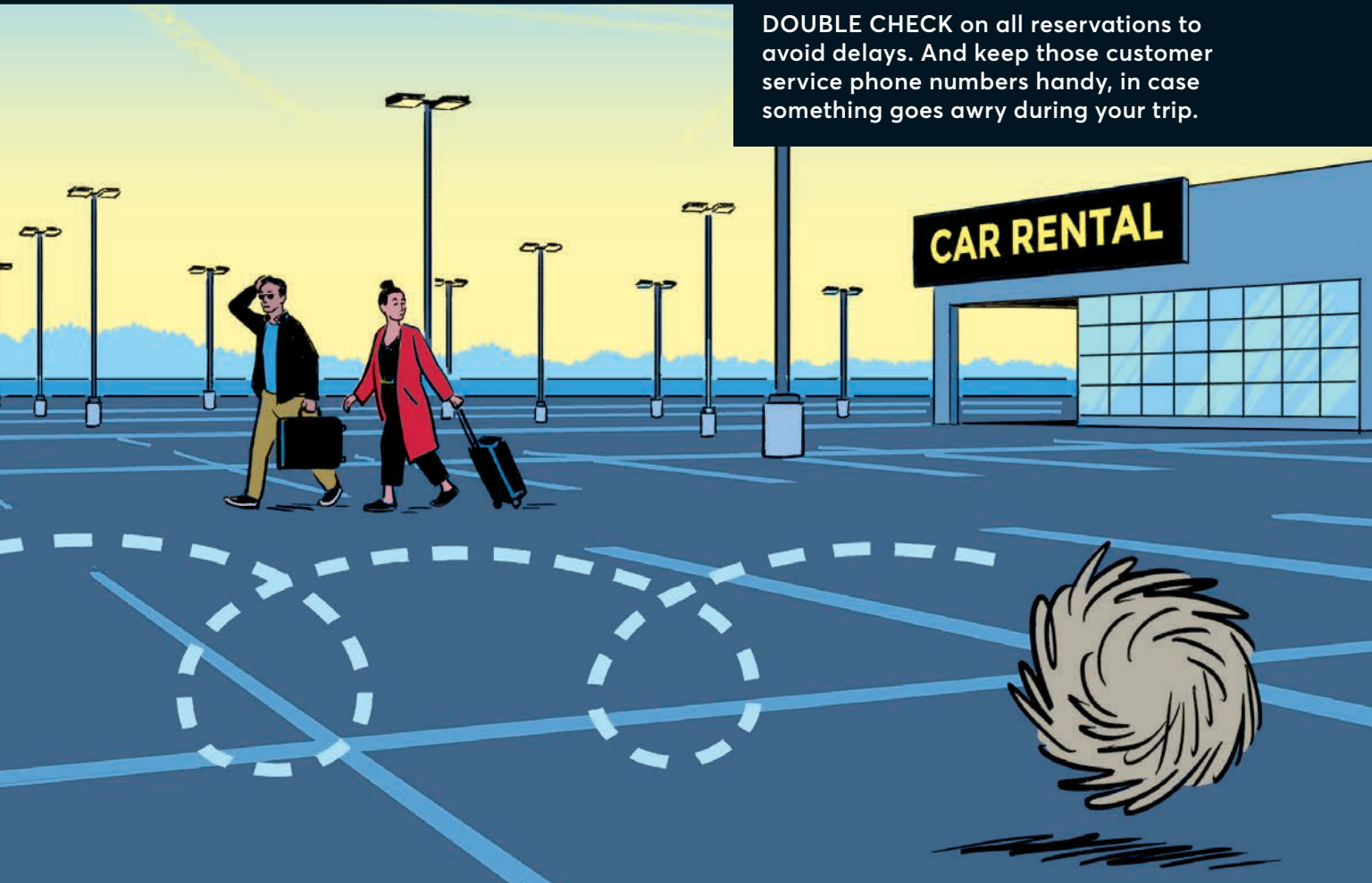
**SIMPLIFY  
YOUR TRIP**  
Take only  
carry-on  
luggage, and  
keep your key  
documents  
where you can  
access them  
quickly.



**MASK UP** when traveling by air and other public transportation—and when it's recommended at your destination.



**DOUBLE CHECK** on all reservations to avoid delays. And keep those customer service phone numbers handy, in case something goes awry during your trip.



# IF

**YOU THOUGHT SUMMER** travel was challenging, you may want to brace yourself for the holidays. You can expect service lags and interruptions as airlines and auto rental companies continue to struggle with a shortage of pilots, planes, and vehicles. Many popular hotels are also booking up fast for fall and winter, according to travel experts, and long lines at check-ins are likely because of understaffing.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to cause disruption at home and abroad, forcing many destinations to tighten rules in the face of fresh outbreaks. For travelers, this means staying on top of frequent changes.

And if you end up needing travel assistance before, during, or after your trip, you may feel like taking another vacation just to make it through the phone wait times. To put a fine point on it, if you're traveling these days, "you need patience and flexibility," says Scott Mayerowitz, executive editor of the Points Guy, a travel website.

Still, there are ways to minimize hassles. Here are expert answers to nine key questions that can help prevent problems and cushion you from the bumps that may crop up.



## Can I do anything now to make travel easier later in the season?

**MAKE SURE YOUR** driver's license, passport, and other important documents are current. If not, fill out renewal forms ASAP, but expect extra-long delays: Routine passport service can now take up to 18 weeks, and expedited requests up to 12 weeks.

Consider enrolling in Clear, Global Entry, or the Transportation Security Administration's TSA PreCheck, which will let you fast-track through security. Some premium credit cards may offer membership, as well as airport lounge access, where you can wait comfortably for your boarding call, have a snack, and get help with same-day scheduling changes, says Ted Rossman, senior industry analyst at CreditCards.com.

If you'll need a rental car, reserve now (see "Are there good ways to get a rental car?" on the facing page). Download airline and other travel provider apps, and save their contact info.



## Do I need to take health precautions for U.S. travel?

**YES.** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises Americans to delay travel until two weeks after their final COVID-19 vaccination. If you're unvaccinated and must travel, the CDC recommends a COVID-19 test one to three days beforehand; a mask on public transportation, including airplanes, and as otherwise required; and social distancing. Get tested three to five days

after returning, and self-quarantine for seven days.

Even if you're fully vaccinated, the CDC advises masking up in certain areas and on public transportation, and some business and community rules require it. (Get info at [cdc.gov/travel](https://www.cdc.gov/travel).) And take your vaccine record, in case any venues ask for it.



## What if I want to go abroad?

**FIRST, FIGURE** out where you can and can't go. "The important thing is to not rely on what an airline rep tells you on the phone when you book a flight," says Wendy Perrin, whose website, at [wendyperrin.com](https://wendyperrin.com), offers personalized travel recommendations. Check the State Department website ([travel.state.gov](https://travel.state.gov)) which has advisories for other countries and links to their COVID-19 entry rules. Monitor this regularly until your trip date.

Have a plan for coming home, too. The CDC requires that airline passengers returning to the U.S. get tested no more than three days before flying and present a negative result or proof of COVID-19 recovery. (Consider packing home COVID-19 testing kits. Results from certain kits can be used for reentry and may also fit the rules for your destination.)



## Will a travel agent make my trip easier?

**WORKING WITH** a good travel agent, aka a travel adviser, is a smart move, says Charlie Leocha, president of the nonprofit Travelers United.



## HOW PROS PACK A CARRY-ON

To sidestep lost-luggage risks and long waits at baggage carousels, experts advise avoiding bag checks. These tips can help you max out a small suitcase, about 22x14x9 inches.



**1 Create a packing list based on the itinerary, weather, and what you're likely to use.** And employ the 3-to-1 ratio: Choose three tops for every bottom, so you can mix and match outfits.

**2 Gather only the toiletries you'll really need while away.** Remember, the TSA requires that liquids be in containers that are 3.4 ounces or less and that all of them fit into a quart-sized resealable bag.

**3 Pack heavier items toward the base of the bag** to prevent tip-overs, and put shoes toe to heel. Roll soft clothes, such as T-shirts, then lay any wrinkle-prone items in plastic bags on top.

**4 Fill nooks and crannies with small items,** such as chargers and underwear. Use every possible space: Stuff socks into shoes, or fill up a half-empty toiletry bag with underwear.

Advisers can not only plan and book your trip but also alert you to changing COVID-19 rules and disruptions, and they can typically rebook you faster if a flight is canceled.

Costs vary: Some premium credit card benefits include travel services, and some agents offer services gratis to consumers and get a commission from travel providers. Others charge a fee, perhaps \$35 to several hundred dollars. Before signing on, ask about an adviser's services, fees, and membership in professional groups, such as the American Society of Travel Advisors, says William McGee, aviation adviser for Consumer Reports. Note: Consolidator sites, such as Orbitz and Priceline, may net you a cheaper package, but if you use one and

your plans change, you'll have to rebook through the consolidator, which can be complicated.



### Should I get travel insurance?

**IT'S WISE** right now, especially for pricey trips. Standard travel insurance reimburses fully for certain expenses—these vary by policy—if your plans are interrupted by unforeseen events (think medical emergency, earthquake, airline strike). It doesn't cover COVID-related disruptions, such as a destination barring travelers, says Megan Moncrief, chief marketing officer at the comparison site Squaresmouth.

The same holds true if you don't receive a passport in time to travel or if you simply decide to cancel.

Standard coverage usually costs 4 to 10 percent of your trip's total amount. But your credit card carrier may provide free coverage, so check first. Or get price quotes at a website such as InsureMyTrip or Squaresmouth, or through your travel agent.

Cancel for Any Reason coverage reimburses for events that standard insurance doesn't, such as COVID-19-related disruptions. It generally costs 40 percent more than a standard policy and reimburses up to 75 percent. You can buy standard insurance almost until departure, but you must buy CFAR coverage typically within 14 to 21 days of booking.



### Are there good ways to get a rental car?

**THE RENTAL CAR** shortage (and the resulting high prices) is likely to continue into spring, Leocha says. So book your rental car ASAP, ideally before making other plans. Look beyond the national chains, too: Local car rental agencies, private limos, and peer-to-peer rental firms such as Turo may have availability. Or focus on destinations with good public transportation, such as Chicago and New York City, says Dani Johnson, vice president of Coastline Travel Advisors in Garden Grove, Calif.



## Will hotels and resorts be fully up and running?

**BECAUSE OF** worker shortages and COVID-19 restrictions, many establishments have cut back services such as hot breakfast

buffets and daily room cleaning. So for these, or amenities such as gyms and restaurants, call and ask whether they'll be available. Too few perks? Consider a bed-and-breakfast or a vacation rental. "If your [hotel] breakfast is a wrapped-up muffin, how is that better than staying in an Airbnb?" says Brett Snyder, president of the Cranky Concierge air travel assistance service.



## Who can help with flight, car rental, or hotel problems?

**IT DEPENDS** on the specifics. But you'll need to be polite and persistent, and you might need to try multiple channels. Flight delay? Call the airline or use its app, even if you're in line for the gate agent—this may enable you to schedule a flight change or connect with help faster, Snyder says. You can also tag the travel provider on social media and request assistance.

If the car rental agency doesn't have the vehicle you reserved, ask for a different car—perhaps an upgrade—or for one at a nearby location. For a room glitch, ask the manager about availability at other hotels. Or check bed-and-breakfasts and vacation rental websites. Ask the providers for refunds or credits if they don't come through.



## How do I handle issues that linger after my trip?

**FOR PROBLEMS** such as an incorrect charge, phone the provider's customer service. (For airline issues, call before East Coast business hours begin, to get to the head of the line, says Willis Orlando, a flight expert at the website Scott's Cheap Flights.) Email the business, too: State the problem and desired resolution, and enclose documentation.

If you used a credit card, you have 60 days after receiving the bill to dispute errors by sending a letter. The bank has 30 days to respond. If the issue involves the quality of the purchase, you must first attempt to get resolution from the merchant. Check with the bank for details.

# ESSENTIAL STEPS TO TAKE BEFORE YOU GO

Attending to these last-minute details can help keep your travel plans on track

### 3 DAYS BEFORE

- **Reconfirm reservations.** This should include those for airlines, car rentals, hotels, tours, and restaurants.
- **Recheck digital tools.** Make sure you can log in to your

provider apps and other travel apps. Add any missing customer service numbers to your phone contacts.

- **Sign up for travel-provider alerts.** This way you'll get immediate info on changes.
- **Give credit card issuers your contact**

**info.** This way they can contact you if any charges are flagged for fraud.

### THE DAY BEFORE

- **Check in online.** Doing this 24 hours before departure can help you skip lines.

- **Print your boarding pass**—it's wise to have a backup for your digital pass. If you have TSA PreCheck or Global Entry and it's not indicated on the pass, call the airline and provide your Known Traveler Number.
- **Gather documents.** Put your passport, driver's license, boarding pass, and other essentials in a folder or an envelope, so they're all together.
- **Scroll key websites.** Check CDC, State Department, and other websites for news that might affect your plans.

- **Pack only TSA-approved items.** The checklist at [tsa.gov](https://www.tsa.gov) can guide you.

### EN ROUTE TO THE AIRPORT

- **Check your phone for notifications** such as gate-change announcements.
- **Make sure your travel documents** will be easy to grab when they're needed.
- **Give a heads-up.** Alert friends and family at your destination that you're on the way to see them.



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

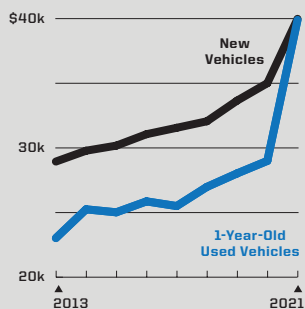
# ROAD REPORT

## TRENDS

### Buying Used Is Not Necessarily Cheaper

The average price paid for new and 1-year-old used cars reached parity in 2021, and a shortage of new cars means that deals can be hard to find. "Demand for SUVs and pickups remains high," says Jake Fisher, senior director of CR's Auto Test Center. "A midsize sedan might suit your needs just as well, and you're more likely to find a bargain on one."

#### AVERAGE PRICE PAID PER VEHICLE



Source: J.D. Power.

## FIRST DRIVE

### Jeep Wrangler 4xe



The 4xe is the first-ever plug-in hybrid version of the iconic Wrangler, pairing a turbo four-cylinder with electric motors for a combined output of 375 hp and 22 miles of electric range.

**CR'S TAKE:** The Wrangler 4xe can traverse boulders and muddy trails powered only by electricity. But the transitions between electric and gas aren't very smooth, and the Wrangler's clumsy on-road handling, elevated wind noise, and bare-bones cabin remain. The 4xe comes with a \$10,000 premium, but buyers qualify for a \$7,500 federal tax incentive.

**BASE PRICE RANGE:**  
\$51,025-\$56,845

**DESTINATION CHARGE:**  
\$1,495

**PRICE AS DRIVEN:**  
\$67,345

## THE VITAL STATISTIC

# \$640

Annual savings gained by switching from a car that gets 22 mpg to a comparable hybrid that gets 35 mpg.

Source: Based on gasoline price of \$3.16/gallon and 12,000 miles driven per year.

## RECALL



### Ford Explorer

Ford is recalling 644,055 Explorer SUVs from model years 2013 to 2017 due to concerns that the rear suspension could fracture, which could result in a crash.

**WHAT TO DO:** Dealers will inspect and replace the affected rear suspension components as necessary. For more information, contact Ford customer service at 800-392-3673.

## DASHBOARD DECODER

### What Does This Icon Mean?



This relatively new symbol is becoming the norm for "continuous" lane keeping assistance. Unlike "momentary" lane keeping assistance,

which activates only when a vehicle is departing a lane, this feature works to keep the vehicle continuously in or near the center of

the lane. "These systems can't see well when vehicles ahead obscure the lines or the road curves out of sight," says Kelly

Funkhouser, CR's program manager for vehicle interface testing. "So drivers must remain vigilant at all times while using them."



# YOUR CAR REPAIR HANDBOOK

If you have a critical maintenance or repair problem, who should you trust to do the work? CR explains when to try your hand at DIY, and when to call a pro.

by Benjamin Preston

W

**ITH NEW** and used car prices surging from a global shortage of microchips, more owners are paying to fix their cars and

putting off new car purchases.

But for repair and maintenance, there's the question of where to service your car. The dealership? A reputable independent shop? Or do it yourself?

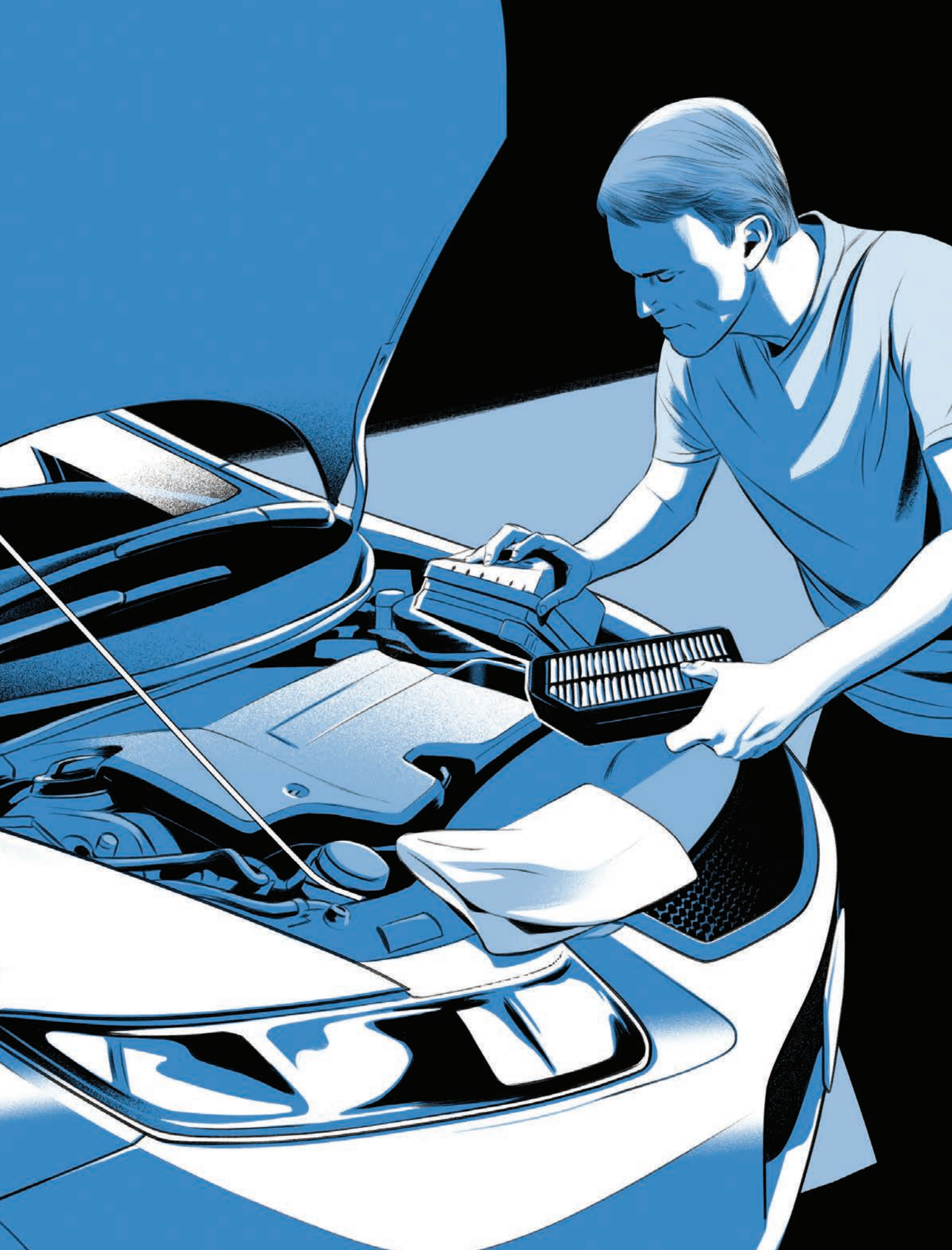
If your car is under warranty, the answer is simple—always take it to the dealership for a covered repair. For other situations, the answer depends on what service needs to be performed.

“Car owners who want to save money will want to strategize the best option for each job,” says John Ibbotson, Consumer Reports’ chief mechanic.

CR auto experts reviewed common maintenance and repair items, breaking down the best and most cost-efficient option for each. For example, if you don't usually change your oil at home, we recommend going to the dealership. It's only marginally more expensive than a chain oil-change shop, and we think it's worth it for the manufacturer-recommended oil and the specific filter your model calls for.

On the other hand, some repairs are so simple, and the parts so inexpensive and easily available, that you may find that it's more convenient—and far cheaper—to do them yourself. We also provide the cost for each repair and maintenance task for a Ford F-150 and a Toyota Highlander, among the most popular models in our survey and in the marketplace.





# FIX IT YOURSELF



## Engine Air Filter

**PARTS, FORD F-150:** \$21

**PARTS, TOYOTA HIGHLANDER:** \$25

**DESCRIPTION OF JOB:** Jill Trotta, vice president of industry and sales at RepairPal, and a technician who has 30 years' experience and is certified by the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence, says increased demand for automotive service work, combined with parts shortages and a yearslong technician shortage, can make for longer wait times at the repair shop. (RepairPal is a CR partner.) That makes doing the easy stuff

yourself a no-brainer. Changing the engine air filter, which keeps harmful contaminants from entering the engine's combustion chamber, is simple. On most cars it's easily accessible. Remove debris from the air cleaner box before installing the new filter, so it doesn't clog the new filter or get into the engine.



## Cabin Air Filter

**PARTS, FORD F-150:** \$30

**PARTS, TOYOTA HIGHLANDER:** \$36

**DESCRIPTION OF JOB:** This filter keeps the air inside the car free of allergens and contaminants, and is usually



## Windshield Wiper Blades

**PARTS, FORD F-150:** \$28

**PARTS, TOYOTA HIGHLANDER:** \$50

**DESCRIPTION OF JOB:** On most cars, these can be replaced in minutes. (Some auto parts stores will even do it free after you buy the wipers.) Place a soft cloth on the windshield in case the spring-loaded wiper arm snaps back onto the glass during the replacement. Make sure the blades are affixed properly—if they fall off, the wiper arm can scratch or break the windshield glass and affect visibility. Some cars have a wiper arm “service position” that makes it easier to install new wiper blades.

## HEADLIGHT REPLACEMENT

Headlight bulbs can burn out after a few years. Many older-type bulbs are easy to replace, but if your car has the newer LED lights, get them installed by a pro because the entire lamp assembly often needs to be replaced.



**10 TO 15  
MINUTES**

### WHAT YOU NEED

- Two replacement bulbs (replace in pairs)
- Basic hand tools



### Expose the Bulb

Be sure the car is off. Open the hood to access the rear of the headlamp housing. A small circular clip or twist lock is often all that holds in the lightbulb in its housing.



### Disconnect the Bulb

You may have to move parts that are in the way—the car battery or air cleaner box, for example. Once exposed, the bulb should twist free or unplug from the wiring harness.



### Install and Test

Wear gloves when installing the new bulbs to avoid getting skin oils on the bulbs, which can cause them to fail early. Test the lights to verify that they shine straight.





and lead to overheating and engine damage. For most head gaskets, replacement can be labor-intensive, but the job is usually relatively simple, so it makes sense to choose an independent shop, which typically charges a lower rate for labor than dealerships charge. “Loyalty to one shop is most often rewarded with technicians who know your particular vehicle, and with an honest appraisal of what’s needed,” says Ibbotson at Consumer Reports. “A good shop that you’ve developed a rapport with will be able to tell you whether they can handle a job, or if you should take it to the dealership or a specialist.”

## Brake Pads

**COST, FORD F-150:** \$167

**COST, TOYOTA HIGHLANDER:** \$228

**DESCRIPTION OF PROBLEM:** This fix is the most frequent on the list of common repairs, according to RepairPal data. Brake pads—a regular wear item, like tires and windshield wiper blades—need to be replaced every so often. The number of miles between replacements depends on the model, road conditions, and how you drive the vehicle. The repair is usually pretty standard from vehicle to vehicle, so we recommend an independent shop. To keep costs down, it will probably use lower-cost aftermarket parts, so it’s up to you to ask for the best ones possible, Ibbotson says. Good aftermarket parts may still be less expensive than factory parts. Brake rotors should usually be replaced to ensure smooth operation. The technician should also inspect the condition of related parts, such as wheel bearings and suspension components, that can affect braking safety and performance, Ibbotson says.

## GO TO AN INDEPENDENT SHOP



## Suspension Shock/Strut

**COST, FORD F-150:** \$628

**COST, TOYOTA HIGHLANDER:** \$658

**DESCRIPTION OF PROBLEM:** Suspension parts are regular wear items that, if in poor condition, could cause unsafe braking and handling. How long shocks and struts last depends primarily on the road surfaces you usually drive on. Rougher roads are harder on these parts. Their replacement is fairly straightforward, but make sure you ask the shop for the highest-quality parts to

ensure a good, long-lasting ride. Even name-brand aftermarket shocks often come in different grades, so ask for details about quality and price.



## Head Gasket

**COST, FORD F-150:** \$1,532

**COST, TOYOTA HIGHLANDER:** \$1,943

**DESCRIPTION OF PROBLEM:** A head gasket creates a seal between your car’s engine block and its cylinder head. Over time the gasket can start to leak, which can get progressively worse



## HOW TO FIND A HIGH-QUALITY REPAIR SHOP

Here are some basics for identifying a good shop, according to John Ibbotson, CR's chief mechanic.

### Ask for Recommendations

Check with friends, especially if you know someone with a car that's similar to yours.

### Find Specialty Shops

Garages that focus on a particular car brand are more likely to have the latest training and equipment for it.

### Check for Certification

A high-quality mechanic and shop should be certified by the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence.

### Look for Online Reviews

Search RepairPal and Yelp for customer reviews. Check Facebook groups for recommendations in your area.

### Give the Shop a Trial Run

Try a new shop with a smaller repair or maintenance work, such as an oil and filter change. If the mechanics do good work and communicate well, you can take your vehicle back for more complicated repairs.

### Ask About Warranties

Inquire about a shop's guarantee for common repairs. It should be willing to stand behind its work.

—Keith Barry



## Spark Plugs

**COST, FORD F-150:** \$232

**COST, TOYOTA HIGHLANDER:** \$409

**DESCRIPTION OF PROBLEM:** Spark plugs ignite the fuel-air mixture in your engine's combustion chambers, which creates power to move the car. When they get dirty or worn out as miles accrue, it can affect fuel economy, drivability, and even emissions. Replacing spark plugs on some engines is easier than on others—a Toyota four-cylinder engine's spark plugs are accessible from the top of the engine, whereas the spark plugs on a Subaru's flat-four are in a tight spot on the side of the engine. Either way, independent shops work on a variety of cars and will have the tools and expertise to replace spark plugs and do other tuneup tasks.



## Alternator Replacement

**COST, FORD F-150:** \$549

**COST, TOYOTA HIGHLANDER:** \$735

**DESCRIPTION OF PROBLEM:** The alternator is a belt-driven part that converts engine power into electricity for charging the battery and powering the vehicle's many onboard electronic components. Replacing one is another common repair that varies in complexity depending on the vehicle make and model. Some alternators are easily accessible. Others, not so much. But in general, disassembly of major components isn't required to get to an alternator, so an independent shop is a good choice. Gas-electric hybrids and even mild hybrids, on the other hand, won't have a traditional alternator, and they might need attention at the dealership if there is a problem.

# GO TO A DEALERSHIP



## Advanced Safety System Alignment

**COST, FORD F-150:** \$280

**COST, TOYOTA HIGHLANDER:** \$178

**DESCRIPTION OF PROBLEM:** Many newer cars are equipped with the active driver assistance systems that CR recommends having in all new vehicles. Features such as automatic emergency

braking, blind spot warning, and adaptive cruise control consist of a series of cameras and/or sensors feeding information to a computer that works with vehicle control systems to increase safety. Occasionally—whether because of a fender bender, windshield replacement, or software problem—these systems can need repair and special alignments so that the cameras and sensors operate with precision. The dealership is best equipped to repair this complex hardware and software

because it will have the most up-to-date tools. Independent shops can do some of this work. But, Ibbotson says, “the dealership’s expertise in its own cars justifies the higher cost of labor for these repairs.”



## Infotainment Glitches

**COST, FORD F-150:** Varies

**COST, TOYOTA HIGHLANDER:** Varies

**DESCRIPTION OF PROBLEM:** CR members complain frequently in our auto surveys about infotainment reliability problems—frozen screens, touch-screen buttons that don’t respond readily, or systems that go dark and need reboots, among other problems. Software bugs are more common than you might think, says John Ibbotson, CR’s chief mechanic. He adds that only factory-backed dealerships will have the right computer equipment and parts available for proper diagnosis and software updates, so it’s not a good idea to go to an independent shop. “Plus, the dealership will always have the latest information from the manufacturer,” Ibbotson says. The owner’s manual might tell you how to reboot the infotainment system yourself, and that might fix a software-related problem.



## Airbag and Seat Belt Maintenance and Repair

**COST, FORD F-150:** \$442

**COST, TOYOTA HIGHLANDER:** \$609

**DESCRIPTION OF PROBLEM:** Problems can also arise with airbags, such as the ongoing spate of Takata airbag recalls over the past several years. Or a blinking airbag light could indicate a

potential malfunction. Seat belts can also develop problems; they contain specialized mechanisms, such as pretensioners, that have turned some restraint systems into high-tech feats of engineering. And child car seats are often secured in the back seat by belts that need to be in tip-top shape. If you have an airbag or seat belt problem, the dealer is best equipped to fix it and to ensure proper operation.



## Timing Belt Replacement

**COST, FORD F-150:** \$1,215

**COST, TOYOTA HIGHLANDER:** \$742

**DESCRIPTION OF PROBLEM:** A timing belt (or chain) is a vital part that keeps



## WHAT ABOUT EV REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE?

CR has found that generally, electric vehicles cost less to maintain than their gasoline-powered counterparts because they contain fewer moving parts. For example, EVs have no timing belt or spark plugs to contend with. But they do have normal wear items, such as tires, brakes, windshield wipers, and suspension parts, that degrade as time and mileage pile up. Most of these items are similar to those found in gas-

powered cars, and they can be worked on at independent repair shops. But some EV-specific maintenance items and repairs require specialized knowledge and equipment, and only EV technicians should tackle them.

### BATTERIES

EV battery packs—the large array of cells that power the car’s motor—usually last a long time. But they degrade over time and can be replaced at a shop that

specializes in battery pack replacement, or at the dealership.

### SOFTWARE ISSUES

As with a gasoline-powered car, you should take your EV to a dealership if there are problems with infotainment or other in-car displays.

### CHARGING

**PROBLEMS** The charging port and information displays can malfunction, making it impossible to fuel the car. This should be addressed by the dealership.

the engine operating smoothly. Timing belts should be replaced proactively at specific intervals, often at 100,000 miles. It’s a complicated procedure, often requiring partial engine disassembly. Skipping this service can lead to major engine damage. And if some key parts, such as idler pulleys, belt tensioners, and even the water pump, aren’t replaced at the same time, it could lead to failure and repairs—maybe expensive ones—down the road. If you already deal with an independent shop you trust, it might be able to handle this job. But Ibbotson says dealerships are more likely to know which parts associated with the timing belt or chain for your model should be replaced at the same time to avoid problems in the future.





# How to Replace Your Car's Key Fob



**REPLACING A LOST** or broken key fob can be a pricey proposition. Most cars today come with advanced, feature-laden fobs that require programming and laser cutting, and can cost as much as \$450 or more to replace. (If your fob isn't working, first check to see if all it needs is a new battery, which you can easily change on your own.) To replace a fob for a car that was built within the past five years, chances are you'll have to go directly to a new-car dealership that has the expensive equipment required to program the key, says John Ibbotson, CR's chief mechanic. But if you have an older car, you might be able to save money on a new fob by taking one of the approaches described below. Always check your car's basic warranty or roadside assistance coverage and your insurance to see if they will cover the cost of replacing lost or damaged keys.

## ORDER A GENUINE FOB ONLINE

You can find genuine replacement fobs at some auto parts websites and at online retailers including Amazon, Car and Truck Remotes, and Walmart.

**KEY FINDINGS:** We found a genuine Hyundai fob for a 2017 Ioniq for \$93 (with shipping) from carandtruckremotes.com, which is \$208 less than what a Hyundai dealer quoted us. Some fobs are easy to program, but this one requires the services of a dealer or locksmith. A local Hyundai dealer quoted us \$130 for the programming, plus \$85 for a laser-cut backup key, bringing the total cost to \$308.

**SAVINGS:** \$208 less than buying a fob from the dealer.

## BUY AN AFTER-MARKET FOB ONLINE

Aftermarket fobs can cost much less than those made by an automaker and are available at many of the same online retailers that sell genuine replacement fobs.

**KEY FINDINGS:** We searched for a seven-button aftermarket fob for a 2008 Chrysler Town & Country minivan through Amazon and found one for less than \$15. (Prices ranged from about \$14 to \$27.) Chrysler owners with two working fobs can program a third themselves. Otherwise, a dealer might charge \$20 to \$100 to program a new one.

**SAVINGS:** \$216 less than purchasing—and having programmed—done—at a dealer.

## CALL A LOCKSMITH

A mobile locksmith is another option that can potentially save time and money. "I can usually come in at 30 to 50 percent less than the dealer," says Jonathan Genesky, a mobile locksmith in Connecticut. But he says he can't handle fobs for certain European brands because he doesn't have the programming gear required. **KEY FINDINGS:** Genesky went to CR's Auto Test Center to make a spare key fob for a 2009 Honda Pilot. He programmed an aftermarket fob he provided and cut a new key in about 15 minutes for \$125.

**SAVINGS:** \$95 less than purchasing and programming at a Honda dealer.

## GO TO A NATIONAL CHAIN

If you prefer going to a store rather than having a locksmith come to your house, try a national chain—such as Ace Hardware or Batteries Plus—that provides key fob replacement and programming. **KEY FINDINGS:** A local Batteries Plus retailer quoted us a price to replace the 2009 Honda Pilot fob that landed in between the mobile locksmith and the Honda dealer. The aftermarket model it offered costs \$75, plus \$70 for programming and key cutting, for a total of \$145.

**SAVINGS:** \$75 less than the dealer; \$20 more than the mobile locksmith.



## ROAD TEST

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



COMPACT HYBRID CARS

### Hyundai Elantra Hybrid

Going Hybrid Improved the Model

75

OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 79

**HIGHS** Fuel economy, braking, controls, quieter and smoother-riding than the regular Elantra

**LOWS** Access due to low stance

**POWERTRAIN** 139-hp, 1.6-liter 4-cylinder hybrid engine; 6-speed dual-clutch automatic transmission; front-wheel drive

**FUEL** 48 mpg on regular

**PRICE**

\$23,550-\$28,100 base price range  
\$24,900 as tested

**AFTER TESTING THE** regular Elantra in May and now its hybrid sibling, we think the hybrid version is best for most consumers. It has much better fuel mileage and offers a smoother ride and a quieter cabin.

The hybrid is nearly a second slower from 0 to 60 mph, but the electric-drive boost makes it feel peppier in around-town driving. The dual-clutch transmission delivers smooth upshifts, but some downshifts are too apparent, unlike the gas version's continuously variable transmission.

There's no denying the hybrid's efficiency, though. It registered 48 mpg overall in our testing, 15 mpg better than the regular Elantra. That result is a bit less than the EPA's 54 mpg combined rating, but it isn't a meaningful difference at this high mpg range and may be explained

by some variations in test methodologies.

The hybrid steers into corners in a sharper manner than the regular model, probably a result of its more advanced independent rear suspension. The hybrid also absorbs bumps better than the regular version, though the ride is still rather firm.

The cabin is a bit quieter, too, because the electric drive and automatic are more adept at masking engine noise.

There is decent space for the driver, but getting in and out is awkward due to the car's low stance. The infotainment screen has large, simple-to-decipher icons and helpful shortcut buttons for common functions.

An impressive roster of active safety and driver assist features come standard, including FCW, AEB with pedestrian detection, BSW, RCTW, LDW, and LKA.



COMPACT HYBRID CARS

### Hyundai Ioniq

Better Braking, Rough Ride

69

OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 75

**HIGHS** Fuel economy, controls, hatchback versatility

**LOWS** Ride, agility, noise

**POWERTRAIN** 139-hp, 1.6-liter 4-cylinder hybrid engine; 6-speed dual-clutch automatic transmission; front-wheel drive

**FUEL** 52 mpg on regular

**PRICE**

\$23,400-\$31,400 base price range  
\$27,200 as tested

**HYUNDAI HAS GIVEN** its Ioniq hybrid hatchback a freshening for 2021, most notably updating the braking system and switching to a different tire brand and model. We're happy to report that the overly long stopping distances we encountered with the 2017 model have improved significantly. Yet its excellent fuel economy of 52 mpg overall remains, showing that higher mpg doesn't have to come at the expense of strong braking performance.

The numbers speak for themselves: Compared with the 2017 model we tested, the new Ioniq stopped 14 feet shorter on our dry surface from 60 mph (at 130 feet) and 15 feet shorter in the wet—both solid performances. Brake-pedal feel also improved, with less of the awkward, spongy sensation we encountered with the previous version.

Most of the other elements

in the Ioniq feel similar. The 139-hp hybrid powertrain gets the car off the line smoothly, and it can drive electric-only at low speeds. Although the power feels adequate in normal driving, there isn't much left in reserve when you need a quick burst of acceleration. The dual-clutch automatic occasionally has some clunky downshifts.

As before, the Ioniq feels reluctant to take corners with any real verve due to some body roll. The ride is also a bit rough, and cabin sound insulation seems like an afterthought. The hatchback configuration allows for extra cargo-carrying flexibility, making it practical for hauling bulky items.

FCW, AEB with pedestrian detection, LDW, and LKA are standard, but buyers need to move up to the SE trim and above in order to get BSW and RCTW.



LUXURY LARGE SUVs

## Cadillac Escalade

A Worthy Flagship

66

OVERALL  
SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 80

**HIGHS** Ride, quietness, acceleration, luxurious cabin, seat comfort

**LOWS** Agility, fuel economy, high step-in, tall hood cuts front visibility

**POWERTRAIN** 420-hp, 6.2-liter V8 engine; 10-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

**FUEL** 16 mpg on regular

**PRICE**  
\$76,195–\$106,595 base price range  
\$98,740 as tested

**CADILLAC'S REDESIGNED** Escalade SUV doubles down on its identity as an imposing status symbol while making major improvements in ride quality, infotainment usability, and passenger comfort. But its fuel economy is dismal at 16 mpg overall, and handling remains clumsy.

Just like the Chevrolet Tahoe that it's based on, the new Escalade benefits from an independent rear suspension that modernizes the driving experience. Aided by our model's optional adaptive dampers, the Escalade soaks up bumps remarkably well. Handling is cumbersome, with noticeable body lean through corners, which isn't surprising for such a large vehicle.

The standard 420-hp V8 is responsive and delivers abundant and effortless power through a well-behaved, smooth-shifting 10-speed automatic transmission.

The slick cabin overflows with high-tech features, including a triple-screen infotainment and instrument cluster setup with vivid, easy-to-read graphics. Although the interior exudes luxury, with abundant leather and padded surfaces, it's undermined by fake-looking wood trim and some rough edges. The large front seats are comfortable and supportive, and the second-row captain's chairs provide a roomy perch. The third row gets more room thanks to the new, space-efficient rear suspension setup.

FCW and AEB with pedestrian detection come standard, but BSW and RCTW don't, a disappointment at this price. Cadillac's enhanced Super Cruise system, which assists the driver with acceleration, braking, and steering on pre-mapped divided highways, is available.

COMPACT ELECTRIC CARS

## Chevrolet Bolt EUV

An SUV-Like Electric Vehicle

76

OVERALL  
SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 80

**HIGHS** Acceleration, ride, quietness, access, no tailpipe emissions

**LOWS** Long charging times, no AWD, gear selector

**POWERTRAIN** 200-hp electric motor; 1-speed direct drive transmission; front-wheel drive

**RANGE** 247 miles

**PRICE**  
\$33,000–\$37,500 base price range  
\$43,590 as tested

**CHEVROLET UPDATED ITS** all-electric Bolt hatchback for 2022 and created an additional version called the EUV (electric utility vehicle).

The freshening brings a nicer interior, more comfortable front seats, and an easier-to-use infotainment system. The new EUV also benefits from a comfortable ride, a roomy rear seat, and easy access. Some might find that the EUV falls short of its promise because it lacks key SUV attributes, such as increased ground clearance, extra cargo space, and available AWD.

The front wheels are powered by the same 200-hp motor that made the original Bolt feel so lively, but the EUV isn't as quick because it's heavier. Its 0 to 60 mph time was 7.2 seconds.

The EUV has a 247-mile EPA-rated driving range, and charging its 65-kWh battery took more than 8 hours from

near empty on a 240-volt connection, typical for an EV.

Compared with the regular Bolt, the EUV is more comfortable over bumps. We appreciated that attribute in regular driving, but there was increased body roll through turns, which contributed to its diminished agility.

The EUV is the first non-Cadillac to come with GM's Super Cruise, which can automatically adjust the Bolt's speed according to traffic and steer with the driver's hands off the wheel on pre-mapped divided highways. But it's not as sophisticated as the version we tested on the Escalade. It's trickier to engage, and it gave us too many steering corrections, which became annoying.

FCW, AEB with pedestrian detection, LDW, and LKA come standard, but BSW and RCTW require purchasing the more expensive Premier trim.



**Ratings** ➤ **All Kinds** This month's tested vehicles range from the all-electric Bolt EUV up to the super-sized Escalade luxury hauler, with a couple of hybrids in between.

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.	Suitcases + duffels/ Cargo volume, cu. ft.	FCW	AEB, pedestrian	AEB, highway	BSW		
3-ROW SUVs OVER \$65,000																						
✓	BMW X7 3.0T	82	⬇️	⬆️	94	22	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	52.5	6.5	136	26.0	S	S	0	S		
	Cadillac Escalade 6.2L	66	⬇️	⬆️	80	16	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	48.5	6.5	136	56.0	S	S	0	0		
	Audi Q7 3.0T	65	⬇️	⬆️	92	20	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	50.5	7.0	133	35.5	S	S	S	S		
	Lincoln Navigator 3.5T	64	⬇️	⬆️	65	16	⬇️ / ⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	47.0	6.2	144	56.0	S	S	S	S		
	Infiniti QX80 5.6L	64	⬇️	⬇️	68	15	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	48.0	6.9	139	49.5	S	S	S	S		
	Chevrolet Suburban 5.3L	60	⬇️	⬆️	76	16	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	49.0	7.6	145	70.0	S	S	0	0		
	Mercedes-Benz GLS450 3.0T	46	⬇️	⬇️	86	20	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	50.5	6.4	133	42.5	S	S	S	S		
HYBRIDS \$25,000-\$35,000																						
✓	Toyota Camry 2.5H	🍀 90	⬆️	⬆️	89	47	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	54.5	7.8	138	3+1	S	S	S	0		
✓	Honda Accord 2.0H	🍀 83	⬇️	⬆️	89	47	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	52.5	7.4	139	4+1	S	S	S	0		
✓	Honda Insight 1.5H	🍀 80	⬆️	⬇️	73	54	⬇️ / ⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	54.0	8.7	136	3+1	S	S	S	S		
✓	Toyota Prius 1.8H	🍀 80	⬆️	⬆️	75	52	⬇️ / ⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	53.5	10.3	135	2+2	S	S	S	0		
✓	Toyota Corolla 1.8H	🍀 77	⬆️	⬆️	69	48	⬇️ / ⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	53.0	10.3	142	3+1	S	S	S	0		
✓	Toyota Prius Prime 1.8H+E	🍀 77	⬆️	⬆️	74	133 <sup>1</sup> / 50 <sup>2</sup>	⬆️ / ⬇️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	55.0	10.8	139	2+0	S	S	S	0		
✓	Hyundai Elantra 1.6H	🍀 75	⬇️	⬇️	79	48	⬇️ / ⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	54.0	8.7	127	2+3	S	S	–	S		
✓	Hyundai Ioniq 1.6H	🍀 69	⬇️	⬆️	75	52	⬆️ / ⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬆️	54.5	9.1	130	3+0	S	S	–	0		
	Kia Niro 1.6H	🍀 62	⬇️	⬇️	65	43	⬇️ / ⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	51.0	9.9	143	2+2	0	0	–	0		
ELECTRIC CARS \$35,000-\$45,000																						
✓	Chevrolet Bolt E	🍀 82	⬆️	⬆️	78	120 <sup>1</sup>	⬇️ / ⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬆️	53.0	6.8	138	2+0	S	S	–	0		
✓	Chevrolet Bolt EUV E	🍀 76	⬇️	⬆️	80	115 <sup>1</sup>	⬇️ / ⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	53.0	7.2	137	2+2	S	S	0	0		
✓	Hyundai Kona Electric E	🍀 74	⬇️	⬆️	76	120 <sup>1</sup>	⬆️ / ⬇️	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬆️	53.5	6.6	135	1+1	S	S	–	S		
✓	Nissan Leaf E	🍀 72	⬇️	⬇️	73	104 <sup>1</sup>	⬆️ / ⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	52.5	7.0	139	3+0	S	S	S	S		
	Kia Niro EV E	🍀 54	⬇️	⬆️	81	112 <sup>1</sup>	⬆️ / ⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬆️	52.5	6.8	135	2+2	S	S	–	S		
➤	Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at <a href="https://www.cars.com">CR.org/cars</a> . 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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# Weird Things Happen in the Fall

You may want to run from these strange—and sometimes scary—signs

## This Trend Has Gone Too Far

Are you over the whole pumpkin spice thing, too? Submitted by Rod Tornquist, via email



## I Scream, You Scream ...

Not the usual place we head to when we're in the mood for a frozen treat. Submitted by T. Albers, as seen in Sault Ste. Marie, MS



## Quick, Make a U-Turn!

This is the real end of the road. Submitted by Gene Vollmers, Johnson City, TN



## We Almost Got Tricked by This Treat Sale

There's no way to sugarcoat this stingy discount. Submitted by Alan Orns, Melville, NY



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