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AUGUST 2021

# CR Consumer Reports®

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HOW TO GET

# BETTER INTERNET

IMPROVE YOUR COVERAGE FOR LESS!



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**JOIN OUR  
DRIVE  
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CHEAPER  
SERVICE**

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**CR**



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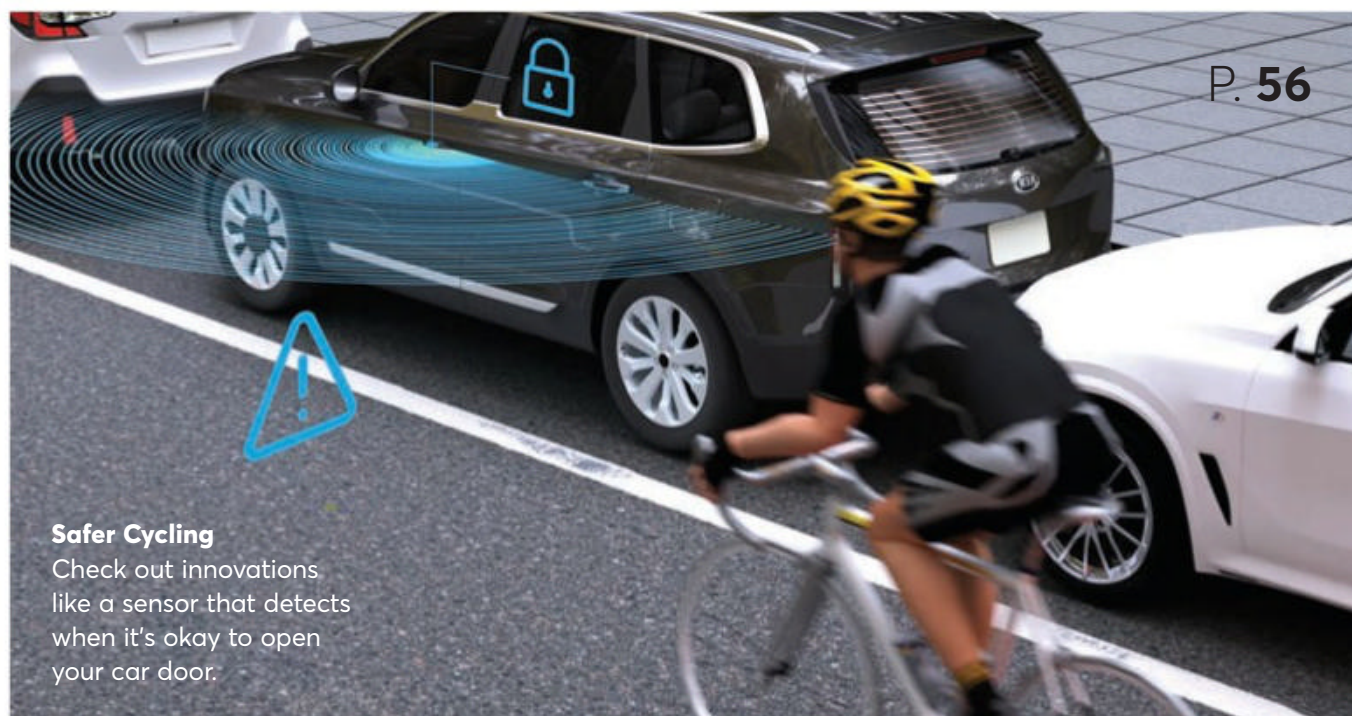
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**Price** In U.S., \$6.99 per issue, special issues \$7.99. In Canada, \$7.99 CAN per issue, special issues \$8.99 CAN (Goods and Services Tax included, GST #127047702). All other countries add \$10 per year to the U.S. price for shipping and handling.

**Back Issues** Single copies of previous 24 issues, \$7.95 each; previous two Buying Guides, \$14.49 each (includes shipping and handling). Please send payment to Consumer Reports, Attn.: Member Services, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY 10703. Other ways to get Consumer Reports on the go: Apple News+, Google Play, Kindle, Nook, Readly, and Zinio.

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**Consumer Reports** (ISSN 0010-7174) is published monthly, except twice in December, by Consumer Reports, Inc., 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY 10703. Periodicals postage paid at Yonkers, N.Y., and at other mailing offices; Canadian postage, at Mississauga, Ontario (Canadian publications registration number 2665247, agreement number 40015148). Title Consumer Reports is a federally registered trademark in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Contents of this issue copyright © 2021 by Consumer Reports, Inc. All rights reserved under international and Pan-American copyright conventions.

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# Getting the Internet We Need



ACCESS TO HIGH-SPEED internet has been a game changer for so many of us over the past year—making it possible to take part in vital activities, including attending school, seeking medical treatment, and working or interviewing for jobs.

But unlike water, electricity, or even phone service, high-speed internet isn't treated as the must-have utility it is.

As a result, consumers are

too often at the mercy of internet service providers that call the shots on where they deliver service, at what speed, and at what cost. I found this out myself last year while wrestling with painfully slow internet service at my home in rural New York state. The local provider said the only option was for my neighbors and me to spend tens of thousands of dollars to cover the cost of upgrading service, which included digging a trench up our dirt road. We ended up hiring a local contractor to do it for far less, knowing full well that we were fortunate to be able to broker this solution. But we need to do better for communities all across the country.

It is simply unacceptable that some 42 million Americans lack the ability to subscribe to broadband internet at home, according to research and advocacy group BroadbandNow—and that still more families, struggling to make ends meet, just can't afford it. To make matters worse, we often have no real choice of service providers or transparency on pricing.

Even as we turn a corner on the pandemic, we need to ensure that everyone has access to affordable high-speed internet. That's why CR members and others are joining our Broadband Together initiative. Consumers around the country will test their internet speeds and share copies of their bills, so we can bring more transparency to the fight for fair internet. I invite you to join this effort to make affordable internet service available to all. Please go to [broadbandtogether.org](http://broadbandtogether.org).

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## Removing Risky Products

### WHAT'S AT STAKE

Exercise equipment company Peloton recalled its Tread+ and Tread treadmills May 5, after the Tread+ was linked to dozens of injuries to children, including one death.

It was a sharp reversal for Peloton, which refused to act in April when the Consumer Product Safety Commission issued an urgent warning for the Tread+.

### HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

CR advocates say the standoff with Peloton reveals a major gap in the CPSC's authority: It can't force a company to recall a product without taking it to court, even when the agency's safety experts have tied a hazardous product to deaths or serious injuries.

"It shouldn't have required so much time and effort to get this product recalled," says William Wallace, CR's manager of safety policy. "The CPSC needs the ability to take quicker, more forceful action when a product is putting people at risk."

In addition to urging these reforms, CR is backing a bill in Congress that would eliminate the controversial Section 6(b) of the federal Consumer Product Safety Act, which severely restricts the CPSC's ability to disclose data and warn the public of risks.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

Consumers can get a full refund at [support.onepeloton.com](http://support.onepeloton.com) until Nov. 6, 2022, and a partial refund after that date.

## Making Infant Sleep Safer

### WHAT'S AT STAKE

For far too long, unregulated infant sleep products have put babies in danger. Almost

100 infant deaths have been associated with inclined sleepers and at least 23 deaths with unregulated flat sleep products, such as in-bed sleepers. These products all have features that can limit a baby's ability to breathe freely and can lead to suffocation.

### HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

These dangers were brought to light by a multiyear CR investigation, which drew on the experience of parents of babies who died while placed in some of these products.

Many inclined sleepers were subsequently recalled or removed from the market, but other products remained on sale. So CR has continued to advocate for rules that would require all infant sleep products on the market to follow the safe-sleep recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), which says infants should sleep alone, on their back, on a firm, flat surface with no extra bedding.

On June 2, the CPSC voted in favor of such a rule. Among other things, it requires infant sleepers to comply with



### ACTION UPDATE

In our February issue we told you about a rule, put into place by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau last October, that will **allow debt collectors to contact consumers via email, text message, and even social media messaging**—and call them up to seven times a week for each debt—all without confirming that money is actually owed. In May, CR formally asked the CFPB to rescind the rule and further limit abusive collection practices. And we delivered the signatures of almost 180,000 consumers in support of our request. (You can add your name to the petition at [CR.org/debt0821](http://CR.org/debt0821).) If the CFPB does not take action, the rule will go into effect in November.

strong minimum safety standards, and draws a clear line between products that are safe for sleep and those that are not. The rule will take effect in about a year.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

We urge caregivers to follow the AAP's recommendations and immediately stop using any product for infant sleep that does not adhere to them.

## Energizing the Case for EVs

### WHAT'S AT STAKE

More than 70 percent of consumers are interested in buying or leasing an electric vehicle (EV), according to CR's nationally representative 2020 survey of 3,392 U.S. drivers. And for good reason: Though the purchase price of an EV is typically higher than that of an equivalent gas-powered vehicle, recent CR research shows that EVs come out ahead when you factor in total ownership costs, including fuel and maintenance—saving owners \$6,000 to \$10,000 over the course of an EV's life span.

### HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

CR is pushing for numerous reforms to help meet the demand for EVs. One of our advocates, alongside CR members, testified in June at an Environmental Protection Agency hearing in support of states' authority to set stricter emissions standards and establish clean car programs. In addition, Virginia recently became the 14th state to adopt a CR-endorsed program that will make it easier to purchase electric and low-emissions vehicles, and a judge recently cleared the way for Minnesota to become the 15th.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

Check out CR's latest electric and hybrid vehicle ratings at [CR.org/ev0821](http://CR.org/ev0821).



**Less Costly EVs for All**  
CR is pushing to make electric vehicles more accessible nationwide.



Our June cover story, “CR’s Great Outdoors Guide,” offered smart ideas and products for making the most of your summer. Here, readers discuss the best grilling techniques and DIY backyard movie night setups. To add your voice to the discussion, go to [CR.org/outside0821](https://www.consumerreports.org/outside0821).

FOR MANY YEARS, I would make my own pizza crust on a charcoal grill (can be done easily on gas, too). Lay it down on a heated charcoal grill grate, browning slightly on one side, turn it over and grill a slight bit darker on the other side. Bring inside and place olive oil, sauce, toppings, plus cheese(s) on the slightly darker side. (Prepare your toppings beforehand.) Then slide the crust with toppings onto the hot grill, lower the hood, and watch closely until nicely browned ... Voila! Perfect grilled pizza while camping and no need for other

costly equipment. I’ve done this on a little 12-inch kettle-type grill and our 22-inch charcoal grills! Tastes just perfect.

–Darlene Raunio, via Facebook

THE BEST WAY to cook veggies is not on a charcoal grill but on an electric one, if you must. But I prefer steamed or wokked veggies—good for you and delicious!

–Bejot Cat, via Facebook

WE LOVE our combo gas/charcoal Weber grill. No fluid needed, real charcoal taste, super-easy to start.

–William Roman, via Facebook

HOW DO YOU add coals easily to the Kamado Joe grill?

–Russell Toon, via Facebook

**EDITOR’S NOTE** *If you need to add charcoal coals to your Kamado Joe while you’re already cooking, it is indeed tricky—because you’ll need to remove hot racks. In our tests of the Kamado Joe, which has two half-grates, we added charcoal by moving our food to one half, then removing the other half of the grate with mitts to add the coal. We then replaced the grate and moved the food back to continue cooking. We took this process into account in our convenience score—though it was still easier than adding coals on some other kamado-style grills we’ve tested. To avoid adding coals while cooking, fill your Kamado Joe to capacity—it should hold enough charcoal to cook for 12 hours or so without needing more.*

**RE: PORTABLE** movie projectors. Using a white sheet works almost as well as a screen.  
–Margie Scott, via Facebook

**EDITOR’S NOTE** *Absolutely! The key to using a sheet is to pull it tight. But it also helps if you iron it first with heavy starch. Then, if you’re attaching the sheet to a wall, try using heavy double-stick tape around the edges to get it as flat as possible. Or, if you’re handy, you can DIY your own makeshift screen frame for the sheet: CR technology editor James Willcox built a frame, then stapled the sheet to the frame with an industrial-grade stapler, stretching the sheet as tight as possible. Then he clamped the frame to a deck railing and was ready for showtime.*



TIRE REPAIRS

YOUR JUNE 2021 ARTICLE “Can Tire Sealants Really Fix a Flat?” raised a question. My 2010 Toyota Prius is not unusual in having a tire-pressure warning in the dash display. This suggests that there are pressure sensors in the wheels. Will sealants damage those sensors, or require they receive special treatment while the tire is off for permanent repair or replacement to ensure accuracy and reliability for future use?  
–Norman Birnbaum, Indianapolis

**EDITOR’S NOTE** *Most tire sealant products, including those we reviewed, are claimed to be safe for tire pressure monitoring systems (TPMS). That said, sealants work by coating the inside of the tire and wheel with a messy residue that can potentially gum up the TPMS, risking erroneous readings. So*



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

WRITE



a tire shop will need to clean out all the sealant when it fixes or replaces your tire, which it may charge you extra for. (But if using a tire sealant helps get you safely to the repair shop, it can be worth the added expense.) Once cleaned, a pro can check that your TPMS is working properly.

IN MY EXPERIENCE, most slow leak flats have the nails left in the tire, which would make the holes much smaller. The “Fix-a-Flat” often works for a while, for an inexpensive, quick, and easy repair. I’ve also had success with plugs, though I know they have been deemed unsafe. Another method is to have an emergency starter battery with a built-in compressor. Kills two emergencies with one product. —Larry Langston, via Facebook

**EDITOR’S NOTE** *Plugging a puncture is not an acceptable practice. Sealants are meant to serve as a temporary solution, with the expectation that the car will be taken to a shop for inspection as soon as possible, ideally the same day. There are industry guidelines to fix a puncture in the tread of a*

*tire using a plug and patch, and this requires removing the tire from the wheel for inspection and repair. In many cases, a puncture may warrant a full replacement of the tire.*

THE KIT that came with my Ford C-Max (with sealant and a compressor) saved my bacon in the middle of nowhere last year. It sealed the hole, aired up to the proper pressure, and allowed me to get to Discount Tire for a proper repair. —Dennis Weiler, via Facebook

TIRE SEALANT didn’t work for me when I got stranded. It depends on the hole in your tire that caused the flat. If the hole is too big, it won’t work. As a result, I bought a spare tire and jack so that I don’t get stranded again. —Peter Kabatek, via Facebook

**EDITOR’S NOTE** *Ultimately, nothing is as effective as a traditional spare tire (if you have room for one) because tire sealants work only on a small puncture in the tread. A hole the size of a large nail or sidewall damage to your tire can’t be repaired by tire sealants.*



#### HOW OFTEN DO YOU STEP ON YOUR SCALE?

Regarding “The Most Accurate Bathroom Scales” (Insights, June 2021): I track averages from week to week. [Weighing yourself] doesn’t need to be every day, it can be every other day or two. —JS Matos-Williams, via Facebook

I like to know which way I’m trending, so it’s important that my scale is consistent. I can step on mine five times and get the same exact weight. I’m within 0.5 percent if I weigh myself daily. —Phillip Wolfe, via Facebook

I haven’t stepped on mine since the pandemic started. I’m too afraid. —Mary Rose, via Facebook

**EDITOR’S NOTE** *Studies suggest you should weigh yourself daily if your goal is weight loss. Do it first thing in the a.m. for your most accurate reading, because your body has had time to process what you consumed the day before.*

last seven to eight days. Every Sunday I replace them, even if the aids do not alert me. I also carry extras in my pocket. —Stephen DeBaun, Woodbury, NJ

THE NEED FOR an audiologist to replace a battery applies only to aids with rechargeable batteries, not to zinc-air batteries that are easily user-replaceable. —Dale Wilkins, Roswell, NM

GOOD HEARING AIDS make all the difference in the world. I had a \$3,000 pair that were lifesavers for six years. I just got a new set that are closer to \$6,000, and they’re awesome. I’ve been able to hear the homily from the back of the church for the first time in forever. —Masha Bean, via Facebook



#### EARBUD BATTERY LIFE

I READ “The Best Noise-Canceling Headphones for Less” (June 2021) about wireless headgear with interest. As an avid distance walker and hiker, I routinely use earbuds to take music with me. However, I learned through experience that the manufacturer’s battery life numbers need to be viewed with a skeptical eye, as I have noted a large variance in the life of different wireless buds. —James Ray, Jacksonville, NC

**EDITOR’S NOTE** *We agree that claimed battery life is often a gamble. In fact, in some cases manufacturers say that they measure battery life with the headphones playing at lower volume, so it’s likely that the advertised battery life won’t always match up with real-world use. It’s smart to check the return policy, just in case you don’t get as many hours out of your new earbuds as you’d hoped.*

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#### HEARING AID FIXES

I JUST READ your June 2021 article “3 Common Hearing Aid Problems & Fixes.” I have been wearing hearing aids for more than 57 years. For me, the major cause of acoustic feedback is poorly fitting earplugs. Spend the money and get custom-made ear molds, keep the air tube clean, and replace the wax guards as needed. I’m a motorcyclist, and it took nine visits to get my aids adjusted properly so that I could ride safely. As for batteries, mine

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

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

## Headphones for \$50 or Less

**WE TESTED:** 34 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** Sound quality, including clarity; how well noise-canceling models reduce ambient noise; and more.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**  
**NOISE-CANCELING**  
Median: 73; Range: 57-74  
**STEREO**  
Median: 59; Range: 41-73

GREAT OVER-EAR HEADPHONES WITH NOISE CANCELLATION

**Anker SoundCore Life Q20**  
\$50

**73**  
OVERALL SCORE



BEST BUDGET BUDS

**1More PistonBuds**  
\$40

**70**  
OVERALL SCORE



WORKOUT BARGAIN PICK

**JVC HA-FX9BT Gummy Wireless**  
\$20

**65**  
OVERALL SCORE



## Mattresses

**WE TESTED:** 120 innerspring models  
**WE TEST FOR:** Support for petite, average, and large/tall side and back sleepers; durability; firmness on a scale of 1 to 10; and more.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**  
Median: 70  
Range: 44-85

MEDIUM FIRMNESS & EXCELLENT FOR PETITE SIDE SLEEPERS

**Ethan Allen EA Signature Platinum Plush**  
\$2,225

**81**  
OVERALL SCORE



FIRMER & EXCELLENT FOR ALL TYPES OF BACK SLEEPERS

**Beautyrest PressureSmart 11.5" Firm**  
\$1,100

**75**  
OVERALL SCORE



SUPERSOFT & VERY GOOD FOR MOST BACK AND SIDE SLEEPERS

**Puffy Lux Hybrid**  
\$1,495

**73**  
OVERALL SCORE



## Ask Our Experts

**I've heard softer mattresses are better for side sleepers. Is that true?**



**NOT NECESSARILY.** Our side-sleeper tests are based on the premise that you will benefit from a mattress that's able to support your spine well enough to keep it relatively horizontal (a straight line parallel to the floor) while you're lying down—rather than curving, which can cause shoulder or back pain. But we haven't found softness to be an indication of that: The five mattresses that receive an Excellent rating in our tests for petite or large side sleepers range from 3 to 7 out of 10 on our firmness scale (with 1 being the softest and 10 the firmest). Instead, side sleepers should look for a mattress that scores well in our side-support tests for your body type, such as the Ethan Allen above.

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

## Toaster Ovens for \$100 or Less

**WE TESTED:** 22 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** How evenly a model toasts sliced bread and bakes muffins and cookies, how well it reheats lasagna, how easy it is to clean, and more.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**  
 Median: 57  
 Range: 39-67

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

**67**  
 OVERALL SCORE



**FITS UNDER LOW CABINETS**  
**Hamilton Beach 6-Slice 31411**  
 \$65

**63**  
 OVERALL SCORE



**RELIABLE BRAND**  
**Oster Designed for Life TSSTTVDF L2 6-Slice**  
 \$40

**63**  
 OVERALL SCORE



## Battery-Powered Chainsaws

**WE TESTED:** 23 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** How easy it is to start; how fast it cuts through a 10-inch square oak beam; how safe it is, including a measurement of its "kickback" intensity; and more.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**  
 Median: ~~67~~  
 Range: ~~50-80~~

**A CUT ABOVE THE REST**  
**Ego CS1804**  
 \$350

**82**  
 OVERALL SCORE



**POWERFUL & EASY TO HANDLE**  
**Echo CCS-58V4AH**  
 \$350

**79**  
 OVERALL SCORE



**BARGAIN BUY**  
**Hart HLCS011**  
 \$190

**73**  
 OVERALL SCORE



## Robotic Vacuums

**WE TESTED:** 34 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** How well a model cleans bare floors and carpets, picks up pet hair, gets into corners, and more.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**  
 Median: 65  
 Range: 32-81

**SUPREME CLEANER BUT PRICEY**  
**iRobot Roomba S9+**  
 \$950

**81**  
 OVERALL SCORE



**GREAT VALUE**  
**Eufy 11S**  
 \$220

**75**  
 OVERALL SCORE



**EXCELLENT ON CARPETS**  
**Samsung Powerbot R7040**  
 \$500

**72**  
 OVERALL SCORE



## Portable A/Cs

**WE TESTED:** 6 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** How quickly and accurately models cool a room to a set temperature, noise level during use on high and low speeds, and more.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**  
 Median: 63  
 Range: 57-66

**TOP PERFORMER**  
**LG LP1419IVSM**  
 \$700

**66**  
 OVERALL SCORE



**RELIABLE BRAND FOR LESS**  
**Whynter ARC-12SDH**  
 \$460

**64**  
 OVERALL SCORE



**MOST BUDGET-FRIENDLY PICK**  
**Whynter ARC-102CS**  
 \$350

**60**  
 OVERALL SCORE



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

**COMING NEXT MONTH** Leaf Blowers & More



## Do children really need to get a COVID-19 vaccine?

YES. IF THEY'RE of eligible age, they should get vaccinated. The Food and Drug Administration has authorized the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for 12- to 15-year-olds after evaluating its safety and effectiveness; and younger children may be eligible by the fall. (In fact, a recent clinical trial found the Pfizer vaccine to be 100 percent effective at preventing COVID-19 in 12- to 15-year-olds.) Moderna has also requested FDA authorization for use of its vaccine in those ages 12 to 17.

In the early months of the pandemic, scientists learned that children and teens were much less likely than adults to become very ill from the virus. While this is still mostly true, in some cases younger children have had organ damage or died as a result of COVID-19. And teens are more

likely to experience the severe symptoms many adults do, says Kathryn Edwards, MD, scientific director of the Vanderbilt Vaccine Research Program and a professor of pediatrics. In fact, teens account for almost a quarter of new cases, and some states are seeing a rapid spread of infections in children. This may be because of the fact that as adults get vaccinated, the percentage of them getting infected goes down, thus increasing the proportion of cases of children who test positive.

Another reason: The new variants of COVID-19 could be more infectious and dangerous—even to younger people. This makes vaccinating children more urgent. “There have been around 300 to 600 pediatric COVID deaths,” says Gregory Poland, MD, director of the Vaccine Research Group at the Mayo Clinic, who studies vaccine response in adults and children. “That’s likely to increase if we don’t stop transmission by getting as many people immunized as possible.”

## Are ‘buy now, pay later’ plans a good idea?

MORE ONLINE SHOPPERS are encountering a new payment method when checking out: a button typically allowing you to put down 25 percent of the purchase price, then pay off the rest in three equal installments over six weeks—with no fees or interest. This “buy now, pay later” (BNPL) type of instant, no-cost financing has become increasingly popular, says CR money editor Penelope Wang.

You may see it while shopping at Amazon, Bed Bath & Beyond, Walmart, and other retailers. And more than 40 percent of American shoppers have used a BNPL plan, according to a Credit Karma/Qualtrics survey. Some hard-pressed Americans are using it to stretch out payments for necessities; others employ it only for big-ticket items (such as a TV). These short-term loans also appeal to consumers who can’t qualify for a credit card but still want to enjoy the advantage of spreading out payments.

There are risks, however. Depending on the type of plan you use, you may face fees and interest charges if you don’t make the payments on time—so you’ll need to manage the payments carefully or set up

automatic ones. You also may have trouble getting a refund, even if the product you bought is defective or otherwise unsatisfactory. “Read the terms of the loans on the lender’s website carefully,” Wang says. And there’s the danger of buying much more than you can afford: One survey found that almost half of BNPL shoppers said they increased their spending by 10 to 40 percent or more compared with using a credit card.

## Does driving more slowly help you save money on gas?

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, keeping to lower speeds can substantially increase your fuel economy (and therefore save you some money). CR’s auto experts looked at the effect of speed on fuel consumption by testing a widely sold sedan (a Nissan Altima) and SUV (a Toyota RAV4). They found that reducing speed from 65 mph to 55 mph improved the fuel economy in both vehicles: Gas mileage improved by 6 mpg in the Altima and 8 mpg in the RAV4—potentially saving drivers between \$92 and \$153 per year in gas money (assuming 12,000 miles of driving annually and a fuel cost of \$3.05 per gallon). In a less efficient vehicle, your savings may be even greater. By driving smoothly at a moderate speed, you’ll also reduce wear and tear on your vehicle and pollute less.



LEARN

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

# CR Insights

IN THE KNOW

## HOW TO LOOK GOOD ON ZOOM

SINCE THE PANDEMIC started, you've probably taken part in at least a few video calls on virtual meeting apps like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet. While many laptops have a built-in camera lens, the sales of external webcams boomed in 2020—and there are plenty of reasons why. The reality is some built-in laptop cameras don't make you look so good, presenting unflattering angles (with the lens looking up at you). Or you may want to connect your laptop to a larger computer monitor, most of which don't have a built-in camera.

Inexpensive stand-alone webcams promise better picture quality than your laptop's built-in camera. But do they actually deliver? Our tests of seven popular webcams found that in most cases, the answer is yes—and that, in our lab test, **even a \$40 webcam offers better video picture quality than the cameras on an HP Envy and MacBook Pro laptop.**

The Aukey (at right) and



Lenovo (below) represent the sweet spot between price and performance, says Richard Fisco, who leads electronics testing for CR. For less than \$50, you can improve the image and audio quality of your video calls, and you'll benefit from useful features like privacy shutters

(which cover the lens to ensure you're not visible when you don't want to be) and built-in tripod mounts (to easily reposition your camera angle). The bottom line? External webcams can be an affordable way to boost the video quality for all of your important onscreen moments.

GREAT PICTURE QUALITY FOR A LOW PRICE

**Aukey PC-LM1E**  
\$40 (above)

- 3/5 PICTURE QUALITY
- 4/5 VERSATILITY
- 4/5 EASE OF USE

ILLUSTRATIONS: RODRIGO DAMATI



BEST PICTURE QUALITY & FLIP-UP PRIVACY SHUTTER

**Logitech Brio**  
\$200

- 4/5 PICTURE QUALITY
- 5/5 VERSATILITY
- 3/5 EASE OF USE



ADJUSTABLE LIGHTING

**Razor Kiyo**  
\$100

- 3/5 PICTURE QUALITY
- 4/5 VERSATILITY
- 4/5 EASE OF USE



LONG USB CORD & SLIDING PRIVACY SHUTTER

**Lenovo Essential FHD**  
\$45

- 3/5 PICTURE QUALITY
- 4/5 VERSATILITY
- 4/5 EASE OF USE

SAVVY SHOPPER

## CHOOSING A GREAT OUTDOOR RUG

LOOKING FOR A pretty rug to improve your alfresco setup? First, consider the material it will be made of: Some textiles are more durable and easier to care for, making them perfect for an outdoor space. To help with your search for an outdoor-worthy rug, we spoke to Carmen Barbee, merchandise buyer for Ballard Designs, and Lisa Wagner, a National Institute of Rug Cleaning certified rug specialist and founder of rugchick.com.



**Polypropylene**  
BEST FOR HUMID CLIMATES  
For a durable outdoor rug, polypropylene—also called olefin—is a good bet, especially if you live in a humid climate. Polypropylene is composed of plastic, won't absorb liquid, and is typically fade- and stain-resistant, which means these rugs can survive spills or a hard rain. UV-treated polypropylene yarn even resists fading. And 100 percent polypropylene rugs are easy to clean because they don't have dyes that bleed or delicate fibers. Some can even be pressure-washed.



**Nylon, Acrylic, and Polyester**  
WIDE VARIETY OF STYLES  
The durability of these synthetics varies, though they tend to be more resilient than 100 percent natural fibers. These rugs often have natural fibers (like cotton or jute) woven in, which makes them more susceptible to fungi, and the outside may be water-resistant but the inner layers may not be. Check the care labels before you buy. If you want the look of a natural sisal rug, you can find a synthetic "sisal-style weave," which mimics true sisal but is a more durable, less expensive option.



**Sisal, Seagrass, and Jute**  
GOOD ONLY IN DRY CLIMATES  
These pricey, natural fiber rugs offer a chic aesthetic, but the materials they're made of are prone to mildew and are suitable only for dry climates (think Arizona). Watch out for borders made of fabric, or a glue-based backing, which traps moisture and causes mildew. Seagrass tends to be more durable; sisal and jute are more delicate. A braided or open weave style will promote airflow and evaporation, but proper care is crucial: Hang the rug in the sun regularly to air it out. And you may need pro cleaning to get out stains.

### Protect Your Deck

Before putting down any rug, Rico de Paz, CR's test engineer for wood stains, says it helps to use a deck stain engineered to resist color change and mildew, such as this recommended product.



**Behr Deckplus Solid Color Waterproofing Wood Stain (Home Depot) \$33**

**74**  
OVERALL SCORE

Digital and All Access members can go to [CR.org/stains](https://www.crisp.org/stains) for more wood stain ratings.

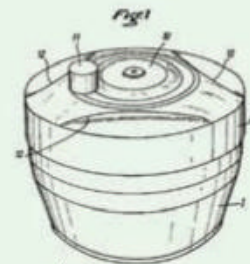
## CR Time Traveler SALAD & DRESSINGS

**1939** Mayonnaise, a popular way to dress greens, is now outsold by lower-calorie mayo-based dressings. After testing seven jarred dressings, Hom-De-Lite, a Best Buy, is rated tops.



**1945** CR tests the flavor and fat content of 15 dressings. A Green Dale product with "acceptable" fat content and very good flavor is judged best.

**1959** Chuck's Steakhouse opens in Honolulu and offers what it claims is one of the first build-your-own salad bars in a restaurant.



**1973** Gilberte Fouinetau patents a salad "drainer" or spinner with a rotating inner container for drying lettuce, which saves time prepping greens.

**1979** We rate 61 salad dressings and find that all contain too much vinegar, salt, and additives, like MSG and artificial colors.



PHOTOS: BOTTOM LEFT TO RIGHT: CONSUMER REPORTS; NEWMAN'S OWN FOUNDATION; CONSUMER REPORTS; GETTY IMAGES; CONSUMER REPORTS. PHOTOS: TOP LEFT TO RIGHT: SHUTTERSTOCK; ISTOCK; SHUTTERSTOCK

CR SMART SOLUTION

## DIY FIX FOR A DENTED BUMPER

Replacement bumper covers can cost more than \$1,000, but dents in the soft plastic bumper covers on cars and SUVs can often be smoothed out at home by applying heat and a little elbow grease.



20-30 MIN.

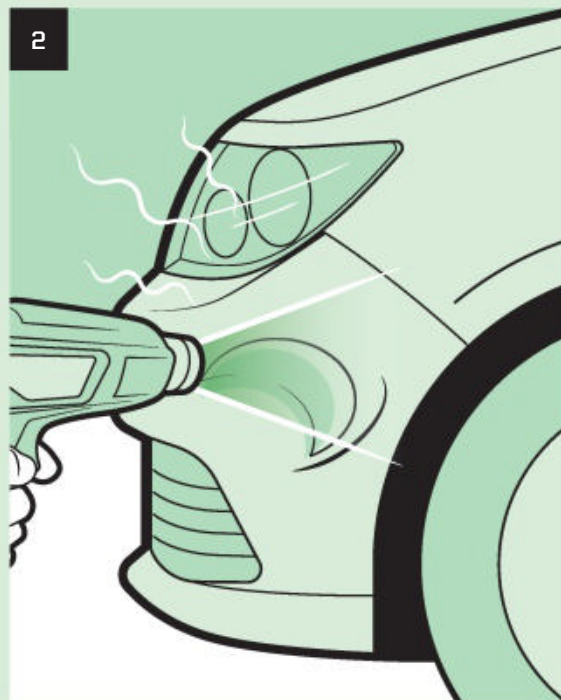
WHAT YOU NEED

- Heat gun, hair dryer, or hot water
- Rubber-tipped tool or dowel



**Get access behind the bumper.**

Depending on the location of the dent on your bumper, you may need to remove the fender liner ahead of the front tire (see above) or a lower aerodynamic valance below the bumper to gain access to the interior of the dent. Both can be unclipped manually.



**Apply heat to the dent.**

Warm the bumper surface with a heat gun tool if you have one (hot water or a powerful hair dryer will work, too) to make the plastic more malleable. Don't apply strong heat too closely or hold the heat source in the same spot for too long—either can damage the paint.



**Gently push out the dent.**

Use a rubber-tipped dowel to push out the dent from the interior until it begins to pop back into its intended shape. Once the major dent pops out, you may need to gently work on any small indents with the dowel to get a smooth surface. Then replace the fender liner.



**1988** McDonald's salads are said to be so successful that farmers can barely keep up, we report. One in 7 CR readers say they ate a salad the last time they got fast food.



**2010** We rate the nutrition of 20 meal-sized salads from casual and fast-food joints. A chicken salad from Panera Bread gets our top score.



**2021** In our tests of 23 salad dressings, Annie's Lite Raspberry flavor tops our ratings for fruit vinaigrettes.

**1980** Actor Paul Newman fills empty wine bottles with homemade salad dressing for holiday gifts. Two years later, Newman's Own Salad Dressing is launched.



**1992** The salad bar trend continues to grow. Some restaurants now offer salad bars with as many as 120 hot and cold dishes, CR reports.



**2019** Our food safety experts find listeria in some supermarket leafy greens, triggering an FDA inspection.



✓ **Annie's Organic Lite Raspberry Vinaigrette** \$0.63 per oz.

**74** OVERALL SCORE

ROAD SMARTS

**THE ABCs OF RVs**




TRAVELING BY motorhome (aka RV) lets you hit the road with many of the conveniences of home. An increasing number of

Americans are giving RVing a go: Rentals surged in the summer of 2020, and in 2021 so far, RV ownership is a record 11.2 million households—almost a third of which are first-time owners—according to IPSOS and Go RVing.

Before you rent or buy, every potential RVer should know a few basics. First off, there are three standard

types of motorhomes: classes A, B, and C. The class designation describes the vehicle structure, referring to the chassis and the body construction of the RV. Size and price can vary widely within each class, but in general, you'll find the smallest RVs—which are not much bigger than a van—in Class B, a variety of medium-sized options in Class C, and

the largest RVs—which can be as big as an interstate bus—in Class A. Look for a model with important safety features, such as automatic emergency braking and electronic stability control. RV shoppers should also insist on quality tires and fit them with tire pressure monitors to avoid underinflation and blowouts—risking an RV rollover or other accident.

	CLASS A	CLASS B	CLASS C
			
	30 to 40 feet long	20 to 24 feet long	22 to 33 feet long
<b>AVERAGE COST*</b>	\$160,000 TO \$220,000 or more	\$95,000 TO \$135,000	\$80,000 TO \$120,000
<b>SLEEPS (MAX.)</b>	6 TO 8 PEOPLE	2 TO 4 PEOPLE	4 TO 8 PEOPLE
<b>CR'S TAKE</b>	These bus-shaped models excel at providing a lot of space for their size, with abundant storage. Manufacturers offer a wide variety of layouts—from medium to large RVs—and prices. It's in this class that you'll find the biggest and most luxurious coaches (often called "diesel pushers," due to the engine being in the rear). Many also have slides—sections that can extend out when the RV is parked to create a wider interior.	Based on a van, Class B RVs are typically the smallest in size but often cost the most per square foot. That's because they tend to pack a lot of premium functions into a tiny amount of cabin space—including, for example, a kitchenette (rather than a full kitchen), a sofa/bed, and a small bathroom, some with a shower over the toilet area. As a result, they can feel cramped, but their modest size makes them easier to drive and park.	Often the best value, Class C motorhomes combine a van cab front with an RV shell. These typically have an over-the-cab sleeping area (the rooftop bulge that sticks out front) offering a nice amount of sleep space, and yet they're still easier to drive than large Class A RVs. There are also pricier heavy-duty "Super C" models that are built on a medium-duty truck platform and offer more engine power than standard Class C motorhomes.
<b>PROS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Come in many sizes and finish levels. (Furnishings can range from basic interiors to resembling a gilded yacht cabin.)</li> <li>■ The largest models have strong, rear-mounted diesel engines.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Best fuel economy of any class of motorhome.</li> <li>■ Durable, full metal body construction.</li> <li>■ Advanced safety equipment may be easier to find because it's offered on many models.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Commonly the least expensive choice.</li> <li>■ Have a decent amount of bed space without adding length to the RV.</li> <li>■ Models less than 25 feet long are easier to drive and park.</li> <li>■ Wide variety of floor-plan options.</li> </ul>
<b>CONS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Can be tricky to drive and park.</li> <li>■ May not fit in smaller campsites (and some national parks have RV length limits).</li> <li>■ Poor fuel economy.</li> <li>■ Not all seats may have full seat belts (meaning they include shoulder and lap belts).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Better for day-tripping than overnight camping due to limited sleep space.</li> <li>■ Can be short on amenities because of space constraints.</li> <li>■ Pricey, given their small size and limited interiors.</li> <li>■ Relatively few floor-plan options.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Cab area may be cramped due to an engine cover that intrudes into the space on some van-based models.</li> <li>■ Moderately priced cab/engine combinations are limited.</li> <li>■ There are a few high-end options, but most Class C RVs stop short of the decadence found in Class A coaches.</li> </ul>



NEW PRODUCT REVIEW

## A SMART SPEAKER THAT SWIVELS TO FOLLOW YOU

AMAZON'S LATEST Alexa-powered smart speaker, the Echo Show 10, introduces a unique new feature: By using motion sensing technology to track your movements, the 10-inch touch screen pivots around its base so that it continues to face you even as you move around a room. This rotating screen may come in handy for multitaskers. If you're moving around your kitchen to prep a meal, it will rotate to follow you so that you can continue to read recipe directions or to video chat.

In our lab tests, the Show 10 received high marks, placing it among the top five of all 45 smart speakers in our current ratings. Testers note that it's easy



✓ Amazon Echo Show 10 Smart Speaker \$250

67 OVERALL SCORE

to use and has some convenient features, such as voice command to control many common streaming services and a dedicated button to mute its microphones when you don't want it to listen. Though its sound quality receives a Good rating, it isn't quite up to its predecessor, the second-generation Echo Show, in that respect.

Outside of our labs, CR's technology reporter tried out the Show 10's moving screen in

a real home kitchen. Generally, it functioned as promised, he reported. It followed the user—whether nearby or across the room—but it sometimes stopped so that the camera was pointed at the user's shoulder instead of his face.

He also discovered that it's important to keep the surrounding area clear so that the rotating screen doesn't collide with anything in its path. The Show 10's quiet

electric motor is so strong that it knocked down a heavy travel mug and a plastic bottle of cooking oil that was mostly full. Amazon includes a 15-inch-diameter template (roughly the size of a beach ball) to measure the space that needs to be clear around the Show 10. So if you're interested in this smart speaker, be sure to carve out a sizable chunk of real estate on your countertop and keep it clear.

Note: Our reporter reached out to Amazon representatives, who declined to comment.

BEST UNDER \$100

## SUPER SMOOTHIE MAKERS

These four blenders aced our tests for making icy drinks, are easy to operate and clean, and won't bust your budget. To test blenders in our labs, we whip up a nonalcoholic piña colada. The result we look for is a thick, consistently smooth texture that doesn't have any chunks of fruit or ice.

EXCELLENT AT ICE CRUSHING

✓ Instant Ace \$80



77

OVERALL SCORE

COMES WITH A FOOD PROCESSOR ATTACHMENT

Oster Classic Series with Food Processor BPMT02-SSF-000 \$90



69

OVERALL SCORE

COMPACT FOOTPRINT FOR SMALL KITCHENS

Hamilton Beach Digital Smoothie Smart 56207 \$50



59

OVERALL SCORE

BARGAIN PRICE

Farberware Performance MJ-BL4501AWC \$35



51

OVERALL SCORE

FOOD IQ™

## DECODING MILK LABELS

Grass-fed? Ultra-pasteurized? You may have noticed a number of confusing phrases on your milk carton lately. Here, we explain some now-common labels you'll find on milk and what they really mean.

### PRODUCED WITHOUT rBST

Some farmers give the growth hormone rBST (or rBGH) to cows to increase milk production, which the Food and Drug Administration says is safe for consumers. But some experts have concerns about cancer and other risks from consuming milk from these cows. Many dairy companies no longer give cows rBST, but you can look for this phrase or "no synthetic hormones."

### GRASS-FED

When cows eat only grass, it may improve the nutrients in their milk: Some research has found higher levels of heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids and antioxidant carotenoids.

### What's in Your Milk?

An 8-ounce glass supplies about a quarter of an adult's daily calcium needs, more than half the vitamin B12 requirement, and 8 grams of protein, but fat and calorie content varies widely by type of milk.



### SELL BY

Federal regulations don't require product dating on milk (or on any product, for that matter, except on infant formula). But some milks may show a date to indicate when they should still be of good quality. "Sell By" tells a store how long to display the product for sale and doesn't predict the safety of the milk.

### VITAMINS A & D ADDED

Adding these vitamins is voluntary, but most milk producers include them. Vitamin A is typically put in reduced fat and skim milk because it's lost in the process of removing fats. Vitamin D, which isn't found in many foods, is added for consumers who may be deficient.

### ULTRA-FILTERED

This is a mechanical filtering process that boosts the protein in milk and reduces (or even eliminates) ingredients some people want less of, such as lactose. For example, Fairlife Ultra-filtered milk has 5 grams more protein and 70 mg more calcium than typical milk, and it's lactose-free.

### ULTRA-PASTEURIZED

Most milk sold in the U.S. is pasteurized, a process that subjects raw milk to high heat in order to kill bacteria that can cause illness and spoilage. Ultra-pasteurized milks are exposed to an even higher temperature to kill more bacteria and triple or quadruple its shelf life. But once you've opened the milk, it will last just 7 to 10 days.

MILK TYPE	CALORIES	FAT (G)	SAT. FAT (G)
WHOLE (3.25% FAT)	150	8	4.5
REDUCED FAT (2% FAT)	120	5	2.5
LOWFAT (1% FAT)	110	2.5	1.5
SKIM (0% FAT)	85	0	0

**SAFETY UPDATE**

**WHICH DRESSERS FAIL CR'S TIP-OVER TESTS?**

EVERY 60 MINUTES somewhere in the U.S., a child is rushed to the emergency room because of injuries from a dresser or other piece of furniture that tipped over. At least 286 children have died from furniture tip-overs between 2000 and 2019.

As part of CR's ongoing investigation, we regularly test dressers to uncover those that fail our tip-over evaluations. CR's recent tests of 13 dressers show that while the industry is

making improvements, some short (marketed as 30 inches or less) dressers continue to pose a tip-over hazard. As the chart below reveals, seven of the dressers we tested tipped over when testers hung 60 pounds of weights (the upper poundage of children hurt by tip-overs) on the largest drawer. One dresser made by One Kings Lane tipped with just 50 pounds of weight.

"Currently, the stability standard governing dressers

is both voluntary and weak," says Gabe Knight, CR's policy analyst. It states that a dresser should stay upright when a 50-pound weight is hung on a single open drawer while the other drawers are closed. It does not account for much of what happens in the real world, such as when multiple drawers are open. Our experts say the wide variety of dressers that failed our tests shows that you can't spot a stable dresser by its size, shape, or price.

**Test 1**  
All drawers open.

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

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

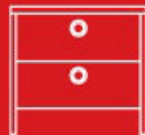
**TESTING KEY**

**FAILED**  
With up to 60 pounds of weight

**PASSED**  
Tests 1, 2 & 3



**Crate & Barrel Dawson Clove 3-Drawer Chest** <sup>1</sup> \$700  
29x31.5x19.25 in. (HxWxD)  
88.2 lb.



**Ikea Busunge 2-Drawer Chest** \$140  
29.75x31.5x15.75 in.  
85.6 lb.



**Baxton Studio Hildon 6-Drawer Chest** \$300  
28x63x15.75 in.  
118.8 lb.



**Epoch Niko/Aniko 6-Drawer Dresser** <sup>2</sup> \$1,000  
29.75x59.75x21.5 in.  
185.2 lb.



**One Kings Lane Aiden 4-Drawer Dresser\*** <sup>2</sup> \$475  
27.25x32x16.5 in.  
48.8 lb.



**Prepac Astrid 6-Drawer Dresser** \$200  
28.5x47.5x16 in.  
81.2 lb.



**Little Seeds Maple Lane Dove 3-Drawer Dresser With Changing Table** <sup>3</sup> \$170  
34.5x35.5x19.5 in.  
102 lb.



**Prepac Salt Spring 6-Drawer Dresser** \$230  
29x59x16.25 in.  
97.4 lb.



**Room Essentials (Target) Mixed Material 3 Drawer Dresser Gray Oak** \$120  
29.75x31.25x20.5 in.  
87.2 lb.



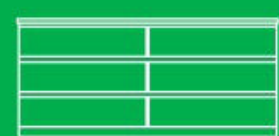
**Signature Design by Ashley Finch Collection 6 Drawer Dresser** \$205  
28.25x54.5x17.25 in.  
96.8 lb.



**Williams-Sonoma Pottery Barn Mateo 3-Drawer Dresser** \$400  
30x32x18 in.  
102.2 lb.



**South Shore Valet Collection 4-Drawer Dresser** \$350  
29.75x57.75x19.5 in.  
133.2 lb.



**Tvilum Scottsdale 6 Drawer Dresser** \$240  
27.5x60.5x19.75 in.  
118.4 lb.

<sup>1</sup> Came with two different-sized drawers. The top drawer passed with 60 pounds, but the middle drawer failed at 58 pounds. <sup>2</sup> Did not come with wall anchors, despite industry standards specifying that it should. <sup>3</sup> Marketed as 30 inches high but measured taller by CR. Dressers were purchased by CR from January through March 2021. \*Failed at 50 pounds.



## RECALLS

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



### FORD TRANSIT CONNECT VANS

Ford is recalling more than 192,000 Transit Connect vans from the 2013 through 2021 model years because a faulty part in the transmission could allow the vehicles to roll away even though the shifter appears to be in Park. The problem is with the connection between the shifter cable and the transmission. If the connection fails, it would be possible to turn off the engine and exit the vehicle with no warning messages or chimes indicating that the vehicle is not in Park. If this happens, the vehicle is at risk of rolling away. Ford says it is not aware of any crashes or injuries related to the recall. Ford's number for this recall is 21S24. **What to do:** Owners can call Ford at 866-436-7332. Ford dealerships will replace the faulty part and add a protective cable, free of charge.

### HSN CLOTHING STEAMERS

HSN is recalling about 5.4 million Joy/JM-branded My Little Steamer and My Little Steamer Go Mini handheld clothing steamers due to reports of hot water spraying or leaking from the steamers, causing burn injuries. The recalled models have either a flat or triangular steamer head, and the name of the product is printed on its side. The products were sold online at [hsn.com](http://hsn.com) and on the HSN television network. They were also sold in stores nationwide and at various online retailers, including Amazon, Bed Bath & Beyond, Lowe's, Target, and Walmart, from January 2002 through December 2020 for \$10 to \$30 individually and \$20 to \$50 in combination sets. **What to do:** Stop using the steamers and call HSN at

855-654-0942 for information on a full refund for units purchased from January 2018 to December 2020, a partial refund for units purchased from January 2015 to December 2017, or a voucher for units purchased before January 2015.

### MAINSTAY FOLDING CHAIRS AND BARSTOOLS

Cheyenne Products is recalling about 795,000 Mainstay metal folding chairs and barstools with padded seats due to reports of the weld that connects the legs to the bottom of the chair breaking, resulting in injuries, including fractures. A white sticker label on the bottom of the seats includes the name Cheyenne Products or Cheyenne Industries and lists the production date by month and year. The chairs and barstools were sold at Walmart stores nationwide and [walmart.com](http://walmart.com) from January 2014 through April 2021 for \$30 to \$42. **What to do:** Stop using the chairs and barstools. Call Cheyenne at 833-351-1707 or go to [cheyenneproducts.com](http://cheyenneproducts.com) and click on Recalls for more info and a complete listing of recalled styles.

### WILD REPUBLIC WATCHES

K&M International is recalling about 463,000 Wild Republic Slap Watches due to the risk of children ingesting or choking on the watch's coin cell battery.

There are 42 models that come in various colors and watch face designs. The back of the watch has K & M on it. The watches were sold at Kole Imports; at many zoos, museums, and aquariums; and online at [wildrepublic.com](http://wildrepublic.com), Amazon, and [peluchescory.com](http://peluchescory.com) from March 2018 through April 2021 for about \$8.

**What to do:** Take the watch away from children. For a full refund, call Wild Republic at 800-800-9678 or go to [wildrepublic.com](http://wildrepublic.com) and click on Safety Recall.

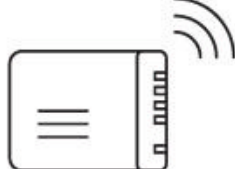
### BONTRAGER BICYCLE PEDALS

Trek is recalling about 316,500 Bontrager Satellite City Pedals because of reports of pedals loosening, locking up, or falling off. The pedals were installed as original equipment on Trek "Allant+," "Dual Sport+," "FX 2," "FX 3," "Verve 2," "Verve 3," and "Verve+" bicycles. "ZTRo2" is stamped on the pedal. The pedals were sold on bikes at Trek Bicycle stores and other bicycle stores nationwide, and online at [trekbikes.com](http://trekbikes.com) from January 2018 through April 2021. The pedals were also sold separately for about \$30.

**What to do:** Stop using the pedals. Call Trek at 800-373-4594 or go to [trekbikes.com](http://trekbikes.com) for more information.

**AUGUST IS THE BEST TIME TO BUY ...**

#### WIRELESS ROUTERS



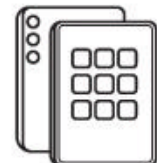
#### COMPUTERS



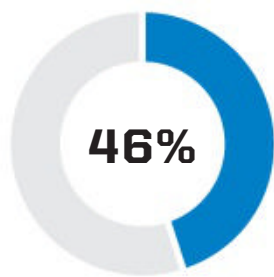
#### VACUUMS



#### TABLETS



Air treatment use increased during COVID-19:



Percentage of consumers who say they are using air treatment appliances more since COVID-19.

Source: 2020 survey conducted by the Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers.

# PRODUCT UPDATE

THE LATEST RATINGS FROM OUR LABS

## Is Your (Indoor) Air Fit to Breathe?

The best air purifiers from CR's tests can help remove pet dander, dust, mold, allergens, smoke particles, and more.

by Tanya A. Christian



**1** Airflow is created when the unit is turned on, triggering the internal fan to draw in air and pollutants (magnified here for visibility).

**2** A fabric pre-filter catches larger particles like dust, dirt, and hair.

**3** Some models have an activated carbon filter, which can trap light household odors.

**4** The dense web of the HEPA filter traps smaller pollutants, like smoke and particles that contain viruses.

**5** Sanitized air flows into the room.

**T**HOSE WHO SUFFER from allergies know the sometimes eye-watering effects of exposure to pollen or pet dander. But breathing certain pollutants can be even more serious: Small particles 10 microns in diameter or less, like those found in dust and smoke, can make their way deep into the lungs, aggravating them and potentially causing asthma attacks and even heart attacks in people with heart disease. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, long-term exposure to high particle levels is linked to bronchitis, reduced lung function, and premature death. Add to these concerns the presence in 2020 of wildfires in places such as California and the Pacific Northwest and the airborne COVID-19 virus, and you can understand why air purifiers—the best of which can remove these particles—have surged in popularity.

Though the pandemic introduced a pressing reason to improve indoor air, the sales of portable home purifiers

have been on the upswing for years. Research suggests that by 2028 the global air purifier market value will reach \$22.8 billion, according to Grand View Research. The U.S. is expected to account for roughly \$4.5 billion of that. In 2020 alone, U.S. demand for air treatment appliances grew by 57 percent, according to a marketing analyst report by Verify Markets.

Experts believe that popularity will continue. “I think COVID-19 just increased the visibility of air purifiers,” says Misha Kollontai, the senior project leader for air purifier testing at CR. “It likely got more of us thinking, ‘Sure, COVID spreads through the air, but what else are we breathing?’”

## The Best Purifier for Your Needs

In our labs we evaluate air purifier models on their highest and lower settings for removal of particles as small as 0.1 micron and up to 1 micron,

a range that can include dust mite allergens, cat allergens, smog, smoke, and dust. (We don’t measure for particles larger than 1 micron because any model that scores well in our tests should also be able to handle larger airborne particles.) We also test noise levels and calculate the annual cost of ownership. You’ll see our test results in the ratings on page 25. And read on for more on selecting the best model for your home.

### Choose the Right Filter Type

The best air purifiers (and the bulk of what CR tests) have mechanical filtration systems. These use an internal fan to draw particle-rich air into the machine, forcing it through the complex net of fibers in a pleated filter. The most effective among these have a very fine mesh filter called a high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter. HEPA filters are able to capture 99.97 percent of particles as small as 0.3 micron, which is a worst-case scenario, though they can capture particles larger and smaller than

# SIZING UP INDOOR AIR POLLUTANTS

Air purifiers with HEPA filters can capture 99.97 percent of particles that are 0.3 micron, which is far smaller than the diameter of a human hair.

<b>COVID-19 VIRUS PARTICLE</b> 0.06-0.14 μm	<b>WILDFIRE SMOKE</b> 0.1-0.7 μm	<b>PET DANDER</b> 0.5-100 μm	<b>DUST</b> 10 or less μm	<b>POLLEN</b> 10-100 μm	<b>GRAIN OF FINE BEACH SAND</b> 90 μm	<b>BLADE OF GRASS</b> 100-200 μm
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that. You may also see models that use other air purifying technologies, which CR's experts believe to be less effective—though we can speak only to models tested in our labs. (See “Filtration Types to Avoid,” on page 24, for more details.)

### Consider Your Space

It can get expensive to outfit every room with its own air purifier, so your best bet is to choose one or two models for the areas where you spend the most time, like your bedroom, living room, or home office. Then match the model to your room's size. To do this, check for the air purifier's clean air delivery rate (CADR) number.

The CADR number reflects, in cubic feet per minute or per hour, the volume of clean air that an air purifier produces on its highest speed setting. According to the Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers (AHAM), a general rule of thumb is to select an air purifier with a CADR number that is at least ⅓ of your room's area (so for a room that's 10x12 feet, with an area of 120 square feet, you'd want an air purifier with a CADR of at least 80). “Some models have labels with three different CADR numbers for dust, tobacco smoke, and pollen,” says Kollontai. “That means the product has been tested to standards set by the AHAM and certified to have those output levels for the different pollutants.” When choosing a model to buy, focus on the CADR number for the pollutant you're most concerned about. For example, if you live with a smoker, look for a high tobacco smoke CADR.

### Factor in Future Costs

The air purifiers we've tested range in price from \$40 to more than \$1,000. While the top model in our ratings, the Blueair Classic 605, is a pricey \$830, we've found a handful of very good performers that cost less than \$300, including the Honeywell InSight HPA5300B, Honeywell HPA300, and GermGuardian AC5900WCA. But keep

PHOTO: JOHN WALSH/CONSUMER REPORTS

# FRESH-AIR CHOICES



The latest air purifiers don't just remove pollutants. Many offer trim good looks and more convenience features.

SMALLER SIZES	SMART FEATURES	SLEEKER STYLING
<p>There are now many compact—even portable—models on the market. LeVoit and PureZone offer options small enough to use in a car, and LG's PuriCare Mini Air Purifier is so petite that you can carry it around your wrist. Note that CR does not test air purifiers in confined spaces like cars or planes; the smaller models we've tested typically end up with lower Overall Scores, because they can't offer as powerful filtration as their larger counterparts do.</p>	<p>WiFi-connected models that you can monitor via a smart-phone app let you see a live particulate matter (PM) reading for your indoor air, as well as the levels of pollutants being filtered out. Some manufacturers, such as Blueair, offer models with extra sensors that can determine the indoor air quality. The app, which doubles as a remote control, also lets you set schedules for the device, and alerts you when your filter needs replacing.</p>	<p>An air purifier is a visible part of your room that's running all the time, so you'll want it to both work well and look good (or at least fade into its surroundings). New designs are increasingly more streamlined and aesthetically pleasing. The Samsung Cube, for example, a top performer in CR's tests, will soon offer custom styling options like a range of colors and with a herringbone or striped front. It's already available in silver and white.</p>
<p><b>1</b></p> <p>LEVOIT PET CARE CORE P350-RAC \$120</p> <p style="background-color: #FFC000; color: white; padding: 2px 5px; display: inline-block;">49</p> <p>OVERALL SCORE</p>	<p><b>2</b></p> <p>BLUEAIR HEALTHPROTECT 7470I \$640</p> <p style="background-color: #70AD47; color: white; padding: 2px 5px; display: inline-block;">77</p> <p>OVERALL SCORE</p>	<p><b>3</b></p> <p>SAMSUNG CUBE \$550</p> <p style="background-color: #70AD47; color: white; padding: 2px 5px; display: inline-block;">76</p> <p>OVERALL SCORE</p>

in mind that most air purifiers have a removable filter that you'll need to replace every three to six months—at a cost of about \$40 to \$200 per year. And because these appliances are designed to run 24/7, you'll want to factor in energy costs. Look for purifiers with an Energy Star rating, which indicates that they use up to 40 percent less energy than regular models. The annual costs column in our ratings factors in both filter replacement and energy cost.

### Look for Quieter Operation

Generally speaking, higher fan speeds will increase the amount of air filtered—a good thing—but don't expect that clean air to come quietly. CR evaluates the noise levels of each model we test, and though some units are quieter than others, you will hear any of them running. That's particularly important to note if you'll be putting one in a space where you plan to sleep or work—or want to hear the TV easily. The best models in our tests earn an Excellent rating for

cleaning the air at high and low speeds, but none of these has higher than a Good rating for noise at high speed.

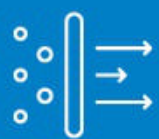
## COVID-19 and Wildfire Smoke

At this point we're painfully aware of the risks of COVID-19, which can include severe illness, long-term health effects, and even death. Wildfire smoke can also cause a number of health problems, including—but not limited to—a burning sensation in the eyes, bronchitis, asthma attacks, heart attack, and stroke. According to the EPA, this smoke—often composed of vegetation, natural fuels, and manufactured materials—has been linked to premature death and breathing trouble in children.

A home air purifier can help with both of these concerns. CR's tests have found that the best models can effectively remove smoke particles and particulates the size of a virus molecule.

And the EPA has recommended air purifiers as an effective tool to combat viruses and smoke, noting that the airborne particles from smoke and respiratory aerosols that contain viruses are often in a similar size range, mostly between 0.1 and 1 micron. HEPA filters are able to trap particles of this size range effectively.

Power is important, too. The more air the purifier can draw in, the better it will be able to reduce the amount of virus drops and aerosols. The same principle is true when buying an air purifier in anticipation of managing wildfire smoke. “Think ‘big,’” says John Galeotafiore, CR's associate director of product testing. “The particulate load during these natural disasters is very high and never-ending. It just keeps coming into the room from outside. So you want an air purifier with one of the best CADR rates. That usually means a big filter and a big fan.” The Blueair Classic 605 and the Blueair Blue Pure 211+ are both good choices for capturing virus-sized particles or wildfire smoke.



## FILTRATION TYPES TO AVOID

Not all air purifiers use HEPA filtration. When shopping, the EPA and Consumer Reports' chief scientific officer James Dickerson say consumers should be mindful of “ozone-generating” models. Breathing in even low amounts of ozone can cause chest pain, shortness of breath, and throat irritation. CR's tests have also found the following technologies to be iffy at best.

### Electrostatic Precipitators

These models draw the air in using a fan, then give the polluting particles an electrostatic charge that makes them adhere to collector plates (which you'll need to wash regularly) inside the machine. The big con for these models is that the process of charging the particles creates ozone.

### Ultraviolet Germicidal Irradiation

As air flows in, particles are pushed toward a UV-C light source, which purportedly kills the bacteria, mold, and viruses. However, the airflow tends to be very low, giving them a low CADR—so many of the dirty particles in the air aren't making it to the UV light or staying exposed to it long enough for sanitizing.

### Photocatalytic Oxidation

These models, including the much-hyped Molekule, use titanium-dioxide-coated filters and UV light to trap gaseous pollutants, then break them down. The jury is still out on how effective they are. In CR's tests that focus on dust and smoke particulates, the Molekule Air earned a Poor Overall Score. The Molekule Air Pro was rated Good.



**Ratings** **Breathing Easier** The best air purifiers in our tests do an impressive job of removing particles like dust, pollen, and smoke. Take note of the Noise columns, especially if you plan to use the machine in your bedroom.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results					Features						
			Dust, pollen, smoke removal		Noise		Ease of use	Room size	Annual cost	Energy Star	Number of fan speeds	Filter-life indicator	Remote control	Auto fan speed
			Low speed	High speed	Low speed	High speed								
<b>Blueair Classic 605</b>	88	\$830	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	L	\$224	•	3	•	App	Optional
<b>Blueair Blue Pure 211+</b>	85	\$300	↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	L	\$192	•	3	•		
<b>Blueair HealthProtect 7470i</b>	77	\$640	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	L	\$135	•	3	•		•
<b>Blueair Blue Pure 211+ Auto</b>	77	\$340	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	L	\$163	•	3	•		•
<b>Samsung Cube</b>	76	\$550	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	M	\$102	•	3	•	App	•
<b>Honeywell InSight HPA5300B</b>	74	\$290	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	L	\$208		4	•		•
<b>Alen BreatheSmart Classic</b>	72	\$650	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	L	\$190		4	•		•
<b>Sharp FXJ80UW</b>	69	\$540	↓	↑	↓	↓	↑	L	\$128	•	3	•		•
<b>Honeywell HPA300</b>	68	\$250	↓	↑	↓	↓	↑	L	\$199	•	4	•		
<b>LivePure Bali LP550TH-W</b>	67	\$310	↓	↑	↑	↓	↑	L	\$276	•	4	•		
<b>GermGuardian AC5900WCA</b>	64	\$230	↓	↑	↓	↓	↑	L	\$231	•	3	•		
<b>IQAir HealthPro Plus</b>	63	\$900	↓	↑	↓	↓	↑	L	\$293		6	•	•	
<b>Honeywell AirGenius 5 HFD-320</b>	62	\$215	↓	↑	↑	↓	↑	M	\$80	•	5	•		
<b>Brondell O2+ Revive</b>	60	\$430	↓	↑	↑	↓	↑	L	\$252		5	•		•
<b>Whynter EcoPure AFR-425-SW</b>	60	\$240	↓	↑	↓	↓	↑	L	\$155		6	•	•	•
<b>Winix 5300-2</b>	59	\$165	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	L	\$90	•	4	•		•
<b>Coway Airmega 300</b>	59	\$550	↓	↑	↑	↓	↑	L	\$110	•	3	•		•
<b>Honeywell Air Genius 4 HFD310</b>	59	\$205	↓	↑	↑	↓	↑	M	\$80	•	4	•		
<b>Honeywell HPA250B</b>	58	\$245	↓	↑	↓	↓	↑	L	\$137	•	4	•	•	•
<b>Bissell air320</b>	56	\$330	↓	↑	↓	↓	↑	M	\$89		5	•		•
<b>Coway AP-1512HH Mighty</b>	55	\$200	↓	↑	↑	↓	↑	L	\$87	•	3	•		•
<b>Coway Airmega 200M</b>	55	\$240	↓	↑	↑	↓	↑	L	\$109	•	3	•		•
<b>Winix C535</b>	55	\$140	↓	↑	↑	↓	↑	L	\$75	•	4	•	•	•
<b>Blueair Classic 280i</b>	54	\$430	↓	↑	↓	↓	↓	M	\$377		3	•		•
<b>Airdog X5</b>	53	\$600	↓	↑	↑	↓	↑	M	\$62		4	•	•	•

Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at [CR.org/air-purifiers](https://www.consumerreports.org/air-purifiers).

**HOW WE TEST:** Overall Score is based primarily on how well models remove dust and smoke from a test

chamber, plus quietness. **Dust/pollen/smoke removal** is how well models capture cigarette smoke and

fine clay dust. **Noise** is a measurement of decibels at high and low speeds. **Room size**—small, medium, or

large—is our recommendation based on performance. **Annual cost** combines filters and electricity.

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# BETTER INTERNET FOR LESS MONEY

BY THE  
EDITORS OF  
CONSUMER  
REPORTS

-----  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
EDMON DE HARO



FIGURE OUT  
WHAT YOU NEED  
PAGE 28



MAKE YOUR  
WiFi BETTER  
PAGE 30



AVOID  
OVERPAYING  
PAGE 32

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**OVER THE PAST 18 MONTHS**, our home internet connections have helped us reach family, friends, and colleagues. They've been both practical tools and a needed source of entertainment during a difficult time. That may be why 76 percent of Americans agree that internet service is as important as electricity or water, according to a February nationally representative Consumer Reports survey of 2,514 U.S. adults. But using the internet at home can be frustrating, too, as we confront dropped video-calls and sputtering movies—along with confusing bills and poor customer service. The good news is that some broadband problems are easy to fix. The following pages can help you do that and maybe even help you save a bit of money. Looking ahead, Consumer Reports is working to make internet access better and fairer for all of us. **See page 31** to learn how you can join the effort.



# FIGURE OUT WHAT YOU NEED

## IF THE INTERNET

is glitchy in your home, the first step toward a solution is to pinpoint the problem. And it helps to understand how online material—be it a Netflix show, Zoom call, or social media post—gets to you.

As you can see in the illustration at the lower right, movies, email, and other data are funneled by your internet service provider (ISP) through a series of cables and wires to your home.

If something's not working, the problem could lie outside your home and may require a call to the company to fix. Or the trouble could be with your home WiFi network, which distributes information wirelessly to your computers, TVs, and other devices.

Which is it? To figure that out, an easy first step is to test your internet speed.



## HOW TO TEST YOUR SPEED

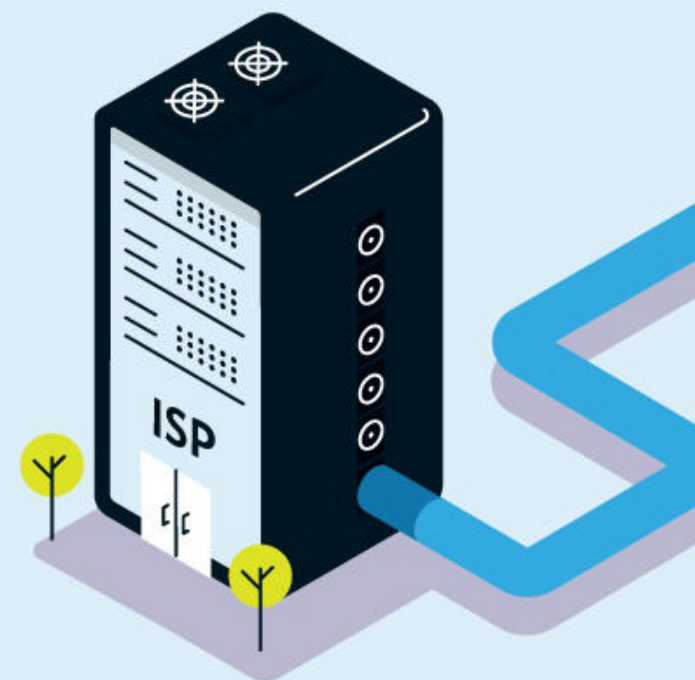
### IT'S USEFUL TO KNOW

how fast data moves into and out of your home. To find out, go to [speed.measurementlab.net](https://speed.measurementlab.net) or [speedtest.net](https://speedtest.net). With a click or two, you'll learn your download speed (how fast data such as a movie streams into your home), and your upload speed (how fast data like your end of a Zoom call streams out). The numbers, measured in megabits per second (Mbps), will vary a bit each time. If possible, first run a test with a computer that's physically plugged into your router using an Ethernet cord. If the result is much slower than the maximum speeds promoted by the ISP, call the company. Then do the same test wirelessly (over WiFi) throughout the house. If it's only the WiFi speeds that are slow, focus on your router to find a solution. (See tips on pages 30 and 31.)



## The Way Data Speeds (or Crawls) to Your Home

Every photo, video, and word you see online passes through your local ISP, and the cables between you and it largely determine the quality of the internet service in your neighborhood.





## IS YOUR SERVICE LEVEL FAST ENOUGH?

**ISPs GENERALLY** offer several plans, each promising a different range of speeds—the faster the connection, the more you pay. So which plan is right for you?

It depends on how many people you have at home and what they do online. You need only around 1 Mbps to listen to a Spotify song and 4 Mbps for a Zoom call—but 25 Mbps to watch a 4K movie on Netflix.

The numbers are cumulative. If two TVs are streaming 4K movies, that's 50 Mbps.

Every ISP has its own tiers, but you can use the speed ranges at right to see where you fit in. Many people may pay for more speed than they really need.



### 300-PLUS MBPS

Few households need more than 300 Mbps. If you have internet problems, the solution is probably not to slap down the plastic for your ISP's priciest superfast service.



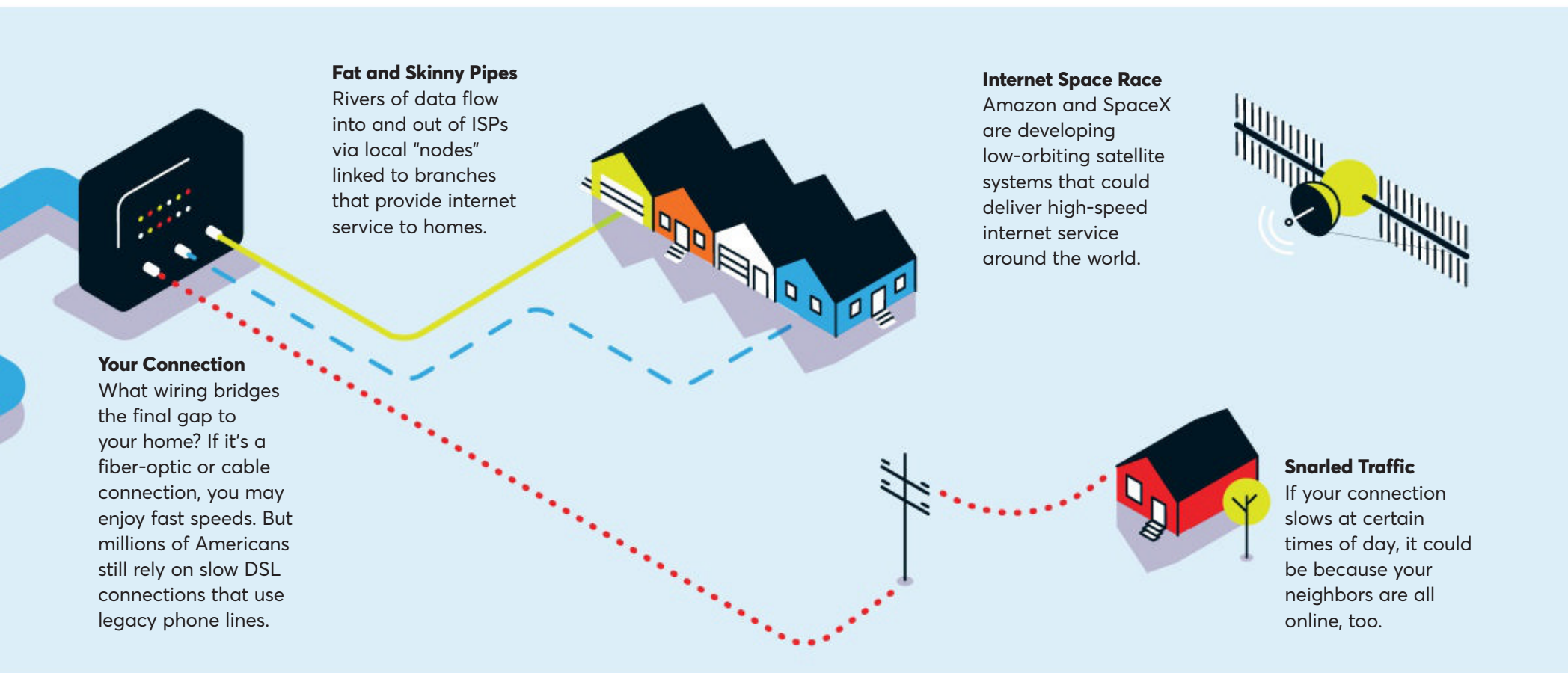
### 100 TO 300 MBPS

These speeds should accommodate even a data-hogging family that plays 4K ultra HD movies and taxing online games all at the same time.



### UP TO 100 MBPS

This is plenty for two or three people with routine needs. That includes Zoom calls, high-definition movie viewing, and some online game play.



#### Fat and Skinny Pipes

Rivers of data flow into and out of ISPs via local "nodes" linked to branches that provide internet service to homes.

#### Internet Space Race

Amazon and SpaceX are developing low-orbiting satellite systems that could deliver high-speed internet service around the world.

#### Your Connection

What wiring bridges the final gap to your home? If it's a fiber-optic or cable connection, you may enjoy fast speeds. But millions of Americans still rely on slow DSL connections that use legacy phone lines.

#### Snarled Traffic

If your connection slows at certain times of day, it could be because your neighbors are all online, too.



# MAKE YOUR WiFi BETTER

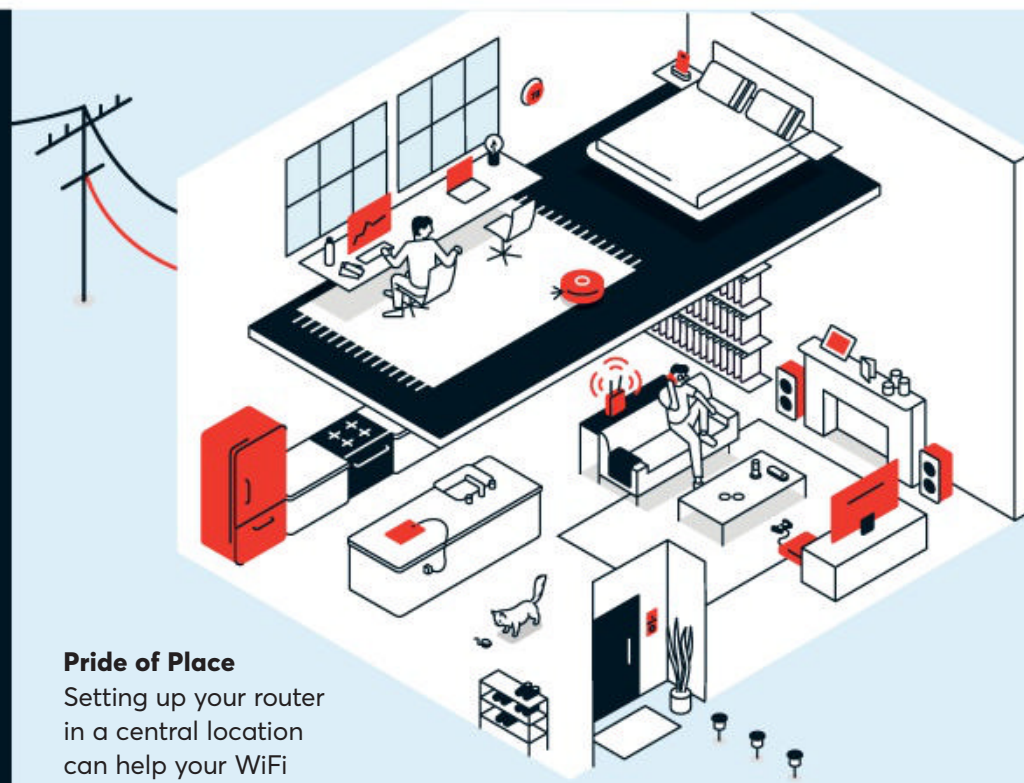
## LET'S SAY YOU'VE

signed up for the right internet service tier, and your speed testing confirms that your ISP truly is delivering the speeds it has promised. (See page 28 for details.) If your internet service is still acting finicky, the problem is likely to lie within your WiFi network. You can probably fix things by fiddling with the equipment in your home. CR's expert tips will help.



## How WiFi Links Your Gadgets

Data—emails, music, movies, etc.—gets to your home through a physical cable or wire. Within your home, it typically moves through the air between your router and all your connected devices.



### Pride of Place

Setting up your router in a central location can help your WiFi network cover your entire home.

### Connected Homes

U.S. households have an average of 25 connected devices—everything from TVs to door locks—according to a 2021 Deloitte survey.

### Stumbling Blocks

Among the many objects that interfere with a WiFi network are masonry walls, fish tanks, and microwave ovens. Mesh routers can help move the signal around obstacles.

ICONS: ELIAS STEIN. DRIVE FOR FAIR INTERNET ILLUSTRATION (FACING PAGE): THE TOM AGENCY



## MOVE YOUR ROUTER

### TEMPTING THOUGH

it may be to banish your router from public view, exiling it to a cabinet or the outskirts of your home can hinder performance. That forces the WiFi signal to pass through more walls and other barriers, and to cover longer distances, to reach every corner of the house.

Place the router out in the open, away from corners, and high in the room. (The signal tends to be stronger below the router than above it.) Also, locate the router as close as possible to the middle of your home. You may be able to move it yourself, or you might need some help from your ISP or a handy friend.



## USE AN ETHERNET CORD

**IF YOU'VE EVER** had a movie night derailed by sputtering WiFi, you know the feeling (major letdown). Need a more stable signal? A \$10 or \$20 Ethernet cable can save the day, linking a TV, streaming video box, or video game console directly to your router.



## SET UP A WiFi EXTENDER

### NEED TO PUSH

a WiFi signal a little deeper into your home? A \$30 palm-sized WiFi range extender could be the answer. Plug it into an outlet midway between your router and, say, the comfy reading chair in your bedroom, and it stretches the signal. There's a catch, however: That extended signal can be only half as fast as the rest of your WiFi network, making this a great fix for emails, but maybe not movies.



## INVEST IN A MESH ROUTER

### IF YOU'RE LOOKING

to improve WiFi coverage throughout your home, a mesh router system may be the way to go. Unlike a traditional router, which toils away on its own, a mesh router uses multiple units—a hub and one or two satellites—that work together to spread the WiFi network from one end of your abode to the other. If there's a dead zone in the den, you can move the satellites around to eliminate it. You can also add satellites to broaden the network's reach. Mesh routers used to cost up to \$500, but prices have fallen in the past 15 months. You can now find highly rated three-piece models for less than \$200.



## JOIN THE DRIVE FOR FAIR INTERNET

**CR IS WORKING** to make high-speed internet accessible to more Americans, and we need your help.

Tens of millions of Americans lack access to the kind of fast internet that's needed—now more than ever—for school, work, and staying in touch with family and friends. Still more are stuck with painfully slow or unreliable connections, or bills they can't afford.

So CR and a coalition of partners are launching a broadband affordability initiative: asking consumers to take an internet speed test, respond to a short questionnaire, and send us a copy of their internet bill. The information we gather will help us learn how much people are paying in neighborhoods across the country, whether they're getting what they were promised, and whether prices are fair.

We need thousands of participants. That's a tall order, but the results can help us pressure internet companies to do better.



Please join us at [broadbandtogether.org](https://broadbandtogether.org).

# 3

# AVOID OVERPAYING

## JUST ABOUT

everyone agrees that internet service is crucial to daily life, but it's hard to place a real price on it. Is \$50 per month reasonable for a connection that often lets you down? Can you avoid any of the fees on your bill? And why are the bills so hard to understand? Here are some concrete tips for saving money while getting the service you want.



## NEGOTIATE A BETTER DEAL

**AS SURVEYS** of CR members have confirmed time and again, it pays to haggle. But it takes skill to duel with an internet service provider, especially in a community with only one or two viable options. So we asked Ben Kurland, co-founder of the negotiating service BillFixers, for advice. "Most of what goes into getting a discount

is just asking for it," he says. Here are his expert tips.

- 1 Call on a weekday.** That's when other customers are busy at work. You'll get shorter hold times and higher-level reps with the best discount codes.
- 2 Don't be too quick to say yes.** Reps will give you the worst offers

first, Kurland says. Turn those down and they'll move on to the better deals.

- 3 Avoid online chat tools.** At most companies, the live-chat reps are lower on the ladder than phone reps, and can't provide the big discounts.
- 4 Threaten to go to a competitor, or to**

**cut your TV or phone service.** That gets your call elevated right away to a rep with the clout to do what it takes to keep you, Kurland says. If there's only one ISP in your area, that may reduce your leverage. But if you're trying to get a better bundled deal with TV and/or phone service, your ISP has plenty of competition from

mobile and video streaming companies. (See "Bye-Bye, Cable TV? Maybe," on page 34.)

- 5 Get it in writing.** When you're satisfied with the rate, ask the customer service rep to send an email outlining the agreement. If the ISP doesn't follow through on the plan, you have backup.





## DODGE EXTRA FEES

**INTERNET FEES** that often surprise consumers include charges for installation and activation, renting a router or modem, and an extra hit if you decide to leave your contract early. But some of those are avoidable.

For instance, ISPs charge an average of \$70.38 for installation—but AT&T, Spectrum (owned by Charter), Xfinity (Comcast), and others offer self-installation kits for an average of \$9.30, according to the Open Technology Institute, a research organization.

You can also save long-term by buying a router and modem rather than renting them from your provider. But you have to make sure the modem is compatible with your ISP—and it might stop working if you switch to another service.



## GETTING CELL SERVICE FROM YOUR ISP

**IN THE PAST FEW YEARS,** more than 5 million people have started to get their cellular service from the same company that provides their internet service: Altice, Spectrum, or Xfinity.

Why? Cheaper rates. At all three ISPs, one phone line



# SUPPORTING A BILL THAT MAKES SENSE

**PICKING AN INTERNET** plan can be an exercise in frustration. In the advertised rates, all the fees that will actually appear on your bill are often buried in fine print, so it's hard to know what you'll end up paying. And it's even harder to compare prices between competing providers—if you're lucky enough to have more than one choice where you live.

In 2016 the Federal Communications Commission came close to fixing that by creating standard broadband labels like the one pictured below. Modeled on the nutrition labels you find on everything from cereal boxes to ice cream, the labels would have spelled out pricing, download and upload speeds, the cost of renting a modem, and other details.

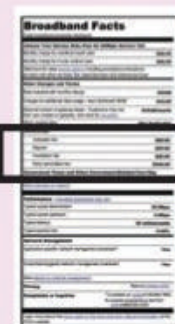
The plan was shelved with the

change of administration in 2017, but the idea is back—and supported by CR, other advocacy groups, and some legislators hoping to make broadband more accessible and competitive.

A broadband label might not ultimately look exactly like this one. But whatever the final form, it would bring internet pricing into the light for consumers, says Jonathan Schwantes, a CR senior policy counsel who works on broadband accessibility. "There's a complete lack of price transparency or information on internet service bills," he says. "Imagine if the auto industry did not put the expected gas mileage or the price on the window sticker of a new car. That's the reality in the murky internet service market."

One-time fees	
Activation fee	<b>\$50.00</b>
Deposit	<b>\$50.00</b>
Installation fee	<b>\$25.00</b>
Early termination fee	<b>\$240.00</b>

**Government Taxes and Other Government-Related Fees May Apply: Varies by location**

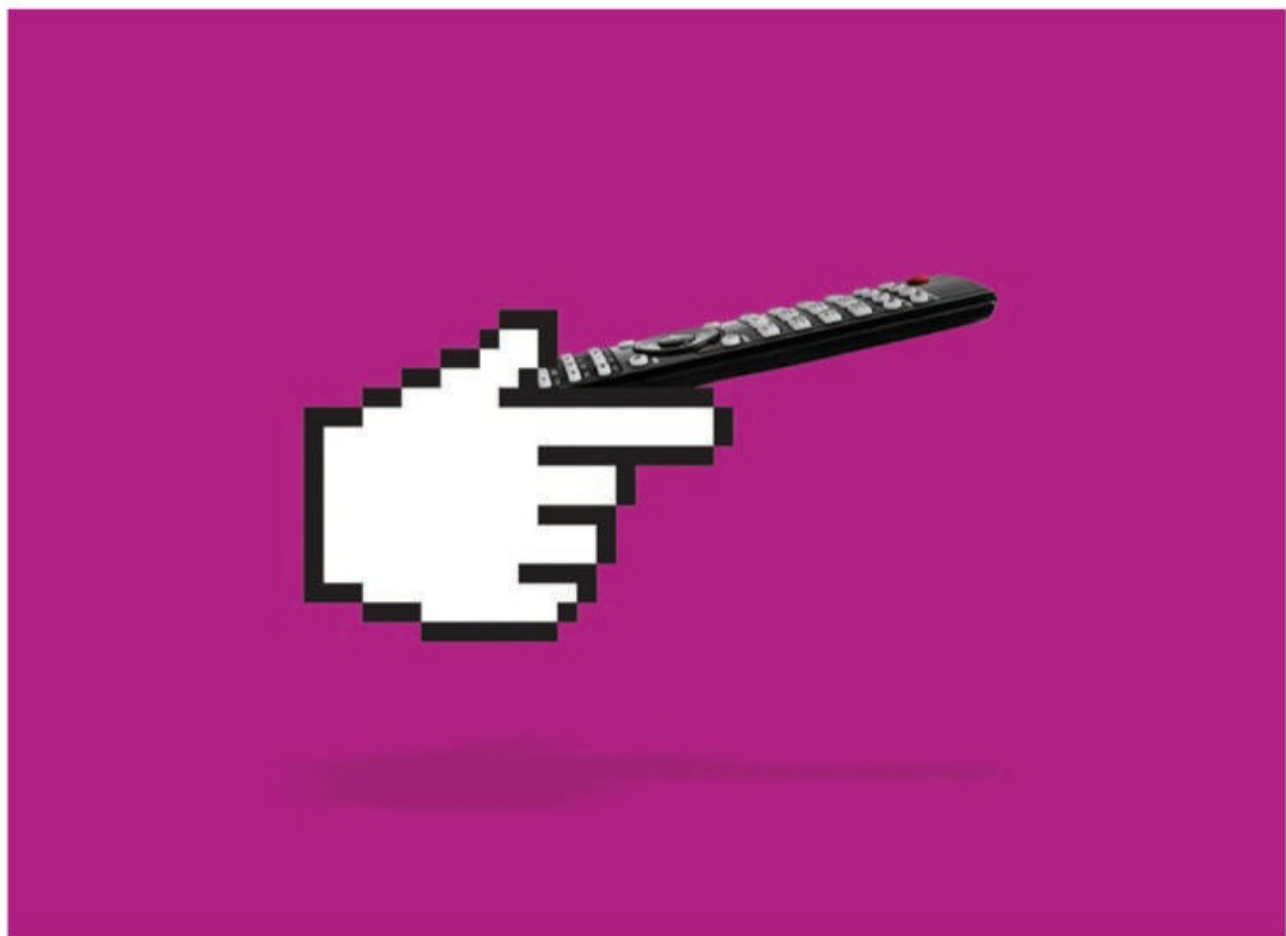


with unlimited data costs \$45 per month. T-Mobile, the cheapest of the big cell service carriers, charges \$60 per month.

Much like Consumer Cellular, Ting, and other smaller providers, ISPs lease excess wireless capacity from one of the major carriers (AT&T, T-Mobile, and Verizon). But whenever possible, they bypass the leased cell tower networks and instead use their own WiFi hotspots to provide mobile service. That WiFi-first approach saves the ISPs money on data traffic fees, and they pass some of the savings along, according to Kristen Hanich, senior analyst at the market research firm Parks Associates.

ISPs also tend to offer more flexible phone plans, especially for families. You can sign up for a 1-gigabyte plan for one phone, a 3GB plan for another, and unlimited service for phones used by the data hogs in your home.

But there are caveats. You need an internet account with a company to sign up for its cellular service. When network traffic is high, your service may get slowed while cell carriers prioritize their own customers. And the ISPs might reduce you to 2G or 3G speeds when you reach a monthly data cap—say, 20GB—even if you have an unlimited plan.



## BYE-BYE, CABLE TV? MAYBE.

Millions of people have cut the pay-TV cord, getting rid of a cable or satellite package while keeping their internet service. They rely on streaming services such as Hulu and Netflix for entertainment. It used to be a surefire way to save money, but streaming-service prices have been climbing. Also, cord-cutters may

find that it's tricky to get all the shows they want. Here's how to figure it all out.

**1** If you have a TV-internet bundle, ask what you'd pay for internet alone.

**2** List all the channels your family wants, including local affiliates (ABC, PBS), cable options (Bravo, HGTV), and premium ones, such as HBO.

**3** See whether you can get some channels with an indoor antenna. FCC.gov has a map, but reception may vary, so know the return policy before you

buy an antenna. (Check out Locast, too. The nonprofit streams TV over the web in some areas for a \$5-per-month donation.)

**4** If antennas and Locast don't work where you live, consider a cable replacement service (Hulu + Live TV, Sling TV, or YouTube TV). It will provide regular channels, including various local options; prices start at roughly \$35 to \$65 per month.

**5** Or skip live channels altogether. You can get several streaming services, such as Disney+

and HBO Max, for much less than a cable package—and you might already subscribe to some.

**6** Make sure your TV is equipped for streaming. If it's not a smart TV, you'll need a streaming device, such as an Apple TV or a Roku.

**7** Once you do the math, you may find that cord-cutting won't save you money—but it might give you a better selection of entertainment. Either way, you now have the information to make a smart decision.



BETTER INTERNET FOR LESS



## THE RISE OF DATA CAPS

**MANY CELL PHONE** plans have data caps, limiting how much music and video streaming a family can enjoy without incurring extra fees. Caps are becoming more common in internet plans, too.

Many fiber- and cable-based ISPs that impose these caps set them at 1.25 terabytes of data, but for DSL and satellite plans, just 150 gigabytes is fairly common. If you exceed the cap, you're charged an overage fee or your connection is throttled, meaning you'll have much slower service until month's end. Or you can pay more for an unlimited plan.

Streaming a 2-hour 4K movie consumes up to 14GB of data. So 1TB—or 1,000GB—may seem like a lot. But data usage is rising fast. In April, Charter CEO Thomas Rutledge told investors that almost 20 percent of Spectrum's broadband-only customers now reach or exceed that threshold. (Charter owns Spectrum.)

AT&T, Comcast, Cox, and other ISPs suspended some caps during the pandemic, but they've begun to restore them. That means many people could soon pay more—because they go over their limit or they opt for an unlimited plan.

*Reporting by Octavio Blanco, Nicholas De Leon, Chris Raymond, and James K. Willcox*

**Ratings** ➤ **Broadband Blues** As our ratings show, CR members tend to be unimpressed by the value, reliability, and speed supplied by their internet service provider.

Provider	Reader Survey Results					
	Overall satisfaction score	Value	Reliability	Speed	Technical support	Customer service
Sonic	85	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤
Google Fiber	82	➤	➤	➤	➤	➤
Wave	71	⬇				⬇
Sparklight	70	⬇				
Midco	70	⬇				➤
RCN	70	⬇				
WOW	70	⬇		⬇	⬇	
Verizon	68	⬇			⬇	⬇
Cincinnati Bell	67	⬇			—	—
TDS	67	⬇		⬇	⬇	
Comcast (Xfinity)	64	⬇			⬇	⬇
Charter (Spectrum)	64	⬇		⬇	⬇	⬇
Atlantic Broadband	63	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
Cox Communications	63	⬇		⬇	⬇	⬇
EarthLink	63	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
AT&T	62	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
CenturyLink	62	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
Consolidated Communications	61	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
Optimum by Altice	61	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
Mediacom	60	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
Dish Network	58	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
Windstream	58	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
Frontier Communications	57	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
SuddenLink Communications	56	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
Viasat	51	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
HughesNet	46	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇

**HOW WE SURVEY:** The ratings are based on the responses of 40,256 CR members reporting on their experiences with their current home internet service provider,

as of winter 2020. **Value** and **technical support** are related to the quality of the service. **Reliability** and **speed** are related to the home internet connection

(e.g., minimal service disruptions and outages). **Customer service** reflects nontechnical concerns, such as billing questions and account management.

Differences of fewer than 5 points between overall satisfaction scores are not meaningful. A gray dash (—) indicates that we didn't have enough data to provide a rating.



# LIFE LESSONS FROM THE PANDEMIC

There has been so much loss. But with it comes new wisdom that may help positively reshape the way we go forward.

BY KEVIN LORIA ILLUSTRATIONS BY LOUISA CANNELL

**O**UR WORLD has certainly seen its share of generation-defining events, from global wars to the 1918 influenza pandemic to the attacks of 9/11. And now, the COVID-19 pandemic. While each was unique, they all altered the lives of those who experienced them.

With the coronavirus pandemic, we've surely learned a lot. Some lessons have been painful—COVID-19 spotlighted healthcare inequities and the higher rates of infection and death in Black, Latino, and Native American populations. But recognizing what's been wrong will help push our systems in the right

direction, experts say, and some of the disruptions the crisis caused may produce lasting benefits.

"There has been often a lot of focus on loss ... now people are beginning to reflect on what was gained," says Vaile Wright, PhD, senior director of health care innovation at the American Psychological Association (APA).

For instance, many people say they want to continue to spend more time at home as the pandemic eases, according to a March 2021 Consumer Reports nationally representative survey of 2,144 American adults. And the vast majority hope the emphasis on cleanliness and hygiene continues.

But what pandemic-related changes are we most likely to hold on to? Here, five key lessons and how they may improve our lives in the long run.





**"I picked up bigger projects (at home):** cleaned out and refurbished an old shed, installed a new kitchen door, and painted the kitchen cabinets. They look terrific—turned out so much better than expected."

**PETE QUINN,**  
MANASQUAN, N.J.

# We've Harnessed Tech for Health, Work, and Socializing

→ **THE TECH REVOLUTION** that seemed perpetually around the corner actually got here as the coronavirus spread—upending the way we work, socialize, and handle many basic needs.

Take telehealth. With restrictions on in-person visits, doctors saw patients via phone, tablet, or computer. More than 80 percent of clinicians who responded to a 2020 COVID-19 Health Coalition survey said telehealth improved the timeliness of care, and a subsequent HC survey found that patients were similarly satisfied. Experts say talk therapy also works well via telehealth. (What's unclear: whether insurers, who expanded coverage for virtual care during the pandemic, will continue their coverage.)

Countless Americans used tech tools for working at home—a full 70 percent of full- or part-time working adults were doing their jobs remotely at least some of the time in April 2020, a Gallup poll found. Many liked it: 81 percent of 1,500 surveyed professionals who worked remotely in the past year would prefer not to

go back to the office at all or to have a hybrid schedule going forward, according to a recent Harvard Business School survey. “We learned a lot about the ability to telework and still get the work done,” says Georges Benjamin, MD, executive director of the American Public Health Association (APHA). “The technology exists to do it effectively.”

Some also turned to tech for leisure activities like virtual cooking, live-streamed museum tours, and interactive fitness classes. And people regularly “visited” with relatives and friends via Zoom or FaceTime. While remote schooling for children was widely unpopular, the expansion of virtual adult education may continue to appeal: About one-third of American adults said online classes offered the best value for them, in a July 2020 survey by the nonprofit Strada Education Network.

One tech issue the pandemic magnified is that not everyone has reliable home internet access. Though solutions may be a while in coming, President Biden's infrastructure bill aims to expand broadband to communities where it's lacking.



# We Picked Up Important Wellness Habits

→ **THOUGH WE INITIALLY** knew almost nothing about COVID-19, over the course of the pandemic many of us learned how strategies such as wearing masks, regular and proper hand-washing, distancing physically from those outside our household, ventilating indoor spaces, and staying

home while sick could help reduce the spread of the illness.

At this point, experts as well as most consumers appear to want to see such infection-protective behaviors become the norm in the U.S. For instance, 79 percent of Americans say they feel positive about the focus on cleanliness and hygiene, and hope it remains after

the pandemic is declared over, according to CR's March 2021 survey. “I think handshakes probably won't return real quickly,” says the APA's Wright.

And just as many people in East Asia wore masks during daily activities such as commuting by public transit after the SARS outbreak there in 2003, some mask-wearing may persist in the U.S. for a while, says Barun Mathema, PhD, an assistant professor of epidemiology at the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University in New York.

This may be more likely in areas that were hit hard by COVID-19—or if a

PHOTO: PREVIOUS PAGE: COURTESY PETE QUINN  
PHOTO: FACING PAGE: COURTESY RHONDA PERRETT



## We've Become Better at DIY

→ **THOSE MONTHS AT HOME** gave some the chance to notice every area of their living spaces that needed fixing or upgrading. That, in turn, motivated consumers with time on their hands to try do-it-yourself projects, and built confidence in their abilities to wield a pair of pliers or a screwdriver, says Grant Farnsworth, president of The Farnsworth Group, which does market research on the construction, lawn, and home improvement industries.

The result: During the pandemic consumers started 5 to 10 percent more DIY home improvement projects—such as landscaping and installing lighting—than they typically do, Farnsworth says.

When spring 2021 rolled around, and COVID-19 vaccines became widely available, industry experts expected the DIY home fix-up trend to end. But it didn't. Instead, even as the professional contracting business has picked up, people are tackling DIY home improvements much as they did in 2020.

And the DIY movement went beyond home fixes. Thanks to guidance from friends, virtual classes, or video tutorials on YouTube, consumers learned to cut their own hair, designed and sewed face masks, and began breadmaking in such large numbers that flour became scarce in grocery stores. Many people also started crafting for fun, says Diana Smith, associate director of retail at market research firm Mintel, which predicts a rise in handmade gifts such as knit hats and home-baked cookies throughout 2021.

Whether this penchant for self-reliance will last is unclear, but the confidence that many gained from home projects could remain for life, Farnsworth says. And some of these DIY projects, Smith points out, offer a leisure option that “kind of feeds the soul.”



“I started a virtual game night a year ago and it's still going strong, joined an online group called Friends and Fiction. ... **It gave me an opportunity to get to know people more**, even if it was on the computer.”

**RHONDA PERRETT,**  
FOREST, VA.

winter surge in coronavirus occurs in the U.S., according to Ali Mokdad, PhD, a professor of health metrics sciences at the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington in Seattle, speaking at a news briefing in April 2021.

Importantly, smart health and hygiene habits have benefits beyond protecting against COVID-19. “The flu epidemic that comes every year didn't happen this year, because of mask-wearing, hand-washing, and social distancing—and vaccination,” says the APHA's Benjamin.



## We Began Shopping Differently

➔ **WHEN THE PANDEMIC** forced us to suddenly alter our shopping routines, many people opted for contactless pickup and online and other delivery-based options.

Before COVID-19, online shopping was growing—people already bought most electronics on the internet, for instance. But the pandemic accelerated this, says Mintel’s Smith, particularly for groceries, household cleansers, and healthcare products, and tech gear useful for working at home. A nationally representative August 2020 Consumer Reports survey of more than 2,000 U.S. adults found that the percentage of Americans who used delivery or pickup for groceries grew by more than 80 percent.

Consumers turned to local venues too, especially for food. A March 2021 survey by the International Food Information Council (IFIC) found that 44 percent of Americans ages 18 to 80 made an effort to support area restaurants and 25 percent purchased from nearby farmers.

The pandemic’s economic blow also made it hard for some people to put food on the table. CR’s August 2020 survey found that about 1 in 5 American grocery shoppers had used a food bank or pantry at some point since the pandemic began—and about half of them said they hadn’t used these programs in the preceding year. In IFIC’s March survey, more than 40 percent said they often or sometimes bought less food or less healthy food due to money worries.



“I started ordering from [a] CSA, so I get seasonal produce all year-round while supporting local farms. **I feel more connected to the food I’m eating,** the businesses around me, and the people in them.”

**AIRIN VIRGILIO,**  
CHICAGO

Looking ahead, 55 percent of Americans say they hope contactless options like curbside pickup will last, CR’s March 2021 survey found. Almost half say they’re still shopping online more than in the past, Mintel says. But many may also continue to buy local, says Smith: “There’s an emphasis and a focus on community and connection.”

PHOTO: COURTESY AIRIN VIRGILIO



# We've Reassessed Our Priorities

➔ **THROUGHOUT** the ups and downs of the pandemic, many Americans have been reconsidering what matters most in life, and that's little surprise to the experts we interviewed.

As Richard Tedeschi, PhD, a professor of psychology at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, points out, going through challenging experiences often leads us to think more deeply about our core beliefs—whether it's our personal relationships or health, the work we do, or how we spend our free time.

In addition, the coronavirus “caused people to realize that things could change in an instant,” says Mintel's Smith. The firm's recent data found that 59 percent of Americans say they want to spend more time with family. And 44 percent said they enjoyed spending more time at home during the pandemic and hope that continues afterward, according to CR's March 2021 survey. “I think people have appreciated being forced to slow down,” says the APA's Wright, “to actually be present in activities” with family and friends.

Mintel also found that 58 percent of people express a desire to take better care of their physical health. Home cooking could help there. According to CR's August 2020 survey, more than a third of grocery shoppers say they cooked from scratch or tried new recipes more often than they used to before the coronavirus.

On the job front, the dedication of healthcare workers throughout the pandemic appears to have inspired more people to become doctors. Applications to attend medical school in 2021 were roughly

18 percent higher than the previous year's numbers, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges. “After 9/11, [we] saw a big increase in individuals joining the armed forces,” Wright says. “I think that this is probably similar.”

The crisis motivated us to look out for our local communities, too, a trend that's likely to endure, Smith says. We saw this worldwide: COVID-19 drove a global surge

of interest in volunteering with food banks and organizations that support the elderly, disabled, or migrant populations, according to the United Nations.

Finally, 35 percent of us say we yearn to try “something new,” Mintel reports. But what? Only time will tell whether that means starting a blog or a business, learning a new language, raising chickens, relocating—or an entirely different kind of pursuit.

## EXPERTS LEARNED HOW TO KEEP US SAFER

Future pandemics are inevitable, according to health experts, but they note that takeaways from this crisis can make all the difference. Here's what they say matters.



**1 STRONG DISEASE SURVEILLANCE SYSTEMS BENEFIT EVERYONE.** Many countries around the world need expert help to identify emerging outbreaks and new pathogens so that possible threats can be contained.

**2 SUPPORTING PUBLIC HEALTH KEEPS US ALL HEALTHIER.** The U.S. spends roughly

\$98 billion annually on public health. That needs to grow by about \$7 billion, says Georges Benjamin, MD, of the American Public Health Association, to address new and chronic diseases. By comparison, the U.S. government spent trillions after COVID-19 spiraled out of control.

**3 COLLABORATION IS ESSENTIAL.** Scientists across the

globe worked together to develop safe and effective vaccines and treatments and learn about the virus in record time.

**4 EVERYONE PLAYS A PART.** After early failures in the U.S. pandemic response, people stayed home when requested, so “we were effective at bending the curve,” Benjamin says.

WHAT TO DO WHEN AN APPLIANCE BREAKS:

# FIX IT OR DIT

The notion of a leaky dishwasher or a fridge on the fritz was unsettling enough during the height of the pandemic, but the outlook for repairing or replacing a major appliance isn't likely to improve this year. Read on for the latest on the supply chain issues, how to determine your best course of action, and tips for appliance shopping now.

**PLUS:** Our third annual Appliance Brand Reliability Rankings.

BY THE EDITORS OF CONSUMER REPORTS



Do you see water collecting on the floor in front of your dishwasher? **First, check the door seal for any rips or other damage.** If there's no longer a perfect seal, get a model-specific replacement gasket, which you install around the cavity's edge.



If your fridge door lets out a draft or pops open, it's likely **time for a new gasket.** Remove the old one and install a replacement. Consult your owner's manual for the details.

# CHIT?

Boil-overs can leave burners on a gas range with clogged ignition ports, resulting in a weak or uneven flame. Remove the burner heads, then **clean the ports with a toothbrush.**



Is your finished laundry still feeling damp? **Clean the dryer's internal moisture sensor,** often located near the lint trap. (Check the lint trap and vent duct, too.)



## REPAIRS YOU SHOULD (PROBABLY) NEVER DIY

There are plenty of fixes you can try yourself (see a few at left), but some are best left for a pro.

### **Fixing a leak on your fridge's sealed refrigerant system.**

It's best to avoid contact with the potentially toxic gases in the circulating refrigerant. Also, making solid connections to copper parts involves brazing (similar to welding).

### **Replacing the bearings on a front-load washer.**

They're usually at the back of the drum, so you have to disassemble the outer cabinet and the drum to reach them. That requires keeping track of all the electrical connections as you go so you can reassemble later.

### **Tinkering with microwave electronics.**

A microwave capacitor can hold a high-voltage charge well after it's unplugged. If you don't correctly discharge the capacitor before you touch any metal parts or wires, you risk shock or even electrocution.

### **Working on an appliance under warranty.**

DIY repairs might void the warranty, so read the fine print before you begin.

# UGH! AN APPLIANCE

# M

asks may be coming off throughout the U.S., but if you're shopping for a large appliance right now—or trying to get your current one fixed—it can still feel like early COVID-19 times. “Back orders on parts and new products have never been this long in the 20 years I’ve been here,” says

Rodney Neuenschwander, manager of Home Appliance, a retailer and appliance repair service in Massillon, Ohio. And the senior acquisition agent who buys large appliances for CR's tests says he's waiting three to four months for some products, mainly higher-end items.

## What's the Holdup?

A variety of forces, some pandemic-related and some decades old, have put kinks in the supply chain. After more than a year at home relying more than before on ranges, dishwashers, and fridges, many Americans are seeking to replace or fix those big-ticket items. Record-low interest rates for mortgages have sparked home buying and building, further fueling appliance demand. Manufacturers that have maintained lean, cost-cutting inventories for decades haven't kept up. And they and their parts suppliers are running with COVID-19 safety protocols that slow production.

Other factors have affected supply: shortages in computer chips and shipping containers; clogged West Coast ports; and a fluke accident in March that blocked the Suez Canal, a major shipping route. Even the weather has played a role. When record cold temperatures in February paralyzed much of Texas's electrical grid, the state's oil production shut down temporarily, delaying production of petroleum-based products like plastics used in many appliances.

## What About Repairs?

The average current wait time for a technician affiliated with RepairClinic.com is about 10 days, says Chris Zeisler, its technical services supervisor. “In more populated areas, it's just something they can't get manpower out on,” he says. “I wouldn't expect that to be a long-term situation, but it's definitely a crunch right now.”

If you can get a technician to your home, you may find you have another wait for parts—if they're available. Or you may have to compromise by accepting generic parts—or decide to buy a new appliance instead.

by Tanya A. Christian, Mary H.J. Farrell, Keith Flamer, Paul Hope, Tobie Stanger, and Daniel Wroclawski

### Is it under warranty?

A standard manufacturer warranty spans one to two years for parts and labor, though some last longer. Not sure? Consult the manual for the appliance or call the maker armed with your serial number. Some retailers offer their own warranty, and if you used a credit card, check its policies, too.

Yes

### No-brainer: Repair.

Call the manufacturer to set up a service call.

### Replace.

A newer, more energy-efficient model will likely save you money on energy in the long run.

It's a \$300 over-the-range microwave or something else on the less expensive side.

Eh

### Consider replacing. But what's the timeline for getting the model you want?

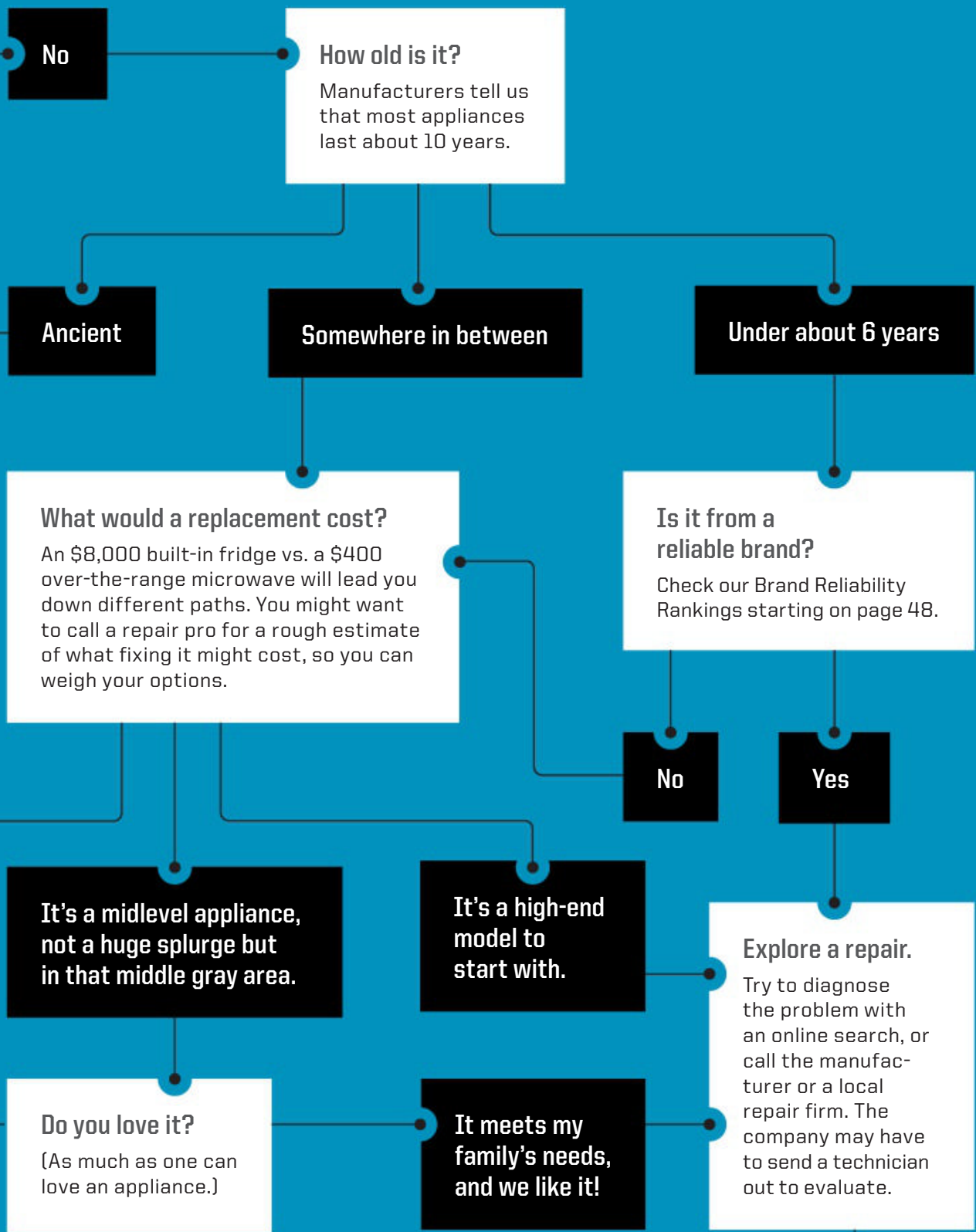
See our shopping tips at right and on the next page.

### If you have to wait ...

In the interim, you can hand-wash dishes; cook in a toaster oven, on a grill, or on a hot plate; hit the laundromat; or line-dry clothes. But if your fridge is dead, head to “If You Need It Right Now,” at right.

# ISN'T WORKING.

Should you replace it or repair it?  
This basic road map can help you decide.



## IF YOU NEED IT RIGHT NOW

**Try an independent dealer.** They often can match big-box prices and supply. They might even offer a loaner while you wait for a new machine. **Narrow your search on big-box websites.** Filter it by what's in stock locally and available for delivery now or soon. **Explore used options in your area** for a temporary or lower-cost permanent solution. For advice, go to [CR.org/usedappliances0821](http://CR.org/usedappliances0821).

## IF YOU CAN WAIT

**Get on an independent dealer's waiting list.** "We're getting a good supply of product," says Ken Miele, CEO of the Appliance Dealers Cooperative in New Jersey. "When you go shopping today, in four to six weeks you'll probably have that washer and dryer." **Sign up for alerts.** Some chains, such as Home Depot and Lowe's, let you set up notifications that tell you when your favored model arrives. **Don't expect prices to drop.** Retailers don't have to discount much while supplies are low and demand is high, says David MacGregor, an appliance-industry analyst at Longbow Research in Cleveland: "My industry contacts speculate the availability issues will extend through the end of 2021."

### DIY

If you think it's a job you can do, how quickly can you get replacement parts and how much are they? RepairClinic.com is seeing common parts on back-order from four to six weeks.

### PRO

How soon can they get to you? Repair shops may prioritize by urgency. You might get a same-day slot for a gas leak but wait two weeks for a faulty dishwasher. Based on our

2018 member surveys on large appliances, here are the median reported costs for repairs paid for completely out of pocket. If you get a quote that far exceeds this, talk through the repair vs. replace equation with your technician.

REFRIGERATORS .....	\$162
<b>RANGES</b>	
ELECTRIC .....	\$133
GAS .....	\$130
PRO-STYLE .....	\$246
<b>DISHWASHERS</b> .....	\$113
<b>OTR MICROWAVES</b> ...	\$103
<b>WASHING MACHINES</b>	
.....	\$135
<b>CLOTHES DRYERS</b> .....	\$116

# APPLIANCE SHOPPING IN 2021

**WHETHER YOU'RE LOOKING** for an upgrade or you're in urgent need of a replacement, flexibility is key. "The situation is not so dire that people will have to go without a refrigerator if they really need one," says Mark Davis, an analyst at Gap Intelligence, a retail and e-commerce market research firm. "But they may not get it at the price they want to pay." Of all

## Refrigerators

**AS ALWAYS:** You can spend anywhere from \$550 for a basic top-freezer to more than \$5,000 for a top-of-the-line French-door model. Measure the width, height, and depth of the spot where your fridge lives. Next, measure the width and height of any doorways, hallways, etc., that a new one will have to travel through to get to the kitchen. Use these to narrow your search.

**WORTH NOTING NOW:** Prioritize your must-have features and focus on models that have the top two or three, such as a water dispenser and icemaker. The longer your list of wants, the more difficulty you'll have finding models that meet your criteria.

**STOCK CHECK:** We've seen fridges back-ordered from a few weeks to over three months. According to data from Gap Intelligence, French-doors are the most available type; side-by-sides are more difficult to come by. Here are two top picks from our tests that can be delivered in under a month:



**\$ LG**  
**LSXS26326S**  
SIDE-BY-SIDE  
\$1,500  
69 IN. H X  
36 IN. W X 34 IN. D  
[ABOVE]

**79** OVERALL SCORE

**✓ Frigidaire**  
**FFTR2021TS**  
TOP-FREEZER  
\$845  
69 IN. H X  
30 IN. W X 33 IN. D

**70** OVERALL SCORE

## Ranges

**AS ALWAYS:** You'll start with the fuel source, of course. In general, it's most cost-effective to stick with the same kind you already have. Switching from electric to gas or vice versa requires permits and licensed pros, adding to the total cost and, potentially, wait time. With that in mind, expect to spend between \$400 and \$3,500 or so for a 30-inch-wide electric or gas model.

**WORTH NOTING NOW:** If you're replacing an electric model, you can typically upgrade to induction—which runs on the same 220-volt line—with no modifications. But a glass manufacturer that makes the tops for electric smoothtop and induction ranges has stepped in to help produce glass vials for COVID-19 vaccines. That could mean longer wait times for these options.

**STOCK CHECK:** Our shoppers report that new ranges are arriving two days to six months after an online purchase. Here are two solid options in each major fuel type:



**✓ LG**  
**LREL6325D**  
ELECTRIC  
SMOOTHTOP RANGE  
\$1,200  
30 IN.  
[ABOVE]

**84** OVERALL SCORE

**✓ GE**  
**JGB735SPSS**  
GAS RANGE  
\$1,080  
30 IN.

**72** OVERALL SCORE

## Dishwashers

**AS ALWAYS:** More expensive models, which can cost as much as \$2,300, often come with additional bells and whistles (think stainless steel interior, special wash cycles and zones, and WiFi connectivity). But dishwashers that cost \$500 and under can get your dishes just as clean. Some have a soil sensor, which improves water efficiency—a worthwhile feature at any price—and many have adjustable racks.

**WORTH NOTING NOW:** While the industry expects availability and pricing to return to pre-pandemic levels by the end of the year, the dishwasher market is experiencing low inventory, and we've seen that for our recommended models. If you've got an immediate need, you may have to make some sacrifices in terms of features or performance.

**STOCK CHECK:** Bosch dominates the top of our ratings. The models below are currently available from major retailers for delivery inside of a month:



**✓ Bosch**  
**Ascenta**  
**SHE3AR72UC**  
\$600  
24 IN.  
[ABOVE]

**89** OVERALL SCORE

**✓ Bosch 100**  
**Series**  
**SHXM4AY55N**  
\$750  
24 IN.

**84** OVERALL SCORE

the appliance categories below, Davis says fridges have had the lowest inventory, with 67 percent of models in stock, on average, from October 2020 through May 2021. But washers and dryers had just over 80 percent in stock. “It’s still a matter of catch as catch can,” says CR’s senior acquisition agent, who buys the large appliances we test.

(We don’t share his name, so purchases are anonymous and independent.) “If you want the latest finish, for example, it could be a longer wait than for white or stainless.” In the meantime, he says, “We’ll test what’s out there, because that’s what’s available to the consumer.” Here’s a closer look at all the large appliances we rate at CR.

## Microwaves

**AS ALWAYS:** Over-the-range microwaves are typically the least expensive part of a kitchen suite, costing between \$130 and \$1,170 depending on the brand and the features included. But because they’re built into the cabinetry, it’s still a hassle when one breaks. You’ll need to hire a professional installer. On the plus side, the standard width of an OTR microwave is 30 inches, just like the range below it, so your new one should easily fit in the old spot.

**WORTH NOTING NOW:** There’s good news here: You should be able to find what you need. Over the past year we haven’t had much trouble finding the OTRs we wanted to buy for testing in our microwave lab.

**STOCK CHECK:** Even microwaves initially on back-order have become available within a few weeks. Here are two top performers that are widely available now:



✓ Whirlpool  
WMH53521H  
\$470  
[ABOVE]

87 OVERALL SCORE

✓ LG  
LMV2031ST  
\$350

81 OVERALL SCORE

## Washers

**AS ALWAYS:** You can spend \$400 for a basic top-load agitator and up to \$2,500 on a front-loader. Measure the width, height, and depth of your laundry space and any doors or hallways leading to it, and consider how big your loads are. Claimed capacity size is key (more than 4.2 cubic feet is a decent size). Most washers are 27 to 30 inches wide, 39 to 45 inches high, and 27 to 35 inches deep. For smaller spaces, try a compact washer (24 inches wide).

**WORTH NOTING NOW:** Laundry appliances haven’t experienced the same supply challenges as large kitchen appliances. According to data from our member surveys, two-thirds of CR members who bought a washer in 2020 were able to get the model they wanted. Currently, top-loaders might be easier to come by than front-loaders.

**STOCK CHECK:** Delivery times are ranging one to four weeks. Here are two models available for delivery within a few weeks:



Ⓢ LG  
WM3400CW  
FRONT-LOAD  
\$800  
39 IN. H X  
27 IN. W X 31 IN. D  
[ABOVE]

86 OVERALL SCORE

Ⓢ LG WT7100CW  
TOP-LOAD HE  
\$800  
45 IN. H X  
27 IN. W X 30 IN. D

81 OVERALL SCORE

## Dryers

**AS ALWAYS:** Clothes dryer prices range from \$400 to \$2,000 depending on the capacity, features, and type (electric, gas, or compact). Roughly half the models in our ratings are Energy Star certified. Those models use 20 percent less energy than the rest, according to Energy Star.

**WORTH NOTING NOW:** If you’re looking for a matching washer/dryer set, remember that not all of them make a great couple. Start your search with the washer first, because it carries the heavier laundry lift and is a more complicated machine.

**STOCK CHECK:** Most of the dryers that sit at the top of our ratings are currently available within a few weeks. Here are two high-scoring models:



Ⓢ LG  
DLE3400W  
\$800  
39 IN. H X  
27 IN. W X 30 IN. D  
[ABOVE]

90 OVERALL SCORE

Ⓢ LG  
DLE7100W  
\$800  
45 IN. H X  
27 IN. W X 29 IN. D

88 OVERALL SCORE

# WHAT IS AVAXHOME?



# AVAXHOME-

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brand new books, trending movies,  
fresh magazines, hot games,  
recent software, latest music releases.

Unlimited satisfaction one low price

Cheap constant access to piping hot media

Protect your downloadings from Big brother

Safer, than torrent-trackers

18 years of seamless operation and our users' satisfaction

All languages

Brand new content

One site



# AVXLIVE ICU

AvaxHome - Your End Place

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# HOW THE BRANDS STACK UP

CR's third annual Appliance Brand Reliability Rankings can help guide you as you shop.

**WHAT'S THE BEST** way to land an appliance that will stand the test of time? Buy from a reliable brand.

A good place to start—especially in the retail climate we're facing now—is with the chart below, our third annual Appliance Brand Reliability Rankings. It shows how reliable a brand is relative to others for multiple appliances. The results are based on data CR collected from our member surveys on more than 760,000 kitchen and laundry appliances purchased new between 2010 and 2020.

To calculate predicted reliability, we asked members if their appliances broke or stopped working as well as they should.

AVERAGE PREDICTED RELIABILITY SCORE



	1	2	3	3	5	6	6	8	8	8	11	11
2021 RANK	1	2	3	3	5	6	6	8	8	8	11	11
RANK CHANGE FROM 2020	-	◀1	◀2	◀7	◀8	◀4	4▶	1▶	4▶	1▶	◀1	◀5

PRODUCT RELIABILITY, BY APPLIANCE

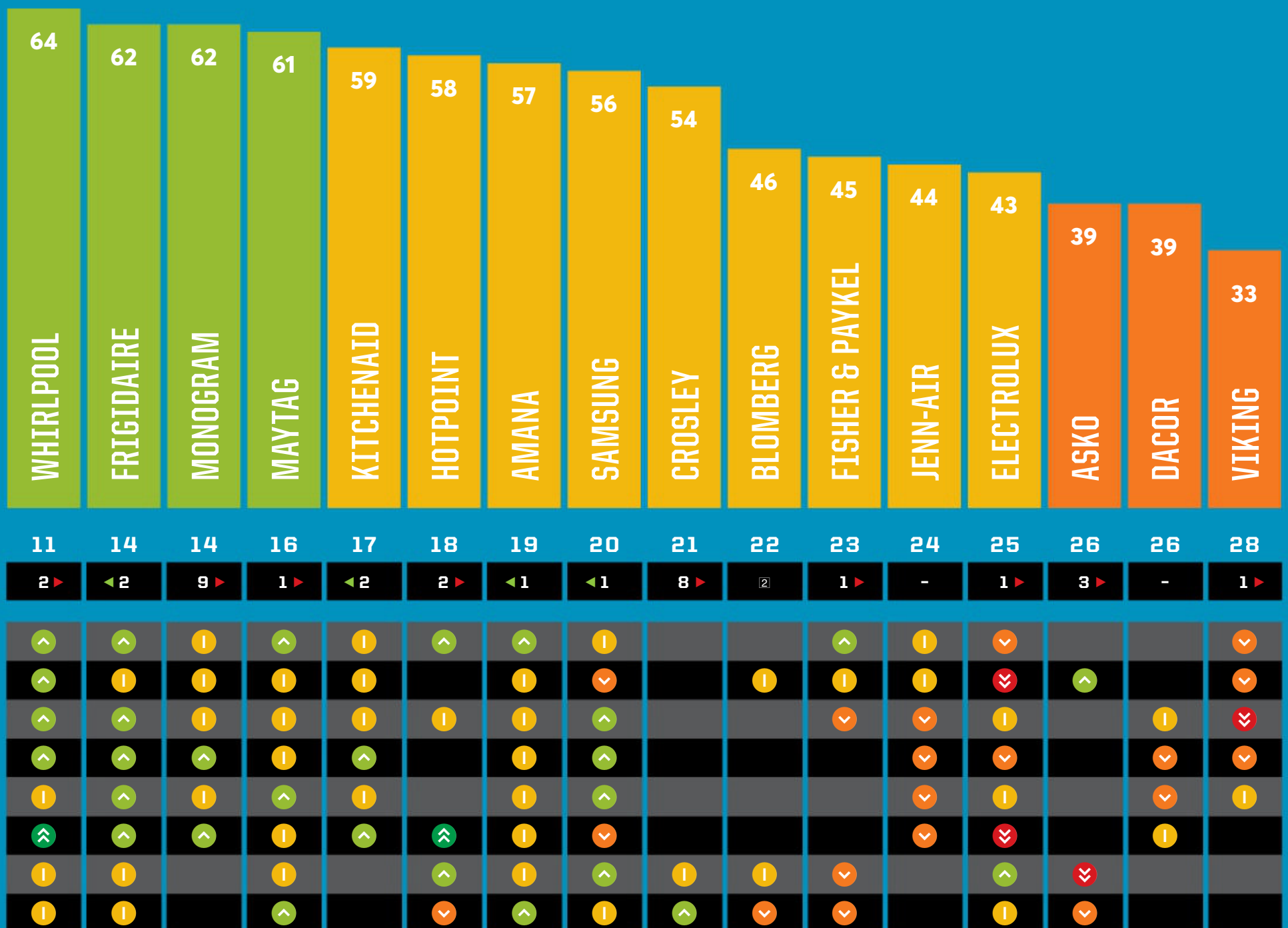
Appliance Type	Speed Queen	LG	Café	IKEA	Thermador	Bosch	Miele	GE	Roper	Signature Kitchen Suite	Kenmore	Sub-Zero/Wolf
REFRIGERATORS		↑			↑↑			↑			↑	↑
DISHWASHERS				↑↑	↑↑	↑↑	↑↑					
RANGES		↑	↑	↑↑		↑	↓	↑↑			↑	
COOKTOPS		↑↑	↑		↑	↑↑	↓	↑		↑↑	↑	
ELECTRIC WALL OVENS		↑	↑↑	↓			↑↑	↑↑		↑		
OTR MICROWAVES		↑	↑	↑				↑		↑	↑	
WASHING MACHINES	↑↑	↑↑					↑		↑			
CLOTHES DRYERS	↑↑	↑↑					↑↑		↑		↑	

We used that data to estimate how a brand's new models will hold up over the first five years of ownership. The chart includes only brands for which we have reliability ratings in at least two categories of major appliances.

The average predicted reliability score for each brand has been adjusted to account for differences among types of appliances. A brand that earns relatively high marks for its French-door refrigerators, for example, gets a bump in its score because French-door models are less reliable than other refrigerator types. Without this statistical adjustment, a brand that makes only

top-freezer refrigerators—the most reliable type—would have an unfair advantage over brands that make multiple types. The predicted reliability ratings for the appliance categories from each brand are an average of the ratings for all types of that brand's appliances (for example, front-loaders, top-loaders, etc., for washing machines).

The top- and bottom-rated brands in the chart remain unchanged. Blomberg is the sole newcomer to this year's rankings. Remember that our predicted reliability ratings aren't an indicator of performance. For more on how a particular appliance fared, go to [CR.org/appliances](http://CR.org/appliances).



Empty cells indicate that either the manufacturer doesn't make that appliance or we have insufficient data to calculate a reliability rating. A dash (-) represents no change in rank from last year. <sup>1</sup> Some brands share a rank due to a statistical tie of their average predicted reliability scores. <sup>2</sup> The brand is appearing in the chart for the first time.

# Build a Healthier Salad

HOW TO MAKE IT TASTY AND NUTRITIOUS.  
PLUS, WE RATE SALAD DRESSINGS.

BY RACHEL MELTZER WARREN PHOTOGRAPH BY NIGEL COX

*Salad's reputation as the ultimate health food* is well deserved.

People who eat greens and veggies on any given day take in more fiber, potassium, vitamin K, and other valuable nutrients than those who don't, according to a recent analysis by the Department of Agriculture.

For some, though, a string of *E. coli* outbreaks in recent years tied to leafy greens have dimmed salad's star. So have articles about salads being ruined by calorie- and salt-packed ingredients like bacon bits, cheese, croutons, and fatty dressings. But it would be a shame to dismiss salads from your diet.





## ELEMENTS OF A PERFECT SALAD

### ***Toss With Dressing***

Control calories and sodium by sticking with 2 tablespoons.

**TRY** Periodically measure 2 tablespoons of your favorite dressing so you know what a serving looks like.

### ***Top With Something Crunchy***

Texture makes a salad more interesting; use 2 tablespoons.

**TRY** Sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, walnuts, pecans, almonds, or roasted chickpeas.

### ***Make It a Meal***

Adding 3 ounces of protein, a half-cup of whole grains, or both will help you stay fuller longer.

**TRY** Beans, edamame, grilled chicken, canned tuna, hard-boiled eggs, or tofu.

**TRY** Farro, quinoa, freekeh, barley, or bulgur.

### ***Throw in Some Nonstarchy Veggies***

They're low-cal, nutrient-packed, filling, and flavorful. Add three or four for a total of one cup.

**TRY** Cucumbers, tomatoes, mushrooms, onions, peppers, avocado, carrots, cauliflower, sugar snap peas, snow peas, celery, beets, or radishes.

### ***Add a Sweet or Salty Extra***

Fruit, olives, or cheese provide a flavor contrast. Include one or more  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup for cheese or olives and up to  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup for fruit.

**TRY** Apples, strawberries, blueberries, peaches, nectarines, grapes, oranges, olives, Parmesan cheese, cheddar cheese, goat cheese, or blue cheese.

### ***Use Dark Greens***

Dark equals more vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. Aim for 2 cups.

**TRY** Kale, arugula, spinach, mesclun, or romaine.

“Eating a salad goes a long way toward helping you get the 2 to 4 cups of vegetables you should have in a day—something just 1 out of 10 Americans does,” says Amy Keating, RD, a nutritionist at Consumer Reports. “And you can build a tasty meal without relying on less-nutritious toppings.”

More good news: Nutritionists actually recommend salad dressing—provided you pick the right one. “A dressing that tastes good and is good for you will encourage you to eat more veggies,” says Su-Nui Escobar, RDN, at Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

CR’s nutrition and food-tasting team zeroed in on ranch and raspberry vinaigrettes—two of the most popular types of dressing—and scouted the supermarket for brands.

They found that while many salad dressings are loaded with added sugars and sodium, there are others with lower amounts to choose from.

Nor do you need to be overly concerned about calories or fat in dressings. The fat is mostly the heart-healthy unsaturated type, and a little fat helps you absorb more of the salad’s nutrients. “Greens and other vegetables offer a lot of nutrition,” Keating says, “so as long as you’re also mindful of salad add-ons and dressing portion sizes, the dressing shouldn’t weigh you down too much.”

## **SAFETY FIRST**

Not too long ago, reports of leafy greens contaminated with the type of *E. coli* bacteria that can make you sick were common. Between 2006 and 2019, romaine lettuce and other greens were involved in at least 46 multistate *E. coli* outbreaks, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. One likely reason: Most commercial leafy greens grown in the U.S. come from areas where cattle—a main source of *E. coli*—are also raised.

But in the past two years there’s been

## **The dressing landscape is changing, with some brands using high-quality ingredients and limiting added sugars and sodium.**

just one multistate outbreak related to leafy greens, in the fall of 2020. It’s unclear exactly why contamination appears to be on the decline, although the Food and Drug Administration recently noted that the industry has improved how it grows, harvests, and packages the greens.

Food nutrition and safety experts also say you should keep the risk in perspective. Donald Schaffner, PhD, a distinguished professor of food science at Rutgers University in New Jersey, says that “while foodborne disease outbreaks can be devastating,” the number of people getting sick from them each year is actually quite small, while the benefits of regularly consuming leafy greens are substantial.

You can also take a few safety steps yourself. Washing greens with water won’t get rid of bacteria, but a 10-minute soak in white vinegar might help. (Rinse afterward to remove the vinegar taste.) And to stay informed on outbreaks, follow @FDAfood and @USDAFoodSafety on Twitter, or sign up for email alerts from both agencies.

## **NICELY DRESSED**

It hasn’t always been easy to find a store-bought dressing that’s both delicious and good for you. But the

landscape is changing, with some brands using high-quality ingredients and limiting the added sugars and sodium that can downgrade a dressing’s nutrition profile.

But not all dressings are created equal. CR’s testers thought most of the vinaigrettes tasted good, but we are recommending only one, Annie’s Organic Lite Raspberry Vinaigrette. It had the least sodium—just 55 mg in 2 tablespoons—and was among those with the least added sugars: 4 grams per serving, or a teaspoon’s worth. Others had up to 7 grams of added sugars. (The American Heart Association advises consuming no more than 25 grams of added sugars a day for women and 36 grams for men.) But some did score low on taste, in part because they didn’t have much berry flavor.

More ranch dressings earned CR’s recommendation. On the whole, they had more sodium than the vinaigrettes, ranging from 150 mg to 260 mg in 2 tablespoons. That’s more than 10 percent of the recommended daily maximum of 2,300 mg per day for adults and, Keating says, “considering the small serving size, it’s a lot.”

Still, none of the ranch versions had more than a gram of sugar, and they were surprisingly low in unhealthy saturated fat. Compared with vinaigrettes, where most of the fat comes from olive or other vegetable oils and is unsaturated, creamy dressings often contain dairy, and that can bump up their saturated fat content. But none of the ranches had more than 2.5 grams. Bolthouse Farms Classic Ranch Yogurt Dressing has less than a gram and just 45 calories, and got high marks for taste.

The ranch dressings tended to taste better than the vinaigrettes. Many had that traditional ranch combo of creamy and tangy, but some went in a more unusual but still flavorful direction—creamy but with lemony, mustardy, or nutty undertones.

# Dressed-Up Labels

LABELS ON SALAD DRESSING BOTTLES can be full of health claims. They may also tout ingredients with a reputation—deserved or not—for being healthy, giving the impression that you’ll be pouring something extra good on your greens. Here, our dressing label decoder for some common tricky terms.

## Lite

A dressing labeled “lite” or “light” must have half the fat or less of the original version. Dressings with this claim often have water or vinegar in place of some of the oil and tend to have more added sugars.



## Contains Avocado or Avocado Oil

Both have healthy fat—but so do most oils. What’s more, even when an ingredient, like avocado, is called out on a label, there may be very little of it in the product. If it’s not high on the ingredients list, it’s not a main component.

## Keto

This typically means the dressing is higher in fat and lower in carbohydrates. But “high-fat, low-carb” describes practically any salad dressing.

## No Artificial Preservatives

Some experts advise avoiding certain artificial preservatives, such as sodium benzoate, BHA, and BHT. So look for this claim if you want to avoid those preservatives. Or read the ingredients list. Many dressings without preservatives don’t note their absence on the label.



## Cage-Free Eggs

This means the hens weren’t raised in a cage, but they still could have been packed into a building with thousands of other birds. There’s no nutritional difference between cage-free eggs and others.

## No Artificial Flavors

Natural flavors must come from a plant or animal but can be extracted in a lab with chemicals. They can be made from many components, which don’t have to be identified in the ingredients list.



## Plant-Based

While there’s no official definition, this term should tell you that there are no animal products such as cheese or buttermilk in the dressing. To be sure, read the ingredients list.

## Expeller-Pressed

This means the oil was extracted with a mechanical press, not by using the solvent hexane, like most oils. It’s unclear if trace amounts of hexane in oil is unhealthy. But the chemical may pose a risk to the environment and to workers if they inhale it.

**Ratings** ➤ **Toss It Together** If the dressing you like isn't the most nutritious, limiting your portion size to 2 tablespoons per serving can help rein in the dietary damage.

Product	Overall Score	Pricing Per package/ package size, fl. oz. (price per serving)	Test Results		Nutritional Information					Flavor & Texture Description
			Nutrition score	Sensory score	Calories	Total fat (g)	Saturated fat (g)	Sodium (mg)	Added sugars (g)	
<b>RANCH</b>										
✓ <b>Primal Kitchen</b> Ranch Dressing & Marinade with Avocado Oil	73	\$6.00/8 oz. (75 cents)	↑	↑	120	13.0	2.0	210	0	More like a vinaigrette than a traditional ranch. Tart and lemony with onion, garlic, and slight black pepper and dill flavors.
✓ <b>Organicgirl</b> Organic White Cheddar Ranch Style Vinaigrette	72	\$5.00/8 oz. (63 cents)	↑	↑	60	5.0	2.5	240	1	Tangy with big sharp cheese and dairy flavors. Well-blended spices. Tastes freshly made.
✓ <b>88 Acres</b> Garden Ranch Dressing	72	\$8.00/8 oz. (\$1.00)	↑	↑	170	16.0	2.5	150	0	Big dill flavor, with a salty, nut butter element. Oily, grainy, and very thick. Good as a veggie dip.
✓ <b>Bolthouse Farms</b> Classic Ranch Yogurt Dressing	70	\$3.50/14 oz. (25 cents)	↑	↑	45	3.0	0.5	230	1	Creamy and smooth with dairy flavors and mild, balanced spices.
✓ <b>Tessemae's</b> Organic Avocado Ranch Dressing	70	\$6.00/10 oz. (60 cents)	↑	↑	160	18.0	1.5	220	0	More like a mustard dressing than a ranch. Creamy and thick. Lots of spices with black pepper notes. Moderately salty and sour.
<b>Marzetti</b> Simply Dressed Avocado Ranch Dressing	65	\$4.00/12 oz. (33 cents)	↑	↓	130	13.0	1.0	180	0	Big sour vinegar taste and slight citrus and avocado flavors. Flavors don't blend well together.
<b>Hidden Valley</b> Simply Ranch Dressing	63	\$3.00/12 oz. (25 cents)	↑	↓	110	12.0	1.5	240	1	Slightly thick. Big mayonnaise taste with mild onion, garlic, dill, and pepper flavors.
<b>Hidden Valley</b> Ranch Avocado Topping & Dressing	63	\$6.00/16 oz. (38 cents)	↓	↑	90	9.0	2.0	220	1	Smooth. Slight avocado and mayonnaise flavors with dill and other herbs. Slightly sour.
<b>Newman's Own</b> Avocado Oil & Extra Virgin Olive Oil Dairy-Free Ranch Dressing	62	\$5.50/8 oz. (69 cents)	↑	↓	160	18.0	2.5	220	0	More like an Italian dressing than a traditional ranch. Tastes mostly of lemon, mustard, and spices.
<b>Healthy Choice</b> Plant Powered Garden Ranch Dressing	55	\$3.50/12 oz. (29 cents)	↓	↓	45	1.5	0.0	260	2	Very sour and vinegary. Spices taste dehydrated. Cauliflower adds a slight sulfur note.
<b>RASPBERRY VINAIGRETTE</b>										
✓ <b>Annie's</b> Organic Lite Raspberry Vinaigrette	74	5.00/8 oz. (63 cents)	↑↑	↓	45	3.0	0.0	55	4	Slightly thick. Sour and slightly sweet berry flavor, with a hint of honey and mustard. Tastes lower-fat.
<b>Marie's</b> Raspberry Vinaigrette	66	\$4.00/11.5 oz. (36 cents)	↓	↑	50	3.0	0.0	100	6	Creamy. Balanced sweet-tart flavor and mildly seasoned.
<b>Newman's Own</b> Raspberry Walnut Vinaigrette	65	\$3.00/16 oz. (19 cents)	↓	↑	70	5.0	0.5	120	6	Slightly thick. Walnut and sweet raspberry flavors with distinct cracked black pepper.
<b>Ken's</b> Lite Raspberry Walnut Vinaigrette Dressing & Marinade	53	\$2.50/16 oz. (16 cents)	↓	↑	80	6.0	0.5	130	7	Thin. Sweet and slightly sour. Tastes of raspberry and other fruit, with a hint of walnut. Well-blended seasonings.
<b>Briannas</b> Home Style Raspberry Poppy Seed Dressing, Sauce & Dip	52	\$4.00/12 oz. (33 cents)	↓	↑	150	13.0	1.0	200	7	Thick with some crunch from poppy seeds. Flavorful and fruity raspberry dressing with hints of sweet mustard. Good as a veggie dip.
<b>Kraft</b> Sweet Raspberry Vinaigrette	41	\$2.00/14 oz. (14 cents)	↓	↓	70	5.0	1.0	330	5	Thin with an oily mouthfeel. Tastes of fruit but not raspberry.
<b>Wish-Bone</b> Light Raspberry Walnut Vinaigrette Dressing	39	\$2.50/15 oz. (17 cents)	↓	↓	70	4.0	0.5	280	4	Slightly thick. Fruity with a little walnut flavor. Very slightly bitter. Tastes lower-fat.

**HOW WE TEST:** CR's food experts tested dressings for nutrition and taste. **Nutrition** is based on calories per gram,

total fat, saturated fat, sodium, and added sugars. **Sensory** is based on the objective opinion of experts who blind-tasted

the dressings straight and on lettuce. We also considered the ingredients and whether they were organic as part

of the **Overall Score**. For full ratings, Digital and All Access members can go to [CR.org/saladdressing](https://www.consumerreports.org/saladdressing).





NEWS & EXPERT  
ADVICE TO  
KEEP YOU  
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THE CURVE™

# ROAD REPORT

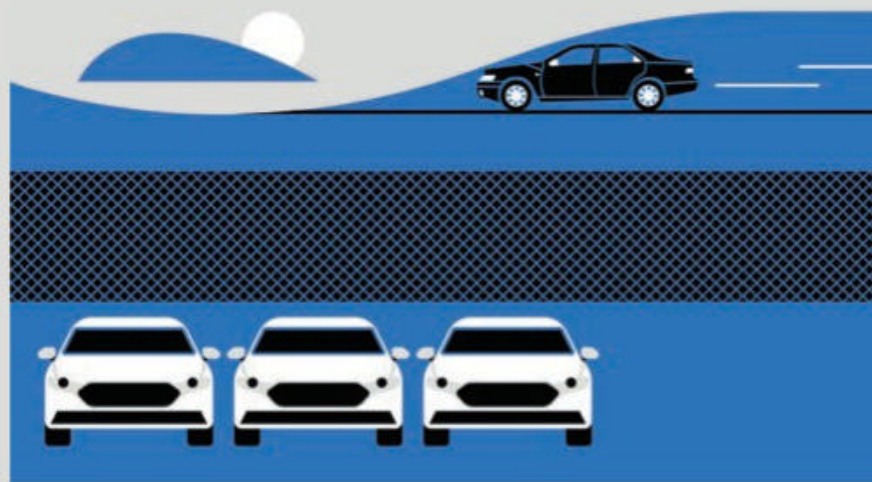
## ASK OUR EXPERTS

### Should you buy a dealership 'loaner' car?

Dealers often end up selling the cars they set aside as "loaners" for customers who need to leave their vehicles overnight for repair. We think it's okay to buy one of these used cars as long as you take some precautions. We recommend an inspection from an independent mechanic, and avoiding any used car with signs of extreme wear, such as average annual mileage of more than 15,000. The sale price on a loaner will likely be lower than a regular used car of the same make and model year. "There can be substantial cost savings," says John Ibbotson, CR's chief automotive services manager. "Just make sure the dealership fixes anything that's wrong before signing the paperwork."

## TRENDS

### How to Find a Rental Right Now



**Travel demand is surging** as COVID-19 restrictions ease, according to AAA. But a shortage of new cars due to a microchip supply disruption has prevented **car rental companies** from restocking their fleets, leading to a **tight supply and higher prices**. Hertz says it expects the situation to last at least through the summer. If you need a rental car, **CR has tips:** Book and pay as soon as you can—even up to six months in advance—to lock in a rate; avoid airports and try other locations; and consider services like Turo or DriveShare, where people offer their personal vehicles for rent.

## THE VITAL STATISTIC

# 38

Number of states where self-driving test vehicles are allowed on public roads. Given the risks to the public, CR wants strong safety standards for these vehicles.

Source: AAA.

## RECALL



### Mercedes-Benz

Mercedes-Benz is recalling about 340,000 coupes, convertibles, sedans, and SUVs from the 2019 through 2021 model years because of faulty software that may prevent backup camera video feeds from displaying. Customers have reported that when they put their vehicles in Reverse, the display remained blank. That creates an increased risk of backing over a person or into an object. **WHAT TO DO:** Mercedes-Benz will update the multimedia/infotainment system in affected vehicles either over the air or at a dealership at no cost to owners. For more information, call customer service at 800-367-6372.

FIRST  
DRIVE

## Nissan Pathfinder



The redesigned 2022 Pathfinder is a user-friendly, highly functional SUV. Its generously sized three-row cabin seats up to eight and can fit three child safety seats in the second row. The 284-hp, 3.5-liter V6 engine is paired with a smooth-shifting nine-speed automatic transmission. The ride is supple and controlled, and handling is

responsive due to limited body lean and fairly quick steering. **CR'S TAKE:** Our rented Platinum-trim Pathfinder was a big step up from the lackluster previous generation. We'll buy the more popular SL trim and put it through our full testing. **PRICE RANGE:** \$33,410-\$48,090 **DESTINATION CHARGE:** \$1,150 **PRICE AS DRIVEN:** \$50,290

# What's Next in Car Safety?

Bright headlights that don't shine in other drivers' eyes, and sensors that can "see" children left behind in hot cars: These are just two lifesaving innovations coming soon to a dealership near you.

BY KEITH BARRY ILLUSTRATIONS BY SINELAB

**I**N THE NOT-TOO-DISTANT PAST, advances in car safety focused on keeping drivers and passengers protected in a crash. Today's vehicles go a step beyond, using cameras, radar, and computing power to prevent crashes and other tragedies from happening in the first place. As a result, modern safety systems protect not only those inside vehicles but also other drivers, pedestrians, and cyclists.

Features such as automatic emergency braking (AEB) and blind spot warning (BSW) are already preventing crashes, but we're still only starting to realize the benefits of how technology can make roads safer, says Jake Fisher, senior director of CR's Auto Test Center. Soon, more powerful processors and sensors will usher in the next generation of safety advances, which will go even further to save lives and prevent injuries.

"Cars are benefiting from the explosion in computer processing power, and automakers are using that technology to make cars smarter and safer," Fisher says. It's also likely that new safety features will become more commonplace on vehicles as new federal policies encourage automakers to install them on the vehicles they sell.

CR has tried early versions of many of these emerging features, and we're confident that they will prevent crashes. "These technologies can help us eventually get to a point where road fatalities are a thing of the past," Fisher says.



## SEE WITH COMPUTER VISION

**WHEN IT'S COMING:** SOME VEHICLES SOLD IN EUROPE ALREADY HAVE VERSIONS OF AUGMENTED REALITY DISPLAYS. WE EXPECT SIMILAR FEATURES IN THE U.S. SOON.



### WHAT IT IS

Augmented reality is designed to blend human and computer vision, projecting 3D holographic animations into the driver's field of view to show exactly where a navigation system says to turn, highlight a pedestrian waiting to cross, or warn of a stopped car ahead, among other things.

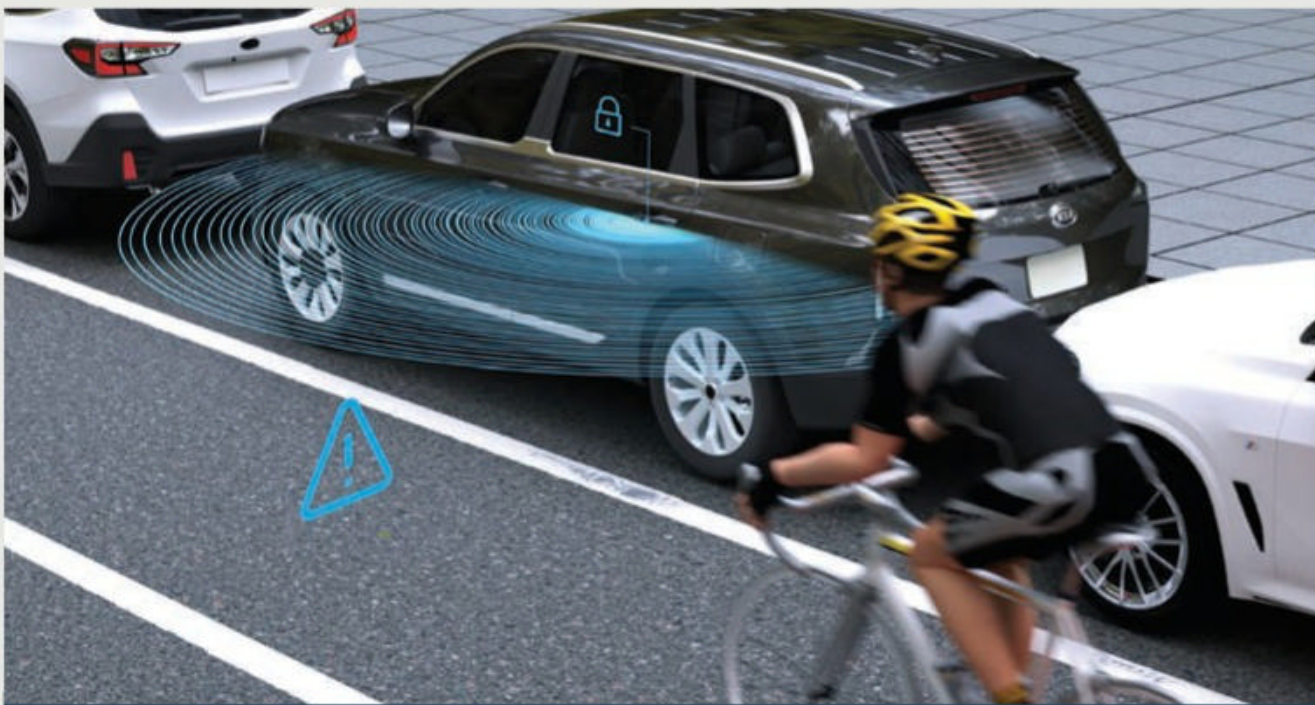
### HOW IT WORKS

The technology is currently in development at multiple automakers and suppliers, such as Continental, GM, and Panasonic. It will use a head-up display that can track a driver's eye movements to ensure that vital information is projected in their line of sight no matter where they

look or how far they sit from the steering wheel. In its research of its own prototype system paired with automated driving, Continental says it found that drivers are quicker to react to augmented reality warnings than to the usual chimes and dashboard lights alone.

### CR'S TAKE

We like it. "These systems put vital information in the driver's sight and don't direct their eyes away from the road like standard gauges and other visual warnings," says Kelly Funkhouser, CR's program manager for vehicle interface testing.



## STOP THE 'DOORING' DANGER



**WHO HAS IT:** SAFE EXIT ASSIST IS ALREADY AVAILABLE ON SOME HYUNDAI, KIA, AND GENESIS VEHICLES.

### WHAT IT IS

"Dooring" is when a parked motorist opens a door directly into the path of a bicyclist, and it's most common when cars parallel park alongside where cyclists ride. A doored cyclist may be injured after colliding with the door itself. Or they could veer into traffic and potentially be struck by a

vehicle, sometimes after falling. To prevent dooring—which in some cities is responsible for close to 20 percent of cycling crashes—some current Audi and Mercedes-Benz vehicles and the upcoming 2022 Lexus NX use built-in sensors to detect oncoming bicycle or vehicle traffic from behind. If it isn't safe to open the door, the

vehicle will sound and/or flash a warning, or keep the door from unlatching. Some Hyundai, Kia, and Genesis vehicles actively prevent rear-seat occupants from exiting the vehicle until it's safe by locking the rear doors. That means added peace of mind for parents with kids out of reach in the back seat.

### HOW IT WORKS

Hyundai (the parent company of Genesis) and Kia's Safe Exit Assist system uses electronic child safety locks and the same bumper-mounted radar that powers other active safety systems. If Safe Exit Assist detects oncoming traffic, it locks the rear doors to prevent an incident. The driver can override this system momentarily with a press of a button, or even deactivate it entirely. Some systems from other automakers display a visual warning for the front and rear doors instead. Lexus says its upcoming NX SUV will also be able to detect traffic—including cyclists—approaching from the rear. If there's a risk of a crash, it will emit visual and audio warnings and disable the front and rear doors' electronic latches.

### CR'S TAKE

We're fans of any safety system that can protect people both inside and outside a vehicle. Some current AEB setups can stop cars when they detect cyclists, a step in the right direction for sharing the road. Features such as Safe Exit Assist go even further. "It's an obvious safety benefit to use a vehicle's existing sensors to create an additional layer of protection for kids in the back seat and cyclists on the road," says Fisher at CR's Auto Test Center.

## PROTECT 'INVISIBLE' PEDESTRIANS



**WHEN IT'S COMING:** THERMAL CAMERAS MAY BE AVAILABLE ON NEW VEHICLES AS SOON AS 2025.

### WHAT IT IS

Unlike vision-based cameras that have problems seeing in poor lighting conditions, thermal cameras are very good at detecting pedestrians in the dark—even when they're not visible to the naked eye. They could be key to reducing pedestrian fatalities on U.S. roads, which are up by 46 percent over the

past decade. In 2020, 6,721 pedestrians were killed in the U.S., according to preliminary data from the Governors Highway Safety Association, which represents state and territorial highway safety offices in the U.S. Typical AEB with pedestrian detection has struggled to "see" in low light. That's a problem because 80 percent of pedestrian

# PREVENT HOT CAR TRAGEDIES



**WHO HAS IT:** THE GENESIS GV70 HAS RADAR-BASED MOTION DETECTION. OTHER HYUNDAI, GENESIS, AND KIA VEHICLES USE ULTRASONIC SYSTEMS.

## WHAT IT IS

On average, 38 children younger than 15 die of heatstroke in parked cars each year, according to the National Safety Council. To prevent these fatalities, multiple vehicle manufacturers have already put rear-seat reminder systems in place. These systems remind drivers to check the back seat after a trip. Others have ultrasonic sensors inside the car that look for motion and sound an alarm if the sensors detect someone left behind in a locked car. Genesis is the first manufacturer to use radar for motion detection, which makes its system sensitive enough to detect the smallest movements of a child's chest as they breathe, says a spokesperson at Hyundai, the parent company of Genesis. It can sense children sleeping in the back seat or pets left in the cargo area. Other manufacturers have expressed interest in using similar technology.

## HOW IT WORKS

If the system senses that a passenger or pet has been left behind or gained access to the vehicle, it will set off a series of visual and audio warnings. Drivers can also sign up to be alerted on their cell phone. The automaker says that Genesis'

radar-based detector is more precise than ultrasonic sensors that are already in place in some vehicles, and can scan the entire car—including the cargo area—for movement. In addition, radar systems are not as susceptible to false activation as some ultrasonic

sensors, which can be tricked by external vibration or noise.

## CR'S TAKE

"Automakers should use every technology available to prevent kids dying in hot cars, and this provides yet another avenue for them," says Emily Thomas, PhD, automotive safety engineer at CR's Auto Test Center. "Many parents assume they would never leave a child behind in a vehicle," she says. "But research shows that anyone can forget a young child in a car." That's especially true if there has been a change in the driver's routine, if the driver is sleep-deprived, or if they're under additional stress. CR supports legislation that would make similar systems standard on all vehicles.



fatalities take place after dark, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says.

## HOW IT WORKS

An infrared heat sensor can detect people in the dark or in low-light situations, even when pedestrians are wearing dark clothing. "Thermal cameras see people as heat," says Chris Posch, director of engineering

for automotive at Teledyne Flir, a company that makes thermal-imaging cameras. The company's internal testing shows that prototype thermal AEB systems can detect pedestrians 100 percent of the time in the darkness, as opposed to existing systems, which fail to see moving pedestrians in low light more often than not. Posch predicts

that automakers will combine data from multiple sensors and cameras to take advantage of their strengths and optimize what a vehicle can "see," a process known as sensor fusion.

## CR'S TAKE

"Pedestrian detection is advancing really quickly, and in the near future we're going to see these systems become

more and more effective at preventing the kind of crash scenarios that happen most frequently," says William Wallace, CR's manager of safety policy. CR is calling for NHTSA to incorporate tests of AEB with pedestrian detection into its star ratings and to mandate minimum requirements for the systems' effectiveness in various conditions.



# LIGHT THE WAY, NOT THE WINDSHIELD



**WHEN IT'S COMING:** SOON, WE HOPE—BUT ADAPTIVE DRIVING BEAM TECHNOLOGY IS NOT YET APPROVED FOR USE IN THE U.S.

## WHAT IT IS

If you've ever had trouble seeing clearly on a dark, winding road or been temporarily blinded by bright headlights from oncoming traffic, you'll appreciate adaptive driving beam

(ADB) headlights. Also called smart headlights, they shine as brightly as traditional high beams and improve a driver's long-range visibility. They also use technology to keep extra glare from shining into the eyes of other drivers. Some systems

can beam a spotlight to draw extra attention to pedestrians or cyclists, or project virtual lane lines on a snow-covered road. A 2019 AAA study showed that ADB lights provided up to 86 percent better illumination in the presence of an oncoming

vehicle without any more glare for oncoming or followed drivers than traditional low beams. Smart headlights are available in other countries, but NHTSA has yet to approve a proposal from 2018 that would allow them in the U.S.



Not all safety improvements require technological leaps. The experts at CR's Auto Test Center say automakers can—and should—make these updates today.



### WIPERS ON? LIGHTS ON.

Headlights make a car more visible in bad

weather, says CR automotive engineer Alex Knizek. We think a vehicle's headlights should automatically turn on when a driver turns on the wipers, just like some vehicles from Ford, Honda, Subaru, and others do. Twenty states already have "wipers on, lights on" laws.



### ROLLAWAY PREVENTION.

A driver shouldn't be able to walk away from a vehicle accidentally left in gear, says Jake Fisher, senior director of auto testing at CR. We believe a car should auto-shift into Park whenever the driver turns off the engine, as some vehicles

already do. CR deducts points from a model's Overall Score if it doesn't automatically shift into Park or engage the brake when the engine shuts off in Drive or Reverse.

### AUTOMATIC ENGINE SHUTOFF.

Leaving a car running in an attached garage can cause carbon

**HOW IT WORKS**

Some ADB headlights use shutters within the headlight assembly to shade oncoming cars, like an umbrella blocking the sun. Others contain multiple LEDs, some of which turn off if a car is approaching or you're following another vehicle, so the light doesn't shine directly at other drivers' windshields or rearview mirrors. Systems with spotlight illumination, such as Lexus' BladeScan, use cameras to detect pedestrians, cyclists, or animals, and direct a beam of light directly at them. A few cars sold in the U.S.—including some Audis—already have ADB hardware installed, but it isn't active. The automaker tells CR that dealerships will activate the feature once regulatory approval is received.

**CR'S TAKE**

"You're getting the benefits of high-beam lights without the glare for everyone else," says Jennifer Stockburger, director of operations at CR's Auto Test Center and head of its headlight test program. She has used ADBs and says they are especially helpful at higher speeds, when low-beams can't light the road far enough ahead for you to react in time.

# KEEP AN EYE ON THE DRIVER



**WHO HAS IT:** GM VEHICLES WITH SUPER CRUISE CAN SLOW DOWN AND CALL FOR HELP IF A DRIVER IS UNRESPONSIVE.

**WHAT IT IS**

Automakers are increasingly adding advanced driver monitoring systems to make sure drivers pay attention to the road. Some can also detect whether a driver is unresponsive—because of either a medical emergency or another problem—and safely slow the vehicle and call for help.

**HOW IT WORKS**

Some vehicles that automate steering, braking, and acceleration use infrared cameras to ensure that a driver's eyes are open and looking at the road; additional sensors monitor whether the driver is having trouble steering or staying in a lane. If the car's built-in software detects these or other signs that the driver has become impaired, it will use its existing

braking and steering automation to stop safely and may call emergency services using a built-in or paired cellular connection. Already, GM vehicles equipped with Super Cruise can slow to a stop in a travel lane, put on hazard lights, and call for help if the driver stops responding. The upcoming 2022 Lexus LS500h's optional Emergency Driving Stop System will be able to pull the car to a stop on the shoulder in some cases.

**CR'S TAKE**

Monitoring should at least be active when both speed and steering assistance are in use, because the driver is at risk of becoming complacent, says Kelly Funkhouser, CR's program manager for vehicle interface testing. But that technology can also be used to detect behavior indicative of a health

problem or intoxication. Based on data collected from NHTSA's National Motor Vehicle Crash Causation Survey from July 2005 to December 2007, an estimated 20,000 drivers annually crashed as a result of a medical emergency, such as a heart attack, seizure, or blackout behind the wheel. Drivers older than 65 are more likely than younger drivers to have medical emergencies while driving. In an August 2020 CR survey of 2,236 American adults, 81 percent of respondents said it was at least somewhat important to them that their next vehicle come with a system that can stop the car and call for help if they are unable to drive. "These systems could combine new and existing technology to help drivers when they need it most," Funkhouser says.

monoxide to seep into the home, putting those inside at risk of exposure. CR supports proposed legislation that would mandate technology to shut engines off automatically if a vehicle is left idling in Park for too long. Ford and GM introduced a shutoff feature in 2012; Toyota added one last year.



**ADJUSTABLE SEAT BELTS.** Some occupants avoid

wearing a seat belt if it doesn't fit comfortably, but some cars lack height-adjustable belts. Simply adding an adjustment feature could save lives. "If your belt is comfortable, it's more likely you'll wear it," says Emily Thomas, PhD,

automotive safety engineer at CR.

**BETTER TIRE WARNINGS.**

Underinflated tires can cause premature wear, waste gas, and worsen handling. Some Nissan vehicles beep the horn when the tires reach the correct pressure during inflation. It's a lot simpler than a pressure gauge.

"All cars should have an alert system to aid proper filling of tires," says Gene Petersen, tire program manager at CR.



**BIGGER VISORS.**

According to a 2017 study published in the journal *Medicine*, the risk of a life-threatening crash is 16 percent greater in

bright sunlight. Kelly Funkhouser, CR's program manager for vehicle interface testing, says the Land Rover Defender comes with an extra visor that sits behind the rearview mirror and really works. "Sun glare is distracting, and more vehicles should come with similar features," she says.



# How to Get the Best Car Insurance



**INSURANCE ISN'T THE** most exciting facet of car ownership, but it's one of the most important. Your policy is designed to protect you from financial calamity in the event of a car crash that may result in costly property damage and medical expenses. Plus, insurance is required by nearly all states. Companies use certain variables when calculating your monthly premium, including your driving record, your credit history, and the overall frequency of traffic-related incidents in the area where you live. So if you have racked up a lot of speeding tickets, have a low credit score, or live in a region with a high rate of crashes that lead to insurance claims, you can expect to pay higher premiums than someone without that baggage. Regardless of your history, CR has strategies you can use as you shop for the best coverage at the lowest price.

## PREMIUMS

In addition to your driving record, insurance premiums can depend on miles driven each year, your car's value, and a variety of personal circumstances, such as education and occupation, says Bob Hunter, director of insurance for the Consumer Federation of America (CFA).

**WHAT TO DO:** Ask your agent if it matters who in your household drives certain vehicles. It might help save on your premiums if the family member with the longest commute drives the least valuable car. Even so, Jack Gillis, CFA's executive director, cautions that teens and other less experienced drivers "should be paired with the vehicles they are most comfortable driving."

## WAYS TO SAVE

CR has found that some insurers increase premiums because they know consumers won't bother switching companies. The practice has been banned in nearly half of states. Collisions and speeding tickets can prompt insurers to raise rates, but they also might be counting on your complacency.

**WHAT TO DO:** Always drive safely, and shop around periodically for better deals. Raising your out-of-pocket deductible also can reduce rates. Hunter says increasing it to \$1,000 from \$500 can cut premiums an average of 11 percent. Be sure to consult our latest insurance company ratings at [CR.org/carinsurance](https://www.consumerreports.org/carinsurance).

## WHEN TO PAY MORE

Nearly all states set minimum limits for liability auto insurance, which covers injuries and property damage in a crash. But those minimums might not be enough for your situation.

**WHAT TO DO:** Experts recommend greater coverage if you have assets—a home or other investments—that could be at risk in a lawsuit. Hunter advises auto liability coverage of \$300,000 for bodily injury and the same for property damage. Homeowners, especially those with significant wealth, should consider an umbrella policy for broader coverage above and beyond their auto and home insurance policy limits. (Note: State minimums are always better than no coverage.)

## WHAT TO SKIP

Collision and comprehensive insurance are a must with any new car, but you can forgo it for an older model as its value declines. That's because you might end up paying more in premiums each year than you would ever recover if the car were totaled.

**WHAT TO DO:** The CFA advises canceling collision and comprehensive insurance when your annual premium for it exceeds 10 percent of your car's value. Consult the car value estimator at [CR.org/tradein](https://www.consumerreports.org/tradein) to see what your vehicle is worth. You can also skip the added premium cost of rental reimbursement coverage if you have a second car you can use.





ELECTRIC VEHICLES

## Ford Mustang Mach-E

Fun to Drive but Reliability Concerns

62

OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 78

**HIGHS** Acceleration, handling, quietness, no tailpipe emissions

**LOWS** Fussy door handles, controls, modest range, long charging times

**POWERTRAIN** 290-hp dual electric motors; 1-speed direct drive; all-wheel drive

**RANGE** 270 miles (extended range)

**PRICE**

\$42,895-\$59,900 base price range  
\$55,800 as tested

**THE MUSTANG MACH-E** is Ford's first dedicated, from-the-ground-up electric vehicle for the U.S. market. Unlike the Mustang muscle car, the Mach-E is a five-passenger SUV. Its combination of style, practicality, and a fun-to-drive nature makes it one of the most enjoyable EVs on the market. Its less-than-stellar Overall Score is largely due to worse-than-average predicted reliability from the Ford brand.

Like most EVs, the Mach-E is quick off the line, even if it has a bit less of a snap-your-head-back sensation than a Tesla Model Y. The version we purchased, with an 88-kilowatt-hour extended-range battery and all-wheel drive, has an EPA-rated 270-mile range. That's decent for an EV but short of the Model Y's 326-mile range, its most direct rival.

Handling is taut and agile, which makes it good fun to

take the Mach-E through fast corners. Although the ride is rather firm and gets choppy on rougher roads, it's not punishing like the Model Y.

Taking a page from the Tesla playbook, the Mach-E dashboard is dominated by a 15.5-inch vertical touch screen that provides for audio, phone, and climate functions. It takes time to get familiar with all the menus, and even popping the power liftgate is a three-step adventure. We don't like the two-step process required to open the Mach-E's door handles, which are a bit fussy and gimmicky to use.

The driving position is roomy, aided by a low center console and well-padded armrests. The front seats are plush, but they would benefit from larger side bolsters and more underleg support.

All Mach-Es come with FCW, AEB with pedestrian detection, BSW, and RCTW.

ELECTRIC VEHICLES

## Polestar 2

An Unimpressive First EV Effort

57

OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 72

**HIGHS** Acceleration, braking, handling, no tailpipe emissions

**LOWS** Ride, controls, cramped interior, modest range, long charging times

**POWERTRAIN** 408-hp dual electric motors; 1-speed direct drive; all-wheel drive

**RANGE** 233 miles

**PRICE**

\$59,900-\$64,900 base price range  
\$62,400 as tested

**THE POLESTAR 2**, a tall hatchback from Volvo's electric vehicle sub-brand, failed to impress with its bone-jarring ride, tight interior, and confusing controls, which more than overshadowed the positives of zippy acceleration and agile handling. Plus, the Polestar 2's EPA-rated driving range of 233 miles is less than the much cheaper Chevrolet Bolt, not to mention Tesla models that get more than 300 miles. It took more than 10 hours to charge on a 240-volt connection.

Much of the usual EV goodness is still present, however. The hatchback scoots off the line when you push hard on the accelerator pedal, sprinting from 0 to 60 mph in 4.4 seconds, admirable for any vehicle. Handling is also impressive, thanks to quick steering and limited body roll. It achieved near sports-car levels of speed through our

avoidance-maneuver test, which simulates swerving quickly to avoid a vehicle or obstacle on the road. The stiff ride is one of its worst aspects, however, with bumps striking through even on relatively smooth highways.

Unlike typical Volvo models, the interior is drab. Much of the fabric and many of the plastic surfaces have a somewhat cheap appearance and feel. The driving position is cramped because of the tall plastic center console, and the tight rear seat lacks thigh support.

The extremely unintuitive controls—which garnered the lowest score we've ever given—are the final dagger. Interacting with the infotainment screen is a distracting affair due to the convoluted menu structure, hidden functions, and confusing icons and text.

FCW, AEB with pedestrian detection, BSW, and RCTW all come standard.



LUXURY MIDSIZED SUVs

## Acura MDX

Great Powertrain,  
Difficult Controls

**61**

 OVERALL  
SCORE

**THE REDESIGNED MDX** is a functional three-row luxury SUV with a potent powertrain and a well-finished cabin priced lower than German rivals. But the distracting infotainment system and Acura's shaky reliability of late should give buyers pause.

All MDXs currently come with a 290-hp V6 that makes lots of usable power and generates invigorating sounds the higher it's revved. But the now larger MDX is about a half-second slower from 0 to 60 mph, and fuel economy regressed by 1 mpg compared with the previous model.

We found the handling mundane out on the road, held back by mushy, artificial steering. But the MDX came alive when pushed to its limits around our track, exhibiting a well-balanced attitude that made it easy to make mid-corner adjustments. The ride is firm but pliant, with only

**ROAD-TEST SCORE 77**

**HIGHS** Smooth powertrain, front- and rear-seat comfort, fit and finish

**LOWS** Controls, braking, must get top trim for some luxury features

**POWERTRAIN** 290-hp, 3.5-liter V6 engine; 10-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

**FUEL** 20 mpg on premium

**PRICE**  
\$46,900-\$60,650 base price range  
\$55,125 as tested

an occasional sharp impact punching through.

The wide front seats are comfortable and supportive, and removing the center seat in the roomy second row lets owners create an aisle between the two outboard positions. The tight third row is low and flat, best suited for small children.

The biggest knock against the MDX is the infotainment system's touchpad. Drivers must press it in a specific place that corresponds with the dashboard screen, and it's tricky to hit the right spot on the first try, requiring a long glance away from the road. Plus, scrolling between menus and within lists is the opposite of conventional touch controllers. At least it includes wireless Android Auto and Apple CarPlay.

FCW, AEB with pedestrian detection, BSW, and RCTW all come standard.

LUXURY SMALL SUVs

## Buick Envision

Lots of Comfort,  
Short on Sport

**78**

 OVERALL  
SCORE

**BUICK HAS ADDRESSED** some of the flaws of the first-generation Envision with this redesign, a comfortable, quiet, mildly upscale SUV that's pleasant to drive.

The only available engine is a 228-hp turbo four-cylinder paired with a nine-speed automatic. We found it smooth and responsive, with enough power for most situations. The transmission works smoothly, marred only by an occasional bumpy downshift. Even with our tested model's optional all-wheel drive, the Envision has a tendency to briefly spin the front tires when taking off quickly from a stop, which can be unnerving in slippery conditions.

The suspension absorbs all but the biggest bumps nicely, and the body remains steady, giving the cabin a relaxed feel. Handling is less impressive because of overly light steering and noticeable body lean

**ROAD-TEST SCORE 79**

**HIGHS** Ride, quietness, braking, infotainment system

**LOWS** Gear selector, low dash vents, front wheelspin

**POWERTRAIN** 228-hp, 2.0-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder engine; 9-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

**FUEL** 23 mpg on regular

**PRICE**  
\$31,800-\$42,200 base price range  
\$43,180 as tested

through corners. There's little wind or road noise, but the engine sounds wheezy at low revs and loud when pushed.

The Envision's interior space is generous for a small SUV, and it's easy to get in and out of, but side and rear visibility are hampered due to the lack of a third side window. The controls are a mixed bag. The touch-screen infotainment system is user-friendly, but the gear selector—which uses a combination of push and pull buttons—is difficult to operate without taking your eyes off the road. Also, the low center dashboard vents can make it challenging to send cool air to the driver's upper body.

The Envision comes standard with FCW, AEB with pedestrian detection, BSW, and RCTW. Getting adaptive cruise control requires choosing the top Avenir trim plus an expensive options package.

**Ratings** > **Touch-Screen Trouble** Confusing controls continue to plague many new vehicles, including three models we tested this month. Also, two new EVs challenge Tesla.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Survey Results		Road-Test Results											Active Safety Features				
		Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	Seat comfort, front / rear	Usability	Noise	Ride	Fit + finish	Routine handling	Avoidance-maneuver speed, mph	Acceleration, 0-60 mph, sec.	Dry braking, 60-0 mph, ft.	Suitcases + duffels/ Cargo volume, cu. ft.	FCW	AEB, pedestrian	AEB, highway	BSW
<b>SUVs \$45,000-\$55,000</b>																			
✓ Lexus NX300 2.0T	82	↑	↓	74	24	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑	49.5	7.5	132	28.5	S	S	S	S
✓ Buick Envision 2.0T	78	↓	↓	79	23	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	55.0	7.5	127	28.0	S	S	0	S
✓ Audi Q5 2.0T	78	↓	↓	83	24	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	52.5	6.8	130	27.0	S	S	0	S
✓ Mercedes-Benz GLC300 2.0T	75	↓	↓	79	22	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	50.0	6.8	132	28.0	S	S	S	S
BMW X3 2.0T	69	↓	↑	92	24	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	50.5	7.7	128	32.0	S	S	0	S
Acura RDX 2.0T	65	↓	↓	82	22	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑	52.0	7.0	127	33.0	S	S	S	0
Infiniti QX50 2.0T	61	↓	↓	77	22	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↓	55.5	7.2	129	30.5	S	S	S	S
Volvo XC60 2.0T	60	↓	↓	79	23	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑	52.0	8.0	124	34.0	S	S	S	S
Lincoln Corsair 2.0T	53	↓	↑	82	23	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	54.5	7.2	128	27.5	S	S	S	S
Cadillac XT4 2.0T	52	↓	↓	78	23	↑ / ↓	↑	↓	↓	↑	↑	55.0	7.6	128	26.5	S	S	0	0
<b>3-ROW SUVs \$55,000-\$75,000</b>																			
✓ Lexus RX350L 3.5L	82	↑	↑	80	20	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	51.5	7.7	136	31.0	S	S	S	S
✓ Buick Enclave 3.6L	76	↓	↓	87	18	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	53.5	7.4	130	48.5	0	0	0	0
Audi Q7 3.0T	65	↓	↑	92	20	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	50.5	7.0	133	35.5	S	S	S	S
Volvo XC90 2.0T	62	↓	↓	84	20	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↓	52.5	7.7	126	35.0	S	S	S	S
Acura MDX 3.5L	61	↓	↑	77	20	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	53.5	7.4	139	37.0	S	S	S	S
Cadillac XT6 3.6L	55	↓	↓	82	18	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	51.0	7.1	134	40.5	S	S	0	0
Lincoln Aviator 3.0T	45	↓	↑	82	19	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	52.0	6.2	138	49.0	S	S	S	S
<b>ELECTRIC VEHICLES \$45,000-\$65,000</b>																			
✓ Tesla Model 3 E	75	↓	↑	82	130	↑ / ↓	↓	↓	↓	↑	↑	55.0	5.3	133	2+2	-	-	-	-
Ford Mustang Mach-E E	62	↓	↑	78	90	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑	52.0	5.3	136	29.5	S	S	S	S
Polestar 2 E	57	↓	↑	72	92	↑ / ↓	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑	55.5	4.4	123	3+0	S	S	S	S
Tesla Model Y E	47	↓	↑	90	121	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑	54.5	4.7	121	25.0	-	-	-	-

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

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

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

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



RECOMMENDED

GREEN CHOICE

☐ Miles-per-gallon equivalent (MPGe).

**A**

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