

## Who Will Care For You?

Understanding the facts about elder care and assisted living will help you and your family be prepared and protected



### Safety Alert

A new warning about laundry pods

### Why Water Works

8 surprising health benefits

Tesla Model S



### Great Car Infotainment Systems



### Best Coffee Beans & Brewing Tips



### Kitchen Makeover Top Matching Appliance Suites



### Grain Bowls We Test This Tasty New Trend

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**RATINGS**

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LUVO PLANTED  
POWER BOWL  
GREAT KARMA  
COCONUT CURRY

**77** OVERALL SCORE

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## ABOUT CONSUMER REPORTS

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 ⚠️ FAIR   
 ✅ GOOD  
🌟 VERY GOOD   
 🏆 EXCELLENT



## The Compassionate Care You Need

OF ALL THE DECISIONS we make in a lifetime, few are as personal or emotional as the decision to move yourself, a spouse, a parent, or another loved one to an assisted living facility. We often go to great lengths to find the right car, phone, or refrigerator to meet our specific needs, so it goes without saying that choosing a residence we can trust to offer compassionate care to a beloved family member at a vulnerable time of life is of the utmost importance. With medical care growing more sophisticated and the population growing older, the average age of new assisted living residents was 84 in 2016—and assisted living facilities now account for 17 percent of America’s senior housing, a 33 percent increase from just five years ago. What’s more, these residents tend to be sicker than previous generations.

With all the stress that can come from caring for or paying for the care of an aging loved one—a responsibility that research reveals falls disproportionately on adult

children, especially daughters—it is vital that the assisted living marketplace operates in a way that puts the needs of consumers first. But as this industry grows, obstacles still remain that can prevent us from making the best choice for our family and getting the peace of mind we need.

This month, in “Who Will Care for You?” on page 28, we’ll provide insight and resources that allow you to better determine the quality, value, and safety of facilities you may be considering—and we’ll update you on the importance of having meaningful staffing and training standards, greater price transparency, and the establishment of “resident rights” so that you can make this difficult decision with confidence and clarity.

**Marta L. Tellado,**  
President and CEO  
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## Self-Driving Standards

### WHAT'S AT STAKE

Though autonomous vehicles could greatly reduce car crashes and other incidents caused by driver error, the evolving technology also raises other safety questions. For instance, it's unclear how reliable autonomous systems will be, or how alert a human will need to be in a self-driving car.

As Congress considers legislation, Consumer Reports recently testified at a hearing on self-driving cars, held by the House Energy and Commerce Committee. The hearing comes as the number of traffic deaths in the U.S. is on the rise.

Our testimony—a consumer voice on a panel dominated by industry stakeholders—focused on exploring the safety potential of self-driving vehicles while ensuring that new challenges are anticipated and addressed. We stressed that lawmakers should require sensible, enforceable, evidence-based measures for the good of consumers.

“It’s not clear what the actual safety impacts will be as companies extensively introduce automated driving systems,” said William Wallace, CR’s policy analyst, during his testimony. Compared with proven advanced active safety systems in cars today—such as automatic emergency braking with forward-collision warning—we know little about whether autonomous driving functionality will be safe. Wallace stressed that research should be released to the public.

To further our mission to advance car safety for consumers, CR welcomed David Friedman as our new director of cars and product policy and analysis. Friedman, who formerly served as both deputy and acting administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, is a respected leader and innovator.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

To read Wallace’s testimony for CR, go to [CR.org/selfdrive1017](http://CR.org/selfdrive1017). You can also contact your lawmakers at [senate.gov](http://senate.gov) and [house.gov](http://house.gov) and ask them to help establish strong rules for automakers and their advancements in automation.

## Student-Aid Protections

### WHAT'S AT STAKE

Some for-profit career colleges have saddled students with steep debt without providing the education they promised. Though recent rules adopted by the Department of Education aim to prevent such abuse, the agency is now considering dialing back these safeguards.

The “Gainful Employment” rule, enacted in 2015 under former President Barack Obama, requires career colleges to demonstrate that their graduates

are making a living wage despite student loan payments. The colleges risk losing their federal financial aid if, for example, a typical graduate’s annual loan payment exceeds 20 percent of his or her discretionary income.

And last fall, the Department finalized “Borrower Defense” rules that make it easier for students to have federal loans discharged if a school defrauded or misled them.

CR helped shape both of these protections and recently joined more than 50 consumer groups to oppose the Department’s efforts to delay, dismantle, and weaken them. Informed by years of public evidence and diverse stakeholder engagement, we believe these rules should be vigorously enforced, and even strengthened.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

Add your voice by sharing how student debt has affected your life, at [ConsumersUnion.org/share-your-story/studentdebt](http://ConsumersUnion.org/share-your-story/studentdebt).

## The Robocall Resistance

### WHAT'S AT STAKE

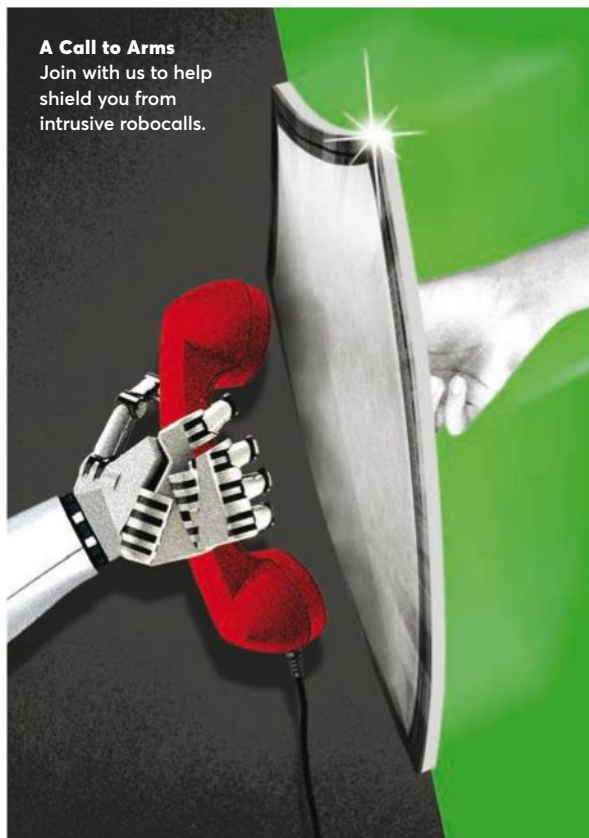
Consumers are inundated with unwanted automated prerecorded marketing calls known as “robocalls” at all hours of the day. Not only are these computer-generated calls a nuisance, but the scammers behind many of them rip off Americans with convincing but phony sales pitches, to the tune of an estimated \$350 million annually. And the epidemic is getting worse, because it’s now easier for swindlers to trick you into answering. Technology has made it simple to “spoof” a phone number so that a robocall can show up on caller ID masked as a legitimate number in your area code.

The Federal Communications Commission is considering a proposal that would strengthen a phone company’s ability to block spoofed numbers.

CR’s advocates organized a group of consumer organizations in August to file comments with the Commission, urging the agency to move forward on the proposal, and to take additional steps, such as revising its proposed definition of the phrase “illegal robocall” to include autodialed or prerecorded text messages and voicemails.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

Almost 750,000 consumers have joined our End Robocalls campaign, which works to push the phone companies and the FCC for free, reliable tools to block robocalls. To join this effort, go to [EndRobocalls.org](http://EndRobocalls.org). Or go to [ConsumersUnion.org/end-robocalls/solutions](http://ConsumersUnion.org/end-robocalls/solutions) for tips on how to block these maddening calls.



**A Call to Arms**  
Join with us to help shield you from intrusive robocalls.



SHARE

Tell us about the challenges you face in today’s crowded and confusing marketplace, at [ConsumersUnion.org/share-your-story](http://ConsumersUnion.org/share-your-story). Your gripe might just become our next big campaign.



## Tuning In to the Cable vs. Streaming Debate

In our August 2017 issue, the article "Does Anyone Still Need Cable?" explored the wide array of options now available for consumers to stream TV shows. Many of you wrote in with answers, opinions, and queries. You can join the ongoing conversation at [CR.org/cable1017](http://CR.org/cable1017).

I READ THE ARTICLE about ditching cable with great enthusiasm. I tried both Sling TV and Hulu with Live TV, and both initially looked like great alternatives to cable. That was until I turned on my home-theater system. Their streams don't provide sound in digital 5.1 format, only stereo sound. That's just not good enough in today's world. Content, price, and device compatibility are obviously important for streaming services. For home-theater aficionados sound quality is just as critical.

—Patrick Conlon, Brookfield, CT

**EDITOR'S NOTE** Yes, sound quality is important. To have 5.1-channel sound, both the streaming service and the streaming device need to support multichannel audio—as well as the content. Amazon, Netflix, Vudu, and others stream content with 5.1-channel sound. But some of the cable-replacement services, such as the ones you mention, don't currently support multichannel audio. Sling TV's live TV is stereo-only; some of its video-on-demand content offers 5.1-channel audio. DirecTV Now also streams on-demand content in Dolby Digital 5.1 on Amazon Fire, Apple TV, and Roku.

ANY ARTICLE mentioning TV/movie streaming services such as Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime should mention the sister service, Netflix DVD. Although online streaming is

more popular than DVD rental, the latter has a much deeper movie library. I subscribe to all four. In my experience, each streaming service has less than a 5 percent chance of offering a movie I want to watch, while the odds are 50 to 60 percent from Netflix DVD. This is especially true of classics and foreign films. Also, the DVD rental service typically carries new movies sooner than the streaming services.

—Bruce Samuelson, Cedar Hill, TX

I READ WITH INTEREST your article "Does Anyone Still Need Cable?" which gave me insight into offerings such as Sling and Hulu, but I missed any discussion of DVR function such as TiVo.

—Paul Kuckein, Los Altos Hills, CA

**EDITOR'S NOTE** The focus of our August article was on streaming services, not hardware such as DVR devices—but we like them, too! Roku, for example, has generally been our top media-player recommendation, with an easy-to-use interface, lots of content, and good search capability. We've also written favorably about several TiVo devices, including the Bolt and Roamio models. We especially liked that the Roamio combines over-the-air reception with streaming services seamlessly.

APPRECIATE THE ARTICLE, but you missed the significant issue of data caps. Cable TV does not count against your internet data cap. Once you stream, all your viewing counts against the cap, which could be a significant added cost.

—Mike Fillmore, via CR.org

**EDITOR'S NOTE** Many of the larger home internet providers that impose data caps (a limit on the data you can use per month), including AT&T, Comcast, and Cox, have upped their caps to 1 terabyte per month, which should be more than sufficient for most streaming homes. Cablevision (now owned by Altice), Charter/Time Warner Cable, and Verizon don't have caps. But certain internet service providers, including Suddenlink (also now owned by Altice) and CenturyLink, have lower caps. If you want to shift to streaming, check to see whether your ISP imposes a cap and whether there will be a surcharge if you exceed it. Many offer an unlimited data plan, but you can pay quite a bit more—Comcast, for example, charges an additional \$50 per month.

**Safe and Sound on the Road**  
A GLARING OMISSION in your automobile reviews is your failure to provide measured data for cabin noise levels. A review may include an offhand comment regarding cabin noise, but there is no supporting data to validate it. Because there is no measured noise-level data offered,



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

WRITE

a reader has no means to compare one vehicle with another. Because of changes in the way manufacturers construct a vehicle's frame, this information has become increasingly relevant. Please consider adding noise-level data to your reviews.

—David Causier, Seal Beach, CA

**EDITOR'S NOTE** *In the past we recorded sound pressure levels in test vehicles, but we stopped because we found that the quality of the noise is more important than the instrumented readings. Harsh sounds are more dissatisfying even if they aren't as loud as other sounds. So today we rate all tested vehicles for dissatisfying noise and make our evaluation part of the ratings score under the metric labeled Noise. Cars with green chevrons in this category tested well for a quiet ride.*

IN YOUR AUGUST 2017 Road Report, you describe all of the great safety features available on cars today. I have all of these and wouldn't drive without them. But I have a question. All of these features can be tested easily to make sure they are working except for automatic emergency braking. I certainly

don't want to try driving my car into a vehicle to test it. So how can one be assured that the system is working?

—Robert Arzt, Las Vegas

**EDITOR'S NOTE** *You definitely don't want to test your own automatic emergency braking system—which is why we do it for you. At CR's Auto Test Center, we have special equipment to test AEB at city and highway speeds. Still, keep in mind that an AEB system will not always prevent an accident, but it could lessen the severity.*

TO UNDERSTAND which advanced crash-avoidance technologies are truly safest, in addition to consumer survey data, we need objective evaluation criteria for each system as to how well they perform. Is Consumer Reports planning any test-track evaluations of each of the individual crash-avoidance technologies? It would help the consumer understand the differences between the cars they are considering.

—Dan Cohen, Elkridge, MD

**EDITOR'S NOTE** *Advanced safety features remain fairly rare today, so we focus on telling consumers which vehicles have them, when they come standard, and when they are an option. (Check our regularly maintained list of models that offer advanced safety features at [CR.org/systems1017](http://CR.org/systems1017).) We also award bonus points as part of our Overall Score to car models that have forward-collision warning and automatic emergency braking as standard across a vehicle's model line.*

THE AUGUST ROAD REPORT disclosed how effective safety technologies are in reducing the number of crashes. However, the report did not discuss any reduction in auto-insurance premiums for purchasing a car with safety technologies. The benefits should be shared. Especially because each accident prevented is a double



## I missed the truck by less than 6 inches. The car without the AEB system crashed.

—Samuel Shukovsky, via CR.org

benefit for the auto insurance company—each crash prevented also eliminates a crash for the other car.

—Lloyd Smith, Los Alamos, NM

**EDITOR'S NOTE** *Though we have not investigated insurance discounts for autonomous emergency braking and forward-collision warning, our 2016 analysis of auto insurance premiums in 50 states and Washington, D.C., did find a significant discount for one type of safety feature: electronic stability control (a technology that minimizes skidding). Colorado had the biggest median discounts—almost \$200 for one driver and one car; and \$600 for two cars, two adults, and one teen driver. Across the country, median discounts for this stability feature were greatest for households with teen drivers, though a third of states had no discount at all.*

YOU DON'T APPRECIATE a system until it prevents an accident. I bought a Subaru Legacy (2013) with EyeSight, and yes, it does give false warnings. However, as I was bringing the car for its first oil change, a truck cut out in front of me, as well as a BMW 3 series in the lane next to me. My car

started braking before I could, then I slammed on the brakes. I missed the truck by less than 6 inches. The BMW without the system crashed into the truck. We got out to exchange numbers with the truck driver, and the BMW owner asked me how I reacted so quickly. I told him the car did it, and his reaction was classic: "I have got to get that system!"

—Samuel Shukovsky, via CR.org

### Sinkhole Solutions

I READ "What You Don't Know About Home Insurance" (August 2017) and contacted the top two companies, Amica and USAA, for a quote. Your rating about their courtesy was spot-on. However, I found that no insurance coverage for homes was being offered for the area in which I live, central Florida, due to "sinkholes." In a rather pointed case of "Macy's telling Gimbel's" I was directed to fmap.org to seek homeowners insurance elsewhere.

—George Del Monte, The Villages, FL

**EDITOR'S NOTE** *Florida has more sinkholes than any other state, so the Sunshine State requires that standard coverage include "catastrophic ground cover collapse": a sudden, visible collapse of the ground that damages the insured structure, which is then condemned and ordered vacated. If a sinkhole doesn't do all that, you might not be covered—unless you have a sinkhole endorsement or separate policy, which Florida insurers are required to offer and costs extra. As for your specific needs, Amica says it insures homes in The Villages area based on a case-by-case risk assessment, including sinkholes. And USAA says that if it can't write a policy it will offer specialized insurance through alliances with a variety of insurance companies. Otherwise, we suggest you shop for the best rates and coverage using Trusted Choice, a website run by the Independent Insurance Agents and Brokers of America, a trade association.*

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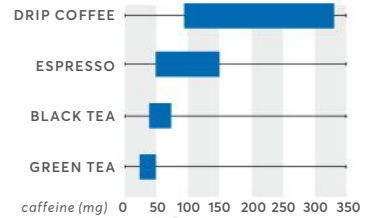
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# Product Updates

The latest ratings from our labs

The range of caffeine in a typically sized brewed serving\*



## Not Your Average Joe

We're spilling the beans on the best coffees and coffee makers, secrets to making the perfect cup, and the surprising health benefits of java.

by **Julia Calderone**

**Stand Your Grounds**  
The Chemex coffee maker produces a balanced brew that earned high marks from our tasters.



**AMERICA HAS A CRAVING** for coffee. Though a steaming cup of joe has fueled the morning routines of many for generations, U.S. coffee consumption is now at an all-time high: Approximately 62 percent of us drink it every day—an increase of 5 percentage points over last year, according to the National Coffee Association.

Coffee drinkers across all age groups, from teens to seniors, have a seemingly insatiable thirst for the stuff. Many of us also have a growing preference for high-quality brew, with more than half the coffee we consume now classified as gourmet. It's a preference that's becoming much easier to indulge: The number of specialty coffee shops (think Intelligentsia, La Colombe Coffee Roasters, and Stumptown Coffee Roasters) increased tenfold between 1993 and 2013.

Most of the coffee we drink, though, is still brewed at home, in no-nonsense drip coffee makers. (See our ratings of the best on page 13.) In their ceaseless quest for the perfect cup, aficionados are also experimenting with new and rediscovered “artisanal” brewing methods, which, it turns out, really do make a difference in how coffee tastes. (See “Battle of the Brews,” on page 11.)

Retailers, eager to cater to devotees willing to pay premium prices, are offering fresh gourmet beans from around the world. According to market research firm Mintel, 30 new Ethiopian coffees hit the U.S. market between 2012 and 2016, more than from any other African country. (See our ratings of Ethiopian beans on page 12.)

But the best news about our collective coffee craze is that it appears to be good for us. A raft of research done in the past two decades has shown that coffee may well be linked to a reduced risk of a number of illnesses including certain cancers, heart disease, and perhaps even Alzheimer's disease.

### **Powerful Health Benefits**

A few decades ago coffee was considered not healthy and possibly harmful, says Edward Giovannucci, M.D., Ph.D., a researcher and professor of nutrition and epidemiology at Harvard's T.H. Chan School of Public Health. “But more recent studies seem to suggest that there's a benefit to drinking coffee,” he says.

The largest analysis we've seen examining coffee consumption and health, based on two studies that included more than 700,000 people from more than 10 countries, was published online in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* this past July.

Researchers from several universities across the U.S. and Europe found that coffee drinkers were less likely to die prematurely. In one study, those who drank one to three cups of coffee per day were 12 to 18 percent less likely to die during the study period from any cause, including cancer and heart, liver, and respiratory diseases. These results suggest that moderate coffee drinking is not detrimental to your health and could even have health benefits, says Neil Murphy, Ph.D., a scientist at the World Health

Organization and a lead author of one of the studies.

Other research published in the past five years has found that regular coffee drinkers seem to have a lower risk of type 2 diabetes and Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases, as well as healthier livers, faster metabolism, and decreased risks of endometrial, prostatic, and colorectal cancers.

Studies have also confirmed what most of us already know: The caffeine in coffee can make you more alert and increase concentration, and may boost learning, decision-making, and performance on cognitive tasks.

Researchers think that the keys to coffee's health benefits are the antioxidants and other biologically active compounds responsible for its distinctive flavor. “It could be a combination of all of these compounds working together,” says V. Wendy Setiawan, Ph.D., an associate professor of preventive medicine at the University of Southern California's Keck School of Medicine and a researcher on one of the studies published online in July.

### **Some Coffee Caution**

Increasing your coffee consumption beyond three cups a day might not up its health benefits. In fact, some studies have suggested a link between more than four or five cups a day and lower bone density, especially in those at higher risk of osteoporosis. (Caffeine potentially limits the body's absorption of calcium, but adding 2 tablespoons of milk to each cup can

help counteract this effect.)

Other researchers have found that certain compounds in coffee can raise cholesterol, although some evidence suggests that brewing with a filter might trap those compounds.

The caffeine in coffee can also have undesired effects: Just one cup can cause sleep problems and irritability in some people, and even regular coffee drinkers can experience headaches, nausea, anxiety, jitters, and increased blood pressure when they drink more than their bodies can handle.

How much caffeine is too much? U.S. government dietary guidelines say

that up to 400 mg per day—the amount in about two to four 8-ounce cups of coffee, depending on the type of bean and how it’s brewed—can be part of a healthy diet for most adults.

Certain high-risk groups, however, should limit their caffeine intake. Pregnant women, for instance, should consume no more than 200 mg per day (the amount in about one 12-ounce cup of coffee), because caffeine could increase the risk of spontaneous abortion as well as growth delays in the fetus. Caffeine can also prevent the absorption of or create new side effects of common drugs such as

certain antibiotics, antidepressants, and antipsychotics. Ask your doctor whether it’s safe to drink coffee if you’re on medication.

For people who need to avoid caffeine, drinking decaffeinated coffee may also be a healthy option, Giovannucci says. Recent research suggests that decaf provides similar health benefits to caffeinated coffee but without the side effects. Decaf has slightly fewer antioxidants than a regular cup, but research shows that it’s also associated with a lower risk of type 2 diabetes and many other perks.

—Additional reporting by Janet Lee

## The Truth About Coffee Packaging Claims

*Certain labels have genuine meaning; others don't. Here's how to tell the difference.*

IF YOU RELY on labels for information about a product’s environmental impact and fair trade policies, you should know that certain claims on coffee labels are essentially meaningless: Terms including “ethically/sustainably farmed,” “shade grown,” and “direct trade” lack any legal definition or industry standards. But you can rely on certain seals to indicate the conditions under which coffee was grown. Charlotte Vallaeys, Consumer Reports’ senior policy analyst and our top food labels expert, explains what some common labels mean.

—Christina Dabney



### USDA Organic

The term “organic” is strictly regulated by the Department of Agriculture. In the case of coffee farms, this seal means synthetic fertilizers and synthetic pesticides that can be harmful to farmers and to wildlife are banned. The label also ensures that soil quality is protected.



### Fairtrade

This seal indicates that the beans were sourced directly from small-scale farmers who were paid a fair price. The certification organization, Fairtrade International, sets a minimum price—enough to cover the costs of sustainable production—that must be paid directly to coffee producers. A premium added to the minimum price is distributed to coffee producers and must be invested in their communities or businesses.



### Fair Trade Certified

Unlike Fairtrade, this label does not indicate that the coffee was purchased directly from small-scale farmers. The beans can be grown on large coffee plantations, but these farms have to meet certain standards, including protecting farmworkers from unsafe working conditions. Farms must also pay workers at least the local minimum wage and implement a plan to increase that to a living wage over time.



### Bird Friendly Habitat

This seal certifies that the farm where the coffee was grown qualifies as a “bird friendly habitat” as defined by the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center. It means that coffee carrying this seal not only is organic but also was grown in an environment that protected biodiversity and maintained native trees so that the coffee farm could remain an important habitat for birds and other wildlife.



### Rainforest Alliance Certified

This seal means that some or all of the coffee in the bag is sourced from farms that have met standards aimed at promoting sustainability and protecting farmers, forests, wildlife, and local communities. But Rainforest Alliance standards for minimizing pesticide use and incorporating native trees are not as stringent as those behind the Bird Friendly Habitat designation.

# Battle of the Brews

We asked our expert tasters to evaluate coffee made using five popular methods. The results reveal that the flavor of the final product is shaped in part by the brewing technique you choose.

For a clean, balanced cup  
**Chemex**



**Chemex**  
\$46

#### THE BREWER

This hourglass-shaped pour-over coffee maker differs from other pour-over models because of the Chemex-branded filters, which are made of heavy paper and designed to regulate the filtration rate and keep sediment out. The glass body has a wooden handle that wraps around the neck of the carafe. It's easy to pour coffee from the Chemex, but the narrow neck makes it difficult to clean by hand. The wooden handle isn't dishwasher-safe, but it can be easily removed.

#### THE RESULTS

Coffee brewed in the Chemex earned high marks for complexity, acidity, and overall quality in our taste tests; the filter minimized the presence of solids in the cup. If you like an aromatic, balanced brew with sweet, juicy undertones, this one's for you.

For a bold, full-bodied taste  
**French Press**



**Bodum Chambord 8 Cup Coffee Maker**  
\$40

#### THE BREWER

French presses brew by allowing coarsely ground beans to steep (usually for about 4 minutes) in hot water. The grounds are separated from the coffee and pushed to the bottom of the carafe when a built-in filter is depressed. This sizable Bodum Chambord brews up to eight cups at once, and it's easy to pour from. The fine-mesh filter forms a tight seal with the glass walls of the carafe, helping keep grounds out of the brewed coffee—a common problem with cheaper models.

#### THE RESULTS

Without a paper filter, this coffee holds on to its natural oils, creating a full-bodied taste. The mesh filter holds back most of the grounds, but small, powderlike coffee grounds (called "fines") can remain in the brew, creating a somewhat viscous cup.

For a refined single serving  
**AeroPress**



**AeroPress Coffee Maker**  
\$30

#### THE BREWER

This one-of-a-kind miniature coffee maker sits on top of a mug and is small enough to travel with. Mix water and grounds in the carafe, then plunge the top down to force the brewed mixture through a micro filter designed to capture even very fine particles. Our tester noted that the process is a bit precarious because the tool has to be balanced on top of a cup. It's also only big enough to brew a single cup at a time.

#### THE RESULTS

The AeroPress produced a high-quality brew, with good body and aromatics but just a touch less complexity. The company claims that—unlike a French press—this method leaves "no grit in your cup," but our tasters found that the coffee sometimes contained a bit of fine coffee silt.

For a simple, quality brew  
**Pour-Over**



**Melitta 6-Cup Pour-Over Brewer**  
\$10

#### THE BREWER

Most pour-over coffee makers are little more than a filter basket that sits on top of a glass or ceramic carafe. The basket is lined with a paper filter, into which grounds are placed. This method puts you in control of a slow, careful pour over the entire bed of coffee, ensuring even distribution. The brewer is relatively easy to clean, dishwasher-safe—and cheap enough that you won't be heartbroken if the carafe shatters in the sink: The filter basket will work on top of other containers as well.

#### THE RESULTS

This brewing method earned high marks. Our tasters found the pour-over coffee had full, juicy flavors that weren't too aggressive, with a smooth feel and sweet taste.

For easy, no-nonsense joe  
**Drip**



**Cuisinart PerfectTemp 14-Cup DCC-3200**  
\$100

#### THE BREWER

In general, drip coffee makers force you to sacrifice some control, but convenience often trumps perfection, especially first thing in the morning. At the top of our drip ratings (see chart on page 13), this programmable model brews in the ideal temperature zone of 195° to 205° F and prepares 40 ounces in just 10 minutes. The controls are generally easy to use and intuitive.

#### THE RESULTS

Scoring slightly lower than other methods in complexity, smoothness, and overall quality, the drip method is hard to beat on convenience. Our tasters noted a higher astringency, and the fruity, somewhat sweeter notes of the coffee were masked by a sharper acidity.

**Ratings** > **Better Beans** More coffees from Ethiopia are hitting store shelves than are gourmet grinds from any other African country.

Recommended	Rank	Product	Sensory Score	Specs		Price			Flavor Description
				Type	Darker Roast	Per Package	Per Pound	Per 6-oz. Serving or Per K-Cup	
✓	1	<b>La Colombe Coffee Roasters</b> Ethiopia-YirgZ (12 oz.)	84	Whole Bean		\$15	\$20	51¢	Vibrant cup with a nice level of sweetness balanced with citrus, fruity flavors, and a hint of honey. A good one to savor black. Medium body.
✓	2	<b>Green Mountain Coffee</b> Organic Ethiopia Yirgacheffe (16-count)	75	K-Cup		\$12	NA	75¢	Well-balanced, with notes of chocolate, fruit, and a trace of citrus. Medium to full body.
✓	3	<b>Birch Coffee</b> Ethiopia Yirgacheffe (12 oz.)	74	Whole Bean		\$15	\$20	51¢	Tangy, with nice fruity layers and notes of lemon, berry, honey, and floral. Lighter body.
✓	4	<b>Stumptown Coffee Roasters</b> Ethiopia Duromina (12 oz.)	73	Whole Bean		\$18	\$24	61¢	Tangy, with very nice aromatics that are citrusy, fruity (tastes of cherry and currants), and floral but a trace grassy. Medium body.
✓	5	<b>Green Mountain Coffee</b> Organic Ethiopia Yirgacheffe (10 oz.)	71	Whole Bean		\$10	\$16	40¢	Fruity (citrus), with dark-chocolate notes and a trace of honey. Moderately astringent, with a bit of smoke and woodiness. Medium body.
Ⓢ	6	<b>Trader Joe's Organic Fair Trade Shade Grown Ethiopian</b> (13 oz.)	70	Whole Bean	•	\$10	\$12	31¢	Strong, with bold, earthy flavors and notes of dark chocolate and fruit (dried fruit, cherry). Bitter and astringent. Medium to full body.
✓	7	<b>Irving Farm Coffee Roasters</b> Konga Ethiopia (12 oz.)	70	Whole Bean		\$17	\$23	57¢	Traces of fruit, citrus, and malt but more grassy and less complex than those more highly rated. Light to medium roast and body.
Ⓢ	8	<b>Coffee Beanery</b> Ethiopian Yirgacheffe (16 oz.)	69	Whole Bean		\$14	\$14	32¢	Chocolate and fruity notes with medium-high sweetness. Medium roast with a medium to full body.
Ⓢ	9	<b>Starbucks</b> Ethiopia (16 oz.)	68	Whole Bean	•	\$14	\$14	32¢	Dark roast that has a smoky, strong flavor. Balanced, with a nice level of sweetness and chocolate and fruit flavors. More bitter than most. Medium to full body.
✓	10	<b>Intelligentsia</b> Kurimi Organic Ethiopia (12 oz.)	68	Whole Bean		\$21	\$28	71¢	Bright and tangy, with lemony notes and traces of other fruit (berry), but slightly grassy. Light to medium body and roast.
✓	11	<b>Illy MonoArabica</b> Ethiopia (8.8 oz.)	68	Whole Bean		\$15	\$27	63¢	Chocolate and fruity top notes but a bit woody (old tasting). Medium roast and body.
✓	12	<b>The Coffee Bean &amp; Tea Leaf</b> Ethiopia Yirgacheffe (16 oz.)	67	Whole Bean	•	\$14	\$14	35¢	Nice sweetness but a trace smoky and burnt, with fruity, citrus, and toasty top notes. Somewhat bitter and astringent. Medium to full body.
✓	13	<b>Gloria Jean's Coffees</b> Ethiopian Yirgacheffe (16 oz.)	67	Whole Bean	•	\$16	\$16	37¢	Fruity, with cocoa and a little bit smoky and earthy. A trace woody. Fairly strong cup with medium to full body.
	14	<b>Archer Farms (Target)</b> Organic Ethiopian Yirgacheffe (10 oz.)	60	Whole Bean	•	\$6	\$10	24¢	Smoky notes with dark chocolate and fruity (dried fruit, berries) flavors. Fairly strong cup that's somewhat bitter, with medium to full body. Medium-dark roast.
	15	<b>Jim's Organic Coffee</b> Ethiopian Sidamo Nura Korate (12 oz.)	58	Whole Bean	•	\$15	\$20	51¢	Traces of fruit, cocoa, and smoky burnt flavors, with bitter notes and low sweetness and acidity. Medium to full body. Not bad but also not delicious. Medium-dark roast.
	16	<b>Peet's Coffee</b> Ethiopian Fancy (16 oz.)	55	Whole Bean	•	\$18	\$18	41¢	Earthy character, with a little fruit and chocolate but also some burnt, bitter notes. Fairly strong flavor with some astringency. Medium body. Darker roast.
	17	<b>Orleans Coffee</b> Ethiopia Harrar (16 oz.)	51	Whole Bean		\$10	\$10	24¢	Fruity and traces of berry. An off-note of ferment mars this coffee, which would otherwise have some positives. Medium roast and body.
	18	<b>Marley Coffee</b> One Love Ethiopia Yirgacheffe (8 oz.)	50	Whole Bean	•	\$12	\$24	55¢	A bit earthy, with some fruit that tastes pulpy. Off-note of ferment. Astringency also detracts. Medium-dark roast.

**HOW WE TEST:** Two coffee experts tested and rated 18 Ethiopian coffees. Except for the K-Cup, each was brewed

by drip method according to the coffee company's directions or standard recipe. Thirteen products were rated

Excellent or Very Good, and three of these are CR Best Buys. Those higher in the ratings generally had a more

complex flavor and fewer defects. Price is per package; prices per pound and per 6-ounce cup are also listed.

**Ratings** > **True Brew** Drip coffee makers are easy to use and can brew up to 14 cups at once. Most can be programmed the night before to start in the morning.

POOR ————— EXCELLENT

\$ CR BEST BUY RECOMMENDED

Recommended	Rank	Brand & Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results			Features			
					Brew Performance	Convenience	Carafe Handling	Brew Time (Min.)	Programmable	Small-Batch Setting	Brew-Strength Control
DRIP COFFEE MAKERS WITH CARAFE											
	1	<b>Cuisinart</b> PerfectTemp 14-Cup Programmable DCC-3200	88	\$100				10			
	2	<b>Cuisinart</b> PerfectTemp 14-Cup Programmable DCC-2800	85	\$100				9			
	3	<b>Hamilton Beach</b> 12 Cup Programmable 49465	84	\$25				10			
	4	<b>Capresso</b> SG220 12-Cup	79	\$60				9			
	5	<b>KitchenAid</b> KCM1202OB	77	\$80				8			
	6	<b>Kenmore</b> Elite 12-Cup # 76772	76	\$90				9			
	7	<b>KitchenAid</b> 12-Cup With One-Touch Brewing KCM1204	76	\$100				8			
	8	<b>Black+Decker</b> CM4000S	74	\$40				8			
	9	<b>Bialetti</b> Triple Brew TSK-1180R2B 35018	73	\$100				9			
	10	<b>Frigidaire</b> Professional Programmable Drip FPDC12D7MS	73	\$100				8			
	11	<b>Mr. Coffee</b> Optimal Brew BVMC-PSTX95	72	\$100				7			
	12	<b>Ninja</b> Bar Brewer CF085	71	\$170				9			
	13	<b>KitchenAid</b> Pour Over Brewer KCM0812	71	\$200				12			
	14	<b>Cooks</b> Programmable 12-cup (JCPenney)	70	\$30				10			
	15	<b>Black+Decker</b> CM2020B	69	\$40				9			
	16	<b>Krups</b> Savoy EC314050	69	\$80				9			
	17	<b>Mr. Coffee</b> BVMC-DMX85 Hot Shot Station	69	\$70				10			
	18	<b>Mr. Coffee</b> BVMC-SJX33GT	68	\$30				10			
	19	<b>Mr. Coffee</b> DW13	68	\$20				10			
	20	<b>Hamilton Beach</b> The Scoop 2-Way Brewer 49980Z	68	\$80				9			
	21	<b>Mr. Coffee</b> BVMC-PJX23 (Target exclusive)	67	\$30				9			
	22	<b>Zojirushi</b> Fresh Brew Plus EC-YSC100	67	\$160				9			
	23	<b>Mr. Coffee</b> Optimal Brew BVMC-PSTX91	66	\$70				7			
	24	<b>Hamilton Beach</b> 46201	66	\$50				9			
	25	<b>Bella</b> Dots Collection 12-cup	65	\$42				9			
	26	<b>Cuisinart</b> Coffee Plus CHW-12	65	\$80				9			
	27	<b>Cuisinart</b> Coffee Center SS-15	64	\$200				9			
	28	<b>Caso</b> Coffee One 10-Cup 1100 Brewing System 11850	64	\$165				8			
	29	<b>Cuisinart</b> Brew Central DCC-1200	64	\$90				8			

> Online subscribers can go to [CR.org/coffeemakers](http://CR.org/coffeemakers) for complete, up-to-date ratings.

**HOW WE TEST:** We calculate the Overall Score by measuring the temperature of water during the brew cycle, noting how long water

remains between 195° and 205° F—the standard set by the Specialty Coffee Association for optimal brewing. Next we assess convenience of the machine

and carafe, noting how easy it is to program each model, fill its reservoir, install any filters, and clean up. We also note how easy it is to handle the

carafe without dripping or spilling. Brew Time is calculated to the nearest minute using 40 ounces of water on the machine's regular cycle.



**Load 'Em Up**  
The Samsung FlexWash (left) and LG's TwinWash system let you launder two loads at once.



# Can Your Washing Machine Work Harder?

Wish you could do more than one laundry load at a time? Now you can. But how much money is that convenience worth to you?

by **Kimberly Janeway**

**WASHING MACHINES USE** a fraction of the amount of water they did a few decades ago. But the trade-off with today's super water-efficient appliances is that it takes longer to get your laundry done.

"For the average-size load in our tests, most front-loaders and high-efficiency top-loaders take around 70 to 110 minutes on the normal-wash/heavy-soil setting," says Emilio Gonzalez, a CR engineer who runs our laundry appliance tests.

Twenty-five years ago, you could knock off a load in 45 minutes using an agitator top-loader. But with less water—and cooler water—going into these high-efficiency machines, cycle times have grown longer to give clothes more time tumbling in the detergent solution.

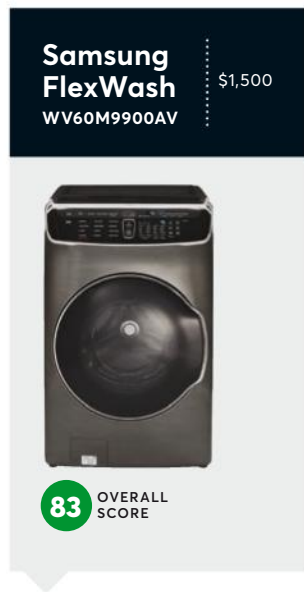
To address consumer complaints that the wash times are too long, manufacturers have introduced washers with bigger capacities, and some have added specialty speed cycles to the lineup. Now Samsung and LG—fierce competitors in the appliance arena—have developed another way to do more laundry at once. The latest

solution? A second, smaller washing unit that lets you wash a few delicates, for example, while sheets go through their own cycle in the main washer or quickly wash your teen's sweaty soccer jerseys before the big game.

First out of the gate in 2015, LG paired a front-loading washing machine with a separate mini washer, called the SideKick, built into a pedestal. Together they're known as TwinWash, and the system gives you the option of washing a full load and a smaller one at the same time—or running either machine on its own. Samsung recently introduced FlexWash, which accomplishes the same feat with a different design: It's one machine comprising two washers, which you can also use separately or simultaneously. The built-in mini washer is above the front-loader.

To find out whether these multitasking machines deliver, we tested the Samsung FlexWash—for a whopping \$1,500—and pitted it against LG's TwinWash system, which we tested when it debuted. Do these dual washers speed up the task? Turn the page to see the results.

# The Might of Two Minis: We Test, You Decide



**THE SETUP** FlexWash is a single machine made up of two integrated washers that can run separately or at the same time. Samsung's mini top-loading washer sits above the front-loader, increasing the total height of the unit to 47 inches (about 8 inches taller than most front-loaders). Homeowners need not add supply lines: The typical setup of one water line for hot and another for cold will work.

**CLAIMED CAPACITY** The front-loader, at 5 cubic feet, is big enough to fit a king-sized comforter. The 1-cubic-foot mini washer can handle small loads, say, four T-shirts, three pairs of yoga pants, or about 30 small, delicate items, such as bras and undies.

**FEATURES** Samsung's main washer has 12 cycles, a steam option to improve stain removal, and WiFi connectivity that allows you to receive alerts on your smartphone when a cycle is done. The mini washer has four cycles, and you can select cold or warm water and an extra-rinse option. Shown here in black stainless, this washer also comes in white. And for those who prefer a matching set, Samsung extends this two-in-one concept to a matching dryer.

**WASH TIMES** On the normal-wash/heavy-soil setting, a full load in the main washer takes about 100 minutes. The mini washer finishes in about 40 minutes on the normal cycle.

**PERFORMANCE** The front-loader scored Excellent overall. That, along with the brand's front-loader reliability, earned it a spot on CR's recommended list. The mini washer is fast and gentle but not very water-efficient, and it can't match the cleaning power of its larger counterpart.



**THE SETUP** Two machines, sold separately, form the LG TwinWash system: a \$700 mini washer called the LG SideKick and an LG front-loader of your choosing. The front-loader sits atop

the SideKick. Compatible LG models, which are represented here by the range of scores in our ratings, sell for \$700 to \$1,800.

The SideKick's drawer houses a mini washer, and it can be put to use below most LG front-loaders made since 2009. The appliances can run independently or simultaneously, and the connections are standard: one water line for hot and one for cold. You can also install the mini washer under a 2017 LG front-control dryer if you have a top-loading washer.

**CLAIMED CAPACITY** Of the compatible LG front-loaders we tested, capacity ranged from 4.3 to 5.8 cubic feet. (A king-sized comforter requires over 4.5 cubic feet.) The mini washer measures 1 cubic foot, so it can fit the same amount of laundry as the Samsung mini.

**FEATURES** The front-loader's features and finish vary (white, graphite steel, or, shown here, black stainless), depending on the model you choose. The mini washer comes in these finishes as well, and has six cycles with cold or warm water and an extra-rinse option.

## Is a Dual Dryer Twice as Good as One?

IF YOU LIKE the idea of dual washers, you might like a dual dryer, too. But this new option doesn't come cheap either. The \$1,500 Samsung FlexDry DVE60M9900V electric dryer, which matches its FlexWash, is among the most expensive we've tested.

A large tumble dryer sits on the bottom, and on top, a small compartment circulates heated air to dry items that lay flat. You can insert a rack (it comes with the appliance) into the mini dryer to divide the roughly 6-inch-deep compartment in two. Our tests found

the main drum to be very good at drying, and relatively quiet. To test the air-drying compartment, we used a man's cotton/poly-blend shirt, then a large cotton sweater, then four synthetic undergarments. We found that the mini

air-dryer worked as promised and dried clothes much faster than air-drying at room temperature. The sweater, for instance, was ready to wear after 55 minutes in the FlexDry, but it was still damp after 24 hours of air-drying. The mini dryer uses cooler



**WASH TIMES** Of the compatible LG front-loaders, the normal-wash/heavy-soil settings take 75 to 120 minutes. The mini washer runs about 40 minutes on the normal cycle.

**PERFORMANCE** Compatible LG front-loaders have scored Very Good to Excellent overall in our ratings. Those scoring Excellent made our recommended list, because brand reliability wasn't a problem. As for the mini washer, its performance was similar to Samsung's.

## The Verdict

Though these dual machines differ in configuration, their performance is quite similar. "One appliance didn't rise above the other in our tests," Gonzalez says. We found Samsung's design to be more convenient because the mini washer is on top, meaning there's less bending as you load and unload. But because this unit takes an all-in-one

approach, only consumers who are replacing their washer can adopt this new technology.

"On the other hand, LG's configuration allows for more flexibility," Gonzalez notes. If you've purchased an LG front-loader since 2009, you could add this secondary element for \$700. With the LG, you have to bend down to load and unload the mini washer, almost at ground level. But here's a heads-up for taller readers: As with a pedestal, the LG SideKick raises the height of the front-loader by 14 inches or so, making it easier to load and unload the main machine.

No, these new systems won't double your clean-clothes output—far from it. But if you need to wash a small load or get a specific item clean before an event—without waiting until you have a bigger load—these miniature machines could help.



Online subscribers can go to [CR.org/washers](http://CR.org/washers) for full washing-machine ratings.

heat than the full-sized one, drying delicates in 55 minutes. When we put the mini dryer to the test with the rack inserted, garments on the bottom were drier than those laid out on the rack above.

The gas version of this dryer is the \$1,600 Samsung DVG60M9900V.



**SAMSUNG FLEXDRY DVE60M9900V**  
\$1,500

**70**

**OVERALL SCORE**

## The Value of Your Liquid Assets



*Today's washing machines use less water than ever before, but clothes come out just as clean—or cleaner.*

IN RECENT YEARS, federal efficiency standards have limited the amount of water washing machines can use. As a result, new appliances are far more water-efficient than older models. That goes for almost any brand or type. Some consumers, noticing the small amount of water used, wonder whether their new washer is doing as good a job at getting clothes clean. We've even heard from readers who were so concerned that they added more water to the machine with a bucket or garden hose.

That's a really bad idea.

In fact, adding too much water can result in dingier clothes.

"Cleaning results may suffer because the clothes can't rub against each other in excess water, which is how newer machines are designed to work," explains Emilio Gonzalez, a CR engineer who runs our laundry appliance tests.

We've seen the effects of these stricter standards in our test lab. An agitator top-loader that CR tested 20 years ago may have used more than 40 gallons of water to wash an average load.

Here's what that number looks like today: Agitator top-loaders still submerge dirty loads in water, with some models using up to 26 gallons per cycle. Models in that category with an automatic load-sensing feature (which senses the weight of the load to determine the right amount of water) used about

19 gallons to wash one of our 8-pound test loads. High-efficiency top-loaders typically use 12 to 17 gallons. And last, front-loaders, as a group, are the most water-efficient, using about 7 gallons to wash a test load while still doing a very good job at cleaning.

You'll know your washer is using too little water if cottons come out dirty or nearly dry straight out of the machine.

"The only time we saw a model use extremely low levels—less than 2 gallons—our test load came out visibly dirty," Gonzalez says. "We figured out that, in this case, that front-loader had a software problem, which the manufacturer has since fixed."

If you're disappointed in the way your washing machine cleans, never add water with a bucket or hose. Instead, try these tips:

- ▶ Allow enough room for the dirty laundry to move around in the washer; don't overstuff. Your owner's manual will guide you.
- ▶ Use a more aggressive setting, such as a heavy-soil, heavy-duty, bulk-items, extra-rinse, or deep-fill option.
- ▶ Try the steam feature. In our tests, it improved cleaning slightly.
- ▶ Pick a laundry detergent that packs more punch. (See our ratings on page 19.)
- ▶ Pretreat tougher stains. For expert tips on how to combat common stains, such as ink and red wine, go to [CR.org/stains1017](http://CR.org/stains1017).

**Proceed With Caution**

Brightly colored laundry pods have been ingested by adults with dementia—with dire results.



**SAFETY ALERT**  
**Liquid Laundry Detergent Pods Pose a Lethal Risk**

*Consumer Reports already recommends keeping these packets out of homes where children younger than 6 are present, but we now also recommend the same for homes with cognitively impaired adults.*

Liquid laundry packets are colorful like candy and squishy like playthings, which helps explain why young children can be drawn to them—and sometimes chew on them. But Consumer Reports has learned during a monthslong investigation that children aren't the only ones at risk. Adults with dementia have ingested pods, too.

In the time since Tide Pods debuted in 2012, ushering in a new product category, eight deaths related to ingesting liquid laundry detergent packets have been reported to the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). Six were adults with dementia, and two were children under 2.

According to the CPSC reports, which CR obtained through a Freedom of Information

Act request, six of the eight deaths involved packets made by Procter & Gamble. That ratio is in line with the company's market share. P&G's Tide Pods and sibling brands represent 79 percent of the market, according to IRI, a Chicago-based market research firm. Sales of laundry pods totaled \$1.2 billion over a recent 12-month period, which is 17 percent of all laundry detergent sales.

"We are aware of accidental ingestions related to our liquid laundry pacs among adults with dementia," Elizabeth Kinney, P&G's senior communications manager for North America fabric care, told CR. "We are deeply saddened by this and have taken action to understand and help prevent these types of incidents."

CR has been calling on manufacturers for five years to make pods safer and the packaging less appealing. P&G and other companies switched from clear containers to opaque ones that hide the colorful packets inside, and added a bitter-tasting substance to the film of the packets themselves.

The most recent data available to CR shows that the changes haven't yet made a significant dent in the number of calls to poison-control centers.

"As a result of the new data highlighting the potential risks to adults with dementia, we now recommend that family members caring for anyone who is cognitively impaired not keep pods in the home," says James Dickerson, Ph.D., chief scientific officer at CR. "We also continue to believe that

manufacturers should modify the appearance of laundry packets so they do not look like candy."

Adults with moderate to severe dementia may mistakenly try to eat items that aren't food, and some with a certain form of the disease may become increasingly interested in putting things in their mouth. "The reasons for these behaviors are not entirely known," says Gregory S. Day, M.D., a neurologist specializing in the diagnosis and management of dementia at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. "Likely they reflect loss of function in brain areas that regulate or restrict such behaviors, returning the patient to a more primitive, child- or baby-like state, where such behavior is common."

**Ratings** > **Super Suds** We tested 51 laundry detergents to find out which ones are the best at removing stains.



Recommended	Rank	Product	Price	Overall Score	Type	Washer Type	Test Results			
							Body Oil	Dirt	Grass	Other Stains

**DETERGENT**

All but two of these formulas are liquid, the big seller among detergents today. Sales of powder formulas have dissolved in recent years.

✓	1	<b>Tide</b> Plus Ultra Stain Release	\$0.25	82	Liquid	HE	↑	↑	↑	↑
✓	2	<b>Persil</b> ProClean Power-Liquid 2in1	\$0.25	82	Liquid	All	↑	↑	↑	↑
	3	<b>Tide</b> Plus Bleach	\$0.19	74	Liquid	HE	↑	↑	↑	↓
	4	<b>Persil</b> ProClean Power-Liquid	\$0.20	74	Liquid	All	↑	↑	↑	↑
	5	<b>Green Works</b> Laundry Detergent <sup>1</sup>	\$0.12	72	Liquid	All	↑	↑	↑	↓
	6	<b>Persil</b> ProClean Power-Liquid Sensitive Skin	\$0.19	71	Liquid	All	↑	↑	↑	↓
	7	<b>Member's Mark</b> Ultimate Clean (Sam's Club)	\$0.12	70	Liquid	All	↑	↑	↓	↓
	8	<b>Persil</b> ProClean Power-Pearls	\$0.25	70	Powder	All	↑	↑	↓	↓
	9	<b>Tide</b> Plus Coldwater Clean HE	\$0.25	69	Liquid	HE	↑	↑	↓	↓
	10	<b>Kirkland Signature</b> UltraClean (Costco)	\$0.11	69	Liquid	All	↑	↑	↑	↓
	11	<b>Tide</b> PurClean <sup>1</sup>	\$0.38	68	Liquid	All	↑	↑	↑	↓
	12	<b>All</b> Radiant	\$0.14	67	Liquid	All	↑	↑	↑	↓
	13	<b>Tide</b> HE Turbo Clean	\$0.19	66	Liquid	HE	↑	↑	↑	↓
	14	<b>Tide</b> Free & Gentle Liquid	\$0.17	64	Liquid	All	↑	↑	↓	↓
	15	<b>Gain</b> Original	\$0.13	62	Powder	HE	↑	↑	↓	↓
	16	<b>All</b> Stainlifter (With In-Wash Pretreaters)	\$0.10	60	Liquid	All	↑	↑	↓	↓
	17	<b>Gain</b> Icy Fresh Fizz Oxi Boost	\$0.19	60	Liquid	All	↑	↑	↓	↓
	18	<b>Up &amp; Up</b> HE Free & Clear (Target)	\$0.12	60	Liquid	All	↑	↑	↓	↓
	19	<b>All</b> Small & Mighty Super Concentrated	\$0.12	60	Liquid	All	↑	↑	↓	↓

**PODS/PACKS**

These single-use packets are convenient, but they don't perform as well as our top liquid detergents. Consumer Reports advises against using liquid-filled laundry pods in homes where children under 6 or adults with dementia are present.

	1	<b>Tide</b> Pods Plus Febreze <sup>2</sup>	\$0.33	72	Liquid	All	↑	↑	↑	↓
	2	<b>All</b> Mighty Pacs Oxi <sup>2</sup>	\$0.17	71	Liquid	All	↑	↑	↑	↓
	3	<b>Tide</b> Pods <sup>2</sup>	\$0.22	71	Liquid	All	↑	↑	↑	↓
	4	<b>Persil</b> ProClean Power-Caps <sup>2</sup>	\$0.31	68	Liquid	All	↑	↑	↑	↓
	5	<b>All</b> PowerCore Pacs Oxi <sup>2</sup>	\$0.33	65	Liquid	All	↑	↑	↑	↓
	6	<b>Gain</b> Flings <sup>2</sup>	\$0.24	64	Liquid	All	↑	↓	↓	↓
	7	<b>Dropps</b> Oxi Scent+ Stain Fighting Detergent <sup>2</sup>	\$0.20	49	Liquid	All	↑	↓	↓	↓
	8	<b>Arm &amp; Hammer</b> Toss 'N Done Ultra Power Paks	\$0.21	32	Powder	All	↓	↓	↓	↓

**HOW WE TEST:** We wash cotton swatches saturated with body oil, dirt, grass, blood, chocolate, wine, and tea in a front-loading washer using cool water, because

that's one way to help save money on energy. We then use a special instrument to measure how much of the stain is removed. The Overall Score is based on

cleaning performance for all stains, giving weight to more common ones, like body oil.

<sup>1</sup> Does not contain brighteners. <sup>2</sup> This product is a single-load liquid laundry detergent packet. Consumer Reports believes it should be avoided in homes where children under 6 years old or adults who are cognitively impaired are present. Contact with or ingestion of the packet's liquid contents may pose a risk of serious injury or death.

# Winning Kitchen Combos

Choosing a range, refrigerator, and dishwasher that perform well and look great together is no easy task. We've found the perfect matching suites for every need and budget.

by Paul Hope



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

**IF ALL YOU** care about when shopping for a new range, refrigerator, or dishwasher is peak performance, your job couldn't be simpler: Take your pick of the top models in our ratings and move on to your next home improvement project.

You should know, however, that you'll probably end up with models from more than one brand because manufacturers rarely earn the top spot in our ratings across all appliance categories. So the look of your refrigerator may clash with the dishwasher from another maker. "One brand's stainless steel might have blue undertones, while another's might look darker or have a brighter sheen," explains Claudette Ennis, CR's market analyst for kitchen appliances. "To ensure your major appliances match, you'll likely have to stick with a single manufacturer."

If a unified look is your only priority, choosing a predetermined group of matching models might work. Retailers frequently offer discounts on appliance suites (comprising a range, refrigerator, and dishwasher) from a single brand. But that approach isn't ideal, either: Your appliances will match, but because of performance inconsistencies across individual brands, you could end up with a dishwasher that works great and a wimpy range that takes 18 minutes to boil a pot of water.

If you really want it all—top-performing appliances that match—you're in for more of a challenge. We've done the detective work to find kitchen appliances that match *and* are up to the task, hand-picking four suites that will suit a variety of needs and budgets (see "Suite Deals," on page 22). You can also come up with a winning kitchen combination of your own, by using the ratings beginning on page 24 and following these simple strategies.

**Build your suite around the range.** The range is the true workhorse of the kitchen, and in our test labs it's where

## Have More Fun With Your Fridge

*High-tech refrigerators promise convenience, but do they really make life easier? Here's our take on two new lines we've tested.*



### **KNOCK, KNOCK!**

With fridges in **LG's Signature line** (starting at about \$7,500), knocking twice on a glass door-within-

the-door illuminates an interior light so that you can see what's inside without letting cool air escape. You can also open the main door by waving your foot through a laser beamed onto the floor.

**CR's take:** *The window gives a limited view of the interior. The hands-free door might be convenient for some, and rest assured, a sensor prevents the door from opening when, say, your cat takes a swipe.*



### **COMMAND CENTRAL**

The tech-loaded models in **Samsung's Family Hub line** (starting at \$3,000) have a built-in tablet

that can display anything from the weather to the day's headlines. Interior cameras record the contents and send images to your phone (so that you can see whether you need to buy milk when you're standing in the dairy aisle at the supermarket).

**CR's take:** *We don't know anyone who needs another tablet—especially one that's stuck to the fridge. If you stash a jar anywhere close to the camera, it can obstruct the view, and items in the door bins go unseen.*

we see differences in performance play out in the most meaningful ways. So choose the model in the configuration you need (gas or electric) with the features you want and the best performance you can afford.

After you've selected the range, move on to refrigerators and dishwashers made by the same brand. You may not find our highest-rated models among them, but chances are good that you'll identify ones with the features and performance to satisfy your needs.

**Mix and match models.** Retailers incentivize buying multiple appliances from a single brand, but you usually don't have to buy the exact models they advertise to get the discount. Most will let you select other models from the same maker, which means you can choose better performers from among our ratings and still enjoy the savings.

**Replace only what's needed.** If you need just a single appliance at the moment, chances are good that a new purchase will match the older ones in your kitchen—as long as you choose a model from the same brand. Manufacturers update the looks of handles or controls from time to time, Ennis says, but they rarely make significant changes in their finishes for this very reason.

**Avoid credit card pitfalls.** Major retailers, including Home Depot and Lowe's, offer credit cards with up to six months of interest-free financing on purchases over \$299—provided you pay the balance within that time.

"If you don't pay the balance in full, you will owe all of the deferred interest on the purchase," explains Gail Hillebrand, associate director of consumer education and engagement at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

Whether you're remodeling your kitchen or just want to upgrade your range in time for the holidays, we provide all the research you need on the following pages.

# Suite Deals

We've assembled four matching appliance suites to highlight some of the best, brand-specific bundles from the models in our ratings. Go with one of the four combos here, or use our ratings on pages 24 to 26 to tailor a matching suite to your needs.

## Best Matching Suite With a Gas Range

Most people prefer gas ranges. The burners respond to adjustments quickly and work well with virtually any style of pot and pan. Plus there's no cooking surface to worry about scratching, as with glass-topped electric ranges. Total: \$5,300

**LG LDG4315ST**  
\$1,700

**73**  
OVERALL SCORE



Our top-rated double-oven gas range, this model offers solid top-of-the-range performance and beautiful baking. "This is a feature-rich, high-performing range at a very competitive price," says Tara Casaregola, who runs CR's range and cooktop lab. The LG has two high-power burners (some have only one), allowing you to boil water for pasta and sear a steak at the same time.

**LG LFXS30766S**  
\$2,500

**81**  
OVERALL SCORE



Another appliance that tops the charts, this French-door refrigerator maintains ideal temperatures throughout the cavity. It's whisper quiet (some fridges produce a hum when the compressor kicks on), has spillproof shelves that capture liquids without letting them drip onto the food below, and has a through-the-door water and ice dispenser.

**LG LDF8874ST**  
\$1,100

**67**  
OVERALL SCORE



A matching suite requires a sacrifice somewhere. This dishwasher, one of LG's best-performing models in our ratings, comes in below the best models we've tested. Even so, it cleans well and operates quietly and efficiently, though it's only average at drying dishes. Plus it has a dedicated third rack for cutlery, freeing up space elsewhere for larger dishes.

## Best Matching Suite With an Electric Range

The best electric smoothtop ranges routinely perform better in our tests than their gas counterparts. Their high-power burners tend to heat water faster, even if their low-power, simmer burners are slower to react to changes in temperature. The glass ceramic tops can be scratched, though not easily, and can be difficult to clean. Total: \$4,600

**SAMSUNG NE59J7850WS**  
\$1,300

**82**  
OVERALL SCORE



This stellar double-oven smoothtop is second only to a slide-in model from Samsung that's \$500 more. And it boasts a unique design: Two doors give way to one baking cavity, which you can divide with a partition. Bake at two different temperatures with the partition in place, or remove it to hold a turkey or roast. It bakes well, broils beautifully, heats fast, and holds steady simmers.

**SAMSUNG RF28K9070SR**  
\$2,600

**82**  
OVERALL SCORE



"While this model doesn't earn the top score in our ratings, it's not too far behind the very best French-door refrigerators," explains Joseph Pacella, who leads the refrigerator testing program at CR. "It still hits the ideal temperatures throughout the refrigerator and freezer, and it's quiet and efficient, too." This model also contains spillproof shelves and a through-the-door water and ice dispenser.

**SAMSUNG DW80M9550US**  
\$700

**77**  
OVERALL SCORE



This model, part of a new line, earned very good marks for cleaning and drying in our tests. But you'll give up peace of mind with this purchase. Though Samsung refrigerators and ranges fare well in our annual reliability survey, its dishwashers break or have serious issues at more than twice the rate of the most reliable brands. As a result, you won't find Samsung dishwashers on our recommended lists.

## Best Budget-Friendly Suite

CR's testing routinely reveals that you don't have to pay a lot for a great range. The ranges here outperform a handful of aspirational pro-style ranges that cost five times as much. You won't get as many features, but performance can still be stellar where it counts most.

**Total: \$2,455 with gas, \$2,650 with electric**

**KENMORE ELECTRIC SMOOTHTOP RANGE 95053**  
\$900

**87**  
OVERALL SCORE



This unassuming range isn't just the top-scoring model in its category, it's the highest-scoring radiant electric range, period. It earns perfect marks on top of the range, heating water rapidly and simmering steadily, and the oven produces near-perfect browning. You'll give up some premium features, but this model comes with a warming drawer and a convection mode.

**KENMORE 51133**  
\$1,100

**70**  
OVERALL SCORE



Compared with ever-popular French-door refrigerators, side-by-side models like this one make it easier to keep the contents of your freezer organized and accessible, rather than lost in the depths of a bottom drawer. This budget-friendly fridge sits near the top of our ratings for side-by-sides. It maintains temperatures perfectly and costs only \$91 per year to operate.

**KENMORE GAS RANGE 74133**  
\$705

**71**  
OVERALL SCORE



Sitting near the top of our ratings for single-oven gas ranges, this Kenmore bakes evenly, the high-power burner heats quickly, and there's even a fifth burner and a warming drawer. You'll have to live with a lackluster broiler (typical of gas ranges), and there's no convection fan in the oven. Bonus: This range is one of only a handful of gas models to ace our self-cleaning tests.

**KENMORE 14573**  
\$650

**79**  
OVERALL SCORE



This dishwasher comes in just behind the very best models we've tested. "The cleaning and drying from this Kenmore are as good as our top-scoring models," says Larry Ciuffo, CR's lead dishwasher lab engineer. "But it's slightly louder than some of the competition, it doesn't have as many wash cycles, and it has a filter that requires periodic cleaning."

## Best Pro-Style Suite

Pro-style appliances make a bold aesthetic statement. Ranges often benefit from multiple high-power burners, but the fact is they don't fare better in testing than our top conventional ranges. If you want to feel like a professional chef in your own kitchen and aren't bothered by the cost, this suite might be the option for you. **Total: \$14,760**

**KITCHENAID KDRS407VSS**  
\$4,140

**72**  
OVERALL SCORE



CR recommends just three of 32 pro-style ranges currently in our ratings. This KitchenAid earns the highest marks of any 30-inch model, thanks to steady simmering, even baking, and fast boiling. Know that you'll need both a gas connection and a 220-volt electrical line to power it. Given that some pro-style models cost \$7,000 or more, this pick seems a relative bargain.

**KITCHENAID KBFN502ESS**  
\$9,000

**79**  
OVERALL SCORE



Like most built-ins, this French-door refrigerator sits flush with surrounding cabinetry and stands more than 80 inches tall. It holds steady temperatures, though it uses more electricity than the competition. And while it looks quite large—measuring 6 inches wider than most built-in models—it actually offers less usable storage space, due to its fairly shallow depth.

**KITCHENAID KDTM704ESS**  
\$1,620

**83**  
OVERALL SCORE



Thanks to mostly hidden controls, a sleek handle, and helpful features (like a third rack for cutlery), this dishwasher holds its own in our pro-style suite. The model rated higher for cleaning performance than almost any other dishwasher in our ratings. It's quiet and efficient, with a relatively short, 110-minute cycle.

**Ratings** > **Step 1: Start With the Range** To build a matching appliance suite, begin by selecting the range, based on your fuel source and budget. The final few digits in a model number indicate finish; each option is listed by the model number we tested.

Recommended	Rank	Brand & Model	Price	Overall Score	Finishes Available				Test Results						Features						
					Stainless Steel	Black Stainless	Black	White	Cooktop High	Cooktop Low	Baking	Broiling	Oven Capacity	Self-Cleaning	High-Power Elements	Medium-Power Elements	Low-Power Elements	Convection Mode	Warming Drawer	Double Oven	
SMOOTHTOP, SINGLE OVEN (30-INCH)																					
✓	1	Kenmore 95052*	\$900	87	•	•	•	•	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	2	0	2	•	•	•
✓	2	LG LRE3083SW	\$855	86	•	•	•	•	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	2	0	2	•	•	•	•
✓	3	Frigidaire Gallery FGEF3035RF	\$650	86	•	•	•	•	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	2	0	2	•	•	•	•
✓	4	GE Café CS980STSS	\$2,550	86	•	•	•	•	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	1	2	2	•	•	•	•
✓	7	Samsung NE58F9500SS	\$1,300	83	•	•	•	•	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	2	0	2	•	•	•	•
✓	8	GE PS920SFSS	\$1,965	83	•	•	•	•	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	1	2	1	•	•	•	•
✓	10	Whirlpool WFE905C0ES	\$630	81	•	•	•	•	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	2	0	2	•	•	•	•
SMOOTHTOP, DOUBLE OVEN (30-INCH)																					
✓	1	Samsung NE58F9710WS	\$1,800	85	•	•	•	•	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	1	2	1	•	•	•	•
✓	2	Samsung NE59J7850WS	\$1,300	82	•	•	•	•	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	1	2	1	•	•	•	•
✓	3	LG LDE4415ST	\$1,600	81	•	•	•	•	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	2	0	2	•	•	•	•
GAS, SINGLE OVEN (30-INCH)																					
✓	1	Samsung NX58F5700WS	\$1,530	79	•	•	•	•	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	2	2	1	•	•	•	•
✓	2	Samsung NX58H9500WS	\$2,000	77	•	•	•	•	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	2	2	1	•	•	•	•
✓	3	GE PGS920SEFSS	\$2,435	73	•	•	•	•	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	1	3	1	•	•	•	•
✓	4	Samsung NX58H5600SS	\$700	73	•	•	•	•	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	2	2	1	•	•	•	•
✓	5	Kenmore 74132*	\$705	71	•	•	•	•	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	2	2	1	•	•	•	•
✓	6	Samsung NX58F5500SS	\$600	71	•	•	•	•	↓	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	2	2	1	•	•	•	•
✓	7	Frigidaire Gallery FGGF3058RF	\$945	69	•	•	•	•	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	2	2	1	•	•	•	•
GAS AND DUAL-FUEL, DOUBLE OVEN (30-INCH)																					
✓	1	Samsung NY58J9850WS (dual-fuel)	\$3,010	79	•	•	•	•	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	2	2	1	•	•	•	•
✓	2	LG LDG4315ST	\$1,700	73	•	•	•	•	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	2	2	1	•	•	•	•
✓	3	GE PGB980ZEJSS	\$2,200	73	•	•	•	•	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	2	2	1	•	•	•	•
PRO-STYLE DUAL-FUEL (30-INCH)																					
✓	1	KitchenAid KDRS407VSS	\$4,140	72	•	•	•	•	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	0	0	1	•	•	•	•
PRO-STYLE DUAL-FUEL (36-INCH)																					
✓	1	KitchenAid KDRU763VSS	\$7,300	74	•	•	•	•	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	0	0	1	•	•	•	•
✓	2	GE Monogram ZDP364NDPSS	\$7,600	72	•	•	•	•	↓	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	0	0	0	•	•	•	•

> Online subscribers can go to [CR.org/ranges](https://www.consumerreports.org/ranges) for complete up-to-date ratings.

**HOW WE TEST:** To test high cooktop heat, we time how long the highest-powered burner takes to bring a 6-liter pot of water to a near-boil. For low cooktop heat, we note how well the lowest-powered burner keeps a

low temperature (such as for melting chocolate), and how well the highest-power burner, set on low, holds tomato sauce below a boil. To test how evenly the ovens

bake, we bake cakes and cookies on two oven racks. We broil a pan of burgers to find out how evenly they brown and to check high-heat searing. To evaluate Oven Capacity, we measure usable space. Then it

gets messy: We test the oven's ability to remove a baked-on mix of cheese, eggs, pie filling, and other food on the Self-Cleaning setting.



**Ratings** > **Step 2: Find the Right Fridge** Look for a refrigerator from the same manufacturer as your range. We hand-selected from our ratings and listed them alphabetically, so it's easier to match.



Recommended	Brand & Model	Price	Overall Score	Finishes Available				Test Results				Features						
				Stainless Steel	Black Stainless	Black	White	Temperature Uniformity	Energy Efficiency	Noise	Ease of Use	Energy Cost/Yr. (\$)	Fridge Usable Capacity (Cu. Ft.)	Freezer Usable Capacity (Cu. Ft.)	Exterior Height (In.)	Exterior Width (In.)	Exterior Depth (In.)	Water Dispenser
THREE-DOOR FRENCH-DOOR																		
	<b>Frigidaire</b> Gallery FGHB2866PF	\$1,900	71	•			•	↑	↑	↑	↓	92	12.3	6.3	70	36	34	External
	<b>GE</b> GNE29GSKSS	\$2,000	83	•		•	•	↑	↑	↑	↑	84	14.7	6.2	70	36	34	External
	<b>GE</b> Café CYE22TSHSS	\$2,790	81	•				↑	↓	↑	↑	86	10.1	5.0	70	36	30	External
	<b>Kenmore</b> 70333	\$3,200	77	•		•	•	↑	↓	↑	↑	97	11.4	4.9	69	36	32	External
	<b>Kenmore</b> 7200[2]	\$1,200	74	•		•	•	↑	↓	↓	↓	83	10.4	4.2	70	33	32	Internal
Ⓢ	<b>LG</b> LFC24770ST	\$1,710	85	•			•	↑	↑	↑	↑	61	12.6	4.8	69	33	33	No
	<b>LG</b> LFXS30766S	\$2,500	81	•	•			↑	↑	↑	↑	101	13.1	6	69	36	34	External
✓	<b>Samsung</b> RF28HDEDPWW	\$2,500	86	•			•	↑	↑	↑	↑	89	13.3	6.7	69	36	34	External
	<b>Whirlpool</b> WRF995FIFZ	\$3,420	82	•				↑	↑	↑	↑	97	15.9	5.7	70	36	37	External
	<b>Whirlpool</b> WRF532SMBM	\$1,530	79	•		•		↑	↑	↑	↓	59	10.9	4.3	69	33	32	No
FOUR-DOOR (OR MORE) FRENCH-DOOR																		
	<b>Kenmore</b> 72493	\$2,000	74	•		•	•	↑	↓	↑	↓	92	12.8	4.3	69	36	33	External
	<b>LG</b> LNXS30866D	\$3,300	79	•	•			↑	↑	↑	↓	99	12.8	8.9	69	36	37	External
✓	<b>Samsung</b> RF28K9070SR	\$2,600	82	•	•			↑	↑	↑	↑	101	11.8	8.6	71	36	35	External
	<b>Samsung</b> RF30KMEDBSR	\$2,195	77	•	•			↑	↑	↑	↑	95	14.3	5.7	70	36	36	External
	<b>Whirlpool</b> WRX988SIBM	\$2,200	72	•				↑	↑	↑	↑	70	12.7	5.2	69	36	34	External
SIDE-BY-SIDE																		
	<b>Frigidaire</b> Gallery FGHS2655PF	\$1,350	67	•				↓	↑	↓	↑	83	11.8	5.6	70	36	34	External
	<b>Kenmore</b> 51133	\$1,050	70	•		•	•	↑	↑	↓	↑	91	12.5	6.7	69	36	34	External
✓	<b>LG</b> LSXS26366S	\$1,620	75	•	•			↑	↑	↑	↑	92	13.8	6.9	69	36	34	External
Ⓢ	<b>Samsung</b> RS25J500DSR	\$1,000	76	•	•	•	•	↑	↑	↑	↓	90	12.3	6.2	69	36	34	External
	<b>Whirlpool</b> WRS975SIDM	\$1,800	70	•				↓	↑	↑	↑	79	12.3	6.4	69	36	34	External
BUILT-IN																		
	<b>GE</b> Monogram ZICP360NHRH	\$7,100	76	•				↑	↓	↑	↑	76	10.4	4.1	84	36	26	No
	<b>KitchenAid</b> KBFN502ESS	\$9,000	79	•				↑	↓	↑	↓	78	13.0	4.0	83	42	26	No

> Online subscribers can go to [CR.org/refrigerators](https://www.crisp.com/refrigerators) for complete up-to-date ratings.

**HOW WE TEST:** To measure temperature performance, we see how uniformly models maintain 37° F in the fridge and 0° F in the freezer, even

as we crank up the heat in our labs. Storage is also key, so we measure Usable Capacity, excluding nooks that manufacturers include but we don't

think are usable. We also measure height, width, and depth (HxWxD), rounded to the nearest inch. Noise is measured with the compressor running.

Energy Cost is how much the unit will cost to run per year based on average electricity prices.

**Ratings** > **Step 3: Pick a Dishwasher** Last, go with a dishwasher (again, listed alphabetically) from the same brand. You might have to make a bit of a sacrifice, in terms of performance, to round out your matching suite.



Recommended	Brand & Model	Price	Overall Score	Finishes Available				Test Results						Features				
				Stainless Steel	Black Stainless	Black	White	Washing	Drying	Energy Use	Noise	Ease of Use	Cycle Time (Min.)	Ample Flatware Slots	Adjustable Upper Rack	Sensor	Self-Cleaning Filter	Hidden Controls
	<b>Frigidaire</b> Gallery FGID2479SF	\$650	61	•				↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	195	•	•	•		All
	<b>GE</b> Profile PDF820SSJSS	\$890	80	•				↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	150	•	•	•		No
	<b>GE</b> GDT545PSJSS	\$495	73	•				↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	150	•	•	•		Some
	<b>Kenmore</b> 14573	\$650	79	•		•	•	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	145		•	•		Some
	<b>Kenmore</b> 13223	\$500	77	•		•	•	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	160		•	•		No
	<b>Kenmore</b> 14523	\$625	75	•		•	•	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	150		•	•		No
✓	<b>KitchenAid</b> KDTM354DSS	\$990	85	•	•			↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	125	•	•	•	•	Some
✓	<b>KitchenAid</b> KDTM704ESS	\$1,620	83	•	•			↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	110	•	•	•	•	Some
	<b>KitchenAid</b> KDTE104ESS	\$650	75	•	•			↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	135	•	•	•		Some
	<b>LG</b> LDF8874ST	\$1,100	67	•				↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	150	•	•	•		Some
	<b>LG</b> LDT9965BD	\$1,080	62	•	•			↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	140	•	•	•		Some
	<b>Samsung</b> DW80K7050US	\$650	81	•	•			↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	130	•	•	•		All
	<b>Samsung</b> DW80M9550US	\$700	77	•	•			↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	135	•	•	•		All
	<b>Whirlpool</b> WDT720PADM	\$430	75	•		•	•	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	155	•	•	•		All
	<b>Whirlpool</b> WDT970SAHZ	\$720	68	•	•	•	•	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	145	•	•	•		Some

> Online subscribers can go to [CR.org/dishwashers](http://CR.org/dishwashers) for complete up-to-date ratings.

**HOW WE TEST:** In our washing tests, we load the machine with heavily soiled dishes and assess how clean they are when the cycle finishes. (The machine is

loaded according to instructions in the owner's manual.) We choose a normal cycle using the high-temperature option, if available. Noise is judged by

a listening panel during fill, wash, and drain. We measure Energy Use, most of which goes to heating the water, as well as how much water is used per

cycle. And we manipulate adjustable tines and racks to see how easy they are to use.



## RECALLS



### CHEST OF DRAWERS

South Shore is expanding a previous recall of its Summer Breeze chests from 3,500 units to 68,300. The unanchored chests are unstable and can tip over and trap children, possibly resulting in injuries or death. The chests were sold online from February 2005 through December 2016 for about \$160.

**What to do:** Call 800-290-0465 or go to [southshorefurniture.com](http://southshorefurniture.com) for a refund or free tip-over restraint kit installation.



### WHITEBOARDS

Really Good Stuff is recalling about 1.6 million Write Again dry-erase whiteboards because their metal surface can separate from the wooden base, posing a laceration risk. The boards were sold in Really Good Stuff catalogs and online from March 2003 through April 2017 for \$10 to \$47.

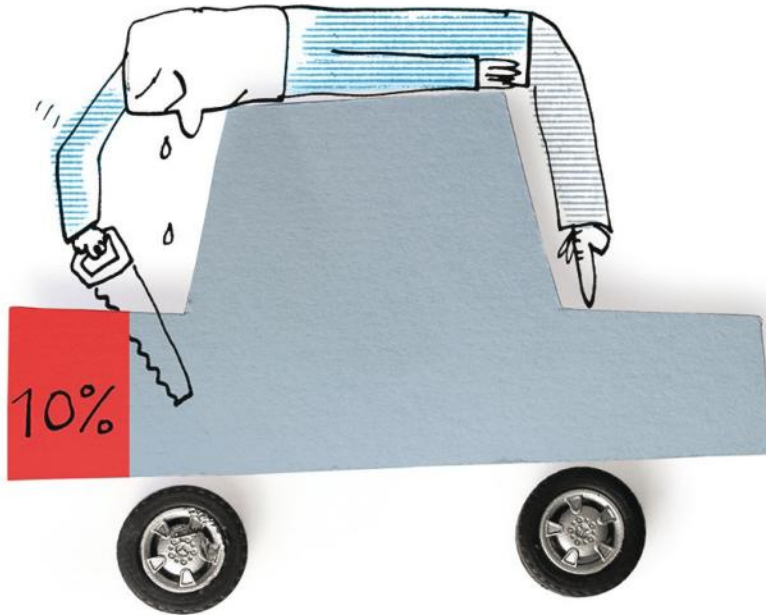
**What to do:** Stop using the board. For a free replacement, go to [reallygoodstuff.com](http://reallygoodstuff.com) or call the company at 800-801-4046.



### GLITTER IPHONE CASES

MixBin Electronics is recalling about 263,000 liquid glitter iPhone cases because they can leak, causing skin irritation and burns. The cases were sold at stores nationwide and online from October 2015 through June 2017 for \$15 to \$65. There have been reports of chemical burns, including one with permanent scarring.

**What to do:** Stop using the case, and go to [getmixbin.com](http://getmixbin.com) or call MixBin at 855-215-4935 for a full refund.



## How much of a deal do I need to get on a 2017 car this fall to overcome the depreciation?

Car dealers—who finance their cars from manufacturers—are eager to clear out 2017 models in the fall because they continue to pay interest on these so-called closeout cars even as 2018 models start arriving in August. So dropping the price benefits both of you.

But buying a closeout car is usually a good deal only if you'll keep it for more than five years or if you are a high-mileage driver who trades in cars every three to five years, says Mel Yu, auto analyst for Consumer Reports. "A closeout car makes it appear that you spread out your mileage over an extra year," Yu says. So even if you go well over the typical 12,000 to 15,000 annual miles, you'll

get a similar trade-in value as a lower-mileage driver who bought the same model at the start of 2017 at a higher price.

Interested? Analyze the deal to ensure that you're really saving: Any new car, including a closeout model, loses about 10 percent of its value as it drives off the lot, so the discount should be 10 percent or higher. Also keep in mind that many cars are worth about half their original purchase price after three years. Though dealer discounts vary, the best sales happen where there is an excess of local inventory. And be aware that as of 2017, new-car sales have begun to cool after years of major growth, so automakers may offer more incentives, such as rebates or low-cost financing, to entice you.

### My 13-year-old water heater seems to be working fine, but should I replace it soon?

The Environmental Protection Agency's Energy Star program suggests replacing water heaters

that are more than 10 years old, but age isn't the only factor you should consider. At 13, your heater is probably out of warranty (most max out at 12 years). If it's a few years past coverage, that's a good time to look into a replacement, advises John Galeotafiore, who oversees CR's home product testing. But an equally important factor is that—thanks to 2015 federal standards—today's water heaters are more energy efficient.

Compared with your old one, a new water heater can cut your utility bill significantly—especially if it is Energy Star certified. An Energy Star certified electric heat-pump, for example, could save a family of four \$3,400 over 13 years. Plus, some utility companies offer rebates for Energy Star buys; go to [energystar.gov/rebate-finder](http://energystar.gov/rebate-finder).

If you decide to buy, a new water heater can cost anywhere from \$500 to well over \$2,000, depending on the size and type. And installation fees can add hundreds more. "But don't assume a new water heater will fit where your old one does," Galeotafiore says. Even if you buy the same type, with added efficiency improvements, a new model may be larger than your old one. For our buying guide, go to [CR.org/waterheaters1017](http://CR.org/waterheaters1017).

### As a new grandparent, how crucial is it that I get the whooping cough vaccine?

"On a scale from 1 to 10? Probably 9," says Marvin M. Lipman, M.D., Consumer Reports' chief medical adviser. That goes for anyone about to have regular contact with an infant. Whooping cough, or pertussis, is a highly contagious bacterial respiratory tract infection that can be serious in adults, but even more so for infants. In fact, half of U.S. babies under 12 months who contract pertussis end up in the hospital and, of those, one out of every 100 dies. In some cases, "you can have pertussis and not know it," Lipman says, so an unprotected adult could pass it on. (More than 20,000 U.S. cases were reported in 2015.)

Children are most vulnerable before they receive their first pertussis shot at 2 months, but they aren't well-protected until age 6, when they receive the last of five such shots. Even if the mother got a pertussis vaccine while pregnant (babies can inherit some immunity this way), relatives should still get the shot.

If you're under age 70, it's likely you were vaccinated as a kid, but because protection fades over time, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises that adults get revaccinated. It takes about two weeks for the vaccine to be effective, so time your shot well before you meet the baby. Tell your doctor if you got the shot more than five years ago, or if you've had any allergic reactions to vaccines in the past.



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



# Who Will Care for You?

With more of us living longer than ever before, understanding the facts about elder care and assisted living will help you and your family be prepared and protected. Here, how to look beyond the fancy lobbies and marketing hype to find a residence that will keep you or a loved one safe and happy, at a price you can afford.

by Penelope Wang



# In

**2010, Wallace Kirkpatrick, 89, was living alone in San Antonio after his wife died. A friend suggested that “Kirk,” as everyone called him, get an apartment in the assisted living facility where he also lived.**

**Kirk soon settled into Esplanade**

**Gardens. “He had a buddy there, and he got along with the director, so he fit in very quickly,” says his daughter, Tara, who lives nearby. Kirk was especially pleased by the dining service, which made grilled bacon-and-cheese sandwiches, one of his favorites, on request.**

For six years Kirkpatrick was happy. But by spring 2016, when he was 95, he began to show small signs of cognitive impairment. “Once he forgot where he was going, and another time he tried to unlock the apartment next door to his by mistake,” Tara says. A newly arrived facility director insisted that the incidents meant Kirkpatrick needed more supervision than the residence could provide. That meant his family would have to move him to a facility with a memory care unit or hire additional caregivers.

The family was reluctant to consider changing residences. “It was too early to move him,” says Tara, 61, a speech-and-language pathologist. “My dad was still very functional and would have been surrounded by people far more impaired.” The family met with the director and agreed to hire private caregivers to keep a closer eye on Kirkpatrick.

He had veterans disability benefits that covered the additional costs, which came on top of the \$4,000 per month for room, board, and an aide, who checked in several times a day and helped him shower and dress. With the additional aides, Kirkpatrick was permitted to remain in his apartment until he died in March 2017. “We couldn’t get it into our heads how we were paying for assisted living, when there was not much assistance,” Tara says.

Jack Collins, executive vice president of SilverCrest Properties, the parent company of Esplanade Gardens, declined to comment on the Kirkpatrick family’s experience.

## The Caregiving Gap

For older Americans, assisted living offers a compelling promise. Your aging parent can live in an apartment with hotel-like services and receive help with medication, bathing, and other tasks of daily living.

By contrast, a nursing home provides 24/7 care for seniors needing medical support. Other kinds of senior-living communities are designed for people who are more active and high-functioning. But these differences are very loosely defined, which can make comparing facilities difficult. And whereas more hospital-like nursing homes are regulated at the state and federal level, oversight of assisted living facilities is uneven at best. A good one can be an excellent choice for someone who can no longer live on his or her own. A bad one could put your loved one at risk.

Assisted living is also a growth industry. As of 2014, about 835,200 older Americans resided in these facilities, up from 733,300 in 2010, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But all too often, as the Kirkpatrick family discovered, assisted living communities lack the resources or expertise to meet the needs of a population that requires increasingly intensive medical care.

Seniors in assisted living tend to be older and sicker than previous generations. In 2016 the average move-in age was 84, with a large number of seniors arriving after a medical emergency, according to A Place for Mom, a national senior housing referral agency based in Seattle. Studies show that more than half of residents have some form of cognitive impairment, according to Paula Carder, an associate professor at the Institute on Aging at Portland State University in Oregon. “Many assisted living facilities are taking residents who have no business being there,” says Amy O’Rourke, president of the board of directors of the Aging Life Care Association, an organization of aging-life-care experts, also known as geriatric-care managers.

Not surprisingly, consumer complaints about assisted living are on the rise, according to long-term-care ombudsmen, trained advocates who operate in all 50 states. Some 55,000 complaints were filed in 2015, compared

PHOTO: PREVIOUS SPREAD: SHUTTERSTOCK. THIS SPREAD: RICHARD BAILEY/GETTY IMAGES

## A Guide to Different Community Types

*All assisted living facilities offer communal living, but their physical settings vary widely. Here are the main types.*

**Apartment-Like Living** Many residential care communities are in large complexes where residents rent an apartment with a small kitchen and private bath. They also offer communal dining and shared activity rooms, such as libraries and

fitness facilities. About 68 percent of residents live in facilities with 50 or more people, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The biggest places typically are part of for-profit chains, including the three largest, Atria, Brookdale, and Sunrise.

**Small Group Homes** Sometimes called board and care, these assisted living residences offer a more intimate, home-like feel, housing just four to 25 people. These smaller places are often located in residential neighborhoods, where seniors can rent single



**Safe and Sound?**  
The top complaints about assisted living include understaffing, slow response to calls, and threatened eviction.

rooms, share common spaces, and dine together.

### **Continuing-Care Communities**

Though most assisted living facilities are standalone, some are connected to nursing homes or are part

of continuing-care communities that offer multiple levels of care, from independent living to nursing-home care. Residents can move from one level to another, which may mean a move to a different section if his or her healthcare needs change.

### **Specialized Care**

Some assisted living facilities offer specialized services for particular medical conditions, such as Parkinson's disease, depression, and diabetes. But as the U.S. population ages, the biggest trend has

been the number of assisted living facilities offering dementia care, says Sheryl Zimmerman, director of aging research at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Today about 60 percent of residential care communities provide a

dementia care program. And almost one-quarter of assisted living communities maintain a dedicated floor or wing for memory care, or they are standalone facilities that serve only people who have more severe forms of dementia, according to the CDC.

with 50,126 in 2012, almost a 10 percent increase. In a recent survey of ombudsmen for Consumer Reports, the National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care, an advocacy organization, found that the most frequent complaints included understaffing, delays in response to calls for assistance, and threatened eviction. About 80 percent said their state government doesn't provide sufficient regulatory oversight for assisted living facilities.

That's not something you're likely to hear from assisted living providers. "The marketing and sales people are trying to fill apartments," O'Rourke says. "They'll tell you they'll take care of you for the rest of your life." They're also likely to tout their high-end amenities, such as wine cellars, libraries, and calendars crowded with cultural events.

The industry's own surveys show high rates of satisfaction with assisted living, says Rachel Reeves, a spokeswoman for the National Center for Assisted Living, an organization that represents the country's assisted living and other long-term-care communities. She says the NCAL "discourages undisclosed or exaggerated information" because doing so "diminishes trust and damages the

relationship between the assisted living community and the customer."

Attractive amenities can contribute to a hefty price, mainly paid out of pocket. In 2016 the median cost for a one-bedroom was \$3,628 per month, or \$43,539 annually, according to a 2016 survey by Genworth, a long-term-care insurance provider. In some regions, costs can exceed \$60,000 per year (see the facing page). Medicare generally does not cover long-term care. Most states provide for some Medicaid coverage of long-term care in assisted living, but the coverage varies widely by state, and to qualify, the resident must spend down his or her assets and meet other criteria. Not-for-profit continuing-care retirement communities typically provide funding for residents who start out in independent living, then move to assisted living and later run out of money. Otherwise, the resident would have to move out unless family members can tap other funding. Many nursing homes take Medicaid, but at press time, because of the ongoing healthcare debate in

Continued on page 34 >

## Why Making Friends and Fitting In Are Essential

*The right assisted living facility will help your parent feel comfortable and stay engaged, which can improve health and happiness.*

A PARTICULAR assisted living facility might look like a solid choice based on location, care services, and your family's finances. But what's also important is finding a good fit for yourself, or for Mom or Dad, a place where you or they can feel comfortable socially and make new friends.

"A person's physical and psychological well-being can be improved by staying active and engaged," says Carolyn McClanahan, a financial planner and doctor in Jacksonville, Fla. Here are tips for finding a good match:

### Use Your Instincts

Look for activities and facilities—such as field trips, a book club, or a pool—that your parent(s) might enjoy with others who have similar interests. Consider the size of the residence, its appearance, and how you see staff members interacting with residents and each other. For a potential resident, "sometimes it is just kind of a gut instinct: Do I feel comfortable here?" says Stephen Maag, a director at LeadingAge, an association of not-for-profit senior-care groups.

### Visit Strategically

To really get a feel for a place, talk to as many residents as possible and make multiple visits at different times. Arrange for Mom or Dad to observe or participate in

one or two activities that are appealing. Consider an overnight visit, if offered.

### Ask About the Welcoming Strategy

The initial weeks after a move could be emotionally difficult. Your parent will be adjusting to a smaller space, as well as unfamiliar faces. "These places can be very cliquish," McClanahan says. Still, the better facilities help residents feel at home as soon as possible, says David Schless, president of the American Seniors Housing Association, an industry group. That might involve a plan to connect Mom with other retired teachers, or bring your Dad into the bridge group.

### Help, but Don't Hover

Visit, but avoid weighing in on every small concern. "Let your parents do for themselves as much as they can do," says Jeff Pine, an aging-life-care expert, also known as a geriatric-care manager, in Santa Fe, N.M.

### Touch Base With the Staff

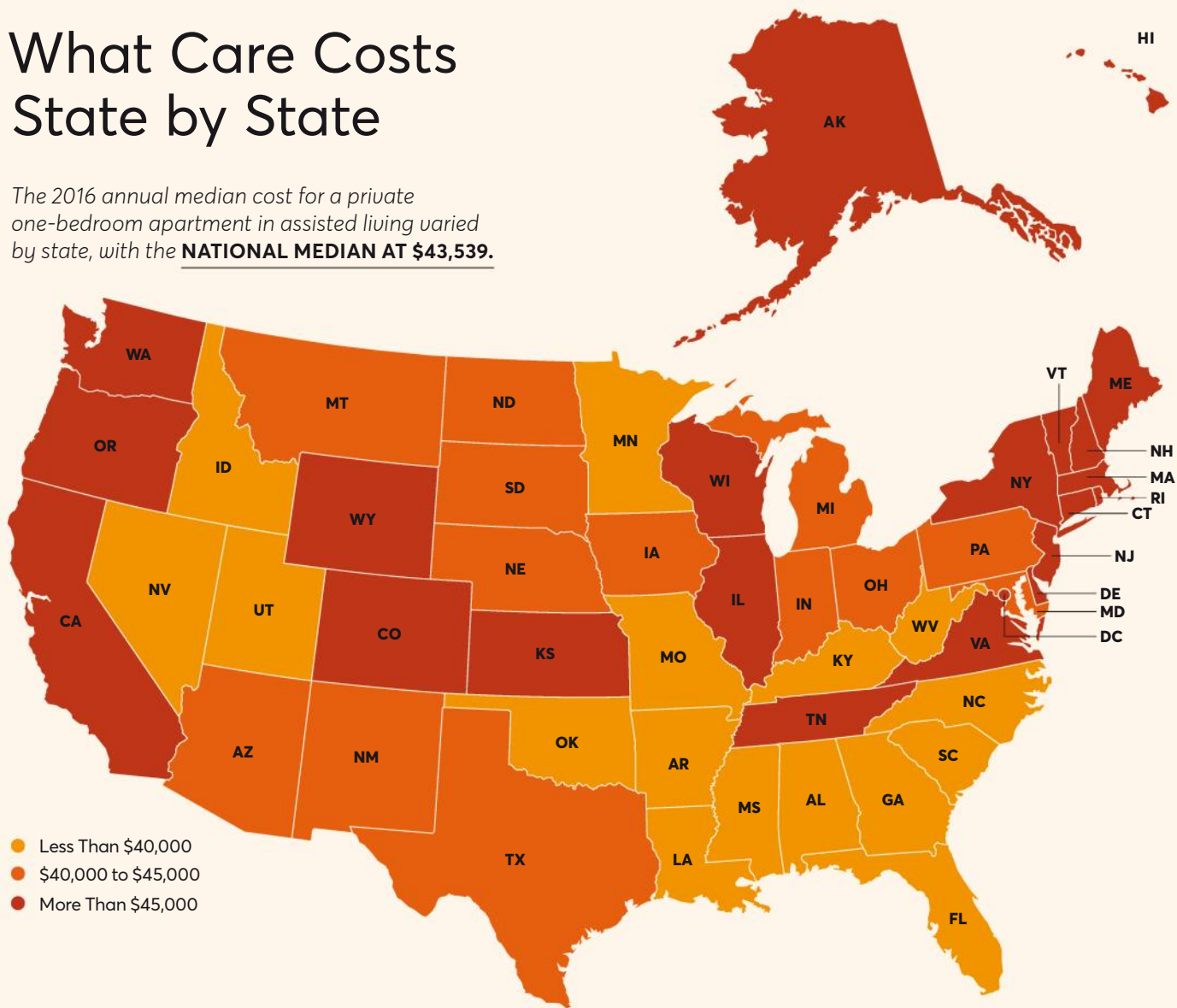
Check in with a manager about how your parent is adjusting. Mom might be making friends and enjoying activities, despite complaints you may be hearing. You might also make specific requests, such as asking a staff member to remind your parent of an activity of particular interest.

—by Karen Damato



# What Care Costs State by State

The 2016 annual median cost for a private one-bedroom apartment in assisted living varied by state, with the **NATIONAL MEDIAN AT \$43,539**.



- Less Than \$40,000
- \$40,000 to \$45,000
- More Than \$45,000

## COST OF CARE BY STATE

● Alabama	\$34,800	● Illinois	\$46,770	● Montana	\$42,150	● Rhode Island	\$59,169
● Alaska	\$69,000	● Indiana	\$42,330	● Nebraska	\$42,120	● South Carolina	\$36,000
● Arizona	\$42,000	● Iowa	\$42,210	● Nevada	\$36,600	● South Dakota	\$40,440
● Arkansas	\$37,590	● Kansas	\$46,350	● New Hampshire	\$57,600	● Tennessee	\$45,360
● California	\$48,000	● Kentucky	\$39,600	● New Jersey	\$59,400	● Texas	\$42,180
● Colorado	\$48,750	● Louisiana	\$37,860	● New Mexico	\$43,200	● Utah	\$35,400
● Connecticut	\$59,400	● Maine	\$59,892	● New York	\$49,635	● Vermont	\$58,320
● Delaware	\$64,416	● Maryland	\$45,000	● North Carolina	\$36,000	● Virginia	\$47,400
● District of Columbia	\$80,400	● Massachusetts	\$65,550	● North Dakota	\$40,080	● Washington	\$54,000
● Florida	\$36,540	● Michigan	\$42,750	● Ohio	\$43,200	● West Virginia	\$39,150
● Georgia	\$34,200	● Minnesota	\$38,400	● Oklahoma	\$33,630	● Wisconsin	\$47,205
● Hawaii	\$49,500	● Mississippi	\$38,400	● Oregon	\$48,780	● Wyoming	\$47,940
● Idaho	\$38,400	● Missouri	\$30,438	● Pennsylvania	\$43,200		

Source: Genworth 2016 Cost of Care Survey.

Continued from page 32

Congress, the program's future funding was uncertain.

Identifying the right assisted living facility for yourself or your parent is difficult, and loose regulatory oversight is a main reason. Under federal law, nursing homes must provide adequate nursing staff and meet other standards. But assisted living is not governed by federal rules. Each state makes its own rules, which are often minimal—some don't require that a facility hire a licensed nurse, for example.

Many advocacy groups, including Consumer Reports, argue that stronger regulations are needed for assisted living. (See "Protections Consumers Need," on the facing page.) "We are concerned that there isn't enough effective public oversight, including from the federal government," says Chuck Bell, programs director at Consumers Union, the policy and mobilization arm of Consumer Reports. The NCAL doesn't see it that way. "Assisted living is unique to each community it serves, whether in size, services, or specialty, which makes it inappropriate to regulate on a national basis," says the NCAL's Reeves. "State regulation is better suited to meeting the needs of local communities."

### A Shortage of Staffers

More regulation would probably improve residents' access to assistance, consumer advocates say. It's not uncommon for assisted living facilities to have only one or two direct-care staffers per 20 residents at night and perhaps one or two on duty per 15 residents during the day, says Carder at Portland State University. These staffers tend to be paid low salaries, often minimum wage. Nurses are also scarce—a handful of states have provisions regarding how many hours a nurse needs to be on call, or on site, so quite often facilities have

no nurse present.

Staffing shortages recently sparked a lawsuit, filed on behalf of Louise McGraw and Charlotte Rogers, who have since died, although the case is still progressing. Both lived at Greystone Inn, a West Virginia facility owned by Chancellor Senior Management. The plaintiffs' attorneys, who are seeking class-action status for the lawsuit, allege that Chancellor bases its staffing on the parent company's labor budgets and profit goals, and not on an assessment of residents' individual care needs, as contractually promised.

The lawsuit alleges that McGraw fell, broke her hip, and was hospitalized because she did not get assistance she was entitled to by Greystone Inn. According to the lawsuit, McGraw repeatedly became dehydrated, she was left unattended, and her calls for help were ignored. Rogers was hospitalized for dehydration within four days of admission to Greystone, the lawsuit alleges. After her discharge from the hospital, she returned to the facility. But she was hospitalized two more times for dehydration, malnutrition, and urinary tract infection.

Executives from Chancellor did not return calls for comment. Reeves says the NCAL strongly encourages facilities to provide care by "assessing the staffing needs for each unique resident."

Adequate staffing is especially critical for dementia care, a fast-growing service now offered by about 60 percent of assisted living facilities. It typically costs about \$4,700 per month. Although Carder says 38 states require dementia care training for staff, she adds that only 16 states require a license or certification for dementia care units.

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## Putting the Contract Under a Microscope

*Getting the fine print right from the start is your family's best protection.*

MOST ASSISTED LIVING residences will ask you to sign an admission agreement, which is a contract, before moving in. Don't rush to sign. You'll want to look at the contract carefully and ask an elder-law attorney to review it. "You want to be aware of all the terms, since you may not have much recourse once you sign," says Lori Smetanka, executive director of National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care, an

advocacy group.

The cost for a legal review will vary from a few hundred dollars to a couple thousand, depending in part on where you live and the particular facility, and whether a contract may be negotiated. "If the lawyer already knows the language in a facility's contract, it may take only an hour or so to go over the details," says Hyman Darling, president of the National Academy of Elder Law

Attorneys, a trade group.

Here are four key provisions to consider:

### Cost of Service

Be sure you understand the fees listed in the contract and how they are assessed. Some facilities might charge a comprehensive fee for room, board, and care; others might have a tier of charges that kick in for higher levels of care. You are also likely to be charged a move-in fee, says Deborah Fins, an

## Protections Consumers Need

*Consumer Reports recommends these 6 steps to improve care in assisted living.*

IT'S CLEAR THAT the assisted living industry needs to evolve to manage the increasing health needs of the population it aims to attract. In that vein, more federal and state regulatory oversight is urgently needed to protect residents and their families. CR believes policy makers should better protect consumers of assisted living facilities by doing the following:

### Define Assisted Living and Levels of Care

The term "assisted living" can describe anything from a facility that merely offers room and board to one that provides full-time nursing care. As a result, confused consumers can end up

paying for services they don't need or, worse, not getting the care they do need. Policy makers should establish and clearly define level-of-care classifications, and facilities should be required to use the classifications to communicate the assisted living services they offer.

### Set Staffing and Training Standards

Staff training and qualification requirements, and minimum per-resident staffing levels, should be set according to level-of-care classifications. Qualified, licensed medical staff should monitor the overall health of residents and administration of medications. Special

staffing requirements should be established for residents with high-level care requirements, including residents with dementia.

### Establish Resident Rights

Policy makers should establish a comprehensive Bill of Rights to ensure some basic rights for residents, including the right to make everyday decisions; receive visitors at any time; refuse treatment; access and control their own money; question and object to facility practices and policies; make formal complaints to administrators and regulators; and bring lawsuits seeking court orders to stop illegal activities and violations and to compensate residents for rights, standards, or contractual violations (a right that should prevail even when residents have signed forced-arbitration clauses, which should be restricted).

### Support Aging in Place

Policy makers should narrow the number of allowable

reasons for evicting residents. Reasonable accommodations should be made, when possible, to allow a resident to remain in a facility, and all services allowable under a resident's level-of-care designation should be made available. If a resident who initially paid privately goes on Medicaid and resides in a Medicaid-certified facility, that facility should be required to accept Medicaid reimbursement for that resident.

### Enforce Regulations

Policy makers should establish rules requiring inspections tied to levels of care. Penalties for violations should be strengthened and applied on a per-violation and per-day basis.

### Make Price and Quality Information Transparent

Policy makers should establish a system that enables consumers to compare costs, features, and services across facilities and types of facilities, including information related to facility inspections and disciplinary actions.

aging-life-care expert in Worcester, Mass. Most contracts are for one year, so fees are likely to increase at each renewal.

### Responsible Party

If you're signing the contract on behalf of a family member who will pay the bills, don't let yourself become financially liable unintentionally. "Make sure you are identified as an agent, not the responsible party," says

Shirley Whitenack, an elder-law attorney in Florham Park, N.J. You should have power of attorney to act for your parent, and the term "attorney in fact" should appear after your signature.

### Terms of Discharge

The contract should include the conditions that could lead to an eviction, called an involuntary discharge, as well as the required notice, typically 30 days.

Often this wording is left vague. It might say, "We can no longer meet your needs," for example. "If the language is not specific, the management can make decisions on an ad hoc basis," says Eric Carlson, directing attorney for Justice in Aging, an advocacy group. Ask for the terms of discharge to be limited to specific reasons, such as nonpayment and care needs that the facility is not licensed to provide.

### Mandatory Arbitration

Many residences include an arbitration provision in their contracts, requiring disagreements to be settled by a third party and not in court. The arbitration clause is sometimes voluntary, but often it's required. Consumer Reports believes mandatory arbitration is not good for consumers and should be banned. If a forced-arbitration clause is in your contract, cross it out

before signing, or write in "refused," says Martin Kardon, a Philadelphia trial attorney specializing in elder care. There's little risk that your loved one won't be admitted if you try this. If the management insists that arbitration is mandatory, you can decide whether it's worthwhile to agree. You should also make sure you receive a complete copy of the signed contract, Kardon says. That way there will be no question about your rights.

# 11 Ways to Afford the Care You Need

*For most people, savings and Social Security income aren't enough to pay for assisted living. Most cobble together those assets along with long-term-care insurance benefits, home-sale proceeds, and contributions from willing and able relatives. Here are other ways to strategize the financing and keep costs in line.*

## Tap Your Resources

**Leverage a life insurance policy.** If you, or your parent, have been paying premiums on a whole or universal life policy for a decade or longer—and are comfortable with leaving less to heirs—you could tap the policy's built-up cash value. If you borrow from the policy or withdraw your cost basis—what you paid in premiums—you'll owe no tax. If you cash in the policy entirely, you'll pay ordinary income tax on everything but the cost basis. “We usually recommend withdrawing up to your cost basis and then borrowing the

rest,” says Joseph Truiano, a Prudential financial services manager in Paramus, N.J. **Determine whether you're eligible for veterans benefits.** Veterans and veterans' survivors who are eligible for a Veterans Affairs pension, and who have documented physical or mental restrictions, may be eligible for an increase in monthly pension benefits, called an enhanced or special monthly pension. To qualify for pension benefits, the veteran must have served during a period of conflict, meet certain age or disability

requirements, and meet certain income and net worth limits. A surviving spouse must meet certain criteria as well. A veteran or survivor also may qualify for an enhanced or special monthly pension if he or she is eligible for pension benefits and needs assistance with daily activities or is housebound because of disability. Patrick Simasko, an elder-law attorney in Mount Clemens, Mich., says the VA's asset and net worth guidelines aren't carved in stone. “The asset test ultimately becomes a subjective decision made by the representative processing the application,” he says. Go to [benefits.va.gov/pension](http://benefits.va.gov/pension) or [vets.gov/pension](http://vets.gov/pension) for information and application details.

### Take out a home loan.

Homeowners who want or need to keep a home in the family can take out home equity loans or home equity lines of credit, says Theodore “Ted” Sarenski, a CPA personal finance specialist and CEO of Blue Ocean Strategic Capital. Shop for the lowest setup costs, including fees for loan processing, origination, and underwriting; appraisals; and document preparation. Some HELOCs require only interest payments during the period in which you take money out, which could be 10 years or longer. That arrangement might work well if the home will be sold within the decade. But HELOCs, based on floating interest rates, pose more risk than fixed-rate home-equity loans.

### Set up a reverse mortgage.

Homeowners 62 and older who have exhausted all other options and are certain they can afford to stay in the home for the long haul might want to use this gambit when only one spouse is entering assisted living. A reverse mortgage lets you tap your home equity for cash. Depending on the loan type, you can get a lump sum or draw down the money as

needed. The older you are, the more you can borrow; the maximum is about 74 percent of the home's value. Reverse mortgages are freighted with significant costs: Borrowers typically pay several thousand dollars in closing costs and fees; a one-time government mortgage insurance premium can run from 0.5 percent to 2.5 percent of the loan amount. These loans don't have to be paid back until the homeowner moves out or dies, but borrowers still are on the hook for home insurance, property taxes, and home maintenance expenses. If you fall behind on these costs, you could lose your home to the lender, which is why you should explore this route with caution. Go to [hud.gov](http://hud.gov) and type “reverse mortgage” into the search box for more information.

### Find the Wiggle Room

**Choose an assisted living situation with a flexible pricing structure.** The most expensive, all-inclusive pricing model combines all services—for instance, three meals a day, 24-hour on-call aides on your floor, transportation—rolled into one price. A less costly “levels of care” or “tiered pricing” model places the senior in a price tier that entitles her to a given number of hours of care. If she can manage without more care, that option might suffice. The potentially most affordable, fee-for-service model allows residents to pay only for services as needed. Most facilities offer at least one type of pricing structure, but if you are given a choice, make your selection with care. “Generally in the industry you can't make a change once you decide on one type of fee structure,” says Colleen Ryan Mallon, chief marketing officer at Kendal, a network of continuing-care communities in the East and Midwest.



### The Bottom Line

You'll need to factor in the many costs other than rent.

### Look for the open beds.

Where there's a decline in occupancy or regional competition for residents, you might be able to negotiate the first month's rent or even get it free. "If a facility has a lot of wheelchair-bound residents, it may be a sign they are loosening their rules to fill beds," says Amy O'Rourke, president of the board of directors of the Aging Life Care Association, representing aging-life-care experts, also known as geriatric-care managers. Be sure to check for adequate staffing levels.

**Choose a not-for-profit.** These residences aren't necessarily less expensive than for-profit assisted living residences. But they might cover residents who run out of funds. That protection can significantly reduce out-of-pocket expenses if your parent stays longer than the average two years. Not-for-profit continuing-care retirement communities are required to provide that guarantee to those who enter at the independent living

level but might not make the same promise at the assisted living level. But some are more generous: Masonic Villages retirement communities, in Dallas, Elizabethtown, Lafayette Hill, Sewickley, and Warminster, all in Pennsylvania, guarantee continued care and services to residents who run out of funds, regardless of their level of care when they enter. Masonic affiliation is not a requirement for entry, or for the guarantee.

### Opt for lower-cost rooms.

As with any real estate transaction, room rent corresponds to location and size. If your parent is able and willing to be farther from the dining room, she could save perhaps \$50 per month on rent, says Jim Pusateri, senior vice president of sales strategies for Brookdale, the country's largest owner of adult-care communities. If she can handle a studio, she could save several hundred dollars a month, he adds. Residents willing to share a one-bedroom apartment, making the living

room into a bedroom, could save 40 to 50 percent of the rent, depending on the facility. If you end up sharing an apartment with two bedrooms, in some cases Brookdale furnishes the common space, so you need to bring furniture only for your own room.

**Discount the glitz.** Consider a residence housed in an older building, or one with fewer beds, advises Maribeth Bersani, chief operating officer of Argentum, a trade association of for-profit adult-care residences. Big, new campuses operated by national or regional chains offer more amenities—at a cost—and must support expensive corporate staff. "If you have Mrs. Smith's Assisted Living, she doesn't have those expenses," Bersani says, adding that Mrs. Smith will need to be vetted for quality of care.

### Mind the Details

In any assisted living stay, you'll need to factor in many costs aside from rent. These might include a nonrefundable

intake fee; a deposit for pets; and fees for administering medications, assistants accompanying your parent to medical appointments, phone and internet service, transportation, haircuts, dry cleaning, and cultural events. Be aware of other considerations:

**Plan for possible coverage gaps.** You or your parent could wait up to six months for the payments from a long-term-care insurer to start. If you need to cash in a CD early, your bank might waive the early withdrawal penalty for an urgent need such as entering assisted living. But if your bank won't budge, don't sweat the penalties, Sarenski says. "The bank will just change the interest rate back to that of a savings account," he explains. "In this low-interest environment, you're not missing much."

**You can write off the cost of care.** Once the total medical expenses exceed 10 percent of adjusted gross income, you can deduct the remainder from federal income taxes for the resident. Deductible medical expenses can include long-term-care insurance premiums and the medical services provided within the facility itself. If you are covering more than half your parent's support in assisted living, you can deduct those expenses from your own taxes when they exceed 10 percent of your adjusted gross income. To maximize the deduction, pay for assisted living with the taxable distributions from retirement accounts, advises Michael Keeler, a certified financial planner at Peak Financial Solutions in Las Vegas. "Even with the 10 percent limit, a bill of \$65,000 a year—not uncommon for assisted living—is likely to result in a sizeable tax break for most people," Keeler says.

—by *Tobie Stanger*

**No Place Like Home**  
Make multiple visits to a facility and ask residents about their experiences before you make a choice.



*Continued from page 34*

### **Making the Right Moves**

Despite these challenges, families can find high-quality assisted living facilities. But start your search well before you or your parent actually needs care. If your parent's health declines, assisted living might not even be an option, says Deborah Fins, an aging-life-care expert in Worcester, Mass. Many facilities will not take people who are wheelchair-bound

or need help with multiple chronic conditions, but some allow residents to stay if they become more infirm. To help you target your search, here are four key questions to ask:

#### **1. What kind of help will the resident need?**

Perhaps your parent no longer drives and is becoming socially isolated. Or he or she can't manage stairs or forgets to turn off the oven. For seniors who need moderate amounts of support, assisted living could be the smart choice. Assisted living is working well for Sharon Koenig, 76,

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

who lived alone for two years after her husband died. “I kept waiting for him to come in the door,” Koenig says. She also was having trouble tracking her medications. With help from an aging-life-care expert, who is familiar with local facilities, Koenig looked at several senior residences, including a small nursing home.

Unlike some of the other places, Regal Palms in nearby Largo, Fla., a large facility with several levels of care, offered a varied menu of activities. Last October, Koenig moved to the assisted living section, into a two-bedroom apartment that has space for her 50-gallon aquarium. She gets help with medication but still does her own laundry. “Some people might be afraid of a big place, but I think it’s better,” she says. “There’s always someone to have dinner with.”

**Smart move:** Make sure your family member has a medical evaluation from a primary care doctor—or a specialist, if your parent has an illness—to understand the level of care required, as well as how those needs might change. For more perspective, hire an aging-life-care expert to help point you to appropriate residences. “Given the wide variation in the types of services provided by assisted living communities, it’s well worth spending the several hundred dollars for a professional care manager,” says Stephen Maag, a director at LeadingAge, an association of nonprofit senior-living groups.

## 2. How good is the quality of care?

Make sure the residence is licensed to provide assisted living, to ensure that there’s at least a minimum level of oversight. Take a close look at the residence’s inspection record, which indicates how often it has been checked or whether it has had complaints. (See “10 Helpful Resources,” on page 41.) Some states, such as Florida and California, maintain consumer-friendly assisted living websites that list inspection records and regulatory actions. But some states do not, or they fail to update them. You can also ask your state ombudsman’s office about a facility’s complaint record.

In the end, the best information about quality of care could come from people who visit facility residents, as well as from the residents themselves. Ask the residents specifics about the care—whether meds are delivered on time, for example—and how management responds to complaints, suggests Liz Barlowe, an aging-life-care expert in Seminole, Fla.

Try to make multiple visits to the residence—including at meal time and on weekends. Most facilities will welcome you even if you don’t have an appointment. Talk to residents, and see whether the staffers seem happy or appear overworked.

**Smart move:** Ask how the residence would handle a fall, a common occurrence. Would a nurse be on hand to evaluate your parent, or would he be sent to the emergency room? And ask whether “the facility provides an on-site clinician or medical staff that can help the resident avoid the expense and health risk of an unnecessary trip to the ER or a

hospitalization,” says Alan Kronhaus, M.D., CEO of Doctors Making House Calls, a North Carolina medical group that provides on-site healthcare to assisted living residents.

## 3. What are the real costs of care?

Ask for a written list of the fees, and make sure the information is included in your contract. (See “Putting the Contract Under a Microscope,” on page 34.) Some facilities have all-in costs that cover room, board, and care for a particular level of assistance, and others have point systems or charge à la carte. (See “11 Ways to Afford the Care You Need,” on page 36.)

Be sure to get clear information about the circumstances that could trigger higher or additional charges and how the facility assesses those fees, says Patty Ducaet, state long-term-care ombudsman for Texas. What would it cost to have your dad driven to a doctor 10 miles away vs. 5 miles away? Is it okay to hire private aides?

**Smart move:** Ask about the policy for lowering fees. Say your mom requires a higher level of care for a week to recover from a hospital stay. How quickly can the fees be cut when she has recovered? “Bumping down the charges tends to take longer than bumping up,” says Karen Jones, a state long-term-care ombudsman in San Luis Obispo, Calif.

## 4. Can your parent be kicked out?

Involuntary discharges rank among the top complaints in most states, according to the National Consumer Voice survey. Discharges are usually triggered by lack of payment or care needs that exceed the facility’s capacity to provide the services. The discharge terms should be detailed in the contract, as well as the required amount of notice you’ll receive, which is typically 30 days.

For Jill Goldberg, the possibility of her mom’s discharge was unexpected. Her mom, Sylvia Wenig, 94, was living in Brookdale West Boynton Beach in Boynton Beach, Fla. “We’d been getting great care there,” says Goldberg, 61, who lives near Boston. But after a hospitalization, Wenig lost her mobility and was not allowed to return to the facility. Goldberg asked if her mother could return for a week or two to allow time to find another facility, but Brookdale refused.

Goldberg says she persuaded the hospital to let her mother stay a few more days, and with help from an aging-life-care expert, she moved Wenig to a nursing home. Says Brookdale spokesman James Hauge, “For residents who require more care than the community is able to provide, we inform them of other care options and actively help them find a community that can meet their new care needs.”

**Smart move:** Don’t rely on the marketing director’s assurances that your parent will be able to age in place. “Verbal agreements are nearly impossible to prove,” says Jones, who recommends getting the promises in writing. With assisted living, it’s better to know exactly where you stand.

# Long-Term-Care Insurance Gets a Makeover

*New, more affordable policies may be worth considering*

ONCE YOU OR A FAMILY MEMBER starts having trouble with everyday activities, such as preparing meals and showering alone, you might need some assistance. It could be help from a home health aide or a move into an assisted living facility or nursing home. Planning for this can be a fraught exercise. But there are new types of long-term-care insurance that might help.

Researchers estimate that more than half of today's 65-year-olds will require long-term care at some point, at an average total cost of \$138,000. Most will need help for less than two years. But one in seven Americans turning 65 today will face more than five years of disability, with potentially dire financial consequences. Medicare covers only short stints in a nursing facility. Medicaid can fill the gap, but only after you've depleted most of your assets. But to afford an assisted living facility, you're probably on your own.

Enter long-term-care insurance, private policies that cover at least a portion of home, assisted living, or nursing home care. A recent survey of Consumer Reports subscribers found that 22 percent were paying for the protection.

But this particular niche of the insurance industry has had problems. For years insurers misjudged how many policyholders would keep paying premiums and eventually make claims. That, combined with unexpectedly low interest rates, led insurers to hike prices by double digits or leave the business. More than 100 companies sold long-term-care policies in the early 2000s. That number is down to about a dozen.

Amid these troubles, the industry

is evolving, bringing consumers new coverage choices. But even the existing choices can be confusing. In the subscriber survey, many long-term-care policyholders expressed uncertainty about what benefits are covered by their policies, beyond nursing home or assisted living care. So before you shop, know the pros and cons of the three major options.

## Traditional Long-Term-Care Insurance

**What's to like:** The median cost of a semiprivate nursing home room nationwide is \$82,125 per year, according to Genworth's 2016 Cost of Care Survey. Assisted living runs \$43,539, with home health aides charging a median of \$20 per hour. Insurance gives you the peace of mind that no matter where you need care, you'll have the money to cover at least a portion of the bill. A lengthy stay at a nursing home is less likely to drain your savings or wipe out your estate.

For a few thousand dollars a year—the recent average annual premium was \$2,727, according to the industry research firm LifePlans—you'll lock in a benefit (an average of \$161 per day for a nursing home) for a set number of years (three is most common). You can include an inflation rider that increases your daily benefit over time, typically by 3 percent a year. The policies are triggered once you can't perform two of six so-called activities of daily living (dressing, bathing, using the toilet, eating, continence, and transferring to a wheelchair) or suffer from severe cognitive impairment. Benefits start after a 30- to 90-day waiting period.

Now that insurance companies appear to have learned from past pricing mistakes, the chance of a future double-digit premium hike may have diminished.

"For new policies you're buying today, the risk of rate increases has never been this low," says Michael Kitces, director of wealth management at Pinnacle Advisory Group in Columbia, Md.

**What are the challenges:** The reason premiums are so stable? "That's because long-term-care insurance has never been more expensive," Kitces says. And what your premium gets you is shrinking as buyers opt for lower daily benefits and shorter coverage and reduced inflation protections. "Middle-income people have essentially been priced out," says Bonnie Burns, training and policy specialist at California Health Advocates. In 2015, the median income of buyers was \$87,500, vs. \$62,500 in 2005, according to LifePlans.

Despite stable rates today, Burns advises budgeting for a 50 percent premium hike down the road because there's no predicting the future factors that could push rates up, such as a wave of long-living boomers needing care.

Also, you must keep paying the premiums until you need the care, perhaps for decades, or you'll forfeit future benefits and all the money you've paid. Yet a 2015 study by the Center for Retirement Research found that more than a quarter of those who buy policies at age 65 lapse, probably because of financial difficulties or cognitive decline. "For those people, a policy is worse than useless," says study co-author Anthony Webb, now research director at the New School for Social Research's Schwartz Center for Economic Policy Analysis.

## Short-Term-Care Insurance

**What's to like:** A more modest approach to long-term care is gaining steam. A short-term policy covers up to 360 days at home or in a facility. Qualifying is easier: Unlike with traditional insurance, you might not have to answer as many medical



underwriting questions. And the premiums are far lower—a 65-year-old might pay \$928 per year for a one-year policy with a \$150-per-day benefit, according to the American Association of Long-Term Care Insurance.

If you spend less than the daily benefit, check the terms of your coverage. Some policies allow you to carry forward the unused amount and stretch out the coverage period longer than a year. And because the potential benefit period is shorter and more predictable, these policies have a better history of rate stability, says Stephen D. Forman, CLTC, senior vice president of Long Term Care Associates in Bellevue, Wash.

A year of coverage might be all you need. The AALTCI reports that 41 percent of long-term-care insurance claims run out within a year. If not, notes Forman, a short-term-care policy “might get you into a nursing home that wouldn’t have accepted you on Medicaid.”

**What are the challenges:** These policies might not cover all care options

and may have stricter requirements, so you need to consider what’s most important for you. For example, not all pay for assisted living or home care.

What’s more, if the point of insurance is to protect against a catastrophe, these policies fail that test. Though you might be able to pay for a year of care out of income and savings, multiyear stays can wreck your finances. “You want insurance for the really bad scenario,” says Colorado Springs, Colo., financial planner Allan Roth, who suggests taking a small benefit or a longer waiting period instead. “That way you partially insure but still protect yourself.”

### Hybrid Life and Long-Term-Care Policies

**What’s to like:** Another increasingly popular option is a policy that combines life insurance with long-term-care coverage. Though still a small part of the market, these policies have seen a 50 percent sales spike since 2012, LIMRA reports. With a hybrid policy, you can tap the death benefit to pay for

long-term care. If you don’t need help, your heirs get the full payout. “You’re guaranteed to get your money one way or another,” Forman says. Rates are considered “noncancelable,” which means premiums are fixed for life (and often paid all at once up front).

**What are the challenges:** A single premium means you’ll have to come up with tens of thousands of dollars at once. In 2016 the average single premium was \$89,000, according to LIMRA, an insurance marketing research group. You may also buy life insurance you don’t need. And, unlike with traditional long-term-care insurance, the premiums are not tax-deductible. But the biggest risk is that you could forego thousands of dollars in potential earnings on your investment if interest rates rise, because the policies don’t guarantee that you’ll earn market rates. “Rates are at 40-year lows,” Kites says. Those lost earnings, he adds, could end up making hybrids the most expensive long-term-care policy of all.

—by Ellen Stark

## 10 Helpful Resources

*Finding information about assisted living residences in your area will require some digging. Online resources can speed your search. You can also enlist expert help that can save time and avoid costly mistakes.*

### For an overview of senior housing options

AARP Comprehensive information on independent living and nursing homes, as well as assisted living. [aarp.org/home-family/caregiving/senior-housing](http://aarp.org/home-family/caregiving/senior-housing)

### To start your search for an assisted living facility

[Caring.com](http://Caring.com) Click Assisted Living, then enter your ZIP code to find residences; listings include communities and services with current state licensing. [caring.com](http://caring.com)

### If you’re in a hurry to find a residence

[A Place for Mom](http://APlaceforMom) Referral service is free to consumers; providers pay the site a fee if you move in. [aplaceformom.com](http://aplaceformom.com)

### To get help from an aging-life-care expert

[Aging Life Care Association](http://AgingLifeCare) Click on Find an Aging Life Care Expert to search in your state. [aginglifecare.org](http://aginglifecare.org)

### To check the assisted living regulations in your state

[National Center for Assisted Living](http://NationalCenterforAssistedLiving) Go to Advocacy, then State Regulations to see rules for every state. [ahcanal.org](http://ahcanal.org)

### A starting point for checking assisted living violations

[A Place for Mom](http://APlaceforMom) Click on your state to find out how to obtain inspection reports. [aplaceformom.com/assisted-living-state-licensing](http://aplaceformom.com/assisted-living-state-licensing)

### To contact your state long-term-care ombudsman

[National Long-term Care Ombudsman Resource Center](http://NationalLong-termCareOmbudsmanResourceCenter) Use the map tool to locate links for your state. [ltcombudsman.org](http://ltcombudsman.org)

### To get a legal review of your contract

[National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys](http://NationalAcademyofElderLawAttorneys) Click Consumer Resources, then Find an Attorney. [naela.org](http://naela.org)

### For the basics on long-term-care benefits

[LongTermCare.gov](http://LongTermCare.gov) This federal website provides an overview of long-term care, as well as links to Medicare and Medicaid information. [longtermcare.acl.gov](http://longtermcare.acl.gov)

### For first-person insight into assisted living

[The Thin Edge of Dignity](http://TheThinEdgeofDignity) Dick Weinman, a retired professor of broadcast communications at Oregon State University, became wheelchair-bound in 2005 after a car crash. In this short documentary, he describes his personal experience with assisted living and how he manages to stay active. Type “Thin Edge of Dignity” into the search box. [youtube.com](http://youtube.com)

# The New Super Bowls

The latest food craze is deep dishes packed with whole grains, vegetables, and protein. Here, we taste and test to reveal which we think will bowl you over.

by Rachel Meltzer Warren



**78** **Amy's Light & Lean**  
Quinoa & Black Beans with  
Butternut Squash & Chard



**77** **Luvo Planted Power Bowl**  
Great Karma Coconut Curry



**75** **Healthy Choice Simply**  
Steamers Unwrapped  
Burrito Bowl



**74** **Kashi Chimichurri**  
Quinoa Bowl



**74** **Luvo Planted Power Bowl**  
Mighty Masala & Greens



**72** **Luvo Planted Power Bowl**  
So Cal Kale & Bean



**72** **Kashi Black Bean**  
Mango Bowl



**72** **Smart Ones**  
SmartMade Mexican-Style  
Chicken Bowl



**71** **Kashi Sweet Potato**  
Quinoa Bowl



**70** **Sweet Earth**  
Curry Tiger



**70** **Smart Ones**  
SmartMade Orange  
Sesame Chicken Bowl



**70** **Amy's Bowls**  
Harvest Casserole



**69** **Smart Ones** SmartMade Mediterranean-Style Chicken Bowl



**67** **Luvo** Bowl Chicken Harissa & Chickpeas



**67** **Sweet Earth** Moroccan Tagine



**65** **Evol** Fire Grilled Steak



**61** **Sweet Earth** Bean & Mango Cubano



**61** **Grainful** Unstuffed Pepper



**59** **Smart Ones** SmartMade Spicy Peanut Chicken & Broccoli



**59** **Smart Ones** SmartMade Grilled Sesame Beef & Broccoli



**57** **Evol** Sriracha Chicken



**57** **Evol** Lean & Fit Teriyaki Chicken



**54** **Grainful** Jambalaya



**54** **Smart Ones** SmartMade Mexican-Style Pulled Pork Bowl



**53** **Healthy Choice** Café Steamers Simply Chicken Fried Rice



**52** **Amy's Bowls** Teriyaki

**THEY GO BY MANY NAMES:** “power bowls,” “grain bowls” ... even the enlightened-sounding “Buddha bowls.” But no matter what they’re dubbed, we’ve concluded that they’re the ultimate healthy comfort food. What are they, exactly? Picture a mix of whole grains, like warm quinoa or wild rice, tossed with greens, such as shredded kale or organic arugula. Add in more veggies, such as roasted corn and peppers and fresh tomatoes. Next is the protein—think roasted chicken, or tofu, black beans, or a dollop of goat cheese and a sprinkling of sunflower seeds. Then it’s all tossed with a flavor-packed sauce or a splash of dressing, like pesto vinaigrette.

Bowl meals are “filling, and you get a mix of flavors and textures in every bite,” says Amy Keating, R.D., a CR dietitian. “Plus their ingredients tend to be what people think of as ‘power’ or ‘super’ foods, those they should be getting more of in their diet.” A modern twist on the whole-grain-based macrobiotic bowls popular in the 1960s, they had a revival when cutting-edge salad joints, like Sweetgreen, and fast casual restaurants with a health bent, like Chipotle, brought well-balanced meals-in-a-bowl to the masses. In fact, according to food-industry

consulting firm Technomic, bowl meal offerings on restaurant menus have increased by more than 30 percent over the past seven years.

It's no wonder then that grain bowls are starting to pop up in the frozen food aisle, too, alongside lasagna, chicken stir-fry, and microwave-ready burritos. "Bowl mania really hit its stride this year, and frozen food manufacturers have taken notice," says Consumer Reports' nutritionist Ellen Klosz. "When we started exploring the supermarket options, we were surprised by how many there were, so we looked at the category to see just how healthy and tasty frozen grain bowls could be."

### Tracking a Tasty Trend

As many as two-thirds of grocery shoppers are looking for foods with fewer and simpler ingredients, according to market research firm Packaged Facts. "For the most part, grain bowls—even frozen ones—deliver on this front. The ones in our tests contained simple, recognizable ingredients, such as whole grains, vegetables, protein, and seasonings," Klosz says. Several bowls were labeled vegan, meaning they contain no animal products whatsoever, and others were labeled organic, gluten-free, or non-GMO.

Bowl meals make it easy to get healthful foods into your diet. Whole grains, usually the base of bowl meals, have long been linked to improved heart health and decreased risk of

diabetes. Newer research finds that subbing whole grains for refined ones, such as white rice or white bread, may help people manage their weight. This is achieved by speeding up metabolism and decreasing the number of calories the body holds on to during digestion—by as much as 100 calories per day, according to a

Tufts University study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition.

Getting enough vegetables in one's diet is a struggle for many consumers. "Many of these meals contained a serving of veggies—in many cases, different types than the typical broccoli—and every serving counts," Keating says. In an analysis of

## Rethinking Your Chicken Choices

Burrito, frozen bowl, or takeout bowl? Have a close look at the nutritional values before you stick a fork in it.

When you're short on time or energy, takeout or a frozen meal can be a solution to the problem of getting a nutritious dinner on the table fast. But even healthy-sounding dishes with similar ingredients and approximately the same serving size can vary greatly in nutrition. We compared a frozen Mexican-style chicken power bowl with both a frozen chicken burrito and a chicken burrito bowl from a chain restaurant and found big differences.

**Red's Organic**  
Chicken, Cilantro & Lime Burrito, 2 (9 oz.)



<b>Calories</b> .....	<b>500</b>
Fat (g) .....	18
Sat. Fat (g) .....	4
Protein (g) .....	24
Carbohydrates (g) ..	66
Fiber (g) .....	2
Sugars (g) .....	2
Sodium (mg) .....	940

Made with: flour tortilla, chicken, brown rice, black beans, cheddar cheese, tomato, corn, red peppers

**Smart Ones**  
SmartMade Mexican-Style Chicken Bowl (9 oz.)



<b>Calories</b> .....	<b>260</b>
Fat (g) .....	5
Sat. Fat (g) .....	2.5
Protein (g) .....	21
Carbohydrates (g) ..	33
Fiber (g) .....	6
Sugars (g) .....	6
Sodium (mg) .....	530

Made with: poblano peppers, black beans, red bell peppers, onions, corn, chicken, brown rice, Monterey Jack cheese, sauce

**Qdoba** Burrito Bowl (9.5 oz.)



<b>Calories</b> .....	<b>550</b>
Fat (g) .....	21
Sat. Fat (g) .....	8
Protein (g) .....	27
Carbohydrates (g) ..	73
Fiber (g) .....	9
Sugars (g) .....	9
Sodium (mg) .....	1,335

Made with: tequila lime chicken, cilantro lime rice, cilantro lime dressing, black bean/corn salsa, Cotija cheese

## A Side Dish With a Nutritional Kick

A frozen vegetarian power bowl makes a more nutritious side dish than a packaged, flavored grain mix side.

Frozen power bowls tend to contain more whole grains, vegetables, and legumes, plus a lot less sodium, says Amy Keating, R.D., a CR dietitian. We compared three of our top-rated power bowls with similarly flavored packaged grain dishes. The nutritional values are for about 1-cup servings of each, as prepared.

**Luvu**



Planted Power Bowl So Cal Kale & Bean

<b>150</b>	<b>Calories</b>	<b>200</b>
3.5	Fat (g)	3
0	Sat. Fat (g)	0
5	Protein (g)	5
27	Carbohydrates (g)	38
5.5	Fiber (g)	3
7	Sugars (g)	0
180	Sodium (mg)	560

**Uncle Ben's**



Ready Whole Grain Medley Quinoa & Brown Rice with Garlic

95 studies on the health benefits of fruit and vegetables published in the International Journal of Epidemiology, the biggest reduction in the risk of heart disease and stroke came from eating about 28 ounces of fruit and vegetables per day. But smaller amounts were protective, too: For every 7 ounces of produce eaten daily—equal to about a cup of cherry tomatoes and a large carrot—the drop in risk of developing these diseases ranged from 8 to 18 percent.

Though meat does serve as the protein source in some grain bowls, many feature plant-based proteins, such as beans or tofu. “Meat is increasingly becoming a side dish or a condiment in meals, rather than the main event,” Keating says. And for those who need some convincing, bowl meals may make a plant-based dinner more palatable. One-third of the U.S. population says it would like to eat less meat, according to Truven Health Analytics, a market research firm. But on a plate, a small (or nonexistent) serving of meat next to a pile of produce and grains may not look so enticing. Mix the same foods in a bowl and add a sauce, and the divergence from the standard “meat, potatoes, and veggie” feels less intimidating.

### No More Fear of Frozen

Frozen meals don’t often get high marks for healthfulness or flavor. But in our tests of 26 power bowls,

15 received a high enough overall score—a combination of nutrition and taste ratings—to make our recommended list, and not one received lower than a Good overall score.

Seven of the bowls got Excellent ratings for nutrition, because they supplied at least a third of the daily value for fiber, contained less than 500 mg of sodium, and had little, if any, added sugars. In fact, a lower sodium count is one advantage that frozen grain bowls have over many traditional frozen dinners. Though it’s not hard to find frozen entrées with upward of 800 mg of sodium, only a handful of bowls in our tests topped 650 mg. “At \$3.50 to \$6.00 per meal, you’re getting a meal that’s healthier than a lot of the frozen fare on the market for about the same or a little more money,” Klosz says.

Healthfulness didn’t come at the expense of taste, however: Our team of professional tasters was actually surprised that some of the meals came from the freezer case. Despite their overall lower sodium content, none were described as bland. “Higher-quality ingredients in the top-rated bowls gave them plenty of flavor,” says Klosz, “and the majority of meals in this category were inspired by cuisines with strong flavor profiles, such as Asian, Indian, and Mexican.” What’s more, “the spices seemed fresh, not dehydrated,” she says. And in many of these dishes, the veggies weren’t mushy or waterlogged, which we’ve

seen in other types of frozen meals.

Interestingly, the completely vegetarian or vegan meals, such as Amy’s Light & Lean Quinoa & Black Beans with Butternut Squash & Chard and Luvo Planted Power Bowl Great Karma Coconut Curry, were flavor favorites of our testers. By contrast, “gristly” or “dry and chewy” were comments they made about the meat and poultry in many of the dishes that contained those proteins.

The calorie counts of most of the frozen bowls in our tests were on the low side for a meal, hovering in the 250 to 300 range. That’s usually not the case with bowls at restaurants or the ones you make yourself at home. “It’s similar to salads. While the majority of the ingredients in grain bowls are healthful, you can get carried away and pile them on,” says Keating. “If you include a lot of calorie-dense foods, like avocado, dressing, or nuts, or big portions of whole grains, it’s pretty easy to make a bowl that has 700 calories or more.” If your frozen bowl meal is smaller than you’d like, toss it on a bed of greens, like baby spinach or arugula, or top with some raw or steamed vegetables to bulk it up for just a few additional calories.



For more information on healthy foods and nutrition, check out our food and drink guide at [CR.org/foods1017](https://www.cancer.org/foods1017).

#### Kashi



Black Bean Mango Bowl

<b>248</b>	Calories	<b>415</b>
7	Fat (g)	11
1	Sat. Fat (g)	1.5
8	Protein (g)	10
42	Carbohydrates (g)	68
8	Fiber (g)	6
9	Sugars (g)	2
203	Sodium (mg)	1,360

#### Goya



Rice & Black Beans

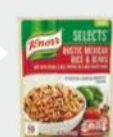
#### Healthy Choice



Simply Steamers Unwrapped Burrito Bowl

<b>203</b>	Calories	<b>360</b>
3	Fat (g)	12
1	Sat. Fat (g)	1.5
7	Protein (g)	7
38	Carbohydrates (g)	57
9	Fiber (g)	3
2	Sugars (g)	4
263	Sodium (mg)	800





























#### Knorr



Selects Rustic Mexican Rice & Beans

**Ratings** > **Going Bowling** With whole grains and veggies, power bowls—a new entry into the frozen food case—can be smart nutritional picks. Unless otherwise noted, meals are vegan.

	Product	Overall Score	Rating		Nutrition Information									Price	Flavor & Texture Description	
			Nutrition	Taste	Serving/Package Size (oz.)	Calories	Fat (g)	Saturated Fat (g)	Protein (g)	Carbohydrates (g)	Fiber (g)	Sugars (g)	Sodium (mg)			Average Price per Serving/Package
Recommended																
Ⓢ	<b>Amy's</b> Light & Lean Quinoa & Black Beans with Butternut Squash & Chard	78	⬆️	⬆️	8	240	5	0.5	10	38	11	6	440	\$4.20	Quinoa with plentiful seasoned black beans, butternut squash, and some Swiss chard and carrots. Hints of garlic and ginger.	
✓	<b>Luvo</b> Planted Power Bowl Great Karma Coconut Curry	77	⬆️	⬆️	10	330	15	5	10	45	9	5	390	\$6.00	Indian-style vegetable and grain bowl with lots of vegetables, chickpeas (regular and green), and black lentils. Seasoned with a flavorful, fairly spicy curry sauce with a hint of sweetness and coconut.	
Ⓢ	<b>Healthy Choice</b> Simply Steamers Unwrapped Burrito Bowl	75	⬆️	⬆️	9	270	4	1	9	50	12	3	350	\$4.00	Big spicy heat. Cilantro flavor comes through in this mix of rice, beans (pinto and black), and sweet, roasted corn. Tomatillo sauce gives it a slight citrusy taste.	
Ⓢ	<b>Kashi</b> Chimichurri Quinoa Bowl	74	⬆️	⬆️	9	260	8	1.5	10	42	10	5	350	\$4.00	Boldly flavored spicy mix of red quinoa, lentils, beans, potatoes, and vegetables in a tangy chimichurri-style sauce with vinegar note.	
✓	<b>Luvo</b> Planted Power Bowl Mighty Masala & Greens	74	⬆️	⬆️	10	300	13	3.5	11	41	9	5	390	\$6.00	Indian-spiced grain vegetable bowl with brown rice, petite black lentils, and plentiful vegetables, including kale, green chickpeas, and red peppers. Fairly spicy overall, with moderate heat.	
✓	<b>Luvo</b> Planted Power Bowl So Cal Kale & Bean	72	⬆️	⬆️	10.25	300	7	0.5	10	53	11	14	360	\$6.00	Unusual combination of ingredients—white and red beans, rice, mushrooms, kale, broccoli, raisins, and carrots. Red wine vinegar adds a tangy flavor. Slightly sweet with cumin and dried thyme. Has some heat.	
Ⓢ	<b>Kashi</b> Black Bean Mango Bowl	72	⬆️	⬆️	10	330	9	1	10	56	11	12	270	\$4.00	Black beans, carrots, bell peppers, and lots of grains in this bowl. Sauce has more of a general sweet taste rather than tasting like mango. Diced jalapeno peppers that add pockets of heat.	
Ⓢ	<b>Smart Ones</b> SmartMade Mexican-Style Chicken Bowl	72	⬆️	⬆️	9	260	5	2.5	21	33	6	6	530	\$3.50	Mexican-style rice, black bean, and chicken bowl with smoky notes from roasted corn and peppers, including poblano. Balanced seasonings overall with hint of citrus lime. Chicken is better than in most others. Not vegan.	
Ⓢ	<b>Kashi</b> Sweet Potato Quinoa Bowl	71	⬆️	⬆️	9	300	8	1.5	9	50	7	9	440	\$4.00	Flavorful combination with red quinoa, brown rice, sweet potatoes, black beans, roasted poblano peppers, kale, and caramelized red onion in a tomato base that is slightly sweet and tangy. Jalapenos add heat.	
Ⓢ	<b>Sweet Earth</b> Curry Tiger	70	⬆️	⬆️	9	370	20	11	15	35	8	9	450	\$3.50	Indian-inspired curry spice blend with plentiful lentils, large broccoli pieces, sweet potato, and carrots. Spicy but not overpowering. You can tell the vegetables are frozen, and the seasoned seitan (wheat gluten) pieces are fairly chewy.	
Ⓢ	<b>Smart Ones</b> SmartMade Orange Sesame Chicken Bowl	70	⬆️	⬆️	9	240	4.5	1	21	30	5	10	530	\$3.50	Quinoa and veggie bowl with broccoli, red peppers, and snap peas in a sweet and sour sauce with a mild orange citrus flavor. Large chicken chunks are a bit dry. Not vegan.	
Ⓢ	<b>Amy's</b> Bowls Harvest Casserole	70	⬆️	⬆️	10	320	10	1.5	13	44	7	8	650	\$4.00	Mix of plentiful red beans, brown rice, broccoli, kale, and sweet potatoes that has an Asian flare with ginger and soy notes. Big bean flavor and slightly tangy. Also includes pumpkin seeds and sparse, heavily seasoned, slightly salty tofu.	
✓	<b>Smart Ones</b> SmartMade Mediterranean-Style Chicken Bowl	69	⬆️	⬇️	9	260	9	4	19	29	5	6	510	\$3.50	Mediterranean-style bowl with strips of chicken, quinoa, chickpeas, kale, and artichokes, seasoned with onion, garlic, and dried oregano. Unique flavor profile. Has a tangy tomato sauce. Hints of feta. Texture of chicken pieces varied. Not vegan.	

	Product	Overall Score	Rating		Nutrition Information									Price	Flavor & Texture Description
			Nutrition	Taste	Serving/Package Size (oz.)	Calories	Fat (g)	Saturated Fat (g)	Protein (g)	Carbohydrates (g)	Fiber (g)	Sugars (g)	Sodium (mg)		
Recommended	 <b>Luvo Bowl Chicken Harissa &amp; Chickpeas</b>	67			8.25	270	10	1.5	16	27	5	2	330	\$6.00	Boldly flavored Indian-spiced dish with brown rice, broccoli, chickpeas, and other vegetables. Chicken pieces fall somewhat short: They're on the dry and chewy side. Not vegan.
	 <b>Sweet Earth Moroccan Tagine</b>	67			9	280	6	1	11	49	10	13	690	\$3.50	Moroccan-style grain and vegetable bowl with seitan pieces, sweet potato, and chickpeas with moderate spicy heat. Flavorful and intensely seasoned but leaves a slightly bitter aftertaste.
	<b>Evol Fire Grilled Steak</b>	65			9	400	18	4	20	40	8	3	520	\$4.00	Strips of marinated beef, black beans, and rice with fresh-tasting red and green peppers and roasted corn. Notes of cilantro and lime add complexity. Beef is slightly chewy. Not vegan.
	<b>Sweet Earth Bean &amp; Mango Cubano</b>	61			9	360	10	1	13	53	14	14	490	\$3.50	Quinoa, cumin, spiced black beans, and mango are the main components. Mango tastes unripe and not sweet. Overall has a tangy flavor with slight heat, but cumin overpowers a bit. Looks better than it tastes.
	<b>Grainful Unstuffed Pepper</b>	61			10	250	7	1.5	17	29	5	4	490	\$4.50	Grain bits and ground white meat chicken with a puréed texture. Flavors of red and green pepper, garlic, onion, tomato, and dehydrated spices. Slight heat and slight fennel note. Not vegan.
	<b>Smart Ones SmartMade Spicy Peanut Chicken &amp; Broccoli</b>	59			9	250	7	1	19	29	5	7	610	\$3.50	Brown rice and vegetables (carrots, scant broccoli, and onions) in a mild peanut-flavored sauce with soy and spicy heat. Vegetables taste frozen and have a soft texture. Chicken pieces are gristly and flavor is off slightly. Not vegan.
	<b>Smart Ones SmartMade Grilled Sesame Beef &amp; Broccoli</b>	59			9	220	5	2	14	31	5	10	610	\$3.50	Beef with snow peas, broccoli, and roasted red peppers in a sauce with tomato, soy, onion, garlic, and slight heat. Some beef pieces are dry and chewy; others are tender. Not vegan.
	<b>Evol Sriracha Chicken</b>	57			9	260	4.5	1	16	39	4	7	640	\$4.00	Big Sriracha heat in this ordinary mixture of plentiful brown rice, chicken, and veggies. Typical frozen vegetable texture. Includes snap peas, broccoli, and carrots. Chicken lacking a bit of freshness. Not vegan.
	<b>Evol Lean &amp; Fit Teriyaki Chicken</b>	57			9	260	2.5	0	14	45	4	12	600	\$4.00	Teriyaki chicken with brown rice and blend of snap peas, carrots, broccoli, and red and green peppers. Sweet sauce with soy. Not vegan.
	<b>Grainful Jambalaya</b>	54			10	270	11	3	11	32	5	3	470	\$4.50	Chewy, gristly sausage and grain bits in a puréed mix that tastes mostly of red peppers, garlic, and paprika. Spicy and hot with a big smoky flavor that overwhelms. Not well-balanced. Not vegan.
	<b>Smart Ones SmartMade Mexican-Style Pulled Pork Bowl</b>	54			10	320	9	4.5	26	33	7	5	670	\$3.50	Mixture of rice, black beans, roasted corn, onions, peppers, and pork pieces. Sauce has tangy tomatillo flavor with a slight cheese note. Some meat pieces are fatty, and the flavor detracts. Pork is the weakest component. Not vegan.
	<b>Healthy Choice Café Steamers Simply Chicken Fried Rice</b>	53			10	320	7	1.5	22	43	4	9	580	\$4.00	Chicken, brown rice, edamame, carrots, and spongy egg pieces that don't add much flavor. Chicken texture is just mediocre. Sauce lacks fullness, with ginger and garlic that doesn't taste fresh, and a very slight bitterness. Rice and vegetables are the best part. Not vegan.
	<b>Amy's Bowls Teriyaki</b>	52			9.5	290	4.5	0.5	12	52	6	15	780	\$5.00	Asian-seasoned tofu "stir-fry" with brown rice, broccoli, green beans, carrots, and scant mushrooms. You can tell the vegetables are frozen. Slightly sweet teriyaki seasoning with garlic and soy.

**HOW WE TEST:** CR's nutrition and food-testing team rated power bowls for nutrition and taste. The Overall Score is

a combination of the two. The Nutrition score is based on: energy density (calories per gram of food), total fat,

saturated fat, fiber, sugars, sodium, and other nutrients. Extra weighting is given for influential nutrients, either positive or

negative, respective to the food. Taste ratings are based on the results of a blind tasting panel of trained sensory experts.



+

+

07%

20

TEASPOONS / SUGAR

0.28

0.0012

36.0

60%

07

0.003

20

OZ.



**IT SEEMS LIKE A SIMPLE SOLUTION:** To curb the obesity problem, make unhealthy foods more expensive and people will eat less of them.

Local governments around the country—including Philadelphia, San Francisco, Seattle, and Berkeley, Calif., among others—have started to do just that, enacting laws that tax sugar-sweetened drinks and sodas at a higher rate than other foods and beverages. Sugary drinks are a logical choice. They’re a major contributor to daily American calorie intake—roughly 7 percent of all calories consumed—while contributing little to no nutritional value. Consider that an average 20-ounce cola harbors about 16 teaspoons of added sugar.

These so-called behavior or sin taxes are among the newest weapons being deployed in the complex war to end America’s obesity crisis. The U.S. currently holds the unenviable title of most overweight nation on earth, with more than a third of citizens now considered obese. While a long-term fix to the nation’s obesity epidemic will require much more than just taxation, an in-depth look at early experiments shows promising results—particularly when taxes are targeted at soda and other sugar-heavy drinks.

“Taxation of sugary beverages and junk food is where we have the most solid evidence of an effect,” says Barry Popkin, Ph.D., an economist and professor of nutrition at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. “Overall, it reduces consumption, and particularly for lower-income people, who have a higher incidence of untreated diseases, such as hypertension, diabetes, and other chronic diseases related to excessive consumption of these foods.”

Some countries, such as Chile and Mexico, are way ahead of the U.S. in their sugary-beverage taxation programs. In its recent review of such initiatives, “Using Price Policies to Promote Healthier Diets,” the World Health Organization’s Regional Office for Europe found that such taxes led to a reduction in consumption proportionate to the tax applied, and in many cases demonstrated a reduction in calorie intake.

# The New War on **Obesity**

Does hiking taxes on sugary drinks work? We investigate.

For instance, a 20 percent levy usually results in roughly a 20 percent usage reduction, according to the WHO review. This equation has proved fairly accurate in American cities that have already established the tax, and it's exactly what happened in Berkeley, Calif., once a 1-cent-per-ounce levy took effect in 2015.

A recent nationally representative survey of 1,010 adults by Consumer Reports shows that while consumers have mixed feelings about sin taxes, among the 42 percent who favor them, the majority approve of taxing sugar-sweetened beverages.

Kayla Yee Mulkern, a 21-year-old student in Philadelphia, says she's for soda taxes, and not just because she's not a soda drinker. "They're going to get the money from somewhere," Mulkern says, "so it might as well be from something that might actually make the public make better health decisions."

### Why Focus on Soda?

Seemingly small increases in calories through the years have contributed to America's current obesity epidemic, which suggests that relatively small adjustments could go a long way toward alleviating it.

The weight gain among Americans stems from what has been estimated to be an increase of roughly 300 calories a day over time, notes Philadelphia health commissioner Thomas Farley, M.D. "Take away one can of soda, which would be about 150 calories, and you're halfway there to offsetting that," he says.

To work well, he says, these efforts need to zero in on two groups—the young and the heaviest soda consumers. Those who are overweight in childhood tend to be overweight as adults, he explains.

And Popkin of UNC-Chapel Hill notes that while the average American consumes 150 calories from soda a day, 40 percent of the population consumes 300 to 800. "That's the group we really want to focus on," he says.

Not surprisingly, the soda industry opposes beverage taxes, and in recent years has tried to defeat city ballot initiatives to enact taxes, and when new laws do pass, challenge

# 42%

**of Americans think  
the government should tax  
unhealthy behavior.**

them in court. Industry representatives note that while the rate of obesity has risen in recent decades, overall consumption of sugary drinks in the U.S. has declined by about 27 percent since 1998—mainly as bottled water has gained as a popular alternative.

As these taxes are contemplated, the beverage industry is also responding to consumer concerns about sugar in its marketing. In July, Coca-Cola said that it would change the recipe of its popular Coke Zero product and rename it, now calling it Coca-Cola Zero Sugar in the U.S. market.

Lauren Kane, of the American Beverage Association, says of the targeted beverage taxes now dotting the country: "There is absolutely no proof out there that these things work."

To be sure, targeted pricing efforts tied to health goals have traditionally had mixed results, research shows. It's not that such strategies never work, but that they tend to require a lot of heavy lifting and market manipulation and battling with industry to achieve the intended results.

"It's important to remember that in public health, there is very rarely a single intervention that works," cautions Jim O'Hara of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, which, along with the WHO, strongly endorses sugar-sweetened-beverage taxes in combination with other measures to reduce consumption and prevent obesity for adults and, especially, children. "There has to be a multifaceted approach: education, policy, taxes, and industry behavior," O'Hara says.

### What We Learned From Cigarettes

Nearly everyone can agree on this: The long and robust campaign against tobacco use in the United States set the gold standard for a successful government health initiative.

The winning formula involved a combination of bold strategies, including high taxation, public education on the dangers of cigarette use, limits on advertising, and a long, grinding battle to restrict where tobacco can be sold and used. And the results have been striking: The smoking rate among American adults has dropped from about 42 percent in 1965 to 15 percent in 2015.

To get there, the financial disincentives for using tobacco have become extraordinarily high—in some places, such as New York City, taxes now add up to more than \$5, or about half the cost of a pack of cigarettes. No less significant, though, is that starting in 1971 the tobacco industry grudgingly accepted tough restrictions and bans on advertising in an effort to head off even more draconian measures.

Devising ways to combat obesity, experts say, will require the same kind of enduring dedication and aggressive game plan used on tobacco.

### The Carrot-and-Stick Approach

The WHO recommends a multipronged strategy that is part punishment, part reward—leveraging both consumer taxes

## The Healing Power of Water

Our bodies are 60 percent water. It's the main ingredient of our blood, which keeps our brain, heart, kidneys, and other organs functioning. How much do we need? Generally, men should aim for roughly 16 eight-ounce cups a day and women 11, though you may need a little more or less depending on your size, your activity level, and the weather. Just remember, water found in foods and all beverages counts toward the total. —Catherine Roberts

### Prevent a Headache

Dehydration can trigger headaches—and drinking up can sometimes help cure one.

### Pamper Your Ticker

Good hydration increases the volume of blood in your arteries, which means fewer heartbeats to transport blood around your body, so it's less taxing on the heart muscle itself.

### Fight a Fever

When you're sick with, say, the flu, drinking plenty of water can limit the rise of your body temperature, when taken in conjunction with fever-reducing medication.

### Curb Appetite

Drinking water before a meal can make you feel full without any calories and help prevent overeating.

### Healthy Flush

Ample water helps ensure that your digestive tract has enough fluid to effectively eliminate waste.

### Boost Your Mood

Experts aren't exactly sure why, but research suggests that people who are well-hydrated tend to be in better moods.

0.009

### Up Your Game

Hydrated runners tend to be faster than dehydrated ones, and feel better afterward, too, possibly because they eliminate lactic acid more quickly.

### Keep Your Cool

Staying hydrated helps you sweat more, which is essential for cooling down your body on hot days or after exercise, and can help you avoid heat stroke, too.

07

and marketplace subsidies. It suggests subsidizing the cost of fruits and vegetables by 10 to 30 percent while taxing foods and beverages high in saturated fat, trans fat, added sugars, and sodium.

Bad-behavior levies would in effect pay to encourage better behaviors. The public will buy into the taxes, the WHO suggests, “if the revenue they generate is earmarked for efforts to improve health systems, encourage healthier diet, and increase physical activity.”

Results from CR’s survey also suggest that consumers would support that idea, with a large majority saying they’d respond favorably to the “carrot” encouragement approach: While half of Americans say they would not cut back on unhealthy food if it cost more, most (73 percent) say they would eat more healthy food if it cost less.

“It’s not acceptable to a lot of people to have their behavior

controlled,” says Ajibade Animasaun, a 63-year-old cab driver in Philadelphia, where a 1.5-cents-per-ounce soda tax went into effect at the start of this year. “Yeah, you can tell me you are going to help me with my obesity problem,” Animasaun says, rhetorically, “but not by taxing me to death.”

While people say that they prefer subsidies to punishments, in many cases taxes have been found to work better. Research shows that while a 20 percent tax generally reduces unhealthy behavior by 20 percent, a 20 percent subsidy improves healthy behavior by only 10 percent.

Programs that encourage healthy changes are much less prevalent than those that tax unhealthy habits.

In 2014, Congress earmarked \$100 million for a program that would increase the value of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits—what used to be called food stamps—when they are used to buy fruits and vegetables.



## Just Say No to Soda: Make These Smart Swaps Instead

If you drink a 20-ounce sugary cola every day for a year you’ll consume 119 cups of sugar and 87,600 calories. Replace that soda with one of these options to drink yourself healthier, cutting your sugar intake and your weight.

If you swap that daily soda for...	Cups of sugar you would eliminate per year	Pounds of body weight you could lose per year	
<b>Water</b> <i>Any amount</i> 	<b>119</b> cups	<b>14</b> pounds	Water is the best option in that it does wonders for the daily workings of your whole body while contributing 0 calories.
<b>Milk</b> <i>2 percent                      8 oz.</i> 	<b>97</b> cups	<b>6.5</b> pounds	Ounce for ounce, reduced-fat 2 percent milk has more calories than soda, in part because it has protein, fat, and naturally occurring sugar. But going with an 8-ounce carton spares you about half the calories while providing calcium, protein, potassium, and vitamin D.
<b>Dunkin’ Donuts Iced Coffee</b> <i>Whole milk, sugar                      16 oz.</i> 	<b>84</b> cups	<b>9</b> pounds	Yes, you’re eliminating some sugar, but you’re replacing one sugary, caffeinated beverage for another. If you love coffee, add the sugar yourself, sparingly.
<b>Honest Lemon Tea</b> <i>16.9 oz.</i> 	<b>80</b> cups	<b>9.5</b> pounds	This brand of iced tea contains less added sugar than some other popular brands but still packs about 5 teaspoons of sugars per bottle. A better bet: Brew your own and add less sugar.
<b>Gatorade</b> <i>Thirst Quencher,                      Original Orange                      20 oz.</i> 	<b>57</b> cups	<b>6</b> pounds	This switch is better than soda, but because it’s mostly added sugars and water, the calories are still empty. Plus, unless you’re exercising vigorously, you really don’t need the extra sodium.
<b>Tropicana Orange Juice</b> <i>14 oz.</i> 	<b>47</b> cups	<b>3</b> pounds	Like milk, pure fruit juice offers vitamins and minerals—but also contains more natural sugar, upping its calorie count. Instead, drink water and eat a whole piece of fruit, for the filling and healthy fiber.

Source: These results are based on the average-sized American adult (male and female); calculations are from the National Institutes of Health Body Weight Planner, using typical servings sizes for each beverage.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, which added \$16.7 million in funding last fall, characterizes it as a success. And a recent survey of SNAP shoppers at seven farmers markets in the program found that 74 to 94 percent of them had increased either their purchase or consumption of fruits and vegetables. It is not clear whether Congress or the Trump administration will renew the program when it ends in 2018.

While applauding the intent, Popkin worries that such initiatives don't address the overwhelming prevalence of junk food in the American marketplace, particularly in the diets of children and adolescents. "Going from two to three servings of fruits and vegetables to three-and-a-half servings doesn't do a lot," he says, "when you're also consuming a lot of chips and soft drinks and other junk food."

### Why Consumer Choice Matters

These kinds of behavior taxes and consumer educational efforts have been around for decades and tried, with mixed results, on everything including cigarettes, alcohol, gasoline, fatty foods, and garbage—the latter to encourage recycling.

For example, Denmark tried to tax foods high in saturated fat several years back, but noticed its citizens were simply crossing national borders to load up on their Danish pastry and other gooey delights. So the tax was removed.

And in 2008, New York City rolled out a nutritional content program requiring calorie counts to be posted on menus at fast-food and large chain restaurants. But researchers found that this public awareness effort did almost nothing to steer customers toward healthier alternatives.

In Philadelphia, there was little public support for a soda tax until city officials promised that its millions in projected revenue would go toward funding pre-kindergarten programs.

It will take years, experts say, to determine whether a reduction in soda consumption leads to a corresponding improvement in the health of the community. What's clear on both a national and individual level is that reducing soda intake won't help much if people replace sugar-added beverages with other high-calorie options.

"If you got rid of the 7 percent of calories consumed through soda, would that be enough to affect weight?" asks Jason Fletcher, Ph.D., a professor of public affairs and applied economics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, who has studied the issue. "The answer is yes, if you take all those calories and just remove them from your diet." But, he says, "If you substitute those beverages with other high-calorie drinks, then you haven't reduced your calories at all."

For example, if an average-sized American adult cut one typical cola from his daily diet and replaced it with a standard serving of orange juice, he'd get more vitamins. But over a year, he would lose only 3 pounds, according to calculations from the National Institutes of Health Body Weight Planner.

# 73%

## of Americans say they would eat more healthy food if it cost less.

If, instead, he substituted water for the large cola, that simple swap would help him lose about 14 pounds and eliminate 52 pounds of added sugars a year from his diet. (See "Just Say No to Soda: Make These Smart Swaps Instead," on page 52, for more.)

As Fletcher puts it, we might be asking a tax alone "to do too much work. There may not be a single policy of any sort that's going to put a dent in the obesity epidemic."

### Lessons From Abroad

Chile has launched what is probably the most ambitious program anywhere. And with reason, given that more than 10 percent of the country's children under the age of 5 are considered obese.

Its government went well beyond the 18 percent sugar-sweetened-beverage tax already in place on drinks containing a high percentage of sugar. Packaging for products that exceed the limit must bear a health warning label, and Chile now prohibits all advertising for those products aimed at children under 14.

Mexico, with one of the highest diabetes rates among industrialized nations, has instituted a similar program, and it is working. The country's 1-peso-per-liter tax on sodas, roughly 10 percent of the cost, led to a 6 percent decrease in overall sales and a drop of nearly 12 percent among lower-income citizens.

Popkin of UNC-Chapel Hill has been advising Mexico on its robust campaign. He is hopeful that more progress can be made in the U.S., starting with beverage taxes. But to date, they are only being adopted piecemeal by more health-conscious communities, and the federal government has yet to take steps toward a national tax.

He has no illusions about achieving a quick fix without a multifaceted strategy and more buy-in from Americans. Despite government-sponsored education to encourage healthy eating, nationally the rate of diabetes and other chronic diseases has continued to climb and obesity levels have yet to decline. One-third of American children are overweight or obese as determined by body mass index.

"We'll be the last country that will be dealing with obesity in a significant way," Popkin says.

—Additional reporting by Catherine Roberts and Thomas Germain

# Road Report

Ratings from our test track plus expert car advice

## Passing the Screen Test

Choosing the right infotainment system—for music, maps, and more—can mean the difference between a fun, smooth trip and a madly frustrating one. Our exclusive survey results will steer you to top picks.

by Mike Monticello



PHOTO: BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES

**JUST AS THE SMARTPHONE** in your hand has become more capable—and more complicated—over the past few years, so have in-car infotainment systems. What is infotainment? It's industry slang for a host of in-car features including music, navigation, phone integration, and voice recognition. And sophisticated digital interfaces are increasingly becoming standard issue in new cars.

“Consumers want cars that bring the communication and entertainment capabilities of their phones into their cars,” says Jake Fisher, director of auto testing at Consumer Reports. “And automakers are responding.”

Well-designed systems can execute multiple complex functions using natural speech (“call Mom on her cell phone”). Badly designed systems can turn those same interactions into a dangerous and confusing distraction.

Consumer Reports has been asking owners about their audio and infotainment systems in our Auto Satisfaction surveys in recent years. And these systems routinely rank as the least satisfying feature for most car owners in our survey. We crunched the numbers for the more than 82,000 vehicles in our latest survey, which includes 2013 through 2016 model years along with a few 2017s. Overall, only 44 percent of

the infotainment systems were given a score of “very satisfied” by the subscribers who use them.

### **Systems Owners Love**

Owners are enthusiastic about big touch screens, and carmakers are moving to make these displays larger and larger. Tesla owners currently get the biggest screens in the business—the Model S and Model X have massive 17-inch touch screens. In our survey, Tesla's customers were the happiest with their infotainment system: 83 percent said they were very satisfied. Larger screens usually bring bigger, easier-to-read text and buttons, making it quicker to find the function you're looking for. The owner of a 2014 Model S said, “The onscreen controls are intuitive, easy-to-use ... all cars' entertainment systems should work this way!”

### **Disappointing Duds**

Lexus' Remote Touchpad is an example of an infotainment system that hinders drivers more than it helps: Just 26 percent said they were very satisfied. An owner of a 2015 Lexus NX called it “terrible,” adding, “difficult to operate, confusing, distracting. The infotainment system is a nightmare.”

Some manufacturers seem to have learned their lesson, improving their

systems and turning drivers' opinions around. Only 44 percent of drivers with MyFord/MyLincoln Touch, Ford's earlier system, were very satisfied, but 70 percent of those using the new and improved Ford/Lincoln Sync 3 were very satisfied. It was a similar story for Audi and its latest MMI All-in-Touch system: 74 percent of owners said they were very satisfied compared with just 49 percent for the older version.

These systems aren't perfect yet, by a long shot. Complicated, unintuitive layouts and those with touch-sensitive features continue to distract, causing drivers to take their eyes off the road.

### **How to Shop Smarter**

If you're in the market to buy a new car, take enough time at the dealership to get familiar with the infotainment system before you write that check. It will be time well-spent if it saves you from long-term frustration. Remember: A good infotainment system isn't the reason to buy a car, but an annoying system is a really good reason to avoid one.

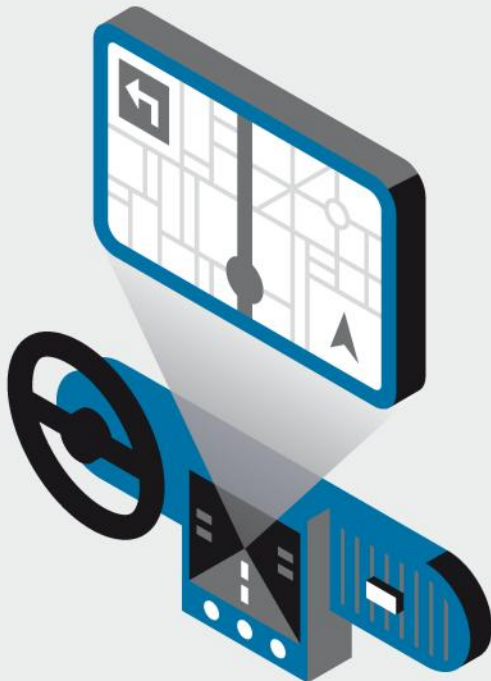


WATCH

Go to [CR.org/video](https://www.consumerreports.org/video) to learn about the latest infotainment technology and see the newest cars, SUVs, and trucks in action at our auto test track.

# In-Dash Navigation

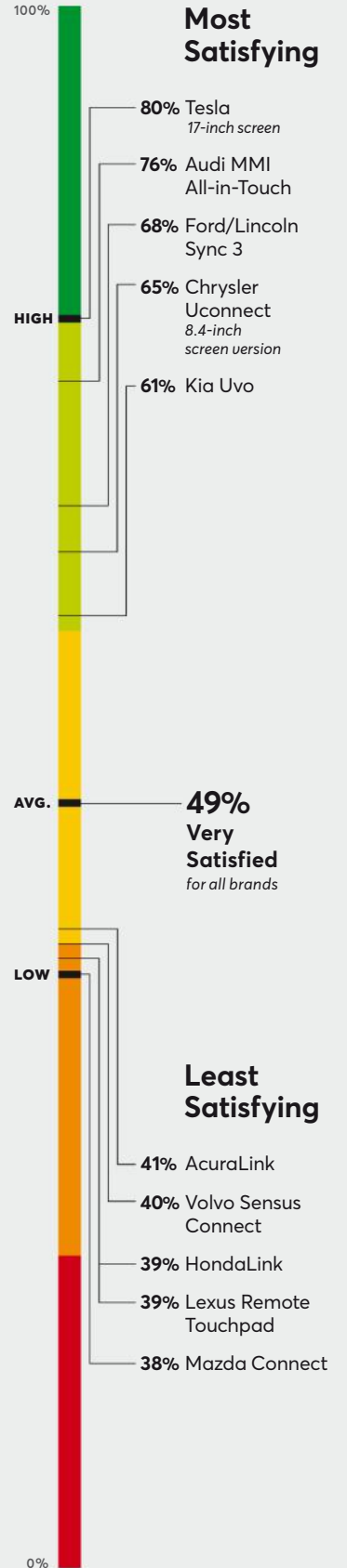
**What they offer now:** With GPS built into smartphones and many cars, it's almost impossible to get truly lost anymore. Built-in navigation systems can give options and let you choose which route you'd like (for example, the quickest route or one that skips toll roads), and many provide real-time traffic information. Although each manufacturer's system is different, screens typically run from 5 inches to more than 10 inches wide, and Tesla has a giant 17-inch touch screen. The systems are controlled by touch screens, knobs, touchpads, voice commands, or a combination of these technologies. Of course, think twice before buying an in-car system, because your smartphone probably has a system that's just as good and won't cost you hundreds or thousands of dollars more. But for your phone to be a good alternative, it must integrate well into your infotainment system.



**CR's take:** A good navigation system should allow you to set your route by simply saying the name of your destination, just as you can with your smartphone. Some systems let you program your destination by using an app before you get into the car. Real-time traffic capability is a must-have; your phone has it, and your in-car navigation should, too. A big, clear screen is important, as is the ability to access your music while also staying current with turns on the route. And you should have access to up-to-date maps without being charged a high price to keep them current, as some manufacturers do.

Navigation systems often falter when it's difficult to input the destination, turn off the guidance instructions, or cancel the route. Of course, they're at their worst when they direct you to the wrong place altogether. A bad system might entice the driver to use his phone instead, which can lead to more distracted driving.

**What owners say:** Tesla owners were by far the most effusive about their car's navigation system, particularly praising the 17-inch screen and intuitive interface, saying such things as, "the easiest to use in-dash navigation of any manufacturer." Audi buyers were also impressed, with one owner applauding the "amazing futuristic technology" in the car, including the ability to get





dramatic aerial views of areas from Google Earth and to put a large version of the navigation map directly in front of the driver, between the speedometer and tachometer.

Drivers get annoyed when they can't input destinations easily. This was especially troubling for Mazda owners, with one saying, "The user interface for the navigation system is ridiculously slow," and another saying, "The voice operation of the navigation is worthless." Honda owners weren't much happier, complaining that the HondaLink system was overly complicated, with one owner pointing to "menus, then submenu, and then submenus of the original submenu." Other Honda owners said it was awkward and time-consuming to set a destination, with one suggesting that "the ability for users to key in the complete address at a single prompt would be a huge improvement."

Lexus owners were unsparing in their distaste for the Remote Touchpad system, a small pad that's located just forward of the cup holders between the front two seats. "The navigation is hard to use when trying to slide your finger on the pad," one owner said. Another said the touchpad was so sensitive "that it's almost unusable."

# Audio Streaming



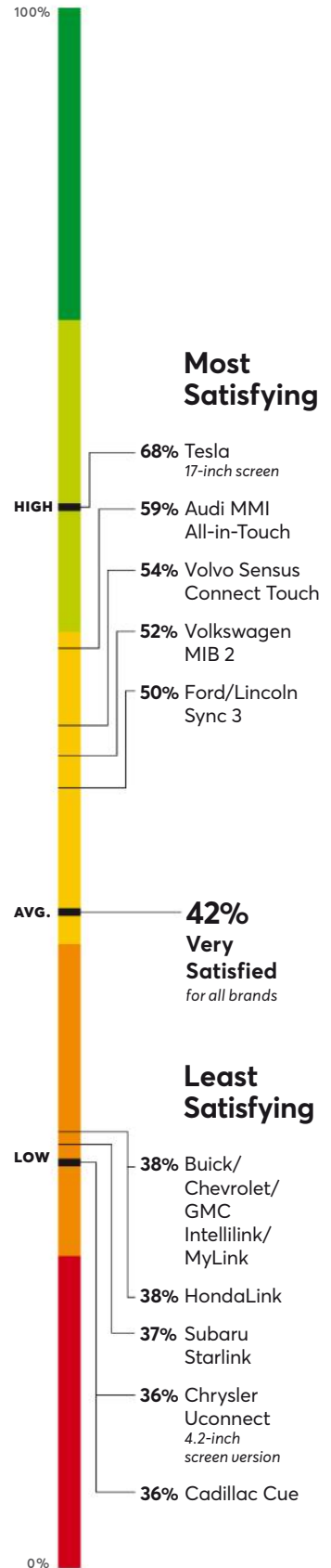
**What they offer now:** In most cars, you can connect your phone or music device to your audio system using a USB cable, Bluetooth, or WiFi to stream music and podcasts or access music apps like Pandora and Spotify. Some vehicles, such as Teslas and Volvos, have onboard connections to directly stream into the car.

**CR's take:** A good audio streaming system should allow you to access your music or internet streaming service without having to touch your phone. Well-designed systems let you navigate your music using steering-wheel controls, voice commands, or through a touch-screen display. Many systems automatically start playing music off your smartphone when you plug it in via USB merely to charge it, overriding the music source currently playing. One way around this is to use a 12-volt power cord with a dedicated USB port for phone charging.

**What owners say:** Even the highest score—Tesla's 68 percent—isn't all that high, which suggests that drivers weren't overly enthusiastic with audio streaming. Comments from Tesla owners indicate they like

the dependable streaming, listing "music on demand" as one of the car's numerous highlights. Many Volkswagen owners praised their system's Android Auto or Apple CarPlay compatibility, which enables them to access Spotify from their cell phones without touching the phone itself.

Cadillac's Cue and Chrysler's Uconnect (with the smaller 4.2-inch screen) tied for last, with just 36 percent of owners saying they were very satisfied. Cadillac owners focused most of their scorn on Cue as a whole, calling it "terrible," "abominable," and generally unintuitive. Some Chevrolet owners said that sometimes the audio disconnects Bluetooth "or doesn't connect to begin with," as one said. Other Chevrolet owners said the MyLink system makes playing music from phones confusing.





## Bluetooth Phone Calling

**What they offer now:** Most new vehicles allow you to wirelessly pair—or connect—your phone to your car’s audio system by using a Bluetooth system. Not only does this let you talk without handling the phone, but many systems will also display contacts, favorites, and recent calls.

**CR’s take:** The best systems allow you to make or accept phone calls without taking your eyes off the road or your hands off the wheel. The acid test for any Bluetooth system is that it consistently reconnects with your phone every time you get back in the car; failure to do so can be a source of major driver frustration.

Beyond that, the better systems let you dial by voice command and sync your phone contacts to the car, and some systems can even read text messages for you and let you reply using voice commands. These systems can vary quite a bit in terms of call quality. On the best ones, the person you’re talking with won’t even know you’re in your car.

What happens when people get frustrated with their Bluetooth system? They simply pick up their phone, defeating the whole hands-free concept.

**What owners say:** Bluetooth was the only feature that, on average, more than half of the owners said they were very satisfied with. So what makes for a good Bluetooth system? Some Ford owners said they were impressed with how quickly Sync 3 paired, with one saying, “Connecting to devices is simple and fast.” BMW also scored well, with an owner praising the iDrive Touch for its “easy-to-use Bluetooth phone integration.” Chrysler and Dodge owners also said the Uconnect system (with an 8.4-inch screen) made for easy hands-free connections.

Some people were bugged by a cumbersome pairing process and dropped calls. An Acura owner complained that the Bluetooth in the AcuraLink system was “very clumsy and takes a lot of time and patience to make work.” Another complained that Bluetooth “drops calls on an intermittent basis,” and constantly disconnected phones. And some Subaru owners had complaints with the Starlink system, including connection inconsistency and poor sound quality. One owner summed up the feeling of many by saying, “Almost everyone complains they can’t understand me while on [my] hands-free phone.”



# Voice Commands

**What they offer now:** Voice commands attempt to let you perform tasks while keeping your eyes on the road and your hands on the wheel. But this functionality tends to be hit or miss. When the systems don't understand what you're saying or take a long time to process, it can cause distraction leading to lots of frustration, as seen by the abysmal satisfaction scores in our survey. "While voice commands allow drivers to keep their eyes on the road and hands on the wheel," says Jake Fisher, CR's director of auto testing, "if the system doesn't immediately understand your command, it can still be a frustrating, lengthy, and distracting process."

**CR's take:** The systems that do it right don't make you memorize special commands. Some systems work as well as today's

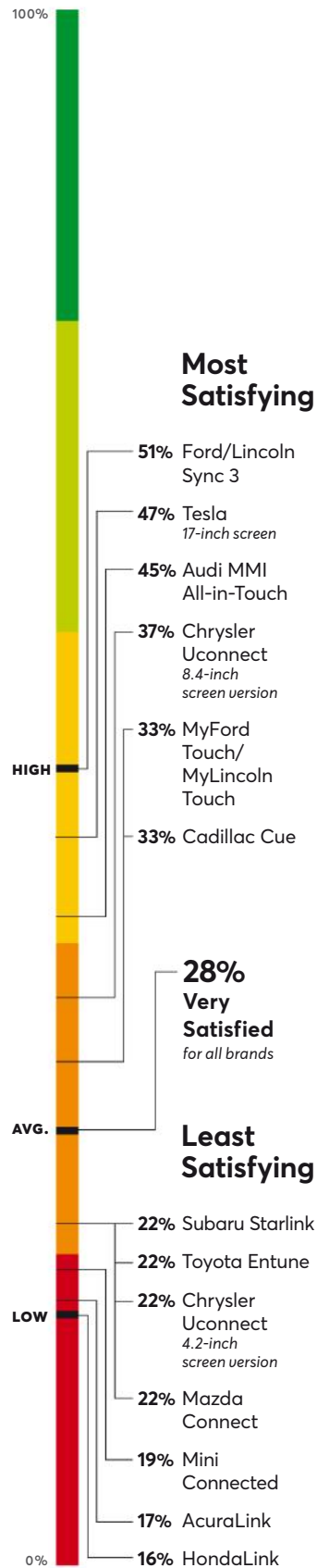
smartphones, interpreting your natural conversational speech. Voice commands can be very useful for making phone calls and



setting destinations in a navigation system, but manufacturers shouldn't intend them as a crutch to make up for poorly designed car functions.

**What owners say:** An average of only 28 percent of owners were very satisfied with voice-command systems. The top-rated Ford/Lincoln Sync 3 was lauded by certain subscribers for its ability to understand more common phrases. Others said that Sync 3 was very easy to use compared with the previous versions, and one owner said "the voice activation works very well." Tesla's system also rated comparatively high. One owner said, "Best feature: Voice control that's responsive and works."

Other voice-control systems had trouble understanding spoken commands, many survey respondents said. Several Acura owners lodged complaints (some filled with expletives), with one saying "the voice input system is incredibly frustrating and is more distracting than the keyboard." Other owners complained that the system was easily affected by the climate system's fan noise, and one owner simply gave up using the voice-command feature because "it does whatever it wants, no matter what you say." Mini owners vented, too, about voice-control tech, using such words as "horrible" and "poor."



**Ratings** > **An Entertaining Experience** The most satisfying systems have big, clear screens; a straightforward command structure; and well-labeled, easy to use controls.

Rank	Brand Name	% Very Satisfied	Features				CR Expert Assessments
			Bluetooth Phone Calling	In-Dash Navigation	Audio Streaming	Voice Commands	
1	<b>Tesla</b> 17-inch screen	83	↑	↑	↑	↓	A giant 17-inch touch screen controls everything. Has big onscreen buttons, clear graphics, quick responses, logical layout, capable internet radio music search. Caution: The eye-catching screen can be distracting, and there are no volume or tuning knobs.
2	<b>Audi</b> MMI All-in-Touch	74	↑	↑	↓	↓	Almost everything can be done by steering-wheel controls; optional Virtual Cockpit puts info directly in front of you. While it has vivid graphics, it can be overwhelming at first, and Google Earth maps can be distracting. Available on redesigned A4, Q7, and newer models.
3	<b>Chrysler</b> Uconnect with 8.4-inch screen	70	↑	↑	↓	↓	Uses simple logic and good old-fashioned knobs and buttons. Has big onscreen text, icons. Screen is highly reflective, making fingerprints and smudges easy to see. Must use touch screen for functions such as heated seats and steering-wheel controls.
4	<b>Ford/Lincoln</b> Sync 3	70	↑	↑	↓	↓	Has large, well-labeled icons, streamlined touch-screen interface, quick responses, natural voice commands, large volume and tuning knobs. Screen is a long reach for shorter drivers in some models.
5	<b>BMW</b> iDrive Touch	58	↑	↓	↓	↓	Has easy-to-read screen with large text, quick input responses, effective controller knob. Takes time to master; optional touchpad isn't very helpful.
6	<b>Volvo</b> Sensus Connect Touch	54	↑	↓	↓	↓	Quick response to inputs and crisp graphics. The large touch screen can be difficult to operate. Swipe and tap commands are confusing and require lots of familiarity; lots of small text. Buggy smartphone integration. Available on XC90, S90, and redesigned XC60.
7	<b>Buick/Chevrolet/GMC</b> IntelliLink/MyLink	52	↑	↓	↓	↓	Has intuitive screens, large text, traditional knobs and buttons, comprehensive steering-wheel controls. Swiping motions are difficult while driving; smaller-screen version offers a less versatile interface.

## Keep Safety in the Driver's Seat

CR is critical of systems that force drivers to take their hands off the wheel or their eyes off the road.

WHILE INFOTAINMENT SYSTEMS offer drivers plenty of cool, interactive features, job No. 1 remains safely piloting the vehicle. "A well-designed car should allow the driver access to the tech they need with minimal distraction," says Jake Fisher, director of auto testing at Consumer Reports. "Unfortunately, some systems can be frustrating to use and take too much attention away from driving." Here are the biggest concerns that CR has about these systems:

> **Features can encourage drivers to take their eyes off the road.** Taking your eyes off the road for 5 seconds at 55 mph is like driving the length of an entire football field with your eyes closed. Multilayered interfaces can require drivers to tap screens repeatedly to dig down to submenus. The systems make it easy for an automaker to save space, but they make drivers divert attention to turn on the A/C or change the audio source. Using Volvo's touch-screen system, a driver has to touch the screen at least twice to turn the A/C on and off.

> **They can be visually distracting.** Big screens are a growing trend, and owners love them, but they can have lots going on. For example,

some systems have navigation maps that can be "pinched" to zoom in and out like on a smartphone, or they have multiple screens that need to be swiped over to reach the correct submenu.

> **Touch-sensitive controls may be unreliable.** The Cadillac Cue system, for example, often requires hitting the same button several times before the driver is sure the command has been received. Using the Lexus Remote Touch, drivers must carefully move the mouse to hit onscreen icons, and the normal movement of a car in motion makes that very difficult. That's not only frustrating but often forces drivers to look away to make sure they've hit the right spot.

Rank	Brand Name	% Very Satisfied	Features				CR Expert Assessments
			Bluetooth Phone Calling	In-Dash Navigation	Audio Streaming	Voice Commands	
Continued							
8	Volkswagen MIB 2	51	↑	↓	↓	↓	Offers seamless phone pairing, handy knobs and buttons for basic functions. Navigation graphics and voice commands aren't the most refined, automatically responding touch screen can be tricky to use. Available on most 2015-17 models.
9	Audi MMI Touch	49	↑	↓	↓	↓	Has central controller, buttons, and handwriting recognition, plus well-designed steering-wheel controls and lots of features. Complex to learn but intuitive once mastered.
10	Lexus Remote Touch	48	↑	↓	↓	↓	Has good steering-wheel shortcuts. The mouselike joystick controller is fussy, and it's a challenge to move the cursor through onscreen choices, especially when driving.
11	Mercedes-Benz Comand	47	↑	↓	↓	↓	It lacks knobs and buttons, and the overly involved menus are distracting to use while driving. Touchpad controls on newest versions are too sensitive.
12	Kia Uvo	47	↑	↑	↓	↓	Has traditional knobs and buttons plus a touch screen with a logical system structure. Scrolling through phone contacts takes too many steps; small screens in base models aren't user-friendly.
13	Ford/Lincoln MyFord Touch/MyLincoln Touch	44	↑	↓	↓	↓	Has a cluttered and unintuitive screen, flush buttons are overly "touchy." Often buggy, with annoying reboots required.
14	Mazda Mazda Connect	43	↓	↓	↓	↓	Even simple functions require multiple steps, touch screen works only when vehicle is stopped, poor voice recognition.
15	Chrysler/Dodge/Jeep Uconnect 4.2-inch screen	42	↓	↓	↓	↓	The diminutive screen requires smaller text; less usable or capable than 8.4-inch system.
16	Cadillac Cue	41	↑	↓	↓	↓	Has a confusing interface, sluggish response, and overly sensitive touch buttons.
17	Mini Mini Connected	40	↓	↓	↓	↓	Requires a learning curve. Voice commands process quickly but require preset commands.
18	Volvo Sensus Connect	40	↑	↓	↓	↓	Has familiar-looking radio knobs, and buttons control screen. Menus aren't logical or easy to use.
19	Honda HondaLink	40	↓	↓	↓	↓	Unintuitive onscreen buttons and menus, poor voice-command quality, confusing dual-screen setup. High-trim systems lack volume and tuning knobs.
20	Nissan NissanConnect	39	↓	↓	↓	↓	Has simple knobs and buttons, good text size, quick navigation-route processing. Cumbersome phone pairing and setup.
21	Toyota Entune	39	↓	↓	↓	↓	Has a logical screen structure, but touch-screen buttons are packed tightly together. Has lackluster voice-command system; forces users to install smartphone app to use additional functions.
22	Infiniti InTouch	37	↓	↓	↓	↓	Two screens make it easy to see lots of information. Slow startup, complicated menu and control structure. Many tasks require multiple screen taps.
23	Subaru Starlink	33	↓	↓	↓	↓	Has easy-to-understand menus. Some onscreen buttons are small and crammed together; few steering-wheel controls; glossy screen reflects sunlight.
24	Acura AcuraLink	33	↓	↓	↓	↓	Has large text; phones pair easily. Frustrating dual-screen setup, convoluted display logic, finicky voice-command system.
25	Lexus Remote Touchpad	26	↑	↓	↓	↓	Large text, logical system structure. Console-mounted touchpad requires deft touch to make selections. Volume, tuning knobs hidden under ledge; universe of accepted voice commands is limited.

**HOW WE SURVEY:** Our infotainment survey data are based on the 2016 Auto Satisfaction Survey, conducted by the Consumer Reports Survey Department. We asked CR subscribers: "Considering all factors (features, usability, reliability, enjoyment, etc.), how satisfied are you

with the Infotainment system in your car?" Scores were determined based on the percentage of owners who said they were "very satisfied" with respect to the systems overall and the four features. We received responses on

more than 82,000 vehicles for model years from 2013 through 2016 as well as some 2017 models. We also provide CR assessments based on our vehicle-testing experience. These rated systems were the 25 most commonly purchased ones in our survey among the newer

models. We don't have sufficient data on some systems, such as those from Hyundai, Jaguar, and Land Rover. To learn more about owner satisfaction, go to [CR.org/reliability](http://CR.org/reliability).

# 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](http://CR.org/cars).



## Hydrogen-Powered Hipness

The **Toyota Mirai** has a long range for an EV, but access to filling stations outside of California could limit its travel.

TOYOTA'S MIRAI is proof that hydrogen fuel-cell vehicles are a viable transportation option—but not yet for widespread use.

The Mirai's primary advantage is that it's an all-electric car that doesn't suffer from typical electric-vehicle limitations. It uses hydrogen as fuel, which is converted into electricity to power the car. The Mirai takes just a few minutes to refill rather than the hours to recharge a conventional EV. And the Mirai's 275-mile range exceeds most EVs by a wide margin. Even better: The only tailpipe

emission is water vapor.

But the hydrogen-fuel infrastructure is very limited outside of California. Toyota will cover fuel costs for three years or up to \$15,000, whichever comes first. The government estimates annual fuel cost at \$1,250 for 15,000 miles, about twice the gas cost for a Toyota Prius.

On the road, the 4,100-pound Mirai has sluggish acceleration and leans into turns, a sensation made more extreme by its tall stance.

The ride, however, is almost luxury-car plush, effectively smothering any bumps in the road. Outside noise is kept to a minimum. Despite the unconventional layout, most controls work intuitively.

Be warned, however: This sedan fits only four adults, and those in the rear must contend with limited legroom, short seats, and jammed-up toes.

Forward-collision warning and automatic emergency braking come standard.

### PLUG-IN HYBRIDS & ELECTRICS

#### Toyota Mirai

OVERALL SCORE **63**

ROAD-TEST SCORE **61**

#### HIGHS

Long range for an EV, relatively quick fill-ups, ride comfort, standard AEB, emits only water vapor

#### LOWS

Only seats four, clumsy handling, limited hydrogen infrastructure, cargo space

#### POWERTRAIN

153-hp electric; 1-speed direct drive; front-wheel drive

#### FUEL RANGE

275 miles per tank

#### PRICE AS TESTED

\$58,335



## Like a Bus, But Better

With tons of room and an appealing driving experience, the **Volkswagen Atlas** is an enjoyable world traveler.

WITH THE ATLAS, Volkswagen finally has a three-row SUV designed with the qualities that American buyers crave.

Many consumers like big SUVs, and the Atlas is just that, inside and out. In daily driving, the 3.6-liter V6 and smooth 8-speed automatic feel lively. But the SUV's heft slowed it down in our 0-to-60 mph test, falling short of its competitors. Fuel economy of 20 mpg overall is on par for the class.

The Atlas doesn't possess VW's typical sporty character, because that isn't a priority for most buyers in this category. Still, this expansive SUV is

capable when the road becomes twisty. It delivers a driving experience that's more engaging than the Honda Pilot or Toyota Highlander.

The Atlas offers a comfortable ride as it smoothly soaks up road imperfections. The cabin is as quiet as a school library during spring break.

The roomy interior has clear appeal, particularly its generous second- and third-row seats. Inside the cabin, you can access the wayback via a slickly articulating seat—with one hand, you can pull a lever and effortlessly pivot the second-row seat forward, opening up a wide access path.

Honda and Toyota, take note: These VW controls are a model of clarity, particularly the intuitive touch-screen infotainment system.

Advanced safety features including forward-collision warning and automatic emergency braking are available starting with the SE trim.

### THREE-ROW SUVs

#### Volkswagen Atlas

OVERALL SCORE **71**

ROAD-TEST SCORE **84**

#### HIGHS

Accommodations, third-row-seat comfort and access, nimbler than size suggests, comfortable ride, quiet cabin, easy-to-use controls

#### LOWS

Acceleration trails competitors, spotty Volkswagen reliability

#### POWERTRAIN

276-hp, 3.6-liter V6 engine; 8-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

#### FUEL

20 mpg

#### PRICE AS TESTED

\$44,165



## Connected Comfort for the Long Haul

The new **Honda Odyssey** transforms the family car into a cutting-edge, high-tech coach.

THE 2018 ODYSSEY'S redesign isn't revolutionary, yet Honda made big improvements to its power, fuel economy, ride, and cabin quietness. It offers more features to pamper travelers and keep them connected. The overall result is a premium feel, especially for a minivan.

Inside, passengers will find the front seats large and inviting, but the bottom cushion loses firmness over long trips. By removing the second-row center seat, the comfortable outboard seats can be shifted inward. This puts children closer to their parents,

and it opens a wider path to access the roomy third-row seats.

Most trims get a new infotainment system that has colorful graphics, easy customization, and app connectivity, among other features.

On the less user-friendly side, the gear selector's buttons are awkward to use, particularly when switching between Drive and Reverse while parking.

The ride approaches luxury levels of comfort, and the cabin is serene except over very coarse pavement. It's no longer the sportiest minivan; handling is mundane but secure.

The strong V6 engine provides plenty of power, and fuel economy of 22 mpg overall is commendable. The nine-speed automatic is merely adequate, but the 10-speed on the Touring and Elite trims shifts more smoothly.

Automatic emergency braking and other advanced safety systems are standard on the EX trim and above.

### MINIVANS

#### Honda Odyssey

OVERALL SCORE **77**

ROAD-TEST SCORE **82**

#### HIGHS

Rides comfortably, quiet cabin, interior room and flexibility, fuel economy, kid-friendly tech

#### LOWS

Unintuitive gear selector, 9-speed automatic isn't the smoothest

#### POWERTRAIN

280-hp, 3.5-liter V6 engine; 9-speed automatic transmission; front-wheel drive

#### FUEL

22 mpg

#### PRICE AS TESTED

\$40,300



## A Frugal Family-Friendly Ride

The first hybrid minivan, the **Chrysler Pacifica Hybrid** is the most efficient model in the segment. But it's hurt by Chrysler's below-average reliability record.

THE NEW PACIFICA plug-in hybrid is the most fuel-efficient minivan on the market, delivering a stellar 27 mpg overall when it runs as a hybrid. It can also travel 29 miles purely on electric power, making it a potential game-changer.

It takes 2¼ hours on a 240-volt connection to fully charge the battery, and 12 hours using a standard household power outlet. This is the greenest minivan available.

Its performance mirrors the conventional nonhybrid version. The ride is comfortable and the living room-like cabin is quiet.

The Uconnect infotainment system, with an 8.4-inch screen, is one of the best around.

The minivan is full of features a family will appreciate and is loaded with storage bins, easy-to-access seating, and plenty of cup holders.

But the hybrid version has seating only for seven vs. eight in the conventional version. In addition, the hybrid is missing Chrysler's handy Stow 'n Go feature, which means the second-row seats don't fold into the floor. (That space is taken up by the hybrid's battery pack.) Instead, you get two fixed seats with extra padding that are more comfortable. There's a deep well behind the third row, which can easily swallow the bags from a large grocery run or an after-school activity carpool.

Advanced safety features, such as forward-collision warning and automatic emergency braking, are available only on the top-trim version.

### MINIVANS

#### Chrysler Pacifica Hybrid

OVERALL SCORE **68**

ROAD-TEST SCORE **88**

#### HIGHS

Interior space and flexibility, ride, quietness, Uconnect 8.4 infotainment system, access, fuel economy, tax incentives

#### LOWS

Chrysler's below-average reliability reputation, expensive to get advanced safety gear

#### POWERTRAIN

248-hp, 3.6-liter V6 hybrid; continuously variable transmission; front-wheel drive

#### FUEL

29 miles (electric-only range); 27 mpg (regular hybrid operation)

#### PRICE AS TESTED

\$48,380

**Ratings** > **Family-Friendly Haulers** Three-row SUVs can carry your gear and offer all-wheel drive, but nothing beats a minivan's flexibility. Plug-in hybrids and electric cars are becoming more practical with every generation.



Rec.	Make & Model	Price	Overall Score	Survey Results		Safety	Road-Test Results												
				Predicted Reliability	Owner Satisfaction		Road-Test Score	Efficiency	Acceleration, 0-60 MPH, Sec.	Dry Braking, 60-0 MPH, Ft.	Avoidance-Maneuver Speed, MPH	Routine Handling	Ride	Noise	Seat Comfort Front/Rear	Controls	Cargo Volume, Cu. Ft. / Luggage, Suitcases+Duffels		
MINIVANS																			
✓	Toyota Sienna XLE	\$38,424	79	↑	↑	Opt.	79	21	—	7.7	137	49.5	↓	↑	↑	↑/↑	↑	70.5	
✓	Honda Odyssey EX-L	\$40,300	77	↓	↑	Opt.	82	22	—	8.1	136	50.0	↓	↑	↑	↑/↑	↓	71.5	
	Chrysler Pacifica Hybrid Platinum	\$48,380	68	↓	↑	Opt.	88	27	84	8.3	145	48.5	↓	↑	↑	↑/↑	↑	66.0	
	Kia Sedona EX	\$34,795	67	↓	↑	Opt.	70	20	—	8.0	133	48.0	↓	↓	↑	↑/↑	↑	46.0	
	Chrysler Pacifica Touring L	\$38,245	66	↓	↑	Opt.	85	21	—	8.0	136	51.0	↓	↑	↑	↑/↑	↑	66.0	
3-ROW SUVs																			
✓	Toyota Highlander XLE (V6)	\$41,169	84	↑	↑	Std./↑	82	22	—	7.4	134	48.5	↓	↑	↑	↑/↑	↑	40.5	
✓	Kia Sorento EX (V6)	\$37,915	82	↑	↑	Opt.	84	21	—	7.4	131	49.5	↑	↑	↑	↑/↑	↑	37.5	
✓	Hyundai Santa Fe SE (V6)	\$36,290	78	↑	↑	Opt.	81	20	—	7.6	133	51.0	↓	↑	↑	↑/↑	↑	40.5	
✓	Honda Pilot EX-L	\$39,585	75	↓	↑	Opt.	80	20	—	7.5	136	49.5	↓	↑	↑	↑/↑	↓	48.0	
✓	Mazda CX-9 Touring	\$40,470	74	↓	↑	Opt.	80	22	—	7.9	139	50.0	↑	↑	↑	↑/↑	↓	34.0	
	Volkswagen Atlas SEL (V6)	\$44,165	71	↓	↑	Opt.	84	20	—	8.7	135	51.0	↑	↑	↑	↑/↑	↑	50.5	
	Dodge Durango GT (V6)	\$43,525	63	↓	↑	Opt.	83	18	—	8.3	134	48.0	↓	↑	↑	↑/↑	↑	44.0	
	Ford Explorer XLT (V6)	\$39,275	59	↓	↑	Opt.	67	18	—	7.9	135	49.5	↓	↑	↑	↑/↑	↓	42.0	
	Nissan Pathfinder SL	\$40,470	56	↓	↓	Opt.	72	18	—	7.7	137	47.0	↓	↑	↑	↑/↑	↑	39.5	
PLUG-IN HYBRIDS and ELECTRIC CARS																			
✓	Toyota Prius Prime Premium	\$29,889	73	↑	↑	Std./↑	74	50	133	10.8	139	55.0	↑	↑	↑	↑/↓	↓	2+0	
✓	Ford C-Max Energi	\$34,940	73	↓	↑	NA	77	37	94	8.1	136	50.5	↑	↑	↑	↑/↑	↓	1+1	
✓	BMW i3 Giga REX	\$50,450	71	↓	↓	Opt.	79	29	139	7.5	131	55.0	↑	↑	↑	↑/↓	↓	1+1	
✓	Chevrolet Bolt Premier	\$43,155	70	↓	↑	Opt.	76	—	119	6.8	138	53.0	↑	↓	↑	↓/↓	↑	2+0	
	Toyota Mirai	\$58,335	63	↑	↑	Std./↑	61	—	67	9.3	142	49.5	↓	↑	↑	↑/↓	↓	2+0	
	Chevrolet Volt LT	\$35,890	54	↓	↑	Opt.	70	38	105	8.0	133	52.5	↓	↑	↑	↓/↓	↑	2+0	
	Ford Focus Electric	\$40,990	52	↓	↓	NA	72	—	107	10.2	140	52.5	↑	↑	↑	↑/↓	↑	1+1	

**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 now deduct points from the Overall Score if a vehicle's shifter is confusing, lacks fail-safes, or is difficult to operate. For full ratings, go to [CR.org/cars](http://CR.org/cars).





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# Fall Fumbles

These colorful mix-ups really put the “um ...” in autumn



**Fruitless Endeavor**  
Someone please tell Kroger that apples grow on trees—not on strawberry plants.  
*Mary Carter, Miamisburg, Ohio*



**The Big Bad Wolf Was Here**  
At least they don't plan to blow the whole house down!  
*Jim Langford, Georgetown, Texas*

**One-Womb Schoolhouse**  
It seems as though kids are starting school younger and younger these days.  
*Keral Fell, Beverly, Ohio*

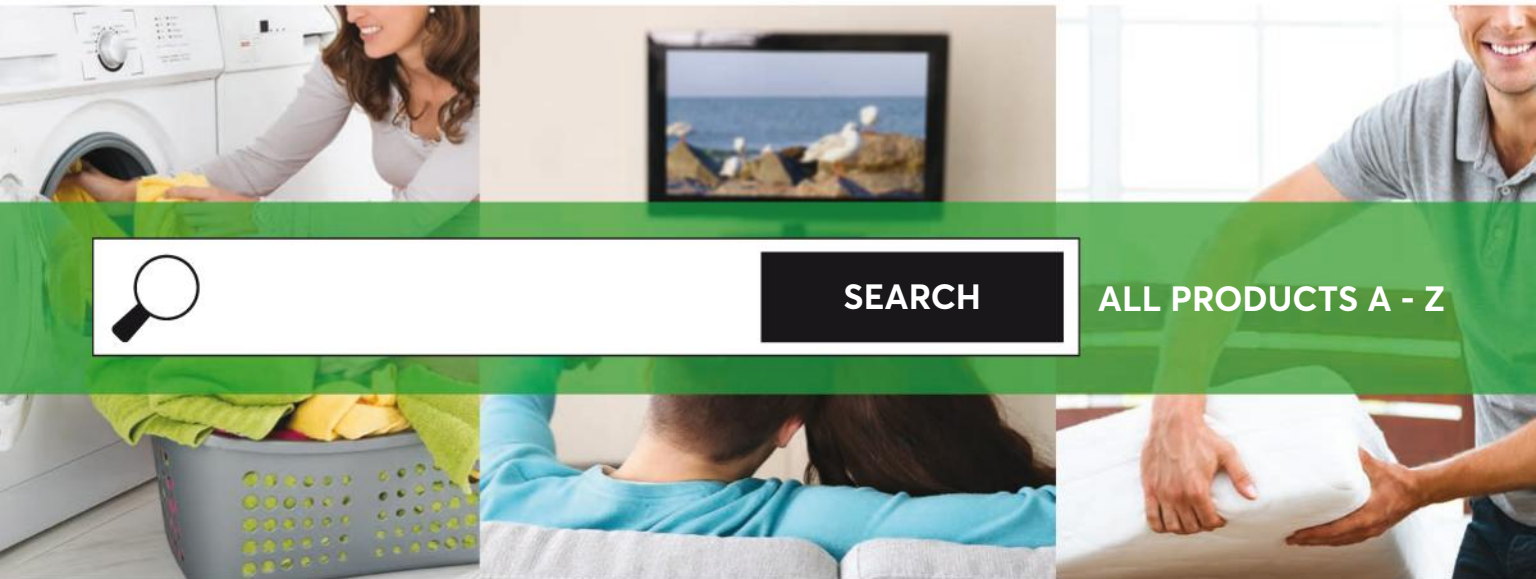


**Flesh Direct** This strange smorgasbord offers more than we can stomach.  
*Linda Johnson, Alexandria, Va.*

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