



Kia Sorento Hybrid

# THE MOST (AND LEAST) RELIABLE CARS

P.50

BEST MATTRESSES FOR BACK PAIN • SAVE BIG ON GROCERIES



MARCH 2025

## RATINGS & REVIEWS

Refrigerators

Ranges

Video Doorbells

Coffee

Headphones

Toaster Ovens

# YOUR ANTI-SCAM GUIDE

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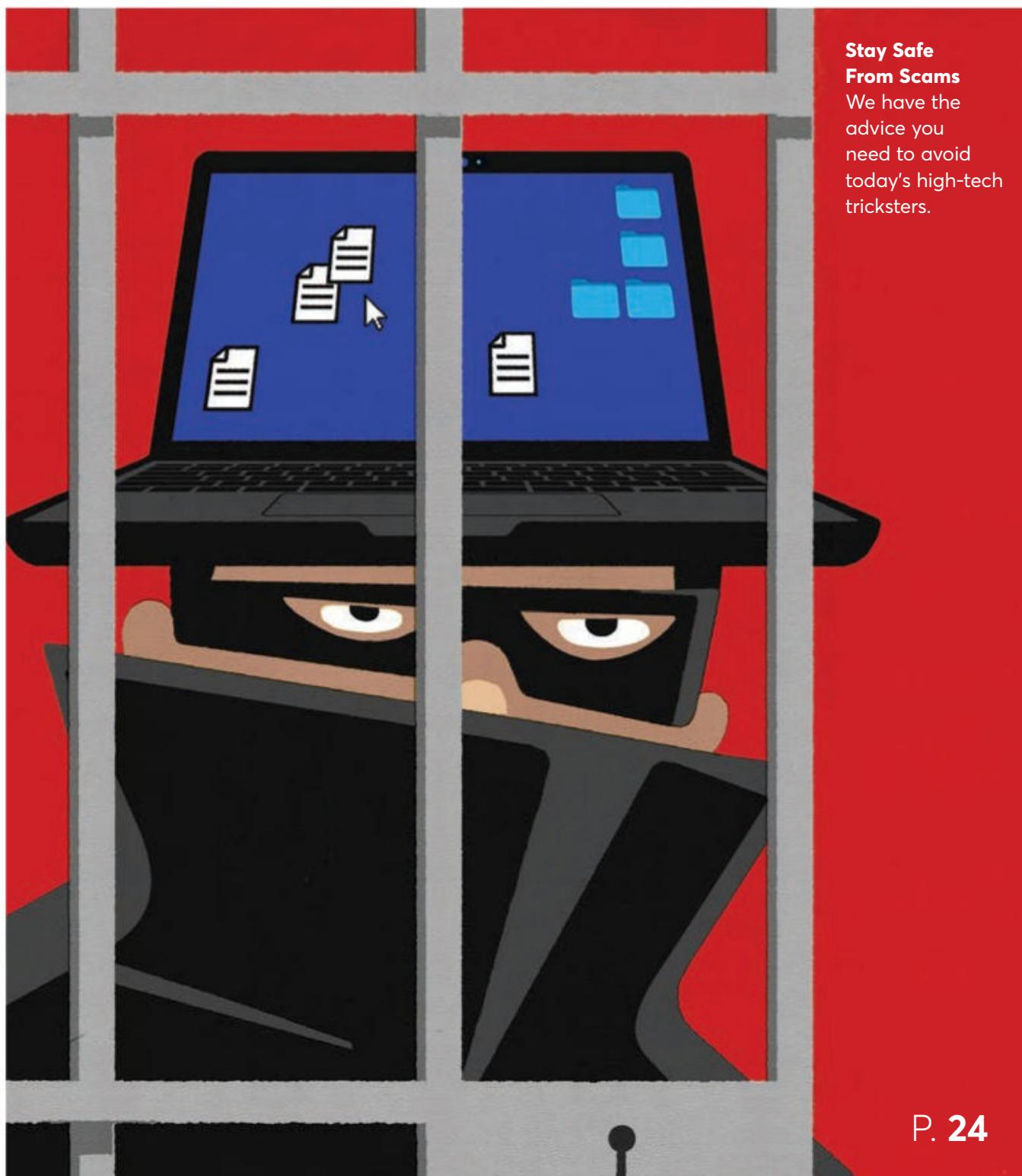


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## Stay Safe From Scams

We have the advice you need to avoid today's high-tech tricksters.

FEATURE



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Fraudsters are using tools like AI to make their schemes more convincing—and harmful. Here's how to protect yourself and your money.

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## Making School Food Healthier

Last spring, a CR investigation raised alarms about Lunchables and other popular prepackaged meal kits, versions of which were being offered as part of the National School Lunch Program. Many were found to contain potentially concerning levels of heavy metals and phthalate chemicals, which have been linked to a long list of health concerns, as well as sodium, which can raise blood pressure even in young people.

In short, CR's experts warned, nobody should eat these products regularly, and "they definitely shouldn't be considered a healthy school lunch." In late summer, we also delivered nearly 50,000 consumer signatures asking the Department of Agriculture to remove Lunchables from the lunch program.

In November, Lunchables manufacturer Kraft Heinz pulled the products from the program. It was a major victory for CR and our partner nonprofit More Perfect Union—and, more important, for the kids eating those school lunches.

Now CR is broadening these efforts, calling on companies and regulators to adopt better nutrition and safety standards for school lunches. We co-sponsored a California law that will ban artificial food dyes—which have been linked to hyperactivity and neurobehavioral problems in children—from food sold in public schools by the end of 2027. And we're petitioning the companies that provide most of our country's school lunches—Aramark, Chartwells, and Sodexo—to remove the dyes from their school offerings.

You can support this ongoing effort by signing our petition at [CR.org/lunchpetition](https://CR.org/lunchpetition).

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meal kits tested by CR contained heavy metals—lead, cadmium, or both.

SOURCE: CONSUMER REPORTS



## ACTION UPDATE

It's reasonable for banks to charge a fee for letting a transaction go through on a tapped-out account, effectively making a short-term consumer loan. But the typical "overdraft" fee of \$35 is out of proportion to what the service costs banks. So CR has been urging the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to limit overdraft fees, and delivered 28,000-plus petition signatures in support of such a measure. In December, the CFPB issued a rule giving large banks the option to charge \$5 or enough to cover costs. The rule is projected to save consumers up to \$5 billion a year.



## Improving Auto Safety

### WHAT'S AT STAKE

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's star-based auto safety ratings system has failed to keep pace with advancements in auto safety technology.

As a result, nearly all vehicles now receive four- or five-star ratings—making it difficult for consumers to distinguish the safest new models from those that offer merely average or lower levels of safety.

In addition, consumer advocates say, if the five-star system (known as the New Car Assessment Program, or NCAP) doesn't clearly signal to consumers the value of the latest safety

features, automakers have less incentive to design them into all their vehicles as standard features.

### WHAT CR IS DOING ABOUT IT

CR has for years been urging NHTSA to overhaul the NCAP program to better reflect the latest safety technologies. And our safety experts have been providing detailed recommendations and feedback to the agency.

CR's work has paid off: In November, the agency finalized new standards that incorporate test criteria for proven safety systems such as forward collision warning, automatic emergency braking, lane keeping assistance, blind spot warning, and other active and passive systems designed to protect drivers, passengers, and pedestrians. These and other updates, which will take effect for the 2026 model year, are the biggest step forward since NCAP was created in 1979.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

To learn which vehicles are already equipped with the most advanced safety features, and read more about the technologies, head to [CR.org/autosafetyguide](https://CR.org/autosafetyguide).



Our November/December article “**Protect Yourself From Big Medical Bills**” offered the best ways to plan and safeguard your assets in the face of high costs. CR readers shared their thoughts about that story and other articles in the issue. Read our responses here.

MANY PEOPLE OVERLOOK an important consideration when weighing Medicare Advantage vs. supplemental plans. Because most Advantage plans are HMOs in nature and depend on networks, they require a primary care physician's referral to seek out a specialist or specialty care. These plans also require pre-approval for many specialist procedures or advanced care. According to the KFF, in 2022 an average of 7.4 percent of preapproval requests were denied (and I've read that

many insurers deny a higher percentage of requests). Only a small number of those were appealed, even though many of those appeals were successful. These denials and the appeal process can be a big hurdle to face for people trying to get treatment for themselves or for relatives.

—Bill Bouyer, Silver Spring, MD

**EDITOR'S NOTE** *It's true that in 2022 Medicare Advantage plans denied 7.4 percent of prior authorization requests—more than in previous years. If you need to appeal a denial, take these steps: First, call your insurer to find out why the claim was denied and to confirm that the denial was not made in error. Next, file a formal*

*appeal. Ask your doctor for any information that could help make your case stronger, then go to medicare.gov and search “filing an appeal” for specific information about what can be a five-level appeal process. As you point out, appeals can work. One analysis, also from KFF, found that 83 percent of appeals resulted in overturning the initial denial.*

I HAVE FOUND that if you contact the billing agency and ask it to reduce the medical bill, many times they will be able to do so, at least for a small amount. This also applies to doctor's offices, hospitals, and sometimes laboratories. In my family's experience, labs will often offer a lower

price if you agree to pay in cash. An equally good strategy is to ask the person ordering the test if it is really needed.

—Robert Bathke, Jacksonville, FL

**EDITOR'S NOTE** *It's true that you can negotiate a medical bill. For example, if you have the funds available, you could offer a one-time payment (instead of opting for a payment plan) for a reduced total bill, which could save you about 15 percent or more. Need to pay in installments? Ask for zero interest. If cash is tight, you could explain your hardship situation and ask for the total bill to be lowered. Although a provider isn't required to provide a discount, it may have some discretion and may be able to work with you if you raise the issue.*



NEW-CAR RATINGS

IN “CR'S NEW CAR RATINGS,” you included ratings for full-sized pickup trucks. The Ram 1500 isn't mentioned on this list. However, in a previous 2024 issue, the Ram 1500 was ranked at the top of its class. I remember this because we bought a 2024 Ram 1500 based on your recommendation. Is there a reason that you chose not to include the Ram in the 2024 end-of-year issue (such as a safety concern that became evident subsequent to the earlier publication)?

—Maureen Voorhees, Greensboro, NC

**EDITOR'S NOTE** *The Ram 1500 has been an impressive truck, and it topped the full-sized pickup ratings in our April 2024 Auto Issue. In fact, it was the only full-sized*



WRITE  
Go to  
[CR.org/lettertoeditor](https://CR.org/lettertoeditor)  
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for publication.

truck that qualified for a CR recommendation. But due to updates and a new inline-six powertrain, we temporarily removed it from our ratings until we can complete our retesting of it. We just finished those tests, so look for updated results in our April 2025 issue.

WHY WASN'T THE Subaru Forester included in your compact-SUV ratings?  
—Giles Nappert, via email

**EDITOR'S NOTE** The Subaru Forester was redesigned for the 2025 model year. We were still in the midst of testing it while we were working on the November/December issue, so we couldn't include the results, but testing is now complete. Due to several improvements, the Forester is currently the top-rated compact SUV. Read the highlights in our road tests on page 57 of this issue, and see the complete report online at [CR.org/cars](http://CR.org/cars).

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## DRY EYE REMEDIES

IN "HOW TO Keep Your Vision Sharp," you mentioned treatments for dry eyes. One other treatment not mentioned in the article: daily low-dose doxycycline. I used to suffer terribly from dry eyes. None of the usual treatments had any effect. However, once I started taking doxycycline each day as prescribed by my ophthalmologist, all my dry eye symptoms disappeared.  
—Lee Barkan, Metuchen, NJ

**EDITOR'S NOTE** It's true: Doxycycline is sometimes used to treat certain eye conditions and infections, and there's evidence that it's an effective remedy for some causes of dry eye, especially when it is caused by meibomian gland dysfunction. While this isn't a typical use of doxycycline, it could be worth asking your doctor about if your condition is not responding to other treatments.



## LAPTOP SCREEN TIPS

I ENJOYED READING "The Best Laptops—for Less." However, unless I missed it, you did not mention one important topic: laptops that have matte/anti-glare screens. I hope I am not the only person in the world who appreciates not seeing my bald head looking back at me—along with reflections of the lights in the room behind me—when I am working on my laptop.  
—Mark Evans, Allen Park, MI



## BREWING A BETTER CUP OF TEA

Regarding "CR's Guide to Tea": This terrific article does not mention the best water temperatures for optimal brewing results.  
—Dennis Boyer, Watertown, MA

**EDITOR'S NOTE** Tea aficionados do use specific water temperatures for different types of tea. It's not an exact science, so you may need to experiment with your favorite type to see which temperature best brings out its flavor (or check the box or tin for suggestions). The ideal temperatures are:

<b>Black</b>	205° F to 212° F
<b>Green</b>	175° F to 180° F
<b>Herbal</b>	212° F
<b>Oolong</b>	185° F to 205° F
<b>Pu erh</b>	180° F to 195° F
<b>White</b>	165° F to 170° F

**EDITOR'S NOTE** Choosing a matte or glossy display largely comes down to personal preference; there's no "right" choice here. A matte display, as you correctly point out, can reduce glare on the screen, which may improve visibility in certain lighting conditions, such as when you're in a space with harsh overhead lighting or outside on a sunny day. Glossy displays, however, tend to show off rich and vibrant colors better than matte (assuming there's no glare getting in the way). In the Detailed Test Results section of our product rating pages, we note the type of display each laptop has. Also, some manufacturers (including Apple) now let you choose which finish your laptop will have. Laptops we've tested with anti-glare finishes that do well in our ratings include the Samsung Galaxy Book4 Ultra, \$2,400, and the Lenovo Legion Pro 5i 16, \$1,830.



## EFFICIENT SPACE HEATING

IN "WHAT WE'RE TESTING in Our Labs ..." I noticed that none of the space heaters reviewed are the water/oil-filled radiant type. Are these generally efficient? They are the only type I have owned for many years.  
—John Shutze, Bowling Green, OH

**EDITOR'S NOTE** CR doesn't measure space heater efficiency; we assess how effectively a heater warms a standard-sized room (17x12 feet) in 15 minutes. Our lab engineers have found that oil-filled heaters struggle to heat a room in even twice that much time and don't keep a nearby person warm very well, either.

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

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

## Video Doorbells

<p><b>WE TESTED:</b> 53 models <b>WE TEST FOR:</b> Video quality in regular and low light, audio quality, the time between when the button is pressed and an alert appears on your smart device, and more.</p> <p><b>ABOUT THE SCORES:</b> Median: 60 Range: 34-84</p>	<p><b>BEST OVERALL &amp; WORKS WITH APPLE HOMEKIT</b> ✓ <b>Logitech Circle View Doorbell 961-000484</b> \$160</p>  <p><b>84</b> OVERALL SCORE</p>	<p><b>BATTERY-POWERED &amp; WORKS WITH AMAZON'S ALEXA</b> ✓ <b>Arlo Video Doorbell (AVD4001-100NAS)</b> \$130</p>  <p><b>82</b> OVERALL SCORE</p>	<p><b>EXCELLENT SMART FEATURES &amp; GREAT FOR GOOGLE ASSISTANT</b> \$ <b>TP-Link Tapo D130</b> \$60</p>  <p><b>81</b> OVERALL SCORE</p>
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## Toilets

<p><b>WE TESTED:</b> 58 models <b>WE TEST FOR:</b> How well a model's flush removes solid waste, how well a flush cleans the front and sides of the bowl, the amount of noise the flush makes, and more.</p> <p><b>ABOUT THE SCORES:</b> Median: 70 Range: 35-81</p>	<p><b>QUIET &amp; EFFECTIVE CLEANING (SINGLE-FLUSH)</b> ✓ <b>Gerber Viper GWS31502S</b> \$220</p>  <p><b>81</b> OVERALL SCORE</p>	<p><b>RESISTS ODOR &amp; SOIL WELL (DUAL-FLUSH)</b> ✓ <b>American Standard Edgemere 204AA200.020</b> \$220</p>  <p><b>73</b> OVERALL SCORE</p>	<p><b>ECO-FRIENDLY (DUAL-FLUSH)</b> ✓ <b>Glacier Bay N2428R-DF (Home Depot)</b> \$95</p>  <p><b>72</b> OVERALL SCORE</p>
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## Ask Our Experts

**My toilet bowl isn't clean after I flush. Can I do anything to fix this?**



A WET BOWL rinses clean more easily than a dry one, so do a quick preflush with toilet cleaner in the bowl before you take a seat, in order to prevent unwanted residue. "Then, when you're done, try holding down the flush lever or button through the entire flush, which allows more water to be used," says CR's John Galeotafiore, who manages CR's product testing. When shopping for a new toilet, our testers say to look for models with a larger flush valve (the device inside the tank that allows the water into the bowl), like a 4-inch flush valve, rather than the standard 2-inch. You can also use our ratings to find toilets that did well in our bowl cleaning test, like the Gerber above.

ILLUSTRATION: JOSEPH CARRINGTON

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

## Oscillating Multi-Tools

**WE TESTED:** 14 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** How quickly a tool cuts through wood, metal, and plastic; how quickly it removes grout between tiles; how well it sands surfaces; and more.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**  
 Median: 84  
 Range: 57-95

BEST OVERALL & CORDLESS  
 ✓ **Flex Oscillating Multi-Tool Kit (FX4111-1A)**  
 \$200



**95**  
 OVERALL SCORE

GREAT DEAL (BUT CORDED)  
 \$ **Avid Power Tools 3.5A Oscillating Multi-Tool (MW146)**  
 \$60



**91**  
 OVERALL SCORE

LIGHTER-WEIGHT CORDLESS  
 ✓ **DeWalt 20V Max XR 3-Speed Cordless Oscillating Multi-Tool (DCS356B)**  
 \$170



**87**  
 OVERALL SCORE

## Refrigerators

**WE TESTED:** 39 side-by-side models  
**WE TEST FOR:** Temperature uniformity throughout the fridge, how energy-efficient and quiet the model is, how spacious the interior is, and more.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**  
 Median: 62  
 Range: 51-72

MADE BY A RELIABLE BRAND  
 ✓ **GE GSE23GGPWW**  
 \$1,618



**72**  
 OVERALL SCORE

NICELY ORGANIZED INTERIOR  
 ✓ **LG LRSDDS2706S**  
 \$2,100



**72**  
 OVERALL SCORE

LARGE-CAPACITY FREEZER  
 ✓ **Whirlpool WRS588FIHZ**  
 \$1,400



**68**  
 OVERALL SCORE

## Hand Mixers

**WE TESTED:** 29 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** How quickly each machine whips cream, how well it mixes cookie dough, how loud it is while mixing, how easy its controls are to use, and more.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**  
 Median: 64  
 Range: 48-83

QUICKEST AT WHIPPING CREAM  
 ✓ **Breville Handy Mix Scraper BHM800SILUSC**  
 \$130



**83**  
 OVERALL SCORE

CONVENIENT TO USE FOR LESS  
 ✓ **KitchenAid Architect KHM7210 7-Speed**  
 \$90



**75**  
 OVERALL SCORE

BUDGET-FRIENDLY BUY  
 \$ **Hamilton Beach Professional 7 62663**  
 \$40



**74**  
 OVERALL SCORE

## Noise-Canceling Headphones

**WE TESTED:** 122 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** Sound quality, including tonal accuracy, and how well the headphones reduce ambient noise when the noise-canceling feature is activated.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**  
 Median: 69  
 Range: 41-86

GREAT SOUND QUALITY  
 ✓ **Bowers & Wilkins Px7 S2e**  
 \$320



**79**  
 OVERALL SCORE

BEST FOR EXERCISE  
 ✓ **Sennheiser Momentum Sport**  
 \$230



**75**  
 OVERALL SCORE

AMAZING PRICE  
 \$ **Soundcore Life Q20**  
 \$50



**73**  
 OVERALL SCORE



## My car smells funky, but I can't figure out why. What can I do?

THERE ARE A NUMBER of potential sources of bad odors in cars. "Water leaks, blocked A/C drains, not changing the cabin air filter—these can all lead to unpleasant smells," says Michael Crossen, CR's lead auto technician.

But first, clean up the basics: Search under the seats for old french fries or other crumbs. Check cup holders for spills. Remove the floor mats and shampoo them at a car wash or at home with a solution of water and detergent. Sprinkle the car's carpet with baking soda, let it sit for 15 minutes, then vacuum it up. When you're done, leave an open can of coffee beans in the car overnight—a trick we learned from a car wash owner. Coffee acts as a deodorizer.

If the air coming out of your car's vents smells like a locker

room, the problem could be the condensation that comes from the evaporator in your heating and cooling system. If water collects and sits in there long enough, you get a musty smell. To fix it, turn the car's interior fan on low and open the windows. Then spray Lysol or A/C disinfectant into the intake vents (found at the base of the outer windshield near the wipers). For a detailed guide, go to [CR.org/mustycar](http://CR.org/mustycar). Also swap in a new cabin air filter (usually accessed via the car's glove box).

Finally, if the vented air smells sweet or fishy, take it to a mechanic. It could be a sign that your car's heater core is leaking coolant, which needs to be fixed right away or your engine could overheat.

### How can I get my kitchen sink really clean?

THE KITCHEN SINK is one of the dirtiest spots in your house. In fact, a 2011 study found that the sink had far more bacteria, including salmonella and E. coli, than almost any other

spot tested—second only to the kitchen sponge. The bacteria in your sink comes from the food you prepare (particularly raw meats), and it can remain on surfaces for a very long time, according to the Department of Agriculture. Salmonella, for example, can live on your sink's surface for 32 hours and potentially contaminate any other foods you rinse in your sink, which can make you sick.

To keep your sink clean, the USDA advises wiping it down with warm, soapy water daily. And if you used it to rinse items such as cutting boards, knives, or packaging that touched risky foods like raw meat, apply a sanitizer such as Clorox disinfectant, after the soap, and allow the sink to air-dry.

Additionally, you should sanitize your sink once a week, paying attention to its corners. If you have a garbage disposal, clean it once a week by tossing in six ice cubes, 1 tablespoon of baking soda, three lemon slices, and 1 teaspoon of bleach. Add six more ice cubes, cover and run it without water while it grinds, then run water to flush it for 30 seconds. For regular drains, pour in a quarter-cup of baking soda, then a quarter-cup of vinegar. Let it sit for 30 minutes, then run hot water to rinse it out.

### What's the best way to heal my chapped lips?

REACHING FOR a good lip balm can be healing—but check the ingredients first. The American Academy of Dermatology recommends avoiding lip balm ingredients such as camphor and eucalyptus, flavorings like peppermint and cinnamon, lanolin, menthol, and salicylic acid, which can actually irritate chapped lips. (If your lips are tingling or stinging, that's a sign to switch balms.) Burt's Bees Lip Balm, ChapStick Original Lip Balm, and Carmex Classic Lip Balm all list some of these ingredients. Instead, try a balm made with ingredients like castor seed or hemp seed oil, ceramides, petrolatum, or white petroleum jelly.

In a staff review, Vaseline Lip Therapy Crème Brûlée Mini, \$3, which contains petrolatum, was our top pick. It was hydrating and stayed on for hours. Apply your balm several times a day (or every 2 hours if you're outside) and before bed. If you breathe through your mouth at night, running a humidifier while you sleep can help, too. Try not to lick or bite your lips, which will only make things worse, and remember to drink lots of water, which helps keep your skin (including your lips) moist.



LEARN

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

## IN THE KNOW

## The Best Blankets

● The latest blankets offer all kinds of bells and whistles to provide you with extra comfort: Electric ones keep you toasty on cold days, cooling blankets fend off night sweats, and weighted blankets may reduce anxiety. More good news: If you prefer an electric blanket, which contains wires that heat up quickly, they're safer than they used to be. Still, look for ones that are UL- or ETL-certified, and always turn yours off before going to sleep.

Cooling blankets, made of materials that dissipate heat instead of trapping it, cater to hot sleepers. If you sweat at night, choose a washable one, like the Elegear below. And weighted blankets, often filled with glass beads, offer gentle pressure that some people find calming. Go with one that's about 10 percent of your body weight for optimal comfort. Here, the blankets we like most.



COOLING BLANKET

### Elegear Revolutionary Cooling Blanket (full-size) \$36 & up

Get night sweats? This machine-washable 59x79-inch blanket is for you. Out of all the cooling blankets we tried, it kept staffers the most comfortable. It's thin, but the material is surprisingly sturdy and soft.



## HEATED BLANKET

### Sunbeam Royal Ultra Heated Throw \$34 & up

This 50x60-inch blanket warmed up quickly and evenly. It can be adjusted from slightly warm to just-out-of-the-dryer hot. We also like its 9-foot cord and that it shuts off after 4 hours.



WEIGHTED BLANKET

### Gravity Blanket (15-pound throw) \$115 & up

Filled with fine glass beads, this 48x72-inch blanket offers even pressure, and we love the soft velour of its machine-washable cover. Note, however, that the directions say to hand-wash the inner blanket.

## SKIP IT

### Beautyrest Heated Blanket (full-size) \$120 & up

Despite feeling luxurious, this 80x84-inch blanket heated up only in select spots, and it felt just as warm on level 8 as it did on level 20.



## TECH UPDATE

## 3 WiFi Problems, Solved

Few things are quite as frustrating as a poor WiFi connection. We've got expert tips to keep your home internet stable, secure, and stress-free.



### Join WiFi Faster

It's important to have a complex WiFi password to keep your home internet secure—but that can be a hassle to type when you want to connect a new device or guests. Here's a quicker way: If the password is saved on a smartphone that's already on the network, you can push it to a nearby device (as long as you are in each other's Contacts). Unlock your phone while your friend selects the network on their device. A request to "Share Password" will pop up on your phone; tap it. Another way: Go to WiFi settings and tap "Show Network QR Code" (or "Share") for a QR code that others can scan.



### Eliminate Dead Spots

If you have a traditional router and it's not in the most central part of your home, move it there to optimize its range. When it's tucked into the corner of a room, the router can't spread its signal as far, but shifting it even slightly can make a difference. (A longer Ethernet cable can also let you move the router to a better spot.) If you still have a dead zone, try a WiFi extender, which repeats the signal from your router to that area. Our testers like the top-rated Netgear AX1800 (EAX15), \$99. You can also try switching to mesh routers. Already own a mesh system? Go to [CR.org/meshmap](https://CR.org/meshmap) for tips on where to place mesh devices for the best coverage.



### Stay Connected During an Outage

If your power goes out in a storm or your internet service is down temporarily, your smartphone can pinch-hit for your wireless router by creating a personal hotspot. On an Android, swipe down from the top of your screen and tap "Hotspot." On an iPhone, go to Settings > Personal Hotspot, or Settings > Cellular > Personal Hotspot. Then toggle on the switch to "Allow Others to Join." The name of your phone should appear under the WiFi options on the device that you want to connect. (If you don't see a hotspot option, your carrier may not support it. Call to check.)

## CR Time Traveler SCAMS

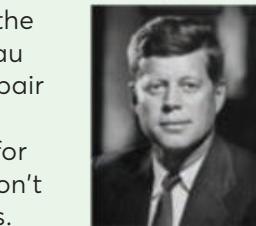


**1939** CR runs a regular column called "The Docket" that collects news of misleading ads, false claims, and fraud to help readers spot similar scams in their own communities.

**1942** With used cars in demand, people are paying high prices for vehicles in poor condition. We reveal how to spot a dishonest dealer trying to sell you a dud.



**1952** We report that the Better Business Bureau found that some TV repair services have been charging consumers for parts and labor that don't actually fix their sets.



**1962** President John F. Kennedy introduces the Consumer Bill of Rights, including protection against "fraudulent, deceitful, or grossly misleading information."



**1975** We tell readers that some petroleum companies have been pumping low-grade gas in place of the higher-grade gas they claim to be selling.

## Which Sandwich Is Healthier?

### CHICK-FIL-A



Cool Wrap	VS.	Grilled Chicken Sandwich
660 CALORIES		390
9 SAT. FAT (G)		2
1,420 SODIUM (MG)		770



A BETTER CHOICE!

### PANERA



Toasted Garden Caprese	VS.	Tuna Salad Sandwich
890 CALORIES		550
16 SAT. FAT (G)		4.5
1,300 SODIUM (MG)		1,060



A BETTER CHOICE!

### JERSEY MIKE'S



The Veggie, #14*	VS.	Grilled Portabella & Swiss, #16*
900 CALORIES		590
21 SAT. FAT (G)		10
1,244 SODIUM (MG)		756

\*Regular size.



A BETTER CHOICE!

If you're headed to a sandwich shop for a quick lunch and looking for the healthiest-sounding option (Maybe a chicken wrap? Or the veggie special?), watch out: Some are actually packed with calories, saturated fat, and sodium. But it's hard to know that unless you dig for the nutritional info (much of which is buried online). So we checked out popular chains to uncover their surprising diet bombs, and the healthier choices to go for instead.

### BOTTOM LINE

Both of these contain grilled chicken, which is healthier than fried, but the wrap, which contains cheese, has about double the sodium and calories, and much more saturated fat.

### BOTTOM LINE

Going meatless is usually a smart move, but this caprese option is high in calories, salt, and saturated fat. The tuna, while still high in sodium, has far less saturated fat.

### BOTTOM LINE

Just because it's called "The Veggie" doesn't make it virtuous. This sub has far more calories and about 500 mg more sodium than the portabella mushroom and cheese sandwich.

**1987** CR reports on widespread telephone scams, in which fraudsters call consumers and falsely promise big profits if they invest in gold bullion, real estate, or art.



**2004** Ransomware attacks, which lock users out of digital files until money is paid to unlock them, begin to pop up on personal computers.



**2025** Many scams use sophisticated technology to trick you, but paper check scams still exist, too. Turn to our Anti-Scam Guide, on page 24, to learn more.



**1995** Scams cost unsuspecting travelers millions of dollars, we say. CR's 24-page travel newsletter teaches readers to spot phony ads, overpriced services, and more.



**2012** Fraud is costing Americans \$40 billion to \$50 billion a year. We teach readers how to avoid common scams, such as tech-support schemes that steal your personal data.





## SAVVY SHOPPER

## Top Tissues From Our Tests

● Tired of dry and scratchy tissues when your nose is raw from a cold or allergies? CR's José Amézquita tested 10 bestselling facial tissue brands for softness, absorbency, tensile strength (how resistant they are to breakage), and abrasion resistance (how much friction a tissue can handle). The results surprised us: Some less expensive store-brand tissues beat out pricier household names like Kleenex, Puffs, and Scotties. What follows: our top picks—and some tissues to leave on the shelf.

## 1 EDITOR'S PICK

**Member's Mark Ultra Soft (Sam's Club)**

1.5¢ per tissue

These unscented three-ply tissues were some of the softest we tested, but they were surprisingly strong and absorbent, making them an excellent choice.

## 2 RUNNER-UP

**Walmart Great Value Ultra Soft**

1.5¢ per tissue

Not a Sam's Club member? These Walmart tissues offer the next best thing: a soft, absorbent three-ply that's budget-friendly. While not as soft as Member's Mark, they won't irritate sensitive skin.

## 3 THIRD PLACE

**Up & Up Ultra Soft Facial Tissue (Target)**

2.6¢ per tissue

If you're shopping at Target, look no further than the store's own brand. It's soft and absorbent but scored a bit below average in our strength test. These tissues are also nicely priced.

## 4 STRONG &amp; ECO-FRIENDLY

**Caboo Tree Free Facial Tissue**

4.6¢ per tissue

Made from bamboo, these tissues impressed us with their strength and absorbency. One exception: The stiffer material felt distinctly rougher on our noses than other brands.

## SKIP THESE

**Kleenex Anti-Viral**

3.5¢ per tissue

They're somewhat soft but got poor marks for strength and absorbency.

**Kirkland Signature**

1¢ per tissue

These were soft for two-ply but the least absorbent of tissues we tested.

**Puffs Ultra Soft**

3¢ per tissue

These two-ply tissues weren't very strong or absorbent.

**Scotties Everyday Comfort**

3.4¢ per tissue

These thin, rough two-ply tissues were last overall.



## CR MONEY SAVER

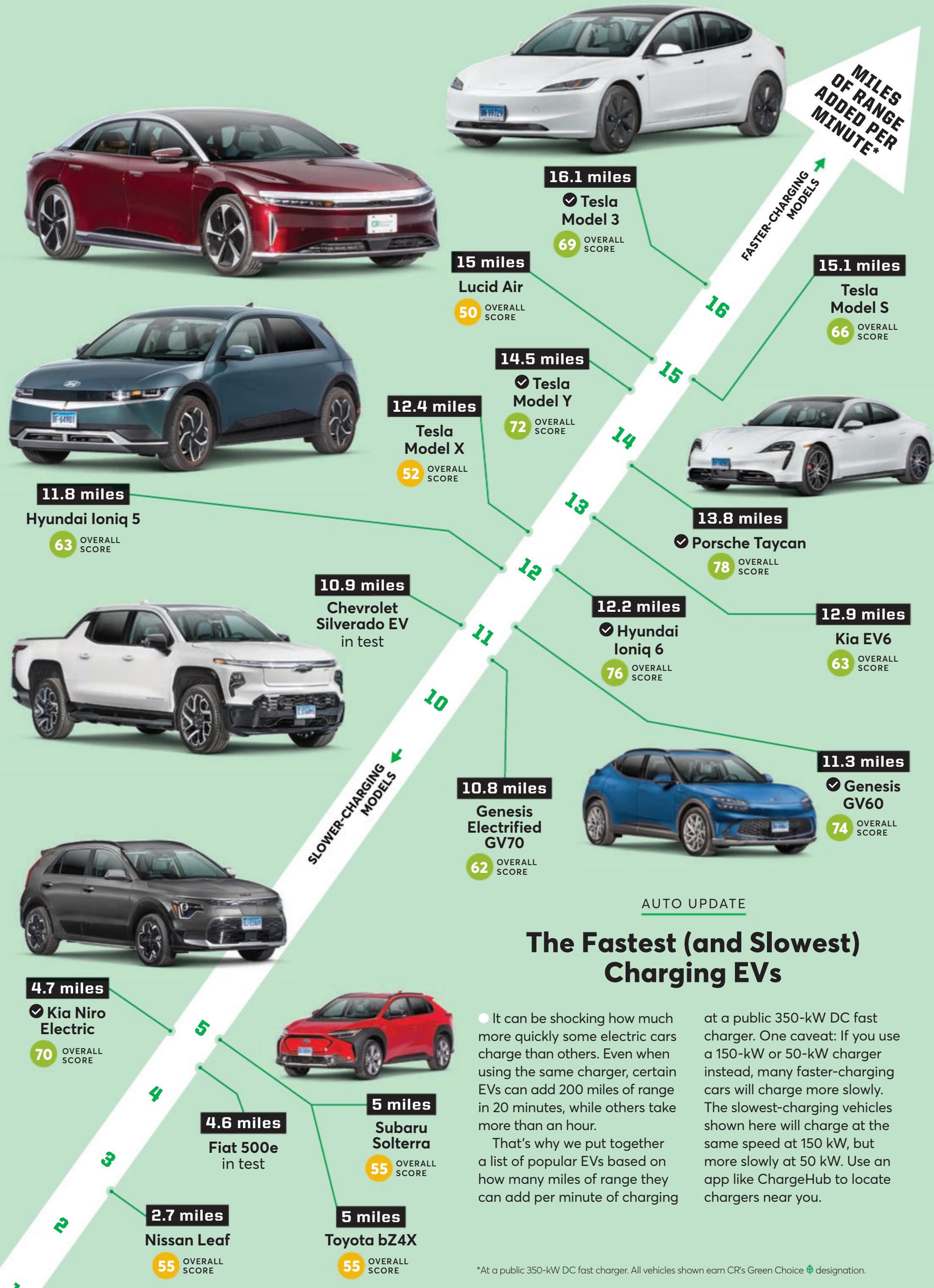
## BEFORE PAYING A MEDICAL BILL, DO THIS

● In a 2023 Commonwealth Fund Survey, nearly half of all insured adults received a bill or copayment fee for a service they had expected to be covered. But less than half challenged bills with potential errors. Here's what to do before you pay yours.

**Check your EOB.** Before you pay a bill mailed directly to you by your care provider, find your "explanation of benefits" (EOB) document. (You may get it by email or snail mail, or it may just pop up in your insurance app.) It's important because bills directly from providers may overcharge you, says Patrick Casale, a licensed insurance broker and owner of The Multicare Group in Las Vegas. But the EOB tells you exactly what you owe, and what your insurance should pay for.

**Request an itemized bill from the provider.** An itemized bill can help you spot errors. Report any you see to the care provider and ask for a revised bill to be sent to your insurer. Also keep an eye out for terms like "pending" or "non-eligible" that indicate that your provider's bill hasn't been processed by your insurance yet.

**Call the care provider's billing or collections department.** Bills typically need to be paid within 30 days, so if you think there's a mistake on yours, call to ask about putting collections on hold while you dispute the charges.



## The Fastest (and Slowest) Charging EVs

It can be shocking how much more quickly some electric cars charge than others. Even when using the same charger, certain EVs can add 200 miles of range in 20 minutes, while others take more than an hour.

That's why we put together a list of popular EVs based on how many miles of range they can add per minute of charging

at a public 350-kW DC fast charger. One caveat: If you use a 150-kW or 50-kW charger instead, many faster-charging cars will charge more slowly. The slowest-charging vehicles shown here will charge at the same speed at 150 kW, but more slowly at 50 kW. Use an app like ChargeHub to locate chargers near you.

## PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

# The Most Versatile Toaster Ovens

● The top models in our tests don't just make toast or reheat leftovers: They can roast vegetables—or a whole chicken—broil burgers, and even bake cookies. Many newer versions also have features like air-frying and convection cooking.

But a toaster oven can eat up a fair amount of counter space, so check the size of the model you're considering as well as what you want to cook in it. That means looking at the interior dimensions, too: A toaster's capacity can be much tighter than its total footprint. If frozen pizza is your go-to snack, for example, you'll want an inner depth of at least 12 inches.



## Hamilton Beach 31156

\$105

71  
OVERALL SCORE

INTERIOR  
4x13x9 inches (HxWxD)  
CONVECTION No

5/5 TOASTING TIME  
4/5 BAKING 3/5 REHEAT



✓ Ninja DCT401  
\$250

69  
OVERALL SCORE

INTERIOR  
upper: 3x13x12 inches (HxWxD)  
lower: 5x13x12 inches (HxWxD)  
CONVECTION Yes

4/5 TOASTING TIME  
4/5 BAKING 3/5 REHEAT



✓ GE G9OAAAASSPSS  
\$220

67  
OVERALL SCORE

INTERIOR  
5x13x11 inches (HxWxD)  
CONVECTION Yes

3/5 TOASTING TIME  
4/5 BAKING 3/5 REHEAT



✓ KitchenAid KCO124BM  
\$220

66  
OVERALL SCORE

INTERIOR  
4x14x12 inches (HxWxD)  
CONVECTION Yes

3/5 TOASTING TIME  
3/5 BAKING 4/5 REHEAT



✓ Breville The Smart  
Oven Air Fryer Pro  
BOV900BSSUSC  
\$400

66  
OVERALL SCORE

INTERIOR  
7x16x12 inches (HxWxD)  
CONVECTION Yes

2/5 TOASTING TIME  
4/5 BAKING 3/5 REHEAT



✓ Gourmia  
GTF7900  
\$100  
INTERIOR  
5x12x12 inches (HxWxD)  
CONVECTION Yes

4/5 TOASTING TIME  
4/5 BAKING 3/5 REHEAT



✓ Wolf Elite  
WGCO150S  
\$750  
INTERIOR  
7x15x12 inches (HxWxD)  
CONVECTION Yes

1/5 TOASTING TIME  
5/5 BAKING 3/5 REHEAT



Breville The Smart  
Oven Air Fryer  
BOV860BSS1BUS1  
\$350  
INTERIOR  
6x14x11 inches (HxWxD)  
CONVECTION Yes

3/5 TOASTING TIME  
3/5 BAKING 4/5 REHEAT



✓ Emeril Power  
AirFryer 360  
S-AFO-001  
\$170  
INTERIOR  
7x12x13 inches (HxWxD)  
CONVECTION Yes

63  
OVERALL SCORE

4/5 TOASTING TIME  
4/5 BAKING 3/5 REHEAT



## RECALLS

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

### HYUNDAI, KIA, AND GENESIS VEHICLES

Hyundai, Kia, and Genesis are recalling more than 145,000 electric vehicles from the 2022-2024 model years because they may suddenly lose power while in motion, potentially increasing the risk of a crash. This is due to a manufacturing issue with the integrated charging control unit (ICCU), which—similar to the alternator in a gas-powered car—sends power to low-voltage vehicle accessories and the 12-volt auxiliary battery.

**What to do:** Dealers will replace the ICCU and its fuse, free of charge, and perform a software update. Many of these vehicles were recalled earlier this year and will need an additional repair. Owners can call Hyundai at 800-633-5151. The NHTSA campaign number for this recall is 24V-868.



MARCH  
IS THE  
BEST TIME  
TO BUY ...

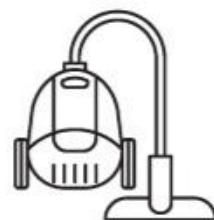
SPACE  
HEATERS



STRING  
TRIMMERS



VACUUMS



For more info,  
scan here.



### GOVEELIFE AND GOVEE SMART ELECTRIC SPACE HEATERS

GoveeLife and Govee are recalling about 512,500 space heaters because they can overheat, posing fire and burn hazards. The heaters were sold online at Amazon, us.govee.com, Govee Home App, and TikTok Shop from September 2021 to September 2024 for \$30 to \$150.

**What to do:** Stop using the space heaters. Call GoveeLife at 833-772-5360 or go to [recall.goveelife.com/heater-recall](http://recall.goveelife.com/heater-recall) for information about getting a refund.

### MEDICAL KING PORTABLE BED RAILS

Medical King is recalling about 222,000 portable bed rails because users can become trapped within the bed rail or between the bed rail and the side of the mattress, posing

a risk of asphyxiation. The bed rails were sold online at Amazon, medicalkingusa.com, walmart.com, and other websites from January 2020 to March 2024 for about \$40. **What to do:** Stop using the bed rails. Call Medical King at 888-715-2630 or go to [medicalkingusa.com/products/recalls](http://medicalkingusa.com/products/recalls) for a free repair kit or a replacement, depending on the model.

### DOREL WALL BEDS

Dorel is recalling about 69,300 wall beds because they can detach from the wall and fall onto those nearby, posing serious impact and crush hazards. The wall beds were sold online at Amazon, bedbathandbeyond.com, target.com, and other websites from May 2021 through April 2024 for about \$900.

**What to do:** Stop using the wall beds. Call Dorel at 888-828-8620 or go to [ameriwoodhome.com/pages/recalls](http://ameriwoodhome.com/pages/recalls) for more information on a reimbursable professional inspection and, if necessary, reinstallation of the wall bed.

### WOLF APPLIANCE RANGES

Wolf Appliance is recalling about 44,000 ranges with infrared griddles because the range can short-circuit if liquids spill on it, which can turn on the griddle unexpectedly, posing a

burn and fire hazard. The ranges were sold at home appliance stores nationwide from August 2020 to September 2024 for \$12,500 to \$23,000.

**What to do:** Stop using the range. Contact Wolf Appliance at 800-200-7820 or go to [wolfappliance.com/recall](http://wolfappliance.com/recall) to schedule a free repair in your home.



### DENOVA DETECT COMBINATION NATURAL GAS & CO ALARMS

DeNova is recalling about 26,360 Detect Combination Natural Gas and Carbon Monoxide alarms because they can go into sleep mode and, during that time, might fail to detect and alert owners to natural gas or carbon monoxide, posing a risk of poisoning. The alarms were sold at Lowe's stores nationwide and online at [denovadetect.com](http://denovadetect.com) and [lowes.com](http://lowes.com) from December 2023 through July 2024 for \$90 to \$102.

**What to do:** Register at [denovadetect.com/safetynotice-dd622](http://denovadetect.com/safetynotice-dd622) to receive a prepaid, labeled shipping package and replacement alarm. Continue using the alarm until you install the replacement device.

# PRODUCT UPDATE



THE LATEST  
RATINGS FROM  
OUR LABS



## Pick the Right Range for You

Searing a steak, simmering a sauce, baking up brownies—the best models in our tests offer top-notch performance for every cooking task.

by Paul Hope

✓ GE PROFILE  
PGS930YPFS  
\$2,750

80 OVERALL  
SCORE

If

you're shopping for a stove for the first time in a while, you're in for a pleasant surprise. On the whole, ranges work better than ever, with stronger performance and features that make for easier meal prep. Think faster boiling, steadier simmering, and more even baking and broiling. Better still, our tests have found those performance improvements across ranges of all types.

Whether you're replacing a gas or electric model, remember that it's always easiest to stick with the type you already have. That's because switching from electric to gas or vice versa may mean running a new gas or electric line, which can be costly. You don't need to worry about that if you upgrade from electric to induction (which might be worth it, for a few reasons we'll discuss later).

Once you've zeroed in on the right type of range, you should consider features carefully. While some of the ones we've seen in the past were gimmicky—like a glitchy in-oven camera that lets you watch your cookies bake in real time—today's best features really do produce better results. Here are a few favorites from our experts, all of which are available in electric, gas, or induction ranges.

→ **AIR-FRY.** This setting uses high heat and an oven's built-in convection from a countertop air fryer to produce beautifully crispy foods cooked in less fat. With this feature, you can skip buying a separate appliance—and you'll be able to air-fry much larger batches. If you're considering a range with an air-fry setting, check to see whether it comes with a dedicated tray, which is sometimes sold separately.

→ **TEMPERATURE PROBE.** Our tests have found that opening the oven door for as little as 5 seconds can cause an oven set to 350° F to drop by 60° to 100° F, significantly slowing down your cooking in the process. But ovens with a built-in temperature probe let you check the temperature of a roasting chicken, casserole, or

anything else while it cooks without cracking open the door. You insert the probe into the food at the beginning of cooking and the temperature is displayed on the oven's control panel. Most models can even be programmed to shut off or switch to a warming setting once your dish reaches the correct temperature.

→ **HIGH-TEMPERATURE SELF-CLEANING.** Finally, a clean oven without noxious sprays and scrubbing. Self-cleaning ovens have been around for years, but some ranges only have a light-duty steam-clean cycle. In our tests, none of these lighter cycles match the cleaning performance of a true high-temperature self-cleaning cycle, which uses a high temperature (800° F) to convert grime into ash that you can wipe away easily.

## Electric or Gas? How to Choose



### GAS RANGES

\$500-\$3,500

(more for pro-style)

Gas ranges remain the gold standard for many cooks, and the best ones hold their own against most electric alternatives. Look for a model with continuous cooking grates, which allow you to easily slide a pot or pan from one burner to another. If you're an avid cook, consider picking a model with a built-in griddle or griddle burner. The former is great for grilled cheese or pancakes, while the latter—an oblong central burner—allows you to use your own griddle or to deglaze and/or sear in a roasting pan on the stovetop.

Because gas is involved, installation should always be left to a professional. A small number of gas ranges are referred to as dual fuel, meaning the range pairs a gas cooktop with an electric oven. For a dual-fuel range to work, you'll need both a standard gas line and a 220-volt electric line.

As you shop, keep in mind that you won't find Inflation Reduction Act rebates for gas stoves. Those models can produce byproducts including particulate matter and nitrogen oxides, which are of particular concern to those with respiratory illnesses like asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or emphysema.

## The New Safety Features

PHOTO: GE (RANGE)

Do you ever wake up suddenly, wondering whether you turned off the stove or bumped into a knob and activated a burner without realizing it? New technology can keep you safer. Samsung recently added "precision knobs"

to some models with front controls to make them more difficult to turn on accidentally. You can also find plastic knob covers that snap over controls so they can't be turned (search online for "range knob covers")—or just pull

the knobs off and leave them in a drawer until you need them. Some ranges have a lockout feature that deactivates the oven and blocks the gas supply to burners or prevents you from activating elements on an electric cooktop. If

you buy a model with WiFi, the related app lets you check the burners from anywhere. Induction has its own built-in safety feature. Because it works only with magnetic cookware, an element can't heat up without a pan in place.



## ELECTRIC RANGES

\$550-\$3,200

Most modern electric ranges are now smoothtop models. Unlike older coil-top, smoothtops hide their coiled heating elements beneath a smooth glass surface, which reduces crevices, making cleanup easier. As a group, electric smoothtop ranges tend to bring things to a boil faster than gas ranges and broil more effectively. But they're much slower to respond when you adjust the temperature, which can make it easier to scorch food if you're not careful.

Because the cooktop surface is totally flat, electric smoothtop ranges tend to work better with cookware that has a perfectly flat base. For the best results, match the base of your pan to the size of the heating element. Look for a smoothtop range with expandable heating elements, which allow you to adjust the diameter of one or more elements to match cookware of different sizes.

Electric smoothtop ranges are eligible for rebates of up to \$840 under the Inflation Reduction Act.



## INDUCTION RANGES

\$1,000-\$4,000

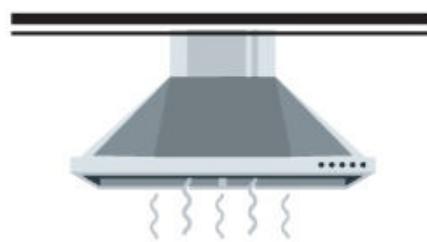
Induction ranges look just like electric smoothtops, with easy-to-clean flat glass cooking surfaces. But the cooktop works differently. Instead of heating a coil element, they generate a magnetic field that causes compatible cookware to heat up directly while the cooktop surface remains relatively cool to the touch.

This technology delivers better performance than electric or gas, with faster boiling and steadier simmering. Induction burners also respond immediately when you turn the temperature up or down—more

like a gas cooktop does. The ovens work just like regular electric ovens.

If you're the type who preps a few stovetop dishes at once, look for an induction range with multiple high-power burners. (Some models have only one.) If you want to use a griddle or roasting pan on the cooktop, choose a range with burners that can be synced up to form a bridge, heating with two elements at once to match the shape of an oblong pan or griddle.

Bear in mind that induction ranges only work with magnetic cookware, so older copper and aluminum pans in particular may not be a good fit. Grab a magnet and press it to the bottom



## All About Range Hoods

A good range hood can improve air quality by removing pollutants that form during cooking. This is especially important with gas ranges, which can produce potentially dangerous compounds including nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, and volatile organic compounds such as benzene. Vent hoods also capture odors and suck up grease that would otherwise settle on surfaces.

Our tests have found that hoods that use ductwork to vent directly to the outside, called vented hoods, work better than ductless or recirculating hoods, which simply try to capture smoke using a series of filters. Regardless of the type you use (or if you can't add a hood), it's wise to open windows and doors and even run a fan while cooking. You want to move around as much air as possible.

of any pan you'd like to test, and if it sticks, the pan will work with induction.

You can expect to pay several hundred dollars more for an induction model than for a comparably equipped electric smoothtop range. But buying one makes you eligible for credits of up to \$840 under the Inflation Reduction Act.

## Getting a Great Deal

Once you've zeroed in on the model you want, it's a good idea to track its price at several online retailers for at least a few weeks. Why? Appliance makers and retailers often give ranges a very high manufacturer's suggested retail price, or MSRP, so they can then appear to slash the price and put the range "on sale" throughout the year. It's so common, in fact, that our experts have seen ranges "on sale" for as long as half a year.

Here's an easy method for tracking the price: Browsers, including Google Chrome, have extensions that let you see the price history for any product for the past 90 days. (Chrome users can turn on price tracking in Settings.) These price trackers will give you some sense of the actual deal you're getting, and they can alert you if the price drops. As you compare costs, don't forget to factor in the price of a new electric plug or gas hose. You should also expect to pay extra for installers to haul away your old range.

It's a good idea to check out multiple retailers to see which ones offer the most accommodating delivery schedule. The same range might ship in a few days from one vs. in a few weeks from another.

Finally, know that stores like Best Buy, Home Depot, and Lowe's will match each other's prices. So if your dream range goes on sale at any of them, pick the most convenient retailer and ask it to match the lowest price.

# RANGES WITH SPECIAL SKILLS

While the best models in our ratings excel at a wide variety of tasks, it makes sense to shop with your own priorities in mind. Here's how to find a range that fits your needs, plus six stellar choices from our tests.

## → If you want a quicker cleanup

### LOOK FOR

- A glass smoothtop surface
- Solid scores for the oven self-clean cycle
- Digital controls instead of knobs, so you'll have fewer crevices to clean

This sleek range has all-digital controls and no knobs. And because it's induction, the cooking surface never gets hot enough to burn any spilled liquids.



INDUCTION RANGE

✓ Frigidaire  
Gallery  
GCFI3060BF  
\$1,400

93  
OVERALL SCORE

## → If you really love to bake

### LOOK FOR

- A rating of very good or excellent for baking
- A large oven capacity
- A convection setting

This great performer aces our baking and capacity tests. It also comes with oven settings including no-preheat baking and steam baking.



ELECTRIC SMOOTHTOP

✓ Frigidaire  
Gallery  
GCFE3060BF  
\$2,000

88  
OVERALL SCORE

## → If you want a pro-style look

### LOOK FOR

- Multiple high-power burners with strong performance scores
- Solid marks for low-heat cooking and broiling
- A temperature probe

Our top-rated pro-style range is noteworthy for having four high-power burners. It also earns strong marks for low- and high-heat cooking and broiling.



PRO-STYLE RANGE

✓ Monogram  
ZGP304NTSS  
\$5,600

81  
OVERALL SCORE

## → If you prefer simple controls

### LOOK FOR

- Minimal extra features or oven cycles
- Physical buttons (or a dial) to control oven settings
- Burner knobs instead of a digital touchpad

This low-cost gas stove has the simplest interface you'll find: one knob for each burner and a fifth to control the oven temperature. A single button turns the oven light on and off.



GAS RANGE

✗ GE  
JGBS30DEKWW  
\$730

75  
OVERALL SCORE

## → If you like baking two things at once

### LOOK FOR

- A double oven that lets you prep multiple dishes at once. (Or just use the smaller oven to heat a meal for one or two.)
- A warming element or simmer burner
- Settings for rapid or no-preheat baking

This double-oven electric smoothtop range has a smaller upper oven to cook for one or two and a larger lower oven for big items like a turkey or roast.



SMOOTHTOP RANGE

✓ LG  
LDE4413ST  
Electric  
\$1,700

81  
OVERALL SCORE

**Ratings** ➤ **Range of Options** The best models in our tests offer impressive all-around performance, with high scores for cooktop, baking, and broiling—and many have great convenience features, too.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results	Test Results					Features + Specs								
				Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Cooktop, high	Cooktop, low	Baking	Broiling	Oven capacity	Self-cleaning	Claimed oven capacity (cu. ft.)	High-power burners	Medium-power burners	Low-power burners	Convection mode	WiFi
<b>GAS AND DUAL-FUEL SINGLE OVEN (30 INCH)</b>																	
✓ LG LSDL6336F (dual fuel)	85	\$2,235	▲	! ▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	6.3	2	2	1	●	●
✓ LG LSGL6335D	80	\$1,500	▲	! ▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	! ▲	▲	▲	6.3	2	2	1	●	●
✓ GE Profile PGS930YPFS	80	\$2,750	▲	! ▼	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	5.6	2	2	1	●	●
✓ LG Studio LSGS6338F	78	\$2,140	▲	! ▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	! ▲	▲	▲	6.3	2	2	1	●	●
✓ Café C2S900P2MS1 (dual fuel)	77	\$3,270	! ▲	! ▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	! ▲	▲	▲	5.7	3	2	1	●	●
✓ Samsung NX60T8711SS	76	\$1,490	▲	! ▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	! ▲	▲	▲	6.0	2	2	1	●	●
✖ GE JGS760SPSS	76	\$920	▲	! ▼	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	5.6	2	2	1	●	●
✖ GE JGB735SPSS	75	\$890	▲	! ▼	▲	▲	▲	▲	! ▲	▲	▲	5.0	2	2	1	●	
✖ GE JGBS30DEKWW	75	\$730	▲	! ▼	! ▲	▲	▲	▲	! ▲	▲	▲	4.8	1	2	1		
✓ GE JGSS61SPSS	74	\$1,165	▲	! ▼	! ▲	! ▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	5.3	2	1	1		
✓ GE JGBS66REKSS	74	\$950	▲	! ▼	! ▲	! ▲	▲	▲	! ▲	▲	▲	5.0	2	2	1		
✓ Café CGB500P2MS1	74	\$1,470	! ▲	! ▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	5.6	2	2	1	●	●
✓ Samsung NX60T8111SS	73	\$1,130	▲	! ▲	! ▲	! ▲	▲	▲	! ▲	▲	▲	6.0	2	2	1	●	
✓ GE JGBS61RPSS	73	\$850	▲	! ▼	! ▲	! ▲	▲	▲	! ▲	▲	▲	4.8	1	2	1		
✓ LG LRGL5823S	72	\$1,150	▲	! ▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	! ▲	▲	▲	5.8	2	2	1	●	●
<b>GAS AND DUAL-FUEL DOUBLE OVEN (30 INCH)</b>																	
✖ GE Profile PGB965YPFS	80	\$1,690	▲	! ▼	▲	▲	▲	▲	! ▲	▲	! ▲	6.8	2	2	1	●	●
✓ LG LTGL6937F	79	\$2,650	▲	! ▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	! ▲	▲	! ▲	6.9	2	2	1	●	●
✓ LG Signature LUTD4919SN (dual fuel)	77	\$3,600	▲	! ▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	7.3	2	2	1	●	●
✓ GE JGBS86SPSS	75	\$1,700	▲	! ▼	! ▲	! ▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	6.8	2	2	1	●	
✓ Café CGS750P4MW2	75	\$3,200	! ▲	! ▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	! ▲	▲	▲	6.7	3	2	1	●	●
✓ Café C2S950P2MS1 (dual fuel)	75	\$3,500	! ▲	! ▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	! ▲	▲	▲	7.0	3	2	1	●	●
✓ GE JGSS86SPSS	74	\$2,005	▲	! ▼	! ▲	! ▲	▲	▲	! ▲	▲	▲	6.7	2	2	1	●	
<b>PRO-STYLE GAS AND DUAL-FUEL OVEN (36 INCH)</b>																	
✓ Electrolux ECFD3668AS (dual fuel)	69	\$4,700	▲	! ▲	! ▲	▲	▲	▲	! ▲	▲	▲	4.4	6	0	0	●	
<b>PRO-STYLE GAS AND DUAL-FUEL OVEN (30 INCH)</b>																	
✓ Monogram ZGP304NTSS	81	\$5,600	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	5.7	4	0	0	●	●

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results	Test Results					Features + Specs								
				Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Cooktop, high	Cooktop, low	Baking	Broiling	Oven capacity	Self-cleaning	Claimed oven capacity (cu. ft.)	High-power elements	Medium-power elements	Low-power elements	Convection mode	WiFi
<b>SMOOTHTOP SINGLE OVEN (30 INCH)</b>																	
✓ Frigidaire Gallery GCFE3060BF	88	\$2,000	⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	6.2	1	2	1	●	
✓ GE Profile PSS93YPFS	88	\$1,600	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	5.3	1	2	1	●	●
✗ LG LREL6321S	87	\$850	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	6.3	2	0	2		●
✓ LG LSEL6337D	86	\$2,000	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	6.3	2	0	2	●	●
✓ GE JB735SPSS	85	\$1,100	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	5.3	2	0	2	●	
✗ LG LREL6325F	85	\$1,000	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	6.3	2	0	2	●	●
✓ GE Profile PB935YPFS	84	\$1,120	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	5.3	1	2	1	●	●
✓ Samsung NE63T8711SS	84	\$1,650	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	6.3	2	0	2	●	●
✓ LG LSEL6333F	83	\$1,100	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	6.3	2	0	2	●	●
✗ Samsung NE63A6711SS	82	\$930	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	6.3	1	2	1	●	●
✓ Bosch HEI8056U	81	\$2,175	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	5.9	2	0	2	●	
✓ Frigidaire FCFE3083AS	81	\$900	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	5.3	2	0	2	●	
✓ GE Profile PB900YVFS	81	\$1,090	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	6.2	2	2	0	●	●
<b>SMOOTHTOP DOUBLE OVEN (30 INCH)</b>																	
✓ Samsung NE63T8751SG	81	\$2,360	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	6.3	2	0	2	●	●
✓ LG LDE4413ST	81	\$1,700	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	7.3	2	0	2	●	●
<b>ELECTRIC INDUCTION OVEN</b>																	
✓ Frigidaire Gallery GCFI3060BF	93	\$1,400	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	6.2	5	0	0	●	
✓ GE Profile PHS93XYPFS	89	\$3,955	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	5.3	3	1	0	●	●
✓ LG LSIL6336FE	84	\$2,300	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	6.3	2	2	0	●	●
✓ Ikea Tvarsaker 404.660.06	83	\$1,400	—	—	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	5.4	4	0	0	●	
✓ Frigidaire Gallery FCFI3083AS	81	\$1,010	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	5.3	4	0	0	●	
▶ Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at <a href="https://CR.org/ranges">CR.org/ranges</a> .																	

**HOW WE TEST:** Overall Score combines performance test results with survey data for predicted reliability and owner satisfaction. **Predicted reliability** estimates the likelihood that newly purchased models from a given brand will develop problems or break within the first five years. **Owner satisfaction** reflects the proportion of CR members

who are extremely likely to recommend the range they bought. Findings are from CR's 2022, 2023, and 2024 Spring Quarterly surveys. In cases where we have insufficient survey data to provide a brand-level rating, indicated by a gray dash (—), we give the model weighted category average scores for reliability and satisfaction. **Cooktop, high**

reflects how quickly the most powerful element heated a large pot of water to a near-boil. **Cooktop, low** is how well the lowest-powered element held a low heat, as for melting chocolate, and how well the most powerful element, set on low, held tomato sauce below a boil. **Baking** reflects even browning of cakes and cookies in multirack baking

tests. **Broiling** is how hot and how evenly the broiler heats. **Oven capacity** is our evaluation of usable space. **Self-cleaning** is that cycle's effectiveness after the oven is coated with a mixture of eggs, lard, cheese, cherry pie filling, tomato purée, and tapioca. **Price** is approximate retail.



# CR'S ANTI- SCAM GUIDE

Fraudsters are using more sophisticated technology to trick you out of your money. Here's how to stay one step ahead.

BY DEREK KRAVITZ

ILLUSTRATIONS BY PETER THOMAS RYAN



## CALL FROM THE FRAUD

department at your bank. The offer of a dream-come-true vacation. An attractive job posting. Scammers can worm their way into your world—and your money—in insidious ways. And today,

even old scams are being given new life using technology that can make bogus pitches more convincing, and more dangerous, than ever.

For one thing, criminals can now easily access deeply personal information about you, from your birthday to your Social Security number, and use it to convince you of their "identity"—for example, that they are a bank employee. Another new problem: Artificial intelligence is being used to create "deepfakes"—realistic computer-generated videos of people you know and trust, like CEOs and celebrities—to get you to lower your guard and open your wallet.

"Americans are continuing to lose substantial amounts of money—even people who consider themselves too smart to fall for scams," says John Breyault, who manages the National Consumers League's Fraud.org campaign. In 2023, U.S. fraud claims rose to more than 2.6 million, a record high, with an estimated \$10 billion lost, according to the Federal Trade Commission. And the true toll is probably far higher because most victims don't report scams to law enforcement and regulatory agencies.

To find out more about how these scams unfold, CR asked members to share their experiences. More than 400 of them responded. We spoke to several who were targeted, and we sought expert advice on how to avoid becoming a victim yourself. Here are their stories.

### THE BANK SCAM

## Your Account Has Been Compromised!



**NAME:**  
Cathy M.\*

**LIVES IN:**  
Santa Clara County, Calif.

**AMOUNT LOST:**  
\$25,000

**CATHY M., A 70-YEAR-OLD** widow, considers herself financially astute and risk-averse. She has all incoming calls from unknown numbers sent straight to her voicemail. And she would never give out her bank account information to anyone over the phone.

So last September, when a Wells Fargo caller ID popped up on her phone and the caller introduced himself as a representative of the bank's fraud department, she was wary. The man said her account had been compromised and that he wanted to verify some new charges that appeared to have been made in Texas, a place she had not recently visited.

"How do I know you're really from Wells Fargo?" was Cathy's first question.

The caller then read back to Cathy the last four digits of her Social Security number, a personal detail so closely held, in her view, that the caller had to be someone from her bank. Her guard came down; she was only too happy to help prevent more fraudulent transactions.

Over the next 90 minutes, the caller elicited numerous banking details from Cathy, including her account

password. He had her write down and read out lengthy strings of numbers he called “transaction IDs.” While she was busy helping in what she thought was fraud prevention, the scammer (or an accomplice) changed the contact phone number on Cathy’s account and called Wells Fargo—pretending to be Cathy—telling an employee she was authorizing a wire transfer of \$25,000 to pay a contractor. The real Wells Fargo emailed Cathy right away, inquiring about unusual activity on her account—but she didn’t notice the alert in her inbox because the scammer on the phone kept her distracted. The scammer also told her not to access her bank account for a few hours while the “active investigation” was going on.

When she finally hung up, Cathy had a bad feeling. She quickly called Wells Fargo using the phone number on the company’s website, but it was too late. The wire transfer had already taken place—and couldn’t be undone.

The \$25,000 scam left just \$2,017.75 in Cathy’s savings account. A day later, Wells Fargo denied her reimbursement claim, saying that because she had willingly shared her personal financial information, albeit under false pretenses, there was nothing it could do. The bank says it “deeply empathizes” with cases like Cathy’s.

Months later, Cathy says she is still finding it hard to sleep at night, mulling over what happened and “what made me believe him. I am angry,” she says.

## How to Protect Yourself

Scammers running imposter frauds can use what’s called spoofing technology to make it appear as if a phone call or text is coming from your bank. And they can purchase personal information (such as Social Security and bank account numbers) on the dark web or via the messaging



app Telegram to help convince you they are who they say they are. Here’s what to do to stay safe:

- ◆ **Confirm that the communication is real.** If a bank or government agency contacts you, don’t assume caller ID is showing you correct information. Hang up and find a verified phone number online to call the bank or agency back. As a precaution, it’s also a good idea to have all unknown calls sent directly to voicemail.
- ◆ **Never give your financial info to anyone.** Legitimate bank employees

should never ask for your username, PINs, one-time access codes, or passwords. Banks understand this information is meant to be private and secure. Instead, to confirm your identity they will send you a one-time code that you then enter yourself.

- ◆ **Don’t act fast.** To put you off guard, scammers will often say that a matter needs to be handled immediately or your money could be at risk. Don’t take the bait. Rather, confirm whether there is really an issue by calling and checking with the bank or government agency yourself.



#### THE SHOPPING SCAM

## I'll Take It—and Your Money!

**NAME:** Kathy D.\*  
**LIVES IN:** Washington, D.C.  
**AMOUNT LOST:** \$200

**KATHY D., WHO WORKED** in environmental research, policy, and education jobs for various federal agencies and nonprofits in Washington, D.C., wanted to sell a dining room table, so she posted it for \$250 on Facebook Marketplace.

Within minutes, Kathy says an interested buyer responded and agreed to a deal sight unseen. She was selling the table for a great price, so it made sense to Kathy that the buyer wanted to act fast. “I was so excited because I thought we were actually going to sell

this thing,” Kathy remembers.

Kathy recalls the buyer writing that she was Swedish and any typos in her messages were due to poor English. She says the buyer sent a photo of herself to confirm that she was a real person. (“A very attractive blonde, kind of Scandinavian-looking,” Kathy recalls.)

Then the buyer said she wanted to confirm that Kathy was a real person selling a real piece of furniture: If Kathy would send her \$200 via Zelle, the buyer would return it immediately along with the price of the table. The request seemed odd, but Kathy says she didn’t know how Facebook Marketplace transactions were supposed to work. She also felt her own honesty was in question. And she really wanted to sell the table.

So, despite her misgivings, Kathy sent the money. Then a second request came, this time for Kathy to pay for insurance if the table arrived damaged. Annoyed, Kathy almost backed out—but finally sent that money, too. The second payment failed when Kathy’s bank

flagged it as suspicious. At the buyer’s insistence, Kathy called her bank to push the payment through.

Kathy says she realized it was a scam when the bank employee started asking questions. Meta, which owns Facebook Marketplace, says the platform is investing in technology to remove similar scam threats.

### How to Protect Yourself

Selling or buying products online from another person is risky. Checks can bounce, purchased goods may never arrive, and the buyers and sellers themselves might be scammers, intent on getting you to quickly send money to them and then disappearing, as in Kathy’s case. Here’s how to use peer-to-peer marketplaces safely:

♦ **Know who you’re dealing with.** When selling or buying on a site like Facebook Marketplace, check the buyer’s or seller’s Facebook profile and see whether they have friends and realistic activity, like recently posted vacation photos. Separately, check their past Facebook Marketplace transactions and reviews by other buyers and sellers.

♦ **Be wary of anyone offering you full price.** Ditto if they don’t seem interested in the item’s condition or seeing it in person. These could be signs the buyer doesn’t really want the item and is just looking to scam you.

♦ **Do not give a buyer your address or other personal information.** To complete a transaction, agree to meet at a public place and accept payment only in cash. Zelle, Venmo, and other instant payment methods lack certain consumer protections, so you should use them only to send or receive money from people you know.

♦ **Use marketplaces with built-in protections.** Etsy and eBay, for instance, offer warranties for both buyers and sellers if transactions go awry. And they handle the payments, so you never have to give a stranger your credit card number.

**THE EMPLOYMENT SCAM**

## Have I Got a (Fake) Job for You!

**NAME:** Courtney T.\*  
**LIVES IN:** Santee, Calif.  
**AMOUNT ALMOST LOST:** \$500

**IN 2023, COURTNEY T.** was ready for a job change and had been scouring online job postings when she spotted a role at Luminis Health, a regional nonprofit healthcare provider. It offered part-time hours and decent pay.

Courtney applied and quickly got a message from someone who seemed to be a Luminis representative. He introduced himself as Andrew, the company's "online interview manager." Communicating via a Microsoft Teams chat, Courtney followed his prompts, filled out a questionnaire, and provided references. She never met or spoke to Andrew but was soon told she was deemed a "good fit" and was offered a job.

That's when Andrew told Courtney she would need to buy some new computer equipment. But don't worry about the costs, he said, because the company was wiring her startup funds. Indeed, when she checked her bank account, the promised sum was pending. At that point, Andrew told her to send \$500 via Zelle to the company's chosen vendor at a Yahoo email address.

At the time, Courtney thought it odd that the company was asking for money from a new employee, but she convinced herself it had something to do with post-COVID protocols. So she tried to send the money. Luckily, her bank—perhaps suspecting a scam—delayed, then canceled the transaction.

Courtney relayed the payment issue to Andrew, who then told her to use Apple Pay or Cash App. That's when

## Paying by Check? Think Again.

While technology can help scammers find and persuade their potential victims, it can also help you protect yourself from common frauds—like checks that are stolen and "washed." Consider this story:

When Mary H.\* who lives near San Diego, pays bills by check, she mails them from one of the U.S. Postal Service's secure mailboxes. And she uses thick envelopes that mask the outlines of the check inside.

Despite those precautions, a \$24.17 check Mary mailed last year to cover a medical bill was intercepted by a thief somewhere along the delivery route. That paper check was then "washed"—meaning it was treated with chemicals or run

through a device to remove the recipient's name and the dollar amount Mary had written in ink. A new value—\$8,600.22—and payee name were written in their place. Mary caught the pending transaction on her online statement and reported it to her bank, which was able to stop the transaction.

But many others aren't so lucky: In 2023, the Federal Trade Commission received over 30,000 reports of fake checks and money orders—almost the same number as in 2019, even though the number of people using paper checks has declined. The median loss amount in 2023: \$1,900.

Using digital tools and high-tech checks can

help you outsmart the scammers. Here's how:

◆ **Pay online whenever you can.**

Most businesses, medical practices, and municipalities offer the option to pay online using a credit or debit card. And banks and credit unions offer automatic online bill pay services that let you pay recurring bills (car payments, utilities, etc.) safely and securely.

◆ **Review your monthly statements.** Check

for new or pending transactions so that if there is fraud, you catch it quickly—as Mary did.

◆ **Ask your bank about more secure checks.**

Checks with some of the security features shown below make it harder for scammers to get away with this ploy.

### ANATOMY OF A SAFER CHECK

**CHEMICALLY SENSITIVE PAPER**

Some parts of the check will reveal a visual change if a scammer tries to wash it.

**WATERMARKS AND HOLOGRAMS**

Invisible patterns and reflective images are very hard to reproduce.

**SPECIAL INKS**

These may change color or become visible when exposed to chemicals or heat.

Courtney began to think this might be a scam. Luckily she had not quit her current job—but she'd come close to being out of work and \$500. Luminis says it is aware of scams like the one Courtney found and is “working tirelessly to protect job seekers.”

## How to Protect Yourself

Scam job posts often come complete with fake company websites and LinkedIn pages, fictitious recruiters with fleshed-out social media profiles, and realistic interview prompts. Employment scams typically target younger people who are more technologically savvy. To avoid them:

- ◆ **Investigate the employer yourself.** To determine that a company is real, find its website and ascertain that it has an address and phone number. If you spot different websites for the same company, that's a red flag.
- ◆ **Never send money or give bank account information to an employer, recruiter, or temp agency.** Scammers can convincingly impersonate real-life companies.
- ◆ **Insist on a face-to-face meeting, online or in-person.** Video calls provide greater transparency and the opportunity to ask more specific questions.

THE TRAVEL SCAM

## Dream Vacations for Years to Come!



**NAME:**  
James Orr  
**LIVES IN:**  
Fresno, Calif.  
**AMOUNT LOST:**  
\$7,000

WHEN JAMES ORR, an engineer living in Fresno, Calif., with his wife, saw a brochure for Primo Network Adventures in his mailbox, it caught his attention. The colorful pamphlet included images of people lounging on cruise ships and reclining in first-class airline seats. It seemed to promise a cruise and a weeklong condo rental, plus a chance of winning valuable prizes like a Tesla. An info session was planned at a nearby hotel, and Orr and his wife decided to attend.

When they got there, they learned about Primo's 10-year travel membership program, which included a condo rental and big discounts on exclusive travel bookings. The cost: nearly \$12,000 up front, plus annual fees.

A key selling point was Primo's Facebook page, filled with gorgeous photos of beaches, resorts, and other attractions. Primo also touted a password-protected booking portal. Orr hadn't heard of the brand but decided the company looked legit—and the potential savings seemed huge.

Still, Orr wasn't completely sold. He says he told them \$12,000 was too much. They asked how much he would spend. He offered \$7,000—the amount he had just received for a consulting job—and they accepted. Orr then signed an eight-page agreement that he says he didn't read carefully.

It turned out the Primo membership was just a new version of the old time-share scam. Primo likely microtargeted older, well-off retirees by buying their personal information from data brokers. Orr says he was never able to take advantage of any of the promised deals because none were appealing or fell during a time when he could travel. He and his wife eventually grew distrustful of anything they received from Primo.



## Is That Really Elon Musk Selling Crypto?

In a widely circulated video on social media, billionaire Elon Musk sits in what looks to be a Tesla facility, hawking a cryptocurrency purportedly connected to his Neuralink brain implants. “With this token, you have a unique

opportunity to invest in the future of brain-machine interfaces,” he says.

While Neuralink tokens are real, the video of Musk hawking them isn't: It's a deepfake. Using AI, scammers manipulated images of Musk to create

In the end, Orr used his Primo membership only once, to book a motel room for a high school reunion. He estimates he saved around \$100 on that reservation.

## How to Protect Yourself

Scammers now have sophisticated tools to find the type of people they feel are most likely to fall for the hard sell. They can buy complete “dossiers” derived from publicly available online sources, as well as personal data collected from cyberattacks and leaks. They then tailor their scams to go after especially lucrative targets, such as retirees living in wealthy ZIP codes.

The scams themselves are manipulative. Fraudsters often pressure their targets to act fast so that they don’t miss out on supposedly valuable opportunities. The goal is to keep you from thinking too much about what you’re buying or how much you’re spending. So before you jump on a seemingly great offer, remember these tips:

♦ **Take your time.** As the saying goes, if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. In James’ case, the scammers dangled luxe trips and big discounts. By saying he had to make

his decision on the spot, they tricked him into rushing his decision without studying the fine print.

♦ **Be wary of promotional prizes.** Consumers are often lured in by the mere chance of winning a sweepstakes prize. Don’t be. Even if promoters fulfill their obligation to disclose the odds in a clear and conspicuous manner, your chances of winning are probably very, very slim.

♦ **Alert your credit card company.** If you think you might have been the victim of this type of scam, and you paid using a credit card, report it to your credit card company ASAP. Disputing a credit card charge forces the financial institution to investigate whether the buyers got what they paid for. In many cases, if a scam is discovered, the charges can be reversed.

♦ **Immediately contact your state’s attorney general.** Many AGs have web portals and hotlines for consumers to file complaints. Also file a report with your local police department, the Federal Trade Commission, and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. In some cases, these entities can identify scammers as part of larger investigations and, eventually, help you get some of your money back.

a convincing but phony sales pitch. Victims report having lost thousands of dollars to such scams, many connected to cryptocurrency. Other celebrities that have “appeared” in deepfake scams include actor Tom Hanks, country artist Blake Shelton, and investor Warren Buffett. Here are some signs the video you’re watching might be a deepfake.

### The deal is being hawked by someone famous.

Well-known investors and tech titans generally don’t endorse specific investments. If they do, the products are typically sold by credentialed financial professionals, not via testimonial videos.

**The profits are too good to be true.** Deepfake celeb scams often make outsized promises, like guaranteeing

you’ll double your money in a matter of weeks.

**It’s “exclusive.”** Scammers frame their pitches as insider info, often touting involvement by successful figures like Musk.

**It’s on social media.** If you come upon a get-rich-quick pitch on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube, you’d be wise to ignore it.

## Stop a Scam Before It Starts

Here’s how to avoid being targeted—and losing money if you are.



### Share less in public.

The more personal info you post publicly, the more material a scammer has to work with when crafting a personalized attack. Don’t share phone numbers, home addresses, or financial details on social media, experts say. Think twice about posting photos of your home, details about an illness, or the names of family members.



### Be suspicious of “emergencies.”

Scammers often make urgent requests and pressure victims to act fast. They might pose as a law enforcement or IRS official and tell you to pay them quickly or risk a big financial penalty. Others pretend to be tech support agents and say they need access to your computer to prevent an ongoing hack. The need for speed is a scam tip-off.



**Have a no-share policy.** Never give anyone who contacts you—whether by email, text, phone, or in-app message—sensitive personal data. This includes bank account numbers, passwords, and security codes, but also your date of birth, home address, Social Security number, or anything else that can be exploited for financial gain.



**Get an outside perspective.** Suspicious about something? Talk it over with friends or family before acting. They may have heard similar stories. And talking to a neutral observer may help you see what’s really going on.



# Grocery Store Staples We Love

CR's tests of coffee, mayonnaise, yogurt, and more uncovered some great-tasting, money-saving choices (plus a few to skip).

**THERE WAS A TIME** when buying a supermarket version of a food or drink meant you'd save money—and possibly sacrifice flavor. But in our recent tests, we found that store brands can taste just as good as or better than iconic names like Dannon yogurt, Starbucks coffee, and Tropicana orange juice—and many are half the price or even less.

Our experts tasted the products “blind”—that is, without any labels—so the reputation of a brand or store wouldn't influence the outcome. We then divided the products into three groups based on how good they tasted (and listed them in alphabetical order). “Best-Tasting” products are those that our panel judged as having the best flavor and texture. The “Good” products are slightly less tasty. Those in the “Skip It” group don't taste terrible, exactly, but their flavor is subpar compared with the other products in the same category. Fortunately, we didn't find many of those. Read on for all the details of our tests.

BY TRISHA CALVO AND AMY KEATING  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY BEN GOLDSTEIN





## Top Pops

### White Cheddar Popcorn

**HOW THEY TASTED** The three best-tasting popcorns delivered big cheese flavor. Walmart's was crunchy and buttery, and it's about half the price of Smartfood—the brand that started the cheese popcorn craze. Angie's was a bit saltier (but still very good) and the priciest in our tests. Some of the cheesiness in these three may be due in part to the added natural flavors they contain. None of the other brands except for Sam's Club had added flavors, and they had a less intense cheese flavor. Of those, Trader Joe's had the most cheese. It also had the least sodium, with 180 mg. The popcorn from 365 Whole Foods Market and Target had tougher kernels and a milder cheese flavor than the others. Some samples of Sam's Club's were extremely salty and had an "off" flavor. And with 330 mg per serving, its popcorn was the highest in sodium.

#### BEST-TASTING

**Angie's Boomchickapop**  
White Cheddar Popcorn, 84¢

**Smartfood**  
White Cheddar Popcorn, 71¢

**Walmart Great Value Fully Loaded Popcorn** White Cheddar, 30¢

#### GOOD

**365 Whole Foods Market** Organic White Cheddar Popcorn, 70¢

**Aldi Clancy's**  
White Cheddar Popcorn, 28¢

**Target Good & Gather** Organic White Cheddar Popcorn, 56¢

**Trader Joe's**  
White Cheddar Popcorn, 40¢

#### SKIP IT

**Sam's Club Member's Mark**  
White Cheddar Flavored Popcorn, 29¢



COST IS PER OZ. (ABOUT 2 TO 3 CUPS).



## Snack Time

### Honey-Roasted Peanuts

**HOW THEY TASTED** We tested both oil- and dry-roasted nuts. The oil-roasted ones had a more even honey coating and were more flavorful. Trader Joe's oil-roasted nuts cost about the same as those from Planters, but TJ's had a better sweet and salty flavor, and the nuts were plumper. If you prefer dry-roasted, opt for BJ's. They had a richer flavor and cost much less than Planters. Amazon's peanuts were the most attractive, and the sweet/salty flavor was good, but one sample tasted stale. Target's nuts didn't have enough honey-roasted flavor.

#### BEST-TASTING

**Trader Joe's**  
The Original Honey Roasted Peanuts, 22¢

#### GOOD

**Aldi Southern Grove**  
Honey Dry Roasted Peanuts, 14¢

**BJ's Wellsley Farms**  
Peanuts Honey Roasted With Sea Salt (dry roasted), 13¢

**Planters**  
Honey Dry Roasted Peanuts, 23¢

**Planters**  
Honey Roasted Peanuts, 21¢

**Walmart Great Value**  
Honey Roasted Peanuts, 16¢

#### SKIP IT

**Amazon Happy Belly**  
Honey Roasted Peanuts, 23¢

**Target Good & Gather**  
Honey Dry Roasted Peanuts, 16¢



COST IS PER OZ.

## A Spoonful Of ...

### Low-Fat Vanilla Yogurt

**HOW THEY TASTED** Dannon's and Trader Joe's were both great and cost the same. Dannon's was thicker and had a stronger vanilla flavor than TJ's. TJ's, however, was lower in added sugars (9 grams in 6 ounces vs. 14 grams). It was also tastier than the Whole Foods Market yogurt, the other lower-sugar option we tested. Our tasters said the vanilla flavor in that one didn't come through enough. Walmart and Yoplait had a fruity vanilla flavor; Yoplait was creamier. Both were very sweet, so it wasn't surprising that they were also the highest in added sugars, with 16 grams (4 teaspoons) per serving.

#### BEST-TASTING



#### BEST-TASTING





## Morning Sunshine

### Orange Juice

**HOW THEY TASTED** Move over, Tropicana. The top-selling brand of OJ wasn't the best we tasted—in fact, it was one of our least favorites. Coming out on top were juices from Costco's Kirkland and brand-name Simply. Although no one would mistake either one for freshly squeezed OJ, they were fresher-tasting than the others we tried. Simply had a balanced sweet and tangy flavor

while Costco's juice was on the sweeter side. You might be just as happy with those from Sam's Club, Aldi, or Target, though. They were slightly less fresh-tasting but would save you 13 to 21 cents per cup compared with Simply. Tropicana had a hint of the bitter taste you'd get from the pith of an orange. There are better options at a lower price, so we say "skip it."

#### BEST-TASTING

**Costco Kirkland Signature** Organic Orange Juice, 93¢

**Simply Orange** Juice Pulp Free, 69¢

#### GOOD

**Aldi Nature's Nectar** Orange Juice Pulp Free, 54¢

**Sam's Club Member's Mark** 100% Orange Juice Pulp Free, 48¢

**Target Good & Gather** 100% Orange Juice Pulp Free, 56¢

#### SKIP IT

**365 Whole Foods Market** Orange Juice No Pulp, 83¢

**Trader Joe's** Orange Juice No Pulp, 77¢

**Tropicana** 100% Orange Juice No Pulp, 73¢



COST IS PER CUP.



#### BEST-TASTING

**Dannon** Low Fat Yogurt Vanilla, 75¢

**Trader Joe's** Organic Low Fat Yogurt French Vanilla, 75¢

COST IS PER 6-OZ. SERVING.

#### GOOD

**365 Whole Foods Market** Organic Low Fat Yogurt, 75¢

**Yoplait** Original Low Fat Yogurt Vanilla, 66¢

#### SKIP IT

**Walmart Great Value** Low Fat Yogurt Vanilla, 49¢





## Pour It On

### Caesar Salad Dressing

**HOW THEY TASTED** You can save big by buying a store-brand dressing, but none tasted quite as good as Ken's and Newman's Own, the name-brand Caesar dressings we tried. Ken's was creamy and had the classic Caesar flavors of garlic, lemon, cheese, and a little anchovy. Newman's Own wasn't as creamy; it was a little like a vinaigrette. But it still had pleasantly tangy Caesar flavors along with some mustard. Aldi's and Amazon's dressings were closest to Ken's, but they were a little light on the lemon and anchovy. Trader Joe's was similar to Newman's Own. It wasn't quite as tasty but was far lower in sodium.

#### BEST-TASTING

**Ken's** Creamy Caesar, 22¢

**Newman's Own** Creamy Caesar, 28¢

#### GOOD

**365 Whole Foods Market** Organic Caesar, 25¢

**Aldi Tuscan Garden** Classic Caesar, 13¢

**Amazon Happy Belly** Caesar Dressing, 13¢

**Trader Joe's** Romano Caesar, 25¢

**Walmart Great Value** Creamy Caesar, 13¢

COST IS PER 2 TBSP.

## Spread This

### Mayonnaise

**HOW THEY TASTED** Hellmann's was tops in taste, with a creamy texture and a delicious balance of egg, vinegar, salt, and mustard flavors. But our testers tried the mayos straight out of the jar. In sandwiches, dips, dressings, etc., you probably won't notice much difference between this iconic brand and the spreads from Aldi, Target, and Walmart—and they're about half the price. Trader Joe's and Whole Foods Market's were a bit tangier, with more vinegar and less egg flavor than the others. Both cost about the same as Hellmann's.

#### BEST-TASTING

**Hellmann's** Real Mayonnaise, 11¢

#### GOOD

**365 Whole Foods Market** Mayonnaise, 11¢

**Aldi Burman's** Real Mayonnaise, 6¢

**Amazon Happy Belly** Real Mayonnaise, 6¢

**Target Market Pantry** Real Mayonnaise, 6¢

**Trader Joe's** Organic Mayonnaise, 12¢

**Walmart Great Value** Mayo, 6¢

COST IS PER 1 TBSP.



# Better Brews

## Colombian Coffee



**HOW THEY TASTED** Walmart's coffee is complex with fruity and sweet flavors, and it's about half the price of Starbucks'. Trader Joe's tasted similar but was more darkly roasted. Sam's Club, BJ's, and Costco's coffee flavors were somewhat dull and a little less complex than Walmart's or TJ's. Starbucks is your best bet if you prefer a very dark-roasted coffee. Although it's labeled medium roast, it has the slightly harsh and smoky flavors that are typical of darker coffees, and they're balanced by rich chocolate and caramel notes. We advise skipping Aldi's version; the flavor was unpleasantly harsh and smoky without other flavors to balance it.

### BEST-TASTING

**Starbucks**  
Colombia Ground  
Medium Roast, 83¢

**Trader Joe's**  
Colombia Supremo  
Whole Bean  
Medium Roast, 54¢

**Walmart  
Great Value**  
100% Colombian  
Ground Medium  
Dark, 44¢

### GOOD

**Amazon Fresh**  
Colombia Ground  
Medium Roast, 55¢

**BJ's Wellsley  
Farms** Colombian  
Ground Medium  
Dark Roast, 33¢

**Costco Kirkland  
Signature** 100%  
Colombian Ground  
Dark Roast, 35¢

**Folgers** Colombian  
Ground Medium  
Roast, 53¢

**Sam's Club  
Member's Mark**  
Classic Roast  
100% Colombian  
Ground Medium  
Dark, 25¢

### SKIP IT

**Aldi Beaumont**  
100% Colombian  
Ground Coffee  
Medium Dark  
Roast, 35¢



COST IS PER OZ.



## Something Crunchy

### Honey-Oat Granola

**HOW THEY TASTED** Target's granola surprisingly costs about a third more than brand-name Nature Valley's—and more than the other store brands we tested. But its crunchy oats and perfect amount of brown sugar make it worth the higher price. If you like coconut, go with Kind's. It's lower in added sugars (11 grams vs. 15 grams), too.

#### BEST-TASTING

**Kind** Oats & Honey Granola with Toasted Coconut, \$1.09

**Target Good & Gather** Organic Honey Almond Granola, 92¢

#### GOOD

**365 Whole Foods Market** Organic Oat & Honey Granola, 71¢

**Aldi Simply Nature** Organic Oats & Honey Granola Cereal, 53¢

**Nature Valley** Oats & Honey Crunchy Granola, 69¢

**Sam's Club Member's Mark** Honey Almond Granola, 41¢

**Walmart Great Value** Oats & Honey Granola, 49¢

COST IS PER 2 OZ. (ABOUT 1/2 TO 2/3 CUP).



BEST-TASTING

## Dip Into This

### Hummus

**HOW THEY TASTED** Target's hummus was tops, beating brand-name Cedar's and Sabra—and it costs about a third less. It had the tanginess of a good hummus and a balance of chickpea, tahini, garlic, and cumin flavors with some lemony zip. If you prefer individual serving cups, try Kirkland or Sam's Club hummus. Both had a nice garlicky flavor. BJ's hummus is a good low-priced option but only comes in a large container, so consider whether you'll eat 30 ounces of hummus before it goes bad (about seven days after opening). Skip pricey name-brand Sabra. The garlic flavor was overpowering and made the dip taste bitter.

#### BEST-TASTING

**Target Good & Gather** Classic Hummus, 60¢

#### GOOD

**365 Whole Foods Market** Original Hummus, 60¢

COST IS PER 1/4 CUP OR INDIVIDUAL SERVING CUP.



# Cheese, Please

**HOW THEY TASTED** All of the cheddars were tasty. What set Sam's Club's and Cracker Barrel's apart? Sam's Club's had a slightly sweet, buttery flavor and a creamy texture, while Cracker Barrel's was the

sharpest and both nutty and firm. If you like a firmer cheese, consider BJ's. It wasn't as nutty as Cracker Barrel's but costs a lot less. Aldi's wasn't bad; it was just mild, lacking the sharpness you'd expect.

## BEST-TASTING

**Cracker Barrel**  
Sharp Yellow Cheddar Cheese, 58¢

**Sam's Club Member's Mark**  
Sharp Cheddar Cheese, 23¢

## GOOD

**365 Whole Foods Market** Sharp Cheddar Cheese, 38¢

**BJ's Wellsley Farms** Sharp Cheddar Cheese Yellow, 19¢

**Cabot** Vermont Sharp Cheddar Cheese, 50¢

**Target Good & Gather** Sharp Cheddar Cheese, 31¢

**Walmart Great Value** Sharp Cheddar Cheese, 25¢

## SKIP IT

**Aldi Happy Farms** Sharp Cheddar Cheese, 25¢

COST IS PER OZ.



**Aldi Park Street Deli** Classic Hummus, 52¢

**BJ's Wellsley Farms** Original Hummus, 37¢

**Cedar's** Original Hummus, 98¢

**Costco Kirkland Signature**  
Organic Hummus (singles), 39¢

**Sam's Club Member's Mark**  
Classic Hummus (singles), 35¢

**Trader Joe's** Hummus Dip, 50¢

**Walmart Marketside** Classic Hummus, 58¢

## SKIP IT

**Sabra** Classic Hummus, 90¢



**FOAM**

✓ **Spindle 10"**  
**Organic Latex**  
\$2,300

**79** OVERALL SCORE

**ADJUSTABLE AIR**

⌚ **Sleep Number c2**  
**Smart Bed Classic**  
**Series** \$1,299

**77** OVERALL SCORE

# The Best Mattresses for Your Body

**INNERSPRING**

⌚ **Bob-O-Pedic**  
**Treasure Cushion**  
**Dual** \$800

**81** OVERALL SCORE



If you struggle to sleep because of back pain, aching hips, or other challenges, consider a mattress or pillow upgrade. We tapped the pros—sleep doctors, physical therapists, spine specialists, and CR's own mattress experts—to help you get a setup that's just right. **BY DANIELLE CLARO / ILLUSTRATION BY SINELAB**

**FOAM**  
✓ Casper The One  
\$1,245  
**83** OVERALL SCORE



**FOAM**  
\$ Earthfoam  
Organic Medium  
\$1,000  
**81** OVERALL SCORE

**Your bed should be a haven. But if you're uncomfortable, you might find that getting a good night's sleep is challenging, to say the least. Have body aches? Acid reflux? Sleep apnea? A change of mattress or pillow could make a difference. There are loads of great options—and yes, some surprising solutions.**

Not a surprise, though: If your mattress is worn out, you might not wake up feeling refreshed. Broadly speaking, a mattress should last eight to 10 years. But, says Chris Regan, CR's lead test engineer for mattresses, more important than the calendar are certain tip-offs: "When you're lying in bed, does your body tip or roll toward the middle? If you sit on the edge of the mattress, do you feel yourself slipping off? These are signs that your mattress is worn out."

And there are other reasons to consider a new mattress. If your body has changed—you've lost or gained weight—or sustained an injury, a mattress that once felt great might not be a good match anymore, Regan says.

The right mattress can help alleviate back and hip pain, allergies, and more, and so can tweaking some habits.

A move as simple as switching the side of the bed you sleep on could ease strain, says physical therapist Karen Gstaider-Dring. "If you've been turning to your left for a lifetime, changing to the right could make a difference." Also consider the position you sleep in; it could be putting pressure on an already achy part of your body.

Here's how to get comfortable, no matter what.



## If you have back pain

**THE BEST AND WORST SLEEP POSITIONS:** "Sleeping on your stomach tends to worsen back pain," says Nnaemeka Echebiri, MD, physiatrist at the

Hospital for Special Surgery in New York City. When the hips sink into the mattress, they force the lower back into a hyperextended—overarched—position. This stresses the small joints that connect the vertebrae—known as the facet joints—and can increase pain, especially for people who have underlying arthritis.

Instead, try to sleep on your back with a pillow underneath your knees. "This can reduce pain by taking pressure off the facet joints," says Echebiri. Sleeping on your side is also a good option, he says.

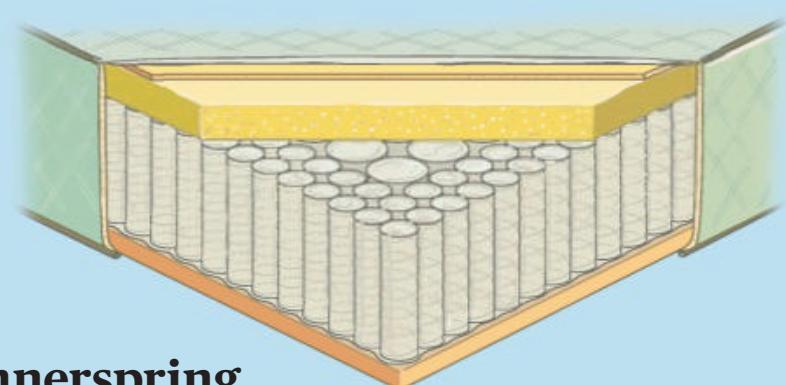
**TRY THIS BED SETUP:** To keep your spine in neutral alignment, with its natural curves maintained and not flattened, pick a medium-firm mattress. "They tend to provide the best support without creating uncomfortable pressure points," says Chris Winter, sleep medicine specialist.

In our mattress ratings (see page 47), medium-firm mattresses get a firmness score between 5 and 7. Many in this range can offer the recommended support, but foam, which may allow the body to sink in more, can make it challenging to change positions, especially if you have joint pain. The Avocado Green, \$1,999 (shown on page 41), is CR's top-rated innerspring

ICONS: ROBERT BRANDT

## THE 3 TYPES, EXPLAINED

There's no "best" type of mattress; it's all about how you want your body to feel. In each category CR tests—**innerspring** (which includes hybrid models), **foam**, and **adjustable air**—is a range of firmness options. Experts agree that medium-firm works well for most people. In our ratings, you can find top-rated mattresses with firmness noted on a scale of 1 to 10, from soft to very firm (5 to 7 indicates medium-firm). We test for body type and sleep style, so you can see how your specs line up with the performance of different mattresses. Here's what to know about each type.



### Innerspring

These are made up of coils topped with fabric or foam (or both). Hybrid mattresses have thicker layers of foam on top of the springs (the thickness of

foam varies among hybrids). A standard innerspring has a resilient feel. You won't have the sensation of melting into the mattress.

mattress and gets high marks in the support category for back sleepers of all sizes (it also gets solid scores for side sleepers).



## If you have hip pain

**THE BEST AND WORST SLEEP POSITIONS:** “Try to sleep on your side with a pillow between your knees. That helps keep your hips aligned and reduces strain on the lower back,” says Michelle Drerup, director of behavioral sleep medicine at the Cleveland Clinic Sleep Disorders Center. Drerup says sleeping in the fetal position can also be a good option: “Curling up on your side with knees drawn toward your chest can open up the hip joint, alleviating pressure.”

Again, sleeping on your stomach is not ideal. That position forces the spine into an unnatural curve and can strain the hips and lower back.

**TRY THIS BED SETUP:** Winter warns against hard mattresses for those with hip pain. That’s because hard mattresses don’t let your hips sink in when you’re on your side, which disrupts alignment and potentially increases discomfort. And a hard

surface pressing against sensitive joints can hurt. Medium-firm styles are your best bet, he says.

Some experts we’ve talked to suggest that the cushier surface of a foam mattress can ease aching hips. Casper The One, \$1,245 (shown on page 41), is CR’s top-rated foam model, with very good side-sleeper support for people of all sizes.

If you don’t like the conforming nature of some foam mattresses, check out our ratings for innerspring or adjustable air options with great support scores for side sleepers. You can always add a mattress topper (see picks on page 45) for added comfort. Or consider a mattress with a built-in pillow top, to minimize pressure. The Avocado Green Pillowtop, \$2,400, offers 2 inches of extra plushness and scores well for side sleepers.

Gstalder-Dring suggests that when lying on your side with a pillow between your knees, a longer pillow is a good choice.

“You want to have that pillow underneath the full length of the leg, not just under your knee, because that could cause your hip to rotate,” which can result in discomfort. (Tall people may need a king-size pillow.)



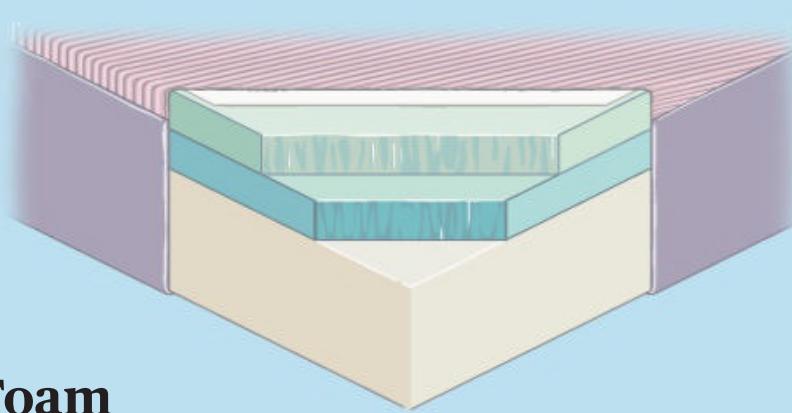
## If you have sleep apnea

### THE BEST AND WORST SLEEP POSITIONS:

If you’ve been diagnosed with sleep apnea—a common condition that causes breathing to repeatedly stop during sleep—you’re best off sleeping on your side, which helps decrease the pressure on your airway, says Drerup. “This in turn keeps the tongue and soft palate from collapsing back into the throat.” It also helps minimize the frequency of breathing disruptions during the night. That is true whether you use a CPAP machine or not. (CPAP, or continuous positive airway pressure, devices work by blowing air into the back of the throat to keep your airways open.) Certain CPAP masks and pillows are designed for side-sleeping.

Avoid sleeping on your back, if you can. “When sleeping supine, gravity pulls down on the tongue, soft palate, and other soft tissues,” says Drerup. This means they’re more likely to partially collapse into the throat, obstructing the airway. If you suspect you have sleep apnea, you can learn more at [CR.org/sleepapnea](http://CR.org/sleepapnea).

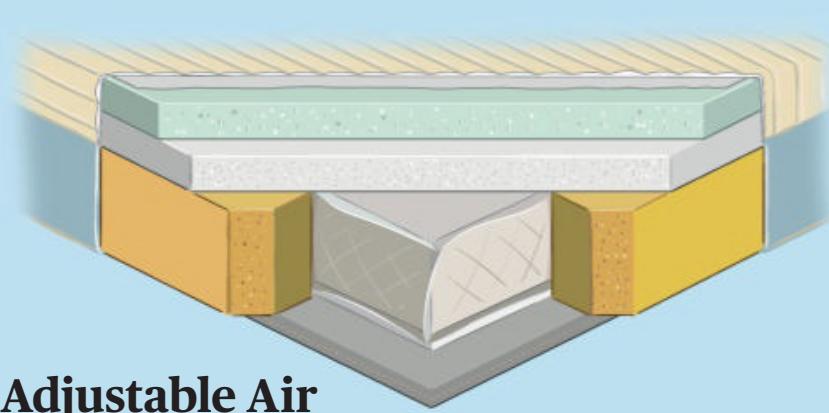
Side note: For those who snore and



### Foam

Primarily made from synthetic foam (including memory foam) and latex, these mattresses tend to conform more to the body. Some people might find

it hard to change positions on a foam mattress. Latex, which can be natural or synthetic, has a bit more spring and bounce than other types of foam.



### Adjustable Air

These have inflatable inner chambers (topped with foam or fabric) that you can customize for your firmness preferences, via remote

control or a smartphone app. With most adjustable air models, each partner can adjust their half of the bed for ideal support.

# MAKE UP YOUR BED

those who have sleep apnea, Drerup says sleeping on your side is fine.

**TRY THIS BED SETUP:** Winter recommends a medium-firm mattress for people with sleep apnea. Drerup says that many people who use a CPAP device find it helpful to elevate the head of the mattress slightly, with the help of an adjustable bed frame or—more simply—a wedge pillow.

The Sleep Number c2 Smart Bed Classic, \$1,299 (shown on page 40), is an adjustable air mattress that works well with an adjustable frame. It's on the firmer side, so if you want something softer, you might consider the Sleep Number p6, \$2,899. Keep in mind that elevating the head of any mattress might change the support, so your firmness experience might differ from the number in our ratings.

A CPAP pillow, which has unique contours and cutouts to accommodate the mask and hose, can make side-sleeping easier. Drerup says these pillows may help decrease mask leaks and improve comfort by reducing facial irritation and pressure points.



## If you have GERD

(gastroesophageal reflux disease)

### THE BEST AND WORST SLEEP POSITIONS:

For those with stomach issues, sleeping on your left side is best, says Meyer Solny, MD, a gastroenterologist at Weill Cornell Medical College in New York City.

**TRY THIS BED SETUP:** Elevating your head and torso can make a big difference. Aim for a 20-degree angle, with your head 7 or 8 inches higher than your feet to ensure that gravity works with you, not against you. "This helps keep stomach acid in the stomach, emptying it down into the small intestine rather than allowing it to flow upward into the esophagus," says

## Choosing the Right Pillow

Experts advise that **thicker pillows (at least 5 inches thick—more if you're broad-shouldered)** are best for side sleepers. But if you have a softer mattress, you may want a bit less loft in your pillow because your body sinks deeper than your head. Conversely, a firmer mattress calls for a thicker pillow. **Thinner pillows (3 to 5 inches thick)** are best for back sleepers. Some pillows are adjustable (like the Coop, Sleep Number, and Layla below), so you can remove some filling (or layers) to create the perfect fit. Also: Don't use too many pillows. Karen Gstaider-Dring, a physical therapist in Irvington, N.Y., says that many people "over-pillow," especially back sleepers, because we're so used to angling our heads forward to look at our phones. One right-sized pillow is usually enough to keep your neck in a healthy, neutral position.

### Picks for Side Sleepers

✓ **Coop Sleep Goods The Original** \$75

90 OVERALL SCORE



✓ **PureLux Simply Cool Memory Foam** \$42

86 OVERALL SCORE

### Picks for Back Sleepers

✓ **Sleep Number ComfortFit Ultimate** \$140

88 OVERALL SCORE



✓ **Layla Adjustable Fill Kapok Luxury Cooling** \$110

83 OVERALL SCORE

## Some Special Pillows to Try

CR doesn't test these pillow types, but sleep experts say they can make it easier to maintain a healthy sleep position.



**Cervical** These help you maintain the curve of the neck.

**MAKE IT YOURSELF:** Roll up a towel and place it inside your pillowcase with your pillow.



**Wedge** This shape makes it easy to elevate your head.

**MAKE IT YOURSELF:** A firm throw pillow under your regular bed pillow might be all the elevation you need.



**Bolster** Try one under the knees for back sleepers or between the knees, running the length of the leg, for side-sleeping.

**MAKE IT YOURSELF:** A king-size bed pillow works for side sleepers, but back sleepers may need a firm bolster designed for sleep.

Layer on plush products that add even more comfort.



**Mattress Toppers** A topper won't save a saggy mattress, but it can soften a too-firm surface. The best in our tests offer good support, provide comforting warmth, and are easy to put on your bed.

✓ **Dormeo**  
\$396

94 OVERALL SCORE



✓ **Viscosoft Select High Density**  
\$170

93 OVERALL SCORE

✓ **BedStory 3" Memory Foam**  
\$140

93 OVERALL SCORE

**Sheet Sets** To determine quality, our experts assess fit, softness, and wrinkling. We also test for strength and shrinkage because we think that good sheets should last.

✓ **Casaluna (Target) Washed Supima Sateen (500 thread count)**  
\$105

86 OVERALL SCORE



✓ **Coop Sleep Goods Comphy SoftSpa**  
\$180

85 OVERALL SCORE

✓ **Kirkland Signature (Costco) Pima Cotton (680 thread count)**  
\$80

76 OVERALL SCORE

**Duvets** The best are breathable, warm, and well made, with evenly distributed filling and a soft-to-the-touch outer shell.

✓ **Buffy Cloud Comforter**  
\$200



✓ **L.L.Bean Baffle Box Stitch Goose Down Comforter, Warm**  
\$429

✓ **Quince Premium Down Alternative Comforter (All Season)**  
\$130

Solny. To achieve the optimal angle, you can use an adjustable bed frame, a wedge pillow, or an anti-reflux pillow designed for elevated side-lying.

Winter says medium-firm mattresses are best for the average person with GERD. The innerspring Bob-O-Pedic Treasure Cushion Dual, \$800 (shown on page 40), is very good for side sleepers and excellent for back sleepers; it works well with an adjustable frame. Check our ratings for more options that fit the bill.

More good advice: Solny says folks with GERD have a better chance of a good night's sleep if they refrain from eating 3 hours before bedtime.



## If you have asthma (or allergies)

**THE BEST AND WORST SLEEP POSITIONS:** Shradha Agarwal, MD, an allergist and immunologist at Mount Sinai Hospital

in New York City, advises sleeping on your back with your head elevated: "This helps alleviate congestion and reduce mucus buildup." If you're lying flat, mucus can collect in the back of the throat, causing coughing and difficulty breathing, she says. If you're a side sleeper, elevate your head and sleep on your left side, which minimizes reflux, another cough trigger. "Stomach-sleeping is the worst position because it reduces free airflow to the lungs."

**TRY THIS BED SETUP:** "Latex and memory foam mattresses are good options since they resist allergens," says Agarwal. A medium-firm mattress will provide the best support. The Earthfoam Organic Medium latex mattress, \$1,000 (shown on page 41), gets top marks for back sleepers of all sizes. (Some people are sensitive to latex, so if that's possibly an issue for you, opt for a memory foam mattress, like the Casper The One, \$1,245, or Tempur-Pedic Cloud Medium, \$2,000.)

You can use normal bed pillows,

bed risers under the feet at the head of the bed, or a wedge pillow to raise your head. You can also consider an adjustable bed frame.

In terms of bedding, "cotton is a smart choice, as certain synthetics may trigger allergies," says Agarwal. Then again, synthetics such as microfiber and down alternatives can be resistant to dust mites. If you think you're allergic to a material in your bedding—like latex, feathers, or wool—see an allergist to pinpoint the problem before shopping.

A few other tweaks: In the bedroom, avoid carpeting and heavy drapes, which can collect dust mites. Dust furniture, vacuum floors, and change bedding regularly. Use removable dust mite covers on mattresses and pillows, and wash the covers often. Keep pets out to minimize dander. Shower before bed, to remove any pollen from your skin and hair. And get an air purifier with a HEPA filter (for more on buying an air purifier, go to [CR.org/air-purifiers](https://CR.org/air-purifiers)).

## ARE PRICIER MATTRESSES WORTH IT?

YOU MAY HAVE SEEN ADS for mattresses claimed to have almost magical properties—with prices that make your jaw drop. While a few expensive options rank high in CR's ratings, there are also pricey mattresses that don't rate well. And there are less-expensive mattresses that get high marks in our tests, many of which come in well under \$1,000 (the

Denver Mattress Doctor's Choice Plush innerspring, \$800, is one). In other words, you don't have to spend a massive amount of money to get a great mattress. The most important thing is to find one that matches your sleep style and body type.

Our ratings make it easy to compare top choices. Chris Regan, CR's in-house mattress

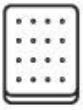
expert, says the sweet spot for mattress pricing is typically between about \$800 and \$1,500. "Year after year, our survey responses confirm the same thing: CR members who are happy with their mattresses have spent about \$1,300." Regan says that there are even some very good mattresses available in the \$500 range.

As you shop, keep in

mind that you can haggle with the salesperson to get a discount. (CR's 2024 Mattress Stores Winter Survey showed a median savings of \$299 as a result of asking for a lower price.) Buying online? Sales often happen on national holidays. Wait for Memorial Day, July Fourth, Labor Day, or Presidents Day to make the purchase, if you can.

**Ratings** ➤ **Rest Easy** The best innerspring, foam, and adjustable air mattresses in our tests offer great support for back and side sleepers of all sizes. Scan our specs, and find your perfect fit.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results	Test Results								Stabilization	Firmness rating		
				Side Sleeper		Back Sleeper		Petite	Average	Large/tall	Petite	Average	Large/tall		
				Comfort score	Owner satisfaction	Petite	Average								
<b>INNERSPRING</b>															
✓ Avocado Green	84	\$1,999	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	1 7	
✓ Casper Snow	83	\$1,600	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	4	
✓ Casper Dream	83	\$1,875	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	3	
✓ Casper Dream Max	83	\$3,125	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	2	
✗ Denver Mattress Doctor's Choice Plush	82	\$800	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	3	
✓ SleepFresh Hybrid	82	\$1,300	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	3	
✓ Charles P. Rogers Lifetime 8 Hybrid	82	\$3,200	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	5	
✗ Bob-O-Pedic Treasure Cushion Dual	81	\$800	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	6	
✓ Parachute Eco	81	\$2,400	—	—	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	5	
✓ Ethan Allen EA Signature Platinum Plush	81	\$3,420	1	1	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	5	
✓ Brentwood Home Hybrid Latex	80	\$1,499	1	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	4	
✓ Bob-O-Pedic Copper Radiance Dual	79	\$1,299	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	5	
✓ Avocado Green Mattress Pillowtop	79	\$2,400	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	1	▲	▲	5	
✗ Zoma Hybrid	79	\$800	—	—	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	3	
✗ Zinus Cooling Gel Memory Foam coil	78	\$730	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	5	
✓ Bear Elite Hybrid	78	\$1,400	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	4	
✓ Big Fig The Mattress for a Bigger Figure	78	\$1,600	▲	▲	▲	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	
✗ Beautyrest BR-800 12" Medium Firm	78	\$770	1	1	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	6	
✓ Bear Star Hybrid	77	\$1,200	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	3	
✓ Beautyrest PressureSmart Plush Pillow Top Standard	77	\$1,750	1	1	▲	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	
✗ Lucid 12" Hybrid	77	\$450	▲	1	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	5	
✓ Charles P. Rogers Real Bed	77	\$1,200	▲	▲	▲	▲	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	
✓ Cloverlane 15" Foam Luxury Firm	77	\$1,500	—	—	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	1	3	
✓ Tempur-Pedic Cloud Medium Hybrid	77	\$2,200	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	1	3	
<b>FOAM</b>															
✓ Casper The One	83	\$1,245	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	6	
✗ Earthfoam Organic Medium	81	\$1,000	—	—	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	7	
✓ Essentia Stratami	81	\$3,500	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	6	
✓ Spindle 10" Organic Latex	79	\$2,300	—	—	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	5	
✓ Tempur-Pedic Cloud Medium	79	\$2,000	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	1	5	

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results	Test Results																																						
				Side Sleeper		Back Sleeper		Petite		Average		Large/tall		Petite		Average		Large/tall		Durability		Stabilization		Firmness rating																		
																																										
<b>FOAM</b> <i>Continued</i>																																										
✓ <b>Avocado</b> Latex Mattress	79	\$3,000																					5																			
✓ <b>Essentia</b> Classic REM5 Organic 8"	79	\$4,200																					3																			
✓ <b>Cocoon by Sealy</b> Chill Memory Foam	79	\$1,200	—	—																				5																		
✓ <b>Purple</b> Renew	79	\$1,399																					4																			
✓ <b>Reverie</b> Dream Supreme II Hybrid Sleep System Medium/Firm	78	\$4,200																					3																			
✓ <b>Tuft &amp; Needle</b> Mint	78	\$1,800																					3																			
✓ <b>DreamCloud</b> Premier Memory Foam	78	\$1,782																					4																			
✓ <b>SweetNight</b> Prime	77	\$720	—	—																				5																		
✓ <b>Bedgear</b> S3 Performance	77	\$800	—	—																				5																		
✓ <b>Molecule</b> Core	77	\$800	—	—																				8																		
✓ <b>Lull</b> The Lull	77	\$800															<img alt="up arrow icon" data-bbox="665 318																									

# ROAD REPORT



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



## SAFETY MATTERS

### Your Garage Needs a Heat Detector

It's important to have a fire alert system in your garage, especially if it's attached to your house or near rooms where people sleep. Fires can spread quickly, and pose a serious threat to life and property. However, a typical smoke alarm won't work well enough for your garage because tailpipe fumes or dust blown in through a large garage door opening could set off false alarms. According to the U.S. Fire Administration, you need a device called a heat detector. It sounds an alert when it measures higher-than-normal temperatures, not smoke.



## ASK OUR EXPERTS

### What's the best way to drive through a puddle?

Puddles pose hidden dangers for drivers, so avoid them if you can do so safely. When tires glide on top of water—known as **hydroplaning**—it's hard to steer and brake. **Puddles can form in deep potholes**, obscuring them and raising the risk of tire, wheel, and even **suspension damage** if you drive over one. So when approaching a puddle, instead of braking, ease off the power and keep steering straight. Rapid steering or braking actions risk a loss of control.

## FIRST DRIVE



### Mazda CX-50 Hybrid

PHOTO: MAZDA

Mazda teamed up with Toyota to build a hybrid version of the CX-50 compact SUV. The style and handling are all Mazda, but the hybrid gas-electric powertrain is essentially the same one found in the Toyota RAV4 Hybrid. AWD comes standard, and EPA-estimated fuel economy is 38 mpg combined. **CR'S TAKE:** Opposites attract. The CX-50 Hybrid smartly combines

the CX-50's fun-to-drive character and the sensibility of a Toyota RAV4 Hybrid, based on our initial experience. It's more powerful than the base CX-50 2.5 S, costs less than the sportier CX-50 Turbo, and has better fuel economy than both.

**BASE PRICE RANGE** \$33,970-\$40,050  
**DESTINATION CHARGE** \$1,420  
**PRICE AS DRIVEN** \$40,100

## THE VITAL STATISTIC

**\$20,365**

**The difference in sale  
price between the  
average new car and  
the average used car.**

This indicates that used car prices are finally dropping, while the prices of new cars continue to rise.

**Source:** Edmunds.

## RECALL



### Volkswagen

Volkswagen is recalling 114,478 Beetle and Passat vehicles to replace potentially dangerous Takata driver's-side frontal airbags. Because of a defect, these airbags could degrade over time and might rupture and spray metal fragments in a crash.

The recall includes 2006-2007 Passat sedans, 2007 Passat wagons, 2012-2014

Passat models, and 2017-2019 Beetle coupes and convertibles. Volkswagen previously recalled some older Beetle models for the same reason.

**WHAT TO DO:** Dealerships will replace the faulty airbags. For more information, call Volkswagen customer service at 800-893-5298.

# The Most and Least Reliable Cars

Our latest auto reliability surveys reveal the automaker that leads the pack right now. Plus, the hybrids and EVs you can count on.

by Jonathan Linkov

**W**HEN A CAR COMPANY starts selling a brand-new model, the first examples are exciting and attention-grabbing but can be prone to problems. In fact, cars from a debut year can have chronic issues that translate into years of repairs.

CR's newest Auto Surveys confirm this: Buyers looking for reliability should avoid all-new or recently redesigned models for at least the first—and sometimes even the second—model year.

That's why, even if you're buying from a dependable brand (see page 53), it's worth researching even deeper. "While brand rankings can guide you to the showroom, it's critical to look at reliability for specific models before making a purchase," says Jake Fisher, senior director of auto testing at Consumer Reports. "Even within high-ranking companies, there can be significant variation in reliability."

To help identify those reliable brands and models, we calculate predicted reliability ratings for almost every new vehicle on the market. To do this, we use data from our annual reliability surveys, which ask CR members about issues they've had with their vehicles in 20 potential problem areas over the prior 12 months. Here's what we found.

## SUBCOMPACT SUV

75 RELIABILITY SCORE



✓ Subaru Crosstrek

## MIDSIZED 3-ROW/LARGE SUV

68 RELIABILITY SCORE



✓ Kia Sorento Hybrid

## LUXURY MIDSIZED SUV

67 RELIABILITY SCORE



✓ Lexus RX Hybrid

COMPACT SUV

98 RELIABILITY SCORE



✓ Subaru Forester

MIDSIZED 2-ROW SUV

61 RELIABILITY SCORE



✓ Subaru Outback

THE MOST  
RELIABLE  
MODELS

BY CATEGORY

LUXURY COMPACT SUV

77 RELIABILITY SCORE



✓ Lexus NX

MIDSIZED PICKUP TRUCK

59 RELIABILITY SCORE



✓ Honda Ridgeline

ELECTRIC CAR

82 RELIABILITY SCORE



✓ BMW i4

## Subaru Surges to the Top

This year, Subaru ascended to the top of our brand rankings, supplanting Lexus and Toyota, which have held the two top spots for many years.

"Subaru's cars share many reliable components," says Steven Elek, who oversees auto data analytics at CR. "This commonality means that when Subaru redesigns a vehicle, it can make fewer incremental changes by carrying over dependable systems. This reduces the risk of new problems."

Within Toyota, below-average reliability scores for the redesigned Tacoma, Tundra, and bZ4X EV hurt the brand's overall ranking.

Subaru's only model with below-average reliability is the all-new Solterra EV, which is based on the Toyota bZ4X.

## Hybrid Reliability Rises

Our survey results also have more data on hybrids and electric vehicles than ever before. On average, hybrid cars remain reliable, while pure electric cars and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs) are more likely to have issues. "Today's hybrids are extremely fuel-efficient," Fisher says. "But despite their added complexity, they deliver reliability that is similar to conventional gas cars." Even compared with gasoline vehicles, the Toyota Corolla Hybrid and RAV4 Hybrid, Hyundai Elantra Hybrid, and Lexus NX Hybrid are among this year's most reliable cars.

However, there are exceptions. Ford's F-150 Hybrid, based on the problematic gas-only F-150, is the least reliable new model in the survey,

with transmission and hybrid battery problems. The Ford Escape Hybrid is also among the least reliable models.

Among EVs, the Nissan Ariya remains the most reliable electric SUV, followed by the Genesis GV60 and Ford Mustang Mach-E. The BMW i4 is now the most reliable electric car, with the Kia Niro EV and Hyundai Ioniq 6 among the other strong performers. At the other end of the EV spectrum, reliability scores for the Rivian R1S and R1T and the Ford F-150 Lightning pickup remain low. "Since EV technology is still relatively new, automakers continue to work the bugs out of their powertrains and platforms," Elek says. "But we also see issues with their non-EV components, such as the latest infotainment and electronic features."

## THE LEAST RELIABLE MODELS BY CATEGORY



## How the Brands Stack Up

Choosing one of the most reliable brands in this chart is a good place to start your car buying research. Just be sure to also check the reliability of specific models.

With PHEVs, having two distinct powertrains—both all-electric and gasoline—increases the chances for problems. The Toyota RAV4 Prime is the most reliable PHEV in our survey, but most have average reliability, including the BMW X5, Hyundai Tucson, Kia Sportage, Lexus NX, Toyota Prius Prime, and Volvo XC60. The BMW, Kia, Lexus, and Toyota are less reliable than their gas versions.

### It Still Pays to Wait

While a few models debuted this year with strong predicted reliability—such as the Ford Mustang, Lexus TX, and Subaru Crosstrek, Forester, and Impreza—it's usually not wise to buy an all-new model.

For example, GM's brand-new all-electric Cadillac Lyriq and Chevrolet

Blazer EV are the lowest-scoring models in our survey, suffering from problems with the EV battery, electrical accessories, climate system, and in-car electronics. Both the gas-only version of the all-new Mazda CX-90 and the also new PHEV version have steering and suspension issues, as well as transmission problems.

If you need more reasons not to buy a new car the first year it's available, look to the Ford Explorer, which we can recommend for the first time since its 2020 debut. This midsized SUV was among the least reliable models in multiple past surveys but has improved to average. So, too, have the Ford Bronco Sport and Genesis GV80, which finally moved to average reliability after multiple years of below-average scores.

1	SUBARU	68
2	LEXUS	65
3	TOYOTA	62
4	HONDA	59
5	ACURA	55
6	MAZDA	55
7	AUDI	54
8	BMW	53
9	KIA	51
10	HYUNDAI	50
11	BUICK	48
12	NISSAN	48
13	FORD	44
14	GENESIS	40
15	VOLVO	38
16	CHEVROLET	37
17	TESLA	36
18	VOLKSWAGEN	34
19	JEEP	33
20	GMC	33
21	CADILLAC	27
22	RIVIAN	14



We calculated brand-level reliability scores by first examining the overall reliability of 2022 to 2024 model years, along with some early 2025 data. Then we averaged all models within a brand, as long as we had a sufficient sample size for at least two models. Due to insufficient model data, we were unable to rank Alfa Romeo, Chrysler, Dodge, Fiat, Infiniti, Jaguar, Land Rover, Lincoln, Lucid, Maserati, Mercedes-Benz, Mitsubishi, Porsche, and Ram at the brand level.

# CR's RELIABILITY PREDICTIONS

**EVERY YEAR** CR asks members about problems they've had with their vehicles over the previous 12 months. We use their responses to calculate reliability ratings for popular models. We statistically adjust for mileage and weight for the severity of the issues, as well as other factors. Predictions for 2025 models are based on the overall reliability of each for the past three years and, in some cases, supplemented with the brand reliability score. Predictions for some new or redesigned models, or models with insufficient sample size, are based on brand history and other factors and are not included. Only one or two years of data are used if the model was new or redesigned in 2024 or 2023. Scores are on a scale of 0 to 100. A score of 41 to 60 is considered average. For more info, read our reliability FAQ at [CR.org/reliability](https://CR.org/reliability).



Lexus RX Hybrid	67
Lexus TX	64
Audi Q7	63
BMW X5	61
Genesis GV80	51
Cadillac XT5	48
Acura MDX	46
BMW X5 Plug-in Hybrid	45
Lexus RX	41
Mercedes-Benz GLE	30



Nissan Ariya	58
Genesis GV60	47
Ford Mustang Mach-E	43
Kia EV9	42
Tesla Model Y	41
Subaru Solterra	38
Toyota bZ4X	38
Kia EV6	31
Hyundai Ioniq 5	30
BMW iX	29
Volkswagen ID.4	29
Audi Q8 E-Tron	26
Tesla Model X	24
Rivian R1S	9
Cadillac Lyriq	5
Chevrolet Blazer EV	5



Subaru Crosstrek	75
Honda HR-V	72
Chevrolet Trailblazer	68
Toyota Corolla Cross	64
Mazda CX-30	64
Toyota Corolla Cross Hybrid	61
Hyundai Kona	49
Buick Encore GX	44
Kia Seltos	44
Volkswagen Taos	24



Subaru Forester	98
Toyota RAV4	86
Toyota RAV4 PHEV (Prime)	84
Toyota RAV4 Hybrid	83

Mazda CX-5	74
Ford Escape	68
Kia Sportage	67
Honda CR-V	61
Nissan Rogue	61

Honda CR-V Hybrid	55
Hyundai Tucson	54
Hyundai Tucson Plug-in Hybrid	52
Buick Envision	51
Volkswagen Tiguan	49

Mazda CX-50	47
Kia Sportage Hybrid	47
Kia Sportage Plug-in Hybrid	46
Ford Bronco Sport	45
Hyundai Tucson Hybrid	44

Ford Escape Hybrid	21
Hyundai Tucson	44
Hyundai Tucson Hybrid	44
Subaru Outback	61
Honda Passport	55

Honda Passport	55
Ford Bronco	44
Hyundai Santa Fe	42
Hyundai Santa Fe Hybrid	42
Nissan Pathfinder	38

Chevrolet Blazer	32
Jeep Wrangler	27
Jeep Grand Cherokee	22
Chevrolet Suburban	35
GMC Yukon XL	35

Chevrolet Tahoe	31
GMC Yukon	31
Mazda CX-90	29
Jeep Grand Cherokee L	22
Mazda CX-90 Plug-in Hybrid	15

Kia Sorento Hybrid	68
Toyota Highlander	65
Toyota Highlander Hybrid	64
Honda Pilot	59
Hyundai Palisade	59

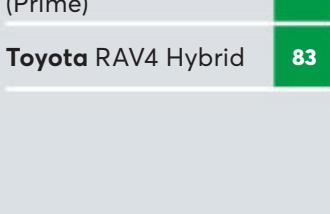
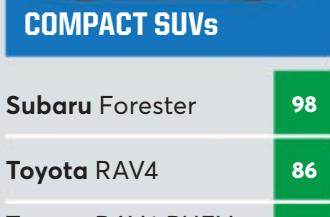
Subaru Ascent	50
Ford Explorer	45
Kia Sorento	44
Toyota Grand Highlander	42
Toyota Grand Highlander Hybrid	42

Kia Telluride	42
Hyundai Santa Fe	42
Hyundai Santa Fe Hybrid	42
Nissan Pathfinder	38
Lincoln Corsair	34

Chevrolet Suburban	35
GMC Yukon XL	35
Chevrolet Tahoe	31
GMC Yukon	31
Mazda CX-90	29

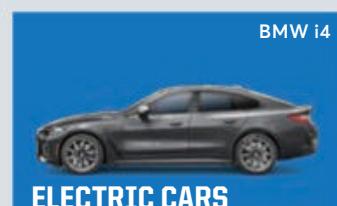
Mazda CX-90 Plug-in Hybrid	58
Volvo XC60	42
Volvo XC60 Plug-in Hybrid	42
Audi Q5	36
Genesis GV70	35

Volvo XC40	35
Lincoln Corsair	34
Cadillac Lyriq	5
Chevrolet Blazer EV	5



## Some Cars Got More Reliable—and Others Didn't

The reliability of a specific model can improve or decline from year to year. Vehicle reliability can worsen as production ramps up, while midcycle changes can eliminate problems. These lists highlight the models that have recently gained or lost our recommendation. For more details, go to [CR.org/reliability](http://CR.org/reliability).



### ELECTRIC CARS

BMW i4	82
Kia Niro EV	54
Hyundai Ioniq 6	50
Nissan Leaf	44
Tesla Model 3	42
Tesla Model S	35
Lucid Air	7



### MIDSIZED/LARGE CARS

Toyota Crown	70
Hyundai Sonata	67
Subaru Legacy	66
Honda Accord	64
Nissan Altima	58
Toyota Camry (Hybrid)	56
Honda Accord Hybrid	46



### MINIVANS

Kia Carnival	68
Honda Odyssey	60
Toyota Sienna	57
Chrysler Pacifica	42



### ELECTRIC PICKUPS

Ford F-150 Lightning	28
Rivian R1T	20



### LUXURY CARS

Lexus ES	75
Audi A4	75
Audi Allroad	75
Lexus ES Hybrid	66
BMW 3 Series	48
Genesis G70	29



### COMPACT/MIDSIZED PICKUPS

Honda Ridgeline	59
Ford Maverick	59
Jeep Gladiator	50
Ford Maverick Hybrid	46
Hyundai Santa Cruz	34
Toyota Tacoma	29
Nissan Frontier	27
Chevrolet Colorado	15
GMC Canyon	15



### SMALL CARS

Subaru Impreza	89
Toyota Corolla	84
Hyundai Elantra Hybrid	79
Toyota Corolla Hybrid	76
Toyota Prius	76
Mazda3	72
Honda Civic	59
Kia Soul	58
Toyota Prius PHEV (Prime)	55
Chevrolet Trax	46
Kia Niro	45
Hyundai Elantra	45



### SPORTS/SPORTY CARS

Ford Mustang	84
Mazda MX-5 Miata	84
Audi A5	72
BMW 4 Series	53
Chevrolet Corvette	51



### FULL-SIZED PICKUPS

Ram 2500	51
Chevrolet Silverado 2500HD	45
GMC Sierra 2500HD	45
Ford F-150	40
Chevrolet Silverado 1500	39
GMC Sierra 1500	39
Toyota Tundra	32
Ford F-150 Hybrid	7

## NEWLY RECOMMENDED

MODELS THAT HAVE IMPROVED TO AVERAGE OR BETTER

Ford Bronco Sport  
Ford Escape  
Ford Explorer  
Genesis GV80

Hyundai Kona Electric  
Volkswagen Tiguan  
Volvo XC60 PHEV

## NO LONGER RECOMMENDED

MODELS THAT HAVE DROPPED TO BELOW AVERAGE

Audi Q8 E-Tron  
BMW iX  
Ford Escape Hybrid  
Hyundai Santa Cruz

Kia EV6  
Lincoln Corsair  
Mazda CX-90  
Mazda CX-90 PHEV



# How to Handle a Fender Bender

BY BENJAMIN PRESTON



**ACCORDING TO** the Highway Loss Data Institute, modern high-tech safety features—automatic emergency braking (AEB), blind spot warning (BSW), lane departure warning (LDW)—have been very effective at preventing crashes. But when cars that feature these and similar systems are damaged in a crash, payment for insurance claims can be more than \$100 higher than for vehicles without those systems. That difference is largely due to replacing and recalibrating sensors and cameras, which are often located in the most vulnerable parts of the vehicle.

If you own a newer vehicle and have a collision, remember that some damage may not be visible. Get an estimate from a dealership or an independent repair shop that includes recalibration of any sensors or cameras that may have been affected. Make sure the facility has the equipment needed for proper calibration. Larger repairs may warrant a second opinion.

Read on to learn more about the most sensitive parts of your car and where to get them fixed if they're damaged.

## BUMPERS

### WHAT CAN GET DAMAGED

Many newer cars have sensors for AEB and adaptive cruise control (ACC) located behind the front bumper cover, which is typically made of plastic. Cars with parking assistance, BSW, and rear collision warning will also have sensors behind the rear bumper cover. After a collision, even if there's no apparent damage to the plastic veneer, the sensors behind them may have been knocked out of alignment. Worse, the body filler and paint applied during a shoddy repair job can prevent the sensors from working properly.

### WHERE TO GET REPAIRS

Dealership or independent shop with calibration equipment.

**SAMPLE COST** \$1,926-\$2,590

## WINDSHIELD

### WHAT CAN GET DAMAGED

Many cars with AEB, ACC, lane centering assistance, and lane keeping assistance have cameras mounted inside the windshield. To replace the glass properly and make sure those features work again, a technician will also need to recalibrate the cameras. Other sensitive devices that live next to the windshield glass include rain sensors, electronically activated shade bands, windshield heaters, and head-up displays.

### WHERE TO GET REPAIRS

Dealership or specialty auto glass shop specifically equipped to repair and recalibrate cameras and sensors.

**SAMPLE COST** \$1,659-\$2,090

## SIDE MIRRORS

### WHAT CAN GET DAMAGED

Because they protrude from the car, side mirrors are especially vulnerable to costly damage. In many new cars, the side mirrors not only house motors for electronic adjustment, and sometimes heating elements, but also might contain components such as surround-view cameras, BSW indicator lights, and the sensors that make the active parking assistance system work. Even a minor impact can knock those cameras and sensors out of alignment, requiring professional repair.

### WHERE TO GET REPAIRS

Dealership or independent shop with calibration equipment.

**SAMPLE COST** \$1,012-\$2,961

## HEADLIGHTS

### WHAT CAN GET DAMAGED

Headlights are at the front corners of a vehicle and can be smashed easily. Many cars now come with expensive LED headlamp assemblies that have to be replaced entirely if they're damaged. Some luxury cars also have projection and curve-adaptive headlamps with motors that can move the beam of light based on where the steering wheel is turned. Replacing a high-tech headlight can cost several thousand dollars, but a lower-tech version on a newer car can still cost more than a thousand dollars.

### WHERE TO GET REPAIRS

Dealership or independent shop with calibration equipment.

**SAMPLE COST** \$1,618-\$4,456



## ROAD TEST

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



LUXURY ENTRY-LEVEL SUVs

### Mini Countryman

Now Roomier but Has Some Power Quirks

71

OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 76

**HIGHS** Agile handling, short stopping distances, decent fuel economy, whimsical character

**LOWS** Unintuitive controls, uneven power delivery

**POWERTRAIN** 241-hp, 2.0-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder engine; 7-speed dual-clutch automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

**FUEL** 28 mpg on premium

**PRICE** \$38,900-\$46,900 base price + \$995 destination charge  
Total MSRP as tested \$43,695

**THE MINI COUNTRYMAN** has gotten bigger in just about every dimension, and it's now about the same size as a Subaru Crosstrek. It remains a charming car that's fun to drive and is also fairly practical, but uneven acceleration and confusing controls bring significant frustrations.

The Countryman's 241-hp, turbocharged four-cylinder engine has plenty of power for merging and passing, and its sporty exhaust note adds to the enjoyment. By the numbers, it outpaces rivals, with a zippy 6.7-second run from 0 to 60 mph. Its seven-speed dual-clutch automatic shifts quickly, but there are annoying power delays and hiccups at low speeds.

Although the Countryman feels more top-heavy than the smaller Mini Cooper two-door, it's more nimble than most SUVs and proved to be a playful companion on

twisty roads. We found it reasonably comfortable as well, but the suspension struggles to dampen sharp transverse ridges in the road.

The Countryman's interior maximizes space, and the vehicle is easy to get into and out of. But the wide front seats don't do a good job of holding you in place through corners. The rear seat is fairly comfortable and spacious for a small vehicle, with lots of headroom, tons of foot space, and good underleg support.

An interior redesign has done away with fussy metal switches that never worked quite right, replacing them with a circular center infotainment screen that also doesn't work quite right. The new setup means that just about every task requires a multistep process through the screen. The ignition switch is also too easily confused with the electronic gear selector.



LUXURY ELECTRIC SUVs

### Acura ZDX

A Competent EV With Unproven Reliability

61

OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 80

**HIGHS** Quick acceleration, quiet interior, roomy cabin, long driving range, qualifies for \$7,500 federal tax credit

**LOWS** Short on handling agility, thick roof pillars hamper visibility

**POWERTRAIN** 490-hp, dual electric motors; 1-speed direct drive; all-wheel drive

**RANGE** 313 miles

**PRICE** \$64,500-\$74,500 base price + \$1,350 destination charge  
Total MSRP as tested \$70,450

**LIKE ITS HONDA PROLOGUE** sibling, the ZDX is born of a partnership with General Motors that allows it to make use of GM's Ultium batteries and EV architecture. We found the ZDX to be a better vehicle than the similar Chevrolet Blazer EV and Prologue, thanks to its smoother ride and more comfortable front seats. But well-below-average reliability for the Blazer EV and Cadillac Lyriq doesn't bode well for Acura's new model.

Even with 490 hp, the ZDX feels sluggish off the line because it requires you to press the accelerator pedal farther than in most EVs to move with vigor. But we learned to appreciate the smoothness of the powertrain, along with how easy it is to use the car's "one-pedal driving" mode, which enables you to accelerate and brake by using just the accelerator.

The ZDX AWD managed 313 miles during our 70-mph highway-range test, which is commendable, and its 190-kW maximum acceptance rate at public DC fast charging stations makes for relatively speedy charging on road trips.

Although the suspension is firm, it absorbs bumps effectively. But the ZDX feels heavy, and there's a distinct lack of agility because of its slow and vague steering.

Most of our drivers found the ZDX's front seats to be more comfortable and supportive than the Prologue's. There's a lot of room in the rear seat, but its low and flat shape doesn't lend much support.

The ZDX's infotainment system is easier to use than in the GM vehicles, and we applaud that it has Android Auto/Apple CarPlay capability. We also like the easy-to-use climate knobs and buttons.


**COMPACT SUVs**

## ✓ Subaru Forester

Quieter and More Comfortable

**93**
**OVERALL  
SCORE**

### ROAD-TEST SCORE 92

**HIGHS** Fuel economy, comfortable ride, short stops, quiet cabin, airy outward views, roomy rear seat

**LOWS** Feels underpowered, cumbersome climate controls

**POWERTRAIN** 180-hp, 2.5-liter 4-cylinder engine; continuously variable transmission; all-wheel drive

**FUEL** 29 mpg on regular

**PRICE** \$29,695-\$39,995 base price + \$1,420 destination charge  
**Total MSRP as tested** \$35,518

**THE REDESIGNED** sixth-generation Forester continues with its core virtues of great outward visibility, a roomy cabin, a comfortable ride, excellent fuel economy, and standard all-wheel drive. Looking past the chunky new styling, the most significant change is that its noisy cabin—long a weak point for the Forester—is quieter thanks to the increased use of sound deadening. It's disappointing that BSW and RCTW aren't available on the base trim and are only optional—instead of standard—on the higher-tier Premium we tested.

The 2.5-liter "flat-four" engine (so-called due to the unique, horizontally opposed cylinder layout) benefits from better low-end torque, which gives it some pep around town. But real power requires pressing the gas pedal down quite far. Fuel economy is a commendable 29 mpg overall.

On a curvy road, the Forester doesn't feel sporty, but it's capable and secure. It exhibited plenty of grip and achieved a high speed through our avoidance maneuver test. The Forester continues to be the best-riding compact SUV because of its supple and absorbent suspension.

The front seats are comfortable, but some of our longer-legged drivers complained that the bottom cushion was too short. The Forester's rear seat is super-roomy for a compact SUV, with good headroom and knee room, along with decent underleg support. Cargo room is a generous 38 cubic feet.

The infotainment screen is simple to use, but it's slow to respond to inputs. It's also annoying that you have to wade into the climate menu rather than using physical controls to change the airflow or to find the "Auto" function.


**MIDSIZED PICKUP TRUCKS**

## Ford Ranger

A Refined Powertrain but Dismal Ride and Handling

**61**
**OVERALL  
SCORE**

### ROAD-TEST SCORE 57

**HIGHS** Stout payload capacity, relatively roomy rear seat

**LOWS** Stiff ride, clumsy handling, long stopping distances, some rough gear shifts

**POWERTRAIN** 270-hp, 2.3-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder engine; 10-speed automatic transmission; four-wheel drive

**FUEL** 21 mpg on regular

**PRICE** \$32,980-\$55,720 base price + \$1,595 destination charge  
**Total MSRP as tested** \$42,960

**BEYOND ITS FAIRLY** refined powertrain and high-tech-looking infotainment screen, the new Ranger remains a truly "trucky" vehicle, with a rough ride, clumsy handling, and long stopping distances. Plus, BSW and RCTW are optional instead of standard.

The best thing about the new Ranger is the one element that's carried over from a previous model: the 270-hp turbo four-cylinder. It delivers healthy midrange torque and a notably more cultured sound than the turbo-fours in other midsized pickups. Occasionally, the shifts aren't smooth, and the Ranger's 7.9-second plod to 60 mph trails rivals by quite a margin.

The Ranger's ride is stiff and uncomfortable, even by truck standards. It gets bouncy and unsettled as soon as the road gets slightly rough. That the truck is relatively quiet is only a partial consolation.

Handling is a weak point as well. The steering is slow and vague, and the truck feels ponderous through corners. Braking performance is downright poor, with much longer 60-to-0-mph stopping distances than its rivals. At least the Ranger has generous payload and towing capabilities. It also did well scaling our challenging rock hill off-road course.

Because of a reasonably priced option package on our XLT trim, the comfortable, cloth-covered front seats are power-operated, including two-way lumbar support. The rear seat has enough headroom for most adults.

We like that the Ranger has physical controls for many common climate functions. But the tall, narrow layout of the infotainment screen forces the driver to look down to use anything situated toward the bottom portion of the display.

**Ratings** ➤ **Hits and Misses** The redesigned Forester is better than ever, the Ranger rides like a buckboard, the Countryman is fun but quirky, and the ZDX is a smooth, comfy EV.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results	Road-Test Results										ADAS			
				Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	CR range, miles (E = EPA electric range)	Seat comfort, front/rear	Usability	Noise	Ride	Fit + finish	Routine handling	Acceleration, 0-60 mph, sec.	Dry braking, 60-0 mph, ft.	BSW/RCTW
<b>COMPACT SUVs</b>																	
✓ Subaru Forester 2.5L	93	\$35,518	⬆️ ⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	92	29	475	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	8.6	127	0
✓ Honda CR-V 1.5T	79	\$34,250	⬆️ ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	88	26	360	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	8.8	129	0
✓ Mazda CX-5 2.5L	78	\$31,190	⬆️ ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	77	24	370	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	8.6	133	S
✓ Hyundai Tucson 2.5L	76	\$31,969	⬇️ ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	84	26	370	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	9.6	130	S
✓ Toyota RAV4 2.5L	76	\$32,109	⬆️ ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	73	27	395	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	8.3	131	0
✓ Nissan Rogue 1.5T	75	\$34,905	⬆️ ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	81	25	360	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	9.1	134	S
✓ Kia Sportage 2.5L	75	\$31,220	⬆️ ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	77	25	355	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	10.0	134	0
✓ Ford Escape 1.5T	70	\$33,850	⬆️ ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	71	26	405	⬇️ / ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	8.9	128	S
<b>LUXURY ENTRY-LEVEL SUVs</b>																	
✓ Lexus UX250h 2.0h	78	\$37,740	⬆️ ⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	75	37	395	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	8.8	137	S
✓ Audi Q3 2.0T	73	\$43,940	⬇️ ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	82	23	365	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	7.8	126	S
✓ BMW X1 2.0T	72	\$46,495	⬇️ ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	86	28	405	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	7.1	124	S
✓ Mini Countryman S 2.0T	71	\$43,695	⬇️ ⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	76	28	395	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	6.7	127	S
Volvo XC40 2.0T	56	\$41,510	⬇️ ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	70	24	335	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	7.3	132	S
<b>LUXURY ELECTRIC SUVs</b>																	
✓ Genesis GV60	74	\$60,220	⬇️ ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	86	NA	251	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	5.1	131	S
✓ Tesla Model Y	72	\$50,380	⬇️ ⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	88	NA	330 <sup>E</sup>	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	4.7	121	S/-
✓ Audi Q4 E-Tron	72	\$60,580	⬇️ ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	79	NA	226	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	5.9	133	S
Lexus RZ	67	\$63,405	⬇️ ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	70	NA	202	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	4.9	138	S
Acura ZDX	61	\$70,450	⬇️ ⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	80	NA	313	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	5.7	132	S
Cadillac Lyriq	49	\$73,945	⬇️ ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	84	NA	315	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	5.1	132	S
<b>MIDSIZED PICKUP TRUCKS</b>																	
✓ Honda Ridgeline 3.5L	79	\$36,480	⬇️ ⬆️	⬇️	⬆️	83	20	380	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	⬆️	7.3	134	S
Ford Ranger 2.3T	61	\$42,960	⬆️ ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	57	21	390	⬆️ / ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	7.9	150	0
Nissan Frontier 3.8L	50	\$40,630	⬇️ ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	67	18	370	⬇️ / ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	7.5	128	0
Chevrolet Colorado/ GMC Canyon 2.7T	46	\$41,070	⬇️ ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	71	19	410	⬇️ / ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	6.9	134	0
Toyota Tacoma 2.4T	45	\$46,787	⬇️ ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	59	20	365	⬇️ / ⬆️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	⬇️	7.5	136	0
Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at <a href="https://CR.org/cars">CR.org/cars</a> . When you're ready to buy, configure the vehicle and find the best price in your area by clicking the green "View Pricing Information" button on the model's dedicated page.																	

**HOW WE TEST:** The Overall Score combines road-test results, survey data for predicted reliability and owner satisfaction, and advanced

safety, which includes crash-test results and the availability of crash-prevention features, such as automatic emergency braking, pedestrian detection, blind

spot warning, and rear cross traffic warning. A dash (—) means no such safety system is offered; 0 means it's optional on at least some trim levels;

S means the feature is standard on all trims. We deduct points if a model's active driving assistance system has inadequate direct driver monitoring.

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# The Better Deal

Many of the products we test at CR earn high ratings for their impressive performance—but some are also a really great value. They have most (if not all) of the attributes of other top-rated products at a much lower price. Check out the deals we found for you this month.

## HYBRID CARS



### ✓ TOYOTA PRIUS

\$27,950-\$36,365 77



### ✓ HYUNDAI ELANTRA HYBRID

\$25,100-\$29,450 82

THE BETTER DEAL

## THE LOWDOWN

THE LATEST PRIUS is sleeker and more efficient than ever, getting 51 mpg overall in our tests. But its streamlined style results in limited visibility and a cramped rear seat. If you don't really need all-wheel drive, the Elantra Hybrid is an appealing, less pricey alternative. It's almost as stellar as the Prius when it comes to fuel economy (48 mpg), and its road-test score is much higher, thanks to a better ride and handling.

## NONSTICK COOKWARE SETS



### ✓ CARAWAY CERAMIC-COATED NONSTICK COOKWARE

\$540 88



### ✓ BLUE DIAMOND CLASSIC DIAMOND-INFUSED CERAMIC

\$145 84

THE BETTER DEAL

## THE LOWDOWN

THE CARAWAY is our top-rated nonstick cookware set, with excellent performance in all

of our cooking tests. The set heats evenly, food slides off the nonstick surface, and the handles are very sturdy. The Blue Diamond set is as good for cooking, and its handles stay cooler—but they're not as sturdy. Both sets are claimed to be

PTFE-free. The Caraway comes with 14 pieces vs. 10 for Blue Diamond. That sounds good, but the extra items are trivets, a lid organizer, and pan racks. The Blue Diamond has one more fry pan, plus a spoon and spatula—for less than one-third of the cost.

## 65-INCH TVs



### ✓ PANASONIC TV-65Z95AP

\$3,200 76



### ✓ SAMSUNG QN65Q80D

\$1,500 78

THE BETTER DEAL

## THE LOWDOWN

THESE SMART TVs have similar Overall Scores. The Panasonic's high price does give you excellent picture quality. But it runs on Amazon's Fire TV operating system, which gets lower scores for data privacy and security. For about half as much money, the Samsung has very good picture quality, security, and data privacy.

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