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JULY 2021

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Living the New Normal

How to stay safe when you travel, see a movie, hang out with your loved ones, and more



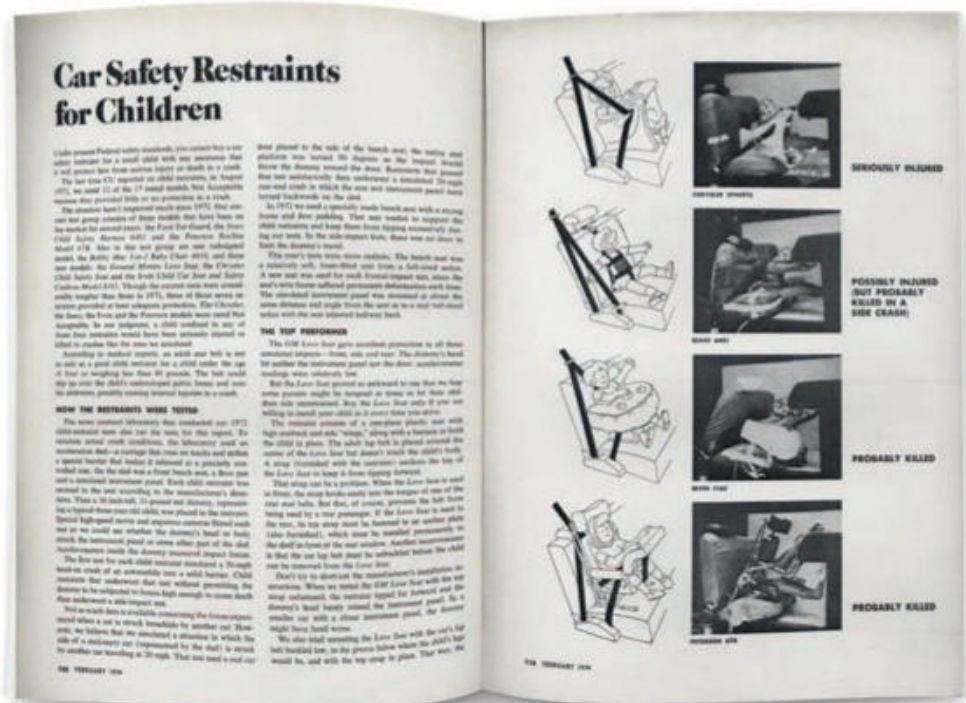
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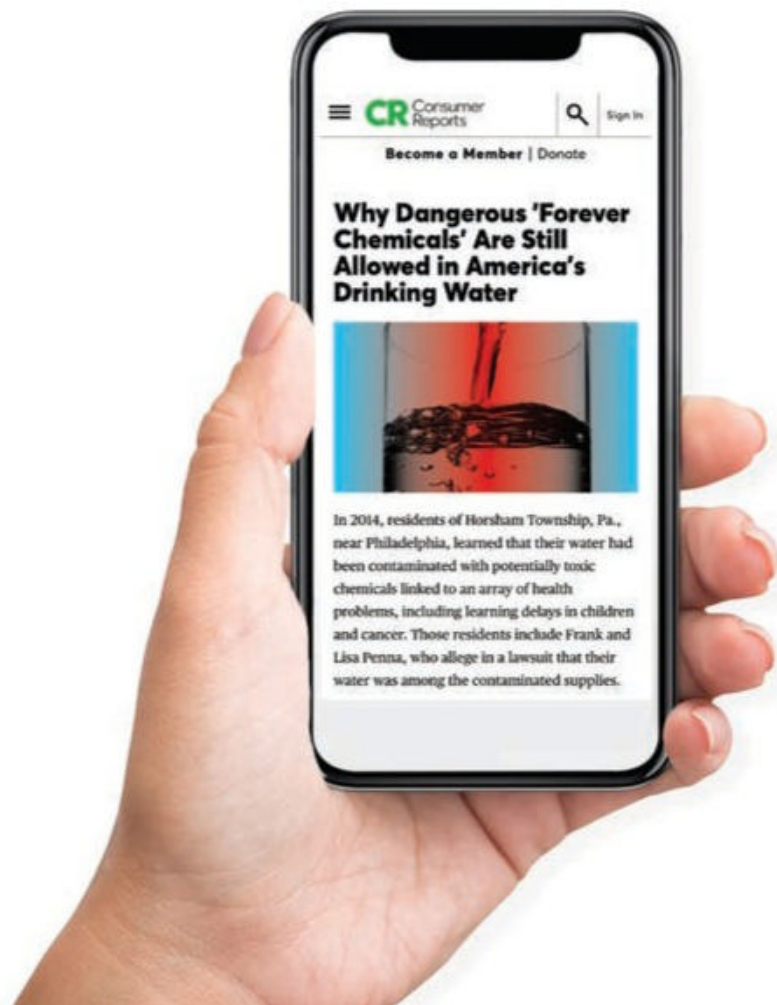
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2021



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What's in Your Credit Score?



IN COLLEGE I once had a summer job at a department store. As a perk, it offered employees a store credit card. Naturally, I was excited, but I recall my father tempering my enthusiasm with a talk on how important it was to build my credit history. I can't say I fully appreciated what he meant at that time, but it was clear that how I used a credit card could

either open or close financial opportunities for me in the future. But that lesson left out an important fact: The big companies that trace my financial history to create my unique credit score can get it wrong.

Your credit score ties directly into so many facets of your life, enabling you to buy a home, get a job, and procure an auto or personal loan. Because of that, you would think that it is a transparent process, understandable to every consumer.

But as we reveal in "How to Fix Your Credit Score," on page 36, this couldn't be further from the truth. For far too many, building up and improving one's credit is a never-ending labyrinth. Even small errors can sometimes have big negative effects on your credit score, putting a temporary halt on achieving your financial dreams, a recent Consumer Reports study found.

Understanding the fluctuations in your credit score, and what you can do to ensure the strongest possible score, is precisely the kind of trusted information you depend on getting as a member of Consumer Reports. Your membership also helps us to advocate for needed changes so that you're not alone in protecting your score.

We will keep working hard to ensure that mistakes by banks and credit bureaus don't harm consumers. With us pushing for reforms to increase equity and transparency in how scores are determined and altered, everyone can thrive in the marketplace and trust that they have the opportunity to build and improve their credit score.

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Keeping Your Data Secure

WHAT'S AT STAKE

So-called dark patterns are website or app designs crafted to trick consumers into taking actions that are not in their best interests. Examples include links and menus that encourage users to spend more money or share more data, or that discourage them from opting out of user agreements or from deleting accounts.

HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

A 2020 CR study uncovered a cluster of these dark patterns: Confusing and nonfunctioning opt-out processes, it found, were preventing people from exercising their rights under the California Consumer Privacy Act, the landmark 2018 privacy law that gives consumers the right to access, delete, and stop the sale of their information.

In March, California's attorney general relied on that study in prohibiting the use of dark patterns to impede a user's choice to stop the sale of their data—a national first.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

When you come across manipulative online practices, report them to CR's new tip line at darkpatternstipline.org.

Fighting for Clean Water

WHAT'S AT STAKE

As reported in our May issue, a joint investigation of America's drinking water by CR and the Guardian US found measurable levels of PFAS chemicals in the vast majority of 120 tap water samples from around the U.S.

Often called "forever chemicals" because they don't break down easily in the environment or in our bodies, PFAS chemicals are used to make everything from nonstick

cookware to stain-resistant fabrics. The compounds can seep into water from factories, landfills, and other sources.

Studies have shown that exposure to PFAS is associated with learning delays, cancer, and other health problems.

HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

CR is working with companies and policymakers to reduce PFAS exposure. These efforts include urging Congress to support a new bipartisan bill, introduced by Reps. Debbie Dingell, D-Mich., and Fred Upton, R-Mich., that would require the Environmental Protection Agency to adopt a drinking water standard for PFAS and declare two specific PFAS chemicals to be hazardous substances. These steps would enable the cleanup of contaminated sites nationwide.

CR is also advocating for California to pass a law banning PFAS in food packaging.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Sign CR's petition, at CR.org/pfas0721, calling on the Biden administration to set federal standards for PFAS levels in tap water.



PROGRESS
UPDATE

In February, spurred on in part by CR's investigations, a House report confirmed what we'd been saying for years: Many popular baby foods contain alarming amounts of heavy metals—and neither baby food companies nor the government has been doing enough about it. Now bills in the House and Senate would require the Food and Drug Administration to establish separate limits for cadmium, inorganic arsenic, lead, and mercury in baby foods. And on April 8, the FDA announced its own plan to reduce heavy metals in baby food, something CR has been asking it to do for more than eight years.

Making Driving Tech Smarter

WHAT'S AT STAKE

In April investigators began probing the cause of a Texas crash in which a 2019 Tesla Model S struck a tree, killing the two people inside. An officer at the scene told CR he was almost certain that no one was in the driver's seat when the car crashed—raising questions about Tesla's Autopilot driver assistance feature, which is not supposed to function without a driver behind the wheel.

A Tesla vice president has acknowledged that adaptive cruise control—one component of Autopilot—had been engaged during the crash. But on-site tests of a separate Tesla by the National Transportation Safety Board found that the other component, Autosteer, "was not available on that part of the road"—suggesting Autopilot could not have been engaged.

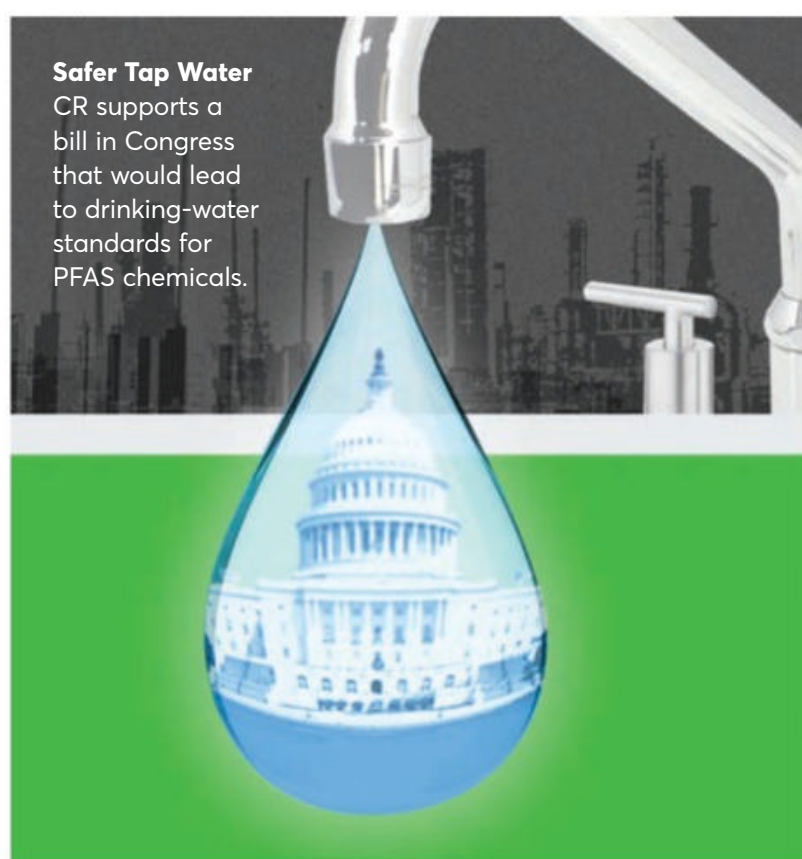
HOW CR HAS YOUR BACK

CR engineers have since shown that a 2020 Tesla Model Y can easily be "tricked" into driving on Autopilot without a driver in place. A video, viewable at CR.org/tesla0721, shows the car driving on our closed test track without signaling that the driver's seat is empty.

CR's evaluation does not provide insight into the Texas crash, but our safety experts say it does show that automakers need to do more to make sure drivers are present and paying attention when using these systems. Every car with active driving assistance should have a system to make sure drivers are present and looking at the road—as, for example, General Motors' Super Cruise system does.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Check out our latest guide to cars with advanced safety systems at CR.org/safety0721.



Safer Tap Water

CR supports a bill in Congress that would lead to drinking-water standards for PFAS chemicals.



Our May cover story, **“Cleaning Secrets for Every Room,”** offered smart strategies for making those neglected corners sparkle, helping readers tackle everything from gunked-up kitchen appliances to smelly bathroom mildew. To share your best cleaning tips, go to [CR.org/clean0721](https://www.consumerreports.org/clean0721).

THANK YOU so very much for featuring a man on the cover of the May issue doing the spring cleaning. You certainly know how to please the ladies.

–Kyra Teis, Schenectady, NY

THANK YOU, CR! I didn’t even know my dishwasher had a filter. I located it, and it was full of gunk.

–ChrisKC, via Instagram

“CLEANING SECRETS for Every Room” highly scores the Dyson V11 Outsize stick vacuum, but last year CR took [Dyson]

off the recommended list for reliability issues. So is CR recommending Dyson or not?

–Shelly Scott, via Facebook

EDITOR’S NOTE We’re not, and here’s why: Though the Dyson V11 cordless stick vacuum received an Excellent rating in our lab tests for cleaning carpets, bare floors, and more, we don’t currently recommend Dyson cordless stick vacuums because of their Fair reliability rating. Brands that get a Fair or Poor predicted reliability rating are not eligible to be recommended by CR. In fact, at this time, CR does not recommend any cordless stick vacuums because of the generally high incidence of problems with them reported by our members. The reported

problems include rechargeable batteries that diminish over time or lose their ability to hold a charge at all.

A COUPLE OF suggestions regarding “De-Crud Your Robotic Vacuum” (Insights, May 2021): Having a particularly dirty environment (dog, sand, dust), we’ve discovered ways to keep our Eufy vacuum clean that your article doesn’t mention. For the roller brushes, we supplement the manufacturer’s provided comb by using a cheap hair comb, which gets the small stuff out of the bristles. To keep the vacuum’s filter from getting clogged up, we use compressed air to blow out the dust.

–Gary Davis, Ocracoke, NC



PESTICIDE-FREE
LAWNS

REGARDING “A Lush Lawn Without Pesticides” (May 2021): There’s a faster, more profound way to stop pollution due to lawns. Stop planting them. The reduction in pollution is exponential. We replaced our 15 acres of lawn with wildflowers suitable for the Michigan climate. They’re perennial. The [use of] 2,4-D and fertilizer you wrote about was stopped. Weekly mowing, pesticides, and fertilizer all stopped. Our small pond was healthier; no more chemicals in that, either. We could literally sit back and smell the flowers. If we’re serious about our habits to reduce climate change, we could start right now. Wind, solar, and electric cars will take a while.

–Ben Myers, Wellington, FL

AS A CERTIFIED Master Gardener, I think your article does not go far enough. Lush green lawns do nothing positive for the environment, nor do they benefit the pollinators upon which we depend for much of our food. Leave swaths of lawn for children and pets to roam. Fill the rest with native trees, shrubs, and perennials. They require very little maintenance and watering once established, and will thrill you with the variety of insects, birds, and small animals that will delight in your yard.

–John Patrick Colatch, via Facebook

ALL GOOD SUGGESTIONS in your article. However, you missed a giant alternative: artificial grass. Its many advantages: no watering, no mowing, no fertilizers, no pesticides, and it is a good solution in sunny and shady areas!

–P. Armstrong, Toronto, Ontario

ICONS: ELIAS STEIN



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

WRITE

THANKS FOR the article on green lawns! We compost food waste and tree trimmings and have been adding grass clippings from a nearby school. We doubt, but aren't sure, that they use fertilizer, pesticides, or herbicides, but if they do, can those chemicals negatively affect the resulting compost?
 –Steve Berg, Solvang, CA

EDITOR'S NOTE A few kinds of herbicide (most notably picloram, clopyralid, and aminopyralid) are still detectable when applied to grass or yard clippings and then composted. You may want to check with the school to make sure products with those ingredients aren't being used on the grass, because they could hinder the growth of many plants, including some veggies.

FINALLY, a wake up call about fertilizers used for our lawns that might be harmful. If pets eat grass that has chemicals in it, can they get cancer?
 –Vincent White, Del Sur, CA

EDITOR'S NOTE The link between pesticide exposure

in pets and cancer is unclear, though a few studies have found that lawn chemicals might be associated with higher risk of certain types of cancer in dogs. What we do know is that pets can be poisoned by pesticides. More than 15 percent of all suspected dog poisonings reported to the Animal Poison Control Center between 2005 and 2014 involved lawn and garden chemicals, according to a 2020 study. If you do use them, follow label instructions on how long to keep pets away from treated areas.



CLEANER DRINKING WATER

“HOW SAFE IS Our Drinking Water?” (May 2021) did not mention refrigerator water filters. Do any refrigerator water filters pass CR's tests for lead or for PFAS and lead?
 –Barbara Rohlf, Westford, MA

EDITOR'S NOTE CR does not currently test refrigerator filters, and we did not include them in this project because they are often specific to individual refrigerator models. Some refrigerator filters do reduce lead and PFAS. Check on the filter replacement packaging that the filter has been independently tested by a lab such as WQA or NSF International and certified to reduce lead and/or PFOA/PFOS.



COMFY CARS

I APPRECIATED “What Makes a Car Really Comfortable” (May 2021), because I consider comfort an important ingredient



MEASURING WIFI SPEEDS AT HOME

Regarding WiFi routers (“Better WiFi for Way Less,” May 2021), are there any suggested methods or tools to identify locations with a weak signal? If there are ways to do that, then a change in the network (such as relocation of an existing router or upgrading a router) could also be tested to optimize signal in a house.
 —Jim Kasper, Mill Valley, CA

EDITOR'S NOTE One of the easiest ways to assess how well WiFi performs around your home is by using a free speed-measuring service like fast.com. First, connect your laptop or smartphone to your router using WiFi and position it next to the router, then run a speed test (at fast.com, it runs one automatically). This will show you your best-case-scenario speed. You can then move around with your device to see how fast (or slow) WiFi is in different locations around your home. Also pay attention to the WiFi signal strength bars as you move from spot to spot.

to owner satisfaction. But I was disappointed that you didn't include an economy class vehicle. My ideal car would be used and easy to maintain, get mileage up into the 40s on the open road, and score well on comfort, including the back seat. I have owned small cars that came close, but none that hit it out of the park.
 –Bob Kellum, Tipton, MI

EDITOR'S NOTE Your wish list underscores why we didn't include small cars in our list: By definition, they tend to compromise on key comfort elements due to their size. For small sedans that are relatively comfortable, we favor the Nissan Sentra and Toyota Corolla. Among small hybrids, take a look at the Toyota Prius and Prius Prime.

I AM a sales rep, and 95 percent of my travel is by car. My key to comfort is how a car treats you when you drive up to 500 miles a day for three or four days a week, week after week. When you drive as many miles as I do, comfort is a safety and an economic issue. When I drove a Hyundai Sonata Hybrid Limited, it was easy to drive 450 to 550 miles a day. Now that the company downsized me to a Hyundai Hybrid Ioniq SE, I stop at 450 miles because I'm beat. Fleet managers everywhere: Read this article!
 –Jim Riggs, via CR.org

EDITOR'S NOTE Long-haul driving is different from when you're just driving around town. Seat comfort, driving position, ride quality, and noise levels all matter as the miles and hours add up. In our tests, the Ioniq delivered 52 mpg overall, compared with 44 mpg overall for the Sonata Hybrid. The difference in annual fuel costs is just \$105, based on driving 12,000 miles a year. For that money, we prefer the Sonata.

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/company/
consumer-reports

What We're Testing in Our Labs ...

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

Pressure Washers

WE TESTED: 33 models
WE TEST FOR: Power, efficiency, and versatility when cleaning a range of surfaces, including outdoor furniture, decking, and concrete walkways.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 62
Range: 45-71

BEST GAS MODEL
Simpson MS60763-S
\$330

71
OVERALL SCORE



BEST ELECTRIC MODEL
Greenworks GPW2700
\$350

66
OVERALL SCORE



GREAT ELECTRIC FOR LESS
Sun Joe SPX3000
\$160

61
OVERALL SCORE



Cast-Iron Frying Pans

WE TESTED: 23 coated and uncoated pans
WE TEST FOR: How evenly the skillet heats up and how well a model can bake cornbread and sear a strip steak. Plus, how easy it is to clean.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 70
Range: 51-83

TOP UNCOATED SKILLET
Butter Pat Joan
\$295

83
OVERALL SCORE



TOP ENAMEL-COATED SKILLET
Tramontina 80131/066DS
\$70

80
OVERALL SCORE



UNCOATED BARGAIN
Artisanal Kitchen Supply Pre-Seasoned (Bed Bath & Beyond)
\$25

77
OVERALL SCORE



Ask Our Experts

What's the difference between enamel-coated and uncoated cast-iron pans?



A CAST-IRON PAN with enamel coating doesn't need to be "seasoned" with vegetable oil to prevent rusting, while an uncoated cast-iron pan does, says CR tester Tara Casaregola. Plus, the smoother enamel surface is easier to clean. But be aware that enamel-coated pans can't be used on a campfire and can chip over time if dropped or hit with a heavy utensil. (Replace a chipped pan to be sure no bits of enamel get in your food.) Both types retain heat well enough to sear steaks, brown scallops, and bake cornbread. In fact, every cast-iron pan we've tested, coated or uncoated, aced our searing test—though the pricey Butter Pat Joan pan, above, turns out the best cornbread.

For the latest ratings of these and other product categories, readers with a Digital or All Access membership can go to CR.org.

Window Air Conditioners

WE TESTED: 21 models
WE TEST FOR: How quickly a window unit can cool a room, how accurately it cools to a set temperature, how noisy it is during use, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
 Median: 73
 Range: 52-87

TOP-RATED FOR MEDIUM-SIZED ROOMS (250 TO 400 SQ. FT.)

Midea U-Shaped MAW08V1QWT
 \$360

87
 OVERALL SCORE



SMART PICK FOR SMALL ROOMS (100 TO 300 SQ. FT.)

Frigidaire FFRE063WAE
 \$270

75
 OVERALL SCORE



COOL CHOICE FOR LARGE ROOMS (350 TO 650 SQ. FT.)

Whirlpool WHAW101BW
 \$340

74
 OVERALL SCORE



Gaming Laptops

WE TESTED: 90 models
WE TEST FOR: Performance while running applications and 3D games, quality of display, ergonomics, battery life, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
 All Tested Laptops:
 Median: 66, Range: 21-87

POWERFUL PERFORMANCE BUT SHORT BATTERY LIFE

MSI GE75 Raider
 \$1,350

72
 OVERALL SCORE



SPEEDY & LONG BATTERY LIFE

Asus ROG Zephyrus GA401QM-211.ZG14
 \$1,500

72
 OVERALL SCORE



GREAT VALUE FOR GAMERS

HP Pavilion Gaming 16-A0032DX
 \$900

69
 OVERALL SCORE



Blood Pressure Monitors

WE TESTED: 28 models
WE TEST FOR: Accuracy of readings, comfort while using, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
ARM
 Median: 77, Range: 55-86
WRIST
 Median: 59, Range: 19-79

TOP-RATED OVERALL
Omron Platinum BP5450 (Amazon)
 \$81

86
 OVERALL SCORE



SUPER-ACCURATE BARGAIN
iHealth KN550BT
 \$40

78
 OVERALL SCORE



GOOD PORTABLE WRIST MODEL
Equate (Walmart) 4500 Series bp3kc1-3ewm
 \$40

78
 OVERALL SCORE



Streaming Media Devices

WE TESTED: 18 models
WE TEST FOR: Picture quality of streaming video and how easy it is to set up and use every day. Also, how user-friendly the interface is for tasks like navigating menus.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
 Median: 65
 Range: 46-76

TOP QUALITY & FEATURES
Nvidia Shield TV Pro
 \$200

76
 OVERALL SCORE



NICE PRICE, PLUS HEADPHONES
Roku Ultra 2020
 \$95

73
 OVERALL SCORE



GREAT FOR ALEXA USERS
Amazon Fire TV Cube
 \$120

70
 OVERALL SCORE



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

COMING NEXT MONTH Chainsaws & More



My A/C isn't cooling well, and it's the busy season for repairs. Can I troubleshoot it myself?

ABSOLUTELY. WE ASKED air conditioner pros and CR test engineers to identify the most common problems that crop up with window and central air conditioners and what consumers can do about them. The most common problem—a dirty filter—affects the performance of window units and central A/C systems, and you can clean or replace the filters yourself. A clogged filter restricts airflow, reducing the ability to cool the air.

For central A/C systems, check the manual for when to swap in a new filter. (In CR's tests, filters last anywhere from three to 12 months.) If you have pets (whose fur can clog filters more quickly) or your system is running constantly, you'll need to

change filters more often. Vacuum the vents (where air cycles in and out) and check the outdoor compressor to make sure the area around it is clear: For adequate airflow, the compressor needs at least 2 feet of space between it and any plants or objects, and 5 feet between the top of the unit and any tree branches above.

Window units typically have a reusable filter that you can clean with a quick vacuuming (for heavy debris) before washing it with soap and water. Then check the seals where the unit meets the window. "Most new window units come with insulation panels to place over the plastic adjustable side panels," says senior CR tester Chris Regan. "But to maximize efficiency, use weather stripping around the unit." If none of these moves work, compare the cost of a repair visit with a new window unit. If your air conditioner is more than 8 years old, it's probably time to replace it. Turn to page 11 for some top picks for every room size.

I haven't used my car in months. What should I check before hitting the road?

"CARS WERE DESIGNED to move. When they sit still, parts can become rusted, batteries drain, and critters can move in," says John Ibbotson, CR's chief mechanic. He advises inspecting a few things yourself but adds, "If your first trip is going to be a long one, have it serviced by a pro."

To start, check the tire pressure. The proper inflation level is on a sticker in the driver's doorjamb. Look under the hood, inspecting hoses and belts for cracks and leaks. Scan for rodent damage such as chew marks, including inside the air filter box. If the oil hasn't been changed for six months or longer, have it replaced. Check the car battery and clean off any corrosion around the terminals. If the car is slow to start, use a trickle charger to replenish the battery. For a car that won't start, AAA members can request a jump-start or battery replacement. (See our battery ratings on page 62.) Once you move the car, look at the parking space for signs of a leak. On the road, watch for any warning lights. If your brakes are noisy, it's probably just rust that will

polish off after a few drives. If the brakes are sticky or unresponsive, though, have a mechanic look at them.

Can I use my smartwatch to check my blood pressure?

THOUGH CR HAS NOT yet tested smartwatches and fitness trackers for the accuracy of this feature, we reviewed the medical literature on them and spoke with independent experts, who told us that the technologies used by these devices might not match the accuracy of a more traditional home monitor, especially one that uses a cuff on the upper arm.

A traditional monitor measures blood pressure by sensing the pressure exerted by blood on an artery. That's what's happening when the cuff tightens and then relaxes around your arm, says CR tester Susan Booth. Smartwatches and fitness trackers, on the other hand, gather other data from your body through an optical sensor (placed against your skin) that emits and measures reflected light to approximate your blood pressure. However, this technology is still fairly new, and it's unclear how accurate it can be. While wearables are likely to get better over time, for the best accuracy our testers say to stick with upper-arm-cuff devices that perform well in CR's tests. (Check out a few smart picks on page 11.)



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

THE BENEFITS OF VACUUM SEALING YOUR FOOD

VACUUM SEALERS ARE practical little machines that save you money by keeping your food fresher longer (especially if you like to buy in bulk and have plenty of freezer space). They work by extracting air from a bag and fusing the sides together along a heated strip to create an airtight seal—something you’ll appreciate if you’ve ever frozen an expensive piece of meat only to find it covered with a thin layer of ice crystals. (That freezer burn doesn’t render the meat unsafe, but it can change the meat’s taste and texture.) The vacuum bags are also perfect for sous vide cooking, in which food that’s been sealed in a plastic bag gets dropped straight into water to cook.

Does vacuum sealing extend the storage life of food? “Past CR tests have shown the answer to be a resounding yes,” says CR test engineer Bernie Deitrick. And our recent tests of seven models found that all rated



VERY EASY TO USE

✓ **Hamilton Beach NutriFresh 78220**
\$120

83

OVERALL SCORE

Excellent at sealing dry food (such as an uncooked chicken breast or steak) but only Very Good or Good at sealing moist food (think meat in a marinade).

To help choose the right machine for your kitchen, consider size. Larger models, such as the FoodSaver and

Hamilton Beach models shown here, are bigger because they store a roll of plastic, called a bag roll, that you cut to size. Those without onboard bag roll storage, such as the Anova and NutriChef below, are small enough to stash in a drawer. Prices for replacement rolls

or bags vary: A batch of 44 quart-sized replacement bags for FoodSaver models costs \$21 on the brand’s website, while 100 generic quart-sized bags cost \$16 on Amazon. We tested two generic brands with all the sealers in our tests, and all worked just fine.

THE ULTIMATE FOOD SEALER



87

OVERALL SCORE

✓ **FoodSaver VS3180 Multi-Use** \$180

GREAT BANG FOR YOUR BUCK



82

OVERALL SCORE

Ⓢ **Anova Culinary ANVS01-US00** \$80

SMALL & SPEEDY



76

OVERALL SCORE

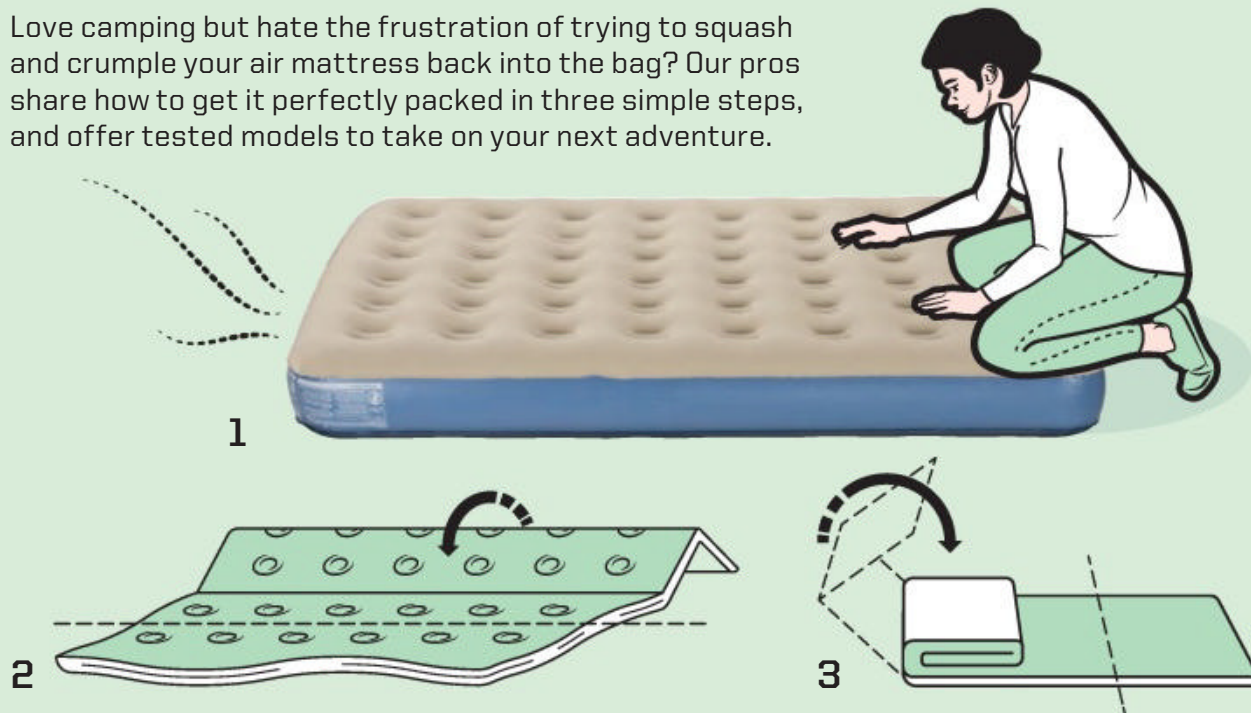
✓ **NutriChef PKVS25BK** \$60

ILLUSTRATIONS: RODRIGO DAMATI

CR SMART SOLUTION

DEFLATE AND FOLD YOUR AIR MATTRESS FASTER

Love camping but hate the frustration of trying to squash and crumple your air mattress back into the bag? Our pros share how to get it perfectly packed in three simple steps, and offer tested models to take on your next adventure.



STEP 1

If your air mattress has a built-in reverse air pump (typically found only on more expensive double-height mattresses), you can flip a switch to auto deflate your bed. But with most single-height mattresses, you'll need to deflate it yourself by opening the plug and pushing the air out manually, starting at the opposite end.

STEP 2

Once your mattress is deflated, fold the outer edges lengthwise, back and forth like an accordion toward the middle. This action helps push out any air left inside the mattress. When you're done, the mattress should be a smaller, skinnier rectangle.

STEP 3

Go to the opposite end of the plug and roll toward the end with the plug, or fold it about a foot and a half inward at a time. Once you reach the other end, the mattress should be small enough to fit neatly back into its box or bag for storage. (We prefer models that come in a bag rather than a box, because bags are much easier to carry and repack.)

Single-Height Air Mattresses

The Aerobed and Coleman models below took 2 minutes to deflate in our tests; the Intex took 7 minutes but costs much less.



✓ **Aerobed Classic Inflatable**
\$125

81
OVERALL SCORE



✓ **Coleman QuickBed Single High**
\$40

72
OVERALL SCORE



Intex Classic Downy
\$15

65
OVERALL SCORE

PHOTOS, BOTTOM LEFT TO RIGHT: FORD MOTOR COMPANY; DODGE; FORD MOTOR COMPANY; VOLKSWAGEN; CONSUMER REPORTS; TOYOTA; HONDA

CR Time Traveler TRUCKS



1917 The Ford Motor Company produces its first-ever truck, known as the Model TT. It has a reinforced chassis and rear axle, so it can haul up to 1 ton of weight in its truck bed.



1946 Dodge makes the Power Wagon, a modified military truck with a 1-ton body and steel cab, we report. It costs about \$500 more than its main competitor, the civilian Jeep.



1952 Volkswagen offers a unique-looking pickup truck version of its popular passenger van.



1948 The first Ford F-Series trucks (the predecessor of the popular Ford F-150) hit the market with eight models, from the ½-ton-capacity F-1 to the 3-ton-capacity F-8.

1955 CR tests the Chevrolet Carryall: a station wagon built on a truck chassis. It fits eight people—but we say it has a “sloppy design” and poor handling.



CR MONEY SAVER

WHAT GROCERY DELIVERY SERVICES COST YOU

ORDERING GROCERIES ONLINE for home delivery can save you time and effort—but it can come at a high price. Some grocery services charge as much as \$10 for delivery per order, and that can add up quickly if you order frequently. A delivery subscription plan can help you pay less for the convenience—but to see whether you actually save any money by signing up (rather than paying a delivery fee each time you order), you'll need to do a little math, as well as compare the different services that are available to you.

First, figure out the delivery fee you typically pay each time you order without a subscription plan, and estimate how many times you typically order

groceries in a given month. You'll also need to assess the amount of money you tend to spend on a single grocery order, because many services have a minimum order requirement of \$35 or more.

For instance, Instacart delivery fees are normally \$3.99 per order without a subscription plan, but an Instacart Express

membership costs \$99 per year. So you'll break even on the annual membership fee after 25 orders. Over a year of use, that means you'd need to order about twice a month or more to save money with an Instacart membership. If you tend to order less frequently than that, you're better off just paying the regular per-order delivery fees.

To help you calculate the best delivery deal based on your own food-shopping habits, we rounded up the typical fees of a few popular grocery delivery services (see above) and show you roughly how many times a year you'd need to order groceries before a subscription plan will start saving you money.

	YEARLY FEE	Delivery Fee per Order Without Service*	Orders Needed to Break Even	SUBSCRIPTION PLAN DETAILS
freshdirect DeliveryPass	\$129	\$5.99 to \$7.99	17 to 22	Minimum order of \$30. No delivery fee on orders of \$30 or more.
instacartexpress	\$99	\$3.99	25	Minimum order of \$35. No delivery fee on orders of \$35 or more.
Shipt Everyday	\$99	\$10.00	10	No delivery fee on orders of \$35 or more. If the order is less than \$35, members pay \$7 for delivery.
STOP&SHOP. GO Pass, Any Day	\$119	\$6.95	17	Minimum order of \$60. No delivery fee on orders of \$100 or more. For orders that meet the minimum (\$60) but are less than \$100, GO Pass members pay \$3 for delivery.
STOP&SHOP. GO Pass, Midweek	\$55	\$6.95	8	Same as above, but the delivery must be on a Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday.
Walmart	\$98	\$9.95	10	Minimum order of \$35. No delivery fee on orders of \$35 or more.

*Typical per-order delivery fees are for regular non-member orders that meet the minimum purchase amount. FreshDirect's delivery fee for non-members varies by location. Stop & Shop's typical delivery fee shown here is for delivery orders of \$100 or more; the typical delivery fee for orders under \$100 is \$9.95.



1970 We put a 3,100-pound camper box on four popular pickups and find major safety concerns. All four—a Chevy, a Dodge, a Ford, and an International—fail our braking tests.

1999 CR furnishes a guide to navigating common truck towing scenarios, from boats that weigh a few thousand pounds to a 7,000-pound Airstream trailer.



2021 The Ridgeline earns the top spot in our compact truck ratings. At 20 mpg overall, it's the most fuel-efficient truck that's not diesel- or hybrid-powered.



1981 The Ford F-Series truck becomes the best-selling vehicle in the U.S.



2007 CR tests six full-sized crew-cab pickups and recommends the Toyota Tundra SR5 TRD for its powerful, responsive powertrain and fantastic towing capacity.

✓ **2021 Honda Ridgeline**
\$36,490 to \$43,920

80 OVERALL SCORE



CR COOK-OFF

THE BEST WAY TO MAKE HOT WINGS AT HOME

THERE'S NO QUESTION that hot wings made in a deep fryer are delicious—but aside from being not-so-healthy, deep frying can be laborious and leaves you with a lot of oil to clean up. So CR staffers went on a quest to find the easier—but still tasty—way to make chicken wings at home. We tried 16 cooking techniques, using a kitchen range, a gas grill, an air fryer, a multi-cooker, and a slow cooker. Then we pitted the methods against each other in a tournament-style taste test (see at right, where we show the winners of each round). We looked for golden-browned, crispy skin on the outside with tender, juicy meat inside, and sauce that stays on the skin—real, deep-fryer-like results.

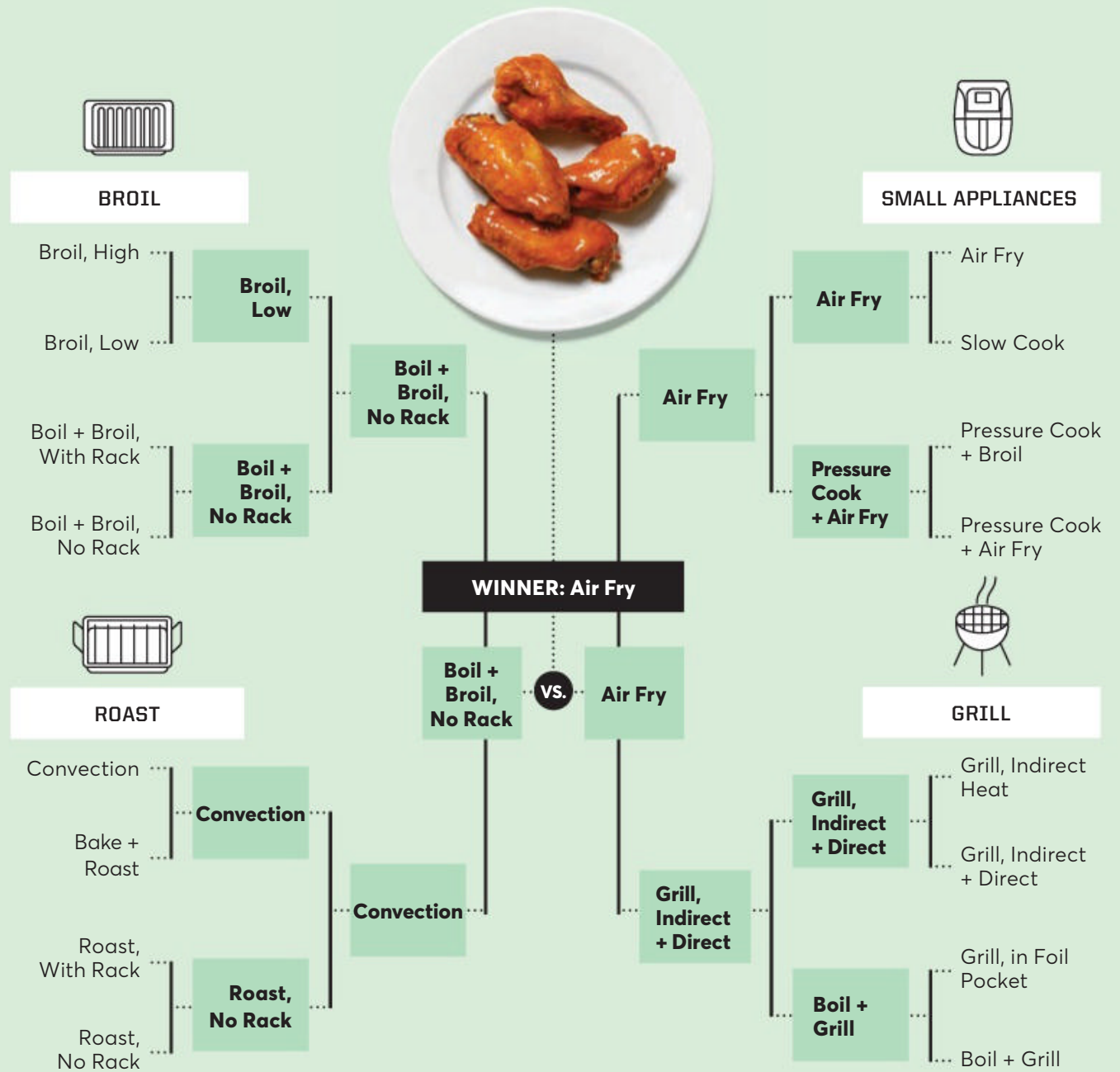


PHOTO: STEPHEN YANG

SAVVY SHOPPER

HOW TO FIND A BIG-SCREEN TV ON A BUDGET

LOOKING FOR A big screen that won't break the bank? It can be difficult to find one that offers the picture quality and overall experience you want without costing over \$1,000. An analysis of more than three years of CR's TV ratings (from March 1, 2018, through March 1, 2021) revealed that

a very low price—for example, a 65-inch set priced at around \$450—often doesn't turn out to be a good deal because of poor performance and quality. In fact, our statisticians have noticed that as the average price of TVs drops, so does the average brand ratings (see our chart at

right): A number of the most expensive TVs from LG, Samsung, and Sony earn top ratings in our tests, and the lowest-priced sets, such as some we've tested from RCA, earn the lowest ratings.

But here's the good news: You can still find an affordable big-screen TV that rates well if you look

in the right places. Start your search by **checking our ratings for those brands that offer sets at prices around \$1,000 or slightly lower but, on average, still get a Very Good rating in our tests.** For example, CR's testing shows that models from somewhat newer, low-cost brands, most

notably TCL and Hisense, have been improving in picture quality recently—particularly in their upper-tier models, such as TCL's 65-inch 6-Series, which offers a lot of bang for your buck (see the "sweet spot" model at right).

But keep in mind that, according to our testers, performance

THE WINNING METHOD

Air-Fried Wings

As you can see, air-frying came out on top: “It’s the next best thing to deep-fried wings,” says CR staffer and cook Perry Santanachote. Air fryers circulate hot air in the same way that convection ovens do, but they allow for more even, faster browning. To make our wings, we set the air fryer to 400° F for 20 minutes, then tossed them in hot sauce in a bowl. Want to give it a try? These three air fryers all perform well and are a cinch to clean.



TOP OF THE HEAP

✓ **Gourmia GAF686 Digital**
\$90

80

OVERALL SCORE

5/5 CONTROLS

4/5 NOISE

4/5 CLEANING



LARGE CAPACITY

✓ **NuWave 6-Qt 37001**
\$130

75

OVERALL SCORE

5/5 CONTROLS

3/5 NOISE

4/5 CLEANING



FOR SMALL KITCHENS

✓ **Ninja AF100**
\$89

71

OVERALL SCORE

5/5 CONTROLS

3/5 NOISE

4/5 CLEANING

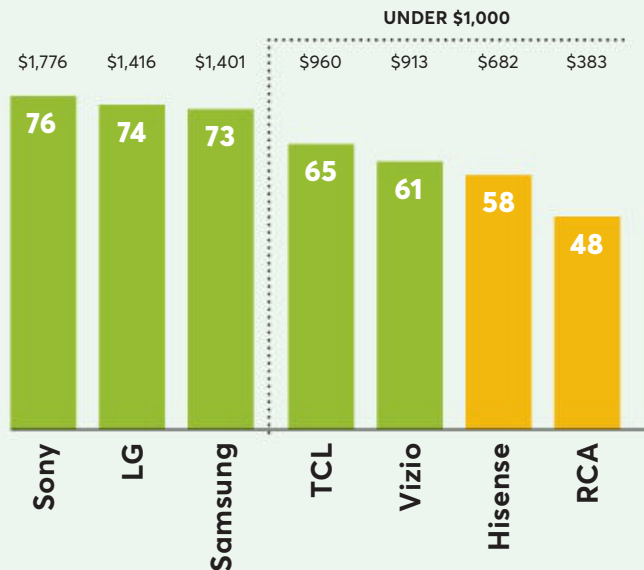
THE RUNNER-UP RECIPE

Boiled, Then Broiled Wings on a Sheet Pan

Don’t have space for yet another countertop appliance? Our second-favorite recipe requires the use of only your range: First, preheat the oven to 450° F—the equivalent of a low broil. Then boil a pot of salty water (like you’re cooking pasta). Add the wings to the pot and reduce the heat slightly, letting the pot simmer for 7 minutes. Drain the wings and dry them well with a paper towel before placing them directly on a metal sheet pan (line the pan with foil first for easy cleanup) with the skin side down. Put the wings in the oven for 25 minutes, then flip them and return them to the oven for 5 to 10 minutes more, until the skin is golden and crisp. To finish, toss the wings in butter and your favorite hot sauce until evenly coated.

Average Price of 60-Inch and Larger Big-Screen TVs by Brand

can vary by model within a brand, so it’s still crucial to research the specific model you’re interested in. For example, some of TCL’s 4- and 5-Series sets, priced under \$700, earn significantly lower ratings than TCL’s 65R635 (between \$950 and \$1,100), so they don’t offer the same value.



A BUDGET-FRIENDLY SWEET SPOT

TCL 65R635
\$950 to \$1,100

64 OVERALL SCORE

About the chart: Our statisticians calculated the average prices and average Overall Scores for sets we’ve tested from leading TV brands over the last three years. We test flagship models and some expensive, high-end sets. There’s often a big difference in price between the least and most expensive sets offered by major brands such as Sony, which sells pricier OLED TVs.

PRIVACY UPDATE

THE PERSONAL INFO INSTAGRAM COLLECTS—AND HOW TO LIMIT IT

INSTAGRAM, the social media app owned by Facebook, is great for sharing photos, but you may not realize that the app is collecting more data from you than just your smartphone’s camera roll. In fact, Instagram may be gathering private contact info from your phone’s address book and text messages log, as well as tracking your physical location. If you want to continue to use Instagram but also limit the information it collects from you, there are settings you can change (if you know where to look). Here: the private intel you may already be sharing—and how to put an end to that.

YOUR PHONE CONTACTS

When you first signed up for Instagram, you may have granted it access to your phone’s contacts list, call log, and SMS text message history. Instagram says it uses this information “to improve its products,” but the details of what the company does with your data are unclear. One report from researchers at Princeton and Northeastern universities suggested that Facebook gleaned information from users’ address books in order to target their friends with personalized advertising.

Take Action

ON THE INSTAGRAM APP:

Go to your own profile > Open the menu in the top right > Settings > Account > Contacts Syncing > Switch the toggle off. And then ...

ON A COMPUTER BROWSER:

Log in to Instagram > Click on your profile picture in the top right to open the menu > Settings > Manage Contacts > Delete All.

YOUR PRECISE LOCATION

Instagram can track your device location (even when you’re not using the app) and can use that data to tailor ads to you on Instagram and on your Facebook profile. If you don’t want marketers to pinpoint your whereabouts, turn off Instagram’s access to your device’s GPS. Know that doing so will stop Instagram from automatically suggesting location tags when you post, but you can always manually enter a location tag instead.

Take Action

ON AN IPHONE: Go to the phone’s Settings > Privacy > Location Services > Instagram. Then select Never.

ON AN ANDROID PHONE: Go to the phone’s Settings > Location > App permissions to location > Instagram. Then select Deny.*

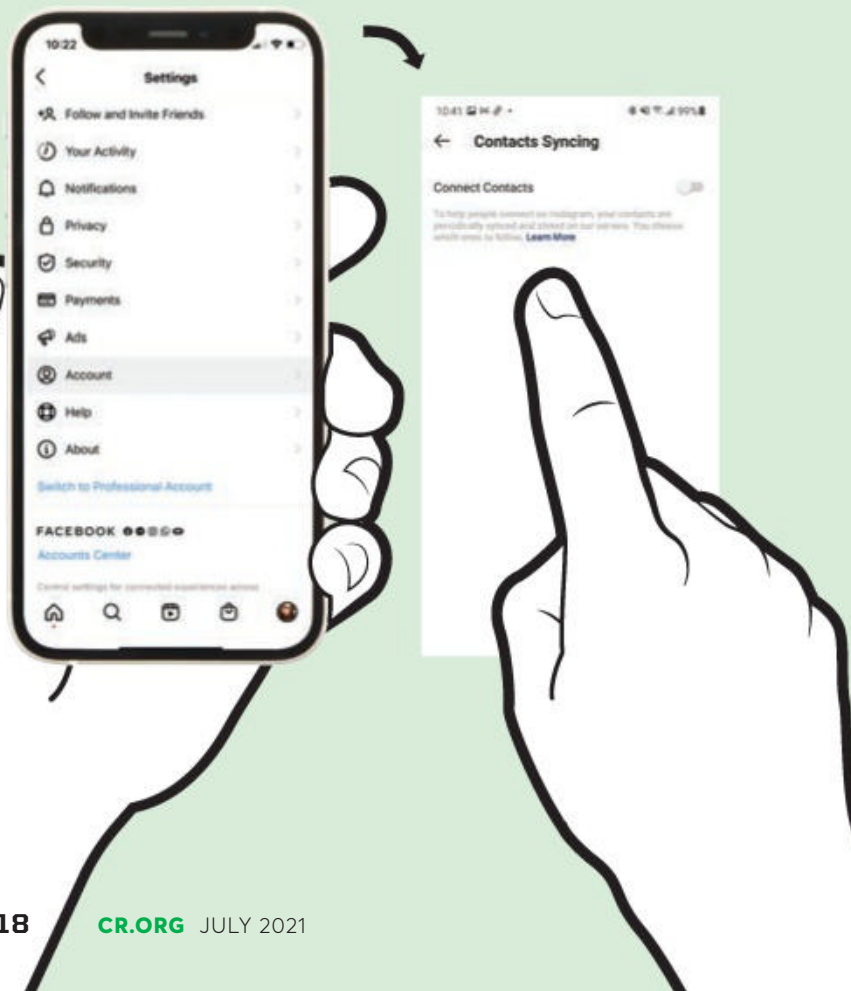
YOUR ONLINE STATUS

You may not realize that other Instagram users can see when you have the Instagram app open on your phone, and even if you’re not currently using the app, when you last used it. For example, Instagram could tell other users that you were “active two minutes ago” or that you’re currently online. Though your friends may find it handy to know when you’re online to message you, you may not want to broadcast your activity every time you open the app. (Note that if you turn off your “Activity Status,” you won’t be able to see anyone else’s activity, either.)

Take Action

ON THE INSTAGRAM APP:

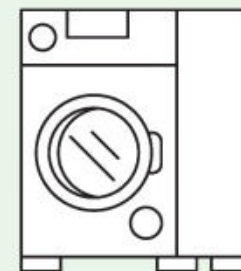
Go to your profile by clicking the icon in the bottom right > Open the menu in the top right > Settings > Privacy > Activity Status > Switch the toggle off.



JULY IS THE BEST TIME TO BUY ...



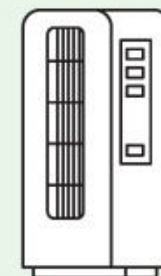
SUNSCREEN



WASHING MACHINES



HOME SECURITY CAMERAS



DEHUMIDIFIERS

For more info, go to [CR.org/buy0721](https://www.cr.org/buy0721).

*Instructions may vary slightly on some devices and Android software versions.



TOP-RATED BATTERY STRING TRIMMER

👉 **Ego ST1502SA**
\$180 (shown at left)

92 OVERALL SCORE

⬆️ PREDICTED RELIABILITY

5 YR. WARRANTY



TOP-RATED GAS STRING TRIMMER

✓ **Stihl FS 56 C-E**
\$240

88 OVERALL SCORE

⬆️ PREDICTED RELIABILITY

2 YR. WARRANTY

PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

GOOD NEWS ABOUT BATTERY-POWERED LAWN TOOLS

“EVERY YEAR WE TEST more battery-operated tools, and every year we find fewer reasons to recommend buying gas tools,” says Misha Kollontai, CR’s lead engineer for outdoor power equipment. Breakthroughs in battery capacity, along with improved efficiencies in motors, have allowed even large, power-hungry tools to go electric, and now some perform as well as or even better than gas models. If you’re in need of new lawn tools this summer, here are three compelling reasons to opt for electric over gas, plus some of the best battery and gas lawn tools we’ve tested.

Great Performance

For the first time in CR’s lawn mower tests, the best battery-powered mowers we evaluated easily rival the best gas ones—and several battery push mowers we tested offer

an impressive run time of 70 or 80 minutes. “That’s enough to cut nearly half an acre on one charge,” Kollontai says. And though battery-powered tools sometimes cost more initially, if you purchase multiple tools from the same manufacturer platform (perhaps a lawn mower, string trimmer, and chainsaw), you can use one battery interchangeably in all of them. And for each tool you purchase without a battery, you save around 30 percent.

Improved Reliability

Based on CR member surveys*, we’ve seen that, in general, battery string trimmers and leaf blowers turn out to be less problematic over time than gas ones. For instance, all of the battery string trimmer brands we rate earn a rating of Very Good or Excellent for predicted reliability, while less than half

of the straight-shaft gas brands that we rate in our survey score the same—and five gas brands earned only a Fair rating. We see more variability with battery lawn mower brands, but a majority earn a reliability rating of Good or better, and a handful earn ratings of Very Good or Excellent—roughly equivalent to the reliability ratings for gas mower brands.

Long Warranties

Many brands are now offering lengthier warranties of two or three years on the battery itself rather than one year, which was common on battery lawn tools just a few years ago. For example, the brand Ego offers a three-year warranty on its battery and a five-year warranty on the tool itself—a fairly common practice among battery tool makers. So when a problem arises with a battery-powered lawn tool, it may be easier to have it fixed rather than throw it out. That’s good news for your wallet (and for the planet). Plus you won’t have some of the added maintenance a gas tool needs, such as “stabilizing” the fuel each winter.



TOP-RATED BATTERY PUSH MOWER

✓ **Ryobi RY401200**
\$480

79 OVERALL SCORE

⬆️ PREDICTED RELIABILITY

5 YR. WARRANTY



TOP-RATED GAS PUSH MOWER

✓ **Honda HRN216PKA**
\$400

78 OVERALL SCORE

⬆️ PREDICTED RELIABILITY

3 YR. WARRANTY

*For our surveys, we ask CR members to tell us about problems they experienced with their outdoor power equipment purchased new during or prior to 2019, then use that data to estimate how reliable newly purchased tools will be through the fourth or fifth year of ownership.



RECALLS

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



PELOTON TREAD+ AND PELOTON TREAD TREADMILLS

Peloton recalled about 126,000 Peloton Tread+ and Peloton Tread treadmills, citing safety hazards. The Peloton Tread+ has been linked to dozens of injuries to children, including one death. The May 2021 recall notice states that "Peloton has received 72 reports of adult users, children, pets and/or objects being pulled under the rear of the treadmill, including 29 reports of injuries to children such as second- and third-degree abrasions, broken bones, and lacerations." The company also recalled its newer Peloton Tread because the touch screen can detach and fall, posing a risk of injury to consumers.

The Peloton Tread+ was available at onepeloton.com and at Peloton showrooms from September 2018 through April 2021 for about \$4,300. The Peloton Tread was available via limited invitation-only release at onepeloton.com and at Peloton showrooms from November 2020 through March 2021 for about \$2,500.

What to do: Consumers should immediately stop using the treadmills and call Peloton at 866-679-9129 or go to onepeloton.com.

com for a full refund (available until Nov. 6, 2022). For consumers who do not want a refund, Peloton is offering to move the Tread+ treadmill free of charge to a room where children or pets cannot access the treadmill. The company is also implementing software improvements to the product that will automatically lock the Tread+ after each use and prevent unauthorized access. A four-digit passcode will be required to unlock the Tread+. Peloton is also offering the option of waiting for a free inspection and repair that will secure the Peloton Tread touch screen to the treadmill to help prevent future incidents.

VERIZON ELLIPSIS JETPACK MOBILE HOT SPOTS

Verizon is recalling about 2.5 million Ellipsis Jetpack mobile hot spots because the lithium-ion battery in the hot spot can overheat, posing fire and burn hazards. The hot spots were sold at Verizon stores and other stores and to school districts nationwide and online at verizon.com from April 2017 through March 2021 for \$50 to \$150.

What to do: You can reduce

the risk of hazard by powering the unit off, unplugging it from its power source, and storing it in a place away from children—on top of a hard surface with adequate ventilation around the unit and away from combustibles—until it can be returned to Verizon. For more details and instructions on how to use the product safely or return it, go to verizon.com and click on "Recall" on the bottom of the page.

GREENWORKS AND POWERWORKS PRESSURE WASHER SPRAY GUNS

Hongkong Sun Rise Trading is recalling about 1.06 million Greenworks and Powerworks pressure washer spray guns because the spray gun connector can break, causing the hose and/or parts of the connector to become dislodged during use and posing an impact injury hazard. The spray guns were sold at Lowe's stores and online at lowes.com, Amazon, and other online retailers from January 2017 through February 2021. The plastic gun accessory kit was sold for about \$40, and the pressure washers were sold for \$100 to \$180.

What to do: Stop using the spray gun. Contact Hongkong Sun Rise Trading at 833-211-9185 or go to greenworkstools.com for details and to get a free replacement of the spray gun handle.

B. TOYS FIREFLY FRANK INFANT TEETHERS

Battat is recalling about 61,000 B. toys Firefly Frank infant teethers because the plastic wings can detach from the teether, posing a choking hazard to young children. The teethers were sold at Target stores and website from July 2019 through February 2021 for \$6 to \$10.

What to do: Take the teether away from young children. Return it to any Target store for

a full refund, or contact Battat at 844-963-2479 or go to battatco.com for details and how to return it by mail for a full refund.

CAT & JACK BABY ROMPERS

Target is recalling about 44,350 Cat & Jack Baby Heart Ears rompers because the heart-shaped graphics on the knees can peel off or detach and pose a choking hazard to children. The rompers were sold in Target stores and online from November 2020 through February 2021 for about \$13.

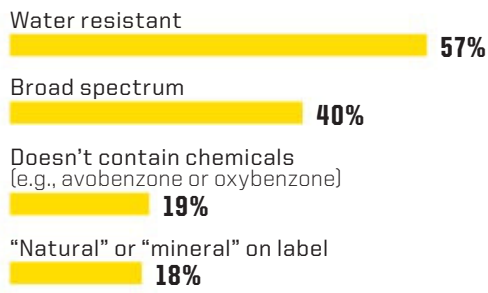
What to do: Take the romper away from children and return it to any Target store for a full refund. If you bought the romper on target.com, contact Target at 800-440-0680 or go to target.com for details and to get a prepaid shipping label to return the romper.

POLARIS ROVs

Polaris is recalling about 41,500 Ranger 1000 and Ranger Crew 1000; ProXD 2000G and 4000G; Ariens/Gravely JSV3200, JSV3400, and JSV6400; and Bobcat UV34 4x4 Gas and UV34 XL Gas ROVs because the drive belt can break during operation and damage the inner clutch cover assembly and fuel line, which can result in a fuel leak, posing a fire hazard. The ROVs were sold at Polaris, Ariens, and Bobcat dealers from September 2018 through December 2020 for \$13,000 to \$18,500.

What to do: Stop using the vehicle. Contact a Polaris, an Ariens, or a Bobcat dealer for details and to schedule a free inspection and repair, if needed. Polaris, Ariens, and Bobcat are notifying all dealers and contacting registered owners directly.

Top four things Americans look for when shopping for sunscreen



Source: A March 2020 CR nationally representative survey.*

PRODUCT UPDATE

THE LATEST RATINGS FROM OUR LABS



Easy Ways to Protect Your Skin in Summer

CR's top sunscreen and insect repellents can help you enjoy the outdoors safely

by Sally Wadyka

*1,557 Americans who wear sunscreen. Respondents were able to select all that applied out of six, including "other."

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <p>1 ✓ ALBA BOTANICA HAWAIIAN COCONUT CLEAR SPRAY SPF 50</p> <p>72</p> | <p>2 ✓ HAWAIIAN TROPIC ISLAND SPORT SPRAY SPF 30</p> <p>75</p> | <p>3 ⚡ EQUATE (WALMART) SPORT LOTION SPF 50</p> <p>68</p> |
| <p>4 ✓ REPEL LEMON EUCALYPTUS INSECT REPELLENT PUMP</p> <p>90</p> | <p>5 ✓ BEN'S TICK & INSECT REPELLENT WIPES</p> <p>96</p> | <p>6 ✓ SAWYER PREMIUM INSECT REPELLENT PUMP</p> <p>83</p> |

HIKING, CAMPING, WATCHING a baseball game—chances are your perfect summer day involves spending time outside. Just don't forget to bring along the sunscreen and insect repellent.

Sunburns and insect bites are more than just short-term discomforts. Exposure to the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays can cause wrinkles and skin cancer, and mosquitoes and ticks can transmit serious diseases such as the West Nile virus and Lyme. But CR's tests of 47 sunscreens and 45 insect repellents have found effective options to keep you safe outside. See our ratings starting on the facing page for the best products, and read on for the right ways to use them all season long.

Rethink Naturals

Many people turn to “natural” sunscreens and insect repellents because they're concerned about the harmful effects of chemicals such as avobenzone or oxybenzone in sunscreens and deet in insect repellents. But the products made with chemical ingredients—as opposed to “mineral” sunscreens and insect repellents made with essential oils—have been found to offer the best protection year after year in CR's tests.

FOR SUNSCREEN: All of our top-rated sunscreens have chemical active ingredients. While it's true that these chemicals have been shown to be absorbed through the skin into the bloodstream, experts at the Food and Drug Administration (which oversees sunscreens) have pointed out that the fact that a substance is absorbed doesn't automatically make it unsafe. And CR's experts—and others—still recommend using those sunscreens. “Chemical UV filters are highly effective ingredients that have been used safely for years,” says Joshua Zeichner, MD, an associate professor of dermatology at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City. (Some people may want to avoid oxybenzone and octinoxate. These chemical active

ingredients may possibly harm oceans, and some evidence suggests that oxybenzone may interfere with hormones in the body. We note which products include these ingredients in our ratings chart.)

The alternative, mineral-based sunscreens—those with only titanium dioxide, zinc oxide, or both as active ingredients—for the most part have received scores of Fair or Poor for overall protection against UV skin

HOW TO APPLY YOUR PROTECTION RIGHT

EVEN THE BEST sunscreens and insect repellents can't do their job if you don't use them properly.



PRO TIP:

Sunscreen goes on first. Let it be absorbed, then apply the insect repellent.



Apply sunscreen liberally 15 to 30 minutes before you go outside.

Use about an ounce of lotion (a shot glass full) to cover your body in a bathing suit, or aim for about a teaspoon for each exposed body part. (See “Be Smart About Sprays,” at right, for instructions on how to apply spray sunscreen.)



Reapply sunscreen every 2 hours you're in the sun and immediately after swimming or if you're sweating heavily.

Apply insect repellent to skin or clothing as directed on the product label. Don't douse yourself in the stuff. A thin film (only on exposed skin) is sufficient; heavier doses don't offer greater protection.

damage in our testing. If you choose to use a mineral sunscreen, California Kids #supersensitive Tinted Lotion SPF 30+ or Badger Active Natural Mineral Cream SPF 30 Unscented are your best bets.

FOR INSECT REPELLENT: Deet-containing products consistently top our ratings. “Deet has been around for a long time and has a very good safety profile,” says David Brown, technical adviser to the American Mosquito Control Association. If you still would rather not use it, choose a product with oil of lemon eucalyptus (such as Repel Lemon Eucalyptus Insect Repellent2 Pump) or picaridin (such as Sawyer Premium Insect Repellent Pump) that did well in our ratings. Skip the ones made with essential oils.

Be Smart About Sprays

Never spray in an enclosed area or near food, and stay away from open flames (like a grill), because aerosol sprays can be flammable. Avoid getting the spray into your mouth, nose, or eyes, and never spray directly into your face. For children, it's best to spray the product onto your hands and then rub it in. At the very least, have them close their mouth and eyes, and turn their head. **FOR SUNSCREEN:** Sprays are great for hard-to-reach spots—such as the scalp, back of the neck and shoulders, and tops of feet. In general, more is better. “Spray until skin glistens,” Zeichner says, then rub in evenly.

FOR INSECT REPELLENT: A light spritz—from 6 to 8 inches away—is enough.




Dress for Success

Clothing can also help protect you against UV rays and biting bugs.

DO THIS WITH SUNSCREEN: Cover up with clothing and a broad-brimmed hat.

DO THIS WITH INSECT REPELLENT: Wear long-sleeved shirts and pants; light colors make it easier to spot ticks. When you're in wooded or grassy areas, tuck your shirt into your pants and your pants into your socks to help keep ticks from reaching your skin.

Ratings > **Be Sun Savvy** We only test broad-spectrum sunscreens labeled SPF 30 or higher. Unless otherwise noted, all are said to be water-resistant for 80 minutes.

	Brand + Product	Overall Score	Pricing		Package size (oz.)	Test Results		
			Price	Cost per oz.		UVA	UVB (SPF)	Variation from SPF
BROAD-SPECTRUM SUNSCREENS LABELED SPF 30 OR HIGHER								
 <p>Lotions with Chemical Active Ingredients</p>	CR Equate (Walmart) Sport Lotion SPF 50	68	\$4.00	\$0.50	8.0	↑	↑	↓
	Kiehl's Activated Sun Protector Lotion SPF 30 ¹	65	\$32.00	\$6.40	5.0	↑	↓	↓
	Neutrogena Ultra Sheer Face Lotion SPF 70 ¹	59	\$13.00	\$9.29	1.4	↑	↓	↓
	Neutrogena Sport Face Oil-Free Lotion SPF 70 ¹	55	\$12.00	\$4.80	2.5	↑	↓	↓
	Coppertone Limited Edition Ultra Guard Lotion SPF 30	54	\$11.00	\$1.38	8.0	↑	↓	↓
	Banana Boat Ultra Sport Lotion SPF 50+	52	\$7.00	\$0.88	8.0	↑	↓	↓
	Hawaiian Tropic Silk Hydration Weightless Face Lotion SPF 30	51	\$9.00	\$5.29	1.7	↑	↓	↓
	Panama Jack Sunscreen Lotion SPF 50	45	\$11.00	\$1.83	6.0	↑	↓	↓
	Alba Botanica Sport Lotion SPF 45	43	\$12.00	\$3.00	4.0	↑	↓	↓
	Sun Bum Sunscreen Lotion SPF 30	42	\$10.00	\$3.33	3.0	↑	↓	↓
	Neutrogena Hydro Boost Water Gel Lotion SPF 30	38	\$12.00	\$4.00	3.0	↑	↓	↓
	La Roche-Posay Anthelios Clear Skin Face Lotion SPF 60	36	\$20.00	\$11.76	1.7	↓	↓	↓
	SkinCeuticals Sport UV Defense Lotion SPF 50	36	\$40.00	\$13.33	3.0	↑	↓	↓
	Walgreens Sport Lotion SPF 50	36	\$3.00	\$0.38	8.0	↑	↓	↓
Babyganics Sunscreen Lotion SPF 50+	22	\$12.00	\$2.00	6.0	↓	↓	↓	
 <p>Sprays with Chemical Active Ingredients</p>	CR Hawaiian Tropic Island Sport Spray SPF 30	75	\$9.00	\$1.50	6.0	↑	↓	↑
	CR Alba Botanica Hawaiian Coconut Clear Spray SPF 50	72	\$11.00	\$1.83	6.0	↑	↑	↓
	La Roche-Posay Anthelios Lotion Spray SPF 60 ¹	65	\$25.00	\$5.00	5.0	↑	↓	↓
	Banana Boat Ultra Sport Spray SPF 100 ¹	63	\$9.00	\$1.50	6.0	↑	↑	↓
	Hawaiian Tropic AntiOxidant+ Mist SPF 30	51	\$9.00	\$2.65	3.4	↑	↓	↓
	Panama Jack Sport Sunscreen Spray SPF 30	47	\$12.00	\$2.18	5.5	↑	↓	↓
	Australian Gold Botanical Natural Spray SPF 50	44	\$16.00	\$2.67	6.0	↑	↓	↓
	Hawaiian Tropic Silk Hydration Weightless Spray SPF 30	42	\$9.00	\$1.50	6.0	↑	↓	↓
	EltaMD UV Aero Continuous Spray SPF 45 ²	27	\$31.00	\$5.17	6.0	↓	↓	↓
 <p>Lotions and Sprays with Mineral Active Ingredients</p>	CR California Kids #supersensitive Tinted Lotion SPF 30+	55	\$20.00	\$6.90	2.9	↓	↑	↑
	Badger Active Natural Mineral Cream SPF 30 Unscented ³	55	\$18.00	\$6.21	2.9	↑	↓	↓
	Alba Botanica Sport Mineral Lotion SPF 45	53	\$13.00	\$3.25	4.0	↓	↑	↑
	Aveeno Positively Mineral Sensitive Skin Lotion SPF 50	50	\$10.00	\$3.33	3.0	↑	↓	↓
	Neutrogena Pure & Free Baby Lotion SPF 50	46	\$13.00	\$4.33	3.0	↑	↓	↓
	Badger Kids Clear Sport Natural Mineral Cream SPF 40	45	\$18.00	\$6.21	2.9	↑	↓	↓
	Aveeno Positively Mineral Sensitive Skin Face Lotion SPF 50	44	\$10.00	\$5.00	2.0	↑	↓	↓
	Thinkbaby Lotion SPF 50+	41	\$13.00	\$4.33	3.0	↑	↓	↓
	Badger Sport Natural Mineral Cream SPF 35 Unscented	40	\$18.00	\$6.21	2.9	↑	↓	↓
	Neutrogena Sheer Zinc Mineral Lotion SPF 50	36	\$9.00	\$3.00	3.0	↑	↓	↓
Hello Bello Mineral Lotion SPF 50+	36	\$9.00	\$3.00	3.0	↑	↓	↓	









 RECOMMENDED


 CR BEST BUY

¹ Contains oxybenzone. ² Contains octinoxate. ³ Water-resistant for 40 minutes.

Brand + Product	Overall Score	Pricing		Package size (oz.)	Test Results			
		Price	Cost per oz.		UVA	UVB (SPF)	Variation from SPF	
BROAD-SPECTRUM SUNSCREENS LABELED SPF 30 OR HIGHER								
	Goddess Garden Organics Daily Mineral Lotion SPF 30	36	\$18.00	\$3.00	6.0	↑	↓	↓
	Kiss My Face Organics Face and Body Mineral Lotion SPF 30	32	\$17.00	\$5.00	3.4	↓	↓	↓
	Thinksport Safe Lotion SPF 50+	32	\$24.00	\$4.00	6.0	↑	↓	↓
	Banana Boat Baby Mineral Lotion SPF 50	31	\$8.00	\$1.33	6.0	↓	↓	↓
	Alba Botanica Kids Mineral Lotion SPF 30	31	\$12.00	\$3.00	4.0	↓	↓	↓
	Coola Organic Mineral Spray SPF 30	31	\$28.00	\$3.50	8.0	↑	↓	↓
	True Natural Baby & Family Lotion SPF 30 Unscented ¹	31	\$19.00	\$5.59	3.4	↑	↓	↓
	All Terrain AquaSport Lotion SPF 45	28	\$19.00	\$6.33	3.0	↑	↓	↓
	Banana Boat Kids Sport Lotion SPF 50+	27	\$7.00	\$1.17	6.0	↓	↓	↓
	MDSolarSciences Mineral Moisture Defense Lotion SPF 50	25	\$39.00	\$9.75	4.0	↓	↓	↓
	Goddess Garden Organics Sport Mineral Spray SPF 30	24	\$16.00	\$2.67	6.0	↓	↓	↓
Australian Gold Botanical Mineral Lotion SPF 30	18	\$16.00	\$3.20	5.0	↓	↓	↓	

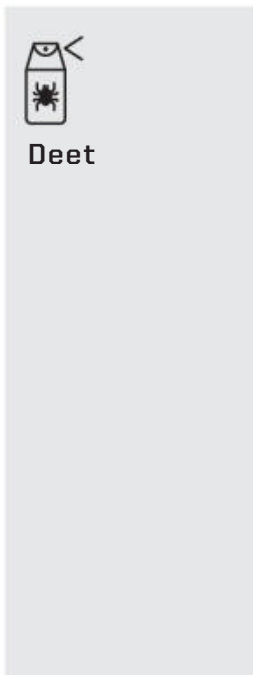
HOW WE TEST: CR uses methods patterned after those the Food and Drug Administration requires for sunscreen manufacturers. We test each product to determine the SPF it





provides (a measure of how well it filters UVB rays) by applying it to volunteers' skin, having them soak in a tub of water, and exposing them to different intensities of simulated sunlight. About

a day later, a trained technician analyzes the exposed areas for redness. We test a product's protection against UVA rays (to provide "broad spectrum" coverage) by applying it to plastic plates, shining

UV light on them, and measuring how much UVA and UVB rays they absorb. **Variation from SPF** score indicates how closely a product's tested SPF matched the SPF on the label.

Ratings > **Bug Out** These ratings for insect repellents are based primarily on how long each protects against mosquito bites. But past tests show that the ones that thwart mosquitoes also work well against ticks.

Brand + Product [% Concentration]	Overall Score	Pricing		Test Results		
		Per package	Per oz. or per wipe	Protection against mosquitoes + ticks	Resists damage to materials	
INSECT REPELLENTS						
	✓ Ben's Tick & Insect Repellent Wipes (30%)	96	\$6.00	\$0.50	↑	↓
	✓ Ben's Tick & Insect Repellent Wilderness Formula Pump (30%)	95	\$6.00	\$1.76	↑	↓
	💰 Total Home (CVS) Woodland Scent Insect Repellent Aerosol (30%)	94	\$6.50	\$1.08	↑	↓
	💰 3M Ultrathon Insect Repellent8 Aerosol (25%)	94	\$9.50	\$1.17	↑	↓
	✓ Off Sportsmen Deep Woods Insect Repellent 3 Aerosol (30%)	93	\$6.00	\$0.75	↑	↓
	💰 Ben's Tick & Insect Repellent Wilderness Formula Aerosol (30%)	88	\$8.00	\$1.33	↑	↓
	✓ Cutter Backwoods Insect Repellent Pump (25%)	88	\$7.00	\$1.17	↑	↓
	✓ Coleman Insect Repellent Ultra Dry Formula Aerosol (25%)	86	\$8.00	\$1.75	↑	↓
	✓ Off Deep Woods Insect Repellent VIII Dry Aerosol (25%)	86	\$6.50	\$2.13	↑	↓
	✓ Sawyer Ultra 30 Insect Repellent Lotion (30%)	84	\$11.00	\$3.33	↑	↓
	💰 Repel Insect Repellent Sportsmen Formula Dry Aerosol (25%)	76	\$5.50	\$1.25	↑	↓
	✓ Cutter Sport Insect Repellent Aerosol (15%)	73	\$8.00	\$1.00	↑	↓
✓ Repel Insect Repellent Scented Family Formula Aerosol (15%)	70	\$4.00	\$0.62	↑	↓	

	Brand + Product [% Concentration]	Overall Score	Pricing		Test Results	
			Per package	Per oz. or per wipe	Protection against mosquitoes + ticks	Resists damage to materials
INSECT REPELLENTS						
 Deet <i>Continued</i>	✓ Cutter Backwoods Dry Insect Repellent Aerosol (25%)	69	\$5.00	\$1.50	↑	↓
	✓ Repel Insect Repellent Mosquito Wipes (30%)	65	\$7.00	\$0.33	↑	↑
	✓ Off Deep Woods Insect Repellent Towelettes (25%)	64	\$6.50	\$0.54	↑	↑
	Sawyer Family Insect Repellent Controlled Release Lotion (20%)	57	\$4.00	\$1.75	↑	↓
	Cutter All Family Mosquito Wipes (7.15%)	51	\$5.00	\$0.35	↓	↓
	Off FamilyCare Insect Repellent I Smooth & Dry Aerosol (15%)	28	\$8.00	\$1.50	↓	↓
	Off Active Insect Repellent I Aerosol (15%)	27	\$8.00	\$0.83	↓	↓
	Cutter Dry Insect Repellent Unscented Aerosol (10%)	25	\$6.00	\$1.13	↓	↓
	Cutter Skinsations Insect Repellent1 Pump (7%)	21	\$6.00	\$0.67	↓	↓
 Picaridin	✓ Sawyer Premium Insect Repellent Pump (20%)	83	\$9.00	\$2.00	↑	↓
	✓ Off FamilyCare Insect Repellent VIII with Picaridin Aerosol (10%)	70	\$7.00	\$1.38	↑	↓
	✓ Natrapel Tick & Insect Repellent Aerosol (20%)	69	\$9.00	\$1.50	↑	↓
	Avon Skin-So-Soft Bug Guard plus Picaridin Aerosol (10%)	55	\$20.00	\$4.00	↓	↓
	Natrapel Tick & Insect Repellent Wipes (20%)	20	\$7.00	\$0.58	↓	↑
	Off FamilyCare Insect Repellent II Clean Feel Pump (5%)	9	\$8.00	\$1.00	↓	↑
	Sawyer Picaridin Insect Repellent Lotion (20%)	4	\$8.00	\$2.25	↓	↓
 Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus (also called PMD)	✓ Repel Lemon Eucalyptus Insect Repellent2 Pump (30%)	90	\$5.00	\$1.75	↑	↑
	✓ Cutter Lemon Eucalyptus Insect Repellent Aerosol (30%)	82	\$9.00	\$2.25	↑	↓
	✓ Natrapel Lemon Eucalyptus Insect Repellent Pump (30%)	72	\$7.00	\$2.06	↑	↓
	✓ Natrapel Lemon Eucalyptus Insect Repellent Aerosol (30%)	69	\$12.00	\$2.00	↑	↑
	Coleman Botanicals Insect Repellent Aerosol (30%)	56	\$10.00	\$2.50	↓	↓
	Coleman Botanicals Insect Repellent Pump (30%)	55	\$6.00	\$1.75	↓	↑
	Off Botanicals Insect Repellent IV Pump (10%)	36	\$9.00	\$1.50	↓	↓
	Cutter Lemon Eucalyptus Insect Repellent Pump (30%)	36	\$6.00	\$1.13	↓	↑
 Other	Coleman SkinSmart Insect Repellent Aerosol	58	\$8.00	\$1.38	↓	↓
	Babyganics Natural Insect Repellent Pump	12	\$10.00	\$1.67	↓	↑
	All Terrain Herbal Armor Natural Insect Repellent Pump	12	\$11.00	\$2.00	↓	↓
	All Terrain Kids Herbal Armor Natural Insect Repellent Pump	8	\$11.00	\$1.50	↓	↓
	Buzz Away Extreme Insect Repellent Towelettes	7	\$9.00	\$0.75	↓	↑
	EcoSmart Insect Repellent Pump	5	\$8.00	\$1.33	↓	↑
	California Baby Natural Bug Blend Bug Repellent Pump	5	\$16.50	\$2.46	↓	↑
	Hello Bello Mosquito Repellent Pump	4	\$10.00	\$1.49	↓	↑

HOW WE TEST: We apply a standard dose of repellent to a measured area of skin on test volunteers' arms. They

place their arms in a cage of disease-free mosquitoes 30 minutes and 1 hour after application, then hourly until

they receive two bites in one 5-minute session or one bite in each of two consecutive sessions. Top-scoring

products are protective for 6.5 to 8 hours. The lowest-rated last 2 hours or less.

↳ LIVING THE

New Normal

As COVID-19 vaccination rates continue to rise across the U.S., more of us can do the things we love with a high degree of safety—though local rules may vary. Here's when you can confidently go without a mask, take a vacation, dine out, and more.

BY CATHERINE ROBERTS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY AMELIA FLOWER





NEXT GAME:
TODAY

SPECIALS

E R Y

A

MERICANS WHO SPENT the past year or longer yearning to get back to their usual activities are now getting the chance. With COVID-19 infection rates trending down in many places in the U.S., restaurants, gyms, hotels, and

other venues are reopening. In May, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced that people who are fully vaccinated against the coronavirus—meaning at least two weeks past their final shot—can go unmasked and without social distancing in most situations, with little risk.

The vaccines don't guarantee you won't contract the virus, but research suggests that they provide near total protection against severe COVID-19. "Even if cases are occurring, they're now increasingly being decoupled from hospitalizations and deaths," said infectious disease specialist Amesh Adalja, MD, a senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins University Center for Health Security in Baltimore, at an Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) press briefing.

But plenty of people are not vaccinated, including younger children, who are not yet eligible. And while there's strong evidence that the few fully vaccinated people who do pick up the virus are unlikely to pass it on, more dangerous variants may continue to emerge.

For these reasons, it's important to continue taking some precautions to protect ourselves and others—notably, older adults, people with chronic medical issues, the immunocompromised, and those who can't be vaccinated—says James Dickerson, PhD, Consumer Reports' chief scientific officer. After all, "you can't distinguish fully vaccinated people who don't wear masks from unvaccinated people who don't wear masks," he says. To this end, the IDSA urges local officials to consider their area's transmission and vaccination rates when setting policies. And though many masking and distancing requirements have been relaxed, some federal, state, and local laws, as well as individual businesses' policies, may still call for these measures. So the new normal could look different, depending on where you are. It's also likely to continue changing.

On the following pages, medical experts cover the safest strategies for vaccinated and unvaccinated people. We're not fully back to normal yet, but we're well on the way. Following this expert advice could help us get there faster.



Planes, Trains & Automobiles

TRAVELERS IN THE U.S. began dusting off their suitcases in April, when the CDC announced that fully vaccinated people can travel safely within the country. There's ample interest: In a Consumer Reports nationally representative survey of 2,288 Americans conducted in April, 22 percent said a vacation was the social activity they missed most before full vaccination (or the most eagerly anticipated activity afterward).

The federal government still requires everyone 2 and older to wear a mask on planes, trains, and other public transportation. As of mid-May, destinations such as Hawaii and Chicago were asking that all visitors, or those from certain states, present a negative COVID-19 test. For unvaccinated domestic travelers, the CDC advises getting a COVID-19 test one to three days before travel and three to five days after, and self-quarantining for seven days after returning home. The agency also recommends that all travelers have a COVID-19 test three to five days after returning from a foreign country. And most airline passengers must have a negative test result no more than three days before traveling back to the U.S. or proof of COVID-19 recovery within the prior three months. (Rules and CDC guidance change often, so be sure to check before travel.)

SHOULD YOU OR SHOULDN'T YOU?

"For anyone who's fully vaccinated, the risk of being on an aircraft, train, bus,



or other mode of public transportation is low to very low,” says infectious disease specialist W. David Hardy, MD, an adjunct clinical professor at the Keck School of Medicine at USC in Los Angeles. For unvaccinated travelers, he says, the risk is at least medium “because of the close seating arrangements and the fact that other unvaccinated passengers don’t always wear their mask correctly.”

Driving? “Of all the modes of travel, the most secure is in the cocooned environment of an automobile,” says William Schaffner, MD, a professor of infectious diseases at the Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville. The risk in a taxi or another for-hire vehicle is also low for vaccinated and unvaccinated people if occupants are masked, passengers sit in back, and

“windows are at least partially open, so fresh air can freely circulate,” says infectious disease specialist Ravina Kullar, PharmD, IDSA spokesperson.

SMART STEPS

Even if you’re fully vaccinated, remove your mask only for eating and drinking—briefly and only if others are masked. “Other passengers are basically at the end of your nose,” Hardy says. “If they sneeze or cough while you have your mask off to eat, that’s where an exposure could occur.” Restrooms pose no heightened risk if you stay masked and wash your hands.

Be clear on cancellation and change policies. Airlines are reinstating some penalties waived earlier in the pandemic: If you bought the least costly tickets after certain dates on American,

Delta, or United, for instance, you can no longer change or cancel them free of charge. Amtrak has waived change fees for reservations made by Sept. 6, 2021, but cancellation penalties may apply.

Many travel insurance policies now cover cancellations due to COVID-19 illness, says Meghan Walch, product manager at InsureMyTrip, a comparison website. “But standard coverage will not cover cancellations due to fear of COVID-19 or border closings.” The Cancel for Any Reason protection in some policies has no exclusions but has eligibility requirements, can be pricey, and typically reimburses only 50 to 75 percent of costs. Note that rental cars may be scarce and expensive, so book ahead and check prices at off-airport locations. They might charge lower rates and have fewer fees.

Hotels & Home Rentals



IF A HOTEL STAY is in your future, it's a good idea to confirm that cleaning and ventilation measures to minimize COVID-19 transmission are in place. "Hotels have a high rate of individuals traveling from all parts of the world, so disinfecting is important to prevent even the remote chance of COVID-19 infection from surfaces," says Kullar at the IDSA. Barring local and state rules, many chains no longer require fully vaccinated guests to wear masks in indoor public areas such as elevators.

SHOULD YOU OR SHOULDN'T YOU?

More than half of Americans in CR's survey—60 percent—said they'd be comfortable at a hotel where other guests might be unvaccinated. And experts say staying in a hotel room or home rental is a fairly safe bet for both vaccinated and unvaccinated travelers. "As long as the room has been properly cleaned and it has been 3 or 4 hours since the previous inhabitants were in the room, I would consider that low-risk," says Hardy at USC, adding that those hours should allow any floating viral particles to dissipate.

SMART STEPS

Even if you're fully vaccinated, some experts, like Kullar, advise that you "continue to wear a mask and practice physical distancing in all public areas." She also recommends that you try to dine outdoors and at least 6 feet from other tables when at a hotel. When booking, remember that the liberal cancellation policies of earlier in the pandemic may have been lifted, that prepaid reservations might be ineligible for refunds under any circumstance, and that policies for hotels and home rental platforms such as Airbnb vary from property to property.

Restaurants & Bars

AFTER A YEAR of closures, takeout, creative outdoor seating setups, and limited indoor capacity, restaurants and bars are taking steps to return to normalcy, and people are eager for it: Seventy-eight percent of Americans in CR's April survey said they plan to eat indoors at a restaurant at least once every other week after the pandemic is declared over.

At this point, the rules on how many people are permitted inside restaurants and bars vary widely by community, but you're likely to see plenty of anti-COVID-19 measures for a while, such as enhanced ventilation and mask requirements while you're not eating or drinking. That's because evidence has shown that in-person dining contributed to early COVID-19 spread, thanks in part to the close proximity of diners to each other and their tendency to linger at the table.



GO OR NOT? INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL & CRUISES

AT PRESS TIME, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advised that people put off international travel until fully vaccinated. "I've traveled internationally and think it's probably okay as long as you take precautions and have been fully vaccinated," says

infectious disease specialist Maria L. Alcaide, MD. Infectious disease expert Ravina Kullar, PhD, has a somewhat different view: "I would not recommend international travel until we see a consistent decrease in cases." As for cruises from U.S.

ports, the CDC projects that some could resume as early as mid-July. However, cruise lines will first need to meet several conditions, such as conducting test sailings or attesting that 98 percent of crew members and 95 percent of passengers are fully vaccinated. Will it

be safe? "If a cruise line is requiring all passengers and crew to be fully vaccinated and test negative for COVID-19 before boarding, you'd be in a bubble and the risk would be low," Kullar says. But shore excursions could hike risks, so for now it may be best to wait to cruise.



SHOULD YOU OR SHOULDN'T YOU?

Whether you're vaccinated or not, having a meal or a drink outdoors with your household can be low-risk because the fresh air helps dissipate any coronavirus particles, especially if tables are spaced well apart and servers wear masks.

But according to the CDC, the risk rises for unvaccinated folks who eat outside with unvaccinated people from different households, so if you haven't gotten your shots yet, you may want to stick to fresh-air dining

only with your household, pod, or fully vaccinated friends. Also, be wary of setups that mimic the indoors: "Just because you're on a street doesn't mean you're 'outside' if there are walls and ceilings and doors," says Melissa Hawkins, PhD, professor in the department of health studies at American University in Washington, D.C.

When it comes to indoor dining and drinking, the overall risk is low if you're fully vaccinated, according to Monica Gandhi, MD, an infectious disease physician at the University

of California, San Francisco, even in louder or more crowded situations, such as at a bar or club with live music. But if you're not vaccinated, indoor dining remains high-risk.

SMART STEPS

If possible, make reservations to avoid potentially crowded waiting areas and to ensure that you get a table if capacity limits are in place. If you're unvaccinated, except for using the restroom (where you'll want to wear a mask), stick to your party, rather than moving about the dining or bar area.



Parties & Celebrations

MANY WEDDINGS, reunions, and other celebratory gatherings postponed in 2020 and early 2021 are now planned for this summer and fall. If you're hosting or considering attending one, check rules and regulations ahead of time because they vary from place to place. For instance, in New Jersey, where private catered wedding venues were prohibited from opening dance floors until recently, guests can now boogie if they're masked and socially distanced.

SHOULD YOU OR SHOULDN'T YOU?

At indoor and outdoor events where everyone is fully vaccinated, masks and staying 6 feet apart are now unnecessary, according to the CDC. (Want to get your nails or hair done beforehand? The CDC says these are low-risk activities for fully vaccinated folks—even without masks.)

If you and some other guests are unvaccinated, the risk is at least medium. So if you go to such a gathering, wear a mask and practice social distancing. And note that risks climb as the event size and number of households rise, especially if attendees come from different states, says Amanda Castel, MD, a professor in the department of epidemiology at the George Washington University Milken Institute School of Public Health in Washington, D.C.

SMART STEPS

Unvaccinated? Find out whether the hosts are asking guests about their vaccination status and requesting that they be tested shortly before the event.



This may help make a potentially iffy situation somewhat safer, Castel says, along with masking and social distancing.

Hosts may want to consider that plenty of fully vaccinated people are still wary about gathering in large groups inside without masks. “If it’s possible, have it outside,” says Hawkins at American University, to take the burden of making a hard decision off the guests.

Oh, and are you wondering whether it’s really okay to hug someone when you see them at a celebration? (Seventeen percent of Americans in CR’s survey said they missed this most before full vaccination or were looking forward to it most afterward.) As long as you and the huggee are fully vaccinated, hug away!



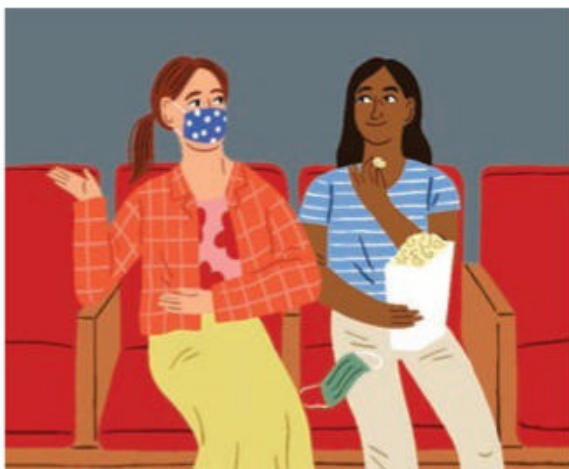
Movies, Museums & Theaters

IN CR’S SURVEY, 42 percent of Americans said they plan to see a movie on the big screen at least once every two weeks after the pandemic is over. So they’ll be glad to know more and more theaters are reopening, many with safety measures in place. The CinemaSafe program from the National Association of Theatre Owners

encourages theaters to not only limit the number of people (there may be local restrictions, too) but also improve ventilation and eliminate communal condiment stations—so no self-serve popcorn butter. Regal Cinemas and Cinemark, for instance, say that they're using their heating, ventilating, and air conditioning systems to bring in more fresh air, and that seats around those that are reserved will be kept empty.

SHOULD YOU OR SHOULDN'T YOU?

As of mid-May, indoor events such as movie and theater performances, and visits to an uncrowded museum, were among the activities the CDC considers low-risk for vaccinated people. But communities or businesses



may require masks. If you're not yet vaccinated, indoor theaters could be iffy, so Hawkins recommends outdoor options such as drive-in movies and concerts, and theater performances in a park—particularly those where masks are required and reasonable distancing measures are in place. Museum-going may be only a medium-risk activity for unvaccinated people wearing masks: Many institutions have timed and ticketed entry, reduced capacity, and mask requirements.

SMART STEPS

Some movie theaters rent screening rooms for small private events. If you want to see a film on the big screen but are concerned about being surrounded by people whose vaccination status is unknown to you, this may be an option, Hawkins says. Invite nine or 10 people (the fully vaccinated don't have to mask up or socially distance in small indoor gatherings of vaccinated and unvaccinated friends and family, per the CDC's guidelines) to split the cost, and you're likely to come close to a typical ticket price. Otherwise, Cinemark recommends buying tickets at limited-capacity theaters in advance to make sure you get the seat you want.



Live Music & Sports



A NUMBER OF these venues are open but may limit guests and ask for documentation of vaccination or a recent negative COVID-19 test. Or, like the San Francisco Giants, they might have separate sections for the fully vaccinated and the unvaccinated.

SHOULD YOU OR SHOULDN'T YOU?

Sports games and concerts—along with movies and plays—were among the



ESSENTIAL ITEMS: YOUR SUMMER TAKE-ALONG KIT

WHETHER YOU'RE DOING a nearby activity or taking a trip, the following items may come in handy.

■ **MASKS** Many places may still require them. If you're going on an overnight or multiday trip, be sure to pack enough to wear a fresh one each day.

■ **HAND SANITIZER** Cleaning your hands often and well is critical for preventing all kinds of infections. Soap and running water are best, but hand sanitizer will also do the job.

■ **VACCINE CARD** Have a photo of both sides of your COVID-19 vaccination card

on hand in case you need it for entry to a venue.

■ **MEDICAL INFO** If someone in your group starts feeling ill, you may need to contact their doctor or seek help. So be sure everyone has their insurance card, doctors' contact info, and a list of

their current medications. In fact, a copy of regular prescriptions is a good idea for travel.

■ **A FIRST-AID KIT** It's wise to have one in your car or travel bag. Make sure your kit includes a thermometer and fever-reducing medications.

events that 15 percent of Americans in CR's survey said they missed most before vaccination or were looking forward to most afterward.

For those itching to get back into the stands, the CDC says big outdoor events are low-risk for vaccinated people without masks. For the unvaccinated, big, crowded events pose risks, but even a large event can be reasonably safe if it's outdoors, with limited numbers of people and with masking and distancing, says Preeti Malani, MD, chief health officer and professor of medicine in infectious diseases at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

SMART STEPS

To avoid crowding at concessions, see whether mobile ordering is available, try flagging down concession sellers in the stands, or eat ahead of time. If you're unvaccinated and want to give the band a "woo hoo" or join in a chant at an outdoor concert or sports game, go ahead as long as you're masked, says Linsey Marr, PhD, a professor of civil and environmental engineering at Virginia Tech University in Blacksburg who studies airborne virus transmission. Cheering and chanting expel viral particles more than normal breathing and talking.



Beaches & Parks



FUN FACT: Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina and Tennessee had its second-busiest year on record in 2020—despite being closed for 46 days because of the pandemic. Outdoor activities such as hiking, camping, and swimming

have provided vital outlets for fun and relaxation in natural settings since the pandemic hit, and the same should hold true this summer, according to Marr, especially now that we know how uncommon it is for the coronavirus to spread in fresh air.

Still, social distancing and other safety measures are in place at many of these popular summertime destinations: The 423 national parks in the U.S., for instance, have unvaccinated visitors wear masks inside buildings and even outside when keeping distant from others isn't possible (such as during a photo op at a crowded overlook). They've also instituted timed and ticketed entry to certain attractions. Some swimming areas limit the number of visitors and have guests stay at least 6 feet apart. (That's a bit longer than a pool noodle.)

SHOULD YOU OR SHOULDN'T YOU?

Experts give the activities above a thumbs-up, whether you're vaccinated or not. If you're unvaccinated, however, the swimming site, park, or campground should allow for some separation of visitors and require masking



WHAT IF YOU'RE VACCINATED—AND THEY'RE NOT?

HOW SAFE IS IT to socialize with friends and family members who aren't yet vaccinated against COVID-19? If you're fully vaccinated and others aren't, smaller and larger outdoor visits are generally considered okay. And the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says

fully vaccinated folks don't need to wear a mask or socially distance at a "small indoor gathering of fully vaccinated and unvaccinated people from multiple households." Unvaccinated attendees, however, should mask up and distance from others both indoors and

outdoors, to reduce their likelihood of infection, says CR's James Dickerson, PhD. This is especially important for anyone at higher risk for severe COVID-19. How about younger children who might not yet be eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine? "Unless they have an underlying

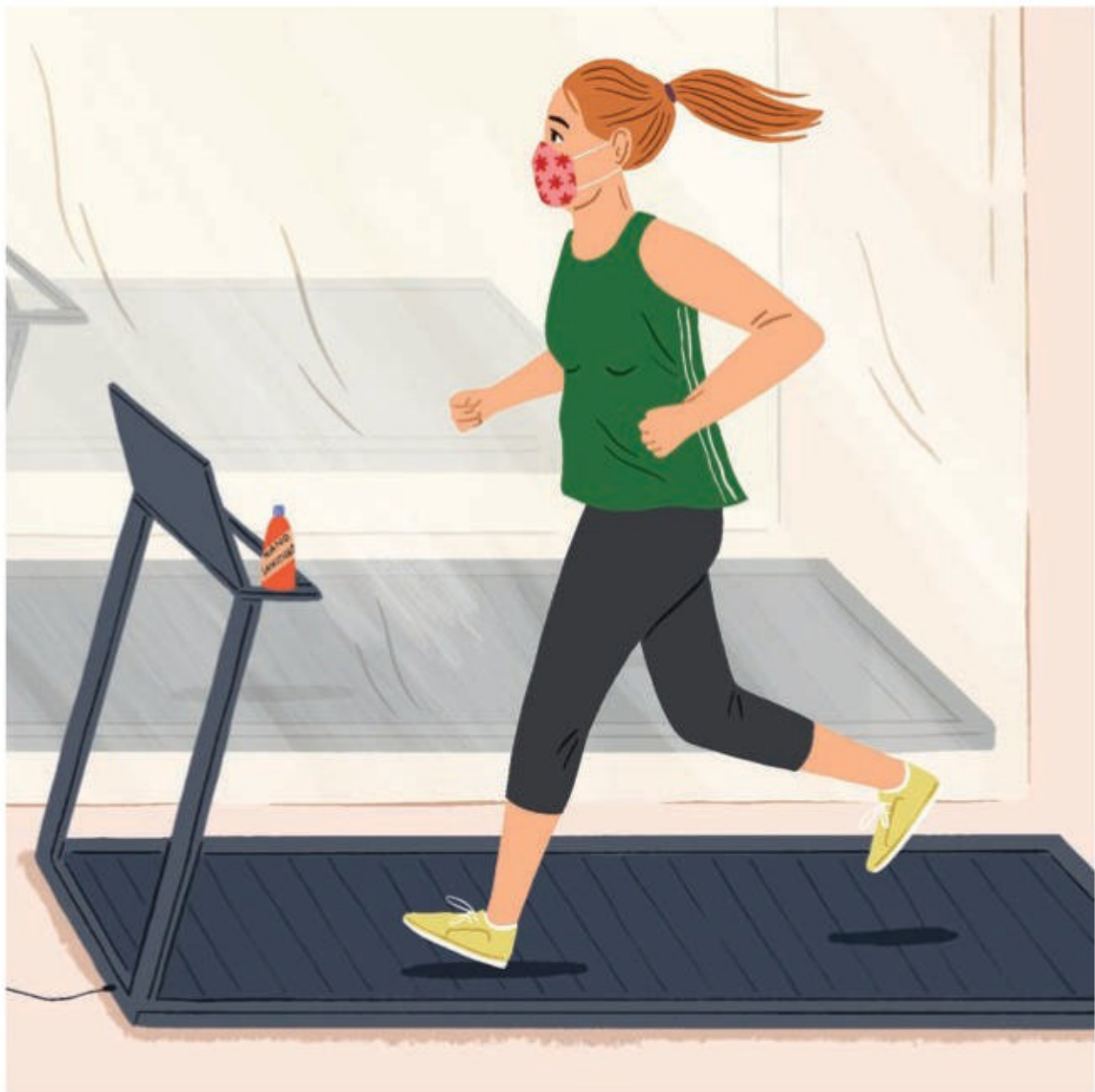
condition, kids do not typically develop severe COVID, so it's okay for them to go to gatherings" as long as all the adults have been vaccinated, says infectious disease expert Maria L. Alcaide, MD. It's best if these get-togethers are outdoors, she adds.

in indoor areas, such as changing rooms. With such measures, these are among the lowest-risk places to spend time this summer.

In fact, the wind at the beach—blowing off a lake or an ocean—may make it safer than some other spots, says Schaffner at Vanderbilt, because it helps diffuse virus particles in the air. Even outdoor community pools, hot tubs, and water parks are pretty low-risk when operated properly, the CDC says: The chlorine used to disinfect them should kill the coronavirus and other germs.

SMART STEPS

Find out ahead of time what rules are in place where you're headed—you may need to take your own food and drinks if concessions are closed. Or you might need to make reservations, as with some of the national parks. If you're unvaccinated, leave your mask on the towel during swims—a wet face covering might not work as well and can make it harder to breathe.



The Gym

EXERCISE OFTEN MEANS heavy breathing, which can contribute to the buildup of viral particles in the air—putting gyms in the higher-risk category during the pandemic. But many fitness centers have taken creative steps to help protect exercisers, such as using large areas like basketball courts to space out stationary bikes. The CrossFit chain has instructed its gyms to install carbon dioxide monitors and ensure that CO₂ stays below a certain level—a sign that the space is well-ventilated with outside air.

SHOULD YOU OR SHOULDN'T YOU?

The CDC says indoor gym workouts—even high-intensity group classes—are pretty safe for the fully vaccinated. But it may still be wise to mask up at the gym because heavy breathing could help viral aerosols spread, says CR's Dickerson. For the unvaccinated, an indoor gym is a risky prospect, particularly in a group setting.

SMART STEPS

If you're unvaccinated, it's best to exercise outdoors for now. Ask whether your gym offers classes outside or look for a class that meets in a park. (You'll need a mask for either.) Workouts are also available on video or on demand.

Consider an indoor workout before full vaccination only if the facility

requires masks, limits the number of patrons, and has plenty of space around equipment—and skip group classes, Castel says. It's best to stick with lower-intensity activities, too.

Also, suss out the ventilation. While open windows and doors certainly help, Marr suggests asking what HVAC filters the gym uses and how often the facility's air is completely replaced. Good signs are the use of a MERV-11 (or higher) filter and air that's replaced at least every 10 minutes, she says.

For everyone at a gym, it's good practice to wipe down any equipment you use—for politeness if nothing else; surfaces aren't a significant driver of COVID-19 spread. Take your own water bottle because water fountains might not be open. (Plan on showering at home for the same reason.)

How to Fix Your Credit Score



A low score undermines your ability to buy a house, go to college, or start a business. But how the scores are determined is often hidden and doesn't treat all consumers equally. Here's what to watch for, and what to do.

BY LISA L. GILL

NINE YEARS AGO, Brittnay Williams' credit score was 569—putting her in the “very poor” category and undermining her dream of buying a home. But over the course of two years and with the help of her credit union, Williams, of West Memphis, Ark., raised her score by 100 points and qualified for a mortgage.

When she began her journey, Williams, 32, was among the estimated 14 percent of active credit consumers with credit scores so low it is hard to qualify for a mortgage, according to Experian, one of the big three credit bureaus. About 26 million adults lack any credit history and have no score at all, according to the most recent figures from the Consumer Financial

Protection Bureau, a government agency.

“Millions of Americans are locked out of the American dream of homeownership, higher education, starting a business, or making major purchases,” says Syed Ejaz, financial policy analyst for Consumer Reports. “For most lenders, everything begins and ends with that score.”

Introduced in the 1950s, credit scores were intended to objectively measure creditworthiness, based on your history of borrowing and paying back loans. Two companies, FICO and VantageScore, create the scoring models, which apply formulas to information in your credit reports, for the three major credit reporting agencies—Experian, TransUnion, and Equifax—that track your past financial behavior. The higher the score, the more



likely you'll receive lower interest rates for a credit card, mortgage, or car loan.

But not everything in your financial life counts toward your score. For example, paying rent on time often won't help, but paying a mortgage on time will. The system usually also doesn't care whether late payments stem from things out of your control—say, an illness—or your own irresponsibility. And it will punish you for years for a slip-up. Moreover, because it rewards people who already have a credit history—and makes it hard for those who don't to establish credit—it creates a circular problem that limits options for many.

That's particularly true for Blacks and Hispanics, who have substantially lower credit scores, on average, than whites, says Chi Chi Wu, staff attorney for the National Consumer Law Center, a nonprofit that works for consumer justice and economic security. For example, a 2019 analysis from the Urban Institute, a nonprofit research organization, found that more than 50 percent of white people had a FICO score greater than 700, while just 21 percent of Black people did.

“Having a weak credit record can hurt your chances for getting a job, because employers often check your credit report,” Wu says. And because landlords and insurers also often check credit reports, a poor score can “prevent you from renting an apartment, or mean you'll pay more for car insurance,” she says.

Credit scores also suffer from a lack of transparency, some consumer advocates say. We all have many credit scores, each calculated differently, and it is hard to know which score a given lender uses, though knowing could help us build that score.

Worse, consumers can't directly dispute a credit score, though the credit report data behind scores often have errors. Around a third of the almost 6,000 volunteers for a recent CR study found mistakes in their credit report.

The scoring system makes it hard for people who don't have a credit history to even establish one.

For Williams, building credit had a lasting impact. Several years after buying her house and finding her financial footing, she opened a home healthcare business that she says now employs 60 people and serves more than 100 homebound seniors. “I am blessed to be able to do this work and get the help I did,” Williams says.

Here are some ways credit scores can undermine your financial future and 11 tips for fixing them.



PROBLEM

Lack of Credit History = Low Score

IT'S A CREDIT CATCH-22: You need credit to build credit, says Bill Hardekopf, a senior industry analyst at CardRates.com, a company that evaluates credit card offers. This can be a challenge in communities of color in particular, he says. The Urban Institute found that 32 percent of Black people vs. 18 percent of white people didn't

have enough information in their credit reports to generate a score.

One way to build history is to open a checking or savings account. But that can be easier said than done: A 2020 Morgan Stanley report on inequality in homeownership found that there is greater commercial “branch scarcity” in communities with diverse populations. Minimum deposit rules and high checking fees can be other deterrents.

Be aware that even if you have a credit history, it can become “stale” if you don't continue to use credit regularly. “That's because some of the scoring algorithms treat recent use of credit as a positive factor in calculating your score,” Hardekopf says. In some instances, credit card issuers can close inactive accounts, and your credit score can take a hit.

HOW TO BUILD CREDIT FAST

FIX 1 Open a bank account, then take out a really small loan and make monthly payments.

That's how Williams fixed her credit. She took out several small loans from a credit-builder loan program that doesn't require a credit score offered at Hope Credit Union, which serves economically distressed communities in the South. Williams paid back the loans, dramatically improving her credit score.

You may be able to get a loan more easily at a credit union than at a bank, says Felicia Lyles, a senior vice president at Hope. That's because credit unions are nonprofits, owned by their members, and often offer better terms. Credit unions may also let you use your paycheck to secure the loan to build a payment history, for instance.

FIX 2 Apply for a secured credit card. This is a type of credit card that you've backed with a cash deposit. The amount you put in becomes your credit limit. Using the card and

paying it off over time will start to build your history and improve your score, Hardekopf says. Check that the bank or credit union backing the card reports your payment activity to all three credit bureaus. Learn the terms and conditions. And don't sign up for a card advertised in grocery or other stores; those cards may carry big fees.

FIX 3 Ask a family member or trusted friend with good credit to add you as a user on their credit card. The debt paid off on the card will show up on your credit report

and help your score, Hardekopf says. But make this move only with people you trust and have an existing financial relationship with because if they miss or are late with a payment, it can ding your score as well as theirs.

FIX 4 Opt in to Experian Boost free of charge to get on-time utility, cell, and even Netflix payments counted toward your credit score. Get your rent counted too by signing up, along with your landlord, for a service like RentTrack or PayYourRent. For a fee, these programs

link your bank account with your credit report to capture nontraditional types of bill paying. They are indicators that a consumer who is "credit invisible" or has a thin credit file is able to manage credit responsibly, says Francis Creighton, president and CEO of the Consumer Data Industry Association, the trade group that represents the credit bureaus.

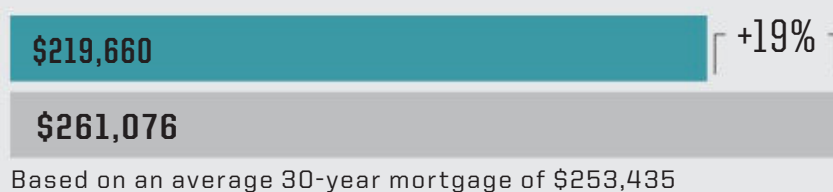
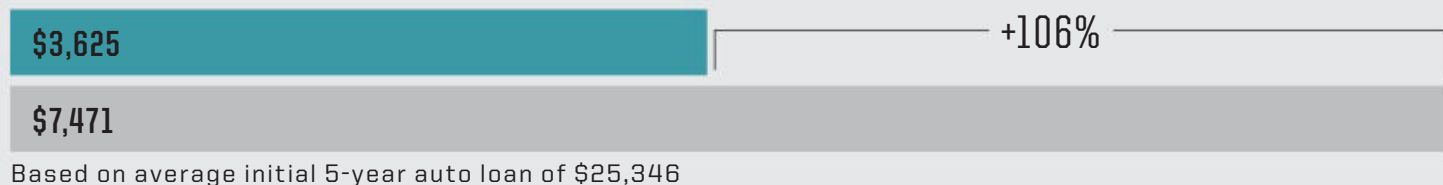
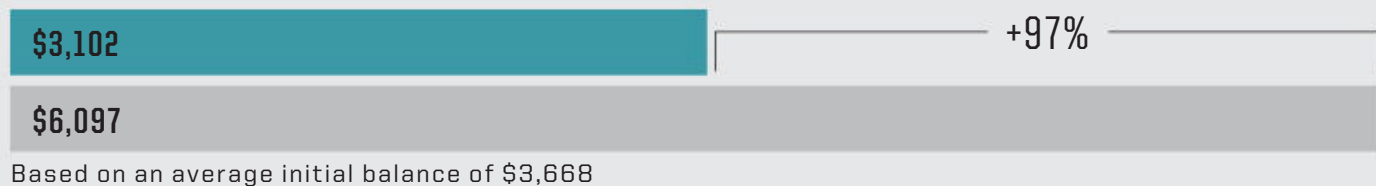
Go to experian.com to sign up for Experian Boost. Although the program "might increase your score by just a few points," Hardekopf says, that could be enough to move your ratings from "fair" to "good."

The High Cost of Low Credit Scores

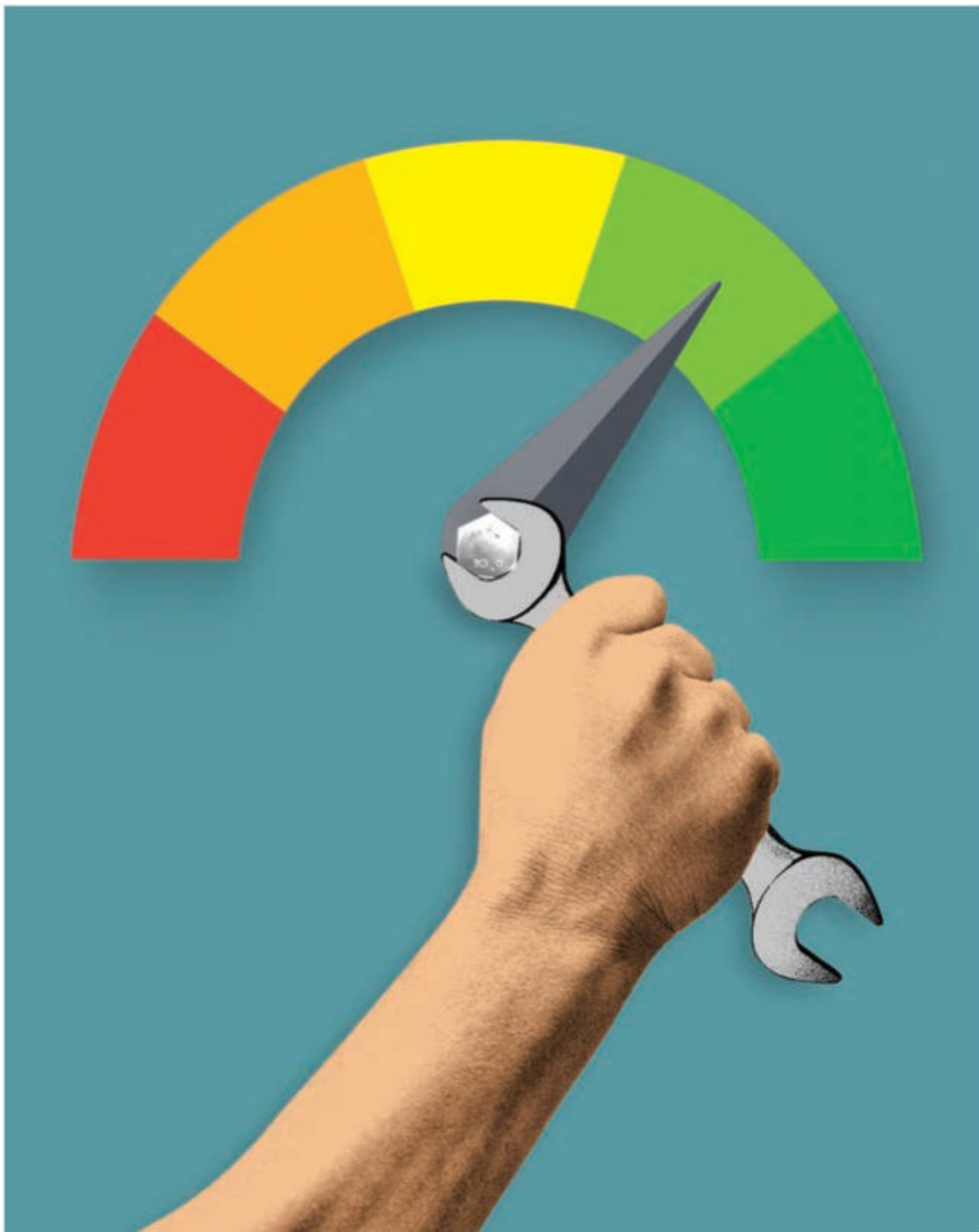


Here's how much more in interest you'd pay on a credit card, a 5-year auto loan, and a 30-year mortgage if you have a low vs. high credit score.

TOTAL INTEREST CHARGED



Source: Q3 2019 figures provided by LendingTree.



HOW TO MANAGE MULTIPLE SCORES

FIX 5

If you're seeking a loan, ask the lender which

VantageScore or FICO score it uses. Then find out how you perform on that score. (Go to myfico.com for your FICO score, or to a third party such as American Express or NerdWallet for your VantageScore. You may have to pay to see the scores—\$29.95 for FICO's Advanced subscription plan, which lets you see scores from all three bureaus.)

If you can learn the main factors that a score considers, you may be able to boost it, Hardekopf says. For example, you could pay down credit card debt to improve your debt-to-credit ratio, which is likely to improve some scores.

FIX 6

Check your credit report, and dispute any errors

you find. Obtain your credit report free of charge at AnnualCreditReport.com and read it carefully. All credit scores can benefit from having incorrect negative items removed, Ejaz says.

In CR's recent study, of the 34 percent of volunteers who found errors, 11 percent said they were related to debt they didn't owe or had already paid off, or to payments inaccurately reported as late or missed.

Dispute errors in writing by sending a certified letter with supporting evidence to each of the big three credit bureaus. They have about 30 days to respond.

FIX 7

Pay down credit card debt so that you use no more

than 30 percent of your available credit. All credit scores respond to the same good habits, and lenders like to see that you have available credit but aren't using much of it, says Bruce McClary, a senior vice president for the National Foundation for Credit Counseling, an organization that helps consumers improve their financial profile. Reducing debt load will almost always help scores.



PROBLEM

So Many Scores

EQUIFAX, TRANSUNION, AND EXPERIAN make money by selling scores, based on models developed by FICO and VantageScore, to banks, insurers, credit card

companies, even employers and marketing firms. That's why you have not one but many credit scores, each designed to assess risk for these various businesses.

For example, when you apply for a mortgage, your lender is most likely to use FICO 2, 4, or 5. But many consumers are surprised to learn that those mortgage scores tend to be lower than other credit scores, says CR's Ejaz.

That's because mortgage FICO scores weigh on-time payments more heavily than FICO 8 or similar scores, which are used by auto lenders and credit card companies.

The 4 Credit Scores You Must Know About

Lenders use different scores depending on whether you're seeking a loan for a house, car, or credit card. Here are common ones.

GENERAL CREDIT



TYPE OF SCORE FICO 8, 9
VantageScore 3.0

FIND IT Free through many banks, credit card issuers, and websites

MORTGAGE



TYPE OF SCORE
FICO 2, 4, 5

FIND IT Free in mortgage documents or starting at \$19.95 at myfico.com

AUTO LOAN



TYPE OF SCORE FICO Auto
Score 2, 4, 5, 8

FIND IT Starting at \$19.95 at myfico.com

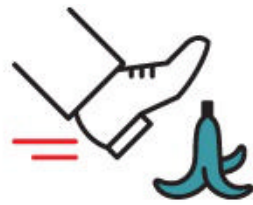
CREDIT CARD



TYPE OF SCORE
FICO Bankcard
Score 2, 3, 4, 5, 8

FIND IT Starting at \$19.95 at myfico.com

Note: FICO recently released FICO 10 and 10 T versions. VantageScore has released a 4.0 version.



PROBLEM

Small Slip-Ups Cause Big Problems

DEBTS 30 DAYS past due or more can devastate your credit history and score, and the impact can be long-lasting.

Patricia L., of Allen, Texas (who asked that her last name be withheld), found that her credit score plummeted more than 140 points after an electric bill for less than \$100 went unpaid because it was sent to the wrong address. The bill went to collections, which she discovered when a credit monitoring service she uses alerted her to the lower score.

By then it was too late. "Credit collection agencies should notify you before an item gets put on your credit report," she says.

Something similar happened to Robin Hennessy from CR's consumer panel. She says her "exceptional" score dropped 100 points after a single missed payment on a credit card. The mistake still haunts her report even though it happened three years ago.

Indeed, such payment snafus can stay on your report for seven years—a period set in the 1970 Fair Credit Reporting Act. But that is "arbitrary," says Wu, of the National Consumer Law Center. She says that Sweden and Germany keep negative items on credit reports for three to four years. Doing the same in the U.S. could "minimize the vicious cycle aspect of low credit scores," she says.

IMPROVING YOUR NUMBERS

FIX 8

Pay off debts in collections as soon as possible.

Collections debt is treated differently than late payments, and once it is paid, most credit-scoring systems won't include it in their calculation or weigh it as heavily, McClary says. If you're negotiating with a debt collector, ask that the notice be removed from your report once the debt is paid. They may do so. "There is no law that says the collection agency has to report it," he says.

FIX 9

When mortgage shopping, do it within a month.

Each time a mortgage lender looks up your credit, called a "hard pull," it hurts your score by a few points for a year or two, McClary says. Credit bureaus usually consolidate similar hard pulls for mortgages, so a good rule of thumb is to do your comparison shopping within 30 days.

FIX 10

Be careful when shopping for credit cards, too.

Ironically, potential lenders "don't want to see that you're shopping around for credit," McClary says, because it looks like you've met financial trouble. So don't apply for a card unless you're sure you qualify and you've settled on a card you want, he says.

FIX 11

Avoid closing unused credit accounts.

You may assume there's no reason not to cancel a card you never use. But doing so could drag down your score, McClary says, if it changes your debt-to-credit ratio. That's what happened to Terry Wilson, who lived in Pennsylvania when a Capital One account he no longer used was closed by the bank. "The loss of a \$15,000 line of credit plunged my credit score," he says.

Exception: It can make sense to close a card with a high annual fee or if doing so will help you control spending.

STAY SAFE IN ANY

STORM

by
TOBIE STANGER

with additional reporting by
JAMISON PFEIFER

illustrations by
SINELAB





Simple ways you can prepare now—and take action in the moment—for a tornado, a hurricane, a wildfire, an earthquake, and more.

AT 7:02 P.M. JULY 8, 2014, a tornado with winds gusting to 135 mph ambushed the town of Smithfield. The storm left four dead—including one infant—and a community stunned.

Smithfield, you see, isn't in Tornado Alley or even in the Great Plains. It's in central New York state. "We don't get tornadoes in New York, right? Anyone will tell you that," Gov. Andrew Cuomo told reporters the next day. "Well, we do now."

Natural disasters are always traumatic. But climate change, abetted by our own activity, is making the unexpected and the extreme ever more likely. Catastrophic floods happen more often: Three, for instance, hit the St. Louis region between 2015 and 2019. Wildfires have burned an average of 7 million acres per year since 2000, more than double the rate in the 1990s. In February, record cold in Texas set off a cascading crisis of electrical outages, burst pipes, and flooded homes.

"It's not like we're seeing new types of disasters, but we're seeing them in places we're not used to, and with more intensity," says Jeff Schlegelmilch, director of the National Center for Disaster Preparedness at Columbia University's Earth Institute. "It's the same concerns, amped up."

The good news? If calamity touches your family or home, a little preparation can make a huge difference—potentially saving money, treasured possessions, and even lives.

So we asked a few dozen experts and survivors for advice on building disaster resilience. As it happens, most of their tips call for a modest investment of money or time. "You don't have to be a doomsday prepper," says Brenda Muhammad, who teaches readiness skills in Syracuse, N.Y. "But be your own first responder."

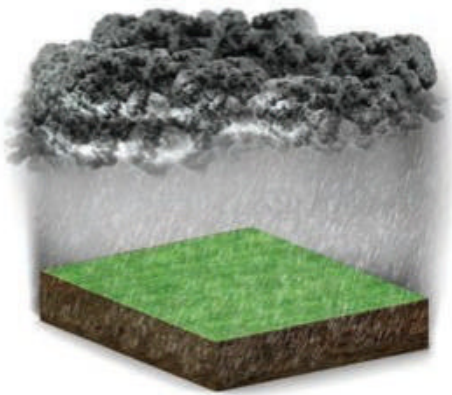


48% of Americans
have made an emergency plan.*

\$400

More than a third of Americans say they couldn't cover an emergency expense of this size with cash, savings, or even a credit card if they had to pay off the balance right away.

HURRICANES AND SEVERE STORMS



HOMEOWNERS IN hurricane-susceptible areas, such as those along the East and Gulf coasts, should consider retrofits, like hurricane shutters, tailored to local conditions. But wherever you live, you can do plenty to limit the impact of extreme weather.

PREPARE NOW

Keep up the upkeep.

Remove dead tree trunks and limbs. Check your roof for decay once a year—use binoculars to avoid the risk of ladders—and hire a roofer if needed. Clean, fix, and secure gutters and leaders. Get your deck inspected every spring.

Get a weather radio. The devices, \$25 to \$100 or more, provide severe weather alerts from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Look for one with the NOAA All Hazards logo. These meet voluntary industry standards, have undergone NOAA usability and performance testing, come with a backup battery, and have either a tone-alert feature—which keeps the radio silent until there's a weather alert—or Specific Area

Message Encoding, which lets you limit alerts to particular regions.

Consider a generator.

In our ratings, on page 49, prices for recommended models run from \$550 for a small portable unit capable of powering a large space heater and charging cell phones to more than \$4,000 for a permanently installed machine that can power an entire house. With portables, look for safety technology,

which turns off the unit when it detects elevated carbon monoxide.

Retrofit right. Buy code-conforming hurricane shutters, impact-resistant windows, and wind-rated garage doors if you live in a wind zone. The cost to buy and install shutters on 10 windows is \$2,350; a garage door in Florida is \$1,200 to \$3,000, according to estimates from the Insurance Institute for

Business & Home Safety (IBHS), an organization that tests building materials. Add metal hurricane clips to strengthen junctures in exposed roof rafters; they can be installed for about \$10 each. When replacing a roof, use shingles that do well in our tests for wind resistance (at [CR.org/roofing0721](https://www.consumerreports.org/roofing0721)). You also can use the specialized building methods and materials that meet IBHS Fortified Roof standards.

LEARN
HOW TO
...

Stack Sandbags

- 1.** Fill bags 1/2 to 2/3 full. Loading them is easier with two people.
- 2.** Lay bags lengthwise, covering the unfilled part of each bag with the next one, tucking the flap under at the end of a row. For more rows, stagger the seams like brickwork.
- 3.** Lighter “sandless” bags expand when wet and stack the same way. Prices vary; online, a six-pack starts around \$33.

\$26,807 Estimated cost of a 1-inch flood
in a 2,500-square-foot, one-story home.

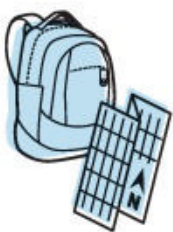


Alabama is the state with the most tornado deaths (34) between 2015 and 2020.



HAVE MULTIPLE MODES OF COMMUNICATION

Enter key contacts into all phones. Give household members paper contact lists, too. Tap someone outside your area to be an emergency communication hub. When power is out, a backup battery for a Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) line can extend its run time and allow for emergency calls; copper landlines generally work in an outage. In a crisis, texts are more likely to connect than calls because they use far less bandwidth. Turn on one device at a time to conserve power. Access social networks to tap community resources. A ham radio, if available, is another good resource, experts say.



HONE YOUR FAMILY'S EMERGENCY PLAN

Store "go bags" and emergency kits where they're easy to grab. Save directions to local shelters; check rules for social distancing and pets. Run drills at least annually: entering a safe room, evacuating, packing the car, and meeting outside the home when separated. (Scout at least two alternative, easy-to-reach places.) With kids, turn drills into games. Reward pets with treats.

PLAN FOR FLOODING

Floods can happen anywhere, the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) says. In higher-risk areas, you can landscape and upgrade your home for more protection. Check your property's flood risk at msc.fema.gov.

Buy flood insurance.

The median annual cost for homeowners in a high-risk area is \$797. It's \$516 in other areas. For renters in high-risk areas, it's \$298 for belongings only; elsewhere, it's \$216. Learn more at floodsmart.gov.

Focus on the foundation.

Fill hairline cracks and small holes with vinyl concrete patching compound or cement. For larger openings, use polyurethane, silicone, or latex concrete caulk (or call in a pro). The average cost of waterproofing an entire basement is \$600 to \$11,500, according to HomeAdvisor. Consider a sump pump with a backup battery; prices range from \$275 to \$3,900, HomeAdvisor says.

Landscape right. A rain garden, for example, is a depressed area where water can pool after heavy rain and be absorbed slowly into the earth. It can be planted with deep-rooted native species for natural flood prevention.



"'MacGyvering' pays off. We shut down the water main so the pipes wouldn't freeze, but kept the faucets on. I started collecting drips in empty bottles. In 24 hours, we filled 8 to 10 gallons."

Yvette Beltran-Southwell, Lewisville, Texas, after the February 2021 "Winter Apocalypse"



WATER WISDOM

Focus first on stocking this necessity. You can live far longer without food than without water.

STORE ENOUGH You'll need at least 1 gallon per person per day, for at least three days. But ideally, have enough for two weeks.

ENSURE THAT IT'S SAFE Buy sealed, prefilled jugs, or sanitize and fill food-grade jugs. (Read how at cdc.gov/healthywater/emergency.) Keep containers cool (50° to 70° F), out of sunlight, and away from toxic substances, such as pesticides and gasoline, that can permeate the plastic. Replace the water every six months. (Use the old water for nondrinking purposes, such as washing your car.) Consider lightweight water sacks for your "go bag" (\$42 for one-hundred 4-ounce packages at redcross.org); they last up to five years, says preparedness expert David Ofwono.

FIND STORAGE SPACE If it's limited, get creative, says Brenda Muhammad, executive director of Focusing Our Resources for Community Enlightenment, a Syracuse, N.Y., not-for-profit that teaches emergency skills. "Put [water containers] under your bed, or put a plank and cloth on a few of them and create an ottoman," she suggests. Look for stackable products; we found stackable 5-gallon food-grade (approved by the Food and Drug Administration) bottles for around \$13 apiece at an online emergency supplier.

BEFORE A STORM, FILL YOUR BATHTUB Use this water for flushing and washing—not drinking. Or buy a capped, plastic bladder that can hold drinkable water in your tub.

UNDERSTAND EMERGENCY ADVISORIES A boil-water advisory from health officials means you can drink tap water that has been boiled for at least 1 minute (3 minutes at elevations above 6,500 feet). With a do-not-drink advisory, even boiling might not make tap water safe—so use only stored, potable water for drinking, cooking, and brushing teeth.



1,226

Average yearly tornadoes in the U.S. (1990 to 2019), the most of any country.*



>40% of all flood losses paid by the National Flood Insurance Program from 2015 to 2019 were for properties outside of high-flood-risk areas.

Build to resist floods.

If you're in a high-risk flood area, consider, among other measures, building a levee or flood wall, or even elevating your house. Raising a home foundation above a flood plain, for instance, typically costs \$2,984 to \$9,101, HomeAdvisor says.

TAKE ACTION BEFORE TORNADOES

Travelers and residents in the Southeast and Central Plains, where most serious tornadoes happen, should take same-day precautions.

Map out a shelter. Save the address in a map app. If you're in a manufactured structure, such as a mobile home, rush elsewhere—a safe room, shelter, or sturdy building—immediately after receiving an emergency alert, FEMA advises.

Designate a safe space. Ideally, choose an interior room—one that has no



INSURE YOUR HOME AND BELONGINGS PROPERLY

Get replacement-cost homeowners insurance, which covers rebuilding your home and replacing its contents. Make sure it covers building-code changes. Consider buying an inflation-guard clause for materials and labor. A higher deductible will lower your premium, but you'll need to save for that expense in the event of a claim. (Check CR's homeowners insurance ratings at CR.org/insurance0721.) Store a video inventory of your home's contents in the cloud, and on a thumb drive to keep with you. Do the same with documents such as birth certificates, passports, insurance policies, and tax forms—and cherished photos.

windows—that's on the lowest level of your home. (A closet will work.) Practice entering the room with your entire household, including your pets. Keep the space generally clear. "One person told me after a tornado, 'The closet where we normally would go was full of stuff because we'd just been to the Super Saver,'" recalls Daphne LaDue, a University of Oklahoma researcher who studies household behavior during tornadoes.

Build or add a safe room. An 8x8x8-foot room in new construction costs between \$9,400 and \$13,100, FEMA says. Online, we found prefabricated units starting around \$4,000, without installation. Make sure the door assembly has a label that says the door meets International Code Council standard ICC-500, indicating it can withstand a tornado wind speed of 250 mph.

READY FOR A COMING STORM

Start outside. Store outdoor furniture. Put vehicles in a garage. Shut windows and doors. "They used to say, crack the windows to equalize the pressure," says Anne Cope, IBHS chief engineer. "But shutting everything limits the extent to which Mother Nature can rampage through your house."

Set up smartphone alerts. Government alerts are on by default on iPhones. On AndroidOS 10.0 and higher, make sure they're on by going to Settings > Apps and notifications > Advanced > Wireless Emergency Alerts. Don't put your phone on silent or night mode. Keep location settings on.

Move valuables to higher floors. Standard homeowners insurance won't cover storm flooding damage. NFIP flood coverage pays only up to \$2,500 for the loss of certain valuables.



POWER MOVES

Have flashlights and extra batteries on hand. If the lights go out, take these steps.

UNPLUG EVERYTHING When power returns, a surge can damage connected machinery.

MAKE A PLAN FOR MEALS In an unpowered but closed fridge, food typically stays at a safe temperature—40° F or below—for about 4 hours. Cook raw meat and perishables within that

time. Food is safe for 2 more hours above 40° F, or 1 hour if the outside temperature is above 90° F, says Sana Mujahid, PhD, manager of food safety research and testing at CR. A full freezer stays cold for about 48 hours; a half-full freezer, half that. Food in a cooler is good if it remains below 40° F. Use an appliance thermometer—about \$6 online—to check.

WHEN IT'S HOT, HYDRATE AND SEEK AIR CONDITIONING Drink extra water. And don't wait until you're thirsty, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says.

WHEN IT'S COLD, CONSERVE HEAT Keep everyone in one room; one with a south-facing window will be warmest. Layer clothing. Use only a portable propane heater designed for indoor use, and follow ventilation instructions carefully.

53,563

Number of wildfires caused by humans in 2020. Number caused by lightning: 5,387.



1 gallon per day for 3 days Minimum amount of water needed for each household member when sheltering in place. Ideally, have enough for two weeks.

WILDFIRES



ANYONE WHO LIVES in a drought-prone area is vulnerable. Even city-dwellers may need to protect themselves from smoke.

PREPARE NOW

Landscape with fire in mind. Use stone walls and gravel as fire breaks. Consider shrubs such as sumac and cotoneaster and plants like coreopsis and French lavender, which are fire-resistant, says the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

Rethink building materials. Consider noncombustible siding materials, such as fiber cement, brick veneer, and stucco, the Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety recommends. When reroofing, make sure the shingles are labeled Class A—the highest fire-resistance rating—by UL. Fire often spreads from home to home via fences and decks, the IBHS says. So if you have a wood or vinyl fence, replace the section next to your house—at least 5 feet—with metal. For decks, opt for a metal-joint substructure.

LEARN HOW TO ...



Build a 'Go Bag'

Contents should include: **1.** Water and nonperishable, nutritious food. **2.** Phone charger, flashlight, and radio (battery or hand-crank). **3.** Change of clothes, sturdy shoes, personal items. **4.** IDs, personal docs, key contacts, maps, cash in small bills. **5.** First-aid kit and meds. **6.** Duct tape. For more info, including a complete supply list for sheltering in place, go to ready.gov/kit.

Clear away combustibles.

Move flammable materials at least 5 feet from your home, decks, and overhangs. Move wood piles at least 30 feet away. Avoid outdoor furniture that can easily catch fire, such as wicker or hardwood seating.

Keep the yard clean.

Regularly remove fallen leaves, dead plants, and pine needles in gutters, under decking, and within 30 feet

of your home. Trim tree branches to at least 10 feet from your chimney and other trees, and remove branches over your roof. Use stone or gravel mulches, not organic ones. Keep your grass cut to no higher than 4 inches.

Buy an effective air purifier. Check CR's August 2021 issue, which will include updated air purifier ratings, or go to CR.org/airpurifiers0721.

Practice packing and fleeing.

"Give yourself 30 minutes to leave," says David Ofwono, director of First on Compliance, an emergency preparedness consulting company based in California. "Sometimes a wildfire moves so fast, that's all the time people have." Have face masks on hand, ideally N95s.

Have an evacuation plan.

If time permits, close and lock windows and doors.



"Know your escape routes, your options, in advance. You don't want to have to figure that out at 2 in the morning as all hell is raining down on you. And never let your gas tank go below half a tank."

MacAdam Lojowsky, Redwood Valley, Calif., on fleeing 2017 North Bay Fire



Alaska is the state that had the most earthquakes (9,020) between 2010 and 2015. Second most: Oklahoma (1,714).*

\$2,300

Per-owner spending for disaster repair in Houston in 2019. In Dallas and Miami it was \$600—compared with \$300 nationally.

EARTHQUAKES



WEST COAST RESIDENTS are most likely to be affected by a damaging quake, though less severe earthquakes are increasingly common elsewhere. And if you'll be traveling to a quake-prone area, it's wise to be ready.

PREPARE NOW

Set up an extra warning. Make sure your smartphone's Wireless Emergency Alerts are on. If you are in California or Oregon, download one of the free MyShake or

QuakeAlertUSA apps, which are designed to deliver alerts seconds before humans feel the ground shake, giving you extra time to shelter. They're available on Android phones and iPhones.

Secure your stuff. Heavy or tall objects should be attached to walls with specialized fasteners. (Water heaters, which can pose fire hazards or land on people, pets, and other items when dislodged, need particular attention.) Install latches on cabinet doors to prevent them from flying open, and place rubberized shelf mats between and under dishes to protect them during tremors.

Investigate earthquake insurance. Earthquakes are not covered by most conventional homeowners policies. In California, check earthquakeauthority.com.

IN THE MOMENT

Drop, cover, hold on. Get under a sturdy table or bed to avoid falling objects. Hold the legs to help you stay underneath. Don't run outside. Don't stand in a doorway; it puts you at risk of injury from falling or flying objects. In bed, cover your head and neck with a pillow. If you're outdoors, avoid buildings. In a car, pull over and set your parking brake.



CONNECT WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

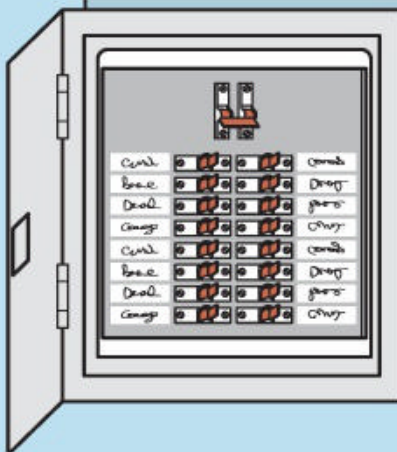
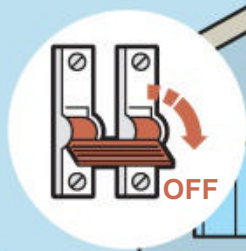
Talk to neighbors about resources, such as firewood and tools, that can easily be shared or swapped. Find out who can perform CPR and first aid—or get trained online or in person (redcross.org/takeaclass). Get involved with a community emergency response team of residents trained to prepare, aid, and equip neighbors to deal with emergencies (ready.gov/cert).

LEARN HOW TO ...

Shut Off Your Utilities

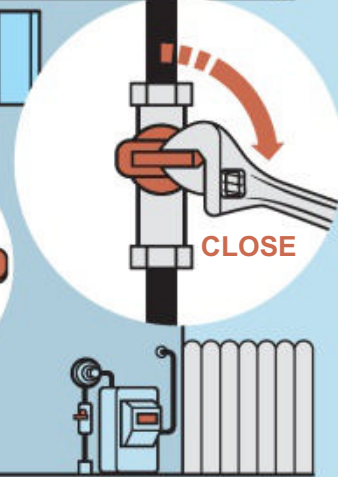
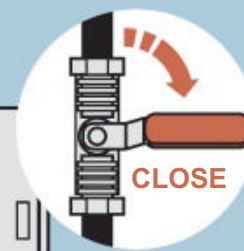
1. Label electrical box, and water and gas shutoff valves.
2. Practice shutting off water; replace defective parts.
3. Consult your utility on gas shutoffs; guidance and equipment vary by area. (Always have a pro turn gas back on.)
4. If you have time, unplug appliances and shut off water and electricity (individual breakers first, then main circuit).
5. Smell gas? Leave. Call 911 or the utility.

ELECTRIC



WATER

GAS



COMMUNITY ICON: RODRIGO DAMATI

Ratings > **Energy to Spare** A typical home's basic functions require about 5,000 watts of power, including about 600 for a fridge, 1,500 for a portable heater, up to 600 for lights, and 750 to 1,500 for a sump pump.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results					Features + Specs				
			Power delivery	Power quality	Noise	Ease of use	CO safety technology	Run time range (hr.)	Claimed output (watts)	Weight (lb.)	Fuel type	Fuel gauge
 GENERATOR RATINGS												
LARGE HOME STANDBY These permanently installed models produce up to 20,000 watts and run on propane or natural gas. They typically turn on automatically and are designed to power everything in your house simultaneously. They're also the most expensive option when you factor in installation.	✓ Champion 100179	93	\$3,000	↑	↑	↓	↑	NA	131-265	NG: 11,000 LPG: 12,500	NA	NG/LPG
	✓ Cummins RS13A	91	\$3,400	↑	↑	↓	↑	NA	139-216	NG: 13,000 LPG: 13,000	NA	NG/LPG
	✓ Briggs & Stratton 040546	90	\$3,600	↑	↑	↓	↑	NA	126-208	NG: 10,800 LPG: 12,000	NA	NG/LPG
	✓ Generac 7177	89	\$4,150	↑	↑	↓	↑	NA	136-238	NG: 16,000 LPG: 16,000	NA	NG/LPG
	✓ Generac 7174	89	\$3,600	↑	↑	↓	↑	NA	124-238	NG: 13,000 LPG: 13,000	NA	NG/LPG
SMALL HOME STANDBY Permanently installed, these run on natural gas or propane and typically kick on automatically during an outage, producing up to 10,000 watts.	💰 Champion 100174	94	\$2,350	↑	↑	↑	↑	NA	228-353	NG: 7,500 LPG: 8,500	NA	NG/LPG
	✓ Winco PSS8B	92	\$4,400	↑	↑	↓	↑	NA	221-294	NG: 7,600 LPG: 8,400	NA	NG/LPG
	✓ Generac 6998	90	\$2,000	↑	↑	↓	↑	NA	236-393	NG: 6,000 LPG: 7,500	NA	NG/LPG
	✓ Kohler 8RESV	90	\$2,400	↑	↑	↓	↑	NA	180-294	NG: 7,000 LPG: 8,000	NA	NG/LPG
PORTABLE Weighing 100 to 300 pounds, these produce up to 8,000 watts and can power entire circuits when connected to a breaker box by a transfer switch. They cost considerably less than standby models—and don't require professional installation—but some make a lot of noise.	✓ DeWalt DXGNR4000	77	\$550	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	8-16	4,000	138	Gas
	✓ Honda EG4000CL With Co-Minder	76	\$1,600	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	0-12	3,500	178	Gas
	✓ Generac 7680	73	\$800	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	9-15	6,500	219	Gas
	✓ Cat RP8000 E	72	\$1,150	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	11-18	8,000	245	Gas
	✓ Briggs & Stratton 30728	72	\$800	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	9-17	6,250	240	Gas
	✓ DeWalt PMC168000	71	\$1,050	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	9-17	8,000	254	Gas
	✓ Generac 7683	71	\$850	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	8-15	6,500	219	Gas
RECREATIONAL INVERTER They can power an appliance or a couple of cells in a pinch. They have automatic shutoff, key for safety.	✓ Honda EU2200iTAG	76	\$1,100	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	5-10	1,800	55	Gas
	✓ DeWalt DXGNI2200	75	\$650	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	4-10	1,700	58	Gas

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

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score is based on the performance of the generator in all our tests. Power delivery indicates the unit's handling of a simulated demand surge. Power quality measures consistency of voltage. Noise is sound intensity at 23 and 50 feet. Ease of use indicates the maneuverability of noninstalled generators and the presence of certain features. CO safety technology is determined by the presence and responsiveness of built-in technology to automatically shut the generator off in an enclosed space before carbon monoxide builds up to dangerous levels; the feature is not necessary in permanently installed systems. Under fuel type, "NG" is natural gas; "LPG," liquefied propane gas; "Gas," gasoline.

TAKE GREAT

PHOTOS

WITH YOUR SMARTPHONE

USE THESE EXPERT TIPS—AND CR'S SELECTION
OF THE TOP SMARTPHONES—
TO GET THE BEST PICTURE EVERY TIME.

BY BREE FOWLER

THE CAMERA ON the average smartphone has come a long way in recent years. What used to be a modest feature, mainly good for simple snapshots, has evolved into a sophisticated collection of hardware, software, and lenses fit for shooting even formal family portraits.

“Phone cameras have gotten so good, it’s ridiculous,” says Scott Kelby, author of “The iPhone Photography Book,” which was published in March by Rocky Nook. Plus, a smartphone is small enough to fit in your pocket—and lets you share images on social media and with your family as soon as you’re finished snapping. So it’s no surprise that more people are using smartphones to document their lives.

While even the best smartphone cameras don’t have the room to pack in the hardware needed to give you the same results as a great digital camera, they come close. A budget

phone such as the Samsung Galaxy A52 5G, for example, which starts at \$500, offers a multicamera setup. In addition to the traditional view, it has a camera with an ultrawide lens that lets you squeeze more into a frame. Other phones add a telephoto-lens camera, so you can zoom in on faraway action.

Advanced features previously reserved for super-premium models have made their way onto less expensive phones. They include optical image stabilization, which helps eliminate blurring, high-definition (4K) and slow-motion video, and portrait, panoramic, and time-lapse photo modes.

But all that wizardry isn’t worth much if you don’t know how to use it to snag a good selfie or group portrait, especially once the sun has set and you’re dining beneath the stars. Here’s how to get great results from the camera in your pocket.



■ TIP

Use an Ultrawide Lens to Fit the Whole Gang Into Your Shot

IT'S ALWAYS AWKWARD when someone gets cut out of a group portrait. But a smartphone with an ultrawide camera can help you squeeze more people—even the stragglers on the ends—into the frame. In much the same way that a zoom lens brings you closer to your subject

from wherever you happen to be, using a camera with an ultrawide lens is like moving back a step or two to capture a wider area. For group selfies, it sure beats stretching out your arm, which can only go so far, or using a selfie stick, which is annoying. Got a sweeping

landscape you want to capture? Ultrawide-angle cameras can be great for that, too. But a word of caution: Some ultrawide lenses create a fish-eye effect, distorting the corners of the image. If that occurs, experiment with using your phone's panorama mode.

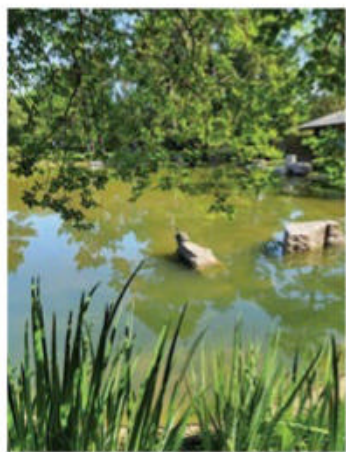
■ TIP

Get Closer to the Action

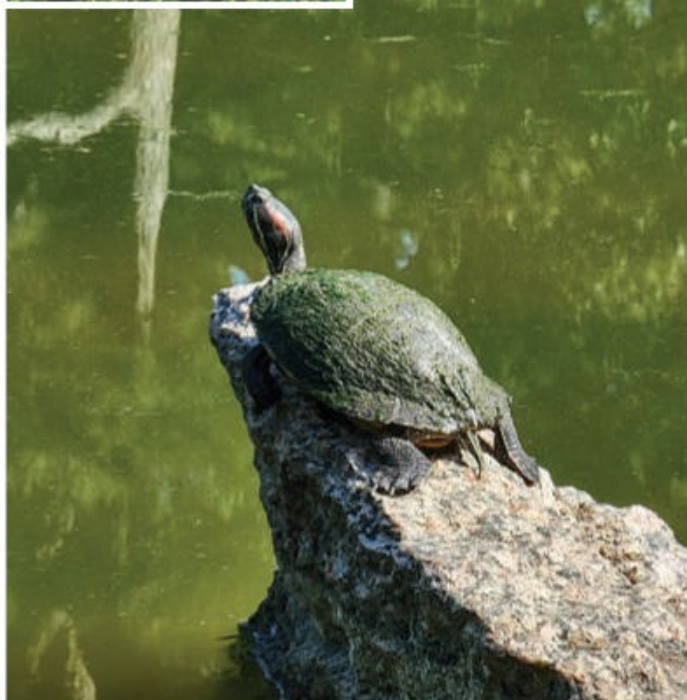
WHILE IT'S VERY tempting to use the "pinch to zoom" method on your touch screen to zero in on your subject, the resulting image won't be crisp. Software zoom just can't match the precision of a telephoto lens.

That's why some phones now offer cameras with optical zoom. While most of these models come with just a modest 2x or 3x zoom (which is still a big help), others let you get even closer. The Samsung Galaxy S21 Ultra boasts a 10x zoom camera—a game changer if you're trying to capture something far away, like a boat on a lake or a child's soccer game.

Don't have an optical zoom? Move yourself closer to your subject. If that's not an option, take a wider shot, then crop your photo later. See "Cropping (and Other Photo-Editing Tricks)," on the facing page, for tips.

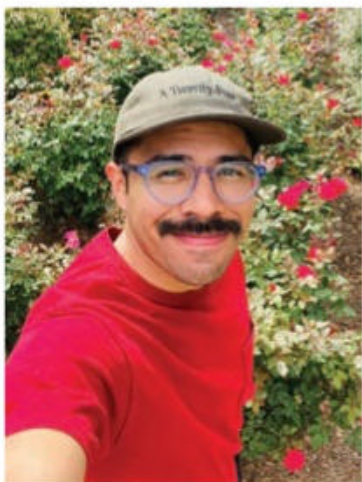


Optical zoom (like the 10X zoom used here) lets you snap a sharp close-up from a distance.



■ TIP

Snap a Flattering Selfie



DOES THIS SOUND like you? While you hold the phone, you struggle to train the camera on your face, maneuver your finger onto the shutter button, and look natural. It's

mighty hard to pull off.

But not when you know how to activate the shutter button remotely so you don't have to actually tap it to take the picture. The S Pen stylus that comes with Samsung's Galaxy Note phones allows you to control the shutter by clicking the button at the top of the stylus. So you can hold it in one hand and the phone in the other—or prop your phone up at a distance while you take the picture from wherever you are. The Apple Watch includes an app that lets you trigger your iPhone's shutter from your wrist.

But you don't need those extras. Most phones have a timer that lets you set a

delayed shutter of 3 to 10 seconds and strike a perfect pose before the camera fires away.

To access this feature on an iPhone, tap on the up arrow at the top of the image to open the camera tools, then select the timer feature. (It looks like a clock.) On Android phones, the timer feature is usually at the top of the display and also looks like a clock.

If you don't have a good spot to prop up your phone, Scott Kelby, a professional photographer, advises holding it above your head and shooting down. This is a flattering angle because it strengthens your jawline.

■ TIP

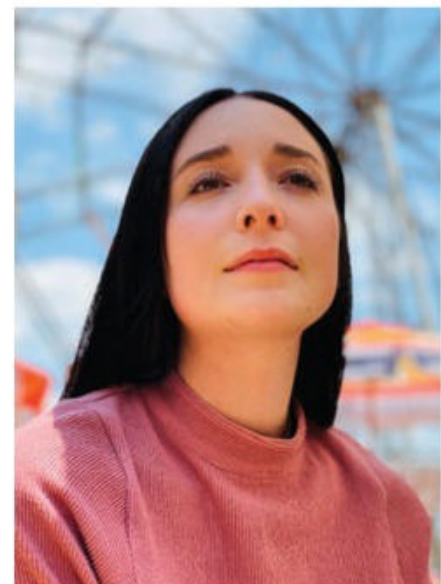
Make a Portrait Really Pop

MANY SMARTPHONES NOW have a built-in portrait mode that reproduces the classic bokeh effect employed by pro photographers, blurring the background to make the subject stand out in the foreground. (The term comes from the Japanese word "boke," which means "blur" or "haze.")

To achieve this effect, the phone uses either two rear cameras that work together to create one image with varied depths of field, or software that harnesses artificial intelligence to "see" the subject and separate it from the background. In CR's testing, two-camera set-ups consistently outperform software-powered ones.

Turn on portrait mode in the camera app (you'll probably see the word "portrait" beneath the image), then simply tap on the subject of your portrait so that the phone knows what should be in focus, and take the shot.

Today's premium phones from Apple and Samsung even let you snap a photo and edit it later, adjusting the level of background blur to suit your taste. If you're not happy with the effect, you can strip the blur out completely.



WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

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■ TIP

See Clearly After Dark

SMARTPHONES HAVE LONG struggled when the sunlight wanes, leaving those who want to capture a cityscape after dark or a night of celebration in an atmospheric interior with fuzzy, hard-to-see results.

In general, the less natural light a smartphone camera has to work with, the more disappointing the results can be. And adding more light is a surefire way to destroy the mood. “When the flash goes off,” Kelby says, “your photo falls to driver’s-license

quality.” Subjects can end up overexposed and colors can appear washed out and distorted.

For the night owls among us, today’s smartphones offer night modes that leave the camera shutter open longer to suck up more natural light, even starlight, for example.

The trick is to hold the phone steady while the shutter is open. If you don’t, details can blur. Brace your arms against your body as you shoot, or rest your elbows on a tabletop. Better yet, invest in an inexpensive tripod that will do all of that for you (see below).



THE BEST \$15 YOU’LL SPEND FOR BETTER PHOTOS

Whether you’re taking a portrait, a close-up of a flower, or a photo in a candlelit restaurant, a tripod can significantly improve the quality of your image.

No need to spring for

a bulky, pricey pro-style model. You can find a basic option on Amazon (and elsewhere) for less than \$15. If you want something a bit more robust, Scott Kelby, author of “The iPhone

Photography Book,” recommends the \$35 Pocket Tripod PRO, a credit-card-sized design that tucks into your wallet and folds out into a tiny stand for your phone.

In a pinch, you can

always prop the phone on top of a soda can to keep it stable and level as you shoot. For landscape pics, bracing your back against a big tree can help keep your body steady.

CROPPING

(and Other Photo-Editing Tricks)



CROPPING

Cutting away the dead space and distracting details from around your subject shifts the focus to details you want to spotlight.

On an iPhone, open the photo app, tap Edit, then the box-shaped icon in the bottom right corner. Select the photo shape (such as “Original” or “16:9”), then pull on the photo’s corners to adjust the zoom. You can also move the image within the box for a more interesting composition.

On most Android phones, tap the pencil icon at the bottom of the image, then the cropping tool icon in the



lower left corner. Click on the icon shaped like a box, then select the photo’s dimensions. Drag its corners in and out, and move the image around.



CONTRAST, BRIGHTNESS, EXPOSURE

With the iPhone and Android photo apps, you can use toggle bars to increase or decrease the levels of these three attributes. Boosting brightness, for example, can add light to a subject. Don’t worry if you make a mistake; both apps let you revert to your original to start over.



FILTERS

Adding one can layer some artsy fun over what might otherwise be a boring picture while keeping it fairly realistic. For example, the iPhone has a handful of “Vivid” and “Dramatic” filter options that can add warm or cool tones. You can also create an old-fashioned vibe by changing your color photo to black and white or sepia.

Ratings > **Picture Perfect** Want a smartphone that takes amazing photos? Many of the models at the top of our ratings feature cameras that scored well in CR's labs. Here's a closer look at how they perform.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Camera Test Results			Test Results				Features				
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Rear image quality	Rear 1080p video quality	Selfie image quality	Battery and charging	Display	Durability	Performance	Battery life (hr.)	Camera (megapixels)	Camera flash	Camera recording resolution	
SMARTPHONES																
✓ Apple iPhone 12 Pro Max	86	\$1,100	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	41	12	●	3840 x 2160
✓ Samsung Galaxy Note20 Ultra 5G	85	\$1,300	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	36.5	108	●	7680 x 4320
✓ Samsung Galaxy S21 Ultra 5G	85	\$1,200	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	38	108	●	7680 x 4320
✓ Apple iPhone 12 Pro	84	\$1,000	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	34	12	●	3840 x 2160
Ⓢ OnePlus 8 Pro	84	\$700	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	34	48	●	3840 x 2160
✓ Samsung Galaxy S21+ 5G	83	\$1,000	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	37	12	●	7680 x 4320
Ⓢ OnePlus 8	83	\$500	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	38	48	●	3840 x 2160
✓ Samsung Galaxy Note20 5G	82	\$1,000	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	34	12	●	7680 x 4320
Ⓢ OnePlus Nord N10 5G	81	\$300	↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	41.5	64	●	3840 x 2160
Ⓢ Samsung Galaxy S20 FE 5G	81	\$700	↑	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	38	12	●	3840 x 2160
✓ OnePlus 9 Pro	81	\$1,070	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	25	48	●	7680 x 4320
✓ Samsung Galaxy S21 5G	81	\$800	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	30	12	●	7680 x 4320
✓ Samsung Galaxy A52 5G	81	\$500	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	45	64	●	3840 x 2160
Ⓢ Apple iPhone XR	80	\$500	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	27.5	12	●	3840 x 2160
Ⓢ Apple iPhone 12 mini	79	\$700	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	28.5	12	●	3840 x 2160
Ⓢ Samsung Galaxy A71 5G	79	\$500	↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	43	64	●	3840 x 2160
✓ Apple iPhone 12	78	\$800	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	32.5	12	●	3840 x 2160
Ⓢ OnePlus 8T	78	\$600	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	23.5	48	●	3840 x 2160
✓ Samsung Galaxy Z Fold2 5G	77	\$1,800	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	29	12	●	3840 x 2160
✓ Samsung Galaxy A42 5G	76	\$400	↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	49	48	●	3840 x 2160
✓ Sony Xperia 5 II	75	\$900	↓	↓	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	45	12	●	3840 x 2160
Ⓢ Samsung Galaxy A51	74	\$400	↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	34	48	●	3840 x 2160
Ⓢ Samsung Galaxy A50	73	\$300	↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	45	25	●	1920 x 1080

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

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score combines test results with survey data for predicted reliability and owner satisfaction. Predicted reliability is based on estimated brand problem rates for newly purchased smartphones within the first two years of ownership. Owner satisfaction is based on the

proportion of members extremely likely to recommend their phone brand to friends and family. Rear image quality is based on objective and subjective judgments on test images produced by the main camera. Rear 1080p video quality is based on the judgments of trained panelists who view recorded video

images shot at the highest-quality setting available (1080p maximum) under various lighting conditions. Selfie image quality is based on objective and subjective judgments on test images, including evaluation of resolution, color accuracy, and visual noise under various lighting conditions and bokeh mode. Battery and

charging reflect performance under nominal cell network signals, including battery consumption during tasks that involve voice, data, and display. It also factors in charge time, fast-charging performance, and wireless charging capability. Display rates color, clarity, off-angle viewing, and touch responsiveness.



NEWS & EXPERT
ADVICE TO
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THE CURVE™

ROAD REPORT

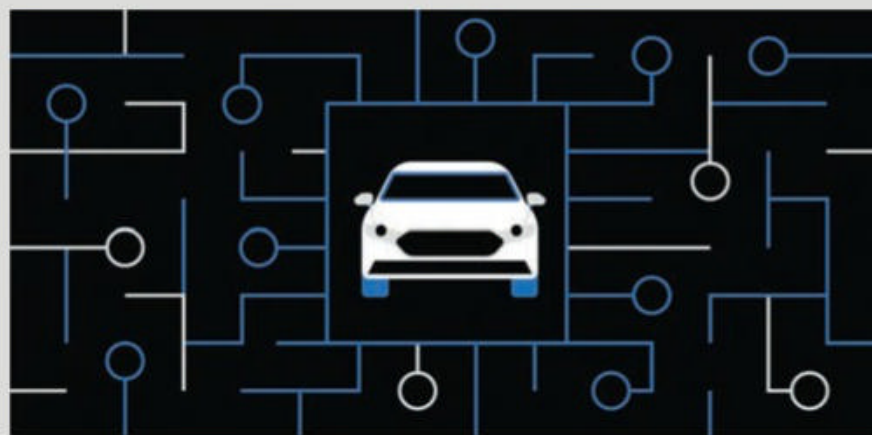
ASK OUR EXPERTS

Should I buy an extended warranty?

Extended warranties may promise peace of mind, but experts say they might not be worth the cost. “Determining if an extended warranty is fairly priced or a good value is difficult because they are complicated legal agreements,” says Chuck Bell, programs director for advocacy at CR. “Dealers may also charge steep markups on the contracts at different rates for different customers. Most consumers are probably better off assuming the financial risk themselves and paying out of pocket.” If you do purchase one, buy only from a reputable company, such as the automaker, and study the fine print, which can dictate what is covered and where the work will be performed.

AHEAD OF THE CURVE

Microchip Shortage Leaves Car Shoppers With Fewer Choices



Today’s cars are essentially **computers on wheels**. A microchip shortage caused by global production disruptions has forced auto manufacturers, including Ford, General Motors, and Subaru, to slow or halt production of widely sold models. That means **your first choice might not be available**, and even if it is, dealers may charge top dollar and not negotiate much on price. (Be forewarned: Used car prices have also surged.) If you can’t wait for the model you want to become available, use the ratings at **CR.org/cars** to find other reliable, top-rated alternatives.

THE VITAL STATISTIC

59%

Percentage of Tesla-owning CR members who say their car’s lane keeping system has made them feel unsafe—higher than any other brand.

Source: 2020 CR Advanced Driver Assistance Systems Survey.

RECALL



Subaru

Subaru is recalling 466,025 model year 2017 to 2019 Impreza sedans and 2018 and 2019 Crosstrek SUVs because of engine control module and ignition coil problems that could lead to stalling, increasing the risk of a crash, or starting problems. It is also recalling 405,000 model year 2019 Subaru Crosstrek and Forester SUVs because bolts on the rear suspension could come loose, also increasing the risk of a crash.

WHAT TO DO Take the vehicle to a dealership to have these problems corrected at no charge. For further information, owners can contact Subaru customer service at 844-373-6614.

FIRST
DRIVE

Volkswagen ID.4



The all-new, all-electric 2021 Volkswagen ID.4 SUV has taut, agile handling and an EPA-estimated range of 250 miles on a full charge. The cabin is quiet, comfortable, and roomy, with ample cargo space. We found many of the ID.4’s controls to be more gimmicky than user-friendly, and the 201-hp, rear-wheel-drive version

we drove accelerated more leisurely than some other EVs.

CR’S TAKE It’s one of the nicest lower-priced EVs on the market. We expect that the 302-hp AWD version we plan to buy later this year will have more verve.

PRICE RANGE \$39,995 - \$48,175
DESTINATION CHARGE \$1,195
PRICE AS DRIVEN \$45,190

THE HIDDEN DANGER OF

BIG TRUCKS

Pickup trucks are getting larger and many also lack advanced safety systems. Here's why that makes them a hazard to pedestrians and drivers of smaller vehicles.

BY KEITH BARRY

► CR experts measured the leading edge of the hood of a Chevrolet Silverado 1500 (shown here) at 49.5 inches tall—about the same height as an average 8-year-old American child. Today's bigger, taller pickup trucks have larger blind spots that can prevent drivers from seeing pedestrians and others on the road.







LAST DECEMBER an 18-year-old man driving a 2020 Jeep Gladiator pickup truck hit and killed Eva Barcza near her suburban New Jersey home. Barcza had been taking a walk, like so many Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic. Her husband of 60 years found her lying in a crosswalk crying in pain from broken bones and serious internal injuries. Hours later, she died in a hospital. Barcza was a teacher, grandmother, and avid gardener, her daughter Mary says.

The driver told the police he didn't see Barcza in the crosswalk, and after an investigation, he wasn't cited or charged.

In the aftermath, Mary Barcza says she started working with the group Families for Safe Streets, which is asking the New York Legislature to lower speed limits in urban areas and require warnings on larger vehicles at the point of sale that detail the risks they pose to others on the road. "I truly believe that my mother would've had a greater chance of survival had she not been struck by such a large vehicle," she says.

The hood of a Gladiator is 45.5 inches high, CR's measurements show. Marketed by Jeep as a vehicle that can "conquer" the road, it's part of a cultural phenomenon of enduring consumer demand for bigger everyday trucks, some of which don't come with important safety features as standard equipment. Research has found that modern pickups—with their tall hoods, large blind spots, stiff body-on-frame designs, and weight that often exceeds 4,000 pounds—are particularly deadly in crashes with pedestrians and smaller, lighter vehicles.

Contacted by CR about the crash, Stellantis, Jeep's parent company, offered its condolences and said its U.S. vehicles met or exceeded safety standards.

A CR analysis of industry data shows that the hood height of passenger trucks has increased by an average of at least 11 percent since 2000, and that new pickups grew 24 percent heavier on average from 2000 to 2018. On some heavy-duty trucks, such as the Ford F-250, the front edge of the hood is now 55 inches or more off the ground—as tall as the roof of some sedans. New CR data shows that drivers have poorer

front sight lines, creating a blind spot that can hide a pedestrian or smaller car right in front. "These trends are alarming," says William Wallace, CR's manager of safety policy. "Automakers must put safety first for people inside and outside the vehicle."

More than 42,000 people were killed and 4.8 million seriously injured on U.S. roadways last year, an 8 percent increase from the year before, despite a decrease in miles traveled. Pedestrian fatalities rose 46 percent over the past decade, according to the Governors Highway Safety Association, and the deaths reflect societal inequities. Low-income people are more likely to be struck; elderly pedestrians and wheelchair users are at higher risk of mortality when hit by a vehicle; and Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous people are overrepresented in pedestrian crash fatalities.

The reasons for the rising death toll are complex, with many variables, including more driver distraction. But a growing body of research indicates that the increasing dimensions of pickups may be contributing to the deadliness of crashes, especially when one hits a person, cyclist, or smaller vehicle.

A VIEW FROM THE INSIDE

WE MEASURED FRONT visibility for 15 new vehicles, including full-sized and heavy-duty trucks. Because of their height and long hoods, we found that some trucks had front blind spots 11 feet longer than some sedans and 7 feet longer than many popular SUVs. When a driver hits someone in their front

blind spot while maneuvering in a driveway or parking lot, it's called a "frontover" collision, says Jennifer Stockburger, director of operations at Consumer Reports' Auto Test Center. "Small children are especially vulnerable to frontover crashes," she says. There have been more than

931 frontover fatalities between 1990 and 2019, with most victims between 12 and 23 months old, according to the advocacy group KidsAndCars.org. Over 80 percent of those fatalities involved a truck, van, or SUV. Here, we show what could be hidden in the front blind spot of a 2020 Ram 1500.



Despite these risks, CR has found that pickup trucks are less likely than sedans and SUVs to have certain advanced safety systems as a standard feature. For example, automatic emergency braking (AEB) with pedestrian detection has been shown to prevent crashes, but only Ford, Honda, Nissan, and Toyota make it standard equipment across their standard-duty truck lineups. General Motors and Stellantis (also the parent of Ram) told CR that their standard-duty trucks will at least have AEB by 2022 per a voluntary commitment made in coordination with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS). (CR agreed in 2016 to monitor compliance with this agreement.)

We also asked the biggest manufacturers of pickups—Ford, GM, and Stellantis—why their trucks have grown so tall. A Stellantis spokesman declined to comment. A spokesman from Ford said the automaker had “shifted from softer lines” because “customers prefer more purposeful looks.” A GM spokesman said buyers want more ground clearance for off-roading, greater towing capability, and more cargo

The **INCREASING DIMENSIONS** and changing design of pickup trucks over the past two decades may be contributing to the deadliness of crashes.

space. (Those changes add weight and volume.) GM and Ford said their big trucks needed larger grilles to support engine cooling when towing trailers.

The Market Wants Bigger

Full-sized pickups command the marketplace. The three best-selling vehicles in the U.S. are trucks: the Ford F-Series, Chevrolet Silverado, and Ram.

Pickups now count for 1 of every 5 new vehicles sold. Within the segment, full-sized trucks have become even more popular than compact or midsize models. Full-sized trucks, such as the F-150, Silverado, Ram 1500, Toyota Tundra, and Nissan Titan, now hold 79 percent of the pickup market, up 12 percent from 2000.

Safety advocates say that truck designers could lower hoods or reduce weight, but automakers are reluctant to do so because pickups are a major source of profit. Industry analysts say that offering bigger trucks with imposing front ends has been a factor in a winning sales strategy.

“Trucks could look less tough, but you don’t want to be the one to make your truck look soft,” says Tyson Jominy, vice president for data and analytics at J.D. Power. He estimates that an automaker might make four to five times more money on a pickup than a sedan, partly because manufacturing a truck is simpler and because buyers will pay more for a pickup. “You can charge a lot for the capability, for the image.”

Automakers are also selling a



lifestyle, says Angie Schmitt, founder and principal at 3MPH Planning and Consulting, a firm focused on pedestrian safety. She points to ads with trucks at construction sites, hauling massive trailers, and racing over sand dunes. “They’re not hiding the fact that they’re marketing these trucks as being really macho and a display of masculinity or prowess,” she says. “That’s a big part of the marketing, and I think that it works.”

Trucks with luxurious amenities and prices north of \$60,000 can also be status symbols. “They’re absolutely not typically a choice for the average American car buyer,” says Bernard Swiecki, director of research at the Center for Automotive Research. He estimates that the typical pickup buyer’s median household income is

\$60,000 a year higher than the average American household’s income.

And the government provides incentives for purchasing larger trucks. They aren’t subject to gas guzzler taxes, heavy-duty trucks are held to looser fuel-economy standards than cars and smaller trucks, and small-business owners get a bigger tax write-off for buying a heavier vehicle—even if their work doesn’t require it. “There’s no shortage of accountants encouraging this loophole,” says Dave Cooke, senior vehicles analyst at the Union of Concerned Scientists.

Deadly Dimensions

In real-world collisions with pedestrians, a pickup’s tall front end and higher bumper are more likely than

a lower vehicle’s to cause serious injuries, transferring energy directly to a victim’s hips and pelvis, says Becky Mueller, senior research engineer at IIHS. Smaller pedestrians also have a higher risk of head injury because they’re more likely to have head-to-hood contact. And trucks are more likely to push a pedestrian down and run them over, she says. “And that, we know, is a more deadly scenario.”

CR testing has found that bigger vehicles in general have a harder time avoiding crashes. “Pickups and other large vehicles routinely do worse in our emergency handling and braking tests,” says Jake Fisher, CR’s senior director of auto testing. And when a truck and car collide, the car’s driver is 1.59 times more likely to die than in two-vehicle crashes without a pickup involved,

FULL-SIZED TRUCK ALTERNATIVES

Some tasks really do require a big truck. But for most jobs and hobbies, other vehicles may be just as good. Here are some you should consider if you’re on the fence about a big pickup.

Smaller Truck



On sale this summer, the Hyundai Santa Cruz is a car-based truck that’s much lower to the ground than a traditional truck and may be as easy to drive as an SUV.

It can still carry bikes, mulch, or other smaller loads in its open bed. Other automakers, including Ford, may also have smaller trucks on the horizon.

Compact Van



Small vans, like the Ford Transit Connect, Nissan NV200, and Ram ProMaster City, have impressive carrying capacity, but they’re as

easy to drive as a car. While they won’t go off-road or tow like a truck, they’re a good choice for anyone who needs to carry a lot of cargo.

Midsized SUV



You’re going to need a full-sized truck if you’re towing a large boat, a sizable travel trailer, or construction equipment. But for occasional towing of smaller items, some

midsized SUVs can still haul as much as 5,000 pounds, enough to pull a small boat or camper. You may need an optional tow package to reach that maximum rating, though.

Full-Sized Truck Rental



If you occasionally need a truck to bring home, say, landscaping material or furniture, consider renting. Some local car rental companies

offer trucks, and home and garden stores rent them as well. And services like Turo will let you rent a local privately owned pickup.

THE PICKUPS THAT LACK KEY PROTECTIVE TECH

according to the IIHS. In comparison, modern SUVs are no longer as deadly as trucks in crashes with cars. That's because SUVs have become lighter and more carlike as a class over the past 20 years—just as trucks started adding weight, partly from popular features such as larger cabs.

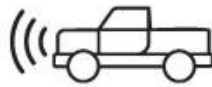
Modern trucks that weigh less than 4,000 pounds pose the same danger as an SUV to the occupants of smaller vehicles. But a full-sized truck with four-wheel drive can top 5,000 pounds, and mid-sized trucks, such as the Gladiator and Ford Ranger, can exceed 4,500 pounds.

Larger pickups also reflect the transportation inequities that may put certain people at greater risk. Buyers of smaller cars that offer less protection in crashes with big trucks tend to have lower incomes. And although most truck buyers are male, an IIHS study found that women are more likely to be injured in a crash with a pickup.

Safety Sidelined

Progress has been slow to improve safety. In 2015 NHTSA proposed adding a pedestrian safety component to its New Car Assessment Program (NCAP), which publishes crash-test ratings for new vehicles. Although the effort stalled, it plans to announce upgrades and improvements to NCAP this year.

Even so, experts say that automakers are unlikely to go against consumer demand and reduce truck size. Safety advocates recommend mandating advanced safety systems for all models. States and cities should also lower speed limits and improve pedestrian and cycling infrastructure in areas where trucks share the roads with people, Schmitt says. "If our vehicles are going to be getting so much bigger and so much more lethal to pedestrians," she says, "it also falls on road designers to do a better job protecting them."



DESPITE BIGGER BLIND spots and longer braking distances, pickups are less likely than cars and SUVs to have standard safety features, such as **automatic emergency braking** with pedestrian detection and **blind spot warning**. AEB can auto-brake to lessen or avoid a crash, and BSW can warn drivers about vehicles in their blind spots. Some pickups, such as the Chevrolet Colorado and GMC Canyon, don't offer them at all. This chart shows which trucks have systems that CR considers critical.

Not Available



Optional



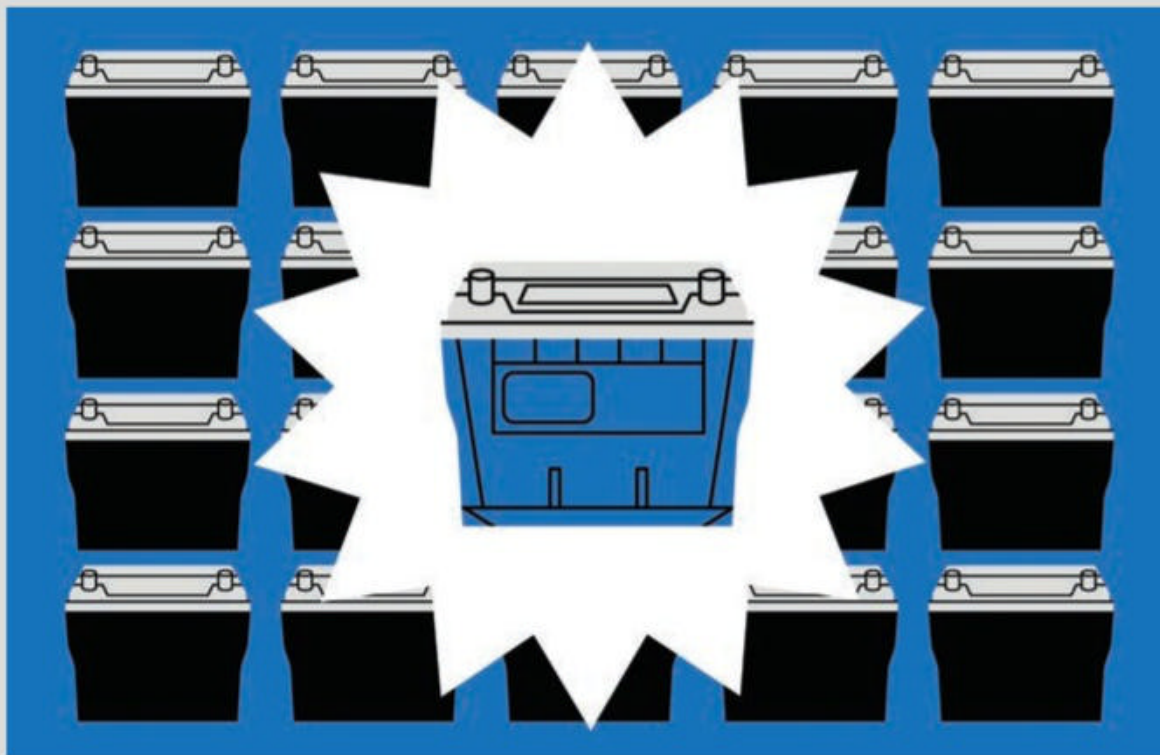
Standard



TRUCK	AEB		BSW
	City Speed	Pedestrian Detection	
Chevrolet			
Colorado	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available
Silverado 1500	Optional	Optional	Optional
Silverado 2500HD	Optional	Not Available	Optional
Silverado 3500HD	Optional	Not Available	Optional
Ford			
F-150	Standard	Standard	Optional
F-250	Optional	Optional	Optional
F-350	Optional	Optional	Optional
Ranger	Standard	Standard	Optional
GMC			
Canyon	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available
Sierra 1500	Optional	Optional	Optional
Sierra 2500HD	Optional	Not Available	Optional
Sierra 3500HD	Optional	Not Available	Optional
Honda			
Ridgeline	Standard	Standard	Optional
Jeep			
Gladiator	Optional	Not Available	Optional
Nissan			
Frontier	Optional	Optional	Optional
Titan	Standard	Standard	Standard
Titan XD	Standard	Standard	Standard
Ram			
1500	Optional	Optional	Optional
1500 Classic	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available
2500	Optional	Not Available	Optional
3500	Optional	Not Available	Optional
Toyota			
Tacoma	Standard	Standard	Optional
Tundra	Standard	Standard	Optional



The Best Car Battery for You



SUMMER'S SCORCHING HEAT is harder on your car's battery than freezing temps. To make sure your battery won't leave you stranded, CR battery expert John Banta recommends having it load-tested annually after it's 2 years old if you live in a Southern or Southwestern state, or after it's 4 years old if you live in a snow belt region. The results will tell you when it's time to start shopping for a replacement.

Performance can vary greatly, even among models in the same price range. Absorbed glass mat (AGM) batteries tend to perform best in our tests and are known for having a long life and being able to tolerate deep discharges. But some lead-acid batteries that cost far less also score well.

Below we identify the best (top-ranked) and best value batteries in several popular sizes. Full ratings can be found online at CR.org/carbattery0721.

SIZE 24/24F

FITS Many Acura, Honda, Infiniti, Lexus, Nissan, and Toyota vehicles.

BEST BATTERY

NAPA Legend Premium 8424F

Approximate retail \$130

OVERALL SCORE **90**

LIFE

CCA

RESERVE CAPACITY

BEST VALUE

Bosch 24-700B

Approximate retail \$115

OVERALL SCORE **85**

LIFE

CCA

RESERVE CAPACITY

SIZE 35

FITS Most Japanese nameplates, including most Mazda, Nissan, Subaru, and Toyota vehicles, and recent Hondas.

BEST BATTERY

Odyssey Extreme Series 35-PC1400T*

Approximate retail \$305

OVERALL SCORE **99**

LIFE

CCA

RESERVE CAPACITY

BEST VALUE

Bosch 35-640B

Approximate retail \$125

OVERALL SCORE **85**

LIFE

CCA

RESERVE CAPACITY

SIZE 48 (H6)

FITS Many Audi, BMW, Buick, Cadillac, Chevrolet, GMC, Jeep, Mercedes-Benz, Mini, Volkswagen, and Volvo vehicles.

BEST BATTERY

Odyssey Performance 48-720*

Approximate retail \$260

OVERALL SCORE **91**

LIFE

CCA

RESERVE CAPACITY

BEST VALUE

Interstate MTX-48/H6*

Approximate retail \$185

OVERALL SCORE **86**

LIFE

CCA

RESERVE CAPACITY

SIZE 51R

FITS Many models from Honda, Mazda, and Nissan.

BEST BATTERY & VALUE

Duracell 51R

Approximate retail \$105

OVERALL SCORE **81**

LIFE

CCA

RESERVE CAPACITY

This traditional lead-acid Duracell is a rare example of a battery being both the top-ranked and the best value in the category.

SIZE 65

FITS Large cars, trucks, and sport/utility vehicles, including those from Dodge, Ford, and Lincoln.

BEST BATTERY

Delphi BU9065 MaxStart AGM Premium 65*

Approximate retail \$200

OVERALL SCORE **91**

LIFE

CCA

RESERVE CAPACITY

BEST VALUE

ACDelco Professional Gold 65PG

Approximate retail \$125

OVERALL SCORE **89**

LIFE

CCA

RESERVE CAPACITY

ILLUSTRATION: MATTHEW HOLLISTER



SMALL SUVs

Ford Bronco Sport

Brimming With Personality

60

OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 75

HIGHS Agility, braking, user-friendly controls, character

LOWS Vibration at low revs, limited driver's seat adjustments, ride

POWERTRAIN 181-hp, 1.5-liter turbocharged 3-cylinder engine; 8-speed automatic transmission; four-wheel drive

FUEL 25 mpg on regular

PRICE
\$26,820-\$38,160 base price range
\$33,655 as tested

THE ALL-NEW BRONCO Sport is brimming with outdoorsy character, but it also has easy-to-use controls, a roomy cabin for its class, and a fair amount of agility as it turns through corners.

Most versions of the Bronco Sport come with a 181-hp turbocharged three-cylinder engine that provides a healthy dose of midrange punch. The little engine runs out of steam at higher revs, however, and it delivers annoying vibrations when it lugs along at 1,500 rpm. Only higher-end versions get a more powerful and refined turbo four-cylinder.

Although its styling (and Ford's marketing) might indicate otherwise, the Bronco Sport isn't a true off-road-capable model. It's a car-based SUV sprinkled with styling elements that shout "adventure." As such, it's adept on pavement, showing

fairly nimble abilities on curvy roads. It was stable through our avoidance maneuver but didn't turn as sharply as we'd like. The front tires slid a bit more than expected as our testers tried to keep the SUV within our tight, orange-cone-lined course. The ride is quite firm, and rougher roads make for a choppy sensation, but it's not a major drawback.

Controls—including the touch-screen infotainment system—are easy to master. The interior has a rugged vibe, with zippered pockets, straps on the back of the front seats, and prominent bucking bronco emblems. The boxy shape affords tons of headroom, but the front seats are short on thigh support because the bottom cushion has limited adjustability.

Standard active safety features include FCW, AEB with pedestrian detection, BSW, RCTW, LDW, and LKA.

SMALL SUVs

Nissan Rogue

A Compelling Redesign

76

OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 80

HIGHS Access, controls, agility, transmission

LOWS Jumpy off the line, low dash vents

POWERTRAIN 181-hp, 2.5-liter 4-cylinder engine; continuously variable transmission; all-wheel drive

FUEL 25 mpg on regular

PRICE
\$25,750-\$36,930 base price range
\$33,230 as tested

THE NEW ROGUE, with its first redesign since 2014, feels more substantial, similar to the transformation we saw with the latest redesign of the sedan. In testing, we found the Rogue to be taut and agile, relatively quiet, and user-friendly, making it a compelling small SUV.

Powered by a 181-hp four-cylinder that's teamed with a continuously variable transmission, it provides smooth but unexciting acceleration. While it surges off the line, the Rogue never feels peppy after that. The CVT does an excellent job mimicking the shifts of a traditional automatic.

The Rogue performs well when the road gets curvy, with quick turn-in response and minimal body lean. When pushed to its limits through our avoidance maneuver—which simulates swerving quickly around a vehicle or

other obstacle on the road—it tended to momentarily lift the rear inside wheel off the ground, which is rare but not a safety concern. The suspension has an underlying firmness, but the Rogue's cabin is one of the quietest in the class.

Front and rear headroom are quite generous. The armrests are well-padded, but the center console intrudes on the driver's right knee space. The rear seat is roomy, but thigh support is lacking. By virtue of a rear door that opens 90 degrees, getting into and out of the back seat is a cinch.

We like that there are easy-to-feel physical buttons and knobs for most infotainment and climate-control functions. But we found that the low-mounted vents direct more air at elbows and knees than the torso. FCW, AEB with pedestrian detection, BSW, RCTW, and LDW are standard.



MIDSIZED SUVs

Hyundai Santa Fe

More Power, and a New Hybrid

76
**OVERALL
SCORE**

HYUNDAI PUT ITS mainstay Santa Fe through an extensive freshening, giving it more powerful engines and upscale interior styling while adding a first-ever hybrid version to the lineup. On the downside, the controls are more complex, and the base 191-hp four-cylinder is feeble, needing 10 seconds to go 0 to 60 mph.

The optional turbo four-cylinder makes the Santa Fe considerably quicker, but it's mated to a dual-clutch automatic that suffers from low-speed vibrations. We think the hybrid, which we rented from Hyundai to see how it drives, is the sweet spot in the lineup. Its small turbo four-cylinder and electric motor deliver decent power and operate smoothly. We'll buy our own hybrid to test later this year.

For all versions, ride comfort remains overly firm, and rough roads bring out a jittery character. In normal

ROAD-TEST SCORE 76

HIGHS Secure handling, braking, interior room, rear occupant alert

LOWS Underpowered with base engine, ride, gear selector

POWERTRAIN 191-hp, 2.5-liter 4-cylinder engine; 8-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

FUEL 24 mpg on regular

PRICE

\$27,000-\$42,450 base price range
\$37,620 as tested

driving the Santa Fe feels ordinary through turns, hurt by vague steering. But it performed well through our avoidance-maneuver exercise, with strong tire grip and a nicely tuned ESC system.

The Santa Fe's elevated seating position gives a commanding view of the road. The rear seat is roomy, with ample leg support and seatback contouring that holds occupants in place during turns. But the controls have taken a step back. The center console is dominated by a sea of buttons, and the infotainment screen defaults to a useless home screen every time you start the vehicle. The push-button gear selector requires extra attention because it can't be easily operated by feel.

FCW and AEB with pedestrian detection are standard, and BSW is standard on all but the base trim.



MIDSIZED LUXURY CARS

Genesis G80

Plush & Powerful, but Confusing Controls

67
**OVERALL
SCORE**

BENEATH THE SLEEK shape of the redesigned G80 midsize luxury sedan is an all-new platform shared with its GV80 SUV cousin. This new sedan is not only quiet and refined, with a feature-packed cabin and a plush ride, but also has the kind of sharp handling prowess usually associated with German competitors. An unintuitive infotainment system and lagging fuel economy are the only drawbacks.

The disappointing infotainment system is centered on a rotary bezel with a touchpad on the console to make selections on the dashboard screen. We found this setup difficult to learn and distracting to use, between pressing and rotating the touchpad and verifying actions on the screen. The rotary gear selector adjacent to the touchpad only compounds confusion. The dashboard

ROAD-TEST SCORE 89

HIGHS Ride, handling, braking, interior room, fit and finish

LOWS Controls, hidden exterior trunk release

POWERTRAIN 300-hp, 2.5-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder engine; 8-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

FUEL 24 mpg on premium

PRICE

\$47,700-\$62,250 base price range
\$56,920 as tested

touch screen is a better alternative, but it's a long reach for the driver.

Just about everything else about the G80 is spot on. The base 300-hp turbocharged four-cylinder (a 375-hp turbo V6 is available) leaves the line without hesitation and provides enough punch for drama-free passing maneuvers, aided by a responsive and super-smooth-shifting eight-speed automatic.

Passengers won't need to fight over whether to sit in the front or rear of the luxurious cabin, which features real matte wood, textured knobs, and chrome finishes throughout. The front seats are comfortable with large side bolsters, and the rear seat is supportive, though headroom could be a bit tight for taller passengers.

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

Ratings ➤ **Mixed Bag** This month we highlight redesigned SUVs and a hip new model in Ford's Bronco lineup.

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
SUVs \$25,000-\$35,000																			
✓ Subaru Forester 2.5L	89	↑	↑	90	28	↑ / ↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	53.0	9.2	130	36.5	S	S	S	0
✓ Mazda CX-5 2.5L	83	↑	↑	78	24	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	54.0	8.6	133	30.5	S	S	S	S
✓ Honda CR-V 1.5T	82	↑	↓	82	28	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	52.0	8.2	137	36.0	S	S	S	0
✓ Kia Sportage 2.4L	80	↑	↓	78	23	↑ / ↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	52.5	9.6	128	29.5	S	S	-	0
✓ Nissan Rogue 2.5L	76	↓	↓	80	25	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	53.5	8.7	135	36.5	S	S	S	S
✓ Chevrolet Equinox 1.5T	74	↓	↓	78	25	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	53.0	9.6	132	32.0	S	S	-	0
✓ Toyota RAV4 2.5L	69	↓	↓	72	27	↑ / ↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	54.0	8.3	131	30.5	S	S	S	0
Volkswagen Tiguan 2.0T	65	↓	↓	84	25	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	52.0	10.3	131	33.0	S	S	S	S
Ford Bronco Sport 1.5T	60	↓	↑	75	25	↑ / ↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	↑	53.5	8.9	126	30.5	S	S	S	S
Ford Escape 1.5T	46	↓	↓	73	26	↓ / ↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	53.0	8.9	128	30.5	S	S	S	S
Jeep Compass 2.4L	39	↓	↓	56	24	↓ / ↓	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓	53.5	9.8	137	27.5	0	-	0	0
2-ROW SUVs \$35,000-\$45,000																			
✓ Subaru Outback 2.4T	86	↓	↑	91	24	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	54.0	7.1	132	37.0	S	S	S	0
✓ Ford Edge 2.0T	83	↑	↓	84	22	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	52.0	7.7	129	39.0	S	S	S	S
✓ Nissan Murano 3.5L	79	↑	↓	77	21	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	50.5	7.7	131	33.5	S	S	S	S
✓ Toyota Venza 2.5H 🌿	78	↑	↑	75	37	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	51.0	7.8	137	26.5	S	S	S	S
✓ Hyundai Santa Fe 2.5L	76	↑	↑	76	24	↑ / ↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	↑	54.5	10.0	126	35.5	S	S	-	0
Jeep Grand Cherokee 3.6L	67	↓	↑	80	18	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	50.0	8.0	134	36.5	0	-	0	S
Chevrolet Blazer 3.6L	67	↓	↓	83	19	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	54.5	6.4	130	34.5	0	0	0	0
Honda Passport 3.5L	64	↓	↓	79	21	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	53.5	6.4	135	39.0	S	S	S	0
SEDANS \$55,000-\$75,000																			
✓ BMW 530i 2.0T	81	↓	↑	94	26	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	52.5	7.2	130	3+1	S	S	0	S
✓ Audi A6 2.0T	77	↓	↓	93	26	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	55.5	6.8	129	3+1	S	S	S	0
✓ Mercedes-Benz E300 2.0T	74	↓	↓	85	24	↑ / ↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	54.5	7.1	128	2+2	S	S	S	S
Genesis G80 2.0T	67	↓	↑	89	24	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	55.5	6.8	128	2+2	S	S	-	S
Volvo S90 2.0T	50	↓	↓	73	23	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑	52.5	7.2	130	2+2	S	S	S	S

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

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

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

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

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

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