

**STAY SAFE IN THE
BACK SEAT** P. 52

**BEST DEALS ON
CELL PHONE PLANS**

**HEALTHY CEREALS
THAT TASTE GREAT**

FEBRUARY 2022

CR Consumer Reports®

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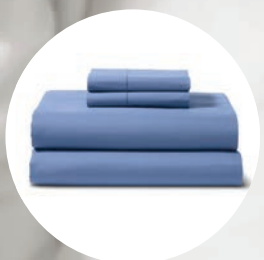
Backpacks

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TO GET THE**

SLEEP

YOU NEED

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BEST MATTRESSES



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



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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

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Fighting for More Consumer Choice



LONG GONE ARE the days when cell phones were optional. They enable us to work, travel, order food, and connect to entertainment, family, and the world. As with any essential product, we want the best choices, which is why this month's issue includes a guide to picking the phone service best suited to your priorities and budget. (See "The Best Cell Plan Deals for Everyone," on page 46.)

But no amount of tactical advice protects consumers from a mobile service market with too much consolidation and too little competition. Until recently, there were just four major carriers. With 2020's roughly \$30 billion Sprint/T-Mobile merger, which CR opposed, we're down to three. Fewer consumer choices, of course, means less competition in the marketplace, which tends to translate into higher prices, lower-quality goods and services, or both. You can save money by using one of the smaller providers we recommend. But the range of consumer choice they represent is somewhat illusory: They all piggyback on the cellular networks of the big three companies.

This troubling dynamic isn't limited to cellular carriers. Anti-competitive behavior is rampant in our economy, nowhere more glaringly than in the tech sector, where Amazon has been accused of manipulating prices to drive rivals out of business, and Apple and Google have been sued for allegedly using their dominance over phone app sales to benefit themselves over others.

That's why CR has called on government agencies to enforce existing antitrust laws, including stopping mergers and acquisitions likely to reduce competition. And we're urging new measures that recognize how our economy has changed and that update consumer protections for the digital world.

We've already seen early steps in the right direction. But a lasting shift requires businesses, government, and consumers to work together and take real action. The best option for us all is a competitive economy that prioritizes better consumer choices, not bigger corporations.

Marta Tellado

Marta L. Tellado,
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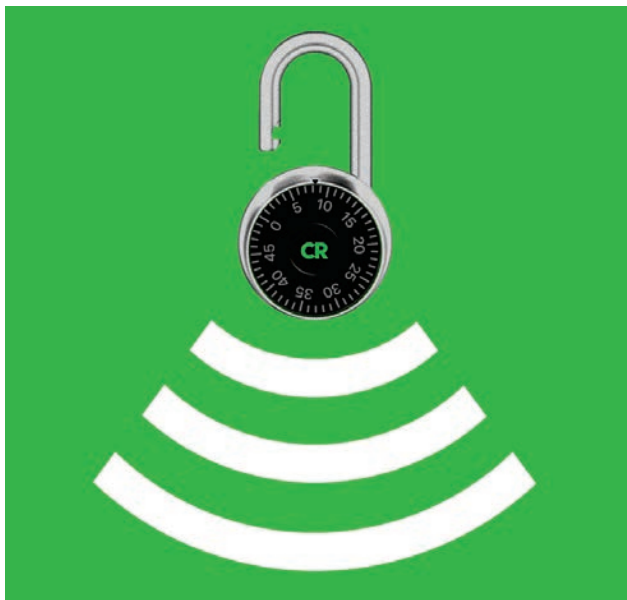
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More Accessible Broadband

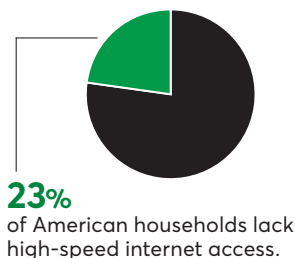
INTERNET ACCESS HAS BECOME a vital necessity, almost as essential to our lives as utilities like water and electricity.

Yet far too many of us either lack access to broadband or struggle to afford it. Almost a quarter of households are not connected to the internet via broadband, according to a June 2021 nationally representative CR survey of 2,565 U.S. adults—32 percent of them because it costs too much, 25 percent because it's not available in their area. Of those who do have broadband, 24 percent say it's difficult to afford.

CR has long urged policymakers to address these problems, and our efforts are now bearing fruit: The federal infrastructure bill signed into law in November includes \$65 billion for new broadband access and affordability initiatives, many of which CR has long championed. Some \$42.5 billion will go to building out broadband infrastructure, with a focus on underserved markets. An additional \$14.2 billion will extend subsidies created in response to the

pandemic to help low-income families afford high-speed internet.

The law will also require providers to use a standardized format to describe their service offerings and prices. Modeled on food nutrition labels, they'll help consumers understand exactly what they'll get for their money, and enable them to comparison shop for providers and service plans.



32% of them say it costs too much.

25% say it's not available where they live.



CALL TO ACTION

A recent CR investigation found that almost a third of popular spices and herbs—40 of the 126 products we tested—contained concerning levels of heavy metals. In most of those products, the amount of arsenic, lead, and cadmium combined poses a health risk for anyone regularly consuming them in typical serving sizes. In children, exposure can affect brain development; in adults, it can contribute to central nervous system and reproductive problems, and can damage kidney and immune function. Help us urge the Food and Drug Administration to set stricter limits on heavy metals in food by signing our petition at [CR.org/spices0222](https://www.consumersunion.org/spices0222).

Reducing Antibiotic Use

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Antibiotic drugs are gradually becoming less effective at treating human illnesses.

One reason is that many industrial farms overuse antibiotics in animals, often to prevent diseases caused by overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions. Such unnecessary use creates more opportunities for microbes to evolve, rendering antibiotics less effective. This also leads to drug-resistant strains of bacteria, such as salmonella and campylobacter, which are commonly spread by food animals. More than 35,000 people die each year from antibiotic-resistant infections, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In 2018, McDonald's, the nation's largest purchaser of beef, committed to reducing the amount of antibiotics it uses in the raising of its beef. At the time, CR and other consumer groups applauded the announcement. But the fast-food giant has



missed its own deadline for announcing reduction targets.

HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

CR has spent years putting a spotlight on this problem and promoting good stewardship of antibiotics by encouraging their use only for people and animals who need them to treat a diagnosed illness.

Now we are organizing consumers to send messages directly to the McDonald's CEO and board of directors, to let them know that action on antibiotic reduction is overdue.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Join us in telling McDonald's to live up to its commitment by reducing the use of medically important antibiotics in its supply chain. You can find the CR petition at [CR.org/antibiotics0222](https://www.consumersunion.org/antibiotics0222).



In our December 2021 article **“The Trouble With Spices,”** CR’s tests revealed that some popular products contained unsafe amounts of lead, arsenic, and cadmium. Readers wrote in with their concerns, as well as tips for DIY spices. To add your voice, go to **CR.org/safespice0222**.

THANK YOU for your article. We were taking supplementary turmeric but, based on the article, have decided that without further study, it is not a good idea. That said, we were surprised about all the herbs that were on the list as potentially having contamination. For the last several years we have been growing our own herbs, such as oregano, thyme, rosemary, sage, basil, and tarragon, as well as paprika peppers. In early fall, we harvest all our herbs, remove the stems, and

dry each separately in the sun. When dried, we either mince, or pulverize in a coffee mill (paprika and sage), for winter use. Many of these herbs can be grown indoors or on a deck, and some are winter-hardy, at least in western Oregon. We have always enjoyed growing our own herbs and are happy to see that is also a safer and less expensive method of obtaining cooking herbs.

–John Martin, Sweet Home, OR

MY HERBS GROW easily in pots, and I bring them inside over the Michigan winter. CR gives other ways to dry your own herbs, but I dry mine by pulling off the leaves and allowing them to dry on a plate.

–Beverly Tulett, via Facebook

I’D LIKE TO HEAR whether fresh spices (specifically oregano and thyme) from the supermarket are also contaminated (or likely to be contaminated). And if I was going to try and grow my own, what is the chance that my home soil or potting soil/other growth media from big-box garden stores is going to have these heavy metal contaminants?

–Denis Bergquist, via CR.org

EDITOR’S NOTE Fresh herbs can contain heavy metals, depending on the soil they’re grown in—and it’s hard to know what type of soil was used to grow the herbs you’re buying at the supermarket. If you want to grow your own, have the soil in your yard tested. Your local agricultural cooperative

extension office can give you advice. For a packaged soil or other growing medium, look for the OMRI Listed seal, which means the product has been assessed for heavy metals by the Organic Materials Review Institute.

I’m curious why cinnamon, a commonly used spice, was not evaluated. Would be helpful to indicate if there are any safe brands vs. brands to avoid here!
–Leigh Durlacher, via CR.org

EDITOR’S NOTE For this test, we chose the most popular herbs and spices with the greatest potential risk for heavy metal contamination. “We didn’t see evidence in our review of the scientific literature that metals in cinnamon were a problem,” says James E. Rogers, PhD, CR’s director of food safety research and testing. “However, because we didn’t test it, we can’t be sure what risk cinnamon might pose. We would consider including it in future testing.”

MY GROUND TURMERIC and ginger were on CR’s “concern” list! After reading this, I made sure to find a store near me that sells the noncontaminated brands.
–Chrissy Lee, via Facebook

IGNORANCE IS NOT BLISS. We can have foods without high levels of heavy metals and toxins, and I am thankful that tests are being done to shine a light on this issue so we can make safer choices.
–David Ryan, via Facebook



HEARING AIDS

REGARDING YOUR December 2021 article “Big News About Hearing Aids,” I have been



WRITE

Go to CR.org/lettertoeditor to share your comments for publication.

using hearing aids for over 30 years. I have used Oticon, Siemens, Phonak, and others—most in the \$3,000 range. All improve your hearing somewhat. But despite all the promises made, most advanced aids are still deficient in filtering out background noise. To my surprise, I have had the most success with a \$1,500 pair of aids purchased at Costco (and previously recommended by CR). In my experience, what distinguishes the Costco aids is the unlimited, no-charge care offered by Costco. They clean the units, change the domes, and tweak the Bluetooth connections whenever necessary—all for free. I am told that Costco audiologists do not receive sales commissions. If true, this makes me respect their counsel even more!

—Roger H. Lourie,
West Palm Beach, FL

I DON'T UNDERSTAND why there would be a stigma attached to having a hearing aid. No one cares if you get glasses, and those are a lot

more noticeable. I'm on my third set and have no reservations about wearing them or letting people know I use them.

—Masha Bean, via Facebook

FOR YOUR FIRST hearing aids, you need to have a period of adjustment. My audiologist started me with a level of adjustment that I could tolerate: She tapped, did typing, and crumpled paper to find the level. Every few weeks she adjusted them to be louder as I adapted to ignoring background noise. It took almost two months to get to the normal hearing level. I am so grateful I had a PhD-level audiologist to help me. I love my aids and wear them every minute I'm awake.

—Jean Hilliard Barnes,
via Facebook

MOST HUMANS with normal hearing can hear sounds at a frequency level between 20 and 20,000 hertz. (Frequency, sometimes referred to as pitch, is the number of times per second that a sound pressure wave repeats itself.) Most people with hearing loss can hear certain ranges of sound fine but have hearing loss in other frequency ranges. My hearing is much worse in the higher sound range but normal in the lower tone range. If a person with issues like mine bought hearing aids that just amplify everything and they turn them up to correct the high tones, they would also be amplifying the sound ranges that don't need to be amplified. The only way I would buy over-the-counter or direct-to-consumer hearing aids is by having an audiologist create an audiogram for my hearing-loss levels and buy hearing aids that can be programmed with that audiogram to amplify only the sound range and sound levels



TIRE-BUYING TIPS

Your "Tire-Buying Checklist" ("Get the Best New Tires for Less," December 2021) left off one item: Check the Department of Transportation stamp on the tire sidewall to make sure you are not buying old tires. Some "buy 3 tires, get 1 free" promotions are a way to get rid of old tire stock. Consumers need to learn how to read the last four digits of the DOT code—first two digits are the week, last two digits are the year. It is recommended that tires be replaced every six to 10 years regardless of a vehicle's mileage.

—Melanie Homer,
Jacksonville, FL

EDITOR'S NOTE Tires do indeed age and can deteriorate over time—even when they're just sitting on the shelf unused! CR recommends that you never drive on a tire that is 10 or more years old. (Some car manufacturers recommend replacement at six years.) When buying new tires, check to make sure they were not manufactured more than two years ago to ensure that you'll be able to drive on them for a long time.

that I need ... but I welcome the lower prices!

—Andrew Kovarik,
Edwardsville, IL

I WAS PLEASANTLY surprised that my traditional hearing aid doubles as a Bluetooth speaker for my smartphone.

—Bob Foos, via CR.org

EDITOR'S NOTE Being able to connect to devices such as your smartphone is a big advantage of the Bluetooth hearing aids. One note: Using the Bluetooth function (to stream audio while watching a movie, for example) can drain your hearing aid's battery more quickly.



TV ANTENNAS

YOUR DECEMBER 2021 article "Get Free TV With an Indoor Antenna" (CR Insights), suggests mounting an antenna directly on a window. Many people now have windows with "low-e" glass, which blocks infrared (heat) and longer-wavelength electromagnetic radiation, such as TV signals. So an antenna on such a window would work poorly.

—Robert Haas, Tualatin, OR

EDITOR'S NOTE Though we have not tested for this particular issue, some manufacturers agree that low-e, or low-emissivity, glass has a coating that blocks infrared radiation and may also block TV signals. The antenna manufacturer Mohu, for example, advises that consumers who have windows with low-e glass try placing the antenna on a wall directly beside the window instead, which may resolve the issue.

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What We're Testing in Our Labs ...

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

Convection Toaster Ovens

WE TESTED: 49 models
WE TEST FOR: How well a toaster oven bakes muffins and cookies, how evenly it toasts bread, how easy it is to clean, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 57
Range: 35-74

GREAT TOASTING & BAKING
WITH EASY-TO-USE CONTROLS
**Breville Smart Oven Air
Convection BOV900BSSUSC**
\$400

74
OVERALL
SCORE



QUICK TOASTING & LONG
WARRANTY (3 YEARS)
**Cuisinart Deluxe
Convection TOB-135N**
\$180

69
OVERALL
SCORE



NICE PRICE & EASY TO CLEAN
**Black+Decker 8-Slice Digital
Extra Wide TO3290XSD**
\$100

67
OVERALL
SCORE



Big-Screen TVs

WE TESTED: 55 models with 70-inch or larger screens
WE TEST FOR: Picture quality, including detail and color accuracy of images; sound quality; versatility of included apps and services; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 65
Range: 49-86

EXCELLENT ALL-AROUND (77")
LG OLED77C1PUB
\$2,900

84
OVERALL
SCORE



SUPERB SOUND &
RELIABLE BRAND (77")
Sony XR-77A80J
\$3,000

84
OVERALL
SCORE



GREAT BIG-SCREEN DEAL (75")
Hisense 75U6G
\$1,050

62
OVERALL
SCORE



Ask Our Experts

**My flat-screen
TV looks dusty.
How should I
clean it?**



Removing dust and fingerprints on an OLED, LCD, or plasma screen TV is easy, but it does require a careful touch or you could damage the screen. Turn off the TV: It's easier to see dirt and smudges when the screen is dark. Use a soft, anti-static microfiber cloth—the kind used to clean eyeglasses. (Don't use paper towels or tissues; they can scratch screens.) Wipe in circles with light pressure—pressing too hard could cause damage. For stubborn stains, slightly dampen the cloth with distilled water and gently try again. Never spray water directly onto the screen (water can get inside your TV and break it). Don't use chemical cleaners, such as Windex, which can ruin screens.

ILLUSTRATION: SERGE BLOCH

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

Wireless Headphones for \$50 or Less

WE TESTED: 22 models
WE TEST FOR: Quality of sound, including tonal accuracy, clarity, and more. We also survey CR members to assess a headphone brand's predicted reliability.

ABOUT THE SCORES:

Median: 62
 Range: 36-73

RELIABLE BRAND WITH GREAT SOUND
Sennheiser CX 150BT
 \$40

73
 OVERALL SCORE



BARGAIN BUDS
Skullcandy Dime True Wireless
 \$25

70
 OVERALL SCORE



NICE ON-EAR HEADPHONES
JBL Tune 510BT
 \$35

67
 OVERALL SCORE



Food Processors for \$100 or Less

WE TESTED: 50 models
WE TEST FOR: How well a model chops onions and almonds, slices celery and mushrooms, shreds carrots and cheddar cheese, grates Parmesan cheese, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:

Median: 61
 Range: 35-81

EFFICIENT CHOPPING & GRATING
Hamilton Beach 8-Cup Stack & Snap 70820
 \$100

67
 OVERALL SCORE



LARGE-CAPACITY CHOPPER
NutriChef NCFP8 Multipurpose 12 Cup
 \$75

61
 OVERALL SCORE



GOOD VEGGIE-SLICING POWERHOUSE
Magic Bullet MB50200 Kitchen Express 2-in-1 (4-cup capacity)
 \$60

60
 OVERALL SCORE



Fitness Trackers

WE TESTED: 22 models
WE TEST FOR: How easy the tracker is to use, including its heart rate accuracy, screen readability, versatility of features and apps, step count accuracy, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:

Median: 71
 Range: 30-84

VERSATILE COLOR TOUCH SCREEN WITH LONG BATTERY LIFE
Amazfit T-Rex Pro
 \$140

84
 OVERALL SCORE



ACCURATE & EASY TO USE
Fitbit Inspire 2
 \$100

84
 OVERALL SCORE



SLIM & BUDGET-FRIENDLY
3Plus HR Plus
 \$40

72
 OVERALL SCORE



Robotic Vacuums Under \$350

WE TESTED: 12 models
WE TEST FOR: How well a vacuum cleans carpet and bare floors and picks up pet hair, how well it cleans along edges and corners of a room, how noisy it is, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:

Median: 66
 Range: 32-72

BEST FOR PET HAIR
Eufy 11S
 \$200

72
 OVERALL SCORE



BEST FOR CLEANING CARPETS
iRobot Roomba e5
 \$320

70
 OVERALL SCORE



GOOD AT CLEANING BUT VERY SMALL DIRT BIN
Shark Ion 750 Connected
 \$228

66
 OVERALL SCORE



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

COMING NEXT MONTH Coffee Makers & More



When filling my gas tank I sometimes 'top it off' after the fuel pump automatically shuts off. Is this safe to do?

IT'S NOT UNCOMMON for drivers to keep going after the pump clicks off to round up the dollar amount of the sale. But this is a potentially dangerous habit that could end up costing you, our experts caution. This practice can damage the onboard refueling vapor recovery (ORVR) system, a charcoal canister that collects potentially harmful fuel vapors, by saturating it with fuel. When damaged, it might not do its job of collecting those vapors (emitting them into the outside air instead), triggering the "check engine light" to go on. Repairing the ORVR system can cost hundreds of dollars—money you'll be spending on a part that otherwise should last

the entire life of your vehicle. Additionally, when you overfill your tank, the likelihood that you spill a few drops of gas on the ground near the pump increases. That's a potential fire safety hazard—as well as an environmental one.

Should I buy an air fryer, or can I get similar results just using my regular oven?

IF YOU HAVE a convection oven or convection toaster oven, you can mimic the crispy fried texture that an air fryer provides, also without using a lot of oil to do it. That's because the convection setting, in which hot air is constantly circulated, using one or more fans, employs the same technology as countertop air fryers. In fact, some full-sized ovens and newer toaster ovens even have a dedicated "air fry" setting. To see how well these work, we made batches of frozen fries in a few full-sized

convection ovens, as well as in two convection toaster ovens.

Even without using any oil, our full-sized ovens turned out nicely golden fries—albeit not quite as beautifully browned as when we cooked them in a countertop air fryer. The often small capacity of stand-alone air fryers lets hot air circulate around food quickly, plus some offer basket-style accessories for better browning. But a full-sized oven has the benefit of holding much more food. As for the toaster ovens, a Breville model we tried (shown on page 10 of this issue) outperformed a competitor from Cuisinart, delivering crispy, golden food.

If you have a convection oven or toaster oven that doesn't have an air-fry setting, look for a convection "roast" or "bake" setting, and use a dark sheet pan (these heat up faster than light-colored ones) to get the crispiest results, advises Tara Casaregola, CR's test engineer in charge of ranges, cooktops, and wall ovens.

I have an Android phone. Is it possible to videochat with friends who have iPhones?

THERE ARE PLENTY of video-chat apps you can use to keep in touch with friends

and family members, "but it can be tricky to find the best option when Android users seek to connect with those who use Apple devices," says CR tech editor Nicholas De Leon. One option is to use Apple's well-known videochat app, FaceTime—but the Apple user needs to be the one to initiate the call: Just open the FaceTime app, tap "create link," then follow prompts to share that link with the Android user via text or email. When the Android user clicks the FaceTime link, they'll be prompted to join the video call.

One method for Android users to initiate video calls to those with iPhones may be to employ the Google Duo app, which comes standard on most Android phones, and is also available in Apple's app store. Google Duo lets you videochat with up to 32 people, and anyone with the app can initiate the call. If the person doesn't pick up, you can even leave a quick video message. Another option: You can both download an app such as Skype or Signal, which also allows any party to initiate or receive a video call. All the apps listed above, including FaceTime, use end-to-end encryption, which is designed to protect your personal data from digital snoops.



LEARN

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

CR Insights

IN THE KNOW

Great Gift Baskets for Less

THE WEBSITE PHOTOS of gift baskets always look so tempting: Delicious fruits and chocolates, cheeses and gourmet popcorn—all of them wrapped to perfection in beautiful containers. But just how closely will the basket you've ordered for a friend or colleague actually resemble what's pictured online?

To find out, we asked 25 CR staffers to purchase gift baskets for co-workers from several popular gifting websites. Each basket (or box) cost about \$100 before taxes and shipping fees, and senders noted the variety of options and ease of ordering. When the gift packages arrived, we then asked the recipients how satisfied they were with their gift basket or box. We also asked recipients to share

photos of their gifts with their senders so that they could also score how happy they were with what they'd ordered.

None of the gifts arrived looking exactly like the highly styled images on the website. But nearly all senders thought that the gifts they'd sent were a pretty close match to what

was shown online. Mouth, the top-ranking company, got high scores for satisfaction from its gift baskets' senders and receivers. Knack, like Mouth, lets users customize what's in their packages, and received high marks for recipient satisfaction. Olive & Cocoa also got some raves from recipients

(one called their box "elegant and sophisticated"). Harry & David, perhaps the most well-known gift basket company we tried, got the lowest scores. Our staffers reported three separate instances of receiving damaged pears. A few people felt Harry & David didn't pack enough in its baskets, given the price.



GREAT
VARIETY &
NICE
PACKAGING

Olive & Cocoa

- 3/5 ORDERING
- 5/5 RECIPIENT SATISFACTION
- 3/5 SENDER SATISFACTION

OLIVE & COCOA®

MOST SATISFYING & A NICE SELECTION OF GIFTS

Mouth

- 4/5 ORDERING
- 4/5 RECIPIENT SATISFACTION
- 4/5 SENDER SATISFACTION



GREAT DIY GIFT OPTIONS

Knack

- 4/5 ORDERING
- 5/5 RECIPIENT SATISFACTION
- 3/5 SENDER SATISFACTION



GOOD VARIETY BUT SOME FRUIT ARRIVED DAMAGED

Harry & David

- 3/5 ORDERING
- 4/5 RECIPIENT SATISFACTION
- 3/5 SENDER SATISFACTION



PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

Sheet Pans You'll Love

A SHEET PAN is a staple in any kitchen—but an inferior one can leave you with unevenly cooked food and be nearly impossible to clean. So in our search for the perfect sheet pan, we put 19 of them to the test: We loaded up each one with neat rows of sugar cookies to assess how evenly the pans baked both the bottoms and tops. Then we evaluated how well each sheet pan handled a complete dinner of chicken thighs, potatoes, onions, carrots, and celery. Finally, we checked to see how easy each pan

was to clean and performed abrasion tests on the pans to gauge the durability of their top surfaces.

In the end, we found a few near-perfect pans (shown below), and noted some key differences between the nonstick coated pans and the uncoated pans we tested: “Coated pans tend to heat up and cook food faster,” says Bernie Deitrick, the CR engineer who conducted our tests. “But the uncoated pans tend to bake more evenly and are more durable over time.”

TOP UNCOATED PAN
BUT HEAVY (3 LB.)

✓ **All-Clad D3
Stainless Jelly
Roll Pan** \$150

90 OVERALL
SCORE



5/5 EVENNESS
5/5 DURABILITY
2/5 CLEANING

BEST VALUE &
LIGHTWEIGHT (1 LB., 9 OZ.)

💰 **AmazonCommercial
Aluminum Baking
Half Sheet 2 Pack** \$25

88 OVERALL
SCORE



5/5 EVENNESS
5/5 DURABILITY
2/5 CLEANING

BEST NONSTICK &
EASY TO CLEAN

✓ **Williams Sonoma
Goldtouch Pro Nonstick
Non Corrugated
Half Sheet** \$33

83 OVERALL
SCORE



4/5 EVENNESS
3/5 DURABILITY
5/5 CLEANING

BARGAIN, DURABLE
NONSTICK

💰 **Mainstays (Walmart)
Gold Nonstick Aluminized
Half Sheet Pan** \$8

81 OVERALL
SCORE

4/5 EVENNESS
4/5 DURABILITY
4/5 CLEANING



CR Time Traveler CHOCOLATE



1907
The first
Hershey's
Chocolate
Kisses are sold.

1923 Mars Wrigley launches a new chocolate bar with malted milk, which it names “Milky Way.”



1939 We test 25 candy bar brands—all priced at 5 cents—and warn readers about the risk of tooth decay from eating candy. Nestlé's Puffed takes honors as the best milk chocolate bar.



1945 As World War II ends, American stores are restocked with affordable cocoa products. But when we examine some of them, some contain so much sediment that they taste “rusty.”



1959 Chocolate is the second-most-popular flavor of ice cream (after vanilla) in the U.S. In CR's tests of 45 brands of chocolate ice cream, Hershey's gets excellent marks for quality—and costs less than most.



REPAIR OR REPLACE?

THE MOST RELIABLE HEATING SYSTEMS

IN OUR RECENT surveys of consumer-owned heating systems*, we asked CR members how long they expected their systems—natural gas furnaces, boilers, or heat pumps—to last. Owners of heat pumps reported a median life expectancy of 15 years, and those who owned gas furnaces or boilers said they were hoping for about 20 years. But, on average, our analysis of the survey found that all three types of heating systems are likely to experience a breakdown halfway through that life expectancy—at eight years for heat pumps and 10 for gas furnaces and boilers.

The good news: CR members who paid for repairs out of pocket reported them costing between \$300 and \$400, no matter which system they had. That's thousands of dollars less than buying a new system, so it's often worth attempting a repair first. When you do need to buy a new system, you'll want one that lasts. At right: the most and least reliable brands from our survey.

To see our full reliability ratings with more brands, Digital and All Access members can go to [CR.org/heat0222](https://www.consumerreports.org/heat0222).

Predicted reliability

GAS FURNACES

Payne	5/5
Trane	5/5
Coleman	2/5
Luxaire	2/5
York	2/5
Frigidaire	2/5
Maytag	2/5
White-Westinghouse	2/5

BOILERS

Burnham	5/5
Crown	5/5
Lennox	5/5
Dunkirk	2/5
Utica Boilers	2/5

HEAT PUMPS

American Standard	5/5
Trane	5/5
Frigidaire	2/5
Maytag	2/5
White-Westinghouse	2/5

*Results are based on our 2019 and 2021 Summer Surveys of 36,348 gas furnaces, 13,458 heat pumps, and 2,137 boilers owned by members who installed a new system between 2005 and 2021. Predicted reliability ratings are based on a statistical model that estimates problem rates for systems that are not covered by a service contract or extended warranty by the end of the eighth year of ownership for heat pumps and by the end of the 10th year of ownership for furnaces and boilers. We also control for the number of months these systems are used per year.



1971 "Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory," starring Gene Wilder, hits theaters. The film's chocolate river was reportedly made with real chocolate.

1986 In CR's taste tests, we find that a less pricey American-made Ghirardelli milk chocolate bar (39 cents per ounce) rates higher than a Swiss-made Lindt bar (55 cents per ounce).



1996 CR tests 12 brands of boxed chocolates—and the quality varies widely. Godiva, a top-scoring brand, offers smooth chocolate with fresh-tasting fillings such as the raspberry preserves above.



2014 In a test of 21 chocolate bars, our testers crown Trader Joe's dark chocolate bar as a CR Best Buy—saving \$1.50 per serving compared with a dark chocolate Scharffen Berger Bittersweet bar.



Hu Organic Simple Dark Chocolate
70% Cacao
\$6.70

2022 We try 10 dark chocolate bars to find healthy, high-cacao choices that are tasty enough to be enjoyable. The Hu bar, above, is moderately sweet, with strong fruit flavors.

FOOD IQ™

The Healthiest Tea for You

ASIDE FROM PLAIN WATER, tea is the most popular beverage in the world. And that's a good thing: Research suggests that drinking tea may lower your risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and more. Some experts even recommend drinking 2 to 3 cups a day. But different types of tea offer different health benefits. Here, we compare the perks of four common teas.



BLACK TEA

This is the most caffeinated type of tea—about 50 mg in one 8-ounce cup—which is about half of what's in a cup of coffee. Black tea leaves are rolled or crushed to release an enzyme that oxidizes its catechins (a type of antioxidant), giving the brew its rich flavor and color. Drinking it regularly may help strengthen your bones: In one study, postmenopausal women who drank black tea regularly over five years had higher bone mineral density than those who didn't.



GREEN TEA

Made from the same leaves as black tea but steamed to prevent oxidation, green tea has long been celebrated for its health properties. Its combo of caffeine (about 30 mg in 1 cup) and plentiful amount of catechins can boost mental alertness, and even raise your metabolic rate so that you burn more calories (though the effect may be too small to help you lose weight). Some data suggests that green tea can also reduce cholesterol and blood pressure, and so lowers your risk of heart attack or stroke.



OOLONG TEA

This tea is made from the same leaves as green and black tea, but oolong leaves are partially dried and then rolled gently to allow partial oxidation. This process can give oolong a yellow-green color (some are more brown when rolled harder). Oolong tea can have slightly more caffeine than green tea, and a decent amount of antioxidants. In particular, oolong has a type of antioxidant called theasinensins, which may reduce inflammation and offer some immune system protection.



WHITE TEA

White tea is made from young tea leaf buds that are rapidly steamed and dried right after picking. This stops those leaves from browning. Because of its mild color and flavor, many people think that white tea contains little caffeine, but a brewed cup can have roughly the same amount of caffeine as green tea. A benefit of drinking this tea is that it has more catechins than other types of teas, which may help keep blood vessels open, as well as help the body break down fat.



CR TIME SAVER

STOP GETTING UNWANTED EMAILS

DO YOU SPEND time every day trashing promotional emails you don't want? Try this easy strategy to stop all that junk from cluttering up your inbox.

The problem starts when online retailers offer you coupons—like 15 percent off your first purchase—for subscribing to their newsletters or signing up for their promotional emails. These deals are tempting, but it's also how you end up with an inbox full of junk emails that use up storage space and make it harder for you to see the emails you really *do* want to read.

The good news is that you can still get a promotional discount without inviting a new flood of emails into your inbox. You just need to use a temporary email address generator, such as 10MinuteMail, Temp Mail, MinuteInbox,

and EmailOnDeck. When you go to any of these websites, they'll provide you with a free, temporary email address and an inbox for viewing any messages sent to it for a short period of time (typically about 10 minutes).

Or, for extra convenience, you may prefer to use Firefox Relay, a temporary email management service that Firefox users can download as a browser extension. (Go to relay.firefox.com to sign up.) Once you've downloaded the extension, it allows you to generate and fill in a temporary email address directly into any web page you're on. The service will also remember the temporary email addresses it has created for you for different sites, in case you want to reuse it in the future.



EDITOR'S CHOICE

Patagonia Black Hole Mini MLC

\$170 (shown at left)
(19.5Hx12.25Wx6D inches)

Pros: A versatile bag with thoughtful design that includes lots of mesh pockets and cubbies for organization. It's easy to carry and was able to fit in every item we packed, with a bit of room to spare.

Cons: If you fill it to the brim (with more items than we did), it might not fit under an airline seat.

BEST FOR BUSINESS TRAVEL

Incase EO Travel Backpack \$180

(21.5Hx15Wx5D inches)

Pros: This polished-looking pack offers smart organizers and a large capacity, perfect for carrying a portable office setup (laptop, mouse, etc.) as well as a change of clothes. And its compression straps help it squeeze under a plane seat.

Cons: The lack of a waist strap leaves your shoulders carrying all of the pack's weight.



CR SMART SHOPPER

The Best Backpacks for Travel

WHEN YOU HEAD to the airport, you want your free “personal item” to be both easy to tote and able to include necessities—while still sliding neatly under the seat in front of you. A backpack is just the thing for the job, but when our editors took a close look at 10 “travel” packs, we found that some work better than others.

All of the bags we tried are roughly 18 to 21 inches high and 13 to 15 inches wide (a range that should meet most airline size requirements), and all were priced at \$300 or less. We evaluated how well each bag accommodated and organized roughly 30 essential items, including personal care products; a change of clothing;

books; tech items such as a camera, a laptop, and charging cords; an umbrella; a water bottle; snacks; sunglasses; pens; and more. We also assessed how comfortably each backpack could be carried for long stretches of time, its general sturdiness, and how easily a full bag fits under an airline seat.

Several of the backpacks we tried handled these basic tasks well (see four smart picks at right), but our hands-down favorite is the Patagonia, above, for its winning combination of size, utility, comfort, and sturdiness.

For more backpack reviews, go to [CR.org/backpack0222](https://www.consumerreports.org/backpack0222).

SMALL & BUDGET-FRIENDLY

Ebags Pro Slim Laptop Backpack \$100

(18Hx12.75Wx8.5D inches)

Pros: This sturdy, slim bag offers many smart organizing pockets and comfy shoulder straps for a lower price than most.

Cons: It isn't as spacious as other bags we tried, so it's better for lighter packers. It also lacks the overall refinement of pricier bags, such as the Incase above.



LARGE & RUGGED

Yeti Crossroads 27L \$230

(19.75Hx12Wx9D inches)

Pros: It's roomy inside, water resistant outside, and very comfortable to wear even on long-haul adventures.

Cons: The Yeti is pricier and bulkier than many of the bags we evaluated (it weighs 3.6 pounds), and is not as ideal for business travel because it lacks organizing touches like slots for pens and small items.



THE BEST WAY TO COOK ...

Secrets to Perfect Stovetop Rice

No rice cooker? No worries. It's surprisingly easy to make fluffy, tasty rice in a pot on your stove. Just follow these foolproof directions.



20 MINUTES

to cook most white rices

45 MINUTES

to cook most brown rices

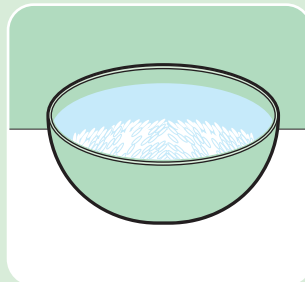
TOOLS NEEDED

- A fine-mesh strainer
- A large mixing bowl or pot for soaking rice
- A cooking pot big enough for your rice to double in size, with a tight-fitting lid to prevent steam from escaping



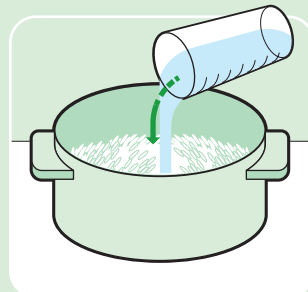
STEP 1

Using a mesh strainer, rinse your rice in cool water until it runs clear to separate any clumps and get rid of the excess starch on the grains. It also helps reduce the dirt, dust, and arsenic that can be present in rice: Rinsing can reduce your exposure to arsenic by 30 percent.



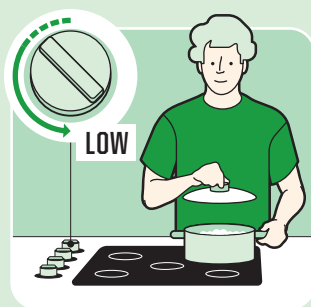
STEP 2

If you're using heartier grains such as brown rice, or Japanese short-grain rice (typically used in sushi rolls), it's generally a good idea to soften up the rice by soaking it in a bowl of water for at least 30 minutes to an hour. This helps ensure that your rice ends up tender, not crunchy.



STEP 3

For most types of white rice, you'll need to add about $1\frac{1}{4}$ to $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups of water to the pot for every cup of rice you want to cook. Brown rice and wild rice tend to need more water: about $2\frac{1}{4}$ cups of water to 1 cup of rice. When in doubt, use the measuring tip below.



STEP 4

Bring to a boil uncovered, then reduce the heat to low, cover with lid, and cook until the water is absorbed. Steam should steadily plume from the sides of the lid, but reduce heat if water bubbles out. Set a timer for 20 minutes for white rice and 45 minutes for brown rice.

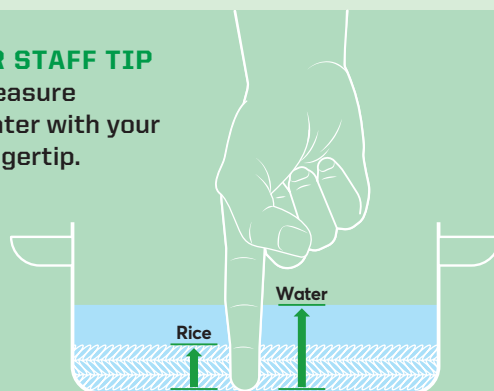


STEP 5

Once the water is absorbed, the rice is done. Leave the lid on and remove the pot from heat. Let it stand for 10 minutes before fluffing with a fork. If it's undercooked, put it in a microwave-safe bowl, cover it, and microwave for 1 to 2 minutes to help soften it.

CR STAFF TIP

Measure water with your fingertip.



Aimee Soriano, manager of data operations at CR, relies on what she calls an ancient Asian secret to achieving a perfect rice-to-water ratio—without a measuring cup. “I place my fingertip on the bottom of the pot and measure the rice to the first knuckle,” she says.



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).



HONDA SUVs & PICKUP TRUCKS

Honda is recalling almost 725,000 vehicles, including the 2019 Passport SUV, 2016-2019 Pilot SUV, and 2017-2020 Ridgeline pickup truck, because their hoods could open while driving. The issue is due to a combination of factors, including a faulty hood latch striker design and a gap between the hood and the grille that could cause the hood to open while the vehicle is in motion, blocking the driver's view of the road.

What to do: Owners can call Honda at 888-234-2138. Honda's ID for this recall is PBV. Depending on the vehicle, Honda dealerships may repair the hood and install a striker support plate, or completely replace the hood with a new part. These repairs will be performed free of charge. Owners who have already paid for a related repair should contact their Honda dealership about a reimbursement.

GOODMAN MANUFACTURING GAS FURNACE DRAIN PANS

Goodman Manufacturing Company is recalling about 298,300 evaporator coil drain pans installed with residential condensing gas furnaces in an upflow configuration because the molded plastic drain pan can overheat, melt, and deform, posing a fire hazard. The equipment was sold at heating and cooling equipment independent dealers nationwide from January 2019 through November 2021 for \$200 to \$1,200 per unit (drain pan paired with evaporator coil). Or you may have purchased a bundled product including the coil, furnace, installation, and ancillary parts and supplies, or may have purchased the evaporator coil drain pan alone as a replacement product.

What to do: Contact Goodman Manufacturing at 888-520-0579 or go to goodmanmfg.com for details and to register for a free repair by a qualified technician.

KUBOTA UTILITY VEHICLES

Kubota Tractor Corporation is recalling about 48,875 RTV-X1100C model utility vehicles because the floor mats can warp or degrade and interfere with the throttle pedal, posing crash and injury hazards. The vehicles were sold at authorized Kubota dealers nationwide from April 2013 through September 2021 for \$21,300 to \$22,950.

What to do: Stop using the vehicle and contact an authorized Kubota dealer, call the company at 888-458-2682, or go to kubotausa.com for details. If the floor mat is warped or degraded, consumers will receive a new one that will be installed by the dealer and secured to the floor. If the floor mat is not warped or degraded, the dealer will complete a modification to the mat by trimming it and then securing it to the floor.

HART NAILER TOOLS

Hart Consumer Products is recalling about 15,700 Hart 18-gauge 2-inch brad nailers because the contact sensor on the nailer can malfunction and involuntarily discharge a nail, posing a risk of serious injury to the user or bystanders. The nailers were sold at Walmart stores nationwide and online at walmart.com from April 2021 through September 2021 for \$130 to \$160.

What to do: Stop using the recalled nailer and return it to any Walmart USA store for a full refund. Consumers may also

return items free by mail via a scheduled pickup from your home. To schedule a free pickup, call 800-776-5191. For details, call Hart Consumer Products at 800-776-5191 or go to harttools.com.

AMAZON BASICS MATTRESSES

Amazon is recalling about 15,300 Amazon Basics Memory Foam mattresses because they fail to meet the mandatory federal flammability standard for mattresses, posing a fire hazard. The mattresses were sold on Amazon from April 2020 through March 2021 for \$150 to \$450.

What to do: Amazon is contacting all purchasers to arrange for direct shipment of a cover for consumers to place over the mattress, free of charge. Call Amazon at 877-444-3765 or go to amazonmattressrecall.expertinquiry.com for details.

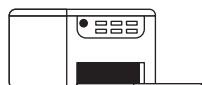
IMPEX FITNESS DUMBBELLS

Impex Fitness is recalling about 77,200 Olympic dumbbell handles because they can drop weights when held perpendicular to the floor, posing an injury hazard. The handles were sold at Dick's Sporting Goods stores nationwide and online at dickssportinggoods.com from July 2015 through July 2021 for about \$50.

What to do: Stop using the handles and call 800-999-8899 or go to impex-fitness.com for details.

FEBRUARY IS THE BEST TIME TO BUY ...

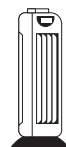
PRINTERS



SNOW BLOWERS



SPACE HEATERS



For more info, go to [CR.org/buy0222](https://www.consumerreports.org/buy0222).

PRODUCT UPDATE



THE LATEST
RATINGS FROM
OUR LABS

The Top Cereals From Our Tests

CR evaluated 32 cereals, searching for the ones that taste great and are good for you, too.

by Rachel Meltzer Warren



YOU MAY LOVE a bowl of Froot Loops, but you're probably under no illusion that eating it is good for you. But what about Flax Maple Pecan Crunch or Smart Start?

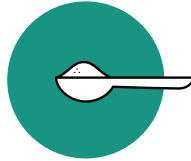
"Whole-grain cereal—especially if you eat it with milk and add some fruit—could be a pretty good way to start your day," says Joan Salge Blake, RDN, a nutrition professor at Boston University. Indeed, eating it may lower risk of heart disease and type 2 diabetes. However, the kind of cereal you pour into your bowl matters.

"Even among whole-grain cereals, there are nutritional differences," says Amy Keating, RD, a Consumer Reports nutritionist. For example, a serving of that healthy-sounding Smart Start has about the same added-sugar content—4½ teaspoons—as a serving of Cap'n Crunch. Shopping for cereal also means assessing on-trend "wellness" ingredients like flax and turmeric, and intriguing health claims such as "grain-free."

CR nutrition and sensory experts munched their way through 32 cereals—both traditional and grain-free options—that at a glance seem good for you. Our findings can help you start the day with a bowl that's healthy and tasty.

Look Past Names and Claims

Wholesome-looking packaging and one or two "superfood" ingredients don't necessarily translate to a better cereal. In our tests, classics such as Cheerios and Grape-Nuts Flakes rated better for nutrition than newcomers with ingredients like flax, turmeric, and ancient grains. "These ingredients don't guarantee extra benefits and, in a few cases, had drawbacks," Keating says. For example, Nature's Path Organic Golden Turmeric Cereal is among the lowest in fiber in our tests, while Special K Protein Honey Almond Ancient Grains is high in added sugars and has soy protein isolate, a highly processed ingredient.



A LITTLE SUGAR ISN'T A BAD THING

TO BE CLEAR, a cereal doesn't have to be sugar-free to make it a healthy breakfast. "Let's pick our battles wisely," says Joan Salge Blake, RDN. If some sugar helps you make a fiber-rich, nutrient-packed cereal part of your morning routine, it's worth it.

And our testers gave several lightly sweetened cereals high marks for nutrition and taste. Among the 10 that are recommended in our ratings, eight had around 1 teaspoon (4 grams) of added sugars or less per serving, and all received Excellent or Very Good taste scores.

CR's nutrition experts recommend choosing a cereal with less than 6 grams of added sugars (1½ teaspoons). When you consider the fact that people tend to eat more than one serving of cereal in a meal, you see how the sugars can add up. One way to keep the sweetness without overdoing it on added sugars is to blend half a serving of a favorite sugary cereal with half a serving of a less sugary one. Or try topping a lower-sugar option with fruit, which will add fiber, as well as sweeten it up without any added sugars.

Grain-Free Has Downsides

Their higher protein and lower sugars content can make grain-free cereals seem appealing, particularly to people on a paleo or keto diet. The ones we looked at range from 4 to 12 grams of protein and 0 to 4 grams of added sugars per serving; some are sweetened with allulose or monk fruit, sugar substitutes with negligible calories. (The grain cereals have 2 to 15 grams of protein and 0 to 18 grams of added sugars.) They aren't low-carb, though. Their carbs come from bean flours, cassava (a root vegetable), and tapioca and potato starches instead of from grains. Those on the higher side for protein rely, in many cases, on processed isolated proteins from sources like lentils, milk, and peas.


You don't have to go grain-free to get more protein. Serving cereal with a cup of low-fat dairy or soy milk, or ¾ cup of low-fat yogurt, adds around 8 grams of protein, similar to an egg, Keating says. As for sugars, several lower-sugar grain cereals in our tests earned top marks for taste. None of the six grain-free cereals was a flavor standout. They also cost around twice as much as traditional cereals.

Portion Size Matters

Cereal serving sizes range from ⅔ cup to 1½ cups. That amount can look puny in a bowl, and most people eat more. In a CR test, participants were asked to pour out the amount of cereal they'd typically eat. Almost everyone overpoured—by 43 to 114 percent more than the serving on the box when using a medium-sized bowl, depending on the type of cereal.

That's not necessarily unhealthy, but you should be aware of how much you're eating. For instance, 2 cups of Post Great Grains Raisins, Dates & Pecans, which received a Very Good nutrition score, has over 500 calories. "Pour the amount you normally eat, and measure it," Keating says. "Then do the math so you know how many calories and how much sugars and sodium you're really getting."

Ratings ➤ **Out of the Box** Our tests of 32 healthy-sounding cereals uncovered surprising differences in nutrition and taste. Cereals are listed from best to worst by nutrition score.

Product	Ratings		Pricing	Nutrition Information									Flavor + Texture Description
	Nutrition score	Taste score	Price per package/ package size (price per serving)	Serving size (cups)	Calories	Total fat (g)	Saturated fat (g)	Carbs (g)	Fiber (g)	Added sugars (g)	Protein (g)	Sodium (mg)	
TRADITIONAL CEREALS													
✔ Nature's Path Organic Heritage Flakes	⬆️	⬆️	\$5.30/13 oz. (\$0.59)	1	160	2	0	31	7	5	5	170	Toasted-wheat and slightly sweet flavors. Crunchy and slightly hard even in milk.
✔ Post Grape-Nuts Flakes*	⬆️	⬆️	\$4.00/18 oz. (\$0.33)	1	150	2	0	34	5	3	4	200	Slightly sweet and crispy, with a big toasted-grain flavor that intensifies in milk.
✔ General Mills Cheerios*	⬆️	⬆️	\$3.00/9 oz. (\$0.50)	1½	140	3	1	29	4	2	5	190	Toasted-oat flavor with very little sweetness or other flavors.
✔ Post Great Grains Raisins, Dates & Pecans*	⬆️	⬆️	\$4.70/16 oz. (\$0.59)	¾	200	4	0	40	4	4	4	140	Fruit is moist and chewy. Not too sweet. Stays crunchy in milk.
✔ General Mills Total*	⬆️	⬆️	\$4.00/16 oz. (\$0.36)	1	140	1	0	33	4	5	3	190	Has toasted-wheat, slightly sweet, and malty flavors that intensify in milk.
✔ One Degree Organic Foods Sprouted Ancient Maize Flakes	⬆️	⬆️	\$7.20/12 oz. (\$1.03)	¾	180	2	0	39	3	4	3	260	A little gritty. Big toasted-corn flavor and slightly sweet. Stays crisp in milk.
✔ General Mills Wheaties*	⬆️	⬆️	\$5.00/16 oz. (\$0.42)	1	130	1	0	30	4	5	3	240	Toasted-wheat and lightly sweet malty flavors.
✔ Kind Honey Almond	⬆️	⬆️	\$6.00/15 oz. (\$0.75)	¾	250	11	4	35	4	7	6	80	Moderately sweet, with honey and cinnamon flavors. Lots of toasted almond slices and coconut flakes.
✔ Post Grape-Nuts Original*	⬆️	⬆️	\$4.90/21 oz. (\$0.49)	½	200	1	0	47	7	0	6	280	Big toasted-wheat and barley flavors. Malty but not sweet. Hard, even in milk, but the longer it sits, the softer the texture becomes.
✔ Barbara's Multigrain Spoonfuls Original	⬆️	⬆️	\$4.70/14 oz. (\$0.47)	1	140	2	0	31	5	7	5	210	Sweet, with flavors of brown sugar and molasses.
Food For Life Organic Ezekiel 4:9 Cinnamon Raisin	⬆️	⬇️	\$7.70/16 oz. (\$0.96)	½	190	1	0	38	5	1	7	130	Strong grain flavor with some cinnamon and very little sweetness. Crunchy and slightly hard even in milk. Hard raisins.
Post Bran Flakes*	⬆️	⬇️	\$6.40/16 oz. (\$0.49)	1	110	1	0	29	7	6	4	190	Toasted-wheat and bran flavors with very slight sweetness.
Nature's Path Organic Flax Plus Maple Pecan Crunch	⬇️	⬆️	\$5.40/12 oz. (\$1.08)	1	240	8	1	41	5	9	7	210	Big pecan and maple flavors that are enhanced by milk.
Cascadian Farm Organic Multi Grain Squares	⬇️	⬆️	\$4.00/12 oz. (\$0.80)	1¼	260	2	0	54	5	9	6	240	Tastes mostly of wheat. Milk brings out sweet and malty flavors.
General Mills Wheat Chex*	⬇️	⬆️	\$3.00/14 oz. (\$0.50)	1	210	1	0	51	8	6	6	340	Toasted-wheat flavor and very lightly sweet. Stays crispy in milk.
Quaker Oatmeal Squares Cinnamon*	⬇️	⬆️	\$4.00/15 oz. (\$0.57)	1	210	3	1	44	5	9	6	190	Moderately sweet, with cinnamon and brown sugar flavors. Crunchy and hard even in milk.
Kellogg's Raisin Bran	⬇️	⬆️	\$3.00/24 oz. (\$0.27)	1	190	1	0	47	7	9	5	200	Lots of large, moist, sugar-coated raisins. Toasted-wheat flavor. Stays crispy in milk.
Quaker Life*	⬇️	⬆️	\$3.70/18 oz. (\$0.31)	1	160	2	0	33	3	8	4	200	Toasted-grain flavor, with sugar crystals throughout. Crispy but softens in milk.
Cascadian Farm Organic Hearty Morning Fiber	⬇️	⬇️	\$4.00/15 oz. (\$0.67)	1	220	4	1	51	10	10	6	180	Toasted-grain with slightly sweet and honey flavors. Slightly bitter and gritty.

Product	Ratings		Pricing	Nutrition Information									Flavor + Texture Description
	Nutrition score	Taste score	Price per package/ package size (price per serving)	Serving size (cups)	Calories	Total fat (g)	Saturated fat (g)	Carbs (g)	Fiber (g)	Added sugars (g)	Protein (g)	Sodium (mg)	

TRADITIONAL CEREALS *Continued*

Barbara's Puffins Multigrain*			\$4.30/10 oz. (\$0.61)	1	130	1	0	33	4	7	3	100	Moderately sweet and vanilla flavors. Some pieces taste stale and get stuck in your teeth. Milk intensifies sweetness.
Nature's Path Organic Golden Turmeric Cereal			\$5.80/11 oz. (\$0.73)	1	160	2	1	34	2	6	2	190	Sweet, with distinct cinnamon, turmeric, and ginger flavors. A bit spicy, but milk mellows the flavor. Stays crunchy in milk.
Kashi Go Crunch			\$4.90/14 oz. (\$0.70)	¾	190	3	0	38	9	11	9	100	Sweet, with brown sugar and cinnamon flavors. A bit crumbly.
Kellogg's Special K Protein Honey Almond Ancient Grains*			\$4.00/11 oz. (\$0.80)	1½	220	3	0	38	6	9	15	270	Honey and maple flavors somewhat overpower grain flavor. Sparse almonds.
Kellogg's Frosted Mini Wheats Original*			\$3.30/24 oz. (\$0.30)	1	210	2	0	51	6	12	5	10	Moderately sweet. Crispy, but gets very soft in milk.
Kellogg's Special K*			\$4.40/18 oz. (\$0.34)	1¼	150	1	0	29	<1	4	7	270	Mild toasted-rice and slightly sweet flavors that are enhanced by milk.
Kellogg's Smart Start*			\$5.00/18 oz. (\$0.63)	1¼	240	1	0	56	3	18	5	260	Quite sweet, with a hint of cinnamon.

GRAIN-FREE CEREALS

Forager Project Organic Grain-Free Os Cinnamon			\$6.00/7.5 oz. (\$0.86)	1	110	1	0	26	4	3	4	5	Slightly gritty. Has vegetal, floral, and cinnamon flavors. Stays crispy in milk. Made from cassava, beans, and pea protein.
Love Grown Grain Free Cinnamon Sweet Potato			\$6.00/8 oz. (\$1.00)	1	130	4.5	1.5	21	4	4	10	75	Milk intensifies the very slight bitter and vegetal flavors and makes it slightly mushy. Slightly cinnamon. Made from pea protein, cassava, tapioca and potato starches, and almond flour.
Seven Sundays Grain Free Real Cinnamon			\$7.00/8 oz. (\$1.17)	1	140	2	1.5	24	2	2	5	10	Very little sweetness. Slight cinnamon flavor with some bitterness. Crunchy and slightly tough. Made from cassava and sunflower protein.
Three Wishes Grain Free Cinnamon			\$10.00/8.6 oz. (\$1.43)	¾	120	2	0	18	3	3	8	130	Quite sweet, with big cinnamon flavor. Made from chickpeas, tapioca starch, and pea protein. Sweetened with monk fruit and sugar.
Kashi Go Grain Free Cinnamon Vanilla			\$5.50/7 oz. (\$1.10)	1	160	7	1	18	5	0	12	160	Cinnamon and vegetal flavors, with some maple. Slightly bitter. Made from lentil and pea proteins, chickpea flour, and tapioca starch. Sweetened with monk fruit and allulose.
Magic Spoon Grain-Free Cinnamon			\$9.80/7 oz. (\$1.96)	1	140	7	1	15	2	0	12	150	Moderately sweet and cinnamon. Airy texture; sticks to teeth. Made from milk proteins and tapioca starch. Sweetened with monk fruit and allulose.

HOW WE TEST: The **nutrition score** is based on values from the nutrition facts panel (e.g., sodium, fiber, added sugars), and the number of processed

ingredients in the cereal, such as preservatives and isolated proteins or fibers. The quantity of whole grains and organic certification are also factored

in. The **taste score** is based on the results of a tasting panel of trained sensory experts. Cereals were tasted with and without milk. Because the

ingredients are so different, grain-free cereals are rated separately.



How to Get the



You Really Need

Can't wake up in the morning? Can't fall asleep at night? Whatever is disrupting your dreams, we have expert advice and new tools to help get you snoozing soundly.

BY MICHELE LENT HIRSCH

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JOE DARROW

SLEEP PROBLEMS ARE a hallmark of modern American life—perhaps never more so than recently. Back in 2016, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that a third of Americans were getting too little sleep at night. But then came the stressors of the pandemic, job losses, disrupted schedules, and closed schools, which kept record numbers of Americans up at night or unable to wake up in the morning.

As many as 2 in 3 Americans reported getting either too much or little sleep, in a survey from the American Psychological Association in the pandemic's second year. And though some parts of life are now returning to normal, the insomnia of the past two years may be stubbornly hanging on: Many people continue having more trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, or have seen unusual shifts in their sleep schedules.

All of this is taking a toll. “These different types of sleep changes seem to be closely related to [problems with] mental health,” says Karianne Dion, a graduate student in clinical psychology at the University of Ottawa. Research she co-authored, published in the *Journal of Sleep Research* in 2021, found “worse symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression” among those who are sleeping less or going to bed later and waking up later than before.

Researchers have long known that anxiety and depression can lead to sleeplessness, while sleeping poorly can increase the likelihood of anxiety and depression. But a good night's rest is also critical for a strong immune system, as well as for health overall. Insufficient sleep over time is associated with a greater risk of diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease, according to the CDC. It can lead to memory and cognitive issues as well.

So how can we get the sleep we need? It's not easy to just flip a switch and start sleeping soundly again—if you ever did in the first place. Here's how to solve seven common problems that can interfere with your rest and your health.

PROBLEM

I often wake up in the middle of the night or early in the morning and then can't get back to sleep.



SOLUTION If light coming into your bedroom is the issue, light-blocking products like blackout curtains or a sleep mask may do the trick. (See pages 28 and 29 for more ideas.) You might also want to cut back on—or cut out—caffeine (which can keep you perky long after you've consumed it) and alcohol (which can interfere with deep sleep).

Many people, however, sleep lightly due to “hypervigilance,” says Rafael Pelayo, MD, clinical professor at Stanford University's division of sleep

medicine and author of “How to Sleep: The New Science-Based Solutions for Sleeping Through the Night” (Artisan, 2020). In this context, hypervigilance refers to focusing too much on what might disrupt your slumber—before you doze off and even while you're sleeping. This leads to an acute awareness of your environment and, paradoxically, can make it harder to sleep.

The best way to address this is a form of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) known as CBT-I—the “I” stands for insomnia, for which it's often the go-to treatment. CBT-I offers techniques that can help you identify and modify thinking patterns and habits that keep you from sleeping. For example, people who spend 9 hours in bed at night but only

6 hours sleeping might be instructed to lessen their in-bed time by 2½ hours for a week. If that cuts down on unwanted wakeups, they may slowly add back in-bed hours.

Though you can ask a sleep doctor about CBT-I, you can learn to do it on your own, too, Pelayo says. Consider an app, like CBT-i Coach, which Stanford University developed in collaboration with the federal government. (The app's makers say it's not a replacement for therapy.) You can also teach yourself strategies to employ when you can't fall back asleep, such as taking some slow, deep breaths, aiming for about six breaths per minute.

PROBLEM

Nature always calls in the middle of the night—often multiple times.



SOLUTION “Waking up once during the night to use the bathroom is completely normal,” says Abigail Maller, MD, an assistant clinical professor of pulmonary, critical care, and sleep medicine at UCLA.

But if you find that you awaken two or more times each night for restroom visits, try reducing the salt in your diet, Maller suggests, because excess sodium—which your kidneys will try to flush out—can contribute. You may also want to avoid fluids in the 2 hours before bed, while making sure you hydrate well earlier in the day.

If these steps have little effect, consult your doctor. The awakenings “may be a symptom of an underlying issue” such as a sleep disorder or diabetes, says Maller. The good news is that treating the root medical problem may reduce your middle-of-the-night bathroom trips as well.

PROBLEM

When I get into bed, my mind races, and it takes me too long to fall asleep.

SOLUTION Lying in bed with your bedroom dark, quiet, and at a comfortable temperature, try a short relaxation exercise—like tensing and then relaxing groups of muscles, starting at your feet and finishing with your neck and face. This may reduce physical tension in the body and help short-circuit thoughts that can interfere with sleep, according to the National Institutes of Health.

If you've been in bed for a while and still can't nod off, go to another room and do a calming activity, rather than lying there watching the minutes tick by. Wait until you feel sleepy again before returning to your bedroom.

Longer-term, have a plan for heading off nighttime fretting: Before getting under the covers, make a habit of writing down the next day's tasks, rather than holding it all in your head. One small 2018 study found that people who spent 5 minutes creating a to-do list before bed fell

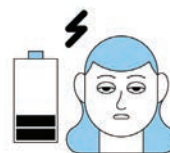
asleep faster than a control group.

It's also helpful to establish a consistent bedtime and wake time, so your body gets used to falling asleep when you need it to. And avoid all screens for at least a half-hour before bed. In the few hours before you turn away from your TV and phone, consider shielding your eyes from their glow by using blue-light-blocking glasses or an app like f.lux or Night Shift. Blue light suppresses your body's production of melatonin, a hormone that helps signal to your brain that it's time to sleep.



PROBLEM

I get at least 7 hours of sleep (go me!) but still wake up exhausted.



SOLUTION Expert groups like the American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommend that most adults get 7 to 9 hours of sleep a night. So if you're getting only 7 hours, start by upping that to 8 or even 9.

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 30]



WHEN TO SEE A SLEEP EXPERT

IF YOU HAVE consistent sleep issues that interfere with your daily life, tell your doctor—who may refer you to a sleep specialist. If the doctor suspects issues like sleep-disordered breathing (such as obstructive sleep apnea), narcolepsy (daytime episodes of falling asleep suddenly), idiopathic hypersomnia (excessive daytime sleepiness), or

periodic limb movement disorder (repetitive leg and foot movement during sleep), they are likely to advise an overnight sleep study for a definitive diagnosis.

These studies usually take place at specially designed sleep centers, where you'll have your own room and bathroom. As you sleep, technicians will typically record your brain waves, heart rate,

breathing, blood oxygen levels, snoring, eye and leg movements, and more. In the case of suspected narcolepsy or hypersomnia, you'll also spend some daytime hours at the center, says Abigail Maller, MD, a sleep specialist at UCLA.

For sleep apnea, you may be able to do an at-home overnight study, with equipment lent to you. Note: This popular

option is prone to false negatives and may require follow-ups.

Insurance for sleep studies can vary, so check first. And if you're simply interested in learning more about how you sleep, consider a smartwatch—like the Apple Watch Series 6 model pictured on the cover—or fitness tracker with sleep-tracking capabilities.

YOUR TOOLKIT FOR A GOOD

WHILE SMART SLEEP HABITS—like taking time to unwind each night—are crucial, optimizing your space can also help set you up for quality slumber. For many, this means a cool, dark, and quiet bedroom. It's also key to remember that pillows and mattresses don't last forever, says sleep expert Rachel Salas, MD, a professor at Johns Hopkins University School of

Medicine in Baltimore. (Ditch pillows that no longer support your head and neck, learn when to replace a mattress at [CR.org/newmattress0222](https://www.consumerreports.org/newmattress0222), and see mattress and pillow ratings on pages 32 and 33.) If your bedtime setup could use an upgrade, here are seven of CR's highly rated sleep products and several other interesting items to check out.



1

Mattress

A mattress that's uncomfortable or sagging from age may leave you struggling to sleep through the night or waking up stiff and sore. Mattress shoppers take note: This brand got high scores for comfort.

✓ **AVOCADO GREEN MATTRESS PILLOWTOP**
\$2,100, queen size

79

2

Pillow

While what's comfiest in a pillow may be a matter of personal preference, it's generally best to pick one with solid support that holds up over time. This one outranked the other 17 in our tests.

✓ **COOP HOME GOODS PREMIUM ADJUSTABLE LOFT PILLOW** \$62

90

3

Sheets

Almost half the sheets in CR's tests shrank so much over time that they no longer fit. And who wants to wake up with a bottom sheet that's all askew? After a year of washing, these still fit a 14-inch mattress.

💰 **L.L.BEAN PIMA COTTON PERCALE** (280 thread count)
\$149, queen size

74

4

Air Purifier

Allergens like pet dander can cause stuffiness, interfering with sleep. An air purifier can remove many allergens from the air, helping you breathe easier. This is the only CR-tested air purifier that rated a Best Buy.

💰 **BLUEAIR BLUE PURE 211 +**
\$300

85

NIGHT'S SLEEP



MORE SNOOZE-FRIENDLY STUFF

BLACKOUT CURTAINS

The persistent glow of street lights can make it hard to fall asleep at night. In the morning, bright rays of sunshine can make it tough to stay asleep. Blackout curtains are lined to keep out all kinds of light that may otherwise seep through and around regular window coverings. And if you share your bedroom with someone who keeps different hours, an eye mask may prevent light from the hallway, bathroom, or reading lamp from waking you.

WHITE NOISE MACHINE

House or street sounds getting in the way of your rest? One of these small devices may be a welcome addition to your bedtime arsenal—although evidence of their efficacy as a sleep aid is mixed. You can also check out white noise apps or try tuning in to radio static instead.

AROMATHERAPY

If a relaxing, electronics-free bedtime routine doesn't help you unwind enough at night, try inhaling the scent of lavender—via an essential oil diffuser or a pillow that contains sachets of the flower. This can ease insomnia, according to a 2021 research review.

5

Weighted Blanket

Sleeping under a weighted blanket may help ease anxiety and insomnia in some cases. Interested? Look for one that's 10 percent of your body weight. This blanket and its cover are both machine-washable.

HARKLA WEIGHTED BLANKET
(15 pounds) \$110 to \$115

6

Cooling Pad

A cooling pad that sits under a fitted sheet may help keep hot sleepers more comfortable on steamy nights. Some can also add heat if the need to warm up arises. Our top-rated cooling pad does both.

CHILI COOLER
\$639 to \$1,360

7

Programmable Thermostat

These let you optimize the temperature of your bedroom for sleep. (Rachel Salas, MD, advises 65° F to 69° F.) Some can be challenging to set, but this model is easy to operate and has a clear display.

HONEYWELL HOME VISION PRO 8000 TOUCH TH8110R
\$145

5/5 OVERALL SCORE

85

POOR ————— EXCELLENT

RECOMMENDED

CR BEST BUY

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27]

Next, figure out whether you're sleepy or fatigued. Sleepiness means you feel drowsy and have a hard time staying awake, Maller says. Fatigue, in which you feel tired but don't find staying awake difficult, is a symptom of many illnesses—including anemia, thyroid disease, and depression—that may not be directly related to sleep.

Discuss ongoing fatigue with your primary care provider, Maller and Pelayo suggest. And if you're constantly sleepy, ask for a referral to a sleep specialist. It could be a sign of some form of sleep apnea, in which breathing stops and starts during sleep.

The doctor may also test you for other sleep disorders that leave you exhausted after a good night's rest. (See "When to See a Sleep Expert," on page 27.) In addition, bruxism (clenching or grinding your teeth during sleep) can get in the way of rest. Headaches and jaw pain in the morning are telltale signs. A dentist can check your teeth for wear and fit you with a mouthguard that may help.

PROBLEM

I always fall asleep in the living room after dinner, wake up, and then can't fall asleep again at bedtime.

SOLUTION Brief naps are not necessarily a problem, especially if you take them after lunch and before dinner. But nodding off on the couch in the evening and then feeling wide awake once you get into bed is "a typical pattern in chronic insomnia," Pelayo says.

If you can't resist the lure of a comfy couch, doing something active at that time, like taking a walk, may keep you from dozing off. But you may also need to reset your circadian rhythm. Here's how: Get up at the same time each day,

and make sure to get some sunlight each morning. If you can't do this, you might want to ask your doctor about trying a light-therapy device.

PROBLEM

My partner's loud snoring and tossing and turning keep me awake.



SOLUTION Allergies, congestion, or a deviated septum can all cause snoring. But routine snoring can also be a sign of obstructive sleep apnea (OSA), in which a physical obstruction in the throat—often the tongue—interferes with breathing during sleep. This can

have serious health consequences, like a higher risk of stroke. Symptoms can also include daytime sleepiness, high blood pressure, and night sweats.

Helping your partner get to the root of their snoring will enable you to sleep—and, Pelayo says, "you may save their life." So urge them to see a doctor.

The most common treatment for OSA is a continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machine, which sends a constant flow of air into your airway through a mask and tube attachment worn during sleep, and is often at least partially covered by insurance. These were once uniformly noisy and bulky, but many modern CPAPs are far sleeker, smaller, and quieter.

Once a CPAP user gets used to the device—and settles on a mask that fits properly, which can take a few tries—the



PHOTO, PREVIOUS SPREAD (WOMAN): GETTY IMAGES. PHOTOS, THIS SPREAD: GETTY IMAGES

snoring should completely stop. If not, adjustments to the device can help.

If your partner moves around a lot and it's ruining your sleep, consider whether it's time for a new mattress. In CR's tests, mattresses are tested for "stabilization" or bounciness—a measure of the likelihood that movement on one side of the bed will disturb someone on the other side. Consider trying mattresses together in a store to see how they feel when you move around, suggests Chris Regan, project leader for CR's mattress testing.

PROBLEM

I work irregular hours, which makes it hard to sleep when I need to.



SOLUTION Sleep issues are common among overnight workers and those with inconsistent schedules—going in, say, at 10 a.m. one day and 7 a.m. the next.

If you need to sleep during the day so that you can work at night, keep your bedroom as dark as possible. Blackout curtains are a must. "Strategic napping"—timing naps for maximum benefit—can help, too, says Maller. For overnight workers, a nap right before a shift (or even during, if it's permitted) may boost alertness and performance. Limit these naps to 60 minutes or less, to reduce the chance you'll enter deep sleep. "Waking from deep sleep can be associated with grogginess and disorientation," Maller says.

You may want to consult with a sleep specialist to figure out what nap-time would help you most, based on your schedule. And though it may not be for everyone, modafinil (Provigil) is a prescription wake-promoting medication approved by the Food and Drug Administration for shift-work sleep disorder, and some other issues.



CAN SUPPLEMENTS HELP YOU SLEEP?

They may, in certain instances. Shopper's tip: A seal from a group like the U.S. Pharmacopeia or ConsumerLab.com provides some assurance that products contain what their labels claim.

Melatonin

This popular supplement is made from a natural or synthetic version of the hormone melatonin, which signals to your body that it's time to sleep. It can be helpful for older adults (who produce less melatonin) and those with wonky body clocks (night owls, jet-lagged travelers, and night-shift workers). But a 2013

meta-analysis found that, on average, people fall asleep only about 7 minutes faster after taking melatonin. Talk to your doctor before trying this supplement, and consider taking it only occasionally: Research is still pending on the safety of long-term use, beyond about three months.

Iron

Iron deficiency is closely linked to restless legs syndrome, a condition marked by uncomfortable sensations in the limbs and an uncontrollable urge to move them—which can interfere with sleep. Think this might

be your issue? Consult a doctor before self-treating. Taking iron could mask a more serious problem. Plus, in people without a deficiency, supplementing could lead to iron overload, which can damage organs.

Vitamin D

A growing body of evidence suggests a link between low levels of vitamin D and sleep troubles. One study of 89 adults with sleep disorders, published in 2018, found that when people whose vitamin D levels were on the low side, but not deficient, took supplements regularly for eight weeks, they said they nodded off faster,


slept longer, and had better sleep quality than those who received a placebo. But other research has found that in certain populations, the supplements have no positive effect on sleep, or may worsen it. What to do? Talk to your doctor about vitamin D testing and whether supplements might be worth a try.

Valerian

This root has been used for centuries to treat insomnia. And several studies suggest that this supplement may help people fall asleep faster and wake up less often at night—though next-day grogginess may occur. But other studies show no benefit. Such

mixed findings may be due to the variable quality and instability of active ingredients in valerian, according to a 2020 research review, so be sure to check for a trustworthy seal on the bottle (see more on seals at [CR.org/seals0222](https://www.consumerreports.org/seals0222)).

Ratings ➤ **A Better Bedtime Story** Start with a mattress that supports your size and sleep style and a pillow that keeps its shape and is right for your favorite slumber position, whether that's your back or your side.

Brand + Model		Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results								Features					
				Comfort	Owner satisfaction	Petite side sleeper	Average side sleeper	Large/tall side sleeper	Petite back sleeper	Average back sleeper	Large/tall back sleeper	Durability	Stabilization	Firmness rating	Resists bounce	Eases movement	Grips	Retains warmth	Mattress-in-a-box
INNERSPRING MATTRESSES																			
✓	Avocado Green	85	\$1,600	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	7	●	●	4		●
💰	Denver Mattress Doctor's Choice Plush	82	\$750	⬇️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	3	●	●	4		
✓	Casper Original Hybrid (2020)	82	\$1,285	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	3	●	●	0		●
✓	Ethan Allen EA Signature Platinum Plush	81	\$3,250	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	5	●	●	6		
✓	SleepFresh Hybrid	81	\$1,100	—	—	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	3	●	●	0		●
✓	Avocado Green Mattress Pillowtop	79	\$2,100	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	5	●	●	4	●	●
✓	Charles P. Rogers Powercore Estate 5000	79	\$1,500	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	6	●	●	8		
✓	Casper Wave Hybrid	78	\$2,300	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	2	●	●	4		●
💰	Beautyrest BR-800 12" Medium Firm	78	\$770	⬇️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	6	●	●	0		
✓	Big Fig The Mattress for a Bigger Figure	77	\$1,900	—	—	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	6	●	●	0	●	●
✓	Charles P. Rogers Real Bed	76	\$1,200	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	3	●	●	4		
💰	Tuft & Needle Nod Hybrid MAT-NODH-01-Q	76	\$675	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	4		●	0		●
✓	Sealy Posturepedic Performance Copper II	76	\$1,900	⬇️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	4	●		0	●	
✓	Leesa Legend	76	\$2,000	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	3	●	●	0		●
💰	Beautyrest Silver BRS900-TSS Medium Firm Tight Top	75	\$790	⬇️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	4	●	●	0		
✓	Sealy Posturepedic Premium Silver Chill	75	\$2,000	⬇️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	3	●		0		
✓	Diamond Intention Hybrid	75	\$1,900	—	—	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	2	●	●	6		●
💰	Sealy Posturepedic Lawson LTD Cushion Firm	75	\$710	⬇️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	5	●	●	0		
✓	Beautyrest PressureSmart 11.5" Firm	75	\$1,200	⬇️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	7	●	●	0		
✓	Tuft & Needle Hybrid with Pillow top	75	\$1,345	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	4		●	0	●	●
FOAM MATTRESSES																			
✓	Essentia Stratami	82	\$3,200	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	6	●	●	0		●
💰	Casper Original (2020)	81	\$1,100	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	6	●	●	0		●
✓	Reverie Dream Supreme II Hybrid Sleep System Firm	81	\$3,600	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	4	●	●	8		
💰	Sleep On Latex Pure Green Firm	80	\$1,000	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	7	●	●	0	●	●
✓	Avocado Latex Mattress	79	\$2,200	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	5	●	●	4		●
✓	Tuft & Needle Mint	78	\$995	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	4	●	●	0		●
✓	BedInABox Tranquillum	78	\$1,160	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	6	●	●	0		●
✓	Lull The Lull	76	\$800	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	6	●		0		●

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results	Test Results	Features
			Comfort Owner satisfaction Petite side sleeper Average side sleeper Large/tall side sleeper Petite back sleeper Average back sleeper Large/tall back sleeper Durability Stabilization	Firmness rating Resists bouncing Eases movement Grips Retains warmth Mattress-in-a-box	

FOAM MATTRESSES *Continued*

👉 Novaform 10" SoFresh Responsive Foam	76	\$500	⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️	5	●●●●●
✔️ Purple The Purple Mattress	76	\$1,200	⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️	3	●●●●●
✔️ GhostBed The GhostBed	75	\$950	⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️	7	●●●●●
✔️ GhostBed Luxe	75	\$1,534	⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️	4	●●●●●
✔️ Sealy Essentials 12"	75	\$800	⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️	2	●●●●●

ADJUSTABLE AIR MATTRESSES

✔️ Sleep Number 360 p6 Smart Bed	80	\$2,600	⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️	4	●●●●●
✔️ Saatva Solaire	77	\$3,045	⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️	4	●●●●●
✔️ Personal Comfort H10 Bed	77	\$2,700	⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️	6	●●●●●

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results	Features
			Side support Back support Resilience User preference Breathability	Washable Memory foam Cooling properties Type Retains warmth

PILLOWS


✔️ Coop Home Goods Premium Adjustable Loft	90	\$62	⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️	●●●●●	Memory foam and microfiber	●
✔️ Sleep Number ComfortFit Ultimate	85	\$150	⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️	Cover only	Blend of memory foam pieces and down alternative fibers	●
✔️ Tempur-Pedic Tempur-Cloud Breeze Dual Cooling	72	\$170	⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️	Cover only	Visco elastic polyurethane (memory foam) & gel	●
✔️ Sealy Memory Foam Gel	71	\$40	⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️	Cover only	Polyurethane foam pad	●
✔️ Avocado Green	71	\$90	⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️	Cover only	Latex and kapok	●

HOW WE TEST: The **Overall Score** for mattresses is based on member feedback on comfort and owner satisfaction, as well as our tests of side- and back-sleeper support, durability, and stabilization. **Comfort** and **owner satisfaction** ratings are based on recent surveys on CR members' experiences with more than 69,718 mattresses purchased within the past decade.

In cases where we have insufficient survey data to provide a brand-level rating, indicated by a gray dash (—), we give the model weighted average scores for comfort and satisfaction. **Support for side sleepers** is the ability of a mattress to keep a side sleeper's spine relatively horizontal. **Support for back sleepers** is the ability of a mattress to maintain the natural curve of the sleeper's spine. In our support tests, we use a woman 4 feet, 11½ inches to 5 feet,

1½ inches tall, and 110 to 127.5 pounds for the petite sleeper scores, and a man 6 feet, 2 inches to 6 feet, 4 inches tall, and 220 to 242 pounds for the large/tall sleeper scores. The **average sleeper** is an average of those two sizes. **Durability** indicates a mattress's ability to keep its original shape, height, firmness, and support after a simulated eight to 10 years of use. A high **stabilization** score indicates little or no bouncing or vibration

transfer. We also note ease of changing position on the mattress. **Firmness** is rated on a 1 to 10 scale, with 10 being firmest. **Price** is approximate retail for a queen-size mattress without a box spring. For pillows, the **Overall Score** is based on how well they support **back** and **side sleepers**, whether they maintain their shape over time, **user preference** data, and whether they allow moisture to dissipate. Go to **CR.org** for further details and complete ratings.



BE A WINNER IN TODAY'S HOT REAL ESTATE MARKET

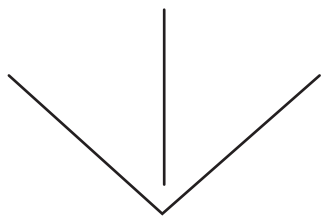
Prices are up, inventory is down, and many buyers are feeling desperate. Here's how to navigate the tricky homebuying game—and also look for something completely different.

By **Lisa L. Gill**

Illustrations by **Fabio Consoli**







TO SWEETEN A RECENT OFFER ON A SMALL HOUSE WITH A FEW ACRES HERE IN TEXAS, NEAR AUSTIN, I PLEDGED TO KEEP JENNY AND JEREMY—TWO AGING DONKEYS THE SELLER NO LONGER HAD USE FOR.

Caught up in the adrenaline of the deal, I didn't take into account just how expensive it could be to care for two large animals—a cost I later learned can easily top several thousand dollars, per donkey, per year, especially as their health deteriorates.

That same real estate frenzy led me astray in other ways, too. I turned a blind eye to the poor condition of the septic system, the seemingly ancient well, and even the fact that the land survey required to purchase the property had yet to be completed. Worse, no one seemed to know who owned the mineral rights underground. (That's a thing in Texas and can be a real headache if it turns out a company can drill for oil on your property.)

Worst-case scenario, I could be on the hook for about \$55,000 in additional costs with all those problems, including the care of the donkeys—a figure that could go far higher “if other issues emerged after purchasing the 50-year-old house and

property,” my agent, Jeffrey Slanker at Keller Williams Realty, told me.

But I was undeterred, raising the question: Who, exactly, was the jackass here?

While the deal didn't pan out—the seller wound up removing the listing altogether—there's much to be gained from my experience.

Since the pandemic began, 50 million people like me have either shopped for a house or attempted to purchase one, according to a September 2021 Consumer Reports nationally representative survey of 2,341 adult Americans. Of those who were looking for a home, only 30 percent successfully closed on one.

To say the U.S. housing market is in overdrive is an understatement. From March 2020 through March 2021, the number of existing homes for sale shrank by about 30 percent, according to the State of the Nation's Housing 2021 report by the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University. And based on data from the U.S.

Census, median house prices in the U.S. increased 29 percent from January 2019 through September 2021. In some markets, including Austin, Miami, Phoenix, and Tampa, Fla., prices increased even more.

For sellers or owners looking to take value out of their homes by refinancing, it's a dream come true. But it can be a nightmare if, like me, you're trying to buy.

According to CR's survey, to seal the deal 28 percent of home buyers made offers over asking price, and 44 percent bid on multiple homes. Seven percent included “escalation” clauses saying their offer automatically rises when higher bids are received, while more—26 percent—agreed to purchase homes “as is,” which means without requiring sellers to make fixes.

Despite the hurdles, home ownership remains a key way to build wealth, especially for the middle class and people of color, who may have fewer other investments, says Mitria Spotser, director of housing policy at the Consumer Federation of America, a consumer advocacy organization. She estimates that home ownership accounts for about two-thirds of the average family's total assets.

Here, we'll share tips on how to navigate this new real estate landscape if you're trying to buy. We'll also explain how you can use the increased value in your present home to make improvements, as well as look at options for nontraditional dwellings and communities where prices might be more affordable.



Lisa L. Gill

When she's not shopping for real estate, Lisa covers pharmaceuticals, health insurance, healthcare costs, and consumer debt.

HOW TO BUY A HOME RIGHT NOW

IF YOU CAN'T AFFORD to pay more than the asking price or to buy a home without contingencies, there are other ways to make your offer stand out. Consider these tips.

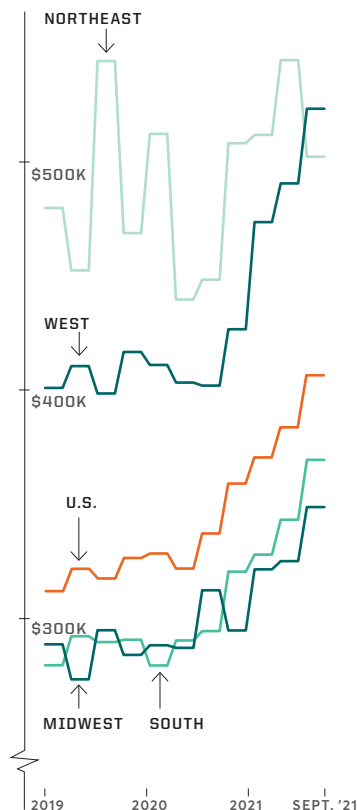
Search listings on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. In a hot market, deals for homes are often made over the weekend, with listings updated to “pending” or “in contract” at the start of the week, says real estate agent Slanker. Waiting till midweek to search online will spare you the disappointment of latching onto great homes that have already come and gone, and help you identify properties that might be languishing, with owners who may be more willing to negotiate on price or other terms. (Be aware, too, that there could be issues with the home that have kept other buyers at bay.) Then check the listings again starting Thursday evening because that is when brand-new listings are most likely to post, Slanker says.

Ask for “up-front underwriting.” This takes the promise of a mortgage preapproval—a conditional agreement from a bank to lend you money—a step further, and can be helpful if you’re up against buyers who “can close quickly because they’re making all-cash offers,” says Wilson Leonard, an agent at Banyan Real Estate in Denver who previously ran a mortgage services company. With up-front underwriting, your financial information—your credit history, debt-to-income ratio, employment, and income—is vetted in advance. If you’re approved, you get a firm pledge for a loan of a fixed amount, saving several weeks of back-and-forth with paperwork after you’ve had an offer on a home accepted.



Home Prices Have Skyrocketed

In most parts of the country, the median cost of real estate has reached record highs.



Sweeten your offer where you can.

To add value, you might, for example, offer to let the sellers stay in the home for a set time after closing—potentially free, if you can manage it. Doing this worked for 8 percent of people who bought homes during the pandemic, according to CR’s survey. I tried this gambit myself. Because the property with the donkeys had been the sellers’ vacation home for decades, I offered to let them return free of charge for one week a year. Another idea, Leonard says, is to agree to let the sellers keep a portion of the money in escrow—the deposit buyers make at the start of a real estate deal—in the event the transaction falls through. “We have clients who say the seller can keep \$2,000 or \$3,000 of the escrow if the deal doesn’t happen,” he says. “That’s how we compete with all-cash deals.”

Write a love letter. Telling owners in writing about yourself, and why you’re interested in their home, may help seal the deal—and is something 22 percent of people in CR’s survey said they did. Letters should be heartfelt and clear. “You’re trying to make a business transaction personal,” Slanker says.



GET SMART ABOUT INSPECTIONS

TWENTY-SIX PERCENT of buyers in CR's survey bought a home as is—but you should consider that only if you have deep pockets. Surprise fixes can be costly—for example, a new well can cost tens of thousands of dollars. Most people buying a home should have it inspected by a professional. Look for one through organizations such as the American Society of Home Inspectors or the National Academy of Building Inspection Engineers. Also ask friends or family for recommendations. And if the inspection does not include it, check for mold, contaminants in water, and radon—a colorless, odorless radioactive gas that can cause lung cancer. Here's what's most important—and what's less so.

VERY IMPORTANT

- 1** Condition of the foundation
- 2** Condition of plumbing, septic tanks, and wells
- 3** Age and condition of electrical wiring, and circuit breakers and boxes
- 4** Age and condition of water heater, and heating and cooling systems
- 5** Age and condition of roof

LESS CRITICAL

- 6** Age of appliances
- 7** Condition of exterior and interior paint
- 8** Condition of exterior fencing, outbuildings, and landscaping
- 9** Age of lighting, bath, and kitchen fixtures
- 10** Age of bath and kitchen cabinets

Consider off-market homes or “pocket listings.” If you have your eye on a particular home that isn’t for sale, ask your agent to contact the owners and make an offer anyway, says Scott Westfall, a real estate consultant and owner of CGP Real Estate in Virginia Beach, Va. Or to get a jump on a property before it is broadly advertised

on an MLS (multiple listing service) database, ask your agent whether they are aware of pocket listings. These are listings that are more informally marketed by word of mouth and usually shared among agents working in the same office, Westfall says. Your agent may be able to find these as well if they have access to the Private

Listing Network offered by Midwest Real Estate Data, a national service.

Don’t get discouraged. CR’s survey found that 44 percent of homebuyers said they had to make offers on two or more homes before one was accepted. Fifteen percent made more than five before getting to yes.

ALTERNATIVE PATHS TO HOME OWNERSHIP

AFTER REPEATEDLY COMING up against all-cash buyers willing to forgo inspections, my search for a home in Texas was going nowhere fast. So I started looking for something different. Here are some options I found for people who might not be looking for just a new home but also a new way of life.

COMMUNITY LIVING

AT NEU COMMUNITY, opening soon in Austin, there are no bidding wars. Instead, buyers are received on a first-come, first-served basis. You can put down as little as \$4,995 toward the purchase of a futuristic-looking “pod” made of skyscraper glass and metal. The pods can be bought individually or in multiples, and configured in numerous ways.

When you purchase at Neu, you’re not buying the pods but shares in a co-op. “It’s the idea that the people living here own the community,” says Jonathan Jenkins, CEO of Neu, adding that they are priced for retirees or people on single incomes.

I toured a 320-square-foot model of a

studio starter pod. Even with its small footprint, the home feels spacious, with built-in cabinets and closets, a Murphy bed, and a full kitchen.

Bonus: fewer cars. Neu will limit gas-powered vehicles by using a community car-sharing program. Such sustainable living is part of what’s driving a larger movement across the

U.S. known as “intentional” living—groups of people who share the same values or vision and purchase homes to live together in communities.

Another example is PDX Commons in Portland, Ore., an environmentally conscious condo community for those in the “last third of their life.” It was co-founded by people who wanted to



COMMUNITY GARDENING Village Hearth Cohousing in Durham, N.C., which bills itself as a “55+ intentional community for LGBTQs, friends, and allies,” turned its usual Friday happy hour into a planting session last spring.

Community Living Pros and Cons

PROS

SUPPORT Sharing values, resources, and responsibilities fosters connection with others.

FINANCING Conventional mortgage can typically be obtained.

GREEN Carbon footprint can be smaller.

CONS

REQUIREMENTS Level of community engagement might not suit everyone.

PROXIMITY Neighbors may live very close to one another.

RULES If you sell, the new owner will probably have to agree to the community’s rules.

live among others dedicated to aging well at home in a supportive community near stores, parks, and cafés. To join, members purchase a condo unit with one to three bedrooms, and share a communal kitchen and other areas. A two-bedroom, two-bath condo sold last March for \$560,000.

There are at least 4,000 intentional communities across the U.S., says Cynthia Tina, co-director of the Foundation for Intentional Community, a nonprofit that supports these groups throughout the U.S. Go to its website, at ic.org, to search for something similar.

TINY HOUSES

WHAT HAS BEEN a fringe curiosity for more than a decade, mostly suited for do-it-yourselfers who want to live in smaller spaces, tiny houses have gone mainstream, and even have a foot in the luxury market.

For a house to be considered “tiny,” it’s typically 400 square feet or less—compared with an average American home of about 2,300 square feet.

High-end builders have gotten onboard with designer-quality homes such as the 26-foot long, 8½-foot wide

Napa model from Mint Tiny House Company in Vancouver, Canada. Once you add things like a drawer dishwasher, a washer-dryer combo, and a tiled shower with glass doors, it costs \$100,425.

And then there’s the 375-square-foot Escher tiny house by New Frontier Design in Nashville, Tenn. It features dark wood finishes and floors, two bedrooms, a chef’s kitchen, a walk-in closet, a custom tile shower, and a garage-door-like wall that opens to the outdoors. Prices begin at \$209,000.

Prefab and DIY kits are also options. One example: the 187-square foot Vista Boho home from Wisconsin builder Escape. Originally a joint project with Ikea, the house starts at \$45,989 and is delivered on a flatbed truck.

New technology can make DIY homebuilding less complicated. Boxabl, in Las Vegas, makes a 375-square-foot, \$49,500 “foldable” home—replete with fixtures, finishes, and electrical—that literally unfolds. It can be put together in a day, with walls and floors that lock into place.

The biggest hurdle might be where to put a tiny house if you don’t own land or have a spot reserved in a tiny house community. Zoning, building codes, and permitting still favor traditional homes, though that’s changing. In early 2022, Oakland, Calif., will allow tiny houses to be primary residences on private property. And last year, Evanston, Ill., approved zoning for tiny “efficiency” houses as primary dwellings.

Meanwhile, here in Texas, I found custom homebuilder Fine Grain Designs in Austin after renting a tiny house the owner and his wife had built. I’d fallen in love with the poured concrete countertops, subway-tiled bath, oak floors, hand-cranked windows, cubby storage, and vaulted ceiling. Now I just need a place to put it!



Tiny House Pros and Cons

PROS

SAVINGS Less expensive than traditional homes.

SUSTAINABILITY Substantially reduced energy costs because of smaller footprint.

PORTABILITY Some homes are built on trailers.

FINANCING Some homes may qualify for recreational vehicle loans.

CONS

OUTLOOK Home might not increase in value and cannot be borrowed against.

FINANCING Conventional 30-year mortgage not obtainable; an RV loan or other financing won’t qualify for federal tax break or loan protection.

STORAGE Limited storage space; additional storage units may be needed.

PLACEMENT Many localities do not permit tiny houses as primary residences.



ALL THE COMFORTS OF HOME The Escher tiny house, from New Frontier Design, has a tricked-out kitchen, a king-size master bedroom, and a stylishly designed bathroom. And it’s on wheels, so you can go mobile.

HOW TO TAP YOUR HOME'S VALUE

IF BUYING A NEW HOME isn't in the cards for you but you're itching for a change—a new kitchen, a dedicated work space—and need a lump sum of money to do it, now may be the time to tap the value you have in your house, especially if it's worth more than when you first bought it.

A common way to do this is by taking out a home equity loan. Another is by doing what's called a cash-out refinance, a type of new mortgage that monetizes the equity you have in your home, says Robert Heck, vice president of mortgage services for Morty, an online residential mortgage broker and consultant firm. Interest on these mortgages is typically lower than on home equity loans.

Whereas a regular refinance replaces your current mortgage with a new one for the same balance, a cash-out refinance replaces your mortgage with a new one for more than you presently owe, with the difference going to you in cash.

Rising real estate values have made cash-out refinances a useful tool for more people. In the second quarter of 2021, the average homeowner gained about \$51,500 in equity. Homes in the West saw the largest bumps—in Idaho, \$97,000; Washington, \$102,900; Los Angeles, \$116,300—according to figures by CoreLogic, a real estate industry research firm.

In the second quarter of 2021 alone, homeowners withdrew \$54 billion in cash-outs, according to Freddie Mac, the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corp.

Home lending pros recommend that you use the money you extract from a cash-out refinance very carefully.



Consider a Refi With Cash-Out If:

- 1** You have more than 20 percent equity in your home.
- 2** Your home's value has increased since you purchased the home.
- 3** You plan to use the funds to reinvest in the home or to pay down expensive debt, such as credit cards.
- 4** You can secure favorable new terms on a mortgage, like a lower interest rate and lower monthly payments.

That includes paying for upgrades that increase a home's resale value; paying down more expensive debt, such as credit cards; or beefing up emergency or retirement savings.

"You should use the money only for a profitable purpose," says the Rev. Dr. Charles Butler, who helps run a nonprofit that offers housing counseling

and other community empowerment programs and is based in New York City. You are ultimately going to need to pay the new, larger mortgage back.

A couple of caveats. While the process of applying for a cash-out refinance is basically identical to that of a regular refi, typically banks won't do it if you have less than 20 percent equity, says Westfall at CGP Real Estate.

And you should expect to see some additional refinancing costs that you won't face with a regular refi. Nationally, the average closing costs for a single-family residential refinance were \$3,398 last year, according to figures from ClosingCorp, a real estate industry data tracking firm. But cash-out refi lenders may impose slightly higher interest rates on the new loans, perhaps 0.125 to 0.25 percent more, than they do for regular refis.

Even so, a cash-out refinance might give you a lower interest rate if you bought your home when mortgage rates were much higher.

—Additional reporting by Octavio Blanco



Is Dark Chocolate Really Good for

What's new, healthier, and tastier, and the brands to try if you only like milk chocolate.

BY SALLY WADYKA ■ PHOTOGRAPH BY GREGORY REID



You?

I

IT'S NO SURPRISE that most of us believe a bar of dark chocolate is essentially a health food. Headlines have touted its nutrition benefits for years. But much of the scientific evidence to date has been contradictory.

It's true that potent antioxidants called flavanols are plentiful in the cacao beans used to make chocolate. And the darker the chocolate, the more cacao—and potentially the more flavanols—it contains.

Like other antioxidants, flavanols have been shown to help blood vessels “relax,” reduce inflammation, and lower cholesterol.

“Giving people chocolate or cocoa flavanols is going to have an effect on blood-vessel function and can improve blood flow,” says Diane McKay, PhD, an assistant professor at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University. It seems logical that better blood flow would be good for both your heart and your brain, but “we don't yet know definitively that eating chocolate is going to help prevent heart disease or improve cognitive function,” she says.

In fact, the research indicates that you may need high doses of cocoa flavanols to see an effect, which would likely require taking flavanols in pill or powder form, not as chocolate candy. For example, you'd probably need to eat 600 calories' worth of dark chocolate to get the 500 mg a day of pure cocoa flavanols that researchers at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston are currently testing for their effect on heart-attack and stroke risk.

“If you want the health benefits of flavanols, there are other ways to get them,” says the study's lead author, JoAnn Manson, MD, chief of the hospital's division of preventive medicine. Some of these include green tea, berries, grapes, apples, and other antioxidant-rich foods.

However, if you're going to eat chocolate, a bar with a higher cacao percentage is a better treat than a milk- or white-chocolate one. Milk chocolate not only has less cacao and fewer flavanols but also contains about twice as much sugar as dark chocolate. White chocolate has cocoa butter but no cacao solids, and as a result has no flavanols. Its sugar content is comparable to that of milk chocolate.

Dark chocolate also contains a surprising amount of nutrients,

making it a healthier dessert option than cookies or cake, which are typically higher in sugar and made with refined flour.

An ounce of dark chocolate can have 3 to 5 grams of fiber, about the same amount as a 6-ounce apple. It also supplies about 65 mg of magnesium (nearly as much as a half-cup of cooked spinach) and 203 mg of potassium (the amount in a half-cup of cooked broccoli). Dark chocolate is higher in fat than milk chocolate, but much of it is a combination of the heart-healthy monounsaturated kind and stearic acid, a type of saturated fat that doesn't raise cholesterol. Still, many people enjoy their chocolate sweet and milky, and dismiss dark chocolate as bitter, grainy, dry, and chalky. If that's been your experience, you might want to give it another try.

“There are more high-quality bars available now made in small batches using beans that have been carefully harvested, roasted, and processed to enhance flavor,” says Michael Laiskonis, chef and director of the Chocolate Lab at the Institute of Culinary Education in New York City. The result? Bars that taste smooth, creamy, fruity, and even surprisingly sweet.

Tips for Healthy Eating

If you're going to work dark chocolate into your diet, the following strategies can help you get the most benefits—and enjoyment—out of it.

TRANSITION TO DARK. Milk chocolate can have as little as 10 percent cacao, and a high-quality bar has only about 27 percent. So milk-chocolate lovers may need to ease into the dark side. Start with a bar that has about 60 percent cacao. It can also help to look for cocoa butter in the ingredients list. Cocoa beans are 50 percent fat, and many chocolate producers use extra cocoa butter to create a smoother, creamier texture, Laiskonis says. Another tip: Try a “single origin” bar, which is made with cocoa beans from one country or region. Beans grown in Madagascar, Belize, and the Dominican Republic are most likely to have berry

and dried-fruit notes, which can make the chocolate taste sweeter, says Megan Giller, author of “Bean-to-Bar Chocolate: America’s Craft Chocolate Revolution” (Storey Publishing, 2017), and founder of Chocolate Noise, a tasting company.

BUY BETTER BARS. Buying quality chocolate is similar to buying fine wine or good coffee. The ingredients, where and how they’re grown and harvested, and how they’re processed and turned into a chocolate bar all play a huge role in the taste of the final product. “The skill and mastery of the chocolate maker can help transform even a 100 percent cacao bar into something rich and creamy that doesn’t taste like baker’s chocolate,” Giller says. To get started, refer to the Top Picks in “Find a Tastier Dark Chocolate,” on the facing page.

EAT IT MINDFULLY. Tasting the subtlety of the flavors will allow you to get the

most satisfaction out of even a small portion. “Put a small piece in your mouth, chew a couple of times, but mostly let it melt over your tongue,” Laiskonis says.

PAIR IT. A dark bar that contains bits of dried fruit, nuts, or sea salt can taste sweeter than a plain dark bar, even if both contain the same cacao percentage. But beware of other sweet add-ins—like caramel or marshmallow—that significantly increase the sugar content. You can also eat dark chocolate with some fresh berries or dried apricots (both of which pack additional flavanols), blending the bitter and sweet tastes in your mouth. Tea, even unsweetened, is another great dark-chocolate companion. Combining the two balances out the slight bitterness of the chocolate.

Chocolate With a Conscience: What Those Labels Mean

Cocoa beans can be grown in ways that harm the environment, exploit workers, or are otherwise unethical. Many terms on labels are used to indicate that a company doesn't engage in those practices, but some labels carry more weight than others. Below, we explain what these terms actually promise—and what they don't.



Fair Trade

There are three main certified fair-trade seals on chocolate: Fair for Life, Fairtrade, and Fair Trade Certified. These ensure that farmers are paid more than market price for cocoa and that no serious labor violations occur on the farms, such as child labor or substandard wages.

Sustainable

This is a broad term intended to convey that the chocolate was produced using environmentally responsible practices. Because the term is vague and unregulated, it's difficult to know for certain whether it's actually meaningful.



Rainforest Alliance

This seal indicates that some or all of the chocolate is sourced from farms that have met Rainforest Alliance standards for protecting farmers, forests, wildlife, and local communities.

Direct Trade

This indicates that the cocoa farmer and the cocoa buyer work with each other directly (rather than through a third party) to set terms and conditions. While this in theory reduces the chances of exploitation, exactly what those terms and conditions are can vary.

Find a Tastier Dark Chocolate

Think dark chocolate is too bitter to be enjoyable? CR's professional tasting panel tested 10 bars and found that it's possible to find high-cacao chocolate that's smooth and fruity. Here's the nutritional info for approximately an ounce of each bar, plus reviews from our panel.



Ghirardelli Intense Dark Chocolate Twilight Delight 72% Cacao \$2.90

Mellow and slightly fruity with flavors of nuts and coffee. Creamy and smooth.

BAR SIZE 3.5 oz.	FAT 11 g	FIBER 3 g
CALORIES 130	SATURATED FAT 7 g	ADDED SUGARS 6 g



Chocolove Extreme Dark Chocolate 88% Cocoa \$3.25

Rich and fudgy. Moderately bitter; little sweetness. Creamy and smooth. Melts slowly in the mouth.

BAR SIZE 3.2 oz.	FAT 15 g	FIBER 4 g
CALORIES 160	SATURATED FAT 9 g	ADDED SUGARS 9 g



Hu Organic Simple Dark Chocolate 70% Cacao \$6.70

Moderately sweet with strong dried-fruit flavors (think raisins or prunes) and hints of caramel. The texture is slightly crumbly.

BAR SIZE 2.1 oz.	FAT 13 g	FIBER 3 g
CALORIES 180	SATURATED FAT 8 g	ADDED SUGARS 8 g



Green & Black's Organic Dark Chocolate 70% Cacao \$3.50

Coffee and berry flavors. Creamy and smooth. Melts quickly in the mouth.

BAR SIZE 3.5 oz.	FAT 13 g	FIBER 3 g
CALORIES 170	SATURATED FAT 3 g	ADDED SUGARS 9 g



Trader Joe's Dark Chocolate 72% Cacao 60 cents

A smooth, less-intense dark chocolate; a good one for milk-chocolate lovers to try.

BAR SIZE 1.65 oz.	FAT 11 g	FIBER 4 g
CALORIES 160	SATURATED FAT 7 g	ADDED SUGARS 8 g



Lily's Extremely Dark Chocolate 85% Cacao \$4.30

A strong, bitter bar. No fruit; has an odd, slightly herbal flavor. Slightly waxy texture means it doesn't melt easily. Sweetened with stevia and erythritol.

BAR SIZE 2.8 oz.	FAT 14 g	FIBER 7 g
CALORIES 150	SATURATED FAT 8 g	ADDED SUGARS 0 g



Alter Eco Organic Dark Chocolate Classic Blackout 85% Cacao \$4

Intense chocolate flavor with notes of fruit and coffee. More bitter than sweet. Creamy and smooth.

BAR SIZE 2.82 oz.	FAT 17 g	FIBER 3 g
CALORIES 190	SATURATED FAT 10 g	ADDED SUGARS 4 g



Lindt Excellence Dark Chocolate 85% Cocoa \$4

Deep roasted flavor with hints of coffee and coconut. Mild bitterness. Creamy.

BAR SIZE 3.5 oz.	FAT 14 g	FIBER 4 g
CALORIES 170	SATURATED FAT 8 g	ADDED SUGARS 9 g



Beyond Good Organic Dark Chocolate Pure Dark 80% Cocoa \$4.50

Fruity but slightly sour, and has very little sweetness. Some bitterness, with a slight grainy texture.

BAR SIZE 2.64 oz.	FAT 11 g	FIBER 3 g
CALORIES 150	SATURATED FAT 7 g	ADDED SUGARS 5 g



Theo Organic Pure Dark 70% Dark Chocolate \$4.25

Lightly sweet and bitter with roasted, woody, and slight berry flavors. Slightly grainy texture.

BAR SIZE 3 oz.	FAT 11 g	FIBER 3 g
CALORIES 170	SATURATED FAT 6 g	ADDED SUGARS 9 g

The Best Cell Plan Deals for Everyone

From young families to people ages 55+, modest data users to heavy streamers, we've got the services that will help you save.

BY MICHAEL FRANK



WE GET IT. Changing cell phone plans sounds like a major headache.

The three big carriers—AT&T, T-Mobile, and Verizon—bury all sorts of caveats in the small type of their plan descriptions, making it hard to compare offerings, much less figure out what you're getting and how much it truly costs.

But based on Consumer Reports' survey findings, it's worth the effort to shop around. In 2020 more than half of CR members who switched

providers in the previous year reported saving money—with nearly one-third pocketing more than \$30 per month.

How? Often by looking beyond the Big Three. Many of the plans recommended on the following pages come from smaller providers that lease excess wireless capacity on cellular networks built and maintained by AT&T, T-Mobile, and Verizon. (There's no escaping them entirely.)

In our ratings of cell phone plans, based on the input of 61,785 CR members, providers such as Consumer Cellular, Mint, and Ting generally

rank near the top for value, customer support, and overall satisfaction.

AT&T, T-Mobile, and Verizon? They end up in the bottom third. In fact, AT&T is the lowest-scoring provider, receiving our worst rating for value and reception. T-Mobile—which had for years placed higher than its chief rivals—took a dip in 2021, too. After merging with Sprint in 2020, the carrier dropped in almost every category, slipping from above average to average for value, customer support, and data quality. Even carrier-owned alternatives like Verizon's Visible rate higher.





▶ Best Low-Cost Plans

FOR THOSE WITH MODEST DATA NEEDS

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IF YOU USE data sparingly, you can cut way down on costs with one of these offerings. All are prepaid, which means you purchase data up front, and if you use it up in a given month, you buy more as needed.

MINT'S 10GB/MONTH PLAN

\$20 per line
NETWORK: T-Mobile
TALK AND TEXT: Unlimited in the U.S.

Ten gigabytes is more than enough data to download favorite podcasts or even a TV show to your phone via cell signal. After three months, however, you have to commit to a year's service to lock in the rate. If you run over the monthly data limit, you don't get charged for more. Mint simply slows the data speed down—just like AT&T might for unlimited plan members who use up their high-speed allowance. So music or videos streamed via cell connection might get a little choppy.

VISIBLE'S \$40/MONTH UNLIMITED PLAN

\$40 a month or less per line
NETWORK: Verizon
TALK AND TEXT: Unlimited in the U.S.

That's a great price for a plan with no data cap—as in, no limit on streaming, etc. And when you add lines, the rate drops. So two lines cost \$35 each; three, \$30 each; and four, \$25 each. Kids left the nest? Reach out to customer service or search "Discussion Boards" at Visible.com and enter the word "Party" to find other folks willing to share the deal. Don't worry; they won't see your bill. It's just a clever way for Visible to increase membership.

TWIGBY'S 300-MINUTE PLAN

\$9/month
NETWORK: Verizon
TALK AND TEXT: 300-minute limit in the U.S.

We don't yet have CR ratings for Twigby (see page 50), but for those who don't need any cellular data, that's a rock-bottom price. And the ability to apply your minutes to calls and texts overseas comes in handy for those with loved ones abroad. If you can't resist a little streaming on the go, the company has a 5GB plan (\$29/month) and a 10GB plan (\$39/month). The service is accessible via most phones from AT&T, Boost, T-Mobile/Sprint, Verizon, and Virgin Mobile.



▶ Best Plans If You're 55+

FOR THOSE WHO CAN EASILY MANAGE THEIR DATA USE

.....

THERE ARE MANY options specifically for people 55 and older, but not all are good. AT&T dangles an Unlimited Elite plan discount for AARP members, for instance, but for two lines the monthly fee amounts to \$130. The picks here are much less expensive and still include options for those who occasionally like to FaceTime with family or stream music out by the pool.

T-MOBILE'S 55+ ESSENTIALS PLAN

\$55/month for two lines
NETWORK: T-Mobile
TALK AND TEXT: Unlimited in the U.S.; free texting to/from nearly 200 countries

If you and your partner travel from state to state and like to stream movies on your phones or videochat with friends and family no matter where you are, this plan is pretty compelling. You get unlimited data use throughout the U.S., though T-Mobile does reserve the right to slow speeds once you surpass a whopping 50GB in a month. To get this rate, you must agree to have your monthly payment automatically deducted from a credit card or checking account.

TING'S FLEX PLAN

\$10 a month per line
NETWORK: T-Mobile and Verizon
TALK AND TEXT: Unlimited in the U.S.

This plan allows you to purchase data as you need it at a reasonable \$5/GB. The rest of the service is inexpensive. And it's fairly easy to hold on to your existing phone because Ting offers comprehensive coverage via the networks of T-Mobile and Verizon.

MINT'S 55+ PLAN

\$15 a month per line
NETWORK: T-Mobile
TALK AND TEXT: Unlimited in the U.S.

Here again, you're looking at a prepaid plan. Mint requires you to pay for the first three months up front and then 12 months at a time to lock in the rate for a year. But if you can swing that, you get 4GB of data per month at a nice price. By comparison, Consumer Cellular's 3GB plan starts at \$25/month for one line. Those who need just one line but lots more data should consider Mint's \$30/month Unlimited plan.



▶ Best Plans for Families

FOR THOSE WHO CONSUME DATA LIKE HUNGRY TEENS

.....

WHEN YOU'VE GOT more than two people on your plan, it's hard to parcel out the gigabytes—especially when some of those people are mighty fond of Spotify, TikTok, and YouTube. The plans at right provide unlimited data use at a reasonable price.

VISIBLE'S UNLIMITED PLAN

\$40 a month or less per line

NETWORK: Verizon

TALK AND TEXT: Unlimited in the U.S.

In case you missed our praise for this plan in the low-cost category, it bears repeating, because the price per line dips as you add more people. Want four lines on Verizon's cheapest unlimited plan? It'll cost you at least \$140/month. At Visible, you don't get extras like free access to Disney+ or Hulu (see below for plans with great perks), but with savings like this, who cares? You can decide for yourself if you want to pay to watch "The Beatles: Get Back."

CONSUMER CELLULAR'S UNLIMITED PLAN

\$90 for three lines

NETWORK: AT&T and T-Mobile

TALK AND TEXT: Unlimited in the U.S.

If you don't need four or five lines, this plan is very cost-effective for families of three. If you're unhappy with the service in your area, it could be a good way to improve your coverage, too, because you get access to both AT&T and T-Mobile networks.

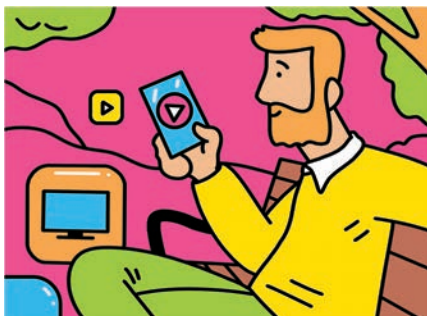
US MOBILE'S UNLIMITED ALL

\$100 for four lines

NETWORK: Verizon and T-Mobile

TALK AND TEXT: Unlimited in the U.S.

CR hasn't rated this provider yet. Beyond the nice price, you might enjoy the data speed—250 Mbps, according to US Mobile, which is pretty close to the 300 Mbps claimed by Verizon's 5G Home Internet service. Think of it as getting low-cost access to the more powerful networks of Verizon and T-Mobile. US Mobile also offers "free perks" such as Audible and Disney+, but you have to pay for them first, then submit receipts to verify your subscription.



▶ Best Plans for Perks

FOR THOSE WHO WANT UNLIMITED DATA AND MORE

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THESE DAYS, MANY providers sweeten plans by bundling in services such as Amazon Prime, HBO Max, or Netflix free of cost. If you're already paying for one of those services, this could be a way to save money. But be careful. Limited-time offers could end up costing you more once they expire. All things considered, here are some of the more attractive offerings out there.

VERIZON'S PLAY MORE UNLIMITED PLAN

\$180 for four lines

NETWORK: Verizon

TALK AND TEXT: Unlimited in the U.S.

If your family likes to stream while on the go, this plan lets you do so at up to 720p, which is good. It also includes regular access to Disney+, Hulu, and ESPN+ (together, called the Disney Bundle), plus six months of access to Apple Music and one year of access to Discovery+, Apple Arcade, and Google Play Pass for gamers. After time limits expire, Apple Music costs \$9.99 a month, Discovery+ \$6.99 a month, and Apple Arcade and Google Play Pass \$4.99 a month. The rate also reflects the savings for choosing autopay and paperless billing.

T-MOBILE'S MAGENTA MAX PLAN

\$200 for four lines

NETWORK: T-Mobile

TALK AND TEXT: Unlimited in the U.S., Canada, Mexico

If you're often on the move, using a phone as a WiFi hot spot for your laptop, the Magenta Max Plan provides 40GB of mobile data at impressive speeds. It offers free access to Gogo Inflight WiFi for domestic travel. And it includes Netflix (streamed on two devices at once, if you'd like), and unlike some Verizon streaming perks, that Netflix deal doesn't expire as long as you keep at least one phone on the plan.

UNLIMITED PLAN BY METRO

\$120 for four lines

NETWORK: T-Mobile

TALK AND TEXT: Unlimited in the U.S.

This plan from a small provider owned by T-Mobile costs more than the Visible Unlimited plan above, but it has a few perks that add to its value, including 15GB a month of hot-spot data that can be used by various plan members at once. It also includes membership in Amazon Prime, which typically costs \$119 a year. As with similar plans, your streaming speeds may get reduced in peak traffic times, but only from high to standard definition—and we're talking about saving \$80 a month vs. T-Mobile's Magenta Max.



HOW TO SWITCH PLANS BUT KEEP YOUR PHONE

You can **probably** change cellular companies without buying a new phone, especially if it was made in the past five years.

To find out for sure, you can call the new provider or often just type the IMEI (international mobile equipment identity) number unique to your phone into an online tool on the carrier's website.

To find the IMEI, you may be able to just dial *#06#.

Owners of iPhones can also go to Settings > General > About. Then scroll down to the number.

The steps will vary on Android phones, but it's relatively easy to find the instructions for your model with a Google search.

If you're still paying off your phone, you'll have to settle up with your old provider before exiting its plan. You also need to make sure the device isn't "locked" to that carrier's network. (Every carrier will unlock your phone if you've paid it off.) For info on how to get yours unlocked, you can go to [CR.org/unlock0222](https://www.consumerreports.org/unlock0222) or call your current carrier.

Once you sign up for a new service, you'll receive a new SIM card for your phone. After installing it, contact the new provider to port over your phone number. Companies are required to let you take the number with you. Some allow you to handle this online; with others, you'll need to call.

Ratings ➤ **Final Call** As these scores from our 2020 Fall Survey confirm, CR members often prefer the value, customer support, and overall satisfaction offered by smaller cell service providers.

Provider	Reader Survey Results					
	Overall satisfaction score	Value	Customer support	Data	Reception	Telemarketing call frequency
Ting	90	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️
Consumer Cellular	89	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️
Mint Mobile	88	⬆️	—	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️
Visible	86	⬆️	—	⬆️	⬇️	—
Spectrum Mobile	85	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️
Google Fi	85	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️
Republic Wireless	84	⬆️	—	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️
TracFone	84	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️
Cricket	83	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️
Straight Talk	83	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️
MetroPCS	82	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️
Credo Mobile	82	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️
Total Wireless	80	⬆️	—	⬇️	⬇️	—
T-Mobile	78	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️
Boost Mobile	77	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬆️
U.S. Cellular	76	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️
Verizon Wireless	74	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️
Lively	74	⬇️	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	—
AT&T	70	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️

HOW WE SURVEY: Ratings are based on a 2020 Fall Survey of 61,785 CR members in the U.S. **Overall satisfaction score** represents their views on their current cell phone service provider, with 100 indicating completely satisfied, 80, very satisfied, and 60, somewhat satisfied. Differences of less than 5 points aren't meaningful.

Value, customer support, and data reflect average scores on a scale from very poor to excellent. **Reception** is based on the percentage of respondents who reported having adequate cell phone reception both inside and outside the home. **Telemarketing call frequency** pertains to the proportion of members who reported that

they didn't receive any phone calls from a telemarketer in the seven days prior to taking this survey. These ratings reflect the experiences of CR members, who may not be representative of the general U.S. population. Dashes (—) indicate insufficient sample size to provide a rating.

ROAD REPORT

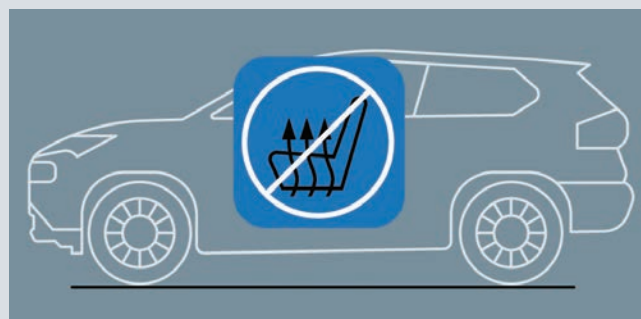


NEWS & EXPERT
ADVICE TO
KEEP YOU
AHEAD OF
THE CURVE™

TREND

Car Part Thefts Rise Sharply

Catalytic converter thefts are on the rise, from about 100 a month on average in 2018 to more than 1,200 a month in 2020. The trend is fueled by rising prices for the precious metals platinum, rhodium, and palladium in this emissions-scrubbing equipment found on all gasoline-powered vehicles. Some hybrid models, such as the Toyota Prius, are at greater risk due to the high scrap value of their converters, which can exceed \$1,000, according to the marketplace website AutoCatalystMarket.com. To deter theft, park in a secured garage or a well-lit area. If you park overnight in a driveway, install motion-sensitive lights. A catalytic converter shield can thwart thieves, but some cost \$300 or more and require a pro to install.



TIP FROM THE TEST TRACK

Make Sure Your Car Comes With All the Features It's Supposed to Have

Your new car might not have all of the features you've been promised. **Some automakers are leaving out equipment** due to the ongoing chip shortage. For example, heated seats and steering wheels are not available in some Chevrolets, some Cadillacs have been sold without Super Cruise active driver assist, and BMW says the availability of wireless phone charging is temporarily limited. **Check that any new car you buy has the features it's supposed to have,** or that they will be installed free when the shortages are over.

THE VITAL STATISTIC

23%

Overall reduction in automobile CO₂ emissions since 2004. "It's clear that the EPA's strong greenhouse gas emissions standards work," says Chris Harto, senior policy analyst at CR. "Now the EPA must finalize its next round of standards to cut emissions further."

Source: Environmental Protection Agency.

RECALL



Toyota

Toyota is recalling more than 227,000 Camry sedans from the 2018 and 2019 model years to fix a faulty part in the vehicles' braking system that could cause a sudden loss of braking power and potentially lead to a crash. Although the brakes will still work if the part malfunctions, they may require increased force to engage.

WHAT TO DO: Toyota dealerships will repair or replace the faulty part free of charge. For more information, owners may contact Toyota directly at 800-331-4331.



ASK OUR EXPERTS

Should I pay extra for synthetic oil?

Probably not. Synthetic oil can add \$30 or more to the cost of an oil change. CR's chief mechanic, John Ibbotson, says you should use the type of oil your owner's manual calls for. Since most cars don't require synthetic oil, he says, most

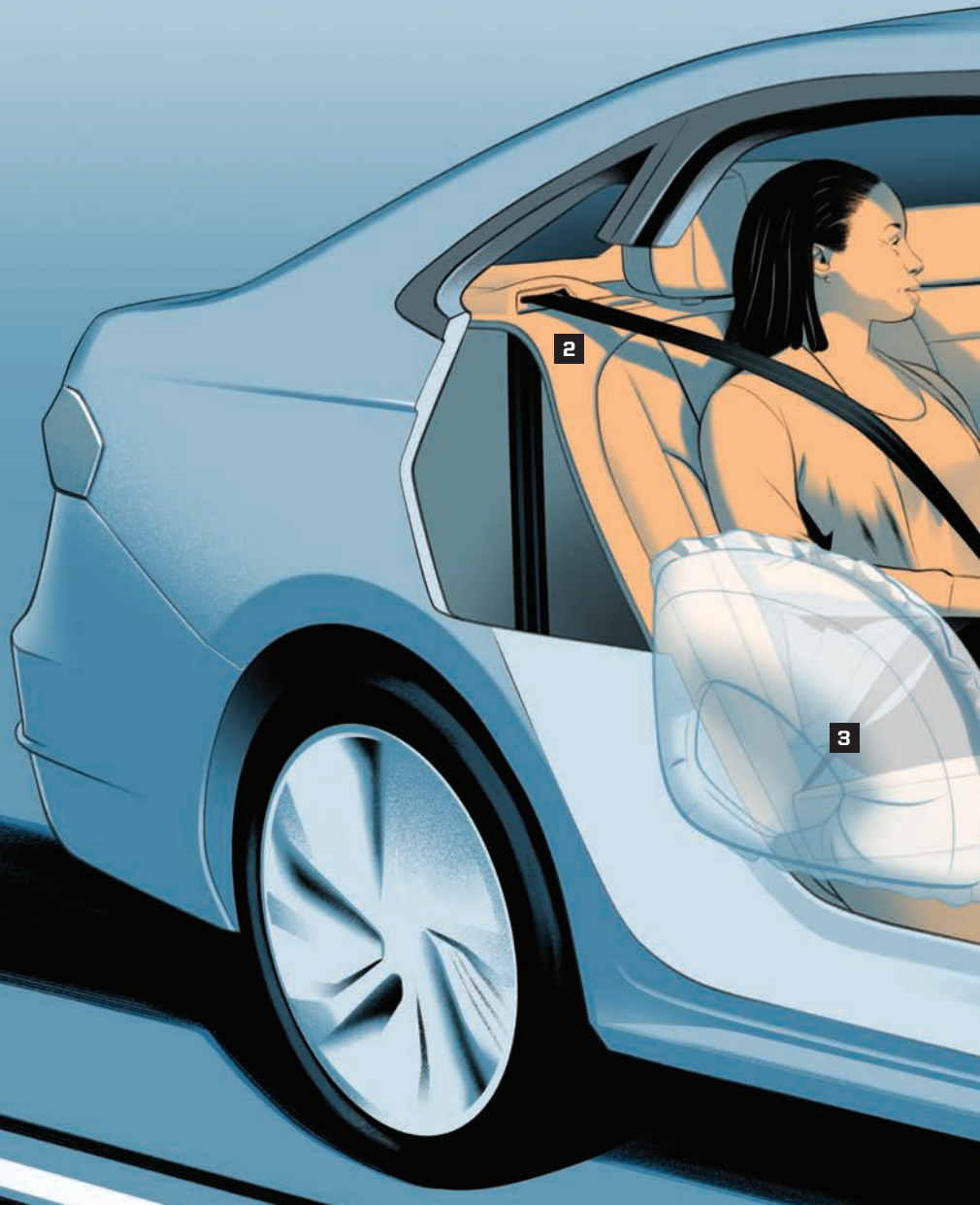
owners don't need it. He adds, however, that switching from conventional motor oil to synthetic can make sense for people who drive in extreme hot or cold climates or do a lot of towing. Synthetic oil is designed to improve lubrication,

and it can better address the demands those driving conditions put on the engine. But if your car came from the factory with conventional oil and your driving isn't demanding, save the money and stick with regular oil.

Staying Safer in the Back Seat

Introducing CR's new Rear-Seat Safety Score, which reveals the cars that work hardest to prevent injuries for those who sit in the back.

by Keith Barry



AR BUYERS HAVE studied safety ratings for years to determine the level of protection a vehicle offers occupants in a

crash. Until recently, those ratings largely focused on the people sitting up front.

Safety groups and crash testers have recently turned their attention to the rear seat. In September 2021, Consumer Reports released its first-ever rear-seat safety ratings, so car buyers can compare rear-seat safety

across 35 popular new vehicles. Later this winter, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), an independent safety-research group sponsored by auto insurance companies, plans to issue results from its new rear-seat crash tests—the first time results of frontal-crash tests with a dummy in the rear seat will be published for U.S. car buyers.

These developments will make it easier for car buyers to determine which vehicles are best at protecting passengers and also encourage automakers to improve rear-seat safety so that future vehicles might

perform better in the new crash tests. The new focus addresses a safety imbalance that can leave some passengers at greater risk depending on where they're sitting in a car, says Emily Thomas, PhD, automotive safety program manager at Consumer Reports. "The rear seat has to take into account all kinds of passengers who sit there, from infants and teens, to adults and ride-hailing passengers of all ages," she says. "But our analysis shows that many automakers don't include the same safety features for rear seats as they do for the front."



CR's Rear-Seat Safety Score

THESE ARE SOME of the features CR's engineers evaluate to calculate our Rear-Seat Safety Score:

1. Head Restraints

The restraints can prevent whiplash and other neck injuries during rear-end collisions. We give points if restraints are tall enough to provide sufficient protection to adult passengers, including those who sit in the middle seat. Head restraints that don't require adjustment score better.

To improve rearward visibility or help a seat fold

flat, some rear head restraints can be stowed or removed when the rear seat is not in use. But seats without head restraints put passengers at an increased risk of injury. So we give points to vehicles that make it difficult for anyone to sit in a rear seat without a properly positioned or installed head restraint.

2. Advanced Restraints

We award points to cars with rear seat-belt pretensioners and load limiters, which have been found to reduce injuries and save

lives for front-seat passengers. We also award points for belts with height-adjustable upper anchors, which can improve belt fit.

3. Rear Airbags

As part of our advanced rear-restraint evaluation, we award points to vehicles with airbags that offer side-impact torso and pelvis protection to rear occupants. Only about a quarter of new vehicles have these features today. In the future, our ratings will add points for rear airbags designed for frontal impact or that protect rear

occupants seated on the side of the vehicle opposite the crash impact, features that are not yet available in most mainstream vehicles.

4. Belt Minders

Nearly all new cars remind front-seat occupants to buckle up, but only some provide that same warning for rear-seat passengers. We give the most points to reminder systems that persist until a belt is buckled and that start to chime if a passenger unbuckles during a trip.

Evaluating Rear-Seat Reminders

Even though nearly all new cars have audible alarms that remind front-seat occupants to buckle up, only about 30 percent of CR-rated vehicles have those reminders for rear-seat occupants, according to a National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) database. There are many reasons why rear passengers might not buckle up, but a dingy chime might encourage them to rethink the decision. That's why CR and IIHS are now evaluating vehicles to see if they have rear-belt reminder systems and to judge how well they work.

Our ratings tell you which vehicles have the reminders. To get full credit, a reminder system must have an audible warning that escalates if a rear passenger fails to buckle up after a trip starts. IIHS expects its ratings to be out soon.

Wear Your Seat Belt

Any improvement to rear-seat safety starts with simply wearing your seat belt—your first line of defense in a crash, no matter where you sit or what level of safety technology a vehicle has. But in a 2016 IIHS survey, only 72 percent of passengers reported always wearing their belts in the rear seat, compared with 91 percent in the front passenger seat. The problem is worse in for-hire vehicles, such as Uber, Lyft, and taxis, where only 57 percent of rear-seat passengers reported always buckling up. It's a sobering statistic considering that in a crash, unbelted rear occupants have nearly an eight times higher risk of suffering a serious injury than belted rear-seat occupants, according to a 2015 study sponsored by IIHS.

In a crash, unbuckled passengers can also become dangerous projectiles and put others in the car at risk, says Jessica Jermakian, vice president for vehicle research at IIHS. "Even if you're buckled but the passenger next to you is not buckled, that can add risk to everyone in the vehicle," she says.



Kids in the Back

CHILDREN 12 AND UNDER should always sit in the back seat. Here's how CR's Rear-Seat Safety Score takes their needs into account.

REAR-OCCUPANT ALERT

On average, 39 children die each year in hot cars, according to the advocacy group KidsAndCars.org. We evaluate warning systems that help prevent these deaths. Some cars can even sense if a person is left behind when the car is locked.

CAR-SEAT FIT

An improperly installed car seat may not fully protect a child, so we rate every vehicle we test on ease of installation for infant and convertible seats. We check LATCH accessibility, see how many seats can fit across a vehicle's second row, and evaluate the installation instructions in the vehicle owner's manual.

BOOSTER SEATS

We also check to see how easy it is to fit a high-back booster seat, whether it blocks access to the belt in an adjacent seat, if it stays in place, how easily kids can buckle themselves, and if the rear head restraint interferes with installation.

Rear-Seat Risks

When researchers from IIHS examined typical rear-occupant injuries from real-world crashes, they found that the most common ones involved the chest. Although serious chest injuries are relatively uncommon, technology is available to reduce the risk even further. This includes pretensioners, which pull the seat belt tighter at the beginning of a crash, and load limiters, which let the seat belt spool out a little during a crash to lower the risk of chest injury by reducing the force the belt applies to the occupant's chest.

Although these features are common in front seats, only about 40 percent of mainstream 2021 model year vehicles have pretensioners and load limiters in the back seat, based on CR's tally from NHTSA's public database of vehicle safety features.

Despite the importance of the equipment, it can be difficult for consumers to tell if a vehicle comes with pretensioners or load limiters. CR's rear-seat safety ratings make it clear if one or both are present in the new vehicles we evaluate.

Concerns for Older Adults

Rear-seat passengers over the age of 55 are especially susceptible to chest injuries in a crash. That's because their bones may break more easily compared with younger, healthier occupants, says Jingwen Hu, associate director at the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute. "If you add the same force to the chest, older occupants may have several rib fractures."

In frontal crashes, rear-seat occupants are also susceptible to "submarining," which is when a passenger slides beneath the lap belt, sometimes causing injuries to the soft tissue above the pelvis. This can be due to seat design, but it also can result from wearing a seat belt improperly.



How You Can Maximize Safety

THERE ARE SOME things all passengers can do to make the most of any vehicle's rear-seat safety features. It starts with buckling up, even on short trips or in a for-hire vehicle, says Emily Thomas, PhD, automotive safety program manager at CR. "All the safety technology in the world is useless if you're unbelted," she says.

- Make sure your belt fits properly. Your shoulder belt should cross the center of your collarbone. Some cars have an adjustable upper-belt anchor on the door pillar,

so look for one and adjust it for the best fit. CR gives credit in our Rear-Seat Safety Score to vehicles that have this feature. "You don't want to be unbelted or leaning away from a belt because it's uncomfortable," Thomas says.

- Your lap belt should be low enough to hug your hip bones, which are stronger than the softer areas of your abdomen. In a crash, a proper lap-belt fit can prevent "submarining"—when a vehicle occupant's body slides forward and under the lap belt.

- Adjust your head restraint so that its top lines up with the top of your head or at least the top of your ears. When adjusting the seat-back, leave no more than 4 inches between the back of your head and the restraint.

- When choosing where to sit, passengers should find the seat where the belt has the most comfortable fit, and then—if possible—make any adjustments. "Sit where you can wear your belt properly throughout the entire car ride," Thomas says.

Better Tests, Safer Cars

Until recently, only side impact crash rating tests in the U.S. were conducted with a dummy sitting in the rear, leaving car buyers in the dark about how rear-seat passengers might fare in a frontal crash. Now IIHS has added a dummy in the rear seat of its latest round of moderate overlap frontal

crash tests, which reflect what happens when a car has a partial head-on collision with a barrier or another vehicle. Small SUVs were tested first, and midsize SUVs are next. By 2024, after more categories of vehicles are tested, IIHS plans to start using rear-seat crash-test results as one of the qualifying factors for its "Top Safety

Pick" designation.

In the short term, experts at IIHS and CR hope that the new safety ratings will encourage car manufacturers to make simple changes to improve safety. Jermakian expects load limiters and pretensioners to become commonplace in rear seats as automakers deploy existing technology

to improve rear-seat crash-test scores. If dummies submarine during crash tests, automakers might redesign seat structures that prevent those kinds of injuries in real-world collisions.

“These are all things that haven’t been addressed by frontal-crash programs in the past, so automakers haven’t had to focus on them,” Jermakian says.

In the longer term, she and CR’s Thomas say car buyers should expect to see new technologies emerge that specifically address rear-seat passenger safety. For example, our analysis shows that just over 25 percent of new vehicles have side airbags specifically designed to protect the pelvis and torso of rear occupants, a figure Thomas expects will grow. A handful of vehicles already have inflatable seat belts, which Hu says may help prevent chest injuries by spreading out the force the belt puts on the chest during a crash. And Mercedes already has made a rear-seat airbag available on the S-Class sedan. “It’s likely that these advanced technologies will show up first as options on higher-priced vehicles but will eventually end up in mainstream cars,” Thomas says.

Changes at the Top

As groups such as IIHS and CR focus on rear-seat safety, the added attention could spark stronger federal policies. Currently, NHTSA has yet to add rear-seat safety ratings to its five-star crash-test program, the results of which are printed on new-vehicle window stickers.

“It’s long overdue for NHTSA to strengthen its five-star safety ratings, which haven’t seen major updates in more than a decade,” says William Wallace, CR’s manager of safety policy. “NHTSA should seize the opportunity presented by new technologies. When the agency updates its ratings, it should fully account for how well a car protects people’s safety in the rear seat.”



CR’s New Rear-Seat Safety Ratings, Explained

FIGURING OUT WHICH cars have various safety features in the back seat can be difficult—if not impossible—for consumers, says Emily Thomas, PhD, CR’s automotive safety program manager. So she and other engineers at CR’s Auto Test Center performed detailed evaluations, tapped data sources, and worked with automakers to tally which cars offer certain rear-seat safety features.

From that tally, and the results of our child-safety tests, we developed CR’s new Rear-Seat Safety Score. As we collect more data, our ratings will expand to include more vehicles. The current list of vehicles we’ve scored is on the facing page.

“The message from our new rear-seat safety testing is not that vehicles with lower scores are unsafe, but that they do not offer the same comparative margin of protection as those vehicles that earn higher marks,” Thomas says.

Winners and Losers

SO FAR, NO NEW VEHICLES get top ratings across all of our scored categories for rear-seat safety. That will likely change, says Jennifer Stockburger, director of operations at CR’s Auto Test Center, who oversees the program. “Automakers often update their vehicles in order to meet more stringent safety evaluations,” she says.

In our first review, a few results and vehicles were particularly noteworthy:

- The Genesis brand lags behind. Although the GV70 SUV features a first-of-its-kind radar-based rear-occupant alert, it fails to offer more basic rear-occupant protection. For example, no Genesis sedan or SUV has advanced rear restraints. A spokesman for Hyundai and Genesis told CR that the automakers are reviewing

advanced rear restraints and “are committed to making these features standard.”

- Some vehicles designed to carry lots of passengers scored poorly, including the Jeep Grand Cherokee L, the Hyundai Santa Fe and Hyundai Tucson SUVs, and the Kia Carnival minivan. None of these newly redesigned vehicles has advanced rear restraint systems or rear-belt reminders. Spokespeople for Jeep and Kia said their companies would not discuss plans for their cars.

- Some affordable and popular vehicles scored well. The Toyota Sienna minivan, Honda Civic sedan, and Nissan Rogue, Nissan Pathfinder, and Ford Bronco Sport SUVs all get very good rear-seat scores. So does the popular Ford F-150 XLT pickup truck.

Ratings ➤ **Getting Safer in the Back** Our new score includes which safety features come standard on the new cars, trucks, and SUVs that we have recently tested for rear-seat safety.

 Make + Model	Model Year Tested	Rear-Seat Safety Score	Child Safety			Rear-Occupant Protection		
			Child-seat fit	Booster use	Rear-occupant alert	Rear-belt minder	Advanced rear restraints	Rear head restraints
Toyota Sienna	2021	69	➤	⚠	⚠	➤	➤	➤
Nissan Pathfinder	2022	66	➤	⚠	⚠	➤	⚠	➤
Honda Civic	2022	66	➤	➤	⚠	➤	⚠	⚠
Nissan Rogue	2021	66	➤	➤	⚠	➤	⚠	⚠
Ford Bronco Sport	2021	61	➤	⚠	⚠	➤	⚠	⚠
Cadillac Escalade	2021	61	➤	➤	⚠	➤	⚠	➤
Ford F-150 XLT	2021	61	➤	➤	⚠	➤	⚠	⚠
Ford Mustang Mach-E	2021	61	➤	➤	⚠	➤	⚠	➤
Toyota Venza	2021	57	➤	⚠	⚠	➤	⚠	➤
Mitsubishi Outlander	2022	52	⚠	⚠	⚠	➤	⚠	➤
Toyota RAV4 Prime	2021	50	⚠	⚠	⚠	➤	⚠	⚠
Acura MDX	2022	48	➤	➤	⚠	⚠	⚠	➤
Lexus IS300	2021	48	⚠	➤	⚠	➤	⚠	⚠
Chevrolet Tahoe	2021	47	➤	➤	⚠	⚠	⚠	➤
Chevrolet Suburban	2021	46	➤	➤	⚠	⚠	⚠	➤
Chevrolet Trailblazer	2021	43	➤	⚠	⚠	⚠	⚠	⚠
Kia K5	2021	42	➤	➤	⚠	⚠	⚠	⚠
Kia Sorento	2021	41	⚠	➤	➤	⚠	⚠	➤
Buick Envision	2021	41	➤	➤	⚠	⚠	⚠	⚠
Polestar 2	2021	41	⚠	➤	⚠	⚠	⚠	➤
Genesis GV80	2021	41	➤	⚠	➤	⚠	⚠	⚠
Jeep Grand Cherokee L	2021	40	➤	➤	⚠	⚠	⚠	➤
Kia Carnival	2022	38	⚠	⚠	➤	⚠	⚠	➤
Hyundai Santa Fe	2021	38	➤	⚠	⚠	⚠	⚠	⚠
Chevrolet Bolt EUV	2022	36	➤	➤	⚠	⚠	⚠	⚠
Genesis GV70	2022	35	⚠	⚠	➤	⚠	⚠	⚠
Kia Seltos	2021	35	➤	⚠	⚠	⚠	⚠	➤
Hyundai Tucson	2022	33	⚠	⚠	⚠	⚠	⚠	➤
Hyundai Santa Cruz	2022	32	⚠	➤	⚠	⚠	⚠	➤
Mercedes GLA	2021	32	⚠	⚠	⚠	⚠	⚠	➤
Volkswagen Taos	2022	31	⚠	➤	⚠	⚠	⚠	➤
Hyundai Elantra	2021	31	⚠	⚠	⚠	⚠	⚠	➤
Hyundai Ioniq	2021	30	➤	⚠	⚠	⚠	⚠	⚠
Acura TLX	2021	28	⚠	⚠	⚠	⚠	⚠	⚠
Genesis G80	2021	24	⚠	⚠	⚠	⚠	⚠	⚠



How to Get a Fair Deal on a Car



CAR SHOPPING over the past year has been a wild ride. Pandemic-related supply chain problems have thinned the selection of vehicles on dealer

lots and driven prices higher than usual—sometimes well above the manufacturer's suggested retail price (MSRP). Even used cars aren't a bargain these days, with sales prices at record levels.

Why are deals so hard to find? It all comes down to supply and demand: Some people can't put off buying a new car and are willing to pay more than the sticker price to get what they want. The highly rated and

sought-after Kia Telluride, for example, has sold, on average, at about 17 percent above MSRP for the past several months, according to CR's most recent data. The Kia Sorento, Chevrolet Trailblazer, and new Ford Maverick are among the many other models that have recently been selling at prices 15 percent or more above sticker.

Several models on the market were recently being purchased for less than MSRP, but these are usually not as sought-after or are expensive to begin with, or are lacking in performance or other key characteristics. For example, the BMW 740i xDrive, recommended by CR, is being discounted by up to 5 percent on average,

but it starts at over \$85,000. Other models—such as the Alfa Romeo Stelvio, the BMW X2, and the Volvo S90—are also selling at a discount but are not recommended by CR.

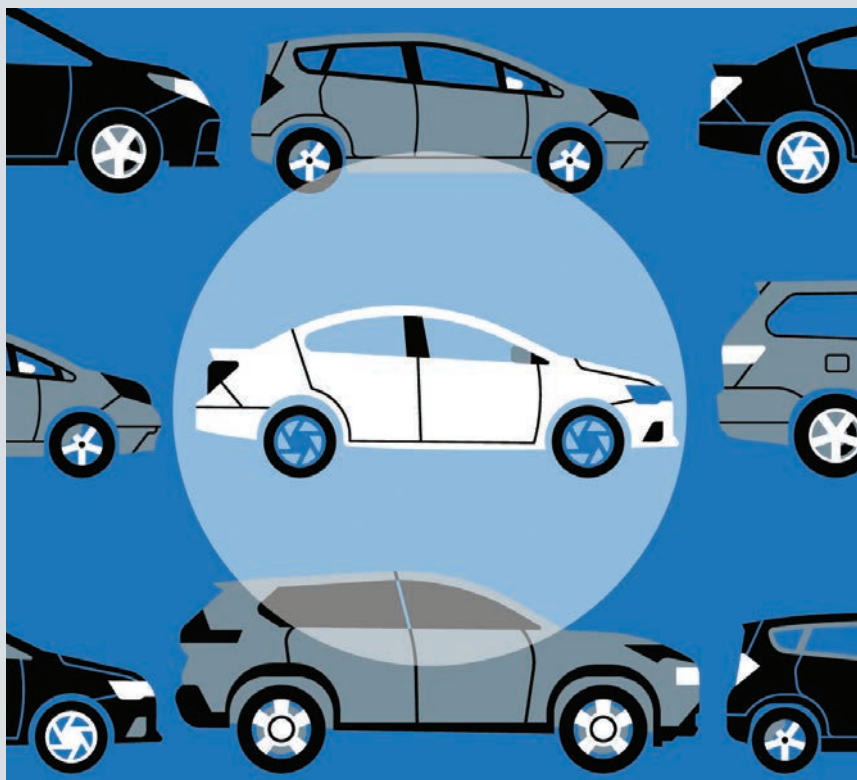
While you're not likely to get a great deal on most cars these days, relative savings can still be found on some worthy choices. CR data show that a handful of models have been selling at or close to MSRP and are comparable to some of the cars people are paying far too much for (see "Smart Choices Can Lead to Big Savings," on the facing page). Let somebody else shell out thousands over sticker for a Telluride while you avoid paying that hefty premium by choosing a comparable Honda Pilot instead. (Model prices can fluctuate from month to month depending on consumer demand.)

The key is to be flexible and, above all, informed. To help you get a fair price on a good car—and avoid falling for a great deal on a bad car—remember these three tips.

➤ **Don't expect awesome deals.** There aren't enough cars to satisfy demand these days, so the great deals that were common early in the pandemic are over. Now a good price is measured by how close the transaction number is to MSRP. But if you do your research, you can get a price that's at or maybe even slightly below MSRP.

➤ **Beware of discounts.** Most of the cars with the deepest discounts right now are either very expensive to begin with or are not very good cars. Don't get stuck with something you'll regret buying.

➤ **Use CR's expert reviews and ratings.** Consumer Reports' expert reviews and reliability data can steer you toward competitive models that are least likely to give you problems in the future. And our online model pages (at [CR.org/cars0222](https://www.consumerreports.org/cars0222)) give you local transaction prices that you can use as a guide. Make the whole process even easier by using CR's Build & Buy car buying service (at [CR.org/buildandbuy0222](https://www.consumerreports.org/buildandbuy0222)) to lock in a competitive price from home.



SMART CHOICES CAN LEAD TO BIG SAVINGS

Many popular models today are selling at far above sticker price. You can save by buying a comparable car that isn't being sold at a premium.

THE POPULAR CHOICE

THE SMARTER CHOICE

2022 KIA TELLURIDE EX AWD

2022 HONDA PILOT SPORT AWD



+17%	MSRP	+2%
\$46,705	AVG. PRICE PAID	\$39,723
\$39,790	MSRP	\$38,830
97	OVERALL SCORE	76
↑	RELIABILITY	↓



2022 CHEVROLET SILVERADO 1500 LTD CREW CAB 4WD

2022 RAM 1500 LONE STAR CREW CAB 4WD



+11%	MSRP	+2%
\$50,372	AVG. PRICE PAID	\$46,383
\$45,300	MSRP	\$45,400
46	OVERALL SCORE	75
↓	RELIABILITY	↓



2022 AUDI Q5 PRESTIGE S

2022 ACURA RDX SH-AWD A-SPEC



+9%	MSRP	-1%
\$49,548	AVG. PRICE PAID	\$46,846
\$45,600	MSRP	\$47,150
79	OVERALL SCORE	71
↑	RELIABILITY	↓



2022 KIA K5 GT

2022 HONDA ACCORD EX-L



+16%	MSRP	+2%
\$36,102	AVG. PRICE PAID	\$32,331
\$31,090	MSRP	\$31,790
76	OVERALL SCORE	88
↓	RELIABILITY	↑





ROAD TEST

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



ELECTRIC CARS

Tesla Model S

Confounding Controls Spoil a Superb EV

60

OVERALL
SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 88

HIGHS Acceleration, braking, quietness, hatchback versatility, no tailpipe emissions, low running costs

LOWES Odd steering wheel shape, controls, access, long charging time compared with fueling a gas car

POWERTRAIN 670-hp, dual electric motors; 1-speed direct drive; AWD

RANGE 405 miles

PRICE
\$94,990–\$129,990 base price range
\$92,690 as tested

THE UPDATED MODEL S

probably would have garnered the highest road-test score we've ever recorded if it weren't for its new yoke-style steering wheel. The yoke—similar to the half steering wheel pilots use to control airplanes—brings major compromises in usability, maneuverability, and comfort. It's a shame, because the Model S is otherwise a truly amazing car.

It's the quickest car we've ever tested, accelerating from 0 to 60 mph in just 3.2 seconds. It also handles superbly, snaking through our avoidance maneuver with outstanding agility, thanks to quick steering and hardly any body roll.

But the yoke was a constant nuisance during daily driving. Turns that required hand-over-hand movements—such as pulling into a driveway or parking—left one hand without part of the wheel to hold onto.

In some cases the steering wheel simply slipped out of the test driver's hands.

Possibly even more egregious is that Tesla eliminated the turn-signal and wiper stalks, replacing them with touch-sensitive buttons on the yoke. We always had to look down at the wheel to activate them.

FCW, AEB with pedestrian detection, LDW, and LKA are standard. Instead of a typical BSW system that grabs the driver's attention by flashing an icon in the side mirror or at the base of the windshield pillar, the Model S displays images of cars in adjacent lanes on the instrument cluster screen—a poor substitute. And despite the names of its standard Autopilot and optional \$10,000 “Full Self-Driving Capability” features, the Model S doesn't drive itself, making the yoke steering wheel design that much more ill-advised.

MIDSIZE PICKUPS

Nissan Frontier

Brawny, but the Ride Is Too Stiff

54

OVERALL
SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 67

HIGHS Braking, transmission, controls

LOWES Ride, tight rear seat, no telescoping steering column

POWERTRAIN 310-hp, 3.8-liter V6 engine; 9-speed automatic transmission; four-wheel drive

FUEL 18 mpg on regular

PRICE
\$27,840–\$37,240 base price range
\$40,630 as tested

AFTER 16 YEARS without a major update, the Frontier has finally gotten a redesign. The new version benefits from a strong powertrain and a modern infotainment system, but it still suffers from a rough ride. It's no match for the Honda Ridgeline or Hyundai Santa Cruz when it comes to comfort and refinement.

The Frontier's pairing of a brawny V6 with a smooth-shifting nine-speed automatic is the truck's best aspect. The engine feels meatier and has more readily available power than the Ford Ranger's turbo four-cylinder.

It rides slightly better than the old model but still feels very “trucky,” with a stiff and jittery character that causes the rear end to bounce around on rougher roads. Our drivers also were put off by the Frontier's unusually heavy steering at low speeds. Their biceps got a workout


just maneuvering around a parking lot. On the plus side, the Frontier posted a higher speed through our avoidance maneuver than its rivals (other than the Ridgeline) due to strong tire grip and a well-tuned ESC, and it stopped much shorter in our braking tests than all of them.

The Frontier still doesn't have a telescoping steering column, an omission that irritated our taller test drivers. We otherwise appreciated the roomy driving position, although the old-school lumbar adjustment lever on the driver's seat didn't work very well. Don't think about sitting in the rear seat for more than a quick jaunt because of the uncomfortably upright seatback. At least the controls are super-easy to use.

FCW and AEB with pedestrian detection come standard, but BSW and RCTW are optional.

PHOTOS: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

Ratings ➤ **Missing the Mark** The Nissan Frontier redesign makes only moderate improvements, while the updated Tesla Model S goes for sizzle over usability.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Survey Results	Road-Test Results													Active Safety Features			
		Predicted reliability	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	
		Owner satisfaction																	

PICKUP TRUCKS \$25,000-\$45,000

✓ Honda Ridgeline 3.5L	82	↑	↑	83	20	↑ / ↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	53.5	7.3	134	NR	S	S	S	0
✓ Ford Ranger 2.3T	62	↑	↓	55	20	↓ / ↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	47.0	7.4	143	NR	S	S	S	0
Hyundai Santa Cruz 2.5T	59	↓	↑	77	24	↑ / ↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	51.5	6.6	132	NR	S	S	0	0
Nissan Frontier 3.8L	54	↓	↑	67	18	↓ / ↓	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓	52.0	7.5	128	NR	S	S	S	0
Toyota Tacoma 3.5L	51	↓	↓	42	19	↓ / ↓	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓	46.0	8.2	146	NR	S	S	S	0
Chevrolet Colorado 3.6L	45	↓	↓	61	18	↓ / ↓	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓	48.5	7.5	132	NR	0	—	—	—
GMC Canyon 3.6L	45	↓	↓	61	18	↓ / ↓	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓	48.5	7.5	132	NR	0	—	—	—
Chevrolet Colorado 2.8D	44	↓	↓	60	24	↓ / ↓	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓	49.0	10.3	134	NR	0	—	—	—
GMC Canyon 2.8D	44	↓	↓	60	24	↓ / ↓	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓	49.0	10.3	134	NR	0	—	—	—
Jeep Gladiator 3.6L	38	↓	↑	52	18	↓ / ↓	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓	49.5	7.8	135	NR	0	—	0	0

ELECTRIC VEHICLES \$45,000-\$55,000

✓ Ford Mustang Mach-E E	80	↑	↑	78	90 [†]	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑	52.0	5.3	136	29.5	S	S	S	S
✓ Tesla Model 3 E	79	↓	↑	82	130 [†]	↑ / ↓	↓	↓	↓	↑	↑	55.0	5.3	133	2+2	S	S	S	—
Tesla Model Y E	59	↓	↑	90	121 [†]	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑	54.5	4.7	121	25.0	S	S	S	—
Polestar 2 E	57	↓	↑	72	92 [†]	↑ / ↓	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑	55.5	4.4	123	3+0	S	S	S	S

ELECTRIC VEHICLES AND LUXURY SEDANS OVER \$75,000

✓ BMW 750i 4.4T	84	↓	↑	99	21	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	52.5	5.3	131	2+4	S	S	0	S
✓ Audi A8 3.0T	83	↓	↓	96	21	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	53.5	6.1	133	2+3	S	S	S	0
Lexus LS500 3.5T	66	↓	↓	72	20	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	51.5	6.0	136	2+1	S	S	S	S
Porsche Taycan E	61	↓	↑	86	77 [†]	↑ / ↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	52.5	4.0	130	1+3	S	S	S	0
Tesla Model S E	60	↓	↑	88	120 [†]	↑ / ↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	58.0	3.2	125	4+3	S	S	S	—
Jaguar I-Pace E	59	↓	↓	82	76 [†]	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑	52.0	4.3	136	25.5	S	S	S	S
Audi E-Tron E	49	↓	↓	90	74 [†]	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	49.5	6.3	131	28.0	S	S	S	S

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

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

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

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

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

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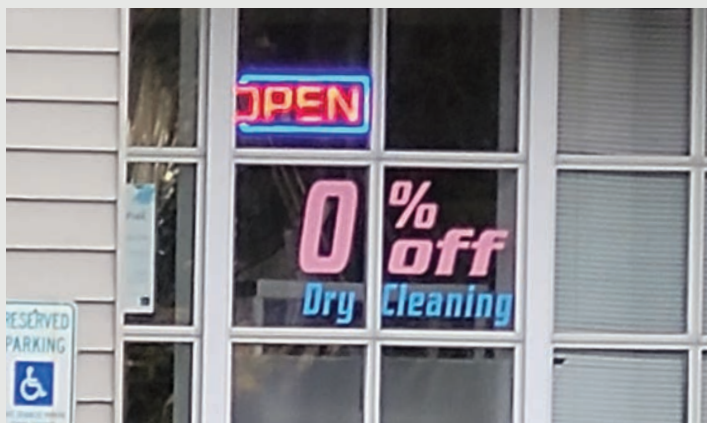
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Don't Be Fooled by These Signs

Some postings just can't be believed

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Who advertises that you'll be paying full price?
Submitted by Sam Whiting, Seattle



9:22



AA

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This special airfare can be yours ... when JetBlue invents an eighth day of the week.
Submitted by J LeCapitaine, via email

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Not exactly safe for wheelchairs, we'd say.
Submitted by Jim Metz, as seen in Honolulu



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you'll find our service on
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Submitted by Michele Hake, via email



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