



TOP-RATED GRILLS UNDER \$400

The Spy in Your Smart TV | BOOST YOUR BITCOIN IQ

CR Consumer Reports™

MAY 2018



REVIEWS & RATINGS

- Ford Expedition
- Laundry Detergents
- Washing Machines
- Drip Coffee Makers
- Wireless Headphones

PAY LESS FOR YOUR MEDS

Tired of skyrocketing prices?
Smart strategies to save money and stay healthy



SAFETY ALERT

FURNITURE
TIP-OVER
WARNING

TASTY NEW
FROZEN VEGGIES
THAT RIVAL FRESH

HOW TO KNOW
WHEN TO
SWITCH BANKS

NEW MEMBERSHIP BENEFIT

GET THE PERFECT PICTURE ON YOUR TV!



TV Screen Optimizer™ is the easy way
to get the best-quality picture on your TV.

Get recommended settings for over 900 models straight from CR's experts
and improve your TV's image in just minutes.

Check out TV Screen Optimizer™ at [cr.org/membership](https://www.consumerreports.org/membership)

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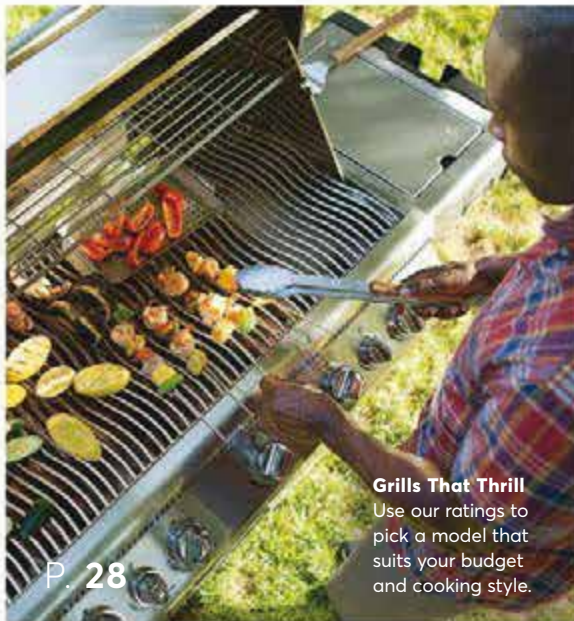
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BUICK REGAL



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 ⚠️ POOR ⚠️ FAIR ⚠️ GOOD
 ⚠️ VERY GOOD ⚠️ EXCELLENT

PHOTO, COVER: STEVE BRONSTEIN/GETTY IMAGES

The True Cost of High Drug Prices



THEY ARE PAINFUL stories to hear. Families that have to choose between buying food and buying medication. A woman forced to decide which utilities to turn off to pay for her prescriptions. A mother who stopped taking her own drugs in order to afford her son's. These are some of the stories people told us during our investigation into how high drug costs are affecting our lives. For many of our friends and neighbors—more

than half of whom regularly take at least one prescribed medicine—the rising cost of drugs has made these images more common than ever. Some find themselves delaying retirement or putting off needed home repairs. Others are driven to risky behavior such as rationing doses to defray costs. A recent Consumer Reports survey revealed that 30 percent of Americans who experienced a hike in the price of one or more of their medications in the past year left a prescription unfilled because it was too expensive; 15 percent said they cut pills in half to make them last longer.

As CR works to raise consumers' voices and call for commonsense policies to curb these rising costs, we also know that many Americans can't wait that long to get relief from painful prices. This month, we're offering proven tips and strategies to help you lower the burden of drug costs without resorting to agonizing choices or unsafe behaviors. We walk through six of the most common problems that lead to higher prices for consumers and offer solutions on how to manage each of them. Our secret shoppers and staffers have been systematically making calls from coast to coast, going to pharmacies, and scouring the web so that you can keep yourself healthy—while keeping more money in your wallet.

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Keeping Hospital Patients Safer

WHAT'S AT STAKE

When patients go to the hospital or see a doctor, they don't expect to get sicker.

But that happens far more often than it should: An estimated 8.8 million hospital patients suffer from preventable medical harm each year, and as many as 440,000 patients die in hospitals after a medical error or hospital-acquired infection.

HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

For more than a decade, CR advocates have worked to enact patient safety reforms at the state and federal levels.

A key part of that work has been partnering with patients and their loved ones who have been harmed. We enacted public reporting of hospital infection rates nationwide, pushed medical boards to inform patients about doctors who have been disciplined, and urged Congress to improve medical device and prescription drug safety.

Now we're joining with them to form the Patient Safety Action Network (PSAN), a patient-driven coalition focused on raising awareness and holding healthcare providers accountable for improving care and reducing needless suffering and deaths.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

If you or someone you care for has suffered from a medical error or hospital infection, we urge you to share your story on PSAN's website, at patientsafetyaction.org.

Safeguarding Financial Protections

WHAT'S AT STAKE

CR has long advocated for the creation of a federal consumer watchdog to keep

unscrupulous financial companies from fleecing their customers.

This idea became a reality in 2011 when the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau opened its doors. In seven years, it has worked to curb illegal and abusive practices in the marketplace. If a credit card company misleads customers into buying useless products or a bank charges people for services they never ordered, the CFPB has been there to enforce consumer protections. Its actions have resulted in billions of dollars being returned to millions of harmed Americans.

But a strategic plan unveiled by the bureau in February emphasizes easing the rules that govern banks and other financial institutions. CR believes this blueprint effectively muzzles the consumer watchdog. The plan, developed by the bureau's acting director,

Mick Mulvaney, follows other announcements by Mulvaney that signal a reversal in priorities at the bureau. In a single week in January, the bureau announced that it would reconsider a rule aimed at limiting predatory payday loans, dropped a lawsuit against four payday lenders, and requested no new funds for operations in the upcoming quarter.

HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

CR is meeting with the CFPB and members of Congress to highlight the challenges consumers face when dealing with a bank, lender, or credit card company—and the need for a strong financial watchdog.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Sign our petition, which you can find at CR.org/cfpbpetition0518, urging Mulvaney to maintain the CFPB's vigorous oversight of the financial industry and continue to fight fraud and

abuse. And if you have a story about your experience with the CFPB, please tell us about it at the same web address.

Stopping Identity Thieves

WHAT'S AT STAKE

In this era of epic data breaches, it's critical that we be able to keep our money safe. A new bill introduced in Congress will give consumers greater control over their credit reports. The Control Your Personal Credit Information Act, introduced by Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., would create a default security freeze for all consumers that will prevent thieves from using stolen personal information to open fraudulent credit accounts and insurance policies.

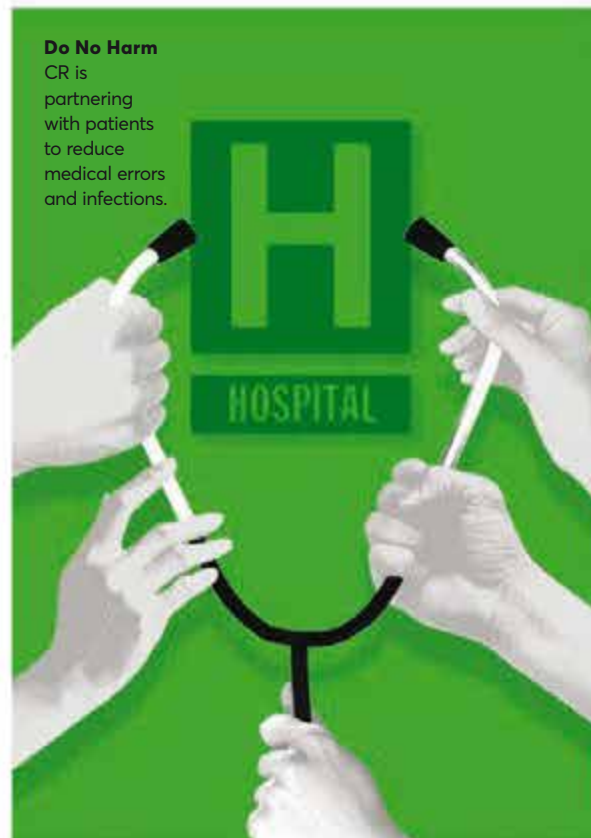
Consumers currently have to put a security freeze on credit files at all three major credit bureaus and, in most states, pay a fee for placing a freeze and for lifting it when applying for credit or insurance, for example. This new bill would simplify that by requiring credit bureaus to get a consumer's written authorization and verify the consumer's identity before giving access to creditors or insurers. It would also prohibit credit bureaus from charging consumers for this protection.

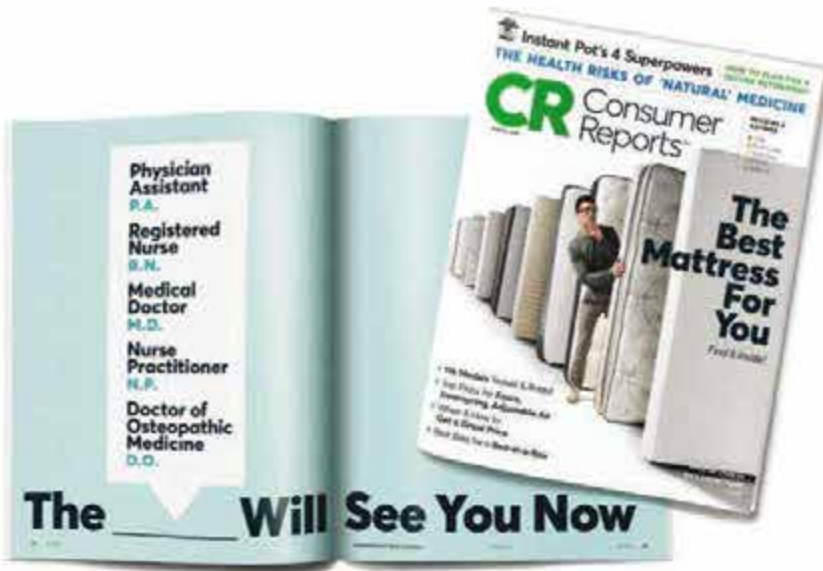
HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

CR has long urged lawmakers to pass legislation requiring companies to adopt reasonable practices to ensure the safety of consumer credit data, and we support the new legislation.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Contact your senators at senate.gov and tell them to support Reed's bill. Sign our petition at CR.org/datasecurity0518 telling Congress to pass stronger federal data security standards. And until stronger protections are enacted, place a security freeze on your files at all three major credit bureaus.





Our March 2018 report, “**The ___ Will See You Now,**” about a growing shortage of M.D.s, sparked a robust conversation about medical practitioners, and the risks of natural medicine. To add your voice, go to CR.org/md0518.

I HAVE BEEN a physician assistant for 10 years in a small emergency department. We handle complex cases and procedures. Over that time I have placed more than 500 central lines and innumerable arterial lines, and performed intubations, thoracentesis, and paracentesis. Emergency Physicians Medical Group is a large company that employs hundreds of advanced practice providers (APPs) with a diverse set of skills and diagnostic capabilities. We handle the sickest of sick cases with excellent results. Am I a physician? Of course not, and I never have claimed to be.

If you're treated by me or my fellow APPs, I am sure that you would receive excellent care and compassion.
—Matthew Wilson, Brighton, MI

I AM A REGISTERED nurse with a Master of Science in nursing, and I prefer to see an N.P. or a P.A. They have great educations and listen intently. They practice under the M.D. and have protocols they must follow. Because I have an advanced degree as well, I know their training and education was very rigorous. Many of them also have specialized certifications that required even more education. They also must pass state board exams to be licensed, and those exams are very tough.
—Veronica Knox, via Facebook


I WORK WITH the American Nurses Association (ANA), and we were very excited to read your report. We

thought that it was a fantastic article and brought much-needed awareness about the roles of today's healthcare professionals. We did, however, want to clarify a point regarding the limitations of R.N.s. In the article it states that “R.N.s can't practice independently or write prescriptions, and they must work under the supervision of an M.D. or a D.O.” While not all R.N.s can write prescriptions, advanced practice registered nurses (nurse practitioners, certified registered nurse anesthetists, certified nurse-midwives, clinical nurse specialists) are a subgroup of nurses who have been educated, licensed, and credentialed to independently write prescriptions. The ANA also continues to advocate for full practice authority for advanced practice registered nurses in a few states.
—Rachel Farbman, on behalf of the ANA

IN YOUR ARTICLE, a reference is made to patients being more satisfied after a visit to a nurse practitioner (presumably as compared to a physician). I would caution equating satisfaction to better care. A 2012 study published in Archives of Internal Medicine found that an increase in patient satisfaction was associated with an increase in mortality. Sometimes unsatisfied patients, such as those not receiving requested opioids, are receiving better care.
—Zac Handler, M.D., Fort Lee, NJ

EDITOR'S NOTE *It's true that high patient satisfaction doesn't necessarily mean high-quality care. But there is no reason the two can't go together. As another letter (written by two M.D.s and one Sc.D.), also published in the Archives of Internal Medicine, pointed out, research links good patient experiences with better health, such as patients being more likely to take their medicine and less likely to be admitted to a hospital. And yes, healthcare providers must occasionally be the bearers of bad news, including sometimes not prescribing drugs that patients may think they need. But that can be easier when patients feel they are treated with compassion and respect.*

I HAVE MORE than 20 years of clinical experience in an allopathic medical practice and found that naturopathic physicians give complementary resources that further aid the healing process using methods that I was not taught in medical school. Allopathic medicine has failed in preventing the rising tide of chronic disease. I believe there is an important role for licensed naturopathic physicians to play on the healthcare team. There is a persistent lack of emphasis in allopathic medicine on lifestyle management, including clinical nutrition, exercise, stress management, and appropriate use of natural remedies.
—Dave Johnson, M.D., FACC, Grand Rapids, MI

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

WRITE

EDITOR'S NOTE *We agree that healthcare today too often focuses on treating disease, not preventing it, and that many physicians and other healthcare providers don't pay enough attention to things such as a healthy diet, regular exercise, and managing stress. No doubt some licensed naturopathic doctors excel at providing such care. But CR seeks to alert consumers when standards of care and training are not consistent, as we believe is the case with naturopathic medicine today. That's a problem that the American Association of Naturopathic Physicians itself recognizes, as it tries to establish national standards and to distinguish licensed N.D.s from unlicensed naturopaths. Consumers also need to know when practitioners, including N.D.s, recommend care that is not backed by solid science, such as homeopathy.*

THANK YOU FOR YOUR cautionary article about "natural" healthcare. In my workshops on eating disorders, I often remind participants that natural is not synonymous with beneficial. After all, poison oak, snakes, and poison mushrooms are natural, but we go to great lengths to avoid them.
—Edward Abramson, Oakland, CA

YOU LEFT OUT concierge doctors. We've been in a concierge practice for almost five years. My husband and I each pay \$412.50 per quarter for almost unlimited access to a family practice physician. He quickly answers emails and phone calls, and we can usually see him the same day. If you have the means and do not want to become enmeshed in the oft-confusing list of medical professionals, a concierge physician will help you sort out the details.
—Judy Wade, Phoenix

Lifesaving Stem Cells

AS A MULTIPLE MYELOMA patient whose life has been

extended greatly by an autologous stem cell transplant, I read "Could This Cell Save Your Life?" (March 2018) with intense interest. The idea that a "stem cell therapy" could be obtained to treat diseases other than blood cancers for as little as \$6,000 would be laughable if the consequences weren't so chilling. While I applaud CR for warning readers about the scams being perpetrated by certain stem cell clinics, I do worry that your article could dissuade some eligible blood cancer patients from considering this lifesaving option. It's a tough decision to make, even without the horror stories. I think myeloma.org is an excellent resource.

—James Tenser, Tucson, AZ

Putting Out Fires

YOUR "HOW TO USE a Fire Extinguisher" (Insights, February 2018) article made me go check mine. Sure enough, it was no longer full. Now that I have a new one, how do I dispose of my old nondischarged fire extinguisher?

—Greg Stroud, Knoxville, TN

EDITOR'S NOTE *Fire extinguishers cannot go out with your regular trash. Contact your local fire department or recycling center to see whether it will accept old fire extinguishers for disposal. (Many fire departments do.) If not, it should be able to tell you the proper disposal method for your area.*

I AM A RETIRED firefighter with more than 40 years of experience. I have a few additional comments: Do not discharge the whole extinguisher at once. Do the sweep once or twice and stop to see if the fire is out. If not, continue applying the agent. This method gives you a lot more firefighting capability. And always call 911, even if you think the fire is out. The fire department will check to make sure the fire is extinguished and

may help clean up and remove smoke. The extinguisher will not extinguish fires that are deep-seated in mattresses and upholstered furniture because the agent cannot penetrate the material.

—Raymond Reynolds, Black Hawk, SD

A Bright Idea for Cars

IN "RAIN-SENSING WINDSHIELD Wipers" (Insights, March 2018), you state that you wish cars turned on headlights automatically when wipers are turned on. My 2014 Honda Accord does exactly that! If my wipers are on for more than 2 minutes, my headlights come on automatically, independently of how light it is out.

—Joseph Gugliotta, Somerville, MA

EDITOR'S NOTE *Honda offered this technology on your vehicle—as other manufacturers, such as Audi and Ford, have—but it isn't as widespread as we would like an important safety feature to be. A 2011 study by the Transportation Lighting Alliance looked at federal data from seven states that established "wipers on, headlights on" laws between 1998 and 2007. Their finding: Fatal daytime multiple-vehicle crashes in the rain were reduced by about 7 percent, and crashes that took place at dawn or dusk were reduced by about 30 percent.*

Q&A on ZZZ's

WE WERE DISAPPOINTED in your otherwise excellent "The Best Mattress for You" (March 2018) because it neglected to mention stomach sleepers. How would your ratings be affected for stomach sleepers?
—Alan Berger, Greensboro, NC

EDITOR'S NOTE *While our research indicates that the large majority of people are side and back sleepers, we do know that stomach sleepers are out there—and we hear you! Our test lab is currently developing*

a method to analyze stomach-sleeping support, and we hope to be able to help you find the right mattress in the near future.

I AM A lifetime subscriber to CR. I was delighted to see the article on buying a mattress, as we need to get a new one. But I was amazed that you did not include any information on the hazards of buying a product that has so many chemicals in it, including flame retardants.
—Jenny Cummins, Seattle

EDITOR'S NOTE *"Mattresses must pass two rigorous flammability tests in order to be placed on the market in the U.S.," says Don Huber, CR's director of product safety. Some manufacturers use chemical flame retardants to pass these tests. Others use materials that pass the tests without the use of flame retardants. But it's not always clear which is which. Call the manufacturer or look on the model for a certification that prohibits or limits the use of chemical flame retardants, such as GOTS, GOLS, or Oeko-Tex.*

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What We're Testing in Our Labs ...

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

Detergents

WE TESTED: 45 products
WE TEST FOR: How well a detergent removes body oil, dirt, grass, blood, chocolate ice cream, and other tough stains.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 57
Range: 33-88

Crème de la Clean
Tide Plus Ultra Stain Release
21¢ per load

88
OVERALL SCORE



Tough on Stains
Persil ProClean Power-Liquid 2in1
22¢ per load

80
OVERALL SCORE



Money-Saving Suds
All Stainlifter
11¢ per load

67
OVERALL SCORE



Front-Load Washing Machines

WE TESTED: 39 models
WE TEST FOR: How well a model's normal cycle cleans fabrics in an 8-pound load of mixed cotton items, energy and water efficiency, noise, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 80
Range: 33-86

Best Overall
Maytag Maxima
MHW8200FW
\$1,030

86
OVERALL SCORE



Whisper Quiet
LG Signature WM9500HKA
\$1,800

81
OVERALL SCORE



Great for Tight Budgets
Samsung WF42H5000AW
\$500

80
OVERALL SCORE



Ask Our Experts

Why are wash times longer for front-load washing machines compared with top-load washers?



WHILE TOP-LOAD AGITATORS tend to have 35- to 80-minute cycles, most front-loaders need more time—typically 55 to 120 minutes—because they largely rely on detergent to clean your clothes, which takes a little longer to work than scrubbing them clean the way an agitator does. They also use less water, “but that doesn’t mean your clothes aren’t getting as clean,” says Rich Handel, CR’s test engineer for washers. In fact, the best front-loaders in our tests clean better than most high-scoring top-loaders and tend to be gentler on fabrics. Plus, front-load drums typically spin faster than agitators, which extracts more water and cuts down dryer time. Need to do a small load in a hurry? Many front-loaders also offer a quick-wash cycle.

ILLUSTRATION: SERGE BLOCH

For even more ratings of these and other product categories, online members can go to CR.org.

Programmable Drip Coffee Makers

WE TESTED: 80 models
WE TEST FOR: Brew performance, including the ability to reach 195° F to 205° F; ease of use, such as filter placement; a carafe's tendency to drip; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
 Median: 64
 Range: 42-84

King of Coffee Makers
 Cuisinart PerfectTemp 14-cup DCC-3200 (14x9x12 inches)
\$100

84
 OVERALL SCORE



Bargain Brewer
 Hamilton Beach 12-cup 49465R (13x9x12 inches)
\$25

79
 OVERALL SCORE



Super Space-Saver
 Betty Crocker 12-cup BC-2809CB (12x7x12 inches)
\$30

70
 OVERALL SCORE



Battery String Trimmers

WE TESTED: 28 models
WE TEST FOR: How quickly and neatly models trim grass around walkways and do edging (trimming a vertical line along a path), cutting power in weeds, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
 Median: 61
 Range: 45-76

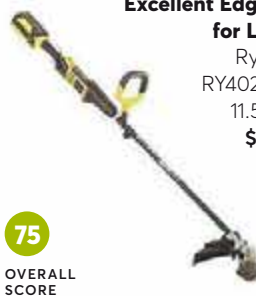
A Cut Above
 Troy Bilt TB4200, 12 lb.
\$200

76
 OVERALL SCORE



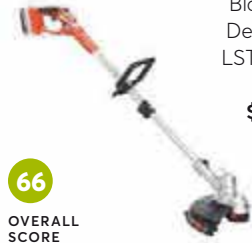
Excellent Edging for Less
 Ryobi RY40220, 11.5 lb.
\$170

75
 OVERALL SCORE



Light & Easy to Handle
 Black+Decker LST136, 7 lb.
\$150

66
 OVERALL SCORE



Blenders for Under \$300

WE TESTED: 76 models
WE TEST FOR: How well a model can crush ice and make icy drinks, such as a nonalcoholic piña colada; how well it can purée soup; ease of use; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
 Median: 61
 Range: 23-85

Purée Perfection
 Dash Chef Series Digital Blender
\$189

78
 OVERALL SCORE



Crushes Ice for a Great Price
 Ninja Professional NJ600
\$100

78
 OVERALL SCORE



Most Reliable Brand*
 Vitamix Explorian Series E310
\$280

67
 OVERALL SCORE



Strollers

WE TESTED: 80 models
WE TEST FOR: Safety, ease of folding and braking, and how well a model maneuvers our test course of S-turns, hills, pavement, grass, and dirt trails.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
 Median: 73
 Range: 33-88

Best Overall
 Peg Perego Booklet, 20 lb.
\$350

88
 OVERALL SCORE



Deal on Wheels
 Baby Jogger City Mini Single, 18 lb.
\$260

84
 OVERALL SCORE



Light and Slim
 Mountain Buggy Nano, 13 lb.
\$250

80
 OVERALL SCORE



Note: We rate different products according to different testing protocols; as a result, Overall Scores of one product category are not comparable with another. *Source: 2015 Product Reliability Survey.

COMING NEXT MONTH Laptops, Tires & More



I put only about 6,000 miles a year on my car. Can I skip an oil change or two?

A typical driver racks up about 12,000 to 15,000 miles annually and will usually need two oil changes a year. But even if you're driving only half that distance, it doesn't mean you can skip these oil changes. That's because mileage isn't the only factor in determining when your car needs fresh oil.

"Oil becomes less effective as it ages," says John Ibbotson, chief mechanic at CR. When you drive so few miles, you're frequently not getting the engine hot enough to burn off contaminants that degrade the engine oil. "If you leave that contaminated oil in your car, it can lead to shorter engine life." Most engines need an oil

change every six months, even if you drive fewer miles than your owner's manual advises for oil changes. There are exceptions: BMW models from 2014 or later, as well as certain Toyota and Audi vehicles, use synthetic oil and thus need an oil change only once a year. When in doubt, change your oil based on whichever marker comes first: the miles or the months.

My smartwatch gets very warm against my skin. Is it overheating or something?

While testing smartwatches, we, too, noticed that certain models—particularly those with a cellular connection—grew warm while performing common tasks. So Maria Rerecich, CR's head of electronics testing, investigated.

In our lab, Rerecich's team performed two experiments to track the rising temperature of an Apple Watch Series 3 when making a call. In one trial,

the team used a heat-sensing camera to observe hot spots on the watch. In the other, it attached a heat sensor to the back of the watch to measure temperature changes. During a 20-minute call, the watch's temperature rose from about 83° F to a peak of 95° F.

Although that can feel warm, "the device wasn't malfunctioning, and the peak temperature definitely wasn't hot enough to burn a user," Rerecich says. "If the warmth is uncomfortable for you, consider a smartwatch without cellular data, and try closing watch apps that you aren't using, such as navigation." To learn more about how we test smartwatches, go to CR.org/watch0518.

Are my used coffee pods recyclable?

If you're using coffee pods—ground coffee that has been packaged into small cups designed to work with brewing systems such as Keurig or Nespresso—you've no doubt discovered that recycling is "not as simple as tossing your used containers in the recycling bin," says Ginny Lui, CR's coffee maker test engineer. Much depends on which

type of pods you use and where you live. Most Keurig K-Cup pods have shells made with No. 7 plastic, which certain towns recycle. If your town does, you'll need to carefully peel off the recyclable aluminum top from the used pod. (You may need a knife or a dedicated pod cutter such as the Medelco Recycle a Cup, \$14.) Then dispose of or compost the grounds and recycle the shell. "For some people, though, that's a lot of work," Lui says.

Still, there's hope for a more convenient coffee future: Keurig has set a goal to make all of its K-Cup pods out of recyclable No. 5 plastic by 2020. So far, two varieties (Green Mountain Breakfast Blend and Breakfast Blend Decaf) are available in this new packaging, as well as K-Mug, K-Carafe, and Vue pods. You'll still need to separate the pods' pieces before you recycle the plastic shells, but some of the foil tops now have a pull-tab.

Nespresso offers free recycling bags with prepaid UPS shipping labels that you can mail back to the company, or take into any Nespresso Boutique, Sur La Table, or Williams-Sonoma store.

To really reduce waste, swap your single-use pods for a compatible reusable pod coffee filter, \$10 to \$15, that you fill each time with your own coffee grounds. Or switch to a single-serve drip coffee maker instead. Our top-rated? The Black+Decker CM620B, \$35.



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

CR Insights



✓ Linksys
AC2600
(EA8500) \$150

89 OVERALL SCORE

In the Know

Strengthen Your WiFi

AS YOU BRING more internet-connected devices into your home—laptops, smart TVs, thermostats, and more—your WiFi may lose bandwidth, which can cause slow loading or poor video streaming quality on your devices. But before you blame your wireless router, try these simple tips to boost your signal. **Pick a central location.** The distance between your wireless router and your internet-connected devices affects your signal strength. So just placing your router in the center of the house can be a big help. If your only internet wall jack is in a corner bedroom, it may help to run an ethernet cable from that spot to a center room. **Clear the way.** Floors, walls, and doors—anything standing between the router and your device—can interfere with the signal.

The effect is cumulative: The more obstructions, the bigger the problem. So don't hide your router in, say, a closet. An open shelf or desk is best—and leave the room's door open. Note that concrete and cinder block walls are particularly likely to impede the signal.

Play with the antennas. Some routers have as many as eight antennas, and they're not there just for decoration. Repositioning the antennas can help. Shift one at a time, and to see whether you're improving your signal, use a free, speed-testing smartphone app like Dr. Wifi (for iOS) or Signal Strength (for Android). Don't see any antennas? Don't worry, some routers have them inside. Simply rotate the entire router to redirect them.

BOOST YOUR SECURITY

D-Link AC2600
Powered by
McAfee \$250



This WiFi router, available in July, has parental controls and security software that scans for malware, which will help keep you from inadvertently visiting phishing sites.

BOOST YOUR VERSATILITY

Asus Lyra Voice
(no price set yet)



Coming soon, this combined smart speaker and high-speed mesh router has Amazon's Alexa built in, connects to other Asus devices, and can be controlled with a mobile app.

BOOST YOUR OUTDOOR SURFING

Netgear Orbi Outdoor Satellite
\$330



Wish your WiFi reached to the porch or yard? Connecting this weather-resistant extender to a Netgear router will add up to 2,500 square feet of coverage outside.



Cool Product

Feature of the Month

Swerving for Safety

WITH THE HELP of innovative technology, pedestrians may soon be safer when crossing streets. The 2018 Lexus LS (above), when equipped with an advanced safety system bundle, can help drivers avoid collisions by employing radar and a stereo camera that watch for hazards. If a pedestrian is detected near the front of the car while it's going between 7 mph and 50 mph, an alert is designed to appear in the driver's field of vision via a graphic projection on the car's windshield (called a "head-up display"). If the driver doesn't react quickly enough, the car will trigger the

automatic emergency braking system (AEB), which will attempt to slow or stop the car. Additionally, if the car senses that the surrounding area is safe, it may then actively steer around the pedestrian. If an impact happens nonetheless, the hood is designed to lift slightly at the base of the car's windshield, allowing it to absorb some of the impact and potentially reduce the severity of head trauma. Though the swerve function is so far unique to Lexus, similar hood engineering is available on the 2018 Buick Regal Sportback and is likely to spread to more U.S. models.

Food Sleuth

Keep Fridge Foods Fresher

A FEW MINUTES OF fridge organizing can go a long way toward keeping your groceries fresher, longer. That's because certain spots in your fridge are slightly warmer or cooler than the set temperature of the main compartment—and those differences can affect the life span of your food. Plus, decluttering can help lower the risk of foodborne illness, reduce food waste, and roll back the frequency of your supermarket trips (thereby saving you money). Simply consult our guide the next time you put away groceries.



ILLUSTRATIONS: CHRIS PHILPOT. PHOTOS: BOTTOM: CONSUMER REPORTS. PHOTO: TOP: REBEKAH NEMETHY/CONSUMER REPORTS

CR Time Traveler GRILLS



1961 The barbecue business—spawned in the 1950s—is now booming: Americans spend about \$100 million a year on outdoor cooking equipment—and CR tests the full gamut, including this popular round "brazier" style (left).

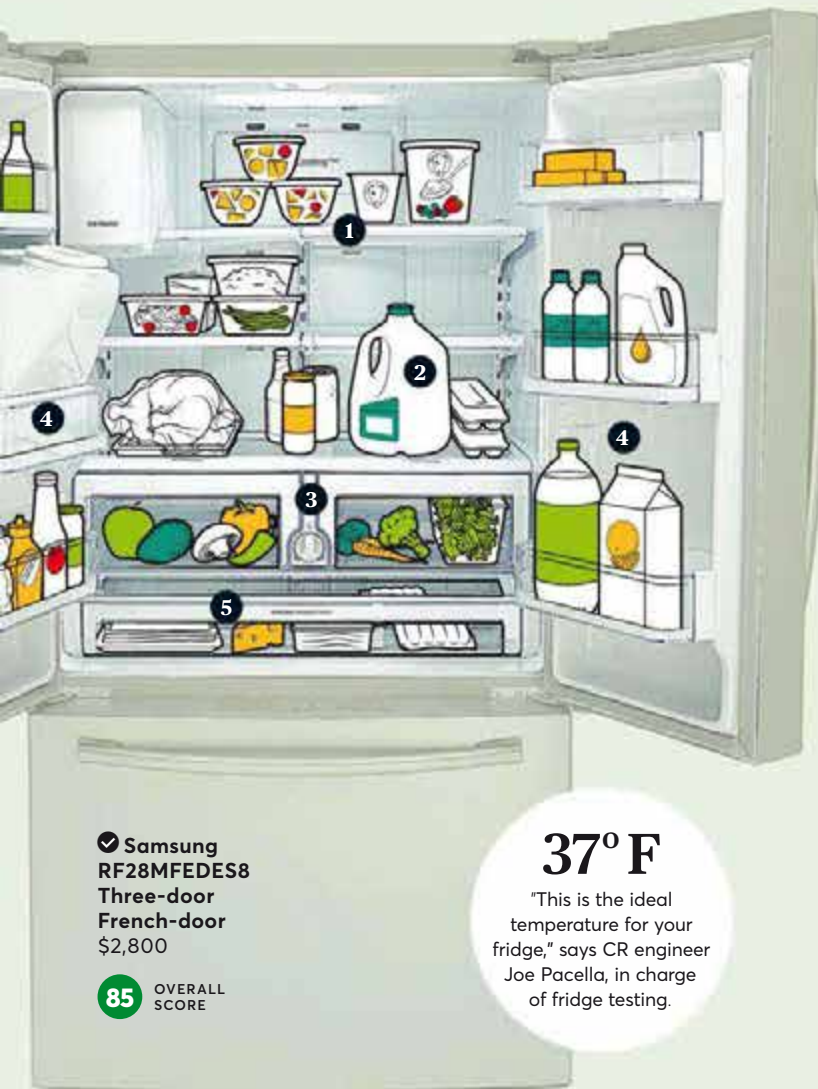
1963 Our testers report that the new Swaniebraai Safari Grill (only \$8.95) looks like "a collapsible wastebasket" but can cook a 1.5-inch steak in 10 minutes.



1974 Ed Fisher opens the first **Big Green Egg** store in Atlanta to sell "kamado"-style cookers.

1983 We praise gas grills like the **Arkla** Embermatic over charcoal because they can preheat easily—no fretting over messy coals.





1 MIDDLE AND UPPER SHELVES

These are some of the warmest areas, with temperatures often reaching up around 40° F, even when the fridge is set to 37° F. You can put snack cups and cooked leftovers here, but large amounts should be transferred to several small containers so that they'll cool faster. Put them toward the front so that you don't forget them.

2 LOWER SHELF

This cool spot is ideal for storing items that are more susceptible to developing harmful bacteria, including milk; eggs, in their original carton to help keep in moisture; and

raw fish, meat, and poultry, wrapped or in a container.

3 CRISPER DRAWERS

These (below) are designed for produce and can often be individually adjusted for humidity. If not, sorting items helps because some fruits emit gases that wilt nearby veggies. **Low-Humidity Drawer**

Low-humidity areas are best for most fruits and some vegetables that require dryer air to stay fresh. Put apples, peaches, ripe avocados, peppers, pears, mushrooms, and squash here. **High-Humidity Drawer**

A little extra humidity can keep vegetables such as broccoli,

carrots, cauliflower, and leafy greens from wilting too soon.

4 THE DOOR

Our temperature tests, done in climate-controlled chambers, found that the fridge door tended to climb a few degrees higher than the main cabin—that's fine for butter or juice but not for milk or eggs.

5 MEAT/DELI BIN

This drawer, most common on French-door bottom-freezer models, is one of the coldest spots in your fridge (about 32° F) and is best for bacon, hot dogs, deli meat, and cheeses.

37° F

"This is the ideal temperature for your fridge," says CR engineer Joe Pacella, in charge of fridge testing.

✓ **Samsung RF28MFEDES8**
Three-door
French-door
\$2,800

85 OVERALL SCORE



1996 Our testers try electric grills and aren't thrilled. The **Thermos**, \$300, "looks like a flying saucer on three legs," couldn't brown a steak well, and was "Not Acceptable" because it posed a burn risk for users.



2018 Some of our top-rated gas grills are from brands such as **Nexgrill**, **Weber**, and **Napoleon**.



✓ **Nexgrill 720**
(Home Depot)
\$270

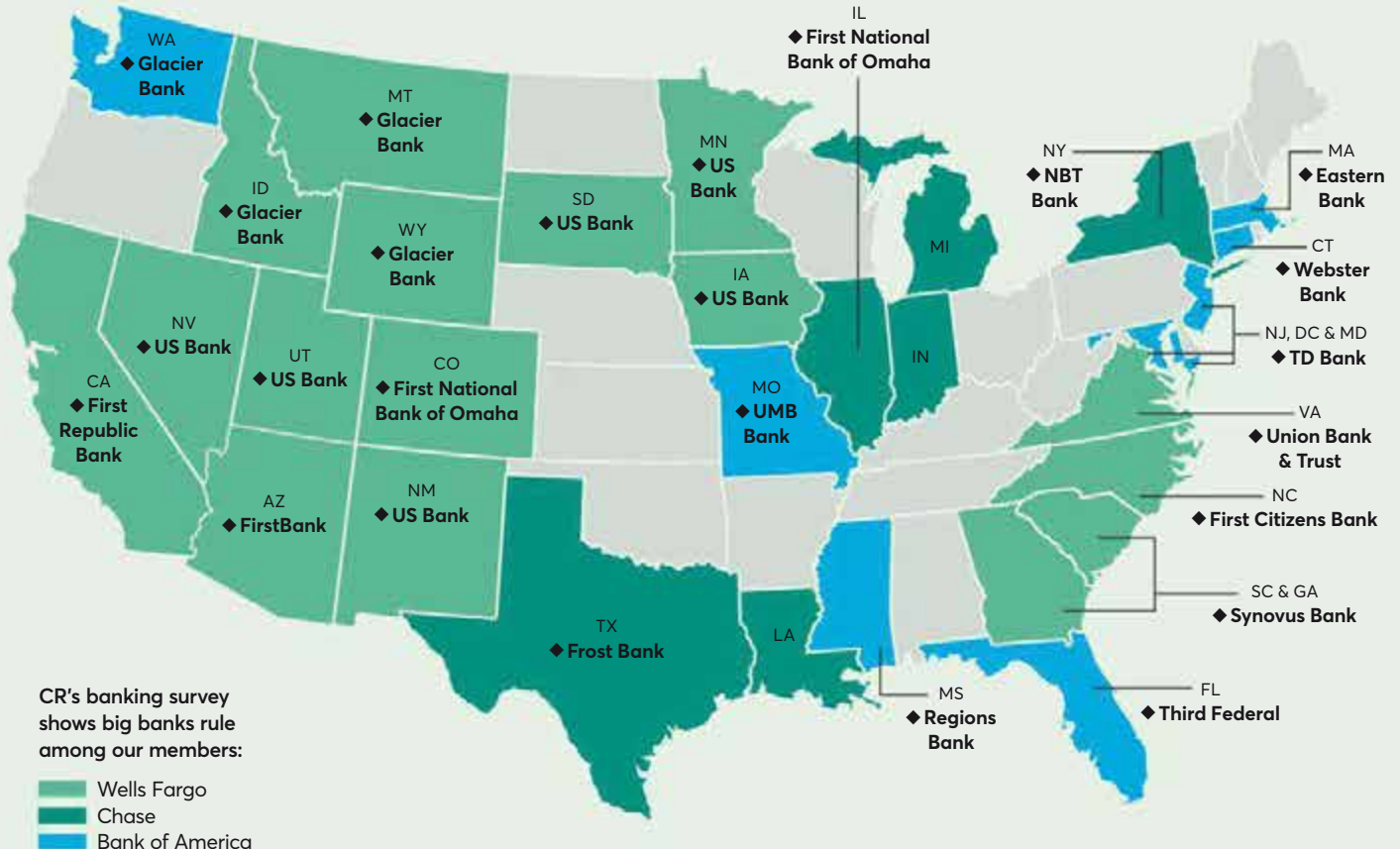
74 OVERALL SCORE

1986 CR engineers discover dangerous design flaws in some gas models, including **Weber** grills that fail to light the gas quickly enough, risking a burst of flame near the lighter's face.

2001 In our testing, a \$200 **Sunbeam** gas grill performs almost as well—and sometimes better than—gas models that cost more than \$1,000.

Map of the Month

Is It Time to Switch Banks?



CR's banking survey shows big banks rule among our members:

- Wells Fargo
- Chase
- Bank of America

But there's often a better choice:

- ◆ Higher-rated, smaller banks with 10 or more branches

* Wells Fargo is both the most-used and highest-rated bank in Alaska, not shown on the map.

IN CR'S RECENT survey of its members about banks and credit unions, 75 percent of the more than 68,000 customers of traditional banks reported that they were highly satisfied with their bank. This map highlights the 31 states and D.C.* in which one of the three largest banks—JPMorgan Chase, Wells Fargo, and Bank of America—is the most-used.

But in 28 of those, there's a higher-scoring option that has 10 or more branches. The higher-rated banks may have fewer locations, but more than a quarter of the traditional bank customers said they had no in-person interaction with a bank employee in the previous year, suggesting that proximity to a branch may not be a top priority for all.

CR Time-Saver TV SCREEN OPTIMIZER™

Make TV Setup a Cinch Frustrated that your new TV doesn't look quite as good as you'd hoped? It's a common problem with an easy fix—if you use our TV Screen Optimizer tool. A new TV is set to default settings by the manufacturer, but those rarely give you the best picture. (And though you may have liked how the picture looked in the store, most retailers set their TVs to "showroom" modes that won't look good in your home.) Never fear: Our lab experts know the ideal settings for hundreds of TVs. Just input your model to reveal your TV's optimal settings. If you're already a CR member, go to CR.org/moreforyou. Not a member yet? Go to CR.org/membership to learn more about this and other benefits.

WHAT 100 CALORIES LOOKS LIKE

Grilling Foods

Ready for a cookout? "Many grill foods—especially lean meats such as chicken or fish—are good for you in moderation," says Maxine Siegel, R.D., who heads the CR food lab. Just use our portion guide to stay mindful. For more calorie visuals, go to CR.org/bbq0518.



2.3 oz.
grilled chicken with BBQ sauce



1/3 hot dog
made with 1.7 oz. beef hot dog, white roll, mustard



1 ear
grilled corn on the cob, with one pat of butter



5 pieces
grilled shrimp



1/3 burger
made with 2.7 oz. 85% lean ground beef, white roll, lettuce, tomato



1 lb.
grilled asparagus with nonstick cooking spray

Still Confused By ...

Bitcoin

What is bitcoin? In simplest terms, bitcoin is a digital currency, also known as a cryptocurrency, that can be used to make electronic payments anywhere on the globe to any person or company that accepts it. "Bitcoin is different from the coins and dollars in your wallet in many ways, not the least of which is that it's not backed by any government," says Christina Tetreault, senior staff attorney for Consumers Union, the advocacy division of Consumer Reports. In other words, there is no "full faith and credit" behind bitcoin, as there is for the U.S. dollar. Another difference is that bitcoin exists only digitally. "Any transfer is done electronically and is recorded in a master ledger, known as a blockchain," Tetreault says, adding that bitcoin transactions are made without the intervention of any bank or payment processor. Neither is bitcoin subject to vagaries of inflation, because its creators capped the number that will ever circulate at 21 million.

Where did it come from? The identity of bitcoin's creator or creators is a matter of some speculation. What is known is that bitcoin appeared as early as 2008 and was invented by one or more computer coders using the alias Satoshi Nakamoto. Generally considered to be the first cryptocurrency, bitcoin caught on early with twin internet entrepreneurs Tyler and Cameron Winklevoss (perhaps best known for suing Mark Zuckerberg over the creation of Facebook), among others. Thousands of other cryptocurrencies have since been created.

So who is using it? Because of the perceived anonymity that bitcoin provides, it has been used by people trafficking in illicit goods, such as drugs. Unlike credit cards, debit cards, or online payments made through banks, bitcoin cannot easily be linked to your identity. Though its current volatility makes it impractical as a day-to-day form of payment, some predict that it will one

day be used for everyday transactions (a few mainstream retailers, including Expedia and Overstock.com, are already accepting bitcoin). Currently, it is seen mostly as a highly speculative form of investment.

How risky is it? Very. The value of bitcoin can rise and fall dramatically and quickly. At the start of 2017, one bitcoin was worth around \$1,000. By the end of the year, its closing price had soared to almost \$20,000 before trading below \$7,000 on Feb. 5, 2018. It continues to swing drastically. Like all cryptocurrencies, bitcoin is not backed by any government or central bank, so its holders have no protections such as those provided by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, which safeguards money deposited in insured banks and savings institutions. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau has warned consumers that cryptocurrencies are subject to risks that include hacking, fraud, and fewer consumer protections. "Some states are taking steps to regulate exchanges where cryptocurrencies are bought and sold, but the status of these efforts varies," Tetreault says. "Consumers should heed the CFPB advisory and fully understand the risks before buying cryptocurrencies."

Still want to buy some? The simplest way to buy bitcoin is probably through one of several online cryptocurrency exchanges, such as Coinbase, which accepts debit cards and U.S. dollars transferred from a bank account, among other forms of payment. (You don't have to purchase an entire bitcoin; Coinbase permits purchases of as little as \$2 worth of the cryptocurrency.) You can leave the bitcoin in your exchange account or move it onto a cryptocurrency wallet, a piece of hardware that resembles a thumb drive. It is also possible to obtain bitcoin through a process known as "mining," which is impractical for most people because it requires extreme technical savvy and powerful computers.



Source: Closing price data provided by CoinDesk.



FORD FUSION

AUTOMOBILES

Ford is recalling about 1.3 million 2014-2018 Ford Fusion and Lincoln MKZ vehicles because they may have loose steering wheel bolts that could result in the steering wheel detaching from the steering column.

What to do: Dealers will replace the steering wheel bolt with a longer bolt. For details, call Ford at 866-436-7332 or go to owner.ford.com, and for Lincoln call 800-521-4140 or go to owner.lincoln.com.

LENOVO LAPTOPS



Lenovo is recalling about 78,000 ThinkPad X1 Carbon 5th Generation laptops because a loose screw can damage the battery and cause overheating, posing a fire hazard. The laptops were sold at computer stores from December 2016 through November 2017 for \$1,100 to \$2,600.

What to do: Call Lenovo at 800-426-7378 or go to lenovo.com

to see whether your laptop is included in the recall. If it is, stop using it. Lenovo will help you find the nearest authorized center for inspection and repair.



INFANT RATTLES

VTech is recalling about 280,000 Shake & Sing elephant rattles because the ears can break off and pose a choking hazard to young children. The rattles were sold at stores nationwide and online from November 2015 through November 2017 for about \$8.

What to do: Immediately stop using the rattle and call VTech at 800-521-2010 or go to vtechkids.com for a full refund or credit for a replacement product.

CAMERA POWER ADAPTERS



Fujifilm is recalling about 270,000 power adapter wall plugs sold with certain Fujifilm digital cameras because the plug can crack, break, or detach, and stay in the wall, exposing live electrical contacts and posing a shock hazard. The plugs were sold at stores nationwide and online from June 2016 through January 2018 for \$160 to \$600, depending on the camera model.

What to do: Stop using the plug until you call Fujifilm at 833-613-1200 or go to fujifilmusa.com and click on Support & Contact for a free replacement. You can continue to charge the camera using the USB cable attached to a computer.

UGG COMFORTERS



Bed Bath & Beyond is recalling about 175,000 Hudson comforters by UGG because there may be mold on them, posing a risk of respiratory or other infections in people with compromised immune systems, damaged lungs, or an allergy to mold. The comforters were sold at Bed Bath & Beyond stores nationwide and online from August 2017 through October 2017 for \$70 to \$110, depending on size.

What to do: Stop using the comforter. Return it to the retailer, Bed Bath & Beyond, for a full refund. Call 800-462-3966 or go to bedbathandbeyond.com for details.

PAIN AND ITCH RELIEF CREAM



Walgreens is recalling about 74,000 Well at Walgreens pain and itch relief creams because the packaging is not child-resistant, as required by law. The cream contains lidocaine, which could poison young children. The creams were sold at stores and online from March 2017 through November 2017 for about \$7.

What to do: Put the cream out of reach of children until you're able to return it to Walgreens for a full refund. Call Walgreens at 866-323-0107 or go to natureplex.com (the manufacturer's website) and click on Product Safety Recall for details.

INSTANT POT MULTICOOKERS



Double Insight is recalling about 104,000 Gem model Instant Pot multicookers because a defect can cause the bottom to overheat and melt, posing a fire hazard. The cookers were sold at Walmart stores and on its website from August 2017 through January 2018 for about \$80.

What to do: Stop using the cooker and return it to Walmart for a free replacement. Call Double Insight at 888-891-1473 or go to instantpot.com for details.

May Is

THE BEST TIME TO BUY ...



Exterior Paints and Wood Stains

Home improvement stores begin to offer promotions on exterior paints and wood stains around Memorial Day.



Blenders

Is warmer weather putting you in the mood for an icy drink? Watch for deep discounts on these around Mother's Day.



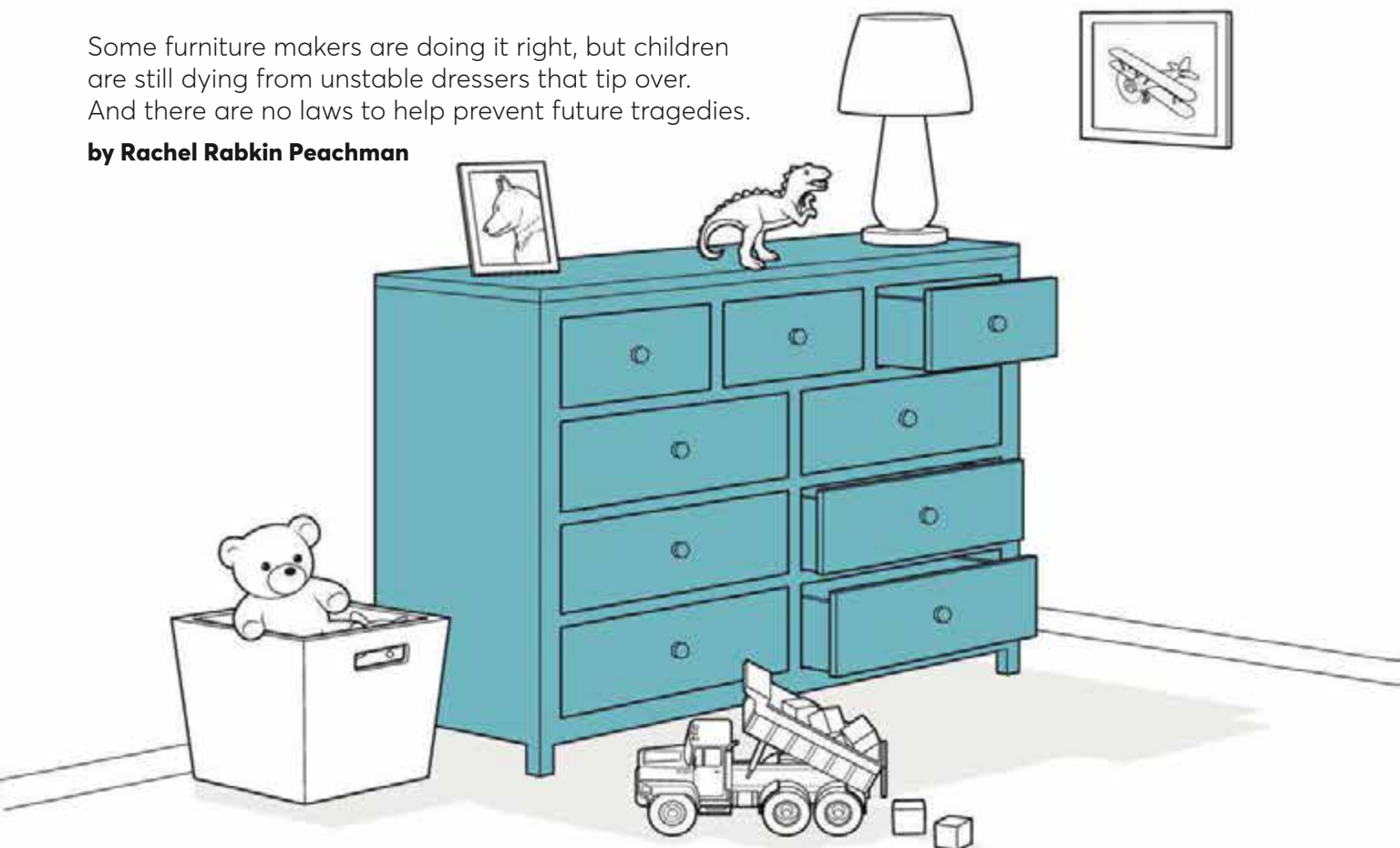
Outdoor Speakers

Look for markdowns on older portable models as you gear up for backyard entertaining season.

A Hidden Hazard in Your Home

Some furniture makers are doing it right, but children are still dying from unstable dressers that tip over. And there are no laws to help prevent future tragedies.

by Rachel Rabkin Peachman



AFTER CHURCH one Sunday afternoon in 2016, Janet McGee waited for her 22-month-old son Ted to wake from his afternoon nap. As family members busied themselves in their Apple Valley, Minn., home, McGee checked on Ted every 15 minutes or so. The last time she peeked in, Ted wasn't in bed, and she noticed the dresser toppled over.

In an instant, the horrible reality set in. "He's under there, he's under there," McGee remembers thinking. "I lifted the dresser up, and I started digging through the drawers because all of the drawers had fallen out. And there he was at the bottom. His face was purple. His eyes were half open. I screamed for

my husband to come. I started CPR on him. My 11-year-old son called 911."

Paramedics rushed Ted to the hospital, but medical staff couldn't revive him. McGee remembers holding his hand at the hospital. "It was cold, and I knew."

The weight of the dresser had suffocated the little boy. And though family members were within earshot, no one heard a crash because Ted's body absorbed the impact of the falling dresser. McGee and her husband, Jeremy, assumed their tragedy was a freakish occurrence. But they soon discovered that Ted was just one of many victims of what safety regulators categorize as a "furniture tip-over,"

a sometimes-fatal event affecting thousands of U.S. families each year. The McGees also learned the dresser, an Ikea Malm, was linked to previous tip-over deaths. Ikea did not decide to recall the product until four months after Ted died.

The tip-over problem is epidemic: Someone in the U.S. is injured every 17 minutes by a furniture, television, or appliance tip-over, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission. After declining for a few years, estimated tip-over injuries for children under age 6 involving dressers and other clothing storage units increased in 2016 to 2,800 from 2,100 the year before, or

by 33 percent, according to the CPSC.

Dressers and other clothing storage units account for at least 11 percent of furniture tip-over injuries, according to the CPSC. But it's the number of tip-over deaths in the category—there were 195 reported to the CPSC between 2000 and 2016—that particularly makes it a crisis.

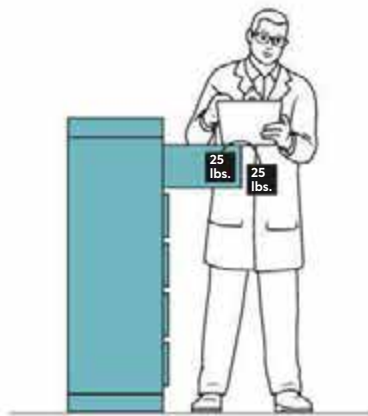
The vast majority of the victims are children under age 6. Many times, they cause the tip-over by climbing on the front of a dresser or by playing inside a drawer. Sometimes, they're alone in their room, and a parent, like Janet McGee, finds them.

To protect Ted in his home, the McGees installed safety gates, covered power outlets, and latched all cabinets—but they had never heard of a furniture tip-over. “It was just this little, tiny window of time where your life changes forever,” McGee told Consumer Reports. “Instead of planning his second birthday party that was supposed to be Elmo-themed, we were planning his funeral.”

The Truth About Tip-Overs

As it stands today, the industry operates under a voluntary tip-over testing standard—which means any dresser taller than 30 inches should stay upright with 50 pounds of weight hanging from an open drawer. Because it's voluntary, manufacturers aren't required to conduct the testing, let alone meet the standard, to sell their dressers in the U.S. Some manufacturers meet the standard or go beyond it; others fall short.

In light of the continuing danger, Consumer Reports launched an investigation to assess the stability of dressers in the marketplace. Over the course of a year, CR analyzed thousands of incident reports obtained from the CPSC through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to better understand the circumstances of injuries and deaths. CR also tested 24 different dressers, representing a cross-section of the market, to find which could pass several progressively more stringent



Deadly Furniture Tip-Overs

CR's investigation found:

Children alone in their rooms. Almost half of tip-over deaths (46 percent) happen in the bedroom, sometimes after a child has napped. The Consumer Product Safety Commission has identified certain “hazard patterns,” including children climbing on open drawers.

TV hazard. CR recommends consumers avoid placing TVs on top of dressers. The CPSC says that 53 percent of reported tip-over fatalities between 2000 and 2016 for children under 18 involved TVs and dressers tipping over together.

Weak tip-over standard. The industry's voluntary standard leaves too many children at risk. Based on our investigation, CR is calling for the tip-over test weight for dressers to be increased to 60 pounds, from 50 pounds, and for dressers 30 inches tall and shorter to be included in the standard because they also can tip over. Three of the four dressers CR tested that were 30 inches or shorter failed CR's second test.

Industry responsible. CR thinks the most effective way to prevent tip-overs is to secure dressers to walls. But we recognize it's not always an option for tenants or those not handy with tools. CR thinks it's the industry's responsibility to ensure safer, more stable dressers and that safety shouldn't rely on consumer skill at anchoring a dresser to a wall.

Some do it right. CR's test results show that manufacturers can make dressers stable enough to meet a tougher standard because many already do.

tip-over tests. Two tests were modeled after the industry's current voluntary standard, but CR also devised a more rigorous test using up to 60 pounds of weight, a higher threshold that more fully represents the weight range of U.S. children under age 6. CR also tested some dressers 30 inches and shorter, a slice of the market currently not covered by the voluntary standard.

CR's investigation concluded that the industry standard is inadequate. At the same time, a majority of the dressers CR tested passed the 60-pound test.

“Clearly, the marketplace has found that one can design a dresser at various prices that is safer and more stable,” says James Dickerson, chief scientific officer at Consumer Reports. (See “How Stable Is Your Dresser?” on page 19.)

CR's findings underscore that there isn't one formula for greater stability. However, many of the dressers that passed all of CR's tests tended to be heavier back-weighted, deeper dressers with less drawer extension. Perhaps most significantly, CR found that there's no easy way for consumers to simply eye a dresser and tell whether it is more likely to tip over. A more effective and mandatory standard would help consumers trust that dressers for sale in the U.S. would resist tipping over onto young children.

Through interviews with parents of victims and with industry representatives, CR also found the most effective prevention strategy available today, anchoring dressers to walls using brackets and straps, isn't an easy option for families less proficient with tools or contending with brick walls. Some parents told CR that they had no idea kits for anchoring dressers even existed. (See “Deadly Furniture Tip-Overs,” at left, for CR's investigative findings.)

Based on our findings, Consumers Union, the advocacy division of Consumer Reports, is calling on regulators to set a strong, mandatory safety standard, allowing regulators to enforce the rules and more easily gain industry cooperation for recalls. In

How Stable Is Your Dresser?

CR conducted tip-over testing on 24 different dressers that represent a cross-section of the retail market, using progressively tougher tests. They were purchased from May 2017 through February 2018. Our tests show that you can't spot a stable dresser with the naked eye.

TESTING KEY

- **PASSED**
Tests 1, 2 & 3
- **PASSED**
Tests 1 & 2
- **PASSED**
Test 1 only

Test 1 All drawers open.

Test 2 Top drawer open with a 50-pound weight hung from the drawer-front.

Test 3 Top drawer open and the 50-pound weight is increased in 1-pound increments to a maximum of 60 pounds.

Note: All drawers are empty during the test.



Bob's Discount Furniture Chadwick Chest \$280
H48.25"xW36"xD17"
99.0 lb.



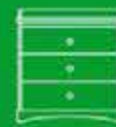
DaVinci Jayden 4-Drawer Dresser \$280
H37.75"xW36"xD18.75"
87.6 lb.



Delta Children Bentley 6 Drawer Dresser \$340
H33.75"xW49"xD19"
111.0 lb.



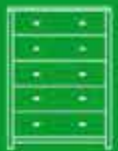
Delta Children Clermont 6 Drawer Dresser \$250
H38"xW47.25"xD18.75"
111.6 lb.



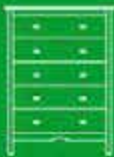
Delta Children Sutton 3 Drawer Dresser \$170
H37"xW35"xD19"
83.2 lb.



DaVinci Kalani 4-Drawer Dresser (discontinued) \$300
H38.25"xW32.75"xD21.25"
83.6 lb.



Epoch Design 5 Drawer Chest \$740
H46.25"xW33.75"xD21"
131.2 lb.



Epoch Design Seneca 5 Drawer Chest \$770
H48.25"xW35.75"xD21.25"
164.0 lb.



Pottery Barn Kids Catalina Dresser \$500
H31"xW38.5"xD18.75"
89.6 lb.



Pottery Barn Kids Catalina Extra-Wide Dresser \$900
H31.25"xW56.25"xD18"
119.2 lb.



Delta Children 3 Drawer Dresser, similar to: Viv + Rae 3 Drawer Dresser \$280
H33.5"xW37"xD20"
74.0 lb.



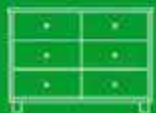
Essential Home Belmont 4 Drawer Dresser Chest (Ameriwood) \$40
H30"xW27.75"xD15.75"
47.0 lb.



Sauder Pogo 3-Drawer Chest \$180
H47.25"xW30.25"xD19.5"
99.4 lb.



Sauder Shoal Creek 4-Drawer Chest \$230
H42.5"xW34.75"xD18.75"
106.4 lb.



Simmons Kids Rowen Double Dresser \$300
H34"xW47.75"xD19.75"
128.2 lb.



Delta Children Epic 3 Drawer Dresser \$180
H33"xW36.5"xD18.75"
71.4 lb.



South Shore Logik 6-Drawer Double Dresser B \$200
H27.5"xW51.25"xD19"
108.6 lb.



South Shore Little Treasures 5-Drawer Chest \$165
H43.75"xW31.5"xD18"
89.8 lb.



South Shore Summer Breeze 6-Drawer Double Dresser B \$230
H31.25"xW52"xD20"
113.2 lb.



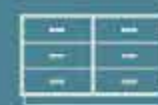
Ikea Malm 3-Drawer Chest \$100
H30.5"xW31.75"xD19"
96.0 lb.



Storkcraft Kenton 6 Drawer Universal Double Dresser \$220
H32.5"xW50"xD18"
102.2 lb.



South Shore Summer Breeze 6-Drawer Double Dresser A \$270
H32"xW52.25"xD16.5"
111.6 lb.



South Shore Logik 6-Drawer Double Dresser A \$200
H29.75"xW47.5"xD17.5"
103.6 lb.



South Shore Libra 3-Drawer Chest, similar to: Simply Basics 3 Drawer Dresser \$90
H27.5"xW31.5"xD16"
57.2 lb.

Notes: 1) Some models have the same name with a modifier ("A" or "B"). The latter sample (B) was found to have different dimensions from the earlier sample (A). This is reflected in both dimensions and test results. 2) Dimensions are overall dimensions of the assembled product rounded up to the nearest 1/4 inch, measured by CR technicians, including any additional components, such as a changing table or hardware. These dimensions may differ from what appears in the manufacturers' specifications. 3) Purchase price may vary from the currently available price.

the meantime, CU thinks the industry should increase the voluntary standard test weight to 60 pounds and include dressers 30 inches and shorter (see “Where CR Stands: Calling for Tougher Tip-Over Standards,” on page 21). The CR investigation comes as the CPSC this year considers issuing stricter, mandatory safety standards.

“Our recommendations would lead to safer dressers for all consumers,” says William Wallace, senior policy analyst for CU. “Raising the test weight would cover more children, and lowering the minimum height would cover more dressers.”

The Consumer’s Conundrum

Under the current system, consumers must put their trust in manufacturers. “The normal consumer has no clue,” says Lisa Siefert, a consumer advocate in Barrington Hills, Ill., who founded Shane’s Foundation shortly after her 2-year-old son Shane died from a dresser tip-over in 2011. Like McGee, Siefert found her son under his dresser after he had taken a nap. She had assumed the dresser was safe.

Jackie Collas’ son Curren died in 2014 after a dresser tipped over onto him in his room at his West Chester, Penn., home. “I just feel like it shouldn’t be left up to the consumer,” Collas says.

Keisha Bowles, of Conway, Ark., lost her 2-year-old daughter, Chance, in 2012. Chance and her then-6-year-old brother, Brandon, were playing in and out of each other’s rooms. Bowles was in the bathroom when a dresser with a TV on top of it fell onto Chance, who died later from her injuries. “I had no idea that they made anything to strap down furniture,” Bowles says.

Acting Chairman of the CPSC, Ann Marie Buerkle, says it’s key to educate

Manufacturers aren’t required to conduct tip-over testing, let alone meet the current standard, to sell their dressers in the U.S.

consumers about securing dressers and TVs already in their homes. “Even if we put a mandatory standard into effect tomorrow, there are a lot of dressers out there that don’t comply.”

Our Testing of Tip-Overs

The voluntary safety standard for dressers is managed by ASTM International, an independent organization that brings together manufacturers, government officials, academics, retailers, consumers, and others to establish standards for thousands of products and processes. (Consumer Reports is an active member and participates in working groups, including dressers.) Not all manufacturers participate, and not all comply with its voluntary standards.

In CR’s investigation, the Pottery Barn, Epoch Design, and Sauder models we evaluated, among others, passed all three of CR’s tests. Other models from various manufacturers passed the first two tests but failed our tougher, third test. Five models from three manufacturers—Ameriwood (one model), DaVinci (one model), and South Shore (three models)—did not pass CR’s second test.

Ameriwood and South Shore told CR their dressers meet voluntary industry standards. Three of the four dressers from these manufacturers that failed CR’s second test were 30 inches or

shorter and would not be subject to the industry’s voluntary standard.

DaVinci told CR in an email that the company has already discontinued the model that didn’t pass the second test because the company adopted a new 55-pound internal test. “Any items that did not pass were either discontinued or underwent construction changes, which include thicker, heavier back panels,” the email says.

CR’s testing shows that the industry in many cases could already meet a tougher standard, with 13 of 24 dressers passing the 60-pound test.

Impact on Industry

Still, meeting a new standard would not be a simple adjustment, says Joe Shamie, co-president of Delta Children, a global manufacturer of cribs, furniture, baby gear, and dressers. Shamie says it would mean redesigning dressers and probably additional per-unit costs for back weights and extra shipping charges from Asia. “As it is right now, my costs are more expensive than the guy that does not pass the [voluntary] standards,” he says. “If they make the [voluntary] standards tougher, my costs will continue to go up, while his costs will continue to be much lower than mine.”

Shamie, who considers himself a dedicated safety advocate, estimates Delta’s budget for safety testing is \$2 million a year. “The company culture is set around safety and corporate and social responsibility,” says Shamie, whose father started the business in 1968. “It’s not about the letter of the law; it’s about using a combination of some common sense and seeing how it could apply further. Because children do things that we don’t anticipate.”

Five of the dresser models CR tested were from Delta. Three passed all three tests, and two passed Tests 1 and 2 but failed CR’s 60-pound test.

In addition to Delta, CR contacted dozens of other furniture manufacturers and retailers to ask a series of questions about design changes, testing,



To see the video about how to properly anchor your dresser to a wall, go to [CR.org/tipover](https://www.consumerreports.org/tipover).

and current safety standards. Of the 13 manufacturers that responded in full and also produce dressers, eight said they want a mandatory standard. Why? “To keep consumers safe and require a level playing field across all suppliers,” David P. DaPonte, senior manager of global quality assurance and testing at L.L.Bean, said in a written response.

Laura Wood, international sourcing coordinator at Lexington Home Brands, says a mandatory standard would eliminate confusion and debate. “Incidents continue to occur because compliance with the standard, and more specifically understanding of the standard, is not consistent,” she says. “I think [issuing a mandatory standard] could certainly clarify for industry that a mandatory standard is mandatory—you have to do it.”

Who Should Be Protected?

Consumer advocates, including CR, think setting a new tip-over testing standard that is reasonable should be based on protecting more at-risk children. A mandatory, 60-pound standard would cover about 95 percent of U.S. children under 6 years of age—a group involved in 82 percent of dresser and clothing storage unit tip-over deaths, according to the CPSC.

Even so, some in the industry say the current voluntary standard is working and that tip-over mishaps will happen, regardless of new laws or standards.

“Do I think the standard is adequate? Yes, I do believe it’s adequate in protecting the most affected at-risk population,” says Bill Perdue, vice president of regulatory affairs for the American Home Furnishings Alliance, a 400-member industry trade group. “I do, however, believe that there’s always room to improve the standard.”

Perdue contends that tip-over deaths and injuries are largely due to non-compliant products. Tip-over incident reports don’t usually include the dresser model involved, so it’s hard to tell which specific models are responsible for the incidents. But in the case of fatalities,

some dresser models are singled out for scrutiny by regulators and the industry.

In the case of Ted McGee’s death, the Ikea Malm dresser that fell on him was still on the market when he died in February 2016, even though it and another Malm model were linked to the deaths of two toddlers in 2014. Those two families each filed a lawsuit against Ikea in 2015 and also reported the incidents to the CPSC. That same year, Ikea issued free anchor kits and urged consumers to stop using Ikea dressers (27 million at the time) until secured to walls. It wasn’t until June 2016, four months after Ted’s death, that Ikea issued a recall for the Malm.

The McGees sued Ikea in August that year, and the company settled with them and the other two families that December. Ikea didn’t respond to CR requests for comment about Ted’s

death. But the company stressed in email responses to CR that all Ikea dressers should be secured to walls.

Elliot Kaye, commissioner and past chairman of the CPSC, says having a mandatory standard tends to speed up the recall process. In many cases, the CPSC doesn’t have the practical resources to quickly force recalls and must either successfully sue or gain industry cooperation.

“With a voluntary standard, where really there’s no enforcement mechanism whatsoever, it’s truly voluntary. Basically what [many in the industry] are saying is let’s wait until more children are killed before we have to do anything, and that to me is—that’s morally reprehensible,” Kaye says. “I’m not comfortable waiting ... when we know that there are concrete changes that can be made now that will save lives.”



WHERE CR STANDS: CALLING FOR TOUGHER TIP-OVER STANDARDS

Consumer Reports recommends that consumers anchor dressers to the wall. But CR also is calling on regulators to set stronger, mandatory tip-over testing standards. In the meantime, industry should take steps to strengthen the current voluntary standard in these key ways:

Protect more children. The current standard—an empty dresser must not tip over when 50 pounds is hung from an open drawer—doesn’t cover enough children and should be increased to 60 pounds, which would cover 95 percent of children under age 6, according to the

Consumer Product Safety Commission.

Include shorter dressers. The standard should be expanded to cover units 30 inches tall and shorter because CR’s investigation shows that some of these dressers can tip over.

Labeling. If the standard is strengthened, as we recommend, manufacturers should clearly mark products to reflect that they meet the new standard.

Congress should act, if needed. If manufacturers don’t agree to toughen the voluntary standard, the CPSC should issue a mandatory standard. This process could take years without

industry cooperation. Congress, however, could speed things up. The STURDY (Stop Tip-overs of Unstable, Risky Dressers on Youth) Act, introduced in 2016 by Sens. Bob Casey (D-Pa.), Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), and Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), and Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.), would have directed the CPSC to issue a stronger, mandatory standard if industry failed to adequately strengthen its voluntary standard within 180 days. Unfortunately, the bill did not pass. Policy makers and industry should act quickly on our findings and issue a tougher standard.

What Your Smart TV Knows About You

Our exclusive testing of several brands reveals that broad-based data collection goes on routinely—and even that some TVs can be hacked, right in front of your eyes. Here's how to limit your exposure.

MOST TVS FOR SALE these days are smart, meaning you can connect them to your home network through WiFi or an Ethernet connection, and then stream movies and TV shows from Netflix, YouTube, and other services.

That's convenient, but it comes with some potential privacy trade-offs. While you watch the TV, it may be watching your behavior—what apps you load, what shows you tune in to, even the DVDs or Blu-ray discs you play.

That represents a big change from the way TVs used to work. And the data collection, along with the potential exposure to internet threats, made smart TVs a perfect place for Consumer Reports to launch a new series of tests to see how connected products handle privacy and security.

How We Tested

Our evaluation of smart TVs was CR's first test using the Digital Standard, a project we unveiled last year that sets expectations for how companies should handle their customers' information.

There are a lot of TVs on the market, but most use just a handful of smart TV software platforms. To get a good cross section, we bought 2017 TVs from five brands: LG, Samsung, Sony, TCL, and Vizio.

Samsung and LG have their own smart TV software, but that's not the case with the other sets. The TCL set uses Roku TV, a system that closely resembles the software on Roku's streaming devices and is also used in sets from Hisense and additional brands. The Sony TV uses Google's Android TV system and Vizio uses Google's Chromecast, platforms that also appear in other brands' TVs.

CR Findings: Your Security

Anything connected to the internet has the potential to get hacked, whether it's a laptop, WiFi security camera, or television. In CR's test of smart TVs, "we were looking for good security practices," says Maria Rerecich, who oversees our electronics testing. "Encryption of personal or sensitive data, protection from common security vulnerabilities—that sort of thing."

This approach is a bit like checking whether there are functioning locks on a house's doors.

In two cases, there weren't.

Our tests showed that hackers could take control of the TCL and Samsung sets over the internet by exploiting simple security flaws. We were able to blast the volume, cycle through channels, and open YouTube content,

all without the user's permission.

The problems amounted to mischief—and a sign of sloppy security—more than significant harm. A hacker couldn't listen in on a family or somehow steal their Amazon credit card information. But if you didn't know what was happening, this sort of TV takeover might feel creepy, as though an intruder were lurking nearby.

In a real attack, a hacker would need to trick you into downloading an app or going to a web page containing malware while you were using a computer or mobile device on the same network as the TV. That might happen if you clicked on a link in a phishing email. In the case of Samsung, the user would need to access the malware using a phone or



tablet that had previously been set up as a remote control for the TV.

We contacted the companies involved. TCL referred us to Roku for questions about data collection and this vulnerability. A Roku spokeswoman said via email, “There is no security risk to our customers’ accounts or the Roku platform,” and pointed out that users can turn off an External Control feature in the TV’s settings—though this would also keep them from using Roku’s own mobile app to control the TV.

In an emailed statement, Samsung said, “We appreciate Consumer Reports’ alerting us to their potential concern,” and that the company was still evaluating the issue while also fixing some other, less severe problems that we uncovered.

CR Findings: Your Privacy

Your smart TV may be collecting a lot more information than you realize.

When setting up one of these TVs, you need to shuffle through a series of screens with privacy policies, terms of service, and various options. Race through, agreeing to everything, and you end up giving permission for a continual stream of data to be sent back to the manufacturer and perhaps its business partners. That includes information on what you watch and other types of data, too.

“For years, consumers have had their behavior tracked when they’re online or using their smartphones,” says Justin Brookman, director of privacy and technology at Consumers Union, the advocacy division of Consumer Reports. “But I don’t think a lot of

people expect their television to be watching what they do.”

The viewing data is collected through technology called “automatic content recognition,” which identifies every show you play on the TV—including cable, over-the-air broadcasts, streaming services, Blu-ray discs, and so on. ACR helps the TV recommend other shows you might want to watch. But it’s also used for targeted ads and other marketing purposes.

You can turn off ACR, which goes by a variety of names, including “viewing information,” without giving up much functionality.

But you sacrifice more if you don’t agree to the TV’s basic privacy policy and terms of service. Those agreements let companies collect such information as which apps you download, what devices you attach to the TV, where you live, and more. Decline, and your smart TV won’t connect to the internet.

How to Protect Yourself

If you have a new smart TV and want to block the collection of viewing data, pay close attention during setup. There, you typically can agree to the basic privacy policy and terms of service while declining ACR.

If you’ve already set up your smart TV, you can go into the settings to turn off ACR. The right screens can be difficult to find, but go to [CR.org/tvsnooping0518](https://www.consumerreports.org/tvsnooping0518) for directions.

To eliminate all data collection, your only option is to decline every privacy agreement—or just take the TV off your home network. You can always add a separate streaming media device to get web-based content from Amazon, Netflix, and other sources. But those devices may have their own expansive data collection practices.



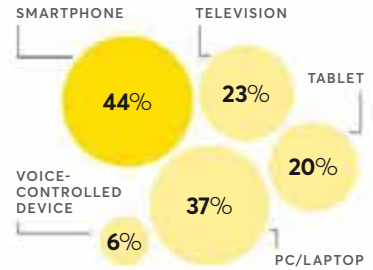
WATCH

Watch our video to see how some smart TVs could be controlled by a hacker, at [CR.org/tvsecurity0518](https://www.consumerreports.org/tvsecurity0518).

Product Update

The latest ratings from our labs

Percentage of music listeners who use each device in a typical week.*



Wild About Wireless

Tired of getting tangled up in headphone cords? Welcome to the world of wireless.

by Nicholas Deleon



INSIDE
CR'S LABS

CR's anechoic chamber is an utterly soundproof room used in testing headphones such as this Bose wireless model.

IF YOU GO shopping for headphones this spring, you'll discover—quicker than you can stream “Despacito”—that the world has gone wireless.

In recent months, Google, HTC, and Motorola have followed Apple's lead and eliminated the headphone jack from their latest smartphones. And according to the market research firm NPD, 69 percent of every dollar spent by U.S. consumers on headphones in 2017 went to models that link to mobile devices via a Bluetooth connection instead of a cord.

“Our customers are living life on the go,” says Jakob Kristoffersen, design and concept manager for the headphone maker B&O Play. “Freedom is not just a choice but a prerequisite for their products.”

Those moving-and-grooving shoppers are presented with a wide selection of wireless options: sports models that log your heartbeat as you exercise, noise-canceling models that electronically drown out the chatter at the local Starbucks, and true wireless models—such as Apple's AirPods—that pump Johnny Cash classics into your ears through two completely separate earbuds.

Focus on Sound Quality

Maria Rerecich, director of electronics testing at Consumer Reports, says Bluetooth headphones have not quite achieved the sound quality of the top wired models in our ratings, but many deliver Very Good sound—and a few Bose QuietComfort models even squeak into Excellent territory.

Val Kolton, founder and CEO of the headphone manufacturer V-Moda, attributes recent improvements in wireless sound to upgrades in audio codecs—the software that processes your Coldplay tracks before they reach your ears.

“The standards have been raised,” says Matt Engstrom, senior category director of product management at headphone maker Shure, who says

Should You Shop Amazon?

Do you have to pay several hundred dollars for a pair of true wireless headphones? Clearly, plenty of people can't or won't. Which is why on Amazon, you'll find dozens of models that sell for less than \$60.

Are they any good? We purchased three pairs that earned almost five stars from at least 100 online reviewers. Then we put the \$50 **Parihy PA-01**, the \$50 **Iyesku YK-T02**, and the \$60 **SoundMoov HV-358** to the test in our labs.

The **Parihy** delivered only Fair sound. And we ordered it twice and both times received a model that differed slightly from the one we had selected.

As for the **Iyesku**, which also rated Fair, our testers said, “The sonic shortcomings leave a lot to be desired when listening to music.” That means the earbuds are better-suited for people who prefer listening to podcasts on a smartphone or movie dialogue on a laptop.

The casual music fan may appreciate the **SoundMoov HV-358**, which crept into the Good sound range. Many others, though, are likely to notice the boomy bass, a thin and rough midrange (voices, guitars, horns), and overbearing treble.

SoundMoov HV-358, \$60



steady improvements to Bluetooth have made wireless connections more stable, too. They're also getting easier to set up: Apple's W1 chip, found in AirPods and select Beats headphones, lets you pair to your iPhone with the push of a button, and the wireless near field communication (NFC) tech found in headphones such as the Sony WH-1000XM2 does much the same for Android smartphones.

In the end, you don't have to pay big money for a Bluetooth connection and high-quality sound. The JVC HA-FX9BT Gumy Wireless, for example, sells for \$30. It doesn't offer fitness tracking functions, noise cancellation, or voice-activated controls like some higher-priced models, but the audio quality met our Very Good standard.

Mastering Wireless Controls

Before you opt for all those high-tech features, though, you should look over the headphone's specs. You may find that the built-in controls that let you adjust the volume, pause the music, and answer a call without removing your smartphone from your pocket work only with either an Android phone or an iPhone.

And it's easy to get confused by the touch controls that perform these functions on certain true wireless models. “The tap patterns can be so complex, you almost need a secret decoder,” Rerecich says. On other models, the controls may kick into action from an accidental touch, pausing your favorite song right when you're barreling into the grand finale.

One last tip: The Bluetooth signal does not travel well through water, and the human body is flush with H₂O, Rerecich says. So at times some headphones might experience difficulty receiving signals from your smartphone. The easy solution? Move your phone to another pocket—one that's closer to the antenna in the headphone. “That often does the trick,” she says.

Sound Check: What You Get for Your Money

All these wireless models have built-in microphones for fielding phone calls, plus controls that let you play music without taking your phone from your pocket. The higher your budget, the more features you'll get.

\$50 or Less

JVC HA-FX9BT
Gummy Wireless
\$30

66

OVERALL
SCORE



This 2017 pair delivers very good sound; if you hunt, you can still find it on shelves at Best Buy and Fry's Electronics.

Motorola
Moto Surround
\$50

66

OVERALL
SCORE



The contoured collar is comfy around the neck and keeps the earbuds handy when not in use. But the model faltered when paired with Apple mobile devices.

Skullcandy Jib Wireless
\$30

46

OVERALL
SCORE



If you simply want good sound at a painless price, these are worth a look.

\$51 to \$100

Jabra Elite 25e
\$80

71

OVERALL
SCORE



This model lets you access the voice commands of a digital assistant such as Cortana, Google Now, or Siri.

Samsung Level Active
\$80

66

OVERALL
SCORE



The Level Active comes with a choice of four earpiece pairs to help with the fit. With one tap, you can access workout data via Samsung's fitness app.

Scosche SportclipAir
\$60

21

OVERALL
SCORE



Scosche's wired SportFlex 3 model delivers very good sound for \$20. But on this \$60 wireless pair, the sound is just fair.

\$101 and Up

Phiaton BT 220 NC*
\$160

76

OVERALL
SCORE



These provide excellent sound and muffle unwelcome distractions—at a nice price compared with Bose's \$300-plus noise-canceling models.

Samsung Gear IconX 2018
\$190

71

OVERALL
SCORE



You get very good sound, fitness tracking, support for Google's digital voice assistants, and a built-in music player that stores up to 1,000 songs.

Apple AirPods
\$160

56

OVERALL
SCORE



They're not the best true wireless model in our ratings, but AirPods deliver good sound and Apple extras such as voice-activated music-player controls.

*For noise-canceling headphone ratings, online members can go to CR.org.

Ratings > **Sound Advice** These wireless headphones are categorized by price. They vary in design and features—see “Sound Check,” on the facing page—but all are portable.

		Brand & Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results	Features	
Recommended	Rank				Sound quality	True wireless	Sports model

\$50 OR LESS

✓	1	JVC HA-FX9BT Gummy Wireless	66	\$30	↑		
✓	2	Motorola Moto Surround	66	\$50	↑		
	3	Skullcandy Ink'd Wireless	46	\$50	↓		
	4	Skullcandy Jib Wireless	46	\$30	↓		
	5	Skullcandy Method Wireless	46	\$50	↓		•
	6	JVC HA-FX39BT Marshmallow Wireless	41	\$50	↓		
	7	Iyesku YK-T02	40	\$50	↓	•	•
	8	Parihy PA-01	36	\$50	↓	•	•
	9	JVC HA-F250BT Gummy Wireless	26	\$20	↓		

\$51 TO \$100

✓	1	Optoma NuForce BE6i	76	\$80	↑		
✓	2	Sol Republic Shadow Wireless	76	\$80	↑		
✓	3	Jabra Elite 25e	71	\$80	↑		
✓	4	Jabra Sport Pulse Wireless	71	\$100	↑		•
✓	5	JBL E25BT	71	\$60	↑		
✓	6	Klipsch R6 BT	71	\$60	↑		
✓	7	Soul Electronics Run Free Pro	71	\$100	↑		•
✓	8	Beats by Dre BeatsX	66	\$100	↑		
✓	9	House of Marley Smile Jamaica BT	66	\$60	↑		
✓	10	Mee Audio X7 Plus	66	\$70	↑		•
✓	11	Optoma NuForce BE Sport3	66	\$70	↑		•
✓	12	Samsung Level Active	66	\$80	↑		•
	13	Jabra Sport Pace Wireless	61	\$80	↑		•
	14	Kicker Audio EB300	61	\$80	↑		•
	15	Jabra Halo Smart	51	\$80	↓		

HOW WE TEST: Sound quality represents the tonal accuracy, clarity, detail, ambience, and dynamics of

the audio reproduced by the headphones. **True wireless** highlights models that do not

		Brand & Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results	Features	
Recommended	Rank				Sound quality	True wireless	Sports model

\$51 TO \$100 *Continued*

	16	SoundMoov HV-358	41	\$60	↓	•	•
	17	Urbanears Stadion	40	\$100	↓		•
	18	Scosche SportclipAir	21	\$60	↓		•

\$101 AND UP

✓	1	Bose SoundSport Wireless	76	\$150	↑		•
✓	2	JLab Audio Epic Air	76	\$150	↑	•	•
✓	3	Bose SoundSport Free Wireless	71	\$200	↑	•	•
✓	4	Jabra Elite Sport	71	\$180	↑	•	•
✓	5	Jabra Sport Coach Wireless	71	\$120	↑		•
✓	6	Jaybird Freedom F5	71	\$150	↑		•
✓	7	Jaybird Run	71	\$180	↑	•	•
✓	8	Jaybird X3	71	\$130	↑	•	•
✓	9	Monster Elements Wireless In-Ear	71	\$170	↑		•
✓	10	Samsung Gear IconX 2018	71	\$190	↑	•	•
✓	11	Sony H.ear MDR-EX750BT	71	\$200	↑		
✓	12	Fitbit Flyer	66	\$130	↑		•
✓	13	JBL by Harman Under Armour	66	\$135	↑		•
✓	14	V-Moda Forza Metallo Wireless	66	\$170	↑		•
	15	LG Tone Free HBS-F110	60	\$200	↓	•	•
	16	Apple AirPods	56	\$160	↓	•	•
	17	Bragi The Dash Pro	56	\$330	↓	•	•
	18	Bragi The Headphone	51	\$150	↓	•	•
	19	Bose SoundLink on-ear headphones	46	\$180	↓		
	20	Sol Republic Amps Air	41	\$150	↓		•

Online members can go to [CR.org/headphones](https://www.consumerreports.org/headphones) for complete, up-to-date ratings.

have cords that link the earbuds together. **Sports model** indicates which headphones have design and

digital features that can be useful during workouts.

Gas Grills to Get Fired Up About

Our ratings of 109 gas grills, expert buying advice, and new sturdiness testing will help you find a model that's built to last and matched to your cooking style.

by Paul Hope

NAPOLEON
LEX730RSBIPSS
\$1,800

66

OVERALL
SCORE



BEST BETS BY PRICE

\$400 & Under
PAGE 31

\$400-\$700
PAGE 33

\$700-\$1,000
PAGE 35

Plus! Full ratings of small, mid-sized, and large grills, starting on page 36.

It's

easy to take a grill for granted. Stationed on a deck or patio, exposed to scorching sun, drenching rain, and heavy snow, it's ever at the ready to be fired up for parties, cookouts, and family dinners throughout the year.

Until it's not.

In our most recent CR member survey of 6,800 gas grill owners, two-thirds reported that they got five or more useful years out of the last grill they owned. Still, all grills eventually need to be replaced, usually because of rusting, broken, or worn-out parts.

And buying a new grill usually isn't as

simple as choosing the same model as the one you had: Manufacturers go out of business, styles and features change, and the model you owned and loved may well not be available anymore. "If it's been more than two years, don't expect to find your old grill for sale, unless it's from a top-tier brand, such as Weber or Napoleon," says CR market analyst Mark Allwood.

You'll probably have to wade through a sea of various sizes and models as you decide, among other things, how big a grill you should buy, whether to get coated cast-iron grates or stainless steel

(stainless holds up better), and whether it's worth spending more for a grill that's built to last.

To give you a head start, we've hand-picked models in the most widely sold sizes across price ranges to highlight those our experts consider to be an exceptional value. (See "Best Bets by Price," starting on the facing page.)

We're also arming you with all the ratings and buying advice you need to find the grill that's right for you. Because grills vary widely in construction and materials, which can affect durability, we're introducing a new criterion in our ratings that measures sturdiness (see "How We Now Test for Toughness," below). And we'll tell you how to keep your grill in tip-top

Continued on page 32 ➔



INSIDE
CR'S LABS

CR technician Scott Collomb puts a grill through our new sturdiness testing.

HOW WE NOW TEST FOR TOUGHNESS

Traditionally, CR has rated gas grills solely on how they cook. What we didn't test for was how well a model will stand the test of time or whether it might fall apart after a few seasons.

"In the past we'd see cheap, flimsy grills rise to the top of our ratings because they did well in our temperature tests," says Cindy Fisher, our lead tester for gas grills. Fisher and other CR engineers wanted gas grill ratings to reflect apparent differences in sturdiness. To make that happen, they spent two years building a proprietary machine that can torque and torture grills. Then we dispatched our secret shoppers to buy new units of models already in our ratings, ran them through the new test, and—with our in-house statisticians—developed new scoring criteria

based on the results.

Here's how the test works (see photo at left): CR's engineers clamp each grill to a structural steel plate, prop open the lid, and connect something called a linear actuator to the lid's handle. The actuator travels along a stationary track, applying lateral force to the lid, while lasers measure deflection down to the hundredth of an inch. This captures the degree to which the metal frame flexes or bows under the stresses a grill might encounter over time, as from being moved.

The best grills barely budge, and the worst suffer permanent damage to the frame or lid during the course of our test. We now factor structural integrity into each grill's Overall Score. **You can see the results in our gas grill ratings, starting on page 36.**

PHOTO: BRIAN FINKE

\$400 & Under

You can find excellent cooking performance and a variety of sizes in this price range, but functionality is basic. The metal used to make these inexpensive options is generally thin and of lower quality than on pricier models, so they might not weather as many seasons.

S

SMALL



HUNTINGTON

Cast 3400 30040 (Home Depot), \$210
Ext. dimensions (HxWxD): 46x49x21 inches

69 OVERALL SCORE

The no-frills, stamped metal construction won't win any design awards, but when it comes to cooking, the Huntington Cast outperforms models that cost 10 times as much. It heats very quickly and offers a broad range of temperatures—good for foods cooked at low temperatures, such as fish, but also good for searing a steak. The model has a single side burner (for warming barbecue sauce or sides while you grill) and wheels—but only two, so you may still need to lift it to move it.

M

MIDSIZED



NEXGRILL

720-0830H (Home Depot), \$270
Ext. dimensions (HxWxD): 47x51x24 inches

74 OVERALL SCORE

This beautifully polished mid-sized stainless grill earns top marks for even heating and quick preheating. It's also stellar at indirect cooking, with four burners that offer a broad range of temperatures. It's not as sturdy as pricier picks, so you'll need to handle it with care.

L

LARGE



CHAR-BROIL

Performance 463276517, \$380
Ext. dimensions (HxWxD): 45x63x26 inches

67 OVERALL SCORE

The Char-Broil performance line is the best large grill we've tested in this price range (it's also available in models made for home centers at a reduced price; see "Where the Grills Are: Home Depot & Lowe's," on page 34). It's solidly built and large enough to hold 24 burgers but doesn't cook as evenly—or heat as quickly—as the best we've tested.

shape, when and where to find the best deals, and how to use our ratings of 109 models to make sure the grill you pick matches your cooking style.

Getting Started

Begin your search for a new grill by deciding on size—and bear in mind that bigger does not necessarily mean better. According to our survey, more than 60 percent of CR members who own a gas grill have a mid-sized model, which is why more than half the gas grills in our ratings are mid-sized. This Goldilocks of grills is large enough for feeding a crowd (they can accommodate up to 28 burgers at a time), compact enough not to dominate your deck, and not too big for whipping up a quick meal of brats and grilled onions for a family of four.

While small grills can equal the best larger models in cooking performance, shoppers who need only a small grill should still consider a mid-sized model:

“Even if you don’t really need the extra cooking area, a mid-sized grill often has more features—such as illuminated controls and LED lighting—that you typically won’t find on smaller grills,” says Cindy Fisher, who oversees grill testing for Consumer Reports.

Where to Shop

According to TraQline, a service that tracks consumer behavior and buying habits, 17 percent of U.S. consumers in a recent survey reported that they had bought their grills online. It’s not surprising: A grill is a major purchase, and buying in a store lets you kick the tires, so to speak, and get a hands-on sense of the quality of construction.

Of course, if you prefer to buy online, you can now rely on our sturdiness test to indicate how solidly a grill is built, but you’ll still have to weigh the convenience of online ordering with the task of assembling the grill.

If you’re not intimidated by a box

full of parts, check online retailers such as Amazon for the broadest selection of unassembled grills; many offer free shipping. It’s possible, too, to order online and have the grill assembled at your home. Amazon Home Services, which provides assembly or installation of products for an up-front fee, will arrange for a local pro to build your grill. We priced out the service for three grills and found that, in each case, we would have to pay around \$140, though the cost depends on the type of grill, your location, and the service provider. (On a handful of pricier models, Amazon provides free assembly.)

Walk-in retailers might offer a less expensive option. Home Depot and Lowe’s, for instance, will assemble grills free of charge at your local store, including models purchased on their websites and shipped to the store. Some also offer delivery services for buyers who don’t have a vehicle capable of getting the grill home.

EASY FIXES FOR FAILING GRILLS

Over time, grill components break. But that doesn’t mean it’s time to scrap your sizzler. Certain key parts can be easily replaced to keep your grill working like new. Here’s how long you can expect parts to last and how much you’ll pay to replace them.



COOKING GRATES

Expected life span:
Three to 10 years
Cost to replace:
\$25 to \$150 for a set

In our survey, nearly 30 percent of CR members who own a gas grill reported problems with grates cracking or flaking on a previously owned grill. They are easily replaced. To maintain them, clean each side with a stiff wire brush (use nylon on porcelain-coated grates) before grilling. Brush again and oil grates after cooking.



BURNER COVERS

Expected life span:
Two to eight years
Cost to replace:
\$5 to \$30 each

Eighteen percent of CR members reported problems with uncontrolled flare-ups on a grill they previously owned. Burner covers, also called heat tents, shield the burner tubes from dripping fat, helping control these. If covers on your grill are damaged or missing, replace them for better performance, and safety.



BURNER TUBES

Expected life span:
Two to 10 years
Cost to replace:
\$10 to \$60 per tube

Nearly 40 percent of CR members reported uneven heating in a grill they no longer use. A leading cause? Clogged or damaged burner tubes. Sometimes the tubes are so damaged that they fail to light at all, which results in extremely uneven cooking.



IGNITER/IGNITION PARTS

Expected life span:
Two to seven years
Cost to replace and assemble:
\$10 to \$90

According to our survey, 92 percent of grills have electronic igniters. If your burners won’t light, check the battery that powers the ignition. If only a single burner is affected, check the wire that leads to that igniter, or the igniter itself, next to the burner tube.

\$400- \$700

These grills don't cook any better than our less expensive top models, but the higher prices get you better construction, heavier-gauge materials, and helpful features (locking caster wheels, fuel-level gauges, and, often, a longer warranty). This price range also includes models from big-name brands such as Weber.

S

SMALL



WEBER GENESIS II E-210, \$500

Ext. dimensions (HxWxD): 46x47x28 inches

67

OVERALL SCORE

This smaller version of Weber's flagship gas grill is nicely made, with considered touches you won't find on lower-priced grills. "It has fold-down stainless warming racks, which are perfect for keeping hamburger buns warm," says CR grill tester Cindy Fisher, and a side-mounted propane tank that's easy to access. It lacks a side burner and has an open cart under the grill. (Pricier Genesis models have a closed frame with metal doors.) This grill cooks evenly using direct and indirect heat, but it's slower to warm up than other models and its temperature range is not as broad as those found on the best small grills.

M

MIDSIZED



3 EMBERS GAS7480BS, \$620

Ext. dimensions (HxWxD): 49x58x24 inches

67

OVERALL SCORE

At twice the price, this model doesn't cook any better than the inexpensive Nexgrill on page 31, but it aced our sturdiness test, suggesting that it should weather multiple seasons' moves into and out of storage. It has a sealed frame with a single door and two pullout drawers, and a glass viewing window that lets you check your steak without opening the lid and allowing the heat to escape. It also earns an Excellent score for evenness, making it easy to cook a slew of burgers and hot dogs simultaneously.

L

LARGE



GRILL ZONE

BG2615B

(True Value), \$400

Ext. dimensions (HxWxD):

46x64x22 inches

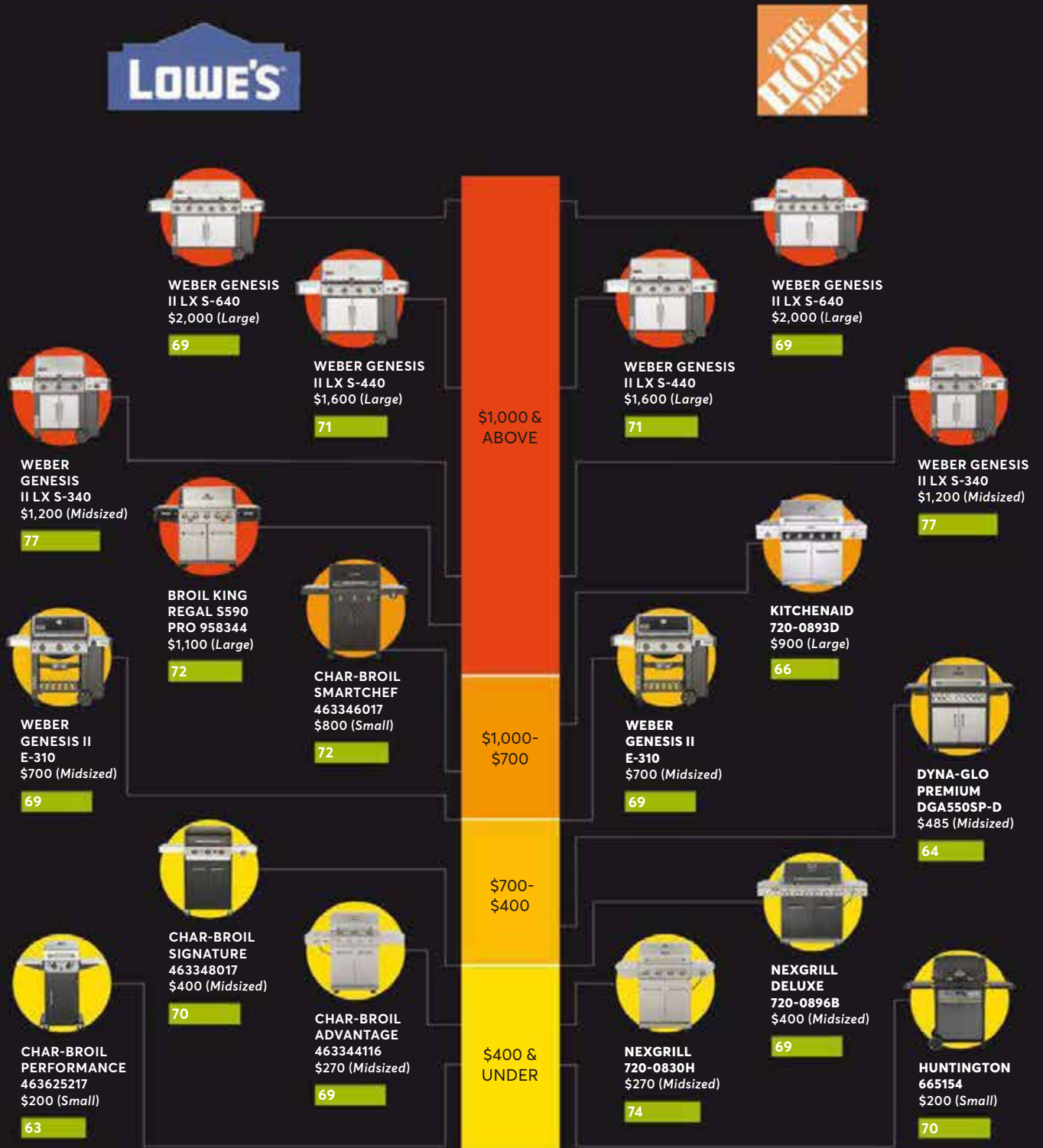
64

OVERALL SCORE

This substantial stainless model offers a lot for the money. It has five burners and a side burner, and it's solidly built. The Grill Zone gets high marks for evenness and preheating but won't deliver as broad a range of temperatures as its competitors—for this, you'll need to spend more.

WHERE THE GRILLS ARE: HOME DEPOT & LOWE'S

Forty-two percent of consumers buy their grills at major home centers. Competition between Home Depot and Lowe's means aggressive pricing on some of the spiffiest models of the season. Here are several of our top picks currently sold at each.



\$700- \$1,000

Grills in this price tier come with plenty of features, as well as solid construction and generous warranties. You'll also find more offerings from premium manufacturers, which translates into the added assurance that replacement parts will be available. Most grills in this price range can be converted to connect to a natural gas line, eliminating the need for refillable propane canisters.

S

SMALL



CHAR-BROIL

SmartChef 463346017, \$800
Ext. dimensions (HxWxD): 48x51x23 inches

72

OVERALL
SCORE

This solid performer boasts built-in WiFi that enables you to control cooking remotely with an app on your phone. Our expert testers found the app to be a bit frustrating to use: It can't, for instance, override the programmed internal cooking temperatures for meat and poultry (based on Department of Agriculture recommendations). Still, the feature does take a lot of guesswork out of cooking, which might appeal to novice grillers.

M

MID-SIZED



NAPOLEON ROGUE

R425SBPK, \$750
Ext. dimensions (HxWxD):
47x50x26 inches

66

OVERALL
SCORE

The Rogue is an option for anyone whose heart is set on a Napoleon but whose pockets aren't deep enough for the brand's pricier offerings. (Napoleon's top-rated large model, the Prestige Pro, costs \$3,200.) The Rogue performs well and is impressive at indirect cooking, but there are higher-scoring models for less, if you can live without the Napoleon cred.

L

LARGE



KITCHENAID 720-0893D, \$900

Ext. dimensions (HxWxD): 49x50x24 inches

66

OVERALL
SCORE

This KitchenAid makes quite an impression: It's clad in high-quality stainless steel and, with more than 555 square inches of cooking space and 545 square inches of shelf space, is large enough for even the most ambitious grillers. Its solid across-the-board performance, with especially high marks for indirect cooking and Very Good scores for preheating and maintaining steady temperatures at low heat, makes it a smart centerpiece for an outdoor kitchen. It converts to run on natural gas, so you'll never have to worry about refilling propane tanks, and it has a side burner and dedicated searing burner, in addition to five primary burners.

Ratings > **Cooking With Gas** We've rated cooking performance, sturdiness, and other key factors of 109 small, midsized, and large grills to simplify your shopping process—and get you grilling more quickly.

Recommended	Rank	Brand & Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results						Features		
					Evenness performance	Preheat performance	Temperature range	Indirect cooking	Convenience	Sturdiness	Stainless steel grates	Coated cast-iron grates	Long-warranty burners
SMALL GAS GRILLS (room for up to 18 burgers)													
✔	1	Char-Broil SmartChef 463346017	72	\$800	↑	↓	↑	↑	↓	↓		•	•
✔	2	Char-Broil Signature 463675517	71	\$300	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	•		•
✔	3	Weber Genesis II LX S-240	71	\$1,000	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	•		•
	4	Huntington 665154 (Home Depot)	70	\$200	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓		•	
	5	Huntington Cast 3400 30040 (Home Depot)	69	\$210	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓			
	6	Nexgrill Evolution Infrared 720-0864M (Home Depot)	68	\$250	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓		•	
	7	Char-Broil Commercial Tru-Infrared 463642316 [Item #748075] (Lowe's)	67	\$300	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓		•	•
	8	Weber Genesis II E-210	67	\$500	↑	↓	↓	↑	↑	↓		•	•
	9	Kenmore Patio 6256600 (Kmart)	65	\$270	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓		•	
	10	Char-Broil Performance 463625217 [Item # 803379] (Lowe's)	63	\$200	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓		•	
	11	Char-Broil Performance 463673517	63	\$170	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓		•	
	12	Grill Zone BG1762B [Item # 204378] (True Value)	61	\$250	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	↓		•	
	13	Dyna-Glo Dual Fuel DDGB730SNB-D	60	\$470	↑	↓	↓	↑	↓	↓		•	
	14	Blue Rhino UniFlame GBC1273SP	60	\$550	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑	↓	•		
	15	Landmann Falcon Series 42204	57	\$400	↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓	•		
	16	RevoAce GBC1729W (Walmart)	54	\$120	↓	↑	↓	↑	↓	↓			
	17	Uniflame GBC1405SP	52	\$230	↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓			
	18	KitchenAid 720-0891B (Home Depot)	51	\$300	↓	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	•		•
	19	RevoAce GBC1705WV (Walmart)	49	\$105	↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓			

THE SECRET TO A PERFECT MATCH

To find the absolute best grill for you, consult our individual performance tests as well as the Overall Score. Rapid preheating, even heating, a wide temperature range, and the ability to cook low and slow are important capabilities—but some

matter more for certain types of cooking. Match your grilling style to the appropriate test results; then consider the models that excel in that area.

CROWD PLEASER: If you love to entertain big groups, look to **Evenness performance**. Grills that earn high marks heat evenly, meaning you can toss 20 burgers on and know that they'll all be cooked to the same degree of doneness at

the same time, regardless of where they sat on the grates.

THE SERIAL GRILLER: Our **Preheat performance** test captures how fast a grill heats and how even the temperatures are across the surface after 10 minutes—a key measurement for anyone who wants their grill ready at a moment's notice.

THE CURIOUS COOK: For those who grill everything from pizza to delicate trout

fillets, watch for **Temperature range**. It captures the span between the highest and lowest temperatures a grill can maintain. Models with the best scores will let you sear a steak beautifully or roast a pork shoulder for hours.

THE BARBECUE AFICIONADO: If you're passionate about pulled pork, check **Indirect cooking** to see which grills are best at the low, steady temperatures that this and other barbecue standards require.

Recommended	Rank	Brand & Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results						Features		
					Evenness performance	Preheat performance	Temperature range	Indirect cooking	Convenience	Sturdiness	Stainless steel grates	Coated cast-iron grates	Long-warranty burners

SMALL GAS GRILLS (room for up to 18 burgers) *Continued*

	20	RevoAce GBC1708WDC (Walmart)	47	\$90	↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓			
	21	Cadac Stratos 98700-23-01	40	\$300	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑		•	

MIDSIZED GAS GRILLS (room for up to 28 burgers)

✓	1	Weber Genesis II LX S-340	77	\$1,200	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	•		•
	2	Kenmore 6256595 [PG-40405SOL] (Kmart)	76	\$400	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	•		
\$	3	Nexgrill 720-0830H (Home Depot)	74	\$270	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	•		
	4	Kenmore Elite 550 Series 48587	72	\$850	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	•		•
	5	Kenmore Elite 600 Series 48593	70	\$1,220	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	•		•
	6	Char-Broil Signature 463348017 [Item # 799960] (Lowe's)	70	\$400	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	•		•
	7	Char-Broil Signature 463372017	70	\$430	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	•		•
	8	Nexgrill Deluxe 720-0896B (Home Depot)	69	\$400	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↓	•		•
	9	Even Embers GAS7540AS	69	\$300	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	↓	•		•
	10	Weber Genesis II E-310	69	\$700	↑	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	•		•
	11	Char-Broil Advantage 463344116 [Item #748080] (Lowe's)	69	\$270	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	•		•
	12	Napoleon Prestige P500RSIB	68	\$1,400	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	•		•
	13	Kenmore 20125	68	\$500	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	•		•
	14	Char-Broil Performance 463347017 [Item # 799958] (Lowe's)	68	\$200	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	•		•
	15	3 Embers GAS7480AS (Tractor Supply)	67	\$500	↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	•		•
	16	3 Embers GAS7480BS	67	\$620	↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	•		•
	17	Char-Broil Signature Tru-Infrared 463367016	67	\$400	↑	↓	↓	↑	↓	↑	•		•
	18	Napoleon Rogue R425SBPK	66	\$750	↑	↓	↑	↑	↓	↓	•		•
	19	Kenmore 34611	66	\$230	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	•		•
	20	Napoleon Rogue R425SIBPSS	66	\$950	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	•		•
	21	Weber Summit S-470	66	\$1,900	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	•		•
	22	Monument Grills 27592	65	\$340	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑	↓	•		•
	23	Char-Broil Signature 463245017 [Item # 799961] (Lowe's)	65	\$335	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	↓	•		•
	24	Char-Broil Signature 463277017	65	\$530	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	↓	•		•
	25	Char-Broil Commercial Tru-Infrared 463242515 [Item #606680] (Lowe's)	65	\$400	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	•		•
	26	Expert Grill BG2824B (Walmart)	65	\$150	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	•		•
	27	Char-Broil Commercial Tru-Infrared 463242715 [Item #606682] (Lowe's)	64	\$500	↑	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	•		•
	28	Napoleon LEX485RSIB	64	\$1,250	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↓	•		•
	29	Char-Broil Signature Tru-Infrared 463276016	64	\$500	↑	↓	↓	↑	↓	↑	•		•

Recommended	Rank	Brand & Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results						Features		
					Evenness performance	Preheat performance	Temperature range	Indirect cooking	Convenience	Sturdiness	Stainless steel grates	Coated cast-iron grates	Long-warranty burners
MIDSIZED GAS GRILLS (room for up to 28 burgers) <i>Continued</i>													
	30	Dyna-Glo Premium DGA550SSP-D	64	\$485	↓	↕	↓	↕	↓	↓	•		
	31	Char-Broil Performance 463376017	64	\$215	↕	↕	↕	↕	↓	↓		•	
	32	Grill Zone BG2723B (True Value)	64	\$200	↕	↕	↕	↕	↓	↓		•	
	33	Chef's Grill RT-24175-1	63	\$450	↓	↕	↕	↓	↓	↓	•		
	34	Nexgrill 720-0888N (Home Depot)	63	\$200	↓	↕	↓	↕	↓	↓		•	
	35	Chef's Grill IR2818-1	63	\$650	↓	↕	↕	↕	↓	↓	•		
	36	Char-Broil Gas2Coal Hybrid 463340516	63	\$300	↓	↕	↕	↕	↓	↓		•	
	37	Cal Flame G3 A La Cart Plus	63	\$2,300	↓	↕	↕	↕	↓	↓	•		
	38	Delsol DSBQ25G-DSGB25	62	\$1,750	↓	↓	↕	↕	↓	↕	•		•
	39	Kenmore 46365	62	\$300	↓	↕	↕	↕	↓	↕		•	
	40	Nexgrill 720-0896 (Home Depot)	61	\$300	↓	↕	↕	↕	↕	↓		•	
	41	Char-Broil Performance 463335517 (Walmart)	61	\$200	↕	↕	↕	↕	↓	↓		•	
	42	Monument Grills 38667	61	\$360	↓	↕	↓	↓	↕	↓		•	
	43	Kenmore 46372	61	\$340	↓	↕	↕	↕	↓	↕		•	
	44	Kokomo Grills KO-BAK4BG-C	60	\$2,240	↓	↓	↕	↕	↓	↓	•		•
	45	Nexgrill Evolution 720-0882A (Home Depot)	60	\$380	↓	↕	↓	↕	↕	↓	•		
	46	Grill Zone BG2724B [Item # 204380] (True Value)	60	\$300	↓	↕	↕	↕	↓	↓		•	
	47	Broil King Imperial 490 956884	58	\$1,600	↓	↕	↕	↕	↕	↕	•		•
	48	Huntington Patriot 4400 682164	58	\$400	↓	↓	↕	↕	↕	↓		•	•
	49	Broil King Signet 320 986854 [Item #758098] (Lowe's)	58	\$400	↓	↕	↕	↕	↓	↓		•	•
	50	Kenmore 45961	58	\$330	↓	↕	↕	↕	↓	↓		•	
	51	Kenmore 23681	57	\$500	↓	↕	↓	↕	↕	↓		•	•
	52	KitchenAid 720-0953 (Home Depot)	54	\$500	↓	↕	↕	↕	↓	↓	•		•
	53	Dyna-Glo DGF493BNP (Home Depot)	51	\$160	↓	↕	↓	↓	↓	↓		•	
	54	Aussie Deluxe 6480-DS	51	\$600	↓	↕	↓	↓	↕	↓	•		
	55	American Outdoor Grill 24PCT	50	\$2,200	↓	↓	↕	↕	↓	↓	•		•
	56	Delta Heat DHGB32-C	50	\$2,930	↓	↓	↕	↓	↓	↕	•		•
	57	Member's Mark GR2210601-MM-00 (Sam's Club)	50	\$300	↓	↕	↓	↕	↕	↕		•	
	58	KitchenAid 720-0954 (Home Depot)	48	\$700	↓	↕	↕	↕	↕	↓	•		•
	59	Bel Air 79000	47	\$600	↓	↕	↓	↓	↓	↓	•		
	60	Char-Griller Grillin Pro 3001	45	\$225	↓	↕	↓	↕	↓	↓		•	
	61	Saber Cast Black R50CC0617	44	\$1,000	↓	↓	↓	↕	↓	↕	•		•
	62	Summerset Sizzler Series CART-SIZ32	43	\$1,950	↓	↓	↕	↕	↓	↓	•		

Recommended	Rank	Brand & Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results						Features		
					Evenness performance	Preheat performance	Temperature range	Indirect cooking	Convenience	Sturdiness	Stainless steel grates	Coated cast-iron grates	Long-warranty burners
MIDSIZED GAS GRILLS (room for up to 28 burgers) <i>Continued</i>													
	63	Cadac Stratos 3 98700-33-01	42	\$450	↓	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑			
	64	Dyna-Glo DGF510SBP (Home Depot)	42	\$200	↓	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓		•	
	65	Saber Cast Black R67CC1117	39	\$1,400	↓	↓	↓	↓	↑	↑	•		•
	66	Fervor Icon 350S	29	\$1,200	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓		•	
LARGE GAS GRILLS (room for 28 or more burgers)													
✓	1	Napoleon Prestige Pro 665RSIB	75	\$3,200	↑	↓	↑	↑	↓	↑	•		•
	2	Kenmore Elite 700 Series 48591	75	\$1,600	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	•		•
✓	3	Broil King Regal S590 Pro 958344	72	\$1,100	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	•		•
✓	4	Weber Genesis II LX S-440	71	\$1,600	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	•		•
	5	Kenmore 16156	70	\$600	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	•		•
	6	Weber Summit E-670	69	\$2,500	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	•		•
	7	Weber Genesis II LX S-640	69	\$2,000	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	•		•
	8	Weber Genesis II E-410	69	\$900	↑	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑		•	•
	9	Char-Broil Performance 463276517	67	\$380	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑		•	
	10	Char-Broil Performance 463245917 [Item # 803378] (Lowe's)	67	\$350	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑		•	
	11	Napoleon LEX730RSBIPSS	66	\$1,800	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	•		•
	12	KitchenAid 720-0893D	66	\$900	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	↓	•		•
	13	Weber Genesis II E-610	65	\$1,300	↑	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑		•	•
	14	KitchenAid 720-0856V (Costco)	64	\$900	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	↓	•		•
	15	Grill Zone BG2615B [Item # 204381] (True Value)	64	\$400	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	•		
	16	Broil King Imperial 590 958884	64	\$1,800	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	•		•
	17	Broil King Sovereign XLS 90 988844	62	\$900	↓	↓	↑	↑	↓	↓	•		•
	18	Bradley Grill Deluxe BG50506	60	\$970	↓	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	•		•
	19	Saber R67SC0012	54	\$1,900	↑	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	•		•
	20	Blaze BLZ-5-LP + BLZ-5-CART	51	\$2,115	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	•		•
	21	Fervor Icon 655S	43	\$2,150	↓	↓	↓	↑	↓	↑		•	
	22	Kenmore 20153	43	\$1,900	↓	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	•		•

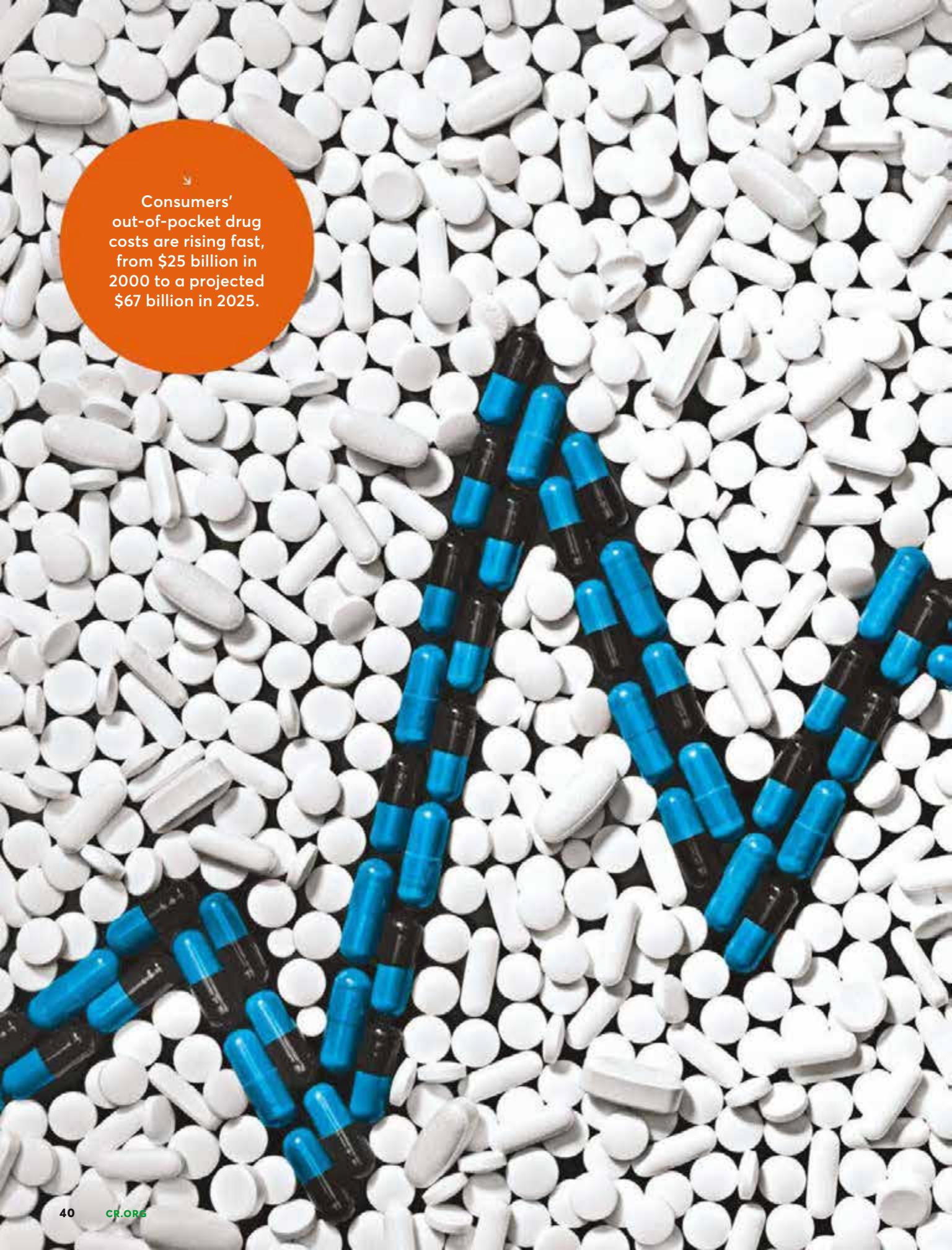
Online members can go to [CR.org/grills](https://www.consumerreports.org/grills) for complete, up-to-date ratings.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score combines results from our tests for Evenness performance, Preheat performance, Temperature range, Indirect cooking, Convenience, and Sturdiness. **Evenness performance** indicates

how even the temperature range is across the cooking surface during preheat and using the main burners' lowest and highest settings. **Preheat performance** measures how hot the cooking surface is after 10 minutes.

It also indicates how fast the grill reaches its maximum temperature. **Temperature range** reflects the span between the lowest and highest settings using all main burners. **Indirect cooking** tells you how well

the grill will slow-cook food when it's not placed directly over flames and using a burner or two. **Convenience** is our evaluation of basic features. **Sturdiness** is how solidly built each model is. **Price** is approximate retail.



Consumers' out-of-pocket drug costs are rising fast, from \$25 billion in 2000 to a projected \$67 billion in 2025.



How to **Pay Less** for Your Meds

No one should have to choose between paying for their groceries and paying for their prescriptions. Yet as the burden of high drug costs grows heavier, more Americans say they're facing that choice and other difficult decisions. Learn why this is happening, how it can be stopped, and what you can do now to lower your costs.

by **Lisa L. Gill**



CHUCK VANDERWIST, 38, says he had to make some awful choices once he learned that his health insurer would no longer cover his prescription for Humalog, the brand of insulin he'd relied on for 17 years to control his type 1 diabetes. While appealing the sudden and expensive change in coverage, he began rationing his remaining supply—a practice that landed him in the emergency room several times with dangerously high blood sugar levels.

And then, even after his appeal succeeded, Vanderwist had a new problem: His co-pay for a 90-day prescription jumped to nearly \$500, triple what it used to be. With other medical bills, rent, and child support, the father from Montrose, Colo., says he had to make another difficult appeal: "I was forced to borrow thousands of dollars from my family and friends."

As drug costs continue to rise, Americans are feeling squeezed and

desperate. A nationally representative Consumer Reports survey of almost 1,200 adults who currently take a prescription drug found that high costs are forcing people to cut back on groceries, delay retirement, and even take on a second job. And some say they're making potentially dangerous choices, such as rationing or even stopping their meds. Just like Vanderwist.

"Seeing a patient give up needed medication or struggle to pay for food or housing because of high drug costs is devastating," says Marvin M. Lipman, M.D., Consumer Reports' chief medical adviser. "While it's not always possible to limit those costs, it often is."

That's what this report is all about: helping you get the drugs you need at prices you can afford.

Why Drugs Cost So Much

Americans spend more on drugs than people in any other country—and costs continue to rise. In 2016 total drug costs went up 6.3 percent compared with the year before, about three times the rate for other goods and services, according to the Department of Labor. The amount consumers have to pay out of pocket is also rising, from about \$25 billion in 2000 to a projected \$67 billion in 2025.

Why is that? There are lots of reasons, with lots of players—and with consumers stuck in the middle, says Stephen W. Schondelmeyer, Ph.D.,

a pharmacoeconomics professor at the University of Minnesota, in Minneapolis.

The players include drug companies that continually raise prices for existing products, saying that the extra profit is needed to bring new drugs to market. It also includes physicians, who too rarely talk with patients about the affordability of the drugs they prescribe. And it involves a tangled web of insurers, employers, big drugstore chains, and companies called pharmacy benefit managers that act as go-betweens among them all. Each has its own interests and contributes to making our system so expensive, complicated, and confusing, Schondelmeyer says.

President Donald J. Trump, in his State of the Union address, acknowledged the problem. "I have directed my administration to make fixing the injustice of high drug prices one of my top priorities," he said.

And a report from the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, out late last year, identified possible fixes, including allowing the government to directly negotiate prices with drug companies and encouraging greater price transparency. But even its authors noted that industry and political resistance make it unlikely that meaningful reform will come soon.

Meanwhile, some large companies in the healthcare marketplace are trying to tackle the problem on their own. Earlier this year a consortium of 450 hospitals announced plans to make its own supply of drugs that it says cost too much or are in short supply. And three iconic companies—Amazon, Berkshire Hathaway, and JPMorgan Chase—say they're working together to create a healthcare company for their combined 1 million U.S. employees.

Consumers have also had to improvise. Chuck Vanderwist eventually worked with his doctor to transition to a slightly less expensive brand of insulin, and a pharmacist



"I was forced to **borrow thousands** of dollars from my family and friends."

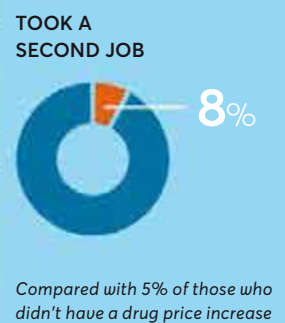
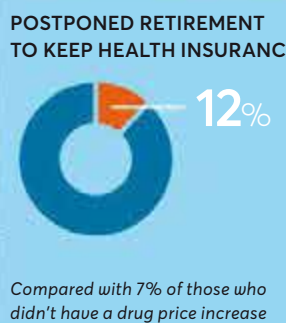
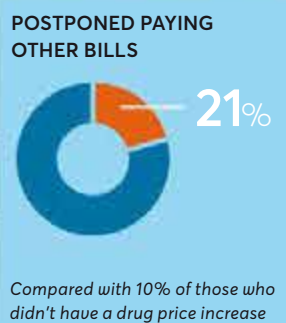
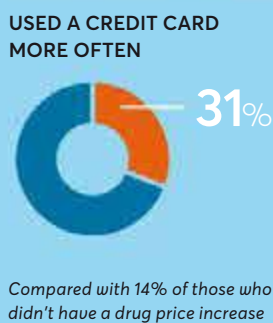
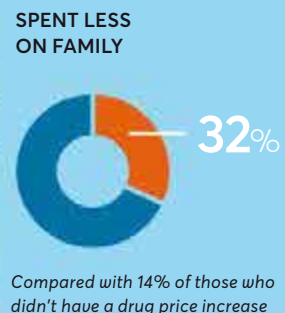
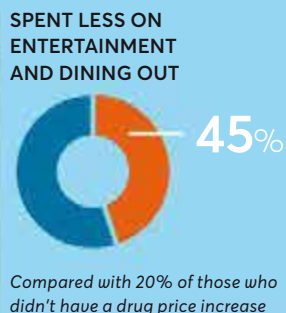
CHUCK VANDERWIST, MONTROSE, COLO.

Painful Trade-Offs

The high cost of drugs is forcing many Americans to cut back on groceries, delay retirement, or ration their healthcare in potentially dangerous ways. That's according to a CR survey of nearly 1,200 adults in the U.S. currently taking prescription drugs. And that's especially true for people who experienced a price hike in the past year.

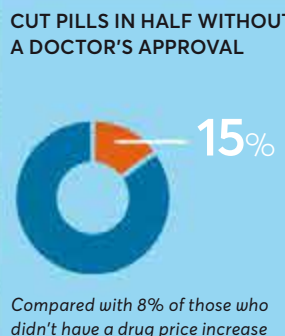
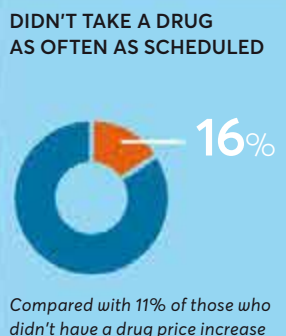
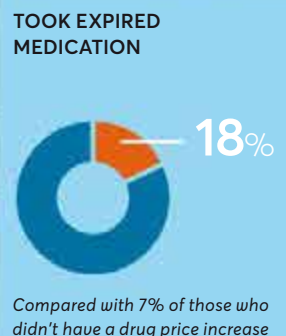
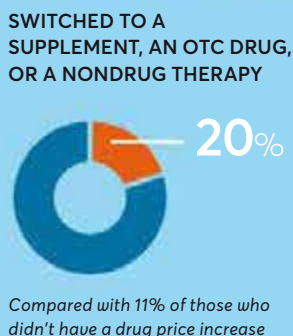
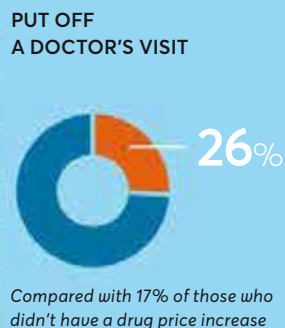
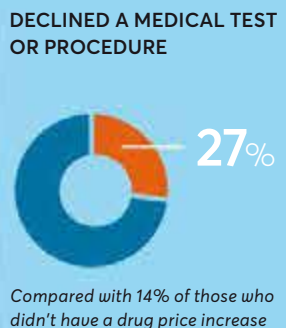
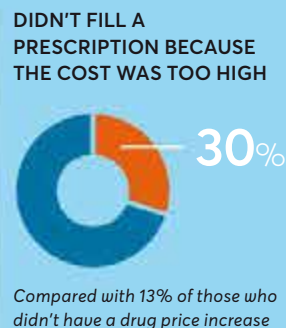
Household Changes

People who experienced a price increase for at least one of their drugs in the past 12 months were more likely than those without increases to take these steps to pay for their medication:



Healthcare Changes

People who had a price increase for at least one of their drugs in the past 12 months were more likely than those without price increases to take these other cost-saving, but risky, steps:



Source: A Consumer Reports nationally representative survey of 1,180 adults currently taking prescription medication, 286 of whom experienced a cost increase in at least one drug in the past 12 months and 787 who did not.

tracked down a manufacturer's coupon that brought his cost down even further, to about \$50 a month.

Consumers Fight Back

A Consumer Reports investigation has identified several ways consumers can lower their drug costs. To find these fixes, we talked with pharmacists, drugstore executives, insurance and Medicare experts, and consumers.

Additionally, our secret shoppers called more than 100 pharmacies across the U.S., asking questions including "Is that really the best price you can offer?"

Along the way, we gained some surprising—and often counterintuitive—insights. For example, the cost of the same prescription drug can vary by hundreds of dollars at different pharmacies, even within the same town. And you can sometimes save money by not using your insurance and instead looking for coupons online, shopping around, and paying cash.

To find those savings, you may have to ask pharmacists some direct questions. That's because they're sometimes bound by "gag clauses" in contracts with insurers that prohibit them from suggesting cheaper alternatives without first being directly asked by a consumer.

"The system is broken when big companies profit while consumers—even those with insurance—are left paying high prices for the drugs they need," says Jessica Rich, who heads Consumers Union, the advocacy division of Consumer Reports. "We are fighting to make the system fairer, but consumers should also know about workarounds they can try right now to get some relief."

Even with the tips outlined in the following pages, high drug costs are sometimes inevitable. But we've identified many common situations when these strategies are worth trying. And you might be surprised by how effective they can be.

6 Smart, Safe Ways to Lower Your Drug Costs

THERE ARE SOME common-sense strategies everyone should consider when trying to lower drug costs, beginning with these three:

Ask your doctor whether you need a drug in the first place.

You might not. In an April 2017 nationally representative CR survey of more than 1,000 adults who take prescription drugs, 70 percent of those who asked their doctor if they could cut down on their drugs were able to eliminate at least one.

If a drug is necessary, ask how much it will cost.

A more recent CR survey found that most doctors don't regularly talk about drug costs with patients. So you might need to take the lead.

When you do, ask whether a less costly drug might work as well. For example, generic drugs have the same active ingredients as brand-name ones, they're regulated in the same way by the Food and Drug Administration, and they cost 80 to 85 percent less.

Look into 90-day prescriptions

for medication to treat chronic conditions such as high blood pressure and diabetes. That reduces how often you need to cover co-pays. Or you could skip insurance altogether. That's because paying cash for a 90-day supply could be cheaper than three co-pays, says Victor Curtis, R.Ph., senior vice president of pharmacy for Costco, consistently one of the lowest-priced, CR's

secret shoppers found. On the following pages we describe ways to address six common and particularly vexing situations involving high drug costs. They sometimes call for tricks that might seem counterintuitive at first but have been found to work.

While these workarounds offer quick fixes, they aren't long-term solutions to the underlying problems. That's why CR is also suggesting meaningful systemic reforms that government, industry, and employers should make right now to fix the flaws that cause high drug prices.

CASE
1

An Insurance Change Drives Up the Price

Until this year, Michele K., 40, never had to think much about the cost of her medication. She had no annual deductible and just a \$20 co-pay when she filled her monthly prescription for Humira, a drug she takes to treat rheumatoid arthritis. Without insurance, it could cost about \$5,000 a month.

So she was devastated to learn that her employer had switched

insurance plans for 2018. Her new co-pay was \$100. More troubling, she now had a \$1,500 deductible to pay before insurance kicked in. "It's like I took a huge pay cut," says Michele, who asked not to be fully identified for fear of retaliation by her employer. "It's outrageous."

WHY IT HAPPENS

In an effort to deal with rising healthcare costs, many employers now require workers to shoulder a larger percentage of their medical expenses, including drugs. In 2017 more than 40 percent of Americans with private insurance were enrolled in high-deductible plans, meaning they had to pay at least \$2,600 for a family and \$1,300 for an individual, out of pocket, before insurance kicked in. In 2010 just 25 percent of those with private insurance

had that kind of plan.

YOUR SOLVE

Michele searched for manufacturer coupons on the website for AbbVie, the company that makes Humira. She found discounts that, over a full year, could save her at least \$1,000.

To see whether a drugmaker offers discounts for an expensive medication you take, check its website or go to medicare.gov/pharmaceutical-assistance-program.

Another option for people with high-deductible plans is to look into health savings accounts, or HSAs. They allow people with high-deductible plans to spend up to \$6,900 a year in tax-exempt dollars on out-of-pocket medical expenses.

POTENTIAL SNAGS

Arranging for manufacturer coupons can be complicated

and time-consuming. And you should check with your insurer to see whether a coupon will count toward meeting your deductible and out-of-pocket maximum. In addition, people on Medicaid or Medicare or living in California might not be able to use them at all. That's because critics say manufacturer coupons can drive up drug prices in the long run by circumventing the negotiated drug lists, or so-called formularies, that are supposed to control medication costs and keep them fair for all consumers.

And keep in mind that HSAs are a good option only if you can afford to fund the accounts in the first place.

LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

Employers could establish "out of pocket" maximums with the

insurers they contract with, limiting how much employees pay per prescription or month. About a third of employers do this, according to the Pharmacy Benefit Management Institute. The Trump administration has proposed similar limits for Medicare Part D plans.

Sens. Cory Booker, D-N.J., Bob Casey, D-Pa., and Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., along with Reps. Elijah Cummings, D-Md., and Lloyd Doggett, D-Texas, have introduced legislation that would let consumers legally order drugs approved by the Food and Drug Administration from Canada. Consumers Union, the advocacy division of Consumer Reports, supports that legislation.

CASE 2

An Old Drug Shoots Up in Price

When Cheryl Kennedy's 4-year-old daughter was diagnosed with pinworm, her doctor prescribed a drug called Albenza. A few years ago, an Albenza prescription cost \$6. But when Kennedy's daughter was prescribed the drug, the price was nearly \$700, even with insurance.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Some drugs, such as Albenza, are prescribed so infrequently that when their patent expires, no company applies to the FDA to make a low-cost generic version. But a few years ago some drug companies started seeing a business opportunity in these overlooked drugs and began purchasing the rights to them—then jacking up the prices. That's what happened in 2015 in the highly publicized case of Martin Shkreli, then the CEO of Turing Pharmaceuticals. He bought the rights to the

CASE 2

"I asked my doctor for an alternative. \$700 seemed **absurd.**"

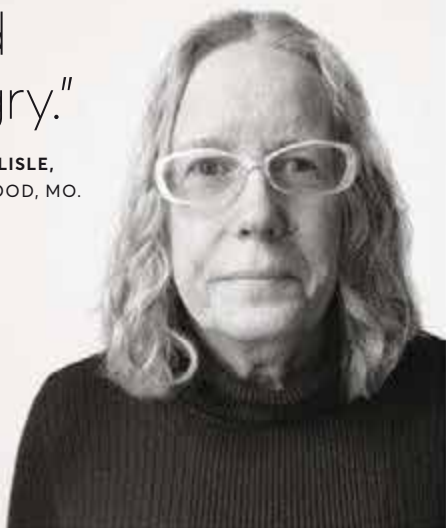
CHERYL KENNEDY,
CHICAGO



CASE 3

"When I found out my new drug was \$600, I was **shocked** and angry."

KIWI CARLISLE,
MAPLEWOOD, MO.



antiparasitic drug Daraprim—and raised the price from \$13.50 a pill to \$750.

YOUR SOLVE

Ask your doctor whether a related but less expensive drug is an option. When Kennedy asked, her doctor suggested trying Reese's Pinworm Medicine, an over-the-counter drug that cost less than \$15. It worked.

LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

Consumers Union supports legislation called the CREATES Act that would help make generic versions of a brand-name drug available more quickly. In addition, Rep. Lloyd Doggett of Texas has urged the Health and Human Services Department to consider large price hikes in meds that were developed with public funds as a reason to use the agency's "march-in" rights. That law

allows companies to make generic versions of otherwise very expensive drugs. CU supports that measure.

CASE 3

A Cheap Generic Becomes Pricey

When Kiwi Carlisle's migraines began to worsen, her nurse practitioner switched her from generic Topamax to a new drug, Qudexy XR. Both contain the drug topiramate. But Qudexy XR is a new version, tweaked by a drugmaker to come in a larger dose that is released over time. The biggest difference is the price—less than \$15 for the old generic and about \$600 for the newly branded one. Because

Carlisle has no insurance and would have to pay full retail, she ended up not filling the prescription at all.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Drugmakers often tweak older drugs, then apply for a new patent, allowing them to charge more for the "improved" product. But those changes are often minor—a slightly larger dose, or time-released—and the new drugs aren't much better than the original.

Sometimes generic drug prices spike in another way: not in higher costs for new "branded" drugs but in skyrocketing prices of the original generic. About 20 percent of generics have had price hikes of at least 100 percent between 2013 and 2017, according to an analysis by the Drug Channels Institute, a consulting firm.

That includes basic meds such as the antibiotic tetracycline, the diabetes drug metformin, and the blood pressure drug captopril. Those increases can occur when several drug companies stop making a generic, and the ones that still do take advantage of the reduced competition to charge more, according to a report from the Government Accountability Office.

The net result for consumers is a double-whammy: higher costs for old standbys and expensive, newly branded meds that may not be necessary or covered by insurance.

YOUR SOLVE

Ask your doctor whether an older drug would work just as well. For example, Carlisle plans to ask her healthcare provider to switch back to generic topiramate but get two prescriptions: one for 100 mg and another for 50 mg. The combined cost: about \$24 through the price-comparison tool GoodRx. Or if you really want to stick with the tweaked, more expensive prescription, enlist your doctor's help in appealing to your employer, insurer, or state board of insurance, explaining why that version is medically necessary.

POTENTIAL SNAGS

Keep this in mind: If you have insurance but choose not to use



National Save Money on Your Meds Week

Consumer Reports is calling for the second week of April—the 7th to the 14th—to be National Save Money on Your Meds Week. We're urging consumers to bring their prescription meds to their local pharmacy that week to ask for the lowest possible price. CR's shoppers found that can be surprisingly effective.

it and shop around instead, the amount you spend won't count toward your deductible or out-of-pocket maximum.

LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

Consumers Union and other advocacy groups have supported legal action by the Federal Trade Commission to stop companies from using tweaks to their older medication as a reason to extend patents. And a new Maryland law allows the state to sue drug companies that jack up prices of generic and off-patent drugs. Other states, including Colorado, Illinois, and Vermont, are also looking into ways to rein in price gouging.

CASE 4

A Drug Costs More With Insurance

In early 2018 Murray Bob, a 67-year-old computer software developer in Acton, Mass., was surprised to find that a prescription for generic Xanax cost almost \$40 more with a Medicare Part D drug plan than without it if he shopped at the online pharmacy HealthWarehouse.com.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Bob could be experiencing a "clawback." That's when companies called pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs), which act as go-betweens for drugmakers and pharmacies, set higher prices on meds than drugstores.

When asked to explain clawbacks, the Pharmaceutical Care Management Association, which represents PBMs, didn't comment directly, saying only, "We support the patient paying the lowest price available at the pharmacy counter."

Critics of the practice are more direct. "It borders on fraud," says Stephen W.

Schondelmeyer, a professor of pharmaceutical economics at the University of Minnesota. He describes clawbacks as unnecessary, hidden charges that end up costing consumers.

YOUR SOLVE

Ask your pharmacist how much you would pay if you didn't use insurance, suggests Victor Curtis of Costco. Pharmacists usually won't offer up such insider information without prodding because contracts between a drugstore chain and a PBM may have a "gag clause" that prohibits him or her from sharing that information.

POTENTIAL SNAG

Again, if you don't use your insurance, what you spend won't count toward your deductible or out-of-pocket maximum.

LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

Arkansas, Connecticut, Georgia,

Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, Nevada, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Texas have banned clawbacks, gag clauses, or both, according to the National Community Pharmacists Association. CU is working on getting similar measures passed in other states.

CASE 5

Mail-Order Drugs Are More Costly

We recently searched for the price of two common drugs—generic Lipitor, a cholesterol med, and generic Cymbalta, an antidepressant—using the Plan

Finder tool at medicare.gov and noticed something curious. In some cases, it costs more to have the prescriptions mailed to you than filled in person at a pharmacy. In one plan, for example, a full year's worth of both prescriptions would cost \$577 through the mail but only \$341 in a store.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Some plans require or strongly encourage you to fill all your maintenance meds—those you take for chronic conditions—through mail order. While that can sometimes save you money, it often doesn't. When the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) looked into the cost of 50 common drugs in 2013, they found that with over a third of the plans they looked at, drugs cost more through the mail than at

CASE 4

"Overcharging consumers even small amounts can harm people and **waste millions** of dollars."

MURRAY BOB,
ACTON, MASS.



a store. And this March, in an analysis for Consumer Reports, the National Community Pharmacists Association found the same pattern for common medications with certain plans in nine U.S. cities.

YOUR SOLVE

When signing up for health plans, look for ones that don't force you to use mail order for your maintenance meds. Plans that do "often cost more," Schondelmeyer says.

If you're choosing a Medicare Part D or Affordable Care Act plan, a retail pharmacy is always an option. But employers can mandate mail-order-only pharmacies. In that case, Schondelmeyer says to complain to your HR department. If it hears from enough employees, it may look for another option.

LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

New York prohibits mandatory mail order in insurance plans. Consumers Union would like other states to adopt the same restriction.



Medicare Patients Face a Price Spike

Robert Marchant from Deltona, Fla., says that late last year his monthly cost for Zetia, a cholesterol drug, suddenly shot up to \$124 from \$45. "Unexpected cost increases while on Social Security and Medicare are a real budget disaster," he says.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Medicare Part D, the government drug plan for people 65 and older, usually functions like other insurance, with an annual deductible plus monthly premiums and co-pays. But that changes when annual drug costs, including out-of-pocket bills and what the plan pays a pharmacy, reach \$3,750. At that point, you have to pay a higher percentage—35 percent for branded drugs and 44 percent for generics—until they hit \$5,000 in annual costs. After that, you qualify for "catastrophic coverage," when you'll pay considerably less—just 5 percent—for the rest of the year. That gap in coverage is known as the "donut hole."

YOUR SOLVE

Try to stay out of the higher-priced zone, says Frederic

Riccardi, vice president of client services for the Medicare Rights Center, a nonprofit organization that helps people manage their plans. Here's how:

- Compare plans before you enroll. When you first sign up near your 65th birthday or during open enrollment in the fall, go to medicare.gov/find-a-plan or call 800-MEDICARE to see how well different plans cover the drugs you take and whether you're likely to go over \$3,750 in drug costs.
- Consider an enhanced Medicare Part D plan that doesn't have the donut hole. These plans tend to have higher premiums, but if a coverage gap is likely, the extra cost may be worthwhile.
- Apply for help. Medicare and many states help cover premiums and co-pays for people with low incomes. For details, go to medicare.gov and click on "Get Help With Costs."
- Appeal. If your plan doesn't cover your drug, appeal. For advice on how, go to medicare.gov/claims-and-appeals.
- Keep drug costs low. That means taking such steps as asking for generics, using 90-day prescriptions, and shopping around for deals.

LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

Under Congress's most recent budget, starting next year consumers who wind up in the donut hole will have to pay only 25 percent of their drug costs.

Also, some consumers with Part D coverage may start to see discounts when they fill a prescription. CMS is suggesting that pharmacy benefit managers redirect some of the rebates they currently receive from drug companies to consumers. But it's unclear when that might happen.

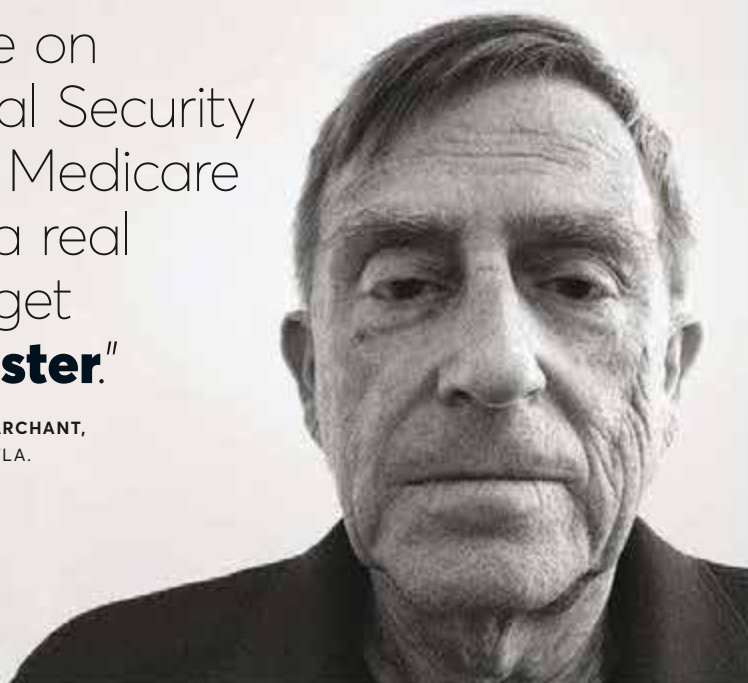
CU thinks that CMS should be able to use its purchasing power to negotiate with drug companies to get lower prices for those on Medicare.

Additional reporting by Ginger Skinner and Rachel Rabkin Peachman.

CASE 6

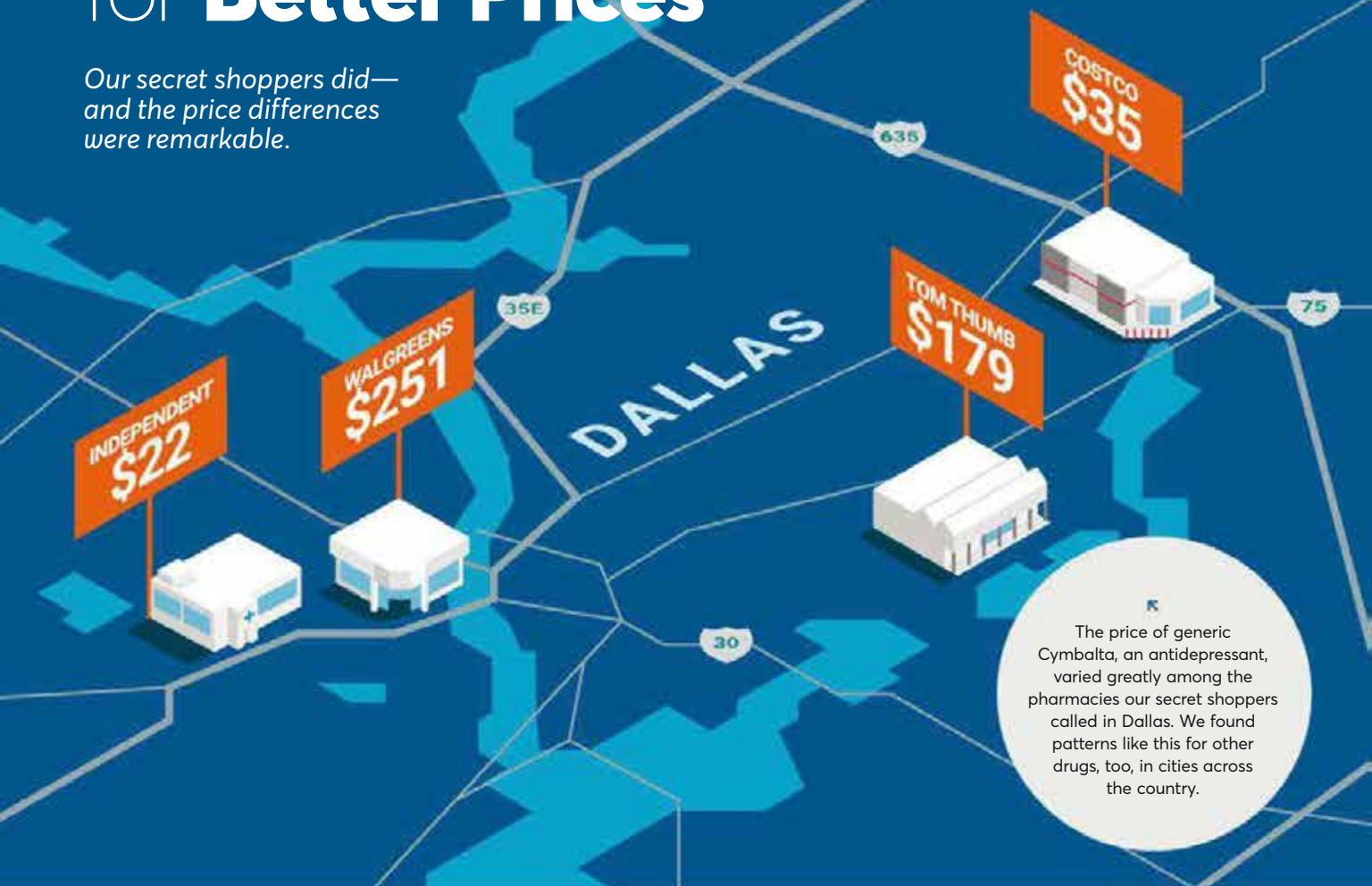
"Unexpected cost increases while on Social Security and Medicare are a real budget disaster."

ROBERT MARCHANT,
DELTONA, FLA.



Shop Around for **Better Prices**

Our secret shoppers did—and the price differences were remarkable.



S

SHOPPING AROUND FOR prescription drugs can save you a lot of money. And doing so can sometimes mean that the least expensive option is paying the retail price instead of going through your insurance, a Consumer Reports investigation found.

Our secret shoppers called more than 150 pharmacies in six metropolitan regions around the U.S. asking for

their retail cash prices for a one-month supply of five commonly prescribed drugs—basically the prices a consumer would pay without insurance.

The range in prices that they found was stunning. The five-drug “marketbasket” cost just \$66 at the online pharmacy HealthWarehouse.com but \$105 at Costco. The two highest-priced national retailers—CVS and Rite Aid—had prices closer to \$900 for the five drugs.

Victor Curtis, R.Ph., senior vice president of pharmacy at Costco, says, “We just price products as low as we possibly can and still make a modest profit.” Costco does that, he says, by

offering a no-frills experience, with no 24-hour service and pharmacies closed on Sundays.

When we asked CVS and Rite Aid about their comparatively higher prices, representatives for each explained that there are in-store programs that can help lower prices for people who don’t have insurance.

But when we brought new prescriptions to CVS and Rite Aid to verify what we were told, we got mixed results. Staff members at some pharmacies used store coupons and other vouchers to offer our shoppers much lower prices; others provided

modest discounts or none at all.

For example, a Rite Aid store near our headquarters in Yonkers, N.Y., was able to get the price of atorvastatin, the generic version of Lipitor, down to just \$18 from \$300 through a combination of in-store and external discount programs.

But at another Rite Aid, we were told the cost could only be lowered to \$127.

And while one CVS used discounts to lower our shopper’s cost by about \$86, another said that we had to pay the store’s full retail price of \$135.

When asked to comment on the different experiences our shoppers

had at the two CVS stores, a company spokesperson, Mike DeAngelis, said that the pharmacy chain is now introducing new tools to make it easier for its pharmacists to help patients lower their high drug costs. He also said that CVS is educating staff members “in order to provide a consistent customer experience across our locations.”

A spokesperson for Rite Aid, Ashley Flower, said the company couldn’t explain the different experiences our shoppers had without talking with the pharmacy staff who actually helped them at each location.

Why It Pays to Shop Around

Shopping around for drugs is clearly important if you’re among the 9 percent of U.S. adults, or roughly 28 million people, who don’t have health insurance and must pay all of their drug costs and other healthcare expenses, says Orly Avitzur, M.D., Consumer Reports’ medical director. But it can be worth the effort even when you are insured.

That’s because we found that the lowest retail prices in pharmacies can sometimes be a better deal than using insurance, especially in the case of drugs that aren’t covered well.

Which Pharmacies Have the Best Rx Prices?

To find out, Consumer Reports’ secret shoppers called more than 150 drugstores across the U.S.—representing dozens of chain pharmacies, supermarket drugstores, and independent pharmacies—to compare prices for five commonly

prescribed generic drugs. They included the diabetes drug pioglitazone (generic Actos, 30 mg); the painkiller celecoxib (generic Celebrex, 200 mg); the antidepressant duloxetine (generic Cymbalta, 20 mg); the cholesterol

medication atorvastatin (generic Lipitor, 20 mg); and clopidogrel (generic Plavix, 75 mg), a blood thinner. The chart shows average discounted retail prices that pharmacies quoted for a one-month supply.

RETAILER	Pioglitazone <i>Actos</i>	Celecoxib <i>Celebrex</i>	Duloxetine <i>Cymbalta</i>	Atorvastatin <i>Lipitor</i>	Clopidogrel <i>Plavix</i>	TOTAL PRICE
HealthWarehouse.com	\$12	\$22	\$13	\$10	\$10	\$66
Costco ^[1]	\$16	\$26	\$35	\$13	\$16	\$105
Independents ^[2]	\$19 <i>\$10–\$493</i>	\$34 <i>\$11–\$295</i>	\$31 <i>\$20–\$267</i>	\$15 <i>\$8–\$197</i>	\$15 <i>\$8–\$260</i>	\$107 <i>\$69–\$1,351</i>
Sam’s Club ^[1]	\$20	\$38	\$31	\$20	\$45	\$153
Walmart	\$132	\$203	\$123	\$30	\$30	\$518
Kmart	\$160	\$185	\$120	\$35	\$35	\$535
Grocery Stores ^[3]	\$113 <i>\$10–\$349</i>	\$189 <i>\$46–\$250</i>	\$170 <i>\$13–\$223</i>	\$32 <i>\$11–\$71</i>	\$36 <i>\$7–\$224</i>	\$565 <i>\$88–\$1,117</i>
Walgreens	\$167	\$204	\$251	\$65	\$65	\$752
Rite Aid	\$255	\$194	\$170	\$128	\$119	\$866
CVS/Target	\$270	\$187	\$195	\$135	\$141	\$928

[1] Nonmember prices. [2] Prices in italics are the ranges across sampled stores. [3] Prices in italics are the ranges of the averages across sampled stores, including Albertsons, Food Lion, Giant Eagle, H-E-B, Hy-Vee, Kroger, Publix, and others.

Yet many people seem unaware of how effective shopping around can be. In a recent CR survey, only 22 percent of current prescription drug takers who had paid more for their medication in the previous year said they comparison shopped for a better deal.

A caveat: If you have insurance but opt not to use it for your prescription drugs, the money you spend won't count toward your deductible or your out-of-pocket maximum.

Save on Meds in 3 Easy Steps

By calling around and asking a lot of questions, our secret shoppers also identified several strategies that may help lower your drug costs.

Those questions included whether retailers would honor discounts found online (generally, yes) and match the lowest retail prices offered by nearby competitors (usually not).

CR staff also went to pharmacies in New York state to fill prescriptions and gain more insight about the in-store experience. We learned that it pays to do some research ahead of time, and when appropriate, ask some very direct questions of the pharmacist. Here's our best advice:

STEP 1 Find and use online discounts.

Start by trying GoodRx, Blink Health, or WeRx.org. They will ask for the name of the drug, the dose, the number of pills, and where you live. Then they will show what you can expect to pay at various pharmacies if you use their discount coupons or vouchers, which you can print out or download to your phone to show a pharmacist.

STEP 2 Widen your scope of where to shop for drugs.

HealthWarehouse.com, an online pharmacy, had the lowest prices for our marketbasket of meds. Keep in mind that it won't fill certain prescriptions, including Adderall and opioids like Vicodin.

Costco and Sam's Club consistently

had low overall prices and could be even cheaper with online coupons. (You don't have to be a member to get those low prices, but if you do join—\$60 at Costco and \$100 at Sam's Club—you could save even more.)

Also consider independent and grocery-store pharmacies. Prescription drug prices do vary greatly there, with some being very expensive. But the absolute lowest prices we found in each city we called were almost always at these kinds of stores.

STEP 3 Ask a pharmacy directly whether it will honor discount online coupons.

Our shoppers learned that pharmacies will almost always honor them—but you may need to be persistent. Pharmacists tend to run prescriptions through insurance automatically, even when paying retail cash price and using discount coupons would cost less.

There are in-store discounts, but they're rarely applied unless you ask for them specifically. Third-party online discount coupons tend to be even deeper and more attractive. So ask for "all available" discounts, and then make sure to get the best option. Otherwise, pharmacists may simply use your insurance or, if you don't have insurance, offer you a smaller in-store discount or even charge you the full retail price.

We found that it's probably not worth asking if they will match the low prices offered at another store. None of the stores our secret shoppers contacted agreed to do that.

Once you settle on a pharmacy that consistently offers good deals on medication, fill all your prescriptions there. That makes it easier for pharmacists to spot potentially dangerous interactions and other safety concerns. But if you find that your drug costs start rising noticeably, it may be time to start the process all over again and find another primary retailer.

Additional reporting by Ginger Skinner and Rachel Rabkin Peachman.



WHERE WE STAND

You deserve affordable medication

No American should have to choose between filling a prescription and paying for food or rent, situations we have heard about over and over again from readers.

Consumers Union, the advocacy division of Consumer Reports, is working to ease that burden by identifying and promoting meaningful reform. Specifically, we believe that all consumers have certain rights in the marketplace:

They should have access to medication that is safe, effective, and affordable.

They should be able to safely purchase medication approved by the Food and Drug Administration from other countries, such as Canada, where drugs are of good quality and cost significantly less.

When insurance denies coverage of a drug, consumers should have clear, timely, and simple ways to appeal.

They should easily be able to determine the lowest price for a drug, meaning that "gag clauses" that now prohibit pharmacists from telling shoppers of less costly options should be made illegal. This is starting to happen, state by state, across the U.S.

And insurers shouldn't be able to raise prices or stop covering a drug during a plan year.

Want to help us fight for a fairer, safer world? Share your story and join our efforts to lower high drug costs, at [CR.org/highdrugcosts](https://www.consumersunion.org/cr.org/highdrugcosts).

Chill Out

Research shows that frozen veggies don't deserve their bad rap for being less nutritious than fresh.



Beyond Peas and Carrots

From mashed cauliflower to broccoli tots, consumers now have more tasty and healthy choices in the frozen food case.

by **Jesse Hirsch**

AS FARMERS MARKET season heads into full swing, you may find yourself dreaming about freshly picked ears of corn, peas in their pods, and tender asparagus spears. So why would anyone want to hear about frozen veggies now?

For starters, it's not always easy to find—or afford—what you want in the supermarket produce aisle. And how many of us have gleefully scooped up a basket's worth of goodies only to find that we didn't have time to prepare a meal fast enough before the bounty wilted in the crisper drawer?

No matter how you get your veggies, we all need to get more: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that only about 1 in 10 Americans consumes his or her daily recommended amounts of veggies (3½ and 2½ cups, respectively). Frozen produce, of course, also cuts down the prep and cook time.

That's why veggie lovers will be cheered to learn about the greater number of inventive new frozen offerings. You'll find veggies that are mashed, riced, roasted, and spiralized, as well as mixed with grains and

beans. There's also a cost advantage: Data from the Department of Agriculture show typically higher average prices for fresh produce, with some items (cauliflower, for one) significantly cheaper in frozen form.

Consumer Reports' food testers sampled a variety of frozen vegetable products, rating them for nutrition, flavor, and texture. Some innovations missed the mark in terms of taste, and others lost points for excess sodium or other concerns. But overall, our testing team found plenty of products to be both healthy and tasty.

A Nutritional New Day

It's a long-held belief that anything not fresh can't possibly be good for you. But when it comes to frozen vegetables, recent research shows that's not the case. Culinary scientist Ali Bouzari, Ph.D., led a study at University of California, Davis, in which his team tested eight hand-harvested items—blueberries, broccoli, carrots, corn, green beans, peas, spinach, and strawberries. They then flash-froze half

of the bounty and stored the other half in typical industry conditions for fresh produce. The researchers periodically tested the content of 11 nutrients in both the fresh and frozen produce.

Comparing like fruits and vegetables with like, there was little difference in nutrient content overall. In some cases, fresh items were slightly better; in others, frozen items had a slight edge. Nutritionally speaking, “good frozen produce is essentially a head-to-head toss-up with good fresh produce,” Bouzari says.

Crazy for Cauliflower

If you're browsing the supermarket frozen veggie aisle, you may be surprised by the wealth of cauliflower in the cases. What's up with that?

According to Kara Nielsen, culinary trends analyst at the marketing firm CCD Innovation, cauliflower has become de rigueur at trendy restaurants in the past few years. “It's the next kale,” she says. Cauliflower mania has spread to home cooks, with sales of products containing the

cruciferous vegetable rising 71 percent in the last year, according to market research firm Nielsen.

The cauliflower craze, says Kara Nielsen, took hold when paleo dieters and other carb-averse eaters discovered that processing it into small, rice-shaped pieces could create a substitute for carb-heavy items like potatoes and rice. The new diet star—bagged, riced cauliflower—became a supermarket fixture, both in the produce and the freezer aisles. Broccoli, sweet potatoes, and other vegetables in “riced” form soon followed suit.

Riced cauliflower fared particularly well in our tests. The four products that were rated Excellent overall each contain riced cauliflower. “It’s a fairly versatile ingredient,” says Maxine Siegel, R.D., who heads CR’s food-testing lab. “It has enough flavor that you could eat it on its own, but riced cauliflower can also replace some of the rice in recipes.” Mashed cauliflower also got high marks.

Though your healthiest option will always be to buy plain veggies and season them yourself, one of our recommended products was preseasoned. Green Giant Riced Veggies Cauliflower with Lemon & Garlic got a high nutrition score in part because it

contained no added salt, but our tasters also rated it highly for its fresh lemony flavor. “It goes to show that it is possible to have a low-sodium packaged product that tastes good,” Siegel says.

Birds Eye Veggie Made Mashed Cauliflower Original and Alexia Mashed Cauliflower with Sea Salt had their nutrition ratings dinged for rather high (470 and 460 mg, respectively) sodium counts. But they were the only products in our test to earn an Excellent rating for taste.

From Spirals to Tots

Spiralized veggies—low-calorie, low-carb substitutions for pasta—are also big news in the frozen food aisle. It’s not surprising: Spiralizing from scratch takes time and specialized kitchen equipment. For fans of these, we found that the frozen packaged Carrot Spirals from Trader Joe’s received one of our highest nutrition and sensory scores. (Green Giant recently released a spiralized frozen veggie line, but the items were not available in time for our tests.)

Also popping up in the freezer section are veggie “tots”—similar to kids’ fried potato tots but with other vegetables inside. “They do beat potato tots nutritionally. Some are lower in calories, fat, and sodium,

and higher in fiber,” Siegel says. Of the three in our tests, the Green Giant Veggie Tots Broccoli got the highest Overall Score. But they’re not twins to kids’ beloved potato versions: According to Siegel, the broccoli filling was flavorful, but the texture was mushy, unlike typical tots.

Powering Up the Protein

Consumers looking to bump up their plant protein intake will also find frozen blends of vegetables, grains, and beans. We found these to be of varying quality. Sodium was a problem, but for Birds Eye Steamfresh Protein Blends California Style—which received Very Good nutrition and taste scores—its 12 grams of fiber and protein per cup compensated for the 450 mg of sodium.

The most disappointing innovation: The line of roasted vegetables from Green Giant. Siegel says her team had high hopes for the concept because roasting brings out vegetables’ sweetness, and having a frozen option means that you can skip the time-consuming process of roasting them yourself. But most of these frozen roasted veggies were barely edible, with a smoky, ashy flavor, according to our tasters.

Should You Swallow the Health Claims on Packages?

It’s common to see lots of exciting-sounding health promises on food packages at the supermarket, and frozen vegetables are no exception. But a little skepticism is in order.

“I’m all for touting the benefits of vegetables if it convinces people to eat more of them,” says Consumer Reports nutritionist Amy Keating, R.D. “But you don’t know how meaningful the claims are unless you check the nutrition facts panel on the back of the package.”

SUSS OUT THE SODIUM.


“If a product is seasoned or in sauce, it likely contains added salt,” Keating says. Birds Eye Veggie Made Mashed Cauliflower, for example, says on its packaging: “50% fewer carbs than the leading mashed potato brand,” but it also has 470 mg of sodium in just ½ cup. A healthy sodium level for a vegetable side dish is 140 mg or less.

CHECK THE CALORIES.

Green Giant Riced Veggies Cauliflower & Sweet Potato claims to be a “reduced calorie food” and a “good alternative to potatoes, pasta, or rice.” While true, these statements may give you the impression that those foods are packed with calories. But 1 cup of skinless baked potato has just 114 calories, for example, and 1 cup of cooked pasta just 200—higher than the 50 in 1 cup of the cauliflower/sweet potato product but certainly not a calorie bomb.

BE SURE ABOUT THE SUGARS.

Birds Eye Steamfresh Superfood Blends Quinoa & Spinach is claimed to be a good source of antioxidant vitamins, but it also has 10 grams of total sugars per cup. A little of that may come from the sugars naturally present in the veggies, but the majority is likely from the dried cranberries and sugars added to the sauce, Keating says.



HANOVER BLENDED
PROTEINS STEAM-IN-BAG
SICILIAN STYLE

64 OVERALL
SCORE



✓ GREEN GIANT
RICED VEGGIES
CAULIFLOWER

85 OVERALL
SCORE



BIRDS EYE
STEAMFRESH
SUPERFOOD BLENDS
BARLEY & KALE

72 OVERALL
SCORE

5 COOKING TIPS FROM CR'S COOKING PROS

It's important to cook your frozen foods so that they maintain their nutritional integrity and taste their best. Here, tips from Consumer Reports' nutritionists Amy Keating and Ellen Klosz.

1. DON'T THAW FIRST.

Cooking your vegetables straight from the frozen state (photo upper left) is the best way to maintain their texture. Also, frozen veggies aren't intended to be served raw, like on a crudité plate.

2. COOK IN AS LITTLE WATER AS POSSIBLE.

The veggies' valuable nutrients can leach out if you use too much water. Steaming and microwaving require little or no water. If you opt for a pot, use a cover (as shown) so that the veggies heat through faster.

3. MIX & MATCH.

Sure, veggies make for a healthy side dish—and vegetable grain and bean blends (photo lower left) can even be served as the main meal—but you can also incorporate them into soups, casseroles, rice dishes, and more. Veggies not only provide layers of complexity but also boost the health factor of, say, mac 'n' cheese or other pasta dishes.

4. STEP AWAY FROM THE SALT SHAKER.

Extra sodium can detract from the health benefits of your veggies, so get creative with seasonings such as pepper flakes, garlic, citrus zest or juice, herbs, or even a splash of balsamic vinegar.

5. SWAP YOUR CHEESE.

Instead of goopy cheddar cheese sauce, sprinkle Parmesan or Romano on your veggies. These cheeses pack a powerful flavor punch, so a little goes a long way.

Ratings > **What's Hot in Frozen Veggies** You'll find more choices in your supermarket. But choose carefully, because flavor and texture can vary widely.

CAULIFLOWER



Recommended	Product	Overall Score	Rating		Nutrition Information										Price	Flavor & Texture Description
			Nutrition score	Sensory score	Serving size (cup)	Calories	Fat (g)	Saturated fat (g)	Protein (g)	Carbohydrates (g)	Fiber (g)	Sugars (g)	Sodium (mg)	Average price per package/Package size (oz.)		
CAULIFLOWER																
\$	1	Green Giant Riced Veggies Cauliflower	85	↑	↑	1	20	0	0	2	4	2	2	20	\$3.00 12	Larger bits of plain cauliflower, mild flavor. Slightly firm and chewy.
\$	2	Green Giant Riced Veggies Cauliflower with Lemon & Garlic	84	↑	↑	1	30	0	0	2	5	2	2	20	\$3.50 12	Small cauliflower bits, with fresh-tasting lemon zest and parsley. Slightly chewy, like rice.
	3	Birds Eye Veggie Made Mashed Cauliflower Original	76	↓	↑	½	50	3	2	2	6	3	2	470	\$4.00 12	Tastes like cauliflower, but the texture, black pepper, and cream make it mashed-potatolike.
	4	Birds Eye Steamfresh Veggie Made Riced Cauliflower Original	73	↑	↑	¾	25	0	0	2	3	2	2	210	\$3.00 10	Small bits of plain cauliflower. Slight natural sweetness. Chewy, like rice.
	5	Hanover Steam-in-Bag Riced Cauliflower Garlic & Herb	70	↑	↑	1	40	1.5	0	2	6	2	3	150	\$2.00 10	Pieces are larger than other riced products. Slight garlic, black pepper, and herb flavors. Slightly chewy texture.
	6	Green Giant Mashed Cauliflower Original with Olive Oil & Sea Salt	69	↓	↑	½	80	5	1.5	3	7	2	3	380	\$5.00 20	Has dairy flavor, a hint of cheese, very slight garlic, and slight white pepper. Creamy.
	7	Alexia Cauliflower Risotto with Parmesan Cheese & Sea Salt	68	↓	↑	½	80	4.5	3	3	6	2	2	410	\$4.00 12	Cauliflower bits with buttery, cheesy flavors, and slight garlic and herbs. Chewy texture, like rice.
	8	Alexia Mashed Cauliflower with Sea Salt	67	↓	↑	½	70	3.5	2	1	7	2	2	460	\$4.00 12	Richly flavored with butter and cream. Strong cauliflower taste. Creamy.
	9	Trader Joe's Mashed Cauliflower	56	↓	↓	½	50	2	1	2	7	2	3	270	\$3.00 16	A bit bland with a slight milk flavor and slight white pepper. Cauliflower bits throughout.
	10	Green Giant Veggie Tots Cauliflower	54	↓	↓	½	110	4.5	0.5	2	15	5	2	370	\$4.00 16	Mild and slightly bitter. Somewhat crispy coating with a pronounced oily flavor. Slightly mushy filling with chewy bits.
MIXED VEGETABLES																
\$	1	Green Giant Riced Veggies Cauliflower Risotto Medley	85	↑	↑	1	20	0	0	2	4	2	2	15	\$3.50 12	Small bits of cauliflower, asparagus, and mushrooms; amounts varied in the tested samples. Slightly chewy, like rice.
\$	2	Green Giant Riced Veggies Cauliflower & Sweet Potato	84	↑	↑	1	50	0	0	2	11	2	3	15	\$3.50 12	A little more sweet potato than cauliflower flavor. Slightly chewy, like rice.
✓	3	Birds Eye Steamfresh Protein Blends California Style	74	↑	↑	1	240	4.5	0	12	38	12	3	450	\$3.00 10.8	Mix of peas, edamame, lentils, and whole grains. Slight garlic and onion flavors; moderate heat. Pleasantly chewy texture.
	4	Birds Eye Steamfresh Superfood Blends Barley & Kale	72	↑	↓	1	160	2.3	0.3	6	27	6	4.7	387	\$3.50 10	Mix of broccoli, carrots, kidney beans, kale, barley, and brown rice. Lightly seasoned with garlic and tangy flavor from vinegar. Slightly bitter. Pleasantly chewy texture.

PHOTOS: JOHN WALSH



Recommended	Product	Overall Score	Rating		Nutrition Information										Price	Flavor & Texture Description
			Nutrition score	Sensory score	Serving size (cup)	Calories	Fat (g)	Saturated fat (g)	Protein (g)	Carbohydrates (g)	Fiber (g)	Sugars (g)	Sodium (mg)	Average price per package/Package size (oz.)		
5	Birds Eye Steamfresh Superfood Blends Quinoa & Spinach	71	↑	↑	1	207	3.3	0.7	6	38	4	10	387	\$3.50 10	Brown rice and quinoa with spinach, red peppers, and dried cranberries in a slightly sweet and tangy sauce. Moist and chewy.	
6	Green Giant Steamers Healthy Weight Sauced Vegetable Blend	70	↑	↓	¾	90	2.5	1	5	14	5	3	220	\$2.00 7	Carrots, black beans, edamame, and snow peas in a light butter sauce. Soft texture.	
7	Birds Eye Steamfresh Protein Blends Italian Style	70	↑	↓	1	270	4.5	1.5	12	45	12	2	450	\$3.00 11.5	Mix of broccoli, white beans, lentils, spinach, whole grains with nutmeg flavor, slight garlic, and very slight dairy note. Pleasantly chewy texture.	
8	Trader Joe's Riced Cauliflower Stir Fry	69	↓	↑	1	50	2	0	2	7	2	3	190	\$3.00 16	Mix of cauliflower bits, roasted corn, red peppers, green onions, and peas with tamar (soy) flavor. Overall flavorful and well-blended. Pleasantly chewy texture.	
9	Green Giant Mashed Cauliflower Broccoli & Cheese	68	↓	↑	½	90	5	3	3	8	2	2	430	\$5.00 20	Broccoli flavor dominates. Milk and cheese flavors come through. Moderately salty with slight garlic. Some small lumps.	
10	Hanover Blended Proteins Steam-in-Bag Sicilian Style	64	↑	↓	1	213	4.7	0.7	13	30	12	3.3	133	\$3.00 10.5	Blend of navy beans, peas, edamame, and a few red bell pepper pieces with kale in a tomato paste sauce. The slightly firm beans contribute to a dryness overall.	
11	Birds Eye Steamfresh Protein Blends New England Style	64	↑	↓	1	260	4	1.5	11	46	12	4	500	\$3.00 11.2	Lentils, potatoes, corn, red beans, green beans, and bulgur with flavors of garlic, slight onion, black pepper, and cheese. Pleasantly chewy texture.	
12	Green Giant Veggie Tots Broccoli	63	↓	↓	½	110	4.5	0.5	3	15	6	1	370	\$4.00 16	Browned, slightly crispy outer coating with a moist, soft, slightly mushy filling. Flavorful, seasoned with onion and garlic.	
13	Green Giant Steamers Antioxidant Blend with Broccoli, Carrots, and Peppers	60	↑	↓	¾	50	3	0	1	7	2	3	115	\$2.00 7	Broccoli, carrots, and red and yellow peppers in a mild sauce with slight garlic and dehydrated spice flavors. Soft texture.	
14	Green Giant Veggie Tots Sweet Potato & Cauliflower	59	↓	↓	½	150	5	0	2	24	5	4	340	\$4.00 16	Browned, slightly crispy outer coating with soft sweet potato and cauliflower pieces. Strong sweet potato flavor with a hint of black pepper. Sweet and slightly bitter.	
15	Alexia Riced Vegetable Pilaf with Sea Salt	58	↓	↑	½	40	2	1	1	5	2	1	420	\$4.00 12	Small bits of cauliflower and butternut squash. Peppery, with some heat, and slight onion, garlic, and buttery notes. Mild vegetable flavors. Overall slightly chewy texture, like rice.	

HOW WE TEST: CR's nutrition and food-testing team rated frozen vegetables for nutrition and taste qualities. The **Nutrition score** is based on energy density

(calories per gram), total fat, saturated fat, fiber, sugars, sodium, and other nutrients. **Sensory score** (taste and texture) is based on the

results of a blind tasting by a trained sensory panel. The **Overall Score** is a combination of the two. **NOTE:** For the most part, the serving sizes are what's listed on

the product package, but for a few our testers modified some recommended portion sizes for comparison purposes.

Road Test

We conduct more than 50 tests on each vehicle at our 327-acre Auto Test Center. For complete road tests, go to CR.org/cars.



King of the Road Trip

The massive Ford Expedition is best suited for the open highway, with family onboard and trailer in tow.

THE FORD EXPEDITION makes a leap forward with this redesign, shedding weight while adding comfort, convenience, and optional safety features.

The extended-length version we tested measures about a foot longer than the standard Expedition and competes directly against the Chevrolet Suburban. That extra size allows for significant cargo space behind the adult-friendly third-row seat, but it also makes parking a challenge.

The 375-hp, 3.5-liter turbocharged V6 engine

catapults this coach easily. Maximum towing capacity is a competitive 9,300 pounds, enough to pull a large trailer. Overall fuel economy is up 2 mpg to 16, typical for this thirsty class.

The ride is composed but on the stiff side—definitely not as comfortable as other three-row SUVs such as the Chevrolet Traverse. The Expedition has ponderous handling but remains under control even when pushed to its limits.

The Expedition's optional retractable running boards are helpful given the step-in height. The driver's seat is like sitting in a living room reading chair. The controls are simple to use, including the rotary dial gear selector.

It has plenty of room in the second row, as well as dedicated climate controls and storage.

Forward-collision warning and automatic braking aren't standard equipment, despite the premium price.

LARGE SUVs

Ford Expedition

OVERALL SCORE

65

ROAD-TEST SCORE 73

HIGHS

Acceleration, quietness, controls, interior room

LOWS

Ride, access, handling

POWERTRAIN

375-hp, 3.5-liter V6 turbo engine; 10-speed automatic transmission; four-wheel drive

FUEL

16 mpg on regular fuel

PRICE AS TESTED

\$75,430



Large Lap of Luxury

The Lincoln Navigator handles like a barge, but its powerful engine and quiet cabin are impressive.

THE REDESIGNED NAVIGATOR differentiates itself from its Ford Expedition sibling by piling on the luxury touches. This hulking SUV can accommodate up to eight people, although it's so large it's probably overkill for most buyers—unless they need to tow upward of four tons.

The turbo V6 packs 411 hp on regular gas, and it's mated to a mostly smooth 10-speed automatic transmission. That abundant power scoots our four-wheel-drive Navigator to 60 mph in just 6.2 seconds. Its 16 mpg overall is on par with similar SUVs.

The continuously adjustable suspension handles bumps quite well except for some low-speed rocking, and the cabin stays whisper quiet. But its handling feels floaty and disconnected in turns. The SUV's imposing width means drivers need to take extra care on narrow streets.

The opulent cabin is full of leather, wood, and chrome, but we found the modern-looking front seats to be uncomfortable. In the back, however, the second-row captain's chairs are large and accommodating, and even the third row is spacious enough for adults.

Beginning any trip in the Navigator requires fiddling with the gear selector, an unintuitive row of chrome buttons on the dash. Most other controls are easy to use, including the Sync 3 infotainment system.

Forward-collision warning and automatic emergency braking aren't available on the Navigator's base trim.

LUXURY LARGE SUVs

Lincoln Navigator

OVERALL SCORE

59

ROAD-TEST SCORE 65

HIGHS

Quietness, acceleration, second- and third-row seat room

LOWS

Front-seat comfort, unintuitive gear selector, clumsy handling, access

POWERTRAIN

411-hp, 3.5-liter V6 turbo engine; 10-speed automatic transmission; four-wheel drive

FUEL

16 mpg on regular fuel

PRICE AS TESTED

\$86,480



Striving to Be Sporty

The **Kia Stinger** is an athletic performer, but it falls short when it comes to ride comfort.

KIA HAS BRANCHED into sports-sedan territory with its new four-door hatchback Stinger.

The 2.0-liter, 255-hp turbo four-cylinder engine, paired with optional all-wheel drive in the car we tested (rear-wheel drive is standard), is powerful, but at 7.5 seconds to 60 mph, it isn't as quick as some rivals. Worse, it gets a mediocre 23 mpg overall. The eight-speed automatic transmission is smooth and responsive.

An additional \$6,450 gets buyers the 365-hp turbo-V6 in the GT and higher trims.

When steering through

corners, the Stinger feels taut and agile, and it can be playful on the track. But the ride is overly stiff and unsettled when encountering bumps. Other performance sedans strike a better balance.

It can be a challenge to get in and out because of the car's low-slung design. Once inside, the front leather seats are comfortable and offer plenty of adjustments. The rear-seat space is hurt a bit by the sloping roofline, but the hatchback creates generous cargo space.

The controls are easy to use, but drivers may struggle with the faint labelling on buttons and a long reach to the infotainment screen. The electronic gear selector in the GT2 trim, which we also drove, can leave drivers confused about whether they're in Reverse or Park.

Optional safety features include forward-collision warning, automatic emergency braking, blind-spot warning, and rear cross-traffic warning.

LUXURY COMPACT CARS

Kia Stinger

OVERALL SCORE

69

ROAD-TEST SCORE 75

HIGHS

Handling, front-seat comfort, hatchback versatility

LOWS

Ride, tight rear seat, difficult access

POWERTRAIN

255-hp, 2.0-liter four-cylinder turbo engine; 8-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

FUEL

23 mpg on regular fuel

PRICE AS TESTED

\$40,400



Comfortable Cruiser

The **Buick Regal** is pleasant, but it has lost some of that curve-loving feeling.

AT A GLANCE, buyers may miss that the stylish new 2018 Buick Regal Sportback is a hatchback, not a sedan. Under that exterior, drivers will find a competent and versatile car.

This Regal has a suspension that impressively soaks up road imperfections. Its handling is responsive and capable, although this generation has become less engaging to drive than its predecessor. The old version chewed up twisty roads; the new model is happier on straightaways.

The 2.0-liter turbo four-cylinder engine provides immediate response, and

the eight-speed automatic transmission is mostly smooth. We got 23 mpg overall on premium fuel, low for an all-wheel-drive car in this class.

The inside of the car is impressively quiet; wind, road, and engine noise are unobtrusive. The cabin is well-assembled but plain and austere, lacking the design details you'd expect from a nearly \$40,000 car.

Up front, the controls, including the touch-screen infotainment system, are easy to use. The seats there provide excellent support, with plenty of adjustments to let the driver and passenger fine-tune their ideal seating position.

The rear seat provides generous legroom, but tall passengers will probably scrape their noggin on the headliner.

Forward-collision warning and automatic emergency braking are optional. We'd prefer that they come as standard equipment.

LUXURY COMPACT CARS

Buick Regal

OVERALL SCORE

73

ROAD-TEST SCORE 87

HIGHS

Ride, acceleration, braking, controls, front-seat comfort, hatchback versatility

LOWS

Less agile than the previous Regal

POWERTRAIN

250-hp, 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine; 8-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

FUEL

23 mpg on premium fuel

PRICE AS TESTED

\$39,715

Ratings **Traveling in Style** Upscale, all-wheel-drive sedans can be rewarding four-season rides, but sometimes a large SUV is what's needed for road-tripping with the whole family.

Recommended	Make & Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Safety	Road-Test Results										
				Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction		Front-crash prevention	Road-test score	Overall mpg	Acceleration 0-60 mph, sec.	Dry/braking 60-0 mph, ft.	Avoidance-maneuver speed, mph	Routine handling	Ride	Noise	Seat comfort front/rear	Controls
LUXURY COMPACT CARS (ALL-WHEEL DRIVE)																	
✓	Audi A4 Premium Plus	85	\$48,890	↑	↑	Std./↑	88	27	6.3	135	53.5	↑	↑	↑	↑/↓	↓	2+2
✓	BMW 330i xDrive	78	\$51,745	↑	↓	Opt.	86	26	6.9	129	55.0	↑	↑	↑	↑/↓	↓	2+2
	Buick Regal Essence (2.0T)	73	\$39,715	↓	↑	Opt.	87	23	7.0	125	55.5	↑	↑	↑	↑/↓	↑	3+2
	Kia Stinger Premium (2.0T)	69	\$40,400	↓	↑	Opt.	75	23	7.5	132	53.5	↑	↓	↑	↑/↓	↑	3+0
	Infiniti Q50 3.0t Luxe	67	\$48,775	↓	↓	Opt.	85	22	5.7	126	56.0	↑	↑	↑	↑/↓	↓	2+1
	Lexus IS 300	67	\$48,149	↑	↓	Std./↑	56	20	6.5	139	53.0	↑	↓	↑	↑/↓	↓	2+1
	Mercedes-Benz C300	66	\$47,560	↓	↓	Std./↑	85	26	6.8	136	55.5	↑	↑	↑	↑/↓	↓	2+1
	Acura TLX SH-AWD	59	\$42,345	↓	↓	Std./↑	75	25	6.5	129	55.0	↑	↑	↑	↑/↓	↓	2+2
	Jaguar XE Premium (25t)	50	\$47,378	↓	↑	Opt.	69	25	7.7	133	53.0	↑	↑	↑	↓/↓	↓	1+2
	Alfa Romeo Giulia Ti	48	\$48,890	↓	↑	Opt.	70	27	6.7	136	53.0	↑	↑	↑	↑/↓	↓	1+2
LARGE SUVs																	
✓	Toyota Sequoia Limited	69	\$54,005	↑	↓	Std./↑	60	15	7.1	146	47.0	↓	↓	↑	↑/↑	↑	61.0
	Chevrolet Traverse Premier (V6)	67	\$49,945	↓	↑	Opt.	95	20	7.3	130	50.5	↑	↑	↑	↑/↑	↑	54.5
	Ford Expedition MAX Limited	65	\$75,430	↓	↑	Opt.	73	16	7.3	143	47.0	↓	↓	↑	↑/↑	↑	66.0
	Dodge Durango GT (V6)	65	\$43,525	↓	↑	Opt.	83	18	8.3	134	48.0	↓	↑	↑	↑/↑	↑	44.0
	Nissan Armada Platinum	55	\$63,020	↓	↑	Opt.	69	14	6.7	133	51.0	↓	↑	↑	↑/↑	↑	46.5
	Chevrolet Suburban Premier	53	\$69,790	↓	↑	Opt.	74	16	7.9	139	47.0	↓	↑	↑	↑/↑	↑	62.5
	Chevrolet Tahoe LT	53	\$60,100	↓	↑	Opt.	67	16	7.7	136	45.0	↓	↓	↑	↑/↑	↑	47.5
	GMC Yukon SLT	53	\$62,125	↓	↑	Opt.	67	16	7.7	136	45.0	↓	↓	↑	↑/↑	↑	47.5
	GMC Yukon XL SLT	49	\$67,370	↓	↑	Opt.	67	16	7.9	139	45.0	↓	↓	↑	↑/↑	↑	62.5
LUXURY LARGE SUVs																	
✓	Toyota Land Cruiser	75	\$84,820	↑	↑	Std./↑	68	14	7.3	140	46.0	↓	↑	↑	↑/↑	↑	43.0
	Buick Enclave Premium	63	\$55,680	↓	↑	Opt.	87	18	7.4	130	53.5	↑	↑	↑	↑/↑	↓	48.5
	Lincoln Navigator Select	59	\$86,480	↓	↑	Opt.	65	16	6.2	144	47.0	↓	↑	↑	↓/↑	↓	56.0
	Infiniti QX80	57	\$63,395	↓	↓	Opt.	68	15	6.9	139	48.0	↓	↑	↑	↑/↑	↑	49.5
	Cadillac Escalade Premium	40	\$87,360	↓	↓	Opt.	61	16	6.1	142	45.0	↓	↓	↑	↑/↑	↓	48.0

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

availability of front-crash prevention features, such as forward-collision warning and automatic emergency braking at city or highway speeds. For these systems, NA means no such system is offered; Opt. means

it's available on some versions but not necessarily on the one we tested; and models with standard systems are rated from ↓ to ↑ based on how many of these features are standard. We also

deduct points from the **Overall Score** if a vehicle's shifter lacks fail-safes or is difficult to operate. Online members can go to CR.org/cars for complete, up-to-date ratings.



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Home Improvement?

These real estate and renovation ads are real fixer-uppers

Up in Smoke

Maybe they needed those chimney bricks to repair the porch.
Submitted by C. Neall and
Dorothy Schroeder, Rochester Hills, MI

Dr. Sweep
Chimney & Masonry Specialists
Senior Discounts Available

BRICK REPAIR

CHIMNEY BEFORE CHIMNEY AFTER PORCH BEFORE PORCH AFTER

Free Estimates

10% OFF Masonry Repairs
\$20 OFF Chimney Sweep
\$10 OFF Chimney Cap
10% OFF Tuck Pointing



No-Car Garage

I guess we'll be parking on the street.
Submitted by
Scott Wycoff, Hockessin, DE

A Change of Scenery

It's amazing what a difference clean windows can make—to your neighbor's house.
Submitted by Rufus Cactus,
Austin, TX

Got Foggy Windows? Ha

Foggy Window Repair • Fragrant Shower Caps

BEFORE AFTER

Foggy Window Repair

Spacious home near Madison's hilltop

Located off Graham Rd., just minutes from Madison's hilltop. This house has much to offer: Oversized living and nic rooms for family enjoyment, 2.5 partially fenced acres, with an above-ground pool, 304 bedrooms, eat-in kitchen, 3-car attached garage, almost 2,500 sq. ft. of finished living space. Raise your family here and never have to leave. There's plenty of room for family expansion and grandkids to enjoy later.

Bargain priced at \$189,900

304 bedrooms

2,500 sq. ft.

Bedroom Community

Someone call the old woman in the shoe!
This place could fit all of her children, with rooms to spare.
Submitted by Sheryl Backus, Madison, IN



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