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THE BEST & WORST  
FROZEN PIZZA

# CR Consumer Reports®

AUGUST 2023

✓ RATINGS & REVIEWS

Midsized SUVs

Smartphones &  
Smartwatches

Exterior Paint

Blenders

Comfort-Height  
Toilets

# YOUR SCAM PROTECTION GUIDE

Don't fall prey to the latest text, email, and phone call tricks from fraudsters.

Here's how to stay safe.



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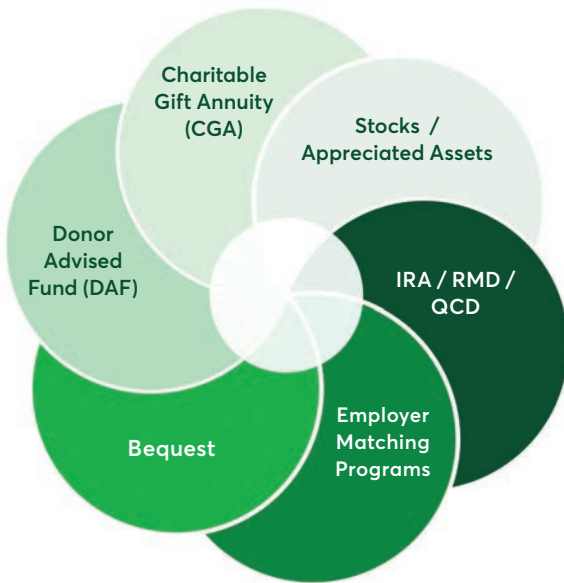
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Deputy Editors, Print Amanda Lecky, Diane Umansky, Natalie van der Meer

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MONEY: Editor: Margot Gilman Policy Lead: Delicia Hand

TECH: Jerry Beilinson, Content Lead Editors/Writers: Nicholas De Leon, Melanie Pinola, Chris Raymond, Allen St. John, James K. Willcox Product Testing: Richard Fisco, Glen Rockford, Michael Visconti, Testing Leads; Elias Arias, Antonette Asedillo, Steve Blair, Claudio Ciaci, Charles Davidman, David DellaRocca, Henry Parra, Justin Stewart, Richard Sulin, Maurice Wynn Market Analysts: Min Kim Bryant, Cesar Carroll, Odalys Grieco, Nish Suvarnakar Policy Lead: Justin Brookman

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Premedia William Belgio, Associate Director; Eugene Chin, Anthony Terzo

Photography Scott Meadows, John Powers

Imaging Francisco Collado

Consumer Engagement Testing Charu Ahuja, Director; Linda Greene, Dana Keester, Paul Ritchey

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# Today's Digital Scams



FRAUDSTERS HAVE always been a fixture of the American marketplace, from the infamous snake oil salesmen of the 1800s right up to the modern imposters of online marketplaces.

Today's scammers, however, have technology on their side, which is why an estimated \$8.8 billion was lost to scams in 2022, more than twice the amount stolen in 2020. Robocalls,

phishing texts, and emails remain some of the most common tools of deceit, but criminals are nothing if not innovative: Earlier this year, an Arizona woman reportedly got a call claiming her daughter had been kidnapped and demanding \$1 million in ransom. She almost fell for the con because, according to Phoenix TV station KTVK, the caller used artificial intelligence to replicate her daughter's voice.

To make matters worse, consumer protections are not keeping up with the tech innovations putting us at risk. A recent CR study of peer-to-peer payment (P2P) apps, such as Venmo and Zelle, found that the companies behind these popular tools typically do not intervene or compensate users when they're scammed into sending money. Consumers fought hard for robust protections against credit and debit card fraud, and we need the same level of security when we use the latest digital finance tools.

That's why we're shining a light on these problems with "CR's Scam Protection Guide," on page 24, which will help you spot common scams. And it's why we're working with companies and policymakers to strengthen digital security policies and protections. At CR, we believe in fair digital finance tools for all consumers, so watch for us to roll out more investigations and evaluations of these products and services, including those popular "buy now, pay later" loans and mobile banking apps.

You can help, too, by signing our petition calling for commonsense protections in P2P apps at [CR.org/p2psecurity](https://www.consumerreports.org/p2psecurity).

Marta Tellado

Marta L. Tellado,  
President and CEO  
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## Requiring Crash Alerts

Automatic crash notification (ACN) is a technology built into most new cars that calls for help in an emergency and provides responders with the vehicle's precise location.

This lifesaving system is mandatory in all new cars sold in most European countries, but it's not yet required in the U.S. And a recent CR analysis found that most automakers still require a subscription fee—sometimes of more than \$100 a year—to keep automatic crash notification active in the U.S., and they'll disable it if the fee isn't paid.

In addition, this technology is often bundled with expensive convenience features such as remote start, mobile WiFi hot spots, and concierge services, putting it out of reach for consumers on a tight budget.

Consumer Reports has long encouraged automakers to make automatic crash notification technology available to all drivers without a paid subscription. "It should come standard, and remain active and free, regardless of what happens with subscriptions for other connected services," says William Wallace, CR's associate director of safety policy. "It's one thing for automakers to charge extra for conveniences, but this is about safety, and safety shouldn't be optional."

Hyundai, which recently announced it will include automatic crash notification free starting with its 2024 models, said CR's advocacy played a role in its decision. And we've launched a campaign to persuade all automakers to follow suit. You can help by signing our petition at [CR.org/acnpetition](https://www.consumerreports.org/acnpetition).

For a list of vehicles that offer automatic crash notification, go to [CR.org/acnarticle](https://www.consumerreports.org/acnarticle).

# 700+

Estimated number of lives that automatic crash notification could save each year.

SOURCE: NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION STUDY, 2019



## ACTION UPDATE

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau was launched in 2011 to make financial markets more fair and to protect consumers from scams and discrimination. To date, it has returned some \$16 billion to Americans harmed by such practices. But a new bill puts that vital mission at risk: It would kill the agency's stable funding source and make its work reliant on an annual vote in Congress. So CR recently sent more than 16,000 consumer emails to U.S. House members urging them to oppose the bill. You can add your voice at [CR.org/cfpbsupport](https://www.consumerreports.org/cfpbsupport).



## Winning the Right to Repair

### WHAT'S AT STAKE

We all know that fixing a broken cell phone or home appliance can be costly. But did you know that many companies want it that way?

Manufacturers may intentionally make it hard or even impossible for consumers and independent repair shops to access the parts, tools, and documentation (such as schematics) needed to fix their products. So many of us turn to expensive "authorized" shops. Or we just give up and buy a new device (and toss the old one).

### WHAT CR IS DOING ABOUT IT

CR has long been a leader of the right-to-repair movement, which opposes

these practices. Among other efforts, we developed the legislation model on which at least 25 state and federal right-to-repair bills have been based. Two of them recently become landmark laws.

The first, signed late last year in New York, requires manufacturers of electronics sold or used in the state to make all parts, tools, and repair instructions available to consumers and independent shops. Consumer advocates cheered, but noted that several important categories, including home appliances, agricultural equipment, medical devices, and cars, were excluded. Then, in May, Minnesota passed an even more robust law, which added home appliances, business computers, and other electronics to the covered categories.

Meanwhile, more right-to-repair bills are making progress in California, Oregon, and Vermont.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

Sign CR's petition urging local and federal officials to pass more robust right-to-repair laws, at [CR.org/repairpetition](https://www.consumerreports.org/repairpetition).



Our May/June 2023 cover story, “**Save Big (and Waste Less) at Home,**” shared easy ways to cut more than \$6,500 on utility bills, groceries, appliance repairs, and much more. Readers offered their own budget-savvy strategies. To add yours, head to [CR.org/saveathome](https://CR.org/saveathome).

THE MAY/JUNE ISSUE is great. Lots of practical ideas to use around the house. Here’s my tip regarding the “time your energy use right” advice on page 39: Before going to bed, set the delayed start on your dishwasher so that it runs overnight, when power is probably cheapest. When you get up, the dishes are done.  
 –James Royle, San Diego

YOUR BRIEF REVIEW of smart thermostats doesn’t mention one problem. Their learning

of users’ daily routines does not take into consideration those people who don’t have set routines. And some smart thermostats make it nearly impossible for users to override their “memory.”  
 –RC N, Sunnyvale, CA

**EDITOR’S NOTE** *That’s true. For that type of household, we recommend a different type of smart thermostat that doesn’t try to “learn” on its own. (Those models don’t score as high in our ratings because one of the criteria we use is how well the thermostat remembers a daily routine.) With that in mind, a few suitable smart thermostats to consider are the Ecobee Smart with Voice Control EB-STATE5-01, \$250; the*

*Wyze Smart WiFi Thermostat WTHERM, \$80; and the Emerson Sensi WiFi ST55, \$80.*

YOU NOTE IN the article that battery-powered yard tools produce zero emissions. This is a common mistake. Generating electricity produces carbon [dioxide] and other pollutants. They’re just generated back at the plant instead of from the exhaust pipe of whatever you are running. Electric-powered things are not 100 percent zero emissions.  
 –Larry Grapentine, Peoria, AZ

**EDITOR’S NOTE** *Any form of energy comes at some cost to the environment. The lithium-ion batteries that power lawn tools need to be recharged*

*with electricity, so they contribute to greenhouse gas emissions indirectly by taking energy generated by power plants. But that’s a fraction of the harmful emissions produced by gas tools. And if your utility company relies in part on renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power, the carbon footprint of your electric tool is even smaller. You can find out how much of the energy you use is generated by oil, natural gas, or renewable sources by entering your ZIP code into the Environmental Protection Agency’s Power Profiler, at [epa.gov/egrid/power-profiler#1](https://epa.gov/egrid/power-profiler#1).*



AS A PERSON with severe hearing loss, I appreciated “How to Hear Better Now” in the May/June issue. I have gotten into the shower a number of times while wearing my hearing aids (possibly a common occurrence among hearing-device wearers!). I wonder if exposure to water was tested. In my case, taking off my devices, removing the batteries, and letting them air-dry has worked well.  
 –Thomas Wisnor, Westlake, OH

**EDITOR’S NOTE** *We haven’t tested hearing aids for water resistance. But the method you describe is very similar to advice from the Hearing Health Foundation. You can also purchase hearing-aid dehumidifiers or drying kits if you think moisture has gotten inside your devices.*

I AM A military veteran with documented hearing loss. The Veterans Administration has provided me with prescription

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

WRITE



hearing aids, free of charge, since 2009. The VA has replaced them, again free of charge, every four years. You need to have access to a VA clinic with an audiology department in order to avail yourself of this benefit.  
—Robert Wolcott, via CR.org



## TANK-PRINTER TROUBLE

“TOP PICKS FOR a Great Home Office” in the May/June issue mentions tank inkjet printers. Tank printers need to be used every day. We didn’t, and the ink solidified in the tubes.  
—Robert Cheri Nay, via CR.org

**EDITOR’S NOTE** Like all inkjet printers, tank models are prone to clogging. To reduce the chance of this happening to your printer, use it at least once a week. (Printing something every single day isn’t necessary.)

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Also, don’t install it in a hot, dry room, and monitor the ink levels and have spare ink on hand so you can replace or refill the ink before it runs dry. Keep it plugged in and allow it to run self-maintenance cycles. If all of this seems like too much work, we recommend switching to a laser printer, such as the Brother HL-L2390DW for \$190.



## COOKWARE SAFETY

YOUR MAY/JUNE ARTICLE “Are Your Nonstick Pans Safe to Use?” doesn’t discuss hard-anodized cookware. Are those pans free from PFAS?  
—Kevin Bondi, Dresher, PA

**EDITOR’S NOTE** Hard-anodized pans can still be coated with PFAS. Some of these “forever chemicals,” such as PTFE, have been linked to liver damage, lowered immunity in children, and other health concerns. Of the pans in CR’s ratings, some of the hard-anodized aluminum ones are coated with PTFE while others are not. To avoid cookware with PFAS, look for a PTFE-free claim on the package (not just a PFOA-free one) or choose a ceramic-coated pan. Ceramic nonstick coatings are generally made without PTFE or other PFAS.



## CAR-CARE COSTS

IN THE MAY/JUNE article “The Cars That Save You Money,” you say that certain 2023 cars are cheap to maintain. Wouldn’t that be a guess, based



## WHAT’S THE BEST WAY TO THROW OUT AN OLD APPLIANCE?

Regarding “Recycle Appliances the Right Way” in the May/June issue: I recently helped dispose of a badly rusted gas stove that was left in the house my son bought. I searched online for “metal salvage yard” and got lucky. There was one just 3 miles away. They gave us \$30 for it. Not a lot of money, but we did not have to pay to have it taken away and it did not end up in a landfill.  
—Matthew Pelc, New Braunfels, TX

**EDITOR’S NOTE** That’s a good way to dispose of an appliance that’s not in usable condition. But sometimes you have to transport an appliance to a salvage yard yourself. You can also find a recycling center near you by going to earth911.com.

on similar models of the past?  
—Richard DuBois, via CR.org

**EDITOR’S NOTE** For our five- and 10-year predictions, we analyze member survey data on reported maintenance and repair costs over the past decade, focusing on models that have been in steady production during that time. This historical perspective allows us to estimate the cost of maintenance going forward. The repair prices listed for the comparison between the BMW X3 and the Lincoln Corsair in the article were obtained from dealers in the Washington, D.C., area that perform those repairs.



## EASIER CAR CONTROLS

REGARDING “AUTOS WITH the Easiest Controls” in the May/June issue, my car hears voice commands—which is much safer [than using manual controls while driving]. So does my phone, which is paired to the car radio.  
—Larry Hurley, via CR.org

**EDITOR’S NOTE** Voice commands can be a great convenience, especially for placing a call, entering addresses for navigation, or making specific music requests. But while this technology is useful, a recent CR survey of a nationally representative sample of 2,001 American adults showed that 50 percent of drivers whose cars have voice-command capabilities for adjusting audio never use them. That’s a missed opportunity. It’s vital to familiarize yourself with your car’s capabilities in order to make your ride the safest it can possibly be. Still, while voice controls can improve safety, a car must also have good physical controls to help limit driver distractions.




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

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

## Stainless Steel Fry Pans

<p><b>WE TESTED:</b> 11 models  <b>WE TEST FOR:</b> How evenly the pan heats up, how easy it is to clean after use, the handle's temperature while the pan is on the stove, handle sturdiness, and more.</p> <p><b>ABOUT THE SCORES:</b>          Median: 79          Range: 72-89</p>	<p><b>STURDY &amp; SUPERB QUALITY</b>          ✓ <b>Oxo Mira Tri-Ply Stainless</b>          \$80</p>  <p><b>89</b>          OVERALL SCORE</p>	<p><b>SET OF TWO PANS (8" &amp; 10")</b>          ✓ <b>Cuisinart N9122-810 Smartnest</b>          \$60</p>  <p><b>80</b>          OVERALL SCORE</p>	<p><b>OVEN-SAFE AT HIGH TEMPS</b>          ✓ <b>Made In Cookware Stainless Steel</b>          \$90</p>  <p><b>79</b>          OVERALL SCORE</p>
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## Salad Dressing

<p><b>WE TESTED:</b> 20 products  <b>WE TEST FOR:</b> How good the flavor and texture are. We also evaluate nutrition, including the amount of calories, sodium, fats, and sugars per serving.</p> <p><b>ABOUT THE SCORES:</b>          Median: 63          Range: 39-74</p>	<p><b>DIET-FRIENDLY VINAIGRETTE</b>          ✓ <b>Annie's Organic Lite Raspberry Vinaigrette</b>          \$6</p>  <p><b>74</b>          OVERALL SCORE</p>	<p><b>TASTY RANCH</b>          ✓ <b>Tessamae's Organic Avocado Ranch Dressing &amp; Dip</b>          \$6</p>  <p><b>70</b>          OVERALL SCORE</p>	<p><b>RANCH WITH FEWER CALORIES</b>  <b>Hidden Valley Avocado Ranch Topping &amp; Dressing</b>          \$4</p>  <p><b>63</b>          OVERALL SCORE</p>
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## Ask Our Experts

### Are bottled vinaigrettes healthier than ranch dressing?



NO. WHILE PUTTING vinaigrette on your salad can be a lower-calorie choice than the creamier ranch dressing, some vinaigrettes can be high in added sugars. There were 7 grams per serving (2 Tbsp.) in one raspberry vinaigrette we tested. That's a lot, given that women should have no more than 25 g of added sugars a day and men no more than 36 g. Of the eight raspberry vinaigrettes we tried, only Annie's, above, earned a CR Recommendation. It was among those with the fewest grams (4) of added sugars. None of the ranch dressings we tested had more than a gram of sugar. Many were also low in saturated fats. But several were higher in calories and sodium, so it's best to stick to a single serving.

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

## 4K Media Streaming Devices

**WE TESTED:** 18 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** Ease of use, including navigating through menus; its compatibility with video services; data security; and more.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**  
 Median: 68  
 Range: 49-82

LOADED WITH FEATURES & DOUBLES AS A SMART SPEAKER

✔ **Amazon Fire TV Cube (3rd Gen)**  
 \$140

**75**  
 OVERALL SCORE



EASY TO USE

✔ **Roku Streaming Stick 4K+**  
 \$70

**73**  
 OVERALL SCORE



PETITE & A NICE PRICE

✔ **Google Chromecast with Google TV**  
 \$50

**67**  
 OVERALL SCORE



## Exterior Paints

**WE TESTED:** 20 paints  
**WE TEST FOR:** How well the paint holds up after accelerated weathering.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**  
 Median: 57  
 Range: 29-75

BEST OVERALL

✔ **Behr Marquee Exterior (Home Depot)**  
 \$61

**75**  
 OVERALL SCORE



STILL LOOKS GOOD AFTER 6 YEARS

✔ **Clark + Kensington Exterior (Ace)**  
 \$47

**75**  
 OVERALL SCORE



BARGAIN BUY

✔ **Valspar DuraMax Exterior (Lowe's)**  
 \$39

**72**  
 OVERALL SCORE



## Smartphones

**WE TESTED:** 58 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** Battery life and speed of charging, quality of screen display, rear- and front-facing cameras, durability of construction, ease of use, and more.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**  
 Median: 75  
 Range: 38-86

IPHONE THAT ACED OUR TESTS

✔ **Apple iPhone 14 Pro Max**  
 \$1,100

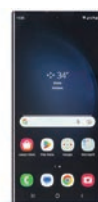
**86**  
 OVERALL SCORE



TOP-SCORING ANDROID

✔ **Samsung Galaxy S23 Ultra**  
 \$1,080

**85**  
 OVERALL SCORE



SMART PICK FOR HALF THE PRICE

✔ **OnePlus 10 Pro 5G**  
 \$550

**78**  
 OVERALL SCORE



## String Trimmers for \$260 or Less

**WE TESTED:** 44 models  
**WE TEST FOR:** How quickly and neatly they trim and edge grass around walkways, the ability to cut through weeds, and more.

**ABOUT THE SCORES:**  
 Median: 78  
 Range: 41-91

BEST BATTERY TRIMMER

✔ **Ego ST1502SA**  
 \$200

**91**  
 OVERALL SCORE



GREAT GAS-POWERED OPTION

✔ **Echo SRM-225i**  
 \$260

**85**  
 OVERALL SCORE



LIGHTWEIGHT BATTERY TRIMMER

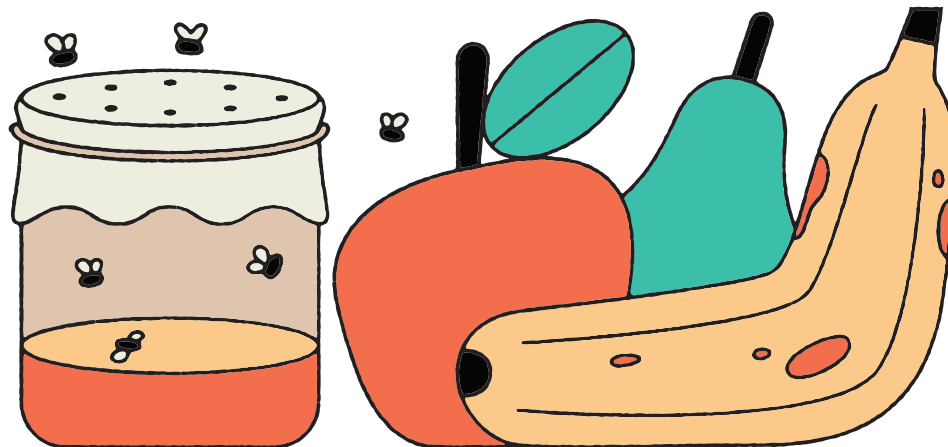
✔ **Stihl FSA 57**  
 \$200

**84**  
 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 **Microwaves & More**



## What's the best way to get rid of fruit flies?

IF YOU HAVE a fruit fly infestation, chances are that a banana is to blame. “Fruit fly eggs are commonly introduced into a home by way of bananas,” says Jody Gangloff-Kaufman, senior extension associate at Cornell University’s New York state integrated pest management program. The simplest way to stop them from hatching in the first place? “Wash bananas when you first bring them home.”

But if these tiny pests are already in your kitchen, the best way to get rid of them is to remove their food sources. A fruit fly’s life cycle is 40 to 50 days, but it’ll last only about a week without food. Fruit flies are drawn to the yeasts found in fruit sugars when fruit begins to ferment, Gangloff-Kaufman says, so dispose of rotten fruit immediately. And don’t let ripened fruit linger

on your countertops. Instead, refrigerate apples and pears, and even tomatoes once they’re about to turn. Freeze ripe bananas to use later in smoothies or baked goods.

Your recycling bin, sink, and/or garbage disposal can also be harboring the yeasts that attract fruit flies. Rinse recyclables to get rid of residual sugars, and clean your sink and garbage disposal with a mixture of vinegar and either ice or baking soda.

You can also set traps for fruit flies. Put fruit juice in a small cup covered with plastic wrap, then poke tiny holes in the wrap. Alternatively, grab a funnel (or make a piece of paper into a funnel) and place it at the top of a recently finished wine bottle with a few drops left. Both methods draw flies in but won’t let them out.

### Can painkillers put me at an increased risk for sunburn and heatstroke?

YES. IN FACT, many medications increase sensitivity to sunlight and heat. With average summer

temperatures rising in many parts of the U.S., it’s important to know if your meds could have these effects on you. Common over-the-counter drugs that are known to increase sensitivity to sunlight include ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin); some antibiotics, such as doxycycline; and some blood pressure drugs, such as ACE inhibitors. Antihistamines that can cause drowsiness (such as Benadryl), tricyclic antidepressants such as doxepin (Sinequan), and acne and anti-aging skin treatments with salicylic acid or tretinoin (Retin-A, Renova) increase sensitivity to heat.

The symptoms vary, but many of these drugs may make you dehydrated and affect your body’s ability to regulate temperature, both of which can result in heatstroke and heat exhaustion. Sensitivity to sunlight can lead to rashes within a few hours of exposure.

If you’re taking meds that could increase your sensitivity to heat and sun, follow these precautions. Drink plenty of water, avoid alcohol (which can dehydrate you further), and wear sunscreen and sun-protective clothing. Keep in mind, too, that high temperatures can make pill coatings crack, melt, or peel, which can affect how the

medication is absorbed, making it ineffective or even harmful. So store meds in a cool, dry place, and talk to your doctor or pharmacist if you have questions about heat- or sun-related side effects.

### Are cars with sunroofs less safe in a crash?

LARGE GLASS SUNROOFS are safe—as long as you’re buckled up. Insurance Institute for Highway Safety tests have not found any evidence that a regular or panoramic sunroof affects your level of protection if you’re in a rollover crash.

“The vehicle’s frame, including the pillars that support the roof, is what keeps the vehicle’s roof from collapsing in a rollover,” says Joe Young, an IIHS spokesperson. And a 2017 CR analysis found that although panoramic sunroofs can shatter while driving, that’s a relatively rare occurrence and usually results in only minor scrapes.

The greater risk is for people who don’t wear their seat belts, because they can be ejected through the glass in a crash. Data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration shows that passengers who are ejected from a vehicle in a serious crash face a high risk of suffering life-changing injuries or death.



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

# CR Insights



THE MULTITASKER

✓ **Ninja Professional Plus Kitchen System**  
BN801 \$220

82

OVERALL SCORE

POWERHOUSE THAT'S GREAT FOR SOUPS

✓ **Vitamix Professional Series 750** \$630

88

OVERALL SCORE



BUDGET-FRIENDLY FOR EVERYDAY TASKS

✓ **NutriBullet Smart Touch**  
NBF50420 \$140

77

OVERALL SCORE



SINGLE-SERVING SIZE WITH A TO-GO LID

✓ **Beast Blender** \$155

76

OVERALL SCORE



## IN THE KNOW

### Is It Time to Upgrade Your Blender?

**IF YOUR OLD** blender struggles to crush ice or purée vegetables for smoothies, it may not be powerful enough to meet your needs. Newer blenders, like the highly rated models shown here, offer plenty of oomph—some have motors with 2 to 3 hp. In fact, even a budget workhorse, like the NutriBullet (at middle right), has a 2-hp motor and aced our smoothie and puréeing tests—perfect if you just want

the occasional icy drink.

But new blender “systems” can be much more versatile. For example, the Ninja (above) is an excellent full-sized blender with two to-go jars, a food processor attachment, and a dough blade. And pricier models like the 8-cup Vitamix (at top right) not only crush ice, and purée fruit and vegetables in under a minute, but also can blend hot ingredients (which most basic models can’t

do). In our lab, the Vitamix puréed veggies into a smooth soup in about 5 minutes.

If your current full-sized blender works well but you don’t want to pull it out for small jobs (like making a single drink), you may want a personal-sized option like the Beast (at bottom right). Even with its smaller motor, it excels in CR’s puréeing test, and it comes with a travel lid for on-the-go smoothie drinking.

PHOTO, TOP: SARAH ANNE WARD, FOOD STYLING: MAGGIE RUGGIERO



SAVVY SHOPPER

## How to Spot Fake Online Reviews

**EVER WONDER WHETHER** those glowing five-star reviews you see for products sold online are real? It's hard to know for sure. In fact, research by Fakespot, a website that analyzes online product reviews, found that 42 percent of Amazon's reviews aren't genuine. How to know whether the reviews you see on e-commerce websites are authentic, and can be trusted when you're making decisions about products to buy?

CR's deals editor, Samantha Gordon, reveals how to recognize what's real—and what's fake.

### 1 Note the time stamps of the reviews.

If you notice a cluster of very positive reviews all posted on the same day, "something fishy might be going on," says Gordon. Fake reviews can be grouped together like this, so it's probably best to skip over them.

### 2 Be wary of identical phrasing in multiple reviews.

This could be another indication that the reviews aren't real. For example, if you see multiple reviews from different users but they all use the phrase "Wow, this product changed my life!" they may not be genuine.

### 3 Look for "Verified Purchase" badges on Amazon.

Any user on Amazon is allowed to leave a review of a product, even if they didn't buy it on Amazon. The "verified purchase" tag on a review signals that Amazon confirmed that the reviewer paid for the product and bought it through Amazon. You can also filter the reviews to see only those that are a verified purchase.

### 4 Click on the reviewer for their history.

If you're interested in a specific review, it may help to look more closely at the user who wrote it. Clicking on their profile should let you see other items they

reviewed, which can give you more clues as to whether that reviewer is legitimate. If a reviewer always gives five stars and uses similar language for different reviews, those may be fake or paid for.

### 5 If you're still unsure, use Fakespot.

This website uses an algorithm to evaluate the quality of customer reviews for products being sold at major retailers, including Amazon, Best Buy, Walmart, and more. Just copy a product URL into the "analyzer" at [fakespot.com/analyzer](https://fakespot.com/analyzer). It will tell you the percentage of reviews for the product that are likely to be genuine.

PHOTOS: BOTTOM LEFT TO RIGHT: KOHLER; CONSUMER REPORTS; MANUFACTURERS; PHOTO, TOP LEFT: GETTY IMAGES

## CR Time Traveler BATHROOMS



**1911** Kohler offers one of the first built-in bathtubs, which have begun replacing free-standing porcelain-enamel cast-iron tubs.

**1939** CR finds that many soap bars are overpriced. We like Colgate's Big Bath bar, which is \$1.77 less per pound than the highly rated Yardley bar.



**1942** We test 44 brands of toilet paper, including Scot and Waldorf. We rate Scot as "superior" for absorbency, strength, and softness.



**1950** We test toilet paper again (49 brands!) and report that multi-ply rolls—like Fashion—are softer and stronger than single-ply rolls.

**1964** Inventor Arnold Cohen introduces one of the first modern bidets—a water sprayer attached to a toilet seat.

**THE BETTER DEAL**

**AIR PURIFIERS**

HIGHER PRICE  
**\$750**

✓ **Alen BreatheSmart 75i Pure**

**87**  
OVERALL SCORE



BETTER PRICE  
**\$298**

✓ **Blueair Blue Pure 211+**

**85**  
OVERALL SCORE



**THE LOWDOWN**

**THE ALLEN BREATHESMART** is top-notch at capturing and removing dust and smoke at both high and low speed settings. But the reasonably priced Blueair also aced our tests for particle removal in large rooms at both high and low speeds. Plus, it has a machine-washable fabric prefilter for capturing larger things like pet hair, which can prolong the life of the main filter. It's a little noisier than the Alen when used at high speeds, but for less than half the price, that may not be an issue for most.

**CONVERTIBLES**

HIGHER PRICE  
**\$52,800 - \$65,300**

✓ **2023 BMW Z4**  
\$59,195\*

**76**  
OVERALL SCORE



BETTER PRICE  
**\$28,050 - \$38,950**

✓ **2023 Mazda MX-5 Miata**  
\$32,715\*

**83**  
OVERALL SCORE



\*Price as tested.

**THE LOWDOWN**

**BOTH OF THESE** roadsters provide thrilling, top-down motoring targeted toward sun-loving driving enthusiasts. The BMW Z4 is more luxurious and slightly quicker than the Mazda MX-5 Miata, but the Z4's stiffer ride and higher price make the Miata a bargain by comparison. The Miata has higher predicted reliability, and our experts found it to have sharper handling. What's more: The Miata offers much better fuel economy at 34 mpg overall; the Z4's fuel economy is 29 mpg overall.

PHOTOS: MANUFACTURERS

**1969** Bad bathroom tile jobs are often the result of low-quality caulking material. Of the 20 we test, caulks from GE and Dow Corning withstand cracking best.



**1989** Bathtub spa bubblers are popular new accessories. After testing eight models, we like the Regina Home Spa, a Best Buy at \$90.



**2010** We give this \$50 Moen (below left) top ratings for its strong water flow. The worst we tried? A \$40 Price Pfister Bell (below right).



✓ **Glacier Bay N2420 (Home Depot)**  
\$180

**77** OVERALL SCORE



**1978** One toilet flush uses up to 8 gallons of water. CR tests water-saving gadgets but says using a plastic bottle and wire (above) is best.

**1995** We test low-flow toilets and prefer models that remove waste by using pressure-assistance, such as the top-rated Gerber Ultra Flush.



**2023** Our labs reveal the top toilets that flush well and are comfortable to sit on, like the Glacier Bay model above.

PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

# Best Budget Electric Bikes

**MORE AMERICANS THAN EVER** are using e-bikes to get around town quickly. Popular types include Class 1 e-bikes, which give you an electric power assist while you pedal, and Class 2 e-bikes, which offer that same power assist with just a squeeze of a hand-operated throttle lever (although many offer a pedal assist option as well). Both types of e-bike motors go up to 20 miles per hour.

But these electric-powered bikes can be pricey: Some cost over \$3,000. The good news? Our testers rode more than 35 e-bikes and found some great budget options. Consider these six easy-to-ride models, all for \$1,600 or less, including some that fold or let you bring a bag along for the ride.

*E-bike regulations vary by locale, so make sure e-bikes are legal where you plan to ride. For more model ratings and information, go to [CR.org/ebikes](http://CR.org/ebikes).*



Aventon Pace 350 Next-Gen Step-Through



82

OVERALL SCORE

✓ **Velotric Discover 1**  
Class 2, \$1,250

- 5/5 ACCELERATION
- 5/5 HILL CLIMB
- 4/5 RANGE

An upright riding position and wide tires (which soak up bumps) provide a comfortable ride. In our tests, this e-bike accelerated quickly and climbed hills with ease.



74

OVERALL SCORE

✓ **Electra Townie GO! 7D**  
Class 1, \$1,600

- 4/5 ACCELERATION
- 4/5 HILL CLIMB
- 3/5 RANGE

Cruiser-style with a relaxed, upright riding position, this bike is comfortable and fun to ride. There's a rack over the rear wheel that houses the battery and can also be used to carry a bag.



70

OVERALL SCORE

**Aventon Pace 350 Next-Gen Step-Through**  
Class 2, \$1,199

- 4/5 ACCELERATION
- 3/5 HILL CLIMB
- 3/5 RANGE

The Aventon Pace 350 offers a good combination of performance and value for a Class 2 e-bike. It's also comfortable to ride and pretty easy to pedal on your own, should the battery die.



70

OVERALL SCORE

**Lectric XP 2.0 Folding**  
Class 2 folding, \$800

- 5/5 ACCELERATION
- 4/5 HILL CLIMB
- 3/5 RANGE

This lower-cost model has a lot of power for quick acceleration and hill climbing, and a luggage rack. It folds, but at 64 pounds, it may be too heavy to carry up stairs or to mount on a car bike rack.



65

OVERALL SCORE

**Citizen Bike London**  
Class 2 folding, \$1,300

- 3/5 ACCELERATION
- 3/5 HILL CLIMB
- 2/5 RANGE

Though not big on power, this model's powertrain gets the job done on hills. At 40 pounds, it's also easy to pedal without e-assist and light enough to carry up stairs, and it folds for easy, compact storage.



63

OVERALL SCORE

**Schwinn Wanderlust**  
Class 1, \$1,130

- 4/5 ACCELERATION
- 3/5 HILL CLIMB
- 3/5 RANGE

This Schwinn e-bike offers a comfortable upright position. Our testers also found it easy to pedal even without motor assistance. There's no luggage rack, but one can be added.

ILLUSTRATION: RODRIGO DAMATI. PHOTOS: MANUFACTURERS





FOOD IQ™

## YOUR GUIDE TO SAFER LETTUCE

**BETWEEN 2014 AND 2021**, there were 78 foodborne disease outbreaks linked to leafy greens (mainly lettuce) reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. So if you've noticed recalls for lettuce contaminated with *E. coli* and listeria, you might be wondering whether the salad in your bowl is safe to eat. CR's experts are here to answer your biggest questions about the risks of bacteria in lettuce and how to minimize them.

### **Q How does lettuce get contaminated in the first place?**

There are a few ways. Irrigation water, which is necessary to grow crops in areas that don't get a lot of rain, creates a pathway for contamination—especially if the lettuce field is located near livestock farms. Cattle can carry deadly strains of *E. coli*, and their manure, which contains the bacteria, can seep into irrigation water and contaminate crops. Even when lettuce is grown free of harmful bacteria, contamination can still occur during harvest, processing, or packaging. And because packaged salad greens are processed at a small number of facilities across the U.S., bacteria, such as listeria, can easily spread from one batch to many.

### **Q Does washing lettuce remove bacteria?**

Not entirely. When bacteria such as *E. coli* come into

contact with lettuce, they're almost impossible to wash off completely. That's often because bacteria can get inside the leaves of the greens as they're growing, when contaminated water taken up by the roots is dispersed throughout the plant. What's more, surface bacteria can adhere stubbornly to the wrinkles and grooves of leaves. So whether the packaging says "triple-washed" or you wash it yourself, bacteria could still be present—and even a small amount can make you sick.

are greenhouse-grown) are less likely to be contaminated by bacteria from animal droppings. Their cleanliness depends on the source of the water used to grow them and whether proper safety practices are followed by people who handle the greens, says James E. Rogers, PhD, CR's director of food safety research and testing.

Whole heads of lettuce (instead of bagged greens) may also be safer. While whole heads don't necessarily have lower bacteria levels than packaged greens, their inner leaves are less exposed to sources of contamination and are handled less than bagged greens. This reduces the opportunities for contamination.

### **Q What else can I do to make my lettuce safer?**

Bacteria multiply at room temperature, so it's crucial to refrigerate bagged lettuce promptly. You should also buy packages with expiration dates as far in the future as possible. If any leaves appear damaged, slimy, or bruised, discard the entire package.

Another strategy: Opt for leafy greens that can be cooked, like spinach or kale. The heat will kill bacteria. This is particularly important for people who are more susceptible to the ill effects of food poisoning, such as those who are immunocompromised, pregnant, or elderly.

### **Q What about soaking greens in vinegar?**

It won't eliminate bacteria, but some experts say that soaking your greens in white vinegar (or a vinegar-water solution) for about 10 minutes, then rinsing with water, may help reduce bacteria levels. Your greens may retain a slightly vinegary taste.

### **Q Are some types of lettuce safer than others?**

Because contamination can happen anywhere from farm to table, no single type of leafy green is risk-free. However, hydroponic lettuces (which

TOP PICKS

## Cleaning Secrets From CR's Experts

CR's home editors aren't just neat freaks—they're pros at cleaning. After years of trying out different products and gadgets, these are the ones they use to banish dust, dirt, and grime.



**TOBIE STANGER**  
Senior Home Editor



### FOR HARD-SURFACE CLEANING

**Dr. Bronner's Pure-Castile Soap \$10**  
**Utopia Towels Cotton Washcloths (60-pack) \$30**

"To clean counters, walls, and other hard surfaces, I dilute and dab Dr. Bronner's on washable cloths like Utopia Towels. It works well and has a nice smell. Plus, this \$10 bottle is more versatile, and lasts longer than products like Magic Eraser, which can cost \$6 for just a 2-pack."



### FOR SMELLY CARPETS

**Arm & Hammer Cat Litter Deodorizer \$5**

"Nothing is perfect for containing cat-pee odor, but this Arm & Hammer powder, made for litter boxes, does a better job of it than other products I've tried. I sprinkle it on the soiled carpet, rub it in a little, and let it sit before vacuuming. Unlike many other cat odor products, it doesn't emit a strong smell that's almost as bad as the cat pee itself."



**KEITH FLAMER**  
Home Editor



### FOR DUSTING

**Libman Microfiber Dusting Mitt \$12.50**

"This mitt is easier to use than a wand-style duster because it lets you really get into corners and crevices. Plus, it's small enough to live in a drawer, and it's machine washable—unlike feather dusters. I use it to clean laminate consoles, dressers, and bedside stands once a week."



### FOR SHOWER TILE

**Vowee Electric Spin Scrubber \$60**

"Scrubbing the shower is one of those chores many people put off because it's such a pain. To make it easy, I use this electric spin scrubber. It comes with a few different snap-on brushes and a long, adjustable pole. The pole helps eliminate stress on your back when you're cleaning tough-to-reach spots, and the brushes are powerful, so you don't need much elbow grease."



**MARY H.J. FARRELL**  
Senior Home Editor



### FOR STAINLESS STEEL COOKWARE

**Bar Keepers Friend \$2.50**

"This powder is truly magic for getting gunk off those discolored stainless pots you've probably had for years and years. It can even make cruddy, hard-to-clean sheet pans look shiny and new again. Just wet the surface you want to clean, sprinkle Bar Keepers Friend on, and then rub off the grime with a sponge."



### FOR CAST-IRON POTS & PANS

**Morton Coarse Kosher Salt \$15 for a 3-lb. box**

"Coarse salt is the cure for cleaning cast-iron cookware that has baked-on residue that isn't budging with regular soap and water. I sprinkle about 3 tablespoons across the bottom of the pan, and add a bit of water to make a thick paste. Massage it into the pan with a scrubber and, voila, the pan is clean again. Then season the pan with a little oil to help maintain it."



## RECALLS

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



### FORD RANGER TRUCKS

Ford is recalling 231,942 2004-2006 Ford Ranger pickup trucks after discovering that replacements for faulty Takata front-passenger airbags may have been installed incorrectly. As a result, the new airbags may not protect occupants in a crash. Owners of Rangers in this latest recall will need to bring their vehicle to a Ford or Lincoln dealership to have its front-passenger airbag inspected and, if necessary, replaced. This is true even if owners already had their passenger airbag replaced under a previous recall or if their trucks weren't included in earlier recalls.

**What to do:** Ford and Lincoln dealerships will inspect your vehicle, and, if necessary, replace the improperly installed inflators free of charge. Ford will contact owners of affected vehicles by mail, but owners may also call Ford at 866-436-7332. The NHTSA campaign number for this recall is 23V306. Ford's own number is 23S08.

### PELOTON EXERCISE BIKES

Peloton is recalling about 2.2 million bikes (model PL01) because the seat can break during use, posing fall and injury hazards. The bikes were sold at Dick's Sporting Goods and Peloton stores nationwide and online at Amazon, [dickssportinggoods.com](http://dickssportinggoods.com), and [onpeloton.com](http://onpeloton.com) from January 2018 through May 2023 for about \$1,400.

**What to do:** Stop using the bike and call Peloton at 866-679-9129 or go to [onpeloton.com](http://onpeloton.com) for details and to arrange for a free repair. Peloton is offering owners a free seat post that can be self-installed.

### CRAFTSMAN, DEWALT, AND STANLEY SLEDGEHAMMERS

Stanley Black & Decker is recalling about 2.2 million Craftsman, DeWalt, and Stanley fiberglass sledgehammers because the head of the sledgehammer can loosen prematurely and detach unexpectedly during use, posing an impact injury hazard. They

were sold at Ace Hardware, Home Depot, and other hardware stores nationwide and online at [acehardware.com](http://acehardware.com), Amazon, [homedepot.com](http://homedepot.com), and other online sellers from November 2013 through November 2022 for about \$18 to \$26.

**What to do:** Stop using the sledgehammer. Contact Stanley Black & Decker at 855-418-3032 or go to [craftsman.com](http://craftsman.com), [dewalt.com](http://dewalt.com), or [stanleytools.com](http://stanleytools.com) for details and instructions to receive a full refund.

### STEAMFAST AND BROOKSTONE TRAVEL STEAM IRONS

Vornado is recalling about 317,000 Steamfast Home & Away and Brookstone Steam Bug travel steam irons because the power cord can become damaged near the cord bushing, which can lead to overheating of the cord, posing fire and burn hazards. In addition, cord damage can result in exposed copper wires, posing a shock hazard. The irons were sold at Bed Bath & Beyond, Walmart, and other stores nationwide and online at Amazon, [steamfast.com](http://steamfast.com), [vornado.com](http://vornado.com), and other online retailers from January 2009 through May 2018 and at Brookstone between 2009 and 2013 for \$13 to \$30.

**What to do:** Stop using the iron. Call Vornado at 866-827-3362 or go to [steamfast.com](http://steamfast.com) or [vornado.com](http://vornado.com) to register and receive a refund of \$19.99.

### CONTINENTAL AND HAMPTON BAY KITCHEN CABINETS

American Woodmark is recalling about 235,000 Continental and Hampton Bay kitchen wall cabinets because the cabinets can detach from the wall, posing an impact hazard. The cabinets were sold at Ace Hardware, Home Depot (in certain states), True Value Company, and other hardware and building supply stores and online nationwide. The cabinets were sold from February 2022 through March 2023 for \$80 to \$265, depending on the model.

**What to do:** Stop using the cabinets. Call American Woodmark at 888-273-7896 or go to [continentalcabinetry.com](http://continentalcabinetry.com) or [hamptonbaykitchens.com](http://hamptonbaykitchens.com) for details and to get a free repair kit. Assistance with the repair will be provided upon request.

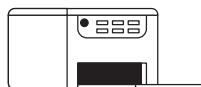
### WALKER EDISON BUNK BEDS

Walker Edison is recalling about 121,000 twin over twin bunk beds because the wooden slats supporting the bunk beds can break while in use, posing fall and impact hazards. The beds were sold online at Amazon, [homedepot.com](http://homedepot.com), [overstock.com](http://overstock.com), [walmart.com](http://walmart.com), and [wayfair.com](http://wayfair.com) from February 2010 through February 2022 for \$206 to \$389.

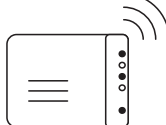
**What to do:** Stop using the bunk beds. Call the company at 877-203-2917 or go to [walkeredison.com](http://walkeredison.com) for details and to receive a free repair kit.

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

#### PRINTERS



#### WIRELESS ROUTERS



#### DEHUMIDIFIERS



#### COMPUTERS



# PRODUCT UPDATE



THE LATEST RATINGS FROM OUR LABS

## Is a Smartwatch Right for You?

If you've been wondering whether you should get one—and what the new health and safety features are all about—check our ratings.

by Allen St. John



**L**OOK AROUND THESE days and you'll see lots of folks wearing smartwatches—and not just to project an air of being tech savvy. These devices have come a long way in recent years, evolving from glorified cell-phone accessories to full-fledged computers with an array of sophisticated capabilities, many of which take advantage of the fact that the watch is strapped to your body.

Yes, a smartwatch can still notify you about incoming texts and calls, as well as the latest news, stock prices, and weather forecasts. With downloaded apps, it can even call an Uber for you or identify an unfamiliar song playing on the radio. But perhaps the best argument for a smartwatch in 2023 is the range of ways these tiny devices can help monitor and improve your health and safety.

Today's top models do far more than track your exercise routines. With built-in sensors that can monitor the rhythm of your heart (like an EKG machine), blood oxygen levels, sleep patterns, stress levels, and more, many watches can actually help you and your doctors make important health decisions and even spot dangerous conditions before they become acute. Some can also detect falls and auto crashes—and, if they sense that you're unresponsive, automatically call for help. (See "Is a Smartwatch as Good as a Medical Alert System?" on page 21.)

Indeed, the range of health and safety features is now so robust that Consumer Reports recently revised its smartwatch

ratings (which start on page 22) to give credit to models that have an abundance of these capabilities.

With dozens of models to choose from, is it hard to find the right smartwatch for you? Not at all. Below, we'll walk you through the key features and explain how to find the best option for your needs.

## What a Smartwatch Can Do

Let's start by defining our terms: What differentiates a smartwatch from a fitness tracker is its mobile apps. Even top-shelf trackers are still limited to the functions that were installed at the factory. Smartwatches, by contrast, offer boundless versatility because, as with smartphones and tablets, they let you add functionality simply by downloading a new app.

And there are thousands of apps available for the main smartwatch operating systems, offering everything from news and entertainment to travel tools and guided meditation. Fitness fans are especially well served, with apps not just for runners and cyclists but also golfers, yoga enthusiasts, scuba divers, and even pickleball players. The selection varies based on the ecosystem you choose—Apple's watchOS, Google's Wear OS, or the Fitbit OS—but name an activity and there's probably a smartwatch app for it.

Healthwise, many of today's watches provide health data in a way that's both detailed and easy to understand. (For more info on the sensors that deliver

those health metrics, see page 20.)

Most of those features are simple to use, too. With an Apple Watch, you can open the Health app on your phone, enable the ECG function, and use the controls to take a measurement in 30 seconds. The results show up on your phone, along with a "share" button to print or email them to a doctor.

Can you really use these features to protect and improve your health? Yes, but first you have to understand their limitations. A smartwatch is generally not going to collect data as precisely or reliably as the instruments in a doctor's office. More important, says Marco Perez, MD, a cardiologist at Stanford University, a smartwatch is no substitute for regular visits with your physician. It can't make sense of the data it collects or offer health advice on its own. "A watch is not a diagnostic tool," he adds. "It's meant to be a guide to your health, to help you and your doctor make decisions."

But even the more basic functions of a smartwatch can be beneficial. Seth Martin, a cardiologist at Johns Hopkins University, says he reviews smartwatch activity logs to get a sense of how much his patients are moving. He uses one himself, sharing data with his mother and sister for mutual support and accountability.

And when his 90-year-old mother was having heart-rhythm symptoms, David L. Brown, MD, a professor at USC's Keck School of Medicine, set up the ECG function on her Apple Watch. The device flagged an atrial fibrillation that had eluded the monitors in the ER.

## 4 Watches and Their Features

(from top)



✓ **APPLE WATCH SERIES 8 45MM** \$430

**87** OVERALL SCORE

The latest Apple Watch can detect if you've been in a vehicle crash and send for help.

✓ **FITBIT SENSE 2** \$300

**82** OVERALL SCORE

The Sense 2 measures your stress levels and includes Fitbit's robust sleep-tracking features.

✓ **GOOGLE PIXEL WATCH 41MM** \$350

**86** OVERALL SCORE

Google's first smartwatch offers fall detection plus easy interaction with other Pixel devices.

✓ **SAMSUNG GALAXY WATCH5 44MM LTE** \$330

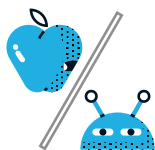
**85** OVERALL SCORE

The Watch5 has a bioelectrical sensor that can measure body-fat percentage.

# Before You Buy, Read This

Gone are the days when the answer to most smartwatch questions went like this: Just buy an Apple Watch. Models made by Apple continue to perform very well in our labs, but Android devices

are better than ever. In fact, several Google Pixel and Samsung Galaxy watches sit near the top of our ratings. Here's what to consider when shopping for a smartwatch.



## APPLE OR ANDROID?

**For a more seamless experience**, try to match your watch to your phone. If you have an iPhone, for example, you'll want an Apple Watch. Models that operate on Google's Wear OS work best with an Android phone. And if you have a Samsung phone, you can pair it with any Android smartwatch. But one made by Samsung will offer extra benefits, like compatibility with the company's fitness apps and the ability to control the volume on a pair of Samsung earbuds from your wrist.



## CELL SERVICE

**Cellular capability** adds a bit to a watch's purchase price and roughly \$10 a month to your phone bill. But it allows you to leave your smartphone behind when you go out for a walk or a run. With a built-in cell service connection, you can receive phone calls and text messages, and take full advantage of your watch's fall-protection features. (Without one, you need to carry your phone at all times to get those benefits.) A built-in mic

and speaker allow you to place phone calls and also use voice commands for Alexa, Siri, and Google Assistant.



## THE RIGHT SENSORS

**While you can add new functionality** in seconds by downloading an app, several of the most sophisticated health and safety features require special sensors that are found only on higher-end models. If, for example, you want an Apple Watch that delivers warnings about an abnormal heart rhythm (which needs an ECG sensor), the most accurate sleep tracking (which needs a blood oxygen sensor), or women's health options (which often require a skin-temperature sensor), you need to spring for the \$400 Apple Watch Series 8 instead of the otherwise capable \$250 Apple Watch SE. Among the higher-end watches that include advanced sensors are the Google Pixel Watch (which has fall-detection sensors), the Samsung Galaxy Watch5 (which can measure body fat and muscle mass), and the Fitbit Sense 2 (which adds a skin-temperature sensor for stress tracking).



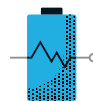
## A CUSTOMIZED WATCH FACE

**There are lots of simple ways** to make a smartwatch your own, just as you'd personalize a smartphone. You can, for example, choose between a classy analog watch face or a bold and easy-to-read digital display. On many models you can then add quick access to your favorite information, including hourly weather forecasts and the fluctuations of the Dow Jones Industrial Average.



## REMINDERS

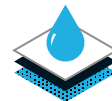
**Smartwatches are great** for reminders, from appointment notifications to medication scheduling. If you enable fitness and mindfulness functions, your watch can even prompt you to stand up or take a few minutes for focused breathing or meditation.



## BATTERY LIFE

**From a battery life standpoint**, smartwatches tend to be more like smartphones (which often need to be charged daily) than

fitness trackers (which last a week or more between top ups). The precise figure—18 to 36 hours and beyond—depends on the model you choose and how you use it. Certain apps, like GPS, can be power-hungry. Pro tip: Many smartwatches come in various case sizes, and the larger cases often have a bigger battery for longer battery life.



## WATER RESISTANCE

**In our labs**, we test smartwatches for water resistance in a pressure tank. Most models survived a 10-minute immersion of 164 feet or more, but if you plan to dive with your watch, choose a model with a deeper rating.



## THE BEST FIT

**Fit is important** for two reasons. To get the most out of a smartwatch, you need to wear it almost all of your waking hours (and maybe while you sleep). A good, snug fit also improves the accuracy of sensors, like those for ECG and skin temperature, that rely on contact with your skin. So be sure to try on several watches before committing. You can often swap out bands in seconds to fine-tune your fit.



## Is a Smartwatch as Good as a Medical Alert System?

## 4 Apps You'll Want to Try

From making contactless payments at Starbucks to helping you track down your lost smartphone, today's smartwatches can do plenty of slick tricks. Here are four popular apps that can make your watch even more useful and fun.

**TRAVEL:** Are you in Milan but your Italian is limited to "Parlo solo inglese"? **iTranslate Converse** provides real-time translation in more than 30 languages. You speak a phrase into the mic on your watch and the app will say and display the translation.

**ORGANIZATION:** If you're ready to venture beyond paper to-do lists, **Things 3** takes task management to the next level, turning both long- and short-term projects into satisfying checklists perfectly suited to your wrist.

**FITNESS:** Wouldn't it be nice to have a personal trainer to help steer you through your daily fitness routine and nutrition choices? **Lifesum** is the next best thing, with guidance for calorie counting, hydration reminders, and tracking of both your workouts and daily activity.

**FUN:** If you want a game app that might also challenge your memory, try **Rules**, which serves up a series of fun and intuitive—but intriguingly tricky—puzzles that require you to remember and apply a series of Simon Says-style instructions.



**SOME SMARTWATCHES** from Apple, Google, Samsung and other brands can detect if you've had a fall and call for assistance. For some people, this could be an alternative to the medical alert systems that use pendants or bracelets.

Details vary from one watch brand to the next, but let's look at the Apple Watch as an example. If you take a hard tumble, the device will sound an alert. Then, onscreen instructions will ask if you need help and if you want to send a message to one of your emergency contacts. If you don't respond, the Apple Watch contacts 911. The smartwatch needs to be within Bluetooth range (roughly 30 feet) of your phone, which the watch uses to make the call, unless the watch has its own cellular connection. (Built-in cellular can add about \$50 to a smartwatch's price, plus \$10 a month to your cell phone plan.)

With a pendant or bracelet from a medical alert system, you typically need to press a button

to call for help, but some can detect a fall on their own. A staff member will answer and assist you—whether you've fallen or are incapacitated for another reason.

Prices vary. Bay Alarm Medical, CR's highest-rated system, costs \$39.95 a month (\$479.40 a year) for fall detection and mobile coverage when you're out of the house. In-home-only service (tethered to a landline) costs \$24.95 a month.


While smartwatches need frequent recharging, medical alert pendants and bracelets typically run for a long time on a replaceable battery.

And Richard V. Milani, MD, chief clinical transformation officer for Ochsner Health in New Orleans, points out that either technology can work—if you use it anytime you're alone. "You literally have to wear [the device] all the time," he says. "You have to wear it to bed. You've got to wear it in the shower, in the bathroom—because that's where the majority of falls occur." —Michael Frank

**Ratings** > **Decision Time** With many smartwatches sporting new and improved health, safety, and fitness features, CR has added a health features score to credit models that have more of those capabilities.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results						Features			
			Ease of use	Versatility	Health features	Step-count performance	Heart-rate performance	Readability in bright light	Cellular	Battery life (claimed)	Phone compatibility	Water resistance
<b>SMARTWATCHES</b>												
✓ Apple Watch Ultra GPS + Cellular (49mm)	89	\$795	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	•	36 hours	iOS	328 feet for 10 minutes
Ⓢ Samsung Galaxy Watch4 Classic LTE (46mm)	89	\$330	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	•	2 days	Android	164 feet for 30 minutes
✓ Apple Watch Series 7 GPS + Cellular (41mm)	88	\$500	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	•	18 hours	iOS	164 feet for 10 minutes
✓ Apple Watch Series 8 GPS + Cellular (41mm)	87	\$750	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	•	18 hours	iOS	164 feet for 10 minutes
✓ Google Pixel Watch LTE	87	\$400	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	•	24 hours	Android	164 feet for 10 minutes
✓ Garmin Venu 2 Plus (43mm)	87	\$450	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑		10 days	iOS and Android	164 feet for 10 minutes
Ⓢ Samsung Galaxy Watch5 LTE (40mm)	87	\$330	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	•	2 days	Android	164 feet for 10 minutes
✓ Samsung Galaxy Watch5 Pro LTE (45mm)	87	\$500	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	•	3 days	Android	164 feet for 10 minutes
✓ Apple Watch Series 7 GPS (45mm)	87	\$430	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑		18 hours	iOS	164 feet for 10 minutes
Ⓢ Google Pixel Watch	86	\$350	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑		24 hours	Android	164 feet for 10 minutes
✓ Samsung Galaxy Watch4 Classic (46mm)	86	\$380	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑		2 days	Android	164 feet for 30 minutes
Ⓢ Samsung Galaxy Watch4 LTE (44mm)	86	\$295	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	•	2 days	Android	164 feet for 30 minutes
✓ Samsung Galaxy Watch5 Pro (45mm)	86	\$450	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑		3 days	Android	164 feet for 10 minutes
✓ Apple Watch Series 8 GPS (45mm)	86	\$430	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑		18 hours	iOS	164 feet for 10 minutes
Ⓢ Samsung Galaxy Watch5 (44mm)	85	\$310	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑		2 days	Android	164 feet for 10 minutes
Ⓢ Samsung Galaxy Watch4 (44mm)	85	\$200	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑		2 days	Android	164 feet for 30 minutes
✓ Garmin Forerunner 745	83	\$500	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑		7 days	iOS and Android	164 feet for 10 minutes
Ⓢ Garmin Vivoactive 4	83	\$320	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑		8 days	iOS and Android	164 feet for 10 minutes
Ⓢ Fitbit Sense 2	82	\$300	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑		6 days	iOS and Android	164 feet for 10 minutes
Ⓢ Apple Watch SE (gen 2) GPS + Cellular (44mm)	81	\$275	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	•	18 hours	iOS	164 feet for 10 minutes
✓ Garmin Venu 2 (45mm)	81	\$320	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑		1 day	iOS and Android	164 feet for 10 minutes
Ⓢ Garmin Venu Sq 2	81	\$250	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑		11 days	iOS and Android	164 feet for 10 minutes
Ⓢ Garmin Venu Sq Music	80	\$195	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑		6 days	iOS and Android	164 feet for 10 minutes
✓ Garmin Instinct 2 Solar (45mm)	80	\$450	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑		28 days	iOS and Android	187 feet for 10 minutes
Ⓢ Fitbit Sense	80	\$200	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑		6 days	iOS and Android	164 feet for 10 minutes
Ⓢ Fitbit Versa 3	79	\$200	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑		6 days	iOS and Android	164 feet for 10 minutes
Ⓢ Amazfit GTR 3	79	\$150	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑		21 days	iOS and Android	164 feet for 10 minutes
Ⓢ Amazfit GTR 2	79	\$120	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑		14 days	iOS and Android	164 feet for 30 minutes



Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results						Features			
			Ease of use	Versatility	Health features	Step-count performance	Heart-rate performance	Readability in bright light	Cellular	Battery life (claimed)	Phone compatibility	Water resistance

**SMARTWATCHES** *Continued*

\$ Fossil Gen 6 (44mm)	79	\$180	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	1 day	iOS and Android	98 feet for 10 minutes
\$ Apple Watch SE (gen 2) GPS (40mm)	79	\$245	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	↑	18 hours	iOS	164 feet for 10 minutes
\$ Citizen CZ Smart	78	\$195	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	1 day	iOS and Android	98 feet for 10 minutes
\$ Michael Kors Gen 6 Bradshaw	77	\$255	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	24 hours	iOS and Android	98 feet for 10 minutes
\$ Fitbit Versa 2	77	\$150	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	5 days	iOS and Android	164 feet for 10 minutes
✓ Polar Grit X Pro	76	\$460	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	7 days	iOS and Android	187 feet for 10 minutes
✓ Garmin Forerunner 945 Music	75	\$475	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	14 days	iOS and Android	164 feet for 10 minutes
✓ Garmin Instinct	75	\$240	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	1 day	iOS and Android	328 feet (duration not claimed)
\$ Fossil Gen 5E (42mm)	74	\$125	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	1 day	iOS and Android	98 feet for 10 minutes
Mobvoi Ticwatch E3	73	\$140	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	3 days	iOS and Android	5 feet for 10 minutes
Montblanc Swiss Summit 3	71	\$1,290	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	↑	Not stated	iOS and Android	164 feet for 10 minutes
Motorola Moto 360 (3rd Gen)	71	\$150	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	1 day	iOS and Android	98 feet for 10 minutes
Amazfit GTS 2e	67	\$120	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	↓	14 days	iOS and Android	164 feet for 10 minutes
3Plus Vibe Pro	66	\$80	↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↑	14 days	iOS and Android	164 feet for 30 minutes
Amazfit GTS 3	61	\$180	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓	↑	1 day	iOS and Android	164 feet for 10 minutes
Citizen CZ Smart 2nd Gen (44mm)	60	\$285	↑	↓	↓	↑	↓	↑	14 days	iOS and Android	98 feet for 10 minutes
Garmin Lily	60	\$250	↑	↓	↓	↑	↓	↓	5 days	iOS and Android	164 feet for 10 minutes
Fossil Hybrid HR (42mm)	60	\$200	↑	↓	↓	↑	↓	↑	14 days	iOS and Android	98 feet for 10 minutes
Citizen CZ Hybrid	58	\$240	↑	↓	↓	↑	↓	↑	15 days	iOS and Android	98 feet for 10 minutes
3Plus Vibe Plus	58	\$50	↑	↓	↓	↑	↓	↓	5 days	iOS and Android	98 feet for 10 minutes
Amazfit GTR 3 Pro	57	\$160	↑	↓	↓	↑	↓	↑	2 days	iOS and Android	164 feet for 10 minutes

**HOW WE TEST:** Overall Score is based on the results of all our tests. **Ease of use** is a composite score combining ease of interaction, pairing, connecting to a charger, mobile compatibility, and readability of the display in bright light and low light. **Versatility** highlights features that increase a smartwatch's utility, including the

number of sensors, cellular connectivity, GPS tracking, inactivity alerts, and similar features. **Health features** gives watches credit for their health, safety, fitness, and wellness functions. **Step-count performance** measures how accurately the watch counted our testers' actual steps. **Heart-rate performance** measures how accurately

the smartwatch measured our testers' actual heart rate. **Readability in bright light** is how easy it is to read the display in sunlight or bright conditions. **Cellular** is the phone's ability to connect to a cellular network without a smartphone. **Battery life** is the claimed number of days that a manufacturer says a watch will function on a single charge.

**Phone compatibility** indicates which mobile phone operating systems can pair with the watch. **Water resistance** reflects how resistant the watch is to submersion in water. We test this in our labs by subjecting the device to water pressure equivalent to the depth the manufacturer claims the watch can withstand. **Price** is approximate retail.



# CR's Scam Protection Guide

It's harder than ever to tell if that email, text, or phone call is from someone trying to steal your money, personal information, or both. What you need to know now.

by **JANET SIROTO**  
illustrations by **DOMENIC BAHMANN**





Technology offers so many convenient ways to keep in touch with friends and family, and manage our daily lives: cell phone calls, emails, texts, social media, and beyond. But it also allows would-be scammers to contact us on these platforms relentlessly—and try to get hold of our money, personal information, and identities. It can make you dread the simple act of answering the phone or opening an email.

That's how Alyson Friedman feels. A business owner in New York City, Friedman was fooled into giving important financial details to a scammer. "Recently, on a hectic day, I got a text saying there was a problem with my bank account," she says. It said that for security reasons, she needed to click a provided link and verify her details. Friedman assumed she'd made a mistake in a Zelle payment: "I figured I must have typo'd the address—I'd just

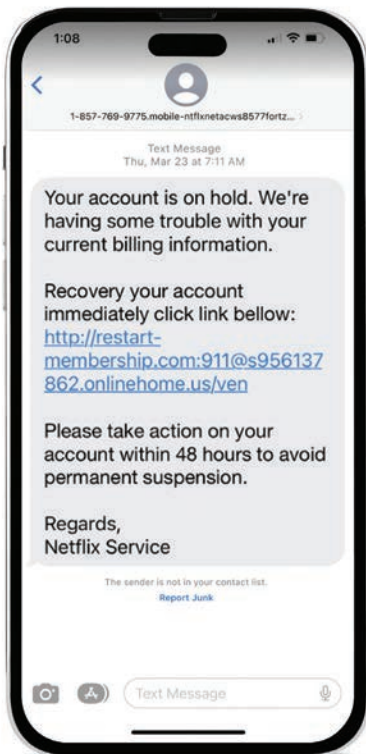
sent money for upholstery cleaning."

So Friedman clicked the link and entered her bank account username and password, only to receive another text—that a new user was attempting to log in. Sensing that something was wrong, she called her bank directly. "I felt like such a fool," says Friedman, who ended up not losing money to the scammer, thanks to her bank's fraud prevention team. Now, she says, "I barely answer my

phone unless I recognize the number."

Given the ever-increasing sophistication of scams and scammers, caution is warranted. Plus, these criminals may be more likely to target older adults, thinking they're less tech-savvy than their younger counterparts. According to the Federal Trade Commission, those in their 60s and 70s who report that they've been defrauded have median losses of \$666 and \$1,000, respectively. The numbers are \$552 for those in their 50s, \$600 for those in their 40s, and \$590 for those in their 30s.

But you are not powerless against scammers. This guide will help you raise your awareness of criminal gambits in the making, so you can sidestep them. It will also tell you what to do if you've been scammed. And don't feel embarrassed or ashamed if you've been tricked, says Eva Velasquez, president and CEO of the Identity Theft Resource Center in San Diego. Even the most tech-savvy people have been fooled by these cunning new frauds.



## The New Text Scams

**THOSE TEXT MESSAGES** certainly are attention-grabbing, saying there's a problem with your Amazon, Apple, Netflix, bank, or cell phone account, or that you've won a great prize or gift card. Or it could have been a "wrong number" text, from someone who supposedly contacted you in error.

Whatever the conceit, these texts usually urge you to click immediately on an embedded link. But doing so can take you to a web page that requests

personal information, like passwords to your Netflix account or credit card numbers to "pay" for shipping and taxes on the prize you supposedly won.

Instead of a prize, you could find unauthorized charges on your credit card or worse: Sixty percent of scam texts are designed to transmit "malware," says Michael Bruemmer, head of global data breach resolution at Experian, the credit reporting agency. This malicious software can infect your device and grab enough personal info to take over your shopping, financial, and social media accounts, or even steal your identity.

Text scams, or "smishing," are overtaking phone call scams as

**Don't Click on Questionable Links** Scammy text messages often encourage you to click. But that can take you to a website that downloads malicious software onto your device.

Account Suspended

[Click Here Now](#)



criminals' digital tool of choice, and now account for 22 percent of all fraud reports to the FTC's Consumer Sentinel Network, which shares scam info with law enforcement agencies. One likely reason: It's easy for fraudsters to send out numerous messages at a time via a chatbot, a tool that can engage in human-sounding communication.

**SPOTTING A TEXT SCAM** "One of the best prevention tips is to be wary of any unsolicited, out-of-the-blue outreach," says Eden Iscil, public policy manager of the nonprofit National Consumers League. And any text that mentions "fraudulent activity detected" or "free

gift" should set off alarms. Spelling and grammar mistakes may also be signs of a scam message.

So if you're unsure, don't respond or click on a link. Contact the source that the text appeared to come from through official channels. "If it's regarding your credit card, call the issuer," Velasquez says. "If it's about your bank account, call the bank directly or log in to your account online to investigate. Call your cable company's customer service number directly." (If you get confirmation that the text was a fake, forward it to 7726 to help your wireless carrier identify scammers. Then block the sender and delete the text.)

**IF YOU OPENED THE TEXT** Opening a suspicious text or even sending a simple reply—for example, "You don't have the right person"—won't put you in danger of malware being transferred to your device or your personal data being taken, Velasquez says. But it does tell the fraudster your number is active, so you could receive more smishing texts in the future. (The same can happen if you click on "unsubscribe" or "stop" links.) Simply forward the text, then block the sender and delete the text.

If you clicked on a link and were led to a website, exit the browser ASAP, and delete the URL from your browsing history, Bruemmer says. Then forward, block, and delete as above. Temporarily disconnect from WiFi or turn on airplane mode. Then, because you can't always tell when a device has been infected with malware, it's smart to run a security program (see "7 Smart Security Steps," on page 29). Or call the device's manufacturer for tech support or a referral to a tech pro who can scan it, Iscil says. And if you shared info that could compromise an account (notably, a password), change relevant information, such as password and username.

**IF YOU GOT SCAMMED** The remedies vary, depending on what was taken and how quickly you became aware of the scam. But if, after reporting and blocking the sender, you suspect or know that someone got into accounts that have payment methods associated with them (perhaps you notice an unfamiliar autopayment coming out of your bank account or your credit card issuer put a hold on a card), contact the fraud teams at those companies right away for guidance. You can search online for the contact number. You may have to close some accounts and open new ones, Bruemmer says, and you'll certainly want to change passwords and usernames of compromised accounts. Then get in touch with the customer service or fraud departments at any

nonfinancial accounts and platforms you think may have been affected.

If your mobile device isn't working after an encounter with a scammer, whether they reached you by phone or another method, take the device to a tech repair service as soon as possible. This can stop a scammer from accessing your personal data and contacts. Also, call your cell carrier for advice; search its name and "fraud department" online to find the appropriate number. They may have you reset the phone.

■ Filing a report with your local police is wise. You might need to do this if you have to prove to creditors and credit bureaus that you were defrauded.

■ If you think the scammer may have sufficient information to open lines of credit in your name (your name, address, and Social Security number can be enough), ask the three credit reporting agencies—Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion—to freeze your credit to prevent this. Request copies of your credit reports, too, and monitor them (and all money-related accounts)

for a year afterward for oddities like your credit score drifting down for no discernible reason or new credit card accounts you didn't open.

■ Watch for unexpected credit or debit cards in the mail, or denials for such cards, says Velasquez at the Identity Theft Resource Center. Isdil at the National Consumers League adds, "Victims of identity theft may also notice incorrect information on a credit report, receive bills for credit cards they did not open, or detect abnormalities on their tax forms or Social Security benefit statements."

■ Depending on your particular situation, you might want to take additional steps. For instance, if you think your Social Security number or Medicare data was used in fraudulent ways, contact those organizations. IdentityTheft.gov, the Identity Theft Resource Center ([idtheftcenter.org/recover](http://idtheftcenter.org/recover)), the AARP Fraud Helpline (877-908-3360), and your local FBI office ([fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices](http://fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices)) may have advice for specific issues.

## IF YOU WERE SCAMMED

Reporting your experience can help federal officials crack down on such criminal activities. You can do this at sites like the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center ([ic3.gov](http://ic3.gov)) and [ReportFraud.ftc.gov](http://ReportFraud.ftc.gov), and at [donotcall.gov](http://donotcall.gov).

## The Latest Phone Scams

**MANY OF US** are familiar with those out-of-the-blue calls, alerting us to a supposed computer virus or perhaps telling us we owe money to a company or government agency and must pay right away. These calls may sound believable, but they're likely from scammers. Phone fraud cost some 68.4 million Americans money in 2022, says the U.S. Spam & Scam Report from Truecaller, creator of a spam-blocking app. The median loss was \$1,400 per person scammed, the FTC says.

These days, some scammers are taking advantage of technological advances such as artificial intelligence to trick us. With voice cloning, a

fraudster snags a snippet of a person's voice—perhaps from a video on social media or recorded during a prior phone call—and creates false statements with the "voiceprint."

Recently, a Phoenix TV station reported on such a situation. According to KTVK, an Arizona family received a terrifying call from someone who claimed to have kidnapped their daughter—with the sound of her crying in the

### Is That Loved-One-in-Trouble Call for Real?

Scammers can now use artificial intelligence to copy another person's voice. If you get a call like this, contact your relative in another way.



# 7 SMART SECURITY STEPS

background. But it was an AI scam, the station says.

Scammers can also “spoof”—or fake—phone numbers to make it seem as if they’re calling from a specific organization or area. For instance, a 202 (Washington, D.C.) area code might make a fake call from the IRS seem more credible. Or a criminal may use your area code and first three local digits, hoping the familiar numbers encourage you to pick up.

**SPOTTING A PHONE SCAM** It can be hard to tell, experts say, but statements like “Scam Likely” or “Potential Spam” on your caller ID may be a tip-off. Spam filtering from your phone carrier and manufacturer may help, too (see “Can You Block Scammers?” on page 30).

But generally, experts say, it’s best to let unsolicited calls from unfamiliar numbers—and those that appear to be from businesses, government agencies, and other organizations—go right to voicemail. If the caller leaves a message, you can listen to it later.

If you think the message might be genuine, look up the company or organization’s contact info on its website. Call that number—not the one that was left on your voicemail. You can’t assume the one in the message is real.

**IF YOU ANSWERED THE CALL** Picking up tells the scammer that they’ve hit on a working number, which could lead to an uptick in such calls in the future.

More worrisome is that having a conversation with the caller could allow them to create a voiceprint of you for use in future scams. So the moment you suspect that you’re on the line with a bad actor or scammy robocall, hang up and block the number. With robocalls, don’t press any buttons or use voice commands to opt out of future calls—this can put you on a call-again list, says Bruemmer at Experian.

What if you get one of those scary relative-in-distress calls? Asking a

question only they know the answer to can tell you if it’s actually your loved one on the line. (If you’re uncertain, call or text them from another device to verify their safety.)

For the future, Rachel Woods, an AI startup founder, recommends in a TikTok post that you establish a safe word—such as Nantucket—with your

stolen or misused. Shut accounts you rarely use and delete the apps.

## 4 Allow automatic software updates.

These ensure that you always have the latest security patches for smartphone, computer, and router operating systems. Allowing them is usually the default setting, so you might not need to do anything.

## 5 Double up.

Multifactor authentication provides an extra layer of security. So if someone steals your bank or email password and tries to use it from an unrecognized device, the account remains sealed until you respond with a second proof of identity (like a one-time code). Scammers may try to get these codes, so never share them over the phone or via text or email.

## 6 Stick with safe payment methods.

Credit cards (and PayPal) offer legal

protections not found with other methods. With gift cards, cryptocurrency, and wire transfers, it’s almost impossible to get your money back if you’re scammed. Peer-to-peer payment apps like Venmo and Zelle also offer little recourse if you get swindled—it’s best to use these only with people you know.

## 7 Use antivirus protection.

Windows 10 and 11 have Microsoft Defender Antivirus, which can shield you from threats like malware. (Check settings to make sure it’s turned on.) Apple’s built-in security is always on. You can get additional protection from software like Avast Premium Security or Bitdefender Internet Security. Get comprehensive security tips at [CR.org/securityplanner](https://www.cr.org/securityplanner).  
—Chris Raymond

nearest and dearest, to protect you all from falling for this kind of scam.

**IF YOU GOT SCAMMED** If a scam that started with a phone call cost you money or compromised your personal credentials, or you notice your phone isn’t working properly, see “The New Text Scams” (follow the advice starting on page 27).

## Suspicious Emails

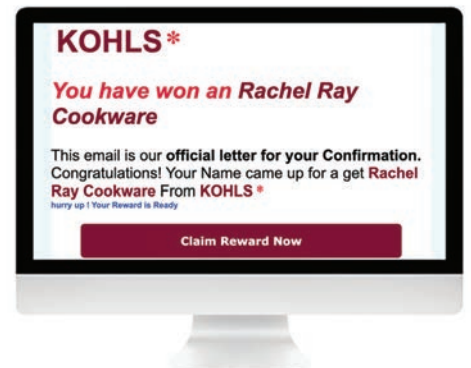
**PHISHING EMAILS**—which are designed to get you to share financial and other personal info—have been around since the mid-1990s and are still going strong. And these days, evolving technology can make email ruses harder to detect. For instance, fraudsters can rapidly create believable messages with ChatGPT, an AI chatbot, says Steve Baker, founder of the Baker Fraud Report and former director of the FTC’s Midwest region.

Common email scams play on emotions to get you to send money or information: joy (you’ve won something!) or fear (your credit card or utility account is locked, and you must click the link to update your credentials). Some appeal to your desire to help others, like alerts to a GoFundMe for someone with a terrible disease. One such recent plea was for a toddler in need of medical care. But the donation link in the email sent funds to a scammer, according to a caution from the city of Urbana, Ill.

**SPOTTING AN EMAIL SCAM** First, check the email address. On a computer, without opening the email, hover your cursor over the sender’s name to bring up the full address. If it’s not from the sender you expect or it’s odd—say,

“Amazonn” (with two n’s) instead of “Amazon”—it’s not legit. On a mobile device, open the email and hit reply, but don’t send a response. This should let you see the sender’s address, though you may need to tap on it, Baker says.

Another red flag is being asked for any payment for something you ostensibly won. Also, a reputable business won’t send an email requesting updated information via an embedded link. You’d likely be asked



## CAN YOU BLOCK SCAMMERS?

There’s no surefire way to stop all undesirable messages. But these strategies can help decrease the volume significantly.

- **For Phone Calls**  
Wireless carriers’ free filtering apps, such as AT&T’s ActiveArmor, T-Mobile’s Scam Shield, and Verizon’s Call Filter, identify and block calls that are likely to be scams or spam. Premium options (\$4 per month per line) add features like reverse number lookup.  
In addition, Apple and Android

phones let you silence calls from people you don’t know. On an Android phone, go to the phone app, then Settings, then Blocked numbers, and turn on Unknown. On an iPhone, go to phone Settings, then Phone, then choose Silence Unknown Callers.

And you can sign up for the National Do Not Call Registry (donotcall.gov). This won’t

stop fraudsters, but it blocks most real sales calls (groups such as charities and political organizations are exceptions). That way, you’ll know sales calls are fairly likely to be scams—and can be on your guard.

- **For Text Messages**  
On an Android phone, open Messages, tap the three-dot





## BE CAREFUL WITH QR CODES

During the pandemic, restaurants started using QR codes to give touchless access to menus. Patrons scanned the code with their smartphone camera and a link to the menu popped up.

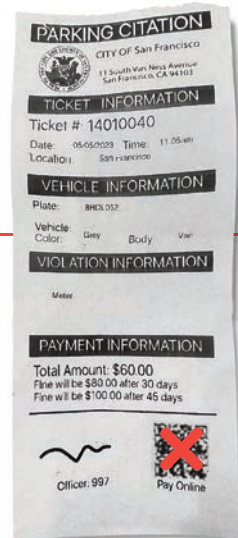
Such codes are now used in various official settings—for instance, to provide information to visitors at certain museums, and at Walmart’s self-checkout lanes.

But scammers are also creating QR codes that can lead to fake payment websites or download malware, the FBI says. The Better Business Bureau says these may show up in emails or texts offering debt consolidation, on ad flyers, on phony

parking tickets placed on windshields, or on stickers put on parking meters.

Think twice if you see a QR code on a sticker. “It’s very easy for bad actors to print out a sticker of their own QR code and place it over the legitimate one,” says security expert Eden Iscil.

Also, bypass any that look odd (very big, small, or pixelated) or are in text or email payment requests, says lawyer Steve Weisman, founder of Scamicide, a website that tracks numerous kinds of scams. Before you use a code, check the website address displayed. The URL should start



### A Fake Ticket

In one parking ticket scheme, QR codes sent payments to scammers.

with “https,” be similar in length to other URLs, and have no misspellings.

If you scan a code and are sent to an unexpected website, close it, shut your WiFi off, and run a security program or consider having your device scanned by a tech professional—even if you didn’t share personal info or make a payment. “Malware can be downloaded just by connecting to the scammer’s website,” Weisman says.

The QR codes elsewhere in this issue, like the one on page 51, are safe to use.

**Ignore Sketchy Prize Notifications** A message that asks you to click a link or provide personal information, or wants to charge fees to send the item you won, is probably fake.

to log in to your account through its website or to call customer service. When in doubt, go to the business’s official website and get the contact information there. Be cautious about GoFundMe requests with a tight deadline or about requests for cash,

icon on the top right of the screen, go to Settings, then Spam protection, and turn on “Enable spam protection.” This way, you’ll be alerted if a message may be coming from a dubious source. On an iPhone, go to Settings, then Messages, then Filter Unknown Senders, and you won’t receive message notifications from

senders who are outside your contacts list.

### ■ For Emails

Email platforms do try to block dangerous emails such as phishing attempts, but some could still get into your inbox. You can filter out messages from specific email addresses and those that have particular words

in the subject line; search the platform’s help center with a term like “email filtering.”

### ■ For Social Media Accounts

Make these as private as possible to keep the circle of people who can post or send you messages small. “That’s the safest option for most consumers,” says Eden Iscil

at the National Consumers League. How you do this and what exactly you can do varies by platform, so you’ll need to check your account settings. For instance, on Facebook, you can change the “Who can send you friend requests” setting from “Everyone” to “Friends of friends.”  
—Melanie Pinola

crypto, a gift card, or a wire transfer, the FTC says. Tip: A reverse search in Google Images (search in your web browser for how) may tell you whether photos were stolen and are actually associated with other people. For a charity, see how it's rated on sites such as Charity Navigator ([charitynavigator.org](http://charitynavigator.org)) and use the organization's website instead of an email link to donate.

**IF YOU OPENED THE EMAIL** As long as you didn't click a link or download an attachment, you're at little risk—even if you replied to the email. (This could put you on an “email again” list, though.) Skip any “click here to unsubscribe” links, which could take you to a malicious website or give criminals the chance to hack your device, says Kathy Stokes, the AARP's director of fraud protection programs. Label the email “spam” or “junk,” and it should be moved out of your inbox. Then block the sender.

If you did click on a link or an attachment, close the email right

away, and label and block as described above. And if your click opened a website window, shut it promptly and delete the address from your browser history to make sure you don't accidentally open it again. Promptly trash any attachment you downloaded and disconnect from WiFi or turn off your phone, tablet, or computer for a minute; this may interrupt any malware that's downloading. To make sure, run a security program (see “7 Smart Security Steps,” on page 29) or have a tech pro check your device. What if you entered personal details, such as your credit card log-in? See “The New Text Scams” (relevant steps start on page 27).

**IF YOU GOT SCAMMED** Follow the guidance in “The New Text Scams.” And if your email was hacked, ask your email provider what steps you need to take next. For instance, if you can't regain control of your account, you might need to open a new one.



## Facebook Frauds

**SCAM ARTISTS ARE** loading up Facebook, Instagram, and other social media platforms with cons: In 2022, social media was the starting point for 11 percent of reported fraud where a contact method was specified. The median loss per incident was \$528.

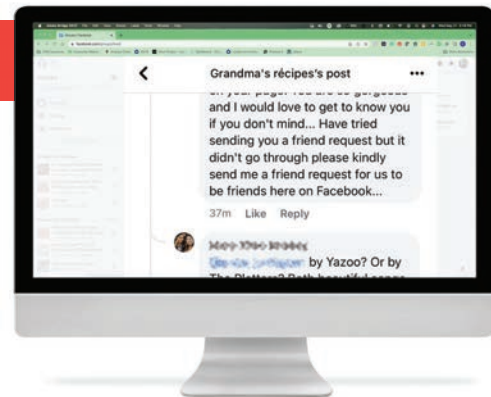
Just a few examples of what you may see in your social media feeds: Ads touting incredible bargains on all kinds of products, offers of low-interest loans and amazing cryptocurrency investing opportunities, friend requests from strangers who think you sound interesting or, curiously, from people you're already friends with.

Some are surely scams. Send off

your payment for those interesting products, for instance, and you may get nothing, or just an item of little value—like a sticker instead of the 50-piece tool set you ordered, Stokes says.

**SPOTTING A SOCIAL MEDIA SCAM** If you receive an odd message from a friend or relative, they were likely hacked, says Velasquez at the Identity Theft Resource Center. Don't respond. Contact them off the platform to see if a scammer was reaching out in their name.

That stranger who wants to get to know you on social media? They may be after money and not friendship. It's wise to ignore anyone



**Be Wary of Strangers Who Want to Be Friends**  
An unknown person who asks to friend you on social media might not be who they say they are. It's best to ignore them, experts say.

you don't know, no matter how many common connections you have, Stokes says. (And keep in mind that



## WATCH OUT FOR THIS ATM CARD SCAM

When using an ATM, you probably should shield your PIN to make sure no would-be thief sees it. But there's a newer ATM scam you might not yet be aware of: the "glue and tap." Here, according to news reports, a fraudster jams an ATM card slot reader so you can't insert your card. They then suggest that you bypass the slot and use the card's "tap" function instead. But unless you log out of the account after a tap transaction, which you might not realize is necessary, the scammer can access your account once you've walked away from the ATM.

If you encounter a jammed ATM terminal

and a stranger is on hand offering advice, find another location with a functional machine. You may want to do the same if someone is just loitering near an ATM you want to use, especially if they try to strike up a conversation. "I wouldn't want to interact with any stranger hanging out while I conduct a financial transaction," says the AARP's Kathy Stokes.

And if you lost money through an ATM scam, call the police and file a report as soon as possible. Also, immediately contact the bank to request a refund. If you report the crime within two days, you should be protected under the Electronic Fund Transfer Act.

any information you share on social media—from your answers on those ever-present quizzes to pictures from a recent vacation to a health diagnosis—can be used by scammers to buddy up to you and gain your trust.)

Also, any loan or investing opportunity that sounds too good to be true probably is—especially cryptocurrency investment offers. From January 2021 through March 2022, almost \$4 out of every \$10 reported lost to a fraud originating on social media was in crypto, far more than any other payment method, according to the FTC.

For shopping, you may get some insight by checking for negative comments below a product post, seeing what the Better Business Bureau ([bbb.org/](https://www.bbb.org/) search) has to say, and searching online for the business's name and the word

"scam" or "fraud." Your safest move might be going directly to a familiar brand's website and buying there, Iscil says. While certain ads in your feed may be legitimate, it can be tough to tell. For instance, Facebook's blue check mark indicates that the seller's identity has been verified. But scammers can duplicate such visuals, as well as logos.

**IF YOU RESPONDED** Merely messaging with another account won't put you at risk, but stop if you have an uneasy feeling, then block the sender and report the incident to the platform's help center. If you revealed personal details (account numbers and/or passwords, for instance), or clicked on a link or downloaded an attachment, follow the related advice starting on page 27 of "The New Text Scams."

**IF YOU GOT SCAMMED** Follow the advice in "The New Text Scams" to secure your accounts and request charge-backs and refunds. For instance, if you used a credit card to pay for an item that never arrived, contact your card issuer. If you lost money investing in cryptocurrency, your odds of recouping it are low, experts say. But it's still smart to report it, as outlined in "The New Text Scams." And if you lost access to a social media account because of a scam, get in touch with the platform's fraud department. Go to the platform's website to find the contact info. If you have to open a new account, alert friends not to communicate with the old account, to reduce their likelihood of being scammed, too.

# THE BEST (and Worst)

We tasted seven supermarket pies to find the ones with the crispiest crust,



▶ 365 by Whole Foods Market Thin Crust Pizza, Four Cheese

▶ Red Baron Classic Crust Four Cheese Pizza

▶ Newman's Own Thin & Crispy Crust Margherita Pizza

▶ Amy's Cheese Pizza

# FROZEN PIZZAS

the most flavorful sauce, and the perfect amount of rich, delicious cheese.



▶ DiGiorno Four Cheese Rising Crust Pizza ▶ Screamin' Sicilian Bessie's Revenge Cheese Pizza

▶ Trader Joe's Pizza Margherita

by TRISHA CALVO  
photographs by SARAH ANNE WARD

I was a very picky eater as a child. That may be why I didn't have my first slice of pizza until I was 14.

After that, though, there was no looking back. Whether it's New Haven coal-fired pizza or Chicago deep dish, I love it. Except for frozen pizza. I knew it was popular—the pizza freezer case in my local supermarket takes up nearly a full store aisle—but my suspicion was that the crust tasted like cardboard, the cheese was squeaky, and the sauce was bland or sour.

Then a friend with a discerning palate mentioned a frozen pie she and her family eat in regular rotation, and I read a 2022 survey by the market research firm Mintel that noted that two-thirds of supermarket pizza buyers said that the taste of frozen pies had improved in the previous few years.

Wondering if I could be wrong, I asked five pizza-loving CR colleagues to join me in a tasting of seven popular frozen pies. For simplicity's sake, we went with cheese-and-tomato and margherita varieties, which would let us easily focus on the three basic components that make up most pizzas: cheese, sauce, and crust.

After having frozen pizza for dinner for a week straight, I can confidently say I was wrong—mostly. None of the pies were as tasty as a good pizzeria version, but several were decent. Only one was bad.

## What Makes Pizza Taste Good?

Before we started our tasting, I spoke to Amy Keating, RD, who heads CR's food tasting and nutrition lab, to get her take on what makes for a great-tasting pizza. Here's what she told me.

■ **CRUST** A high-quality pizza should have a crust that is distinctly crispy on the edge and on the bottom, but not so crispy that the interior of the crust is dried out. When you bite into it, the crust should have some give and a bit of chewiness without being tough. In our review, Amy's Cheese Pizza had the best-tasting crust.

■ **CHEESE** Mozzarella is the classic pizza cheese, but others—such as Parmesan, Grana Padano, provolone, and even cheddar—are often used as well. So the flavor of the cheese can be mild and milky or rich and sharp, but it should have a distinct taste, not just supply saltiness, and there should be plenty of it on your slice. When you

bite into the pizza, the cheese should stretch but adhere to the crust, so you don't pull all the cheese off in a single bite. We considered how the amount of cheese on each pizza compared with others in our evaluation. Cheese lovers would probably be happy with Screamin' Sicilian Bessie's Revenge Cheese Pizza. The box promises ridiculous amounts of cheese, and the pizza does not disappoint.

■ **SAUCE** The best tomato sauces are neither too acidic nor too sweet, and you can really taste the tomato flavor, as well as herbs like oregano, basil, and in one we tasted, dill. A fresh tomato sauce will have a lighter taste than one that is reduced in cooking, which has a deeper, caramelized flavor. (Some frozen pizzas don't have tomato sauce at all—they may have pesto or creamy garlic sauce beneath the cheese, or no sauce at all. But we tasted only pizzas with tomato sauce.)

The sauce on Red Baron Classic Crust Four Cheese Pizza stood out. Our tasters said it wasn't too salty and had

a sweet tomato flavor with a peppery kick. "It gives the whole pizza a more well-rounded and interesting taste," one tester said. Red Baron also took best overall in our review because its flavors and textures blended together well, creating a complex savory flavor called umami—which is key to a delicious pizza. Often called the fifth taste, umami has been described as having a flavor that spreads across the whole tongue, as opposed to bitter, sweet, salty, or sour, which may be perceived only on parts of the tongue.

That flavor comes from amino acids in proteins, namely glutamate. Glutamate is a flavor booster, and cheese and tomatoes naturally contain a lot of it.

The browning of the cheese and crust that occurs when you cook a pizza also adds another flavor element. Under high heat, the crust and the toppings undergo a series of chemical reactions that create other flavor compounds and aromas. These factors don't always guarantee a perfect pizza, as our evaluation shows, but they help to explain why a good pizza can be irresistible.

## Nutrition Notes

In general, pizza is not considered a particularly healthy meal. "Most are made with a white flour crust low in fiber, and they're high in sodium," Keating says. Amy's Cheese Pizza, which has the best nutrition profile in our evaluation, still has 590 mg of sodium per serving—or a little more than a quarter of the maximum 2,300 mg you should have in a day. Trader Joe's Pizza Margherita had the most sodium, with 840 mg sodium per serving.

A serving, by the way, ranges from 1/6 to 1/3 of the pie for those we reviewed. So these will feed two adults, (maybe three for the larger ones, such as DiGiorno Four Cheese Rising Crust Pizza). And the smaller pies, such

as 365 by Whole Foods Market Four Cheese Thin Crust Pizza, might satisfy only one very hungry adult. Assume you'll eat at least half the pizza, which can add up to a lot of calories and sodium in one meal. For example, half of a Red Baron Four Cheese Pizza has 760 calories and 1,440 mg of sodium.

Another option is to make a quarter

or third of the pizza more satisfying by topping it with vegetables, like peppers, mushrooms, or onions. To make sure the veggies are cooked when the pizza is done, sauté them first.

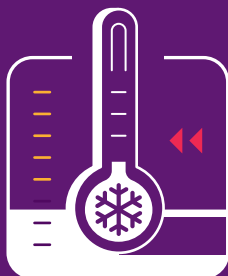
Or turn it into a salad pizza by piling some raw arugula and fresh tomatoes, lightly dressed in olive oil and lemon juice or balsamic vinegar, on the pizza

after you've cooked it. If you prefer your pizza plain, you can get the same benefit by serving a big salad or a plate of roasted vegetables on the side.



Trisha Calvo  
Deputy Editor, Health & Food

## How to Heat Your Pizza Like a Pro



### STEP 1

#### Preheat your oven.

Then let it sit at the recommended temperature for a few minutes before you put the pizza in.



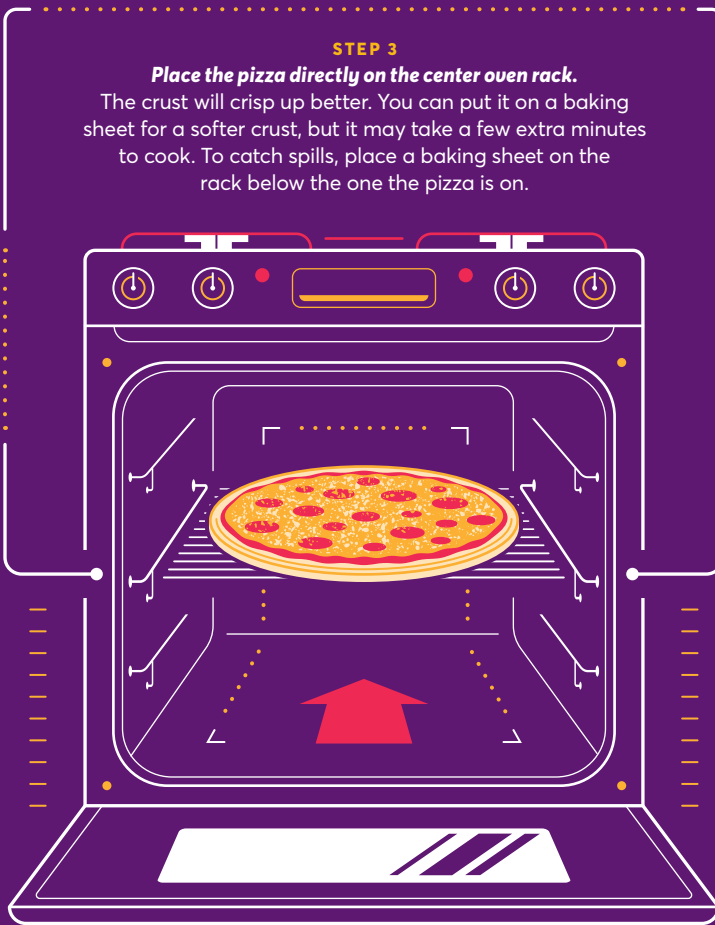
### STEP 2

Put the pizza into the oven without thawing. Cook time is based on it being frozen before heating it up.

### STEP 3

#### Place the pizza directly on the center oven rack.

The crust will crisp up better. You can put it on a baking sheet for a softer crust, but it may take a few extra minutes to cook. To catch spills, place a baking sheet on the rack below the one the pizza is on.



### STEP 5

#### Got leftovers?

An air fryer does a good job of recrisping the crust. Place the pizza on the frying plate inside the air-fryer basket, and set the temperature to 360° F. Air-fry for 4 to 6 minutes, or until the cheese is bubbling. A toaster oven is also good for reheating pizza. Just don't microwave—you're likely to end up with a soggy crust.

### STEP 4

#### Wait a few minutes before cutting.

This will give the flavors a chance to meld and allow the ingredients to firm up a bit. Use a pizza cutter—not a knife—for best results.



## THE REVEAL

At least three CR staffers reviewed each pizza after heating up the pies in their home ovens according to package directions. Their evaluations focused on the taste and texture of each pizza.

### OUR FAVORITES

#### EDITOR'S CHOICE



#### Red Baron Classic Crust Four Cheese Pizza

Red Baron is a crowd-pleaser, with a perfect balance of flavors and textures. You get the distinct taste of crust, sauce, and cheese in each bite. This isn't a thin-crust pizza, but the crust is still crispy. The pizza is topped with an ample amount of a mozzarella, cheddar, provolone, and Parmesan blend, which gave it a lot of flavor. The sauce tasted like it came from sweet, ripe tomatoes and had a peppery kick, which lends the pizza a more vibrant taste.

SERVING SIZE: ¼ pizza  
 CALORIES: 380 SATURATED FAT: 9 g  
 CARBS: 40 g FIBER: 2 g  
 PROTEIN: 16 g SODIUM: 720 mg

#### BEST-TASTING CRUST



#### Amy's Cheese Pizza

The crust on Amy's Cheese Pizza was more substantial than a typical thin-crust pizza, but it was not overly bready. The crust browned nicely and was crispy on the outside and tender on the inside. Our tasters were divided on the sauce and the cheese. One said there was a nice amount of both and reported that the sauce was simple and well-seasoned. Another thought that the cheese was plentiful but that the sauce was too skimpy and bland.

SERVING SIZE: ⅓ pizza  
 CALORIES: 290 SATURATED FAT: 5 g  
 CARBS: 33 g FIBER: 2 g  
 PROTEIN: 12 g SODIUM: 590 mg

#### FOR THE CHEESE LOVER



#### Screamin' Sicilian Bessie's Revenge Cheese Pizza

The crust of this Sicilian-style pie is thick, and it boasts the right amount of saltiness. The fresh, shredded mozzarella is milky and stretchy. It also has cheddar, Parmesan, and Romano, and the sharp flavors of the latter two hit you in a big way. The sauce has robust tomato and garlic flavors, although one taster wanted even more garlic. Two tasters thought it had a nice balance of sauce and cheese, but one said, "There isn't enough sauce, so some bites taste more like cheesy breadsticks."

SERVING SIZE: ¼ pizza  
 CALORIES: 360 SATURATED FAT: 10 g  
 CARBS: 31 g FIBER: 2 g  
 PROTEIN: 17 g SODIUM: 720 mg

PHOTOS, TOP ROW: CONSUMER REPORTS. BOTTOM LEFT, FOOD STYLING: MAGGIE RUGGIERO



## Are Veggie Crusts Better for You?

You can now find frozen pizzas with crusts made from cauliflower, broccoli, sweet potatoes, spinach, and chickpeas. You'd think a veggie crust would be a better choice than one using a refined white flour crust, so we looked at the

nutrition information and ingredients in five popular brands to compare their nutritional chops. We found that in most cases, there's little nutritional advantage to buying a veggie crust.

Although these crusts do have vegetables, it's not clear



## BEST THIN CRUST



### Trader Joe's Pizza Margherita

The box doesn't say this is a thin-crust pizza, but it is. The outside is crisp, and the inside is slightly soft. Several testers thought the amount of tomato sauce was too skimpy. Still, it has the rich, deep flavor of a sauce that has been simmering for hours. It's nicely spiced but contains dill, which you might not expect to find in pizza sauce. Mild, milky mozzarella is the primary cheese. It also has Grana Padano, though larger amounts would have added welcome sharpness. On the downside, this pie tastes a bit too salty.

SERVING SIZE: 1/3 pizza  
CALORIES: 320 SATURATED FAT: 7 g  
CARBS: 40 g FIBER: 3 g  
PROTEIN: 15 g SODIUM: 840 mg

## OTHERS WE TRIED

### CHEESY IN THE EXTREME



### 365 by Whole Foods Market Thin Crust Pizza, Four Cheese

The crust of this pie is quite thin, but it's not particularly crispy. Some testers wished it were thicker. Still, the flavorful cheese and the sauce, lightly spiced with basil and oregano, made up for the not-so-perfect crust. The four cheeses—mozzarella, fontina, provolone, and Parmesan—make for the best-tasting cheese topping of all the pizzas we evaluated. But there was so much of it and it was spread so far to the edges of the pie that for two testers, the cheese dripped off the sides of the pizza onto the oven half-way through the cooking time.

SERVING SIZE: 1/3 pizza  
CALORIES: 310 SATURATED FAT: 8 g  
CARBS: 29 g FIBER: 2 g  
PROTEIN: 14 g SODIUM: 690 mg

### A LITTLE BLAND



### Newman's Own Thin & Crispy Crust Margherita Pizza

Crispy at the edges, with a nice texture, the crust could have been more flavorful. The plentiful, evenly distributed uncooked tomatoes that top this pie gave it a fresher taste than others, but some testers found the tomatoes to be bland. The sauce was nicely tangy, and the Italian herbs gave this pie a little kick of spicy heat. The cheese has a pleasant consistency, and it browns well on the edges but stays milky and stretchy in the center.

SERVING SIZE: 1/3 pizza  
CALORIES: 320 SATURATED FAT: 7 g  
CARBS: 33 g FIBER: 1 g  
PROTEIN: 15 g SODIUM: 710 mg

## SKIP IT

### SOGGY CRUST



### DiGiorno Four Cheese Rising Crust Pizza

The crust does indeed rise as promised. But it's an overly doughy pie, with a white bread texture that goes gummy in your mouth. Some tasters wished the pizza had less sauce, which they felt made the crust soggy in places and overwhelmed the flavor of the cheese. It also has 3 grams (nearly a teaspoon) of added sugars per serving, the most of any of the pizzas we reviewed. Most of the pizzas had 1 gram or less of added sugars.

SERVING SIZE: 1/6 pizza  
CALORIES: 300 SATURATED FAT: 5 g  
CARBS: 37 g FIBER: 1 mg  
PROTEIN: 16 g SODIUM: 700 mg

how much because they also contain brown or white rice flours and corn, tapioca, or potato starch, which help hold the crust together.

Just like in regular pizzas, the nutrient counts in the veggie pizzas we evaluated vary. The amounts of calories,


saturated fat, carbs, and fiber are pretty similar to pizzas with white flour crusts. While some veggie pies have less sodium, the numbers are not low. For example, Newman's Own Cauliflower Crust Cheese Pizza has 200 mg less sodium per serving than its Thin &

Crispy Crust Margherita Pizza. Some also have less protein than regular pizzas. One exception is Banza The Pizza Made From Chickpeas Four Cheese. The crust is made from chickpea flour, and is richer in fiber than other regular or veggie crust

pizzas. A serving has 7 grams of fiber, and it has 16 grams of protein. But a serving still has 690 mg sodium. "If you want more veggies, you're better off topping your pie with them than getting them from your crust," says CR nutritionist Amy Keating.

# HOW TO BEAT THE RISING COST OF Rx DRUGS

BY LISA L. GILL



Are you paying more for prescriptions than you used to?

Are you being asked to meet a separate deductible for drugs?



Is your insurer refusing to cover the drug your doctor prescribed?

Did that coupon you were using stop working?

## When it comes to the cost of drugs today, there's good news and bad news.

Thanks to the Inflation Reduction Act signed into law by President Biden in 2022, vaccinations, including the shingles vaccine, are now free for people on Medicare, and most insulin costs just \$35 or less a month for people on Medicare Part D. Beginning Jan. 1, 2025, another huge benefit kicks in—seniors on Medicare Part D won't pay more than \$2,000 annually out-of-pocket for medications.

These changes will help many people because even though most Americans have health insurance, high drug costs remain a big problem: Three in 10 adults reported not taking medicine as prescribed at some point in the past year because of the cost, according to a Kaiser Family Foundation March 2022 survey. This includes about 1 in 5 who said they have not filled a prescription due to the price.

But high drug costs are just part of the unaffordability problem. People may also have to reach further into their wallets because of changes to their insurance plan. For example, a drug might no longer be covered, or might be covered less well, says Stacie Dusetzina, a professor of health policy at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine in Nashville, Tenn., and an expert in health costs. When either happens, "you'll be stuck with a higher bill," she says.

Other causes of drug price sticker shock: high deductibles that have to be met, discount coupons that have expired, and more.

## When you first see a price jump

If a drug you take suddenly becomes more expensive, make sure the new price is, in fact, accurate. For example, if you've changed jobs, make sure the pharmacy has the right insurer information. Or it's possible your pharmacy may have lost your details, says Brandy Letson, PharmD, co-owner of Cashiers Valley Pharmacy, in Cashiers, N.C. In either event, the pharmacy "won't locate your insurance coverage properly and you'll get charged the full price," she says. After checking that, confirm that the pharmacy has the right info about your drug, Letson says. "Sometimes doctors send prescriptions for a larger quantity of drug than you want, or at a higher dosage, which could raise the cost." Price still high? The cause may be one of the scenarios detailed below. Check out our solutions for each.

### PROBLEM

## Your insurer no longer covers your drug

Maybe you've changed jobs and the insurer doesn't cover your drug. Or your insurer changed its formulary—the list of drugs it covers. This can happen at the start of each plan year, usually January for Medicare Part D, but it could happen any month with other plans.

While the insurer must notify you of formulary changes, the alert can be easy to miss or hard to understand, says Stephen W. Schondelmeyer, PhD, professor at the University of Minnesota and director of the PRIME Institute, which researches economic and policy issues around pharmaceuticals. Formulary changes often involve price increases, or

# 600

The approximate number of drugs dropped by each of the three largest companies that oversee drug coverage in 2023—a record.\*

the drug being dropped altogether.

In fact, in the last 10 years the number of drugs dropped from coverage has grown "dramatically," says Adam Fein, PhD, an expert in drug pricing and founder of the Drug Channels Institute, an industry research firm. His analysis shows that so far for 2023, the three big pharmacy benefits companies (which manage drug coverage for insurance companies) dropped a record number of medications—around 600 or more each—off of their formularies.

### SOLUTION

**File an appeal.** If you have employer-provided or private insurance and you take a drug that works well, and changing to another poses a hazard to your health, ask your doctor and pharmacist to appeal for an exception with your insurer.

This is one important benefit of having a long relationship with a pharmacist, Letson says. "If you tried a substitute drug unsuccessfully, we

can provide records of that to the insurance company."

To file an appeal, you may need these records as part of the package you submit. The Patient Advocate Foundation can help if you have a serious condition, such as cancer or rheumatoid arthritis. Call 800-532-5274 or go to [patientadvocate.org](http://patientadvocate.org).

If you have Medicare Part D and the denied drug isn't in a speciality tier, you can apply for an exception by calling your plan. If approved, the exception normally runs out at the end of the calendar year. You can ask for longer or apply again. If that's denied, you can file for a "redetermination." Your plan should explain how to do this. A standard redetermination takes up to a week; an expedited one, 72 hours.

### PROBLEM

## Your one-time 'courtesy' Rx ran out

Say you get a new prescription and when you go to the pharmacy to fill it you have to cover only a low-cost copay. Understandably, you assume your insurer fully covers the drug. But when you attempt to refill the prescription a month later, you're charged full price. Why? "Often, insurers provide a 30-day courtesy fill even if they don't cover the drug," Letson says. "Then, in the second month, the courtesy is over."

### SOLUTION

**Ask your insurer about similar drugs.** If your insurer agrees to fill a prescription only once, it's probably because there is an alternative that works as well, is safe, and is less expensive, Schondelmeyer says. So ask whether a less expensive generic or alternative can be prescribed instead. Pro tip: Nip the problem in the

bud—when your provider first writes a prescription—by asking whether your insurer will cover it.

**PROBLEM**

## Instead of a cheap copay, you now pay a percentage of the full cost

A formulary change can mean a drug that used to cost a fixed \$10 or \$15 copay now costs 20 percent, 30 percent, or more of its full cost. This is called coinsurance, and you may be asked to pay it for more expensive brand-name meds or high-cost generics, Schondelmeyer says. And because coinsurance is based on a drug’s full cost, if that increases, your out-of-pocket share will go up too.

**SOLUTION**

**If you have employer insurance and take a branded medication for which you pay coinsurance, consider applying for a manufacturer copay coupon, which covers copays as well as coinsurance.**

Manufacturers offer these because they want you to use their medication. The coupon will cover all or most of your costs, usually for about a year or a set number of prescriptions. To find a copay program, ask your pharmacist, go to the drug manufacturer’s website, or go to [needymeds.org](http://needymeds.org), a nonprofit that tracks drug discount programs.

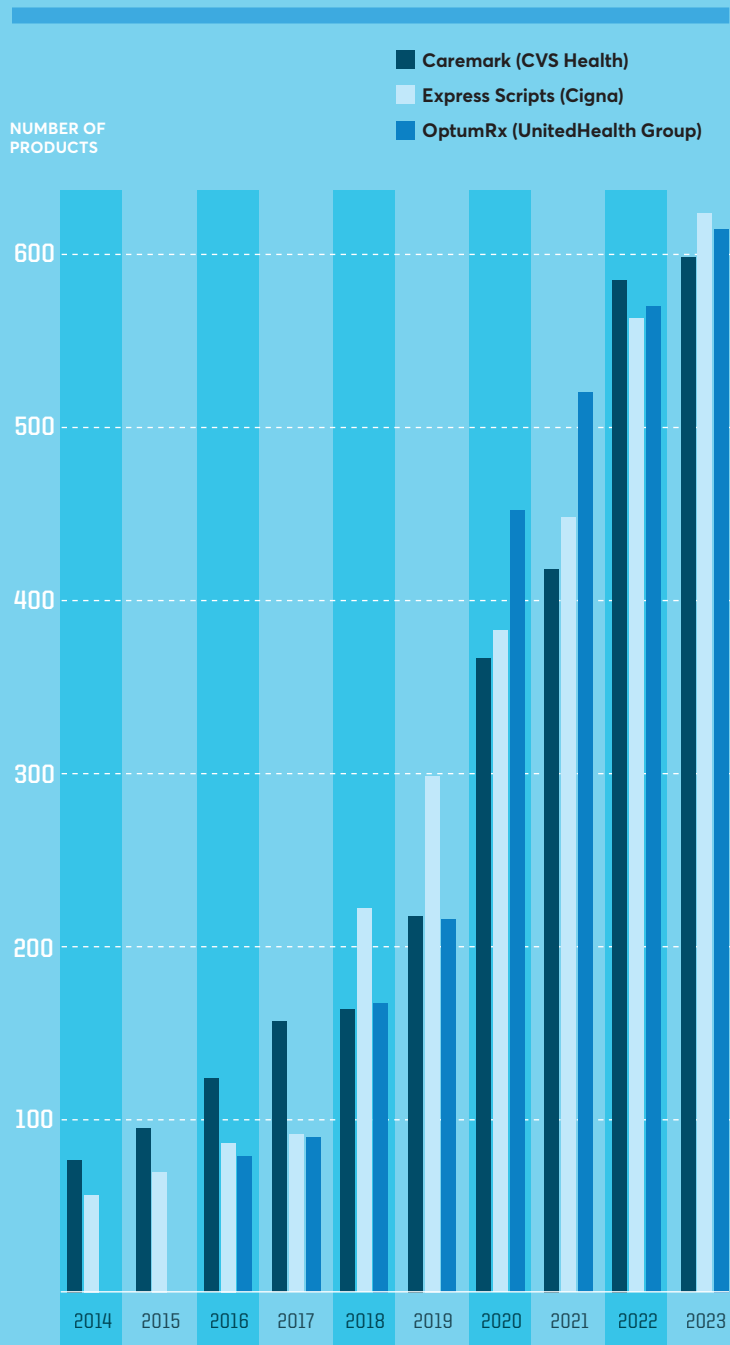
**PROBLEM**

## Your drug company coupon no longer saves you much

Copay cards and other discount programs offered by branded drug

# INSURERS ARE DROPPING MORE DRUGS THAN EVER

**ONE BIG REASON** many Americans have to spend more on drugs is that the number of medications insurers exclude from coverage is exploding. This chart shows how many drugs the three largest companies that administer pharmacy benefits for insurers have dropped from coverage over the last 10 years.



Source: Drug Channels Institute analysis of company reports, published Jan. 10, 2023.

makers can be major cost-savers, but they're not a forever fix, says Vanderbilt's Dusetzina. They may limit how many prescriptions you can fill in a year. Once you reach that, you're back on the hook for the amount the insurer charges you. Or there may also be a dollar limit to how much the manufacturer will cover, Dusetzina says. Either way, you could be stuck facing a rather big bill.

#### SOLUTION

**Contact the manufacturer.** Assuming there is no other less expensive and better-covered drug that works as well to treat your condition, call the drug company's copay program to see whether there are other payment options or whether an exception can be made. Often they have some leeway to cover your costs in the short term or until a new plan year begins, says Rich Sagall, MD, president of NeedyMeds.

If that's a no-go and your insurance plan is through an employer that operates its own plan (that is, is self-insured), contact your HR department and appeal for a higher rate of reimbursement. If that doesn't work, consider applying for a Patient Assistance Program from the drug manufacturer by going to [needymeds.org](http://needymeds.org) and looking up your drug's discount and assistance programs.

#### PROBLEM

### You must first meet a deductible

You're probably familiar with paying deductibles for doctor visits. But you may have a separate deductible for prescription drugs, Dusetzina says. Or you may have to meet your plan's full deductible before your plan's drug coverage kicks in. In either case, the average deductible for an individual

# \$1,763

The average deductible for an individual on an employer-provided insurance plan.\*

on an employer plan (including for drugs) last year hovered around \$1,763, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, a nonprofit health research and policy group. For Medicare Part D plans, the maximum deductible in 2023 is \$505.

#### SOLUTION

**Consider paying cash.** Counter-intuitively, some drugs can be more expensive when you use insurance to pay for them, Dusetzina says. And some, including hundreds of low-cost generics, can be purchased inexpensively if you pay for them with cash.

For example, Walmart's discount program offers a month's supply of generic drugs for \$4, or \$10 for a 90-day supply. You can also find online discounts at [healthwarehouse.com](http://healthwarehouse.com), [costco.com](http://costco.com), or [costplusdrugs.com](http://costplusdrugs.com). Your local independent pharmacy could also meet or beat a price you find online or at a big chain store. To find out, ask your

pharmacist for the lowest possible price it can offer, Letson says.

You could also try to turn in your receipt for prescription purchases to your insurer as an out-of-network cost so that it counts toward your drug or combined medical and drug deductible. In California, for example, plans may accept a receipt for medication and count it toward your deductible.

#### PROBLEM

### You must try—and fail—on other drugs before the insurer will cover your med

Called step-therapy, your insurer may ask you to try a lower-cost alternative medication before it covers a pricey, brand-name drug. It can be problematic if the request happens midway during your coverage year, and you already know that other drugs don't work as well for you. "Your new employer's insurance won't have your previous medical records that show you've been more successful on the med they don't want to cover," Letson says.

#### SOLUTION

**Ask your doctor to apply for a prior authorization.** Your doctor will ask the insurer to reconsider the decision, and if they do, you'll be charged a copay or coinsurance. If not approved, you'll be on the hook for the full amount.

In that case, ask your pharmacist to look for coupons or apply for a manufacturer Patient Assistance Program. Once reserved for low-income people, many manufacturers have loosened their eligibility requirements and some have set income caps over \$100,000.



# MORE WAYS TO SAVE ON YOUR MEDS

You can protect yourself from drug price increases. Here are ways you can save big bucks.

## Buy in bulk.

If you're positive you'll be taking the same drug at the same dose for a while, you can realize some eye-popping savings by filling prescriptions for several months at a time. At Amazon Pharmacy, we found a six-month prescription of 20-mg generic Lipitor (atorvastatin) for \$32.90, compared with \$9.50 for a single month's supply—a \$24 savings. Get a year's worth at an H-E-B grocery store in Texas for \$23 using a GoodRx coupon.

## Consider an online pharmacy subscription service if you take several generics.

Two options: ScriptCo and GoodRx. At both, you pay an

annual fee and get free or low-cost common generic meds—sometimes just pennies per pill. This could be an option if you take multiple generic drugs. For that same generic Lipitor, after paying a \$140 annual membership fee at ScriptCo, you'd be charged \$6.57 for a year's worth. For \$10 a month Gold membership at GoodRx, a year's worth of the same drug would cost \$22.43 at RiteAid. You'll also have access to telehealth visits (\$19 each) for prescription renewals.

## On Medicare Part D? See whether you qualify for Extra Help in 2024.

A third of all enrollees in Medicare Part D get some

sort of assistance, according to figures from the Kaiser Family Foundation, and with the Inflation Reduction Act, up to 300,000 additional people will be eligible for the assistance. To qualify for the program, called "Extra Help," your annual income can't exceed \$21,870 for an individual or \$29,580 for a married couple. (Even if your annual income is higher, you may still be able to get some help.) Also, the value of your savings, investments, and real estate (other than your home) can't exceed \$16,660 for an individual or \$33,240 for a married couple living together. If you fit the bill, you could get Medicare Part D for

free or at a reduced cost. Find out whether you qualify by going to [ssa.gov/extrahelp](https://ssa.gov/extrahelp) or calling 800-772-1213.

## Ask for a rebate with the drug company.

In addition to traditional drug copay coupons and patient assistance programs, consider calling the drug manufacturer to see whether it is willing to offer you a rebate. Some manufacturers may do this if you ask, says Rich Sagall, MD, president of NeedyMeds, a nonprofit that tracks all U.S. discount drug programs and helps patients find and fill out any needed applications for assistance, free of charge.



# Easy Ideas for a Better (and Safer) Bathroom

Tubs with relaxing jets. Showers with massaging handheld sprayers. Heated toilet seats. The newest bath innovations create spalike sanctuaries, but for many of us, this room is still filled with safety hazards, including hard surfaces and slippery floors. The Consumer Product Safety Commission reports that between 2016 and 2020, older adults sustained more than 97,000 injuries every year from falls around the bathtub alone. Fortunately, there are ways to make your bathroom safer and more comfortable—with no renovation required.

by  
**MOLLY GUINN  
BRADLEY**

illustrations by  
**VA ARTS**

## **Slip-Proof Surfaces**

Improving the traction of tubs, showers, and floors is a quick DIY job.

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**Consider  
Toilet Height**

The best in our tests have higher seats, which make it easier to sit and stand.

PAGE 52

**Swap Out Your  
Showerhead**

CR's top-rated models have easy-to-use controls and a choice of spray settings.

PAGE 49

**Add Strong  
Supports**

Well-placed grab bars can help prevent a fall (and they look a lot better than they used to).

PAGE 51

# Spruce Up the Tub & Shower

Your bathroom should provide a sense of well-being, says Deborah Rozell, president of Innovative Inclusive Design and a certified aging-in-place specialist (CAPS)—but it can't do that if you don't feel secure navigating it. And although it's tempting to let aesthetics take the lead when it comes to your shower and tub, water and tile can be a slippery combination. Making a few adjustments in and around bathing areas can help you enjoy your shower time with less worry.

## GET GOOD TRACTION

Falls are a huge concern in a bathroom, but there's a lot you can do to mitigate that risk. If your shower or tub floor is slippery, you can use products that apply traction to tiles, says Russell Kendzior, president of the National Floor Safety Institute (NFSI). Made with a mild acid, these solutions aren't a coating but a scrub that you use on the surface to break down the buildup of soil and soap and micro-etch it, improving slip resistance. Try the **SlipDoctors Stone Grip Anti-Slip Floor Treatment** (Amazon, \$65), which works on porcelain and ceramic as well as stone.

Outside the shower or tub, choose a bath mat with a non-skid bottom. Mats with a thick

pile made from long-staple cotton yarns are particularly soft and absorbent, like **Frontgate's Resort Collection Skid-Resistant Bath Rug** (Frontgate, from \$59).

When you clean the floor, use products that don't leave a slippery residue. The NFSI tested 17 common ones and found that a surprising 12 of them left residue on the floor that reduced traction. So look for residue-free products (labeled as such on the packaging) like **Bona's Hard-Surface Floor Cleaner** (Home Depot, \$20 for 128 ounces).

If your floor tile is slippery, you can use the same traction product you use for the shower.

## SEAT YOURSELF

A stylish shower bench can provide support while

you bathe or just serve as a place to rest and relax. Vince Butler, a CAPS builder who serves on the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) Remodelers Council, recommends the Invisia line from HealthCraft Products for attractive bench options. They're not inexpensive, he says, but they're exceptionally well built and come in a range of styles. **Invisia's SerenaSeat** (HealthCraft Products, \$450) affixes to a wall and folds up, which saves valuable shower space when it's not in use, but it does require some drilling. There are also plenty of freestanding shower benches in different sizes and styles, though many aren't compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Butler doesn't recommend those for people with mobility issues. But a bench like the **Genuine Teak Spa or Shower Seat** (Home Depot, \$100) makes a good surface for bath accessories.

## SIMPLIFY YOUR FAUCET

Consider replacing your tub and shower fixtures with single-lever controls like **Glacier Bay's Dorind Single-Handle 1-Spray Tub and Shower Faucet** (Home Depot, \$199). A lever is easier to grasp than a knob, Rozell says, and having just one handle for temperature control allows for finer adjustments than separate ones for hot and cold.



### Make It Easy to Enjoy

A few simple choices—easy-to-grasp cabinet pulls, lever handles on faucets, an adjustable handheld shower—can add peace of mind in the bathroom.

## RETHINK YOUR SHOWERHEAD

If you've always had a fixed showerhead, you might appreciate the flexibility of a handheld style, which has a long hose (look for one that's 59 inches long) and a sprayer head. You can use it

## THE BEST TOWELS

"Good-quality towels are made of 100 percent cotton," says Preeti Arya, PhD, an assistant professor of textile science and marketing at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City. The high percentage of cellulose in cotton makes it super-absorbent. Egyptian, Pima, and Turkish cottons feel soft, but Egyptian and Pima have longer fibers that make them extra plush. How they're woven affects the texture, too.



## Terry

These cozy towels have loops in the weave that increase absorbency. But they get heavy when wet and can take longer to dry. CR likes the **Frontgate Resort Collection Bath Towel** (Frontgate, \$44), left, and the **Hydrocotton Quick-Dry Organic Towel** (Pottery Barn, \$35).



## WHAT'S YOUR SHOWER STYLE?

CHANGING A SHOWERHEAD IS EASY: Just unscrew the one you have and replace it (the connections are standard). Choose a model with the effects you want, from simple all-over coverage to options for a more focused or intense stream.



### Quick Changes

Just tap its surface (or use a wall-mounted remote) to switch among four spray patterns.

✓ **American Standard Spectra+ eTouch** \$132

**82** OVERALL SCORE



### A Steady Spray

This single-setting model that our panelists found refreshing has a wireless Bluetooth speaker, too.

✓ **Kohler Moxie BT** \$99

**77** OVERALL SCORE



### Adaptable Choice

This model detaches for use as a handheld, great for cleaning yourself and your shower.

✓ **Moen Engage Magnetix** \$73

**81** OVERALL SCORE



### Power Shower

Love an intense stream? That's one of the five spray options this showerhead supplies.

✓ **HOPOPRO High Pressure Fixed** \$18

**85** OVERALL SCORE

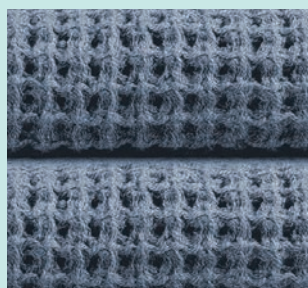
hands-free when the sprayer head is resting in a holder at typical showerhead height, or as a hand shower whether you're standing or seated in the shower or tub. (Bonus: It's great for rinsing off the walls or shower door when you're cleaning). For even more

versatility, choose a style that slides up and down on a vertical side bar, so that you can raise or lower it to your desired height without having to hold it as you bathe. **Kohler's Awaken 27.25" Shower Slide Bar** (*Home Depot*, \$51) comes in a few different finishes.



### Flat Weave

Flat-woven towels like **West Elm's Turkish Tassel Organic Towel** (*West Elm*, \$30), left, are thinner and lighter but still absorbent (though not as much as terry). They'll dry more quickly than heavier towels and take up less space.



### Waffle

These crisp towels, like the **Onsen Bath Towel** (*Huckberry*, \$100 for a set of 2), left, aren't as plush as terry but they trap moisture well. The texture provides good airflow, so the fabric dries quickly. Arya points out that this type of towel also has a gentle exfoliating effect.



**Layer the Lighting**

A combination of targeted task lighting in slippery areas, dimmable overall illumination, and night lights will make the bath safe, functional, and beautiful.

**Be Strategic About Safety**

A sturdy grab bar that does double duty as a toilet paper holder won't detract from the style of your bathroom.

**Store More**

Use interior organizers to maximize cabinet space, so you can keep surfaces neat and tidy. Bins and baskets are great for corralling clutter on shelves.

# Give the Toilet Some Attention

If yours predates the mid-1990s, when water conservation regulations for household toilets changed, it might be time to replace it. You'll see savings in your water bill, and you can choose one with a size and shape that best fit your bathroom and your personal preferences. While you're at it, consider installing a grab bar nearby (and in the shower, too).

**CHOOSE THE RIGHT TOILET**

Many of CR's highest-rated models cost between \$200 and \$400, and some are priced even lower. They come in single- and dual-flush models (the latter let you choose between two flush rates, one lower for liquid waste and the other higher for solid waste). And they're pretty straightforward to replace, says Chris Regan, a senior test engineer at CR, especially for a plumber or handyperson.

It's a good idea to choose one that's easier to sit down on and stand up from. These

models, like the two top-rated styles shown above, are often described as "comfort height," and measure between 17 and 19 inches from floor to toilet seat. Elongated seats are typically more comfortable than round ones, though a round bowl takes up less space (helpful in a tight bathroom).

If you'd like to update your existing toilet, you can add height by replacing the seat with a taller one, like **Kohler's Hyten Elevated Quiet-Close Elongated Toilet Seat** (Wayfair, \$100). Or place a toilet riser—for example, the **Vive Toilet Seat**

## TOP PICKS

The best toilets and bidets from CR's evaluations can make your loo time more comfortable. For additional options, see our ratings on page 52.

**Glacier Bay N2420**  
(Home Depot) \$180

**77** OVERALL SCORE



**American Standard Esteem VorMax 717AA101S.020**  
(Lowe's) \$300

**76** OVERALL SCORE

**Brondell Swash 1000 Advanced Bidet Toilet Seat** \$600

**5/5** USABILITY



**Luxe Bidet Neo 120** \$40

**5/5** USABILITY

**Riser** (Amazon, \$65)—beneath the seat you have now. Just don't go too high: Your heels should touch the floor when you're seated, says Vince Butler, a home builder.

#### WEIGH THE BENEFITS OF A BIDET

During the pandemic's toilet-paper shortage, bidet seats and attachments went from a curiosity to a coveted convenience. The truth is, they aren't intended to replace toilet paper entirely. Still, a good bidet will help you use a lot less of it—a boon for your budget and the environment. As you shop, you'll see both seats and attachments that spray water to cleanse your backside:

**Bidet seats** replace your existing toilet seat, and they can be mechanical (relying on water pressure to send a stream of water upward) or mechanical and electric (using an electric pump to power the stream). Some even have a range of features, though not all of them are necessary. For instance, the **Brondell Swash 1000 Advanced Bidet Toilet Seat**, on the facing page, has a heated seat and a warm air dryer, and uses warm water.

**Bidet attachments** connect to your existing seat and they're mechanical, so you won't need to plug them in. Some come with water-pressure control and self-cleaning nozzles, like the **Luxe Bidet Neo 120**, also on the facing page.

#### INSTALL GRAB BARS

A grab bar positioned by the toilet can support you and provide a general sense of comfort and stability as you move around the room. "I call

them the seat belts of our bathroom," Butler says. They're also better than toilet support rails—frames that rest on the toilet or freestanding ones—because they're designed to support your full body weight, while most toilet frames aren't, according to Butler.

And good news: These safety aids don't have to be eyesores. "People may think, 'Ugh, my space is going to look like a hospital room'—and it doesn't have to," says Deborah Rozell, an aging-in-place specialist. Many options can match the style and finish of the rest of your bathroom hardware.

**Kohler's Grand Grab Bar** (Wayfair, \$108) comes in several finishes and three lengths, and you'll find plenty of other styles from other brands. **Moen's Home Care 8" x 1" Screw Grab Bar with Integrated Paper Holder** (Home Depot, \$47, on the facing page) functions as a toilet-paper holder, too.

As you shop, look for grab bars that are ADA compliant or compliant with accessibility standard A117.1. That will ensure they support 250 pounds of weight.

Install the bars horizontally 33 to 36 inches high beside the toilet and in the shower or tub—and any other place you might like some extra support. Both ends of the bar should be anchored into wall studs or solid framing, or with hollow-wall anchors. If you've never installed one, search the online directory of the National Association of Home Builders, at [uat.nahb.org](http://uat.nahb.org), to find a local certified expert to do the job. Tip: Don't place towel bars where you might be tempted to grab them; they aren't designed to support you.



#### Scan the QR code to see how we test toilets

In our labs, CR testers use polyethylene balls, sponges, and paint to simulate waste, flushing them through transparent piping to evaluate the performance of the models in our ratings. Watch a video of our engineers in action by scanning this code.

## KEEP IT BRIGHT AND CLUTTER-FREE



### Let There Be Lighting

**Ceiling fixtures provide overall illumination**, but don't forget to place task lighting in areas where better visibility could prevent accidents: by the sink, near the toilet, and above the tub or shower.

**Try dimmable or even multicolored bulbs**, says Paul Harris, PhD, a social psychologist at Rollins College in Winter Park, Fla. The **Philips Hue 100W A21 LED Smart Bulb** (Best Buy, \$65) lets you adjust the intensity and color of the light from bright white as you're getting ready in the morning to a warm glow when you wind down in the evening.

**Position night lights by the toilet and sink** to help you navigate in the dark. Choose ones that stay on rather than motion-sensor lights, so that you can see where you're going before you enter the bathroom.



### Make the Most of Storage Spaces

**Drawers and cabinets should be easy to reach and open.** Consider replacing knobs with lever or bar handles, and look for units with slide-out shelves. Organizers like the **Lynk Professional Undersink Cabinet Organizer** (Lowe's, \$59) can be screwed into your existing cabinets.

**Make essentials more accessible** by relocating items that don't need to be in the bathroom. For example, cleaning products and detergent take up a lot of room and you probably don't use them every day. Move them to a utility closet instead.

**If you're doing a bigger update** and have an electrician on the job, installing an outlet inside your vanity storage can help keep appliances like hair dryers neatly corralled and away from water.

**Storage areas are also great spots to add personal touches that won't get in the way.** Display a small plant on a shelf—a **ZZ plant** (The Sill, \$48) can tolerate minimal lighting—or stock a shower caddy with body scrubs or a gel like the **lavender-tonka Lush Sleepy** (Lush, \$25 for 8.4 fluid ounces) to fill the space with a fragrance you love.

**Ratings** > **Super Bowls** The best toilets in our tests offer effective, quieter flushing and come in a comfort-height design, with a seat that's an easy-to-manuever 17 to 19 inches from the floor.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results			Features				
			Solid-waste removal	Noise	Bowl cleaning	Type	Gallons per flush	Resists soil and odor	Resists drain-line clogs	Bowl shape

**COMFORT-HEIGHT SINGLE-FLUSH TOILETS**

🇺🇸 <b>American Standard</b> Champion 747BA107SC.020 (Home Depot)	77	\$250	👍	👍	👍	Gravity	1.28	●	●	Round
✓ <b>American Standard</b> Esteem VorMax 717AA101S.020 (Lowe's)	76	\$300	👍	👍	👍	Gravity	1.28	●	●	Elongated
✓ <b>St. Thomas by Icera</b> Richmond (6123.218, 6125.028)	75	\$405	👍	👍	👍	Gravity	1.28	●	●	Elongated
🇺🇸 <b>Zurn</b> Z5551-K	75	\$250	👍	👍	👍	Gravity	1.6	●	●	Elongated
✓ <b>American Standard</b> Optum VorMax 707AA.101.020	75	\$300	👍	👍	👍	Gravity	1.28	●	●	Elongated
✓ <b>Gerber</b> Avalanche Elite WS-20-828	73	\$425	👍	👍	👍	Gravity	1.28	●	●	Elongated
✓ <b>Kohler</b> Cimarron Rev 360 K-31668	72	\$270	👍	👍	⚠️	Gravity	1.28	●	●	Round
✓ <b>Gerber</b> Avalanche Elite WS-20-852	72	\$425	👍	👍	👍	Gravity	1.28	●	●	Round
🇺🇸 <b>Delta</b> Foundations C43913-WH	71	\$160	👍	👍	👍	Gravity	1.28	●	●	Elongated
✓ <b>Kohler</b> Highline Classic K-3493	71	\$430	👍	👎	👍	Pressure	1.6	●	●	Elongated
🇺🇸 <b>Glacier Bay</b> N2428RB/N2428T (Home Depot)	71	\$110	👍	👍	👍	Gravity	1.28	●	●	Round
✓ <b>Gerber</b> Ultra Flush UL-20-318	71	\$520	👍	👎	👍	Pressure	1.0	●	●	Elongated
✓ <b>American Standard</b> Acticlean 714AA151.020	71	\$400	👍	👍	👍	Gravity	1.28	●	●	Elongated
✓ <b>Toto</b> Entrada CST243EF#01	70	\$250	👍	👍	👍	Gravity	1.28	●	●	Round
🇺🇸 <b>Delta</b> Turner C43908-WH	70	\$200	👍	👍	👍	Gravity	1.28	●	●	Elongated
✓ <b>Delta</b> Turner C41908-WH	70	\$250	👍	👍	👍	Gravity	1.28	●	●	Round
✓ <b>Gerber</b> Avalanche WS-21-818	70	\$360	👍	👍	👍	Gravity	1.28	●	●	Elongated
✓ <b>Toto</b> Drake II CST453CEFG	69	\$485	👍	👍	👍	Gravity	1.28	●	●	Round
✓ <b>Kohler</b> Santa Rosa K-3810	69	\$350	👍	👍	👍	Gravity	1.28	●	●	Elongated
✓ <b>American Standard</b> Clean 2514101S.020 (Lowe's)	69	\$280	👍	👍	👍	Gravity	1.28	●	●	Elongated
✓ <b>Niagara Conservation</b> Stealth 77000WHA11/N7714 N7717 (Home Depot)	68	\$210	👍	👍	👍	Gravity	0.8	●	●	Elongated
✓ <b>Toto</b> Drake II CST454CEFG	68	\$420	👍	👍	👍	Gravity	1.28	●	●	Elongated
🇺🇸 <b>Glacier Bay</b> N2428E (Home Depot)	68	\$120	👍	👍	👍	Gravity	1.28	●	●	Elongated
✓ <b>Gerber</b> Avalanche 21-014	68	\$520	👍	👍	👍	Gravity	1.28	●	●	Elongated

**COMFORT-HEIGHT DUAL-FLUSH TOILETS**

✓ <b>American Standard</b> Edgemere 204BA200.020	77	\$270	👍	👍	👍	Gravity	1.6/1.1	●	●	Round
🇺🇸 <b>Glacier Bay</b> N2420 (Home Depot)	77	\$180	👍	👍	👍	Gravity	1.6/1.1	●	●	Elongated
✓ <b>American Standard</b> Edgemere 204AA200.020	76	\$220	👍	👍	👍	Gravity	1.6/1.1	●	●	Elongated
✓ <b>Toto</b> Drake Close Coupled MS746124CEMFG	74	\$470	👍	👍	👍	Gravity	1.28/0.8	●	●	Elongated
🇺🇸 <b>Glacier Bay</b> N2428R-DF (Home Depot)	73	\$110	👍	👍	👍	Gravity	1.28/1.1	●	●	Round

# ROAD REPORT



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



## FIRST DRIVE

### Subaru Crosstrek

Essentially a taller Impreza hatchback, the 2024 Crosstrek brings infotainment changes, mild exterior restyling, and an enhanced EyeSight driver assistance system that has AEB with pedestrian detection.

**CR'S TAKE:** The redesign brings subtle improvements, including a more comfortable ride, making the driving experience more pleasant. Top trims equipped with the 2.5-liter four-cylinder engine are peppier.

#### BASE PRICE RANGE

\$24,995-\$31,995

**DESTINATION CHARGE** \$1,295

**PRICE AS DRIVEN** \$29,685



## AHEAD OF THE CURVE

### An AI Assistant May Soon Be Your Co-Pilot and Tour Guide

Artificial intelligence is coming to your car's dashboard, where digital assistants promise to be **helpful road trip companions**. Some Ford models with Sync 3 or Sync 4 infotainment systems offer Mappo, an integrated app that uses **AI to share travel recommendations and suggested routes**. Mercedes-Benz offers a similar service in Germany that will expand to other markets. And GM is studying an AI-based assistant that might be able to walk owners through **tasks like changing a tire**.

## THE VITAL STATISTIC

# 350%

### Rate of Increase in Consumer Demand for Electric Vehicles\*

For now, supply isn't meeting shoppers' demand for EVs, and it might not catch up until 2030, according to a recent analysis by Consumer Reports. There are now approximately 45 ready buyers for every EV being manufactured.

## RECALL



### Ford & Lincoln

Ford Motor Company is recalling more than 1.2 million Ford Fusion and Lincoln MKZ sedans from the 2013 to 2018 model years because their front brake hoses could rupture and leak brake fluid, increasing the risk of a crash. If a leak occurs, a warning light may come on and the brake pedal may feel different from usual.

**WHAT TO DO:** Ford and Lincoln dealerships will replace the faulty brake hoses free of charge. For more information, contact Ford at 866-436-7332.



## ASK OUR EXPERTS

### Do new cars still need a break-in period?

Yes. Many automakers still advise that you take a few simple precautions early on to avoid stressing a gas-powered car's components. The guidelines for your car

can be found in the owner's manual. "Generally speaking, you want to limit vehicle speed, the rate of acceleration, and heavy braking for a set number of miles—often

in the 500 to 1,000 range," says Mike Crossen, a master technician and Consumer Reports staff mechanic. Even some EVs require a break-in period. With

the Ford F-150 Lightning, an electric version of the popular F-150 pickup truck, the owner's manual says to avoid highway speeds and towing for the first 1,000 miles.

ILLUSTRATION: KIERSTEN ESSENPREIS

\*Sources: Nationally representative CR surveys of 3,392 U.S. drivers in July and August 2020, and 8,027 U.S. adults in January and February 2022.

# Get the Most From Your Infotainment System

How to make your car's screens and buttons more user-friendly, and what to look for when buying new.

by Keith Barry



**YOU MIGHT LOVE** many things about your car—how comfortable it is, how it drives, that it's reliable. But all that love can

go right out the window if, like many Americans, you're frustrated with the car's infotainment system.

Virtually every new vehicle on sale today has a center control—or infotainment—screen for phone calls, navigation, music, and climate control. But in a 2022 survey of CR members, only about half of those who own cars from model year 2020 or newer said they were “very satisfied” with the infotainment systems in their vehicles. Common complaints include freezing screens, convoluted menus, and touch-sensitive controls that are harder to use while driving than physical buttons and knobs.

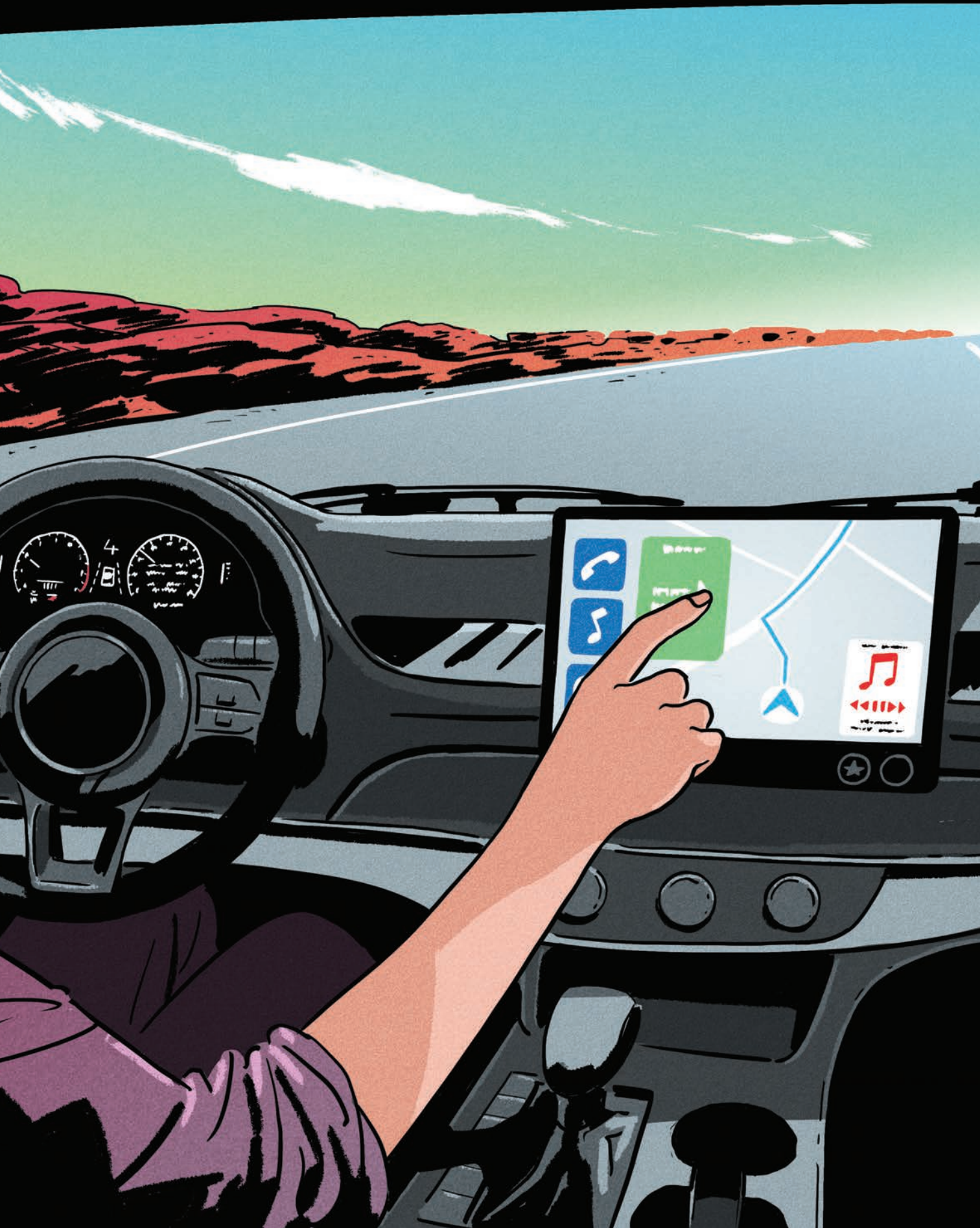
At the same time, the sleek, minimalist look of touchscreens is very popular with consumers,

says Kelly Funkhouser, manager for vehicle technology at CR's auto test center. The problem is, some systems take a good idea and go overboard, putting too many features in one place. “In many newer models, common tasks that drivers used to accomplish with the simple press of a button or turn of a knob now require navigating through multiple screens, which means more steps, more time, and more attention,” she says.

If you're one of the many who are annoyed with your car's infotainment system, our experts will tell you how to optimize it so that it's easier to use. We'll also show you how Android Auto or Apple CarPlay can bring familiar phone apps to your car's screen and make a bad system much better. And, if you're like one of the many survey respondents who told us they're hanging on to an older vehicle simply because it has fewer bells and whistles, we'll help you find a new car with an infotainment system that's easy to use.







## Make Your System Work for You

Nearly every automaker’s infotainment system looks and operates differently, and most can be complicated—even overwhelming—to learn. Our experts offer step-by-step advice on how to make using these systems simpler so that you can benefit from what they offer. Here’s what to do:

### 1 Check for a Software Update

If you’re experiencing problems with your system, first check to make sure you’re running the latest software. Automakers sometimes release new software that can improve an infotainment system’s performance, fix bugs, and add features. For example, a software update on the Ford Mustang Mach-E made Apple CarPlay displays larger and easier to read on the screen, and our reliability survey data showed that the number of complaints from BMW owners about blank and frozen infotainment screens decreased after BMW issued software updates.

Some updates are done automatically via a car’s cellular connection, some can be downloaded and installed at home over WiFi, and others require a trip to the dealership. The next time your car is in for service, ask whether there are any available software updates. If you’re having trouble with Bluetooth, Android Auto, or CarPlay, it may be your phone’s fault, says Michael Crossen, automotive technician at CR’s auto test center. “I have seen a phone that worked fine with a vehicle stop working after the phone performed an update,” he says. Further software updates might address this problem, so make sure your phone and car are both running the latest versions.

### 2 Set Up Quick Access to Your Favorite Feature

Instead of pressing many buttons or searching through multiple screens just to change the radio station or make a phone call, many cars have a shortcut

button that lets you perform a frequent task—like calling a family member, switching from streaming audio to an FM radio station, or navigating to a specific address. You can follow the instructions in your owner’s manual or ask the dealership to help you.

“If your car has a programmable shortcut button, you should use it to launch a task you do frequently to save yourself some time and hassle,” Funkhouser says. In Kia and Hyundai vehicles, the shortcut button is labeled with a star. In some GM vehicles, it’s mixed in with the radio presets. Other vehicles let you customize the home screen so that the apps you use most often are easiest to access.

### 3 Reboot to Fix Common Problems

Few issues are more frustrating than a frozen or blank screen, especially if you’re relying on navigation to tell you which way to go. Turning a system off and on again will usually clear up this and other problems. In most newer cars, that means putting the car into Park, turning it off, and opening and closing the driver’s door before restarting the ignition. (You’re essentially tricking the car into thinking you parked it and walked away.) If you’re having phone connectivity problems, disconnect your phone and turn it off. “Let it sit for a minute and then power the phone back on and reconnect to the car,” Crossen says.

If that doesn’t fix things, you might need to do a hard reset to restore the system to factory settings. This differs from car to car but is easy to do at home with our instructions. To find out how, head to [CR.org/rebootinfo](https://www.cars.com/cr/rebootinfo).

### 4 Get Help at Your Dealership

Printed owners’ manuals are becoming a thing of the past, but you now have access to online videos and

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 58]

# What a Good Infotainment System Looks Like

## AN EASY-TO-USE INTERFACE

The Hyundai (shown at right) has a familiar touchscreen setup. The Acura (below) has a screen that you don’t operate by touch. Instead, you use the separate touchpad between the front seats—an arrangement many survey respondents complained about. “The touchpad has a few different zones that control different regions of the screen, so using it properly requires extra time and attention,” she says.



**IT CAN BE** hard to tell a good infotainment system from a bad one just by looking at the screen. Consider the difference between the two screens shown below. At a glance, they look almost identical. But the one in the larger photo, from Hyundai, is one of the highest-rated in our survey, with 64 percent of owners saying they're very satisfied with it. The one at the bottom left,

from Acura, has the lowest satisfaction in our survey, with only 28 percent saying they're very satisfied with the system.

Acura owners complained that their infotainment systems had confusing controls and icons, couldn't always connect to phones, and didn't recognize voice commands. Hyundai owners had some complaints, too—but not nearly as many. “The

last thing you want is for your infotainment system to become a source of distraction and frustration that causes you to fuss with your phone or a screen while you're driving,” says CR's Kelly Funkhouser.

Luckily, it seems some automakers are getting the message that consumers want better systems. After Honda's infotainment systems spent a long time near the bottom of our surveys,

the automaker recently redesigned them. Our experts think the ones in Honda cars and SUVs are now some of the best out there, thanks to their simple menu design, clearly marked controls, large icons, and easy Android Auto and Apple CarPlay compatibility.

We asked Funkhouser to walk us through what separates the best from the rest, to help you make an informed shopping decision.



### WRIST REST

Bumpy roads can make it hard to touch a precise spot on any touchscreen. The best-designed systems provide a ledge or place to rest your wrist while making a selection, and show icons big enough so that they're easy to select.

### PHYSICAL CONTROLS

Knobs for controlling volume and tuning are easier to operate than screen icons.

### SEPARATE CLIMATE CONTROLS

Although our infotainment survey didn't ask about climate controls, automakers often add temperature, vent direction, fan speed, and heated steering wheel and seat controls to the same touchscreens used for media and navigation. That can lead to a crowded screen that's hard to operate while driving, Funkhouser says.

### A DEDICATED SHORTCUT BUTTON

Like many other carmakers, Hyundai has a dedicated, customizable shortcut button to quickly summon a frequently used screen. It saves drivers from having to root around in complex menus.

HYUNDAI SANTA FE HYBRID

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 56]

guides—and even to live experts—to help you set up and customize your infotainment system or answer questions about it.

For example, Honda offers videos on dealership websites that walk you through common tasks, like pairing a phone or entering a navigation destination. Lexus has what it calls Technology Specialists—dealership employees who can help answer your infotainment questions at the point of sale and after. BMW’s Genius Hotline can connect you with an infotainment expert over the phone. Many individual dealerships put YouTube videos with step-by-step instructions about infotainment functions on their websites, so search there, too.

“I like to start locally, at the dealership,” says Crossen. “Even a phone call can sometimes clear up an issue.” If you do have to visit the service department, make sure you have your phone with you, because they may need it to diagnose the problem.



**JUST BECAUSE** your car has an infotainment system you hate doesn’t mean you’re stuck with it. In fact, you might be carrying the solution in your pocket or purse: your smartphone. Nearly all new vehicles (and many older ones) feature Apple CarPlay and Android Auto compatibility, which lets your smartphone

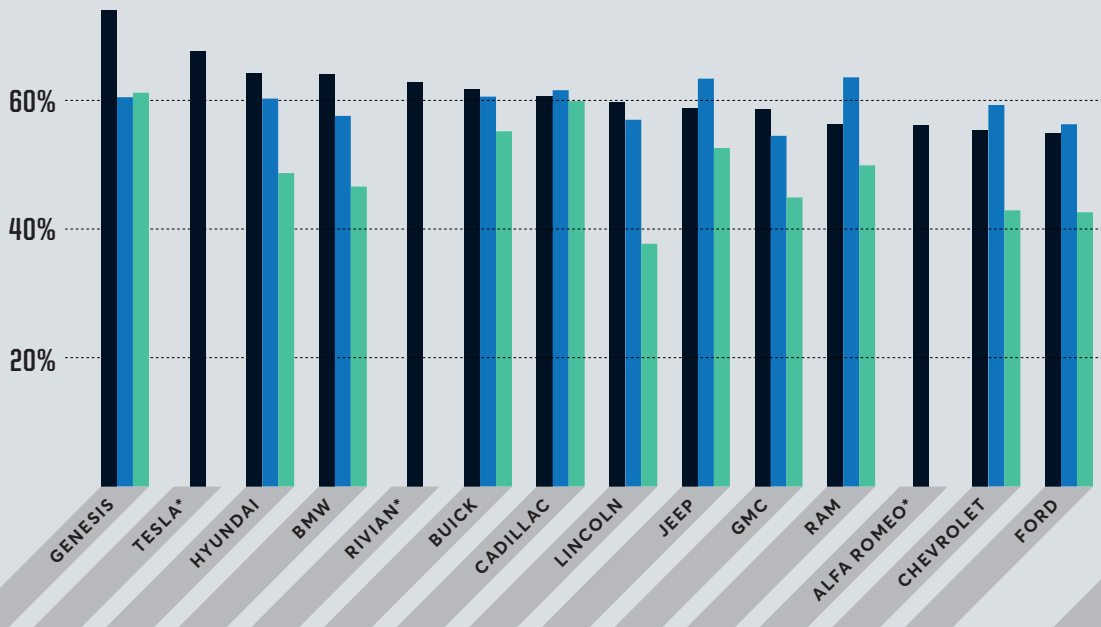
serve as your car’s infotainment system. When you connect your phone to a car and use Apple CarPlay or Android Auto, the infotainment screen looks a lot like your phone’s screen, except with easier-to-see menus. You’ll have access to some of the same apps you probably already use on your phone, such as

Spotify for music and Waze for navigation, while distracting features, such as keyboard-based texting, are disabled. Apple CarPlay and Android Auto use your phone’s own data plan for streaming audio and for map and traffic data. By comparison, built-in systems often require subscriptions or expensive software

## Which Brands Are Best?

OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH INFOTAINMENT SYSTEM

THE BRAND RANKINGS in this chart are based on CR survey data on more than 40,000 vehicles from the 2020 model year and newer. If you’re shopping for a new car, use them to determine which systems you might want to avoid. If you’re not satisfied with your current vehicle’s built-in system, consider using Apple CarPlay or Android Auto to improve the experience.



updates to get similar real-time data.

Overall, 57 percent of our survey respondents said they were very satisfied with CarPlay, compared with a 50 percent satisfaction rating with built-in systems and 44 percent for Android Auto. They improved the user experience for three out of the five least-satisfying brand systems in our survey.

In the case of CarPlay, it made the majority of systems better. But more than a quarter of drivers said they never or rarely used either system. For navigation, these smartphone-based systems are less useful in EVs, where a built-in navigation system might do a better job creating a custom route based on a car's energy usage and battery state.

## APPLE CARPLAY



### PROS

- Familiar Apple and third-party apps
- Uses Siri for voice recognition
- Large, colorful icons

### CONS

- Not as easy to customize home screen as Android Auto
- Sometimes unreliable connection, particularly when wireless

## ANDROID AUTO



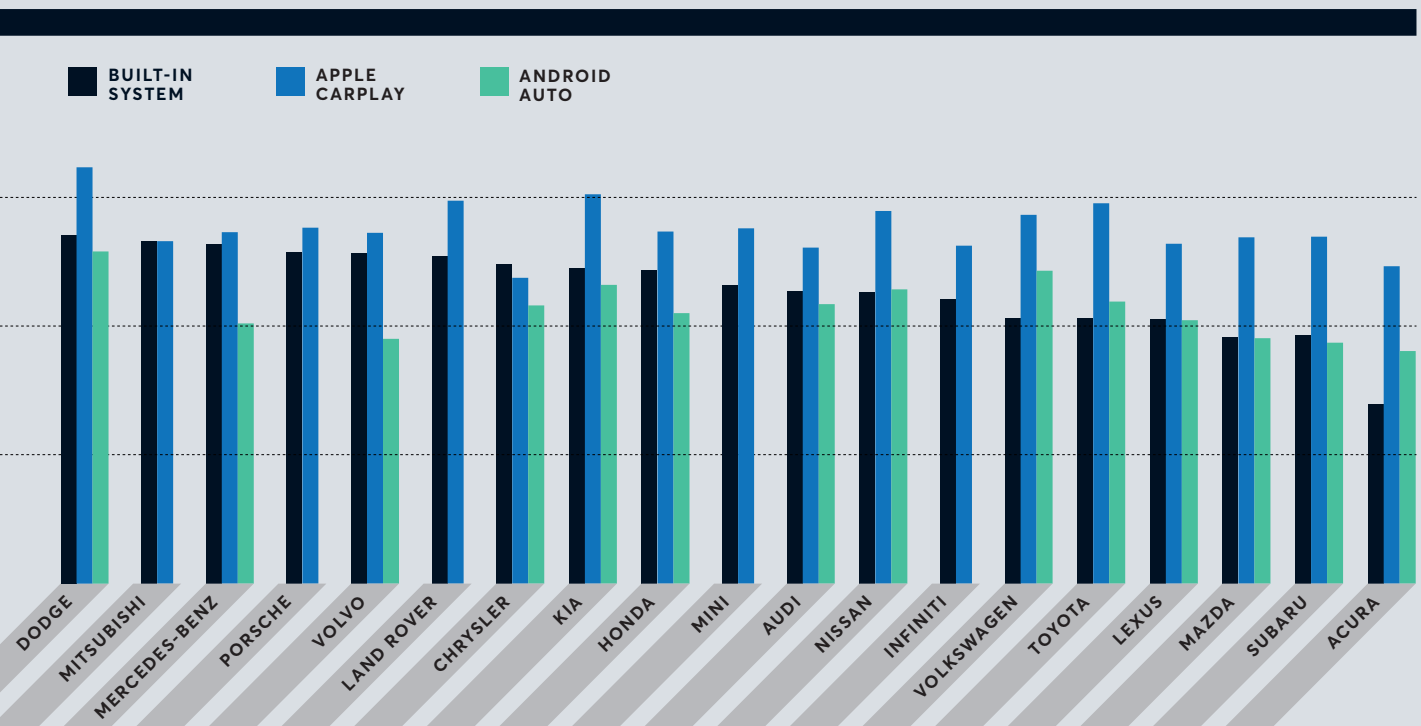
### PROS

- Works with less-expensive phones
- Easily customizable home screen
- Google Assistant for voice recognition

### CONS

- More frequent software updates can change the look of the system just as drivers are getting familiar with it
- Not available in as many vehicles

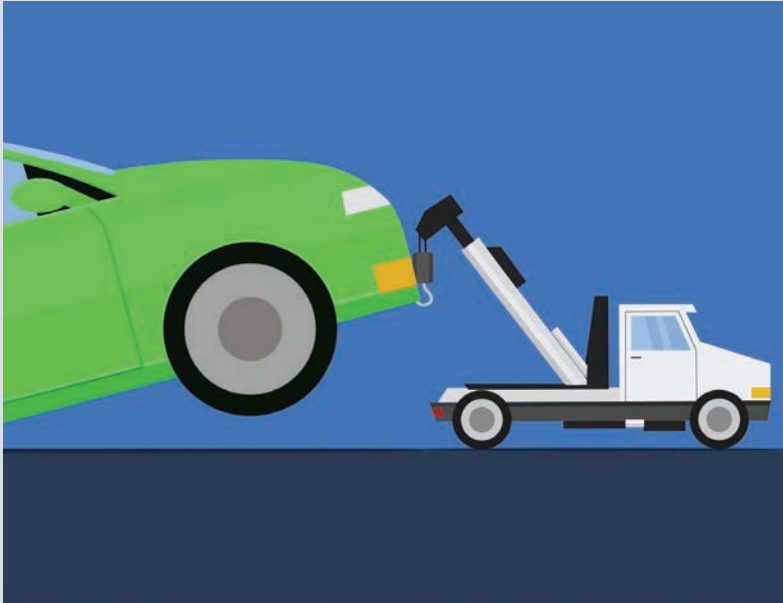
**Note:** Seven percent fewer models offer Android Auto than Apple CarPlay, according to S&P Global Mobility.



\*Neither Rivian nor Tesla offer Android Auto and Apple CarPlay; we lack enough data to give a score for Alfa Romeo.



# How to Get Roadside Help ASAP



A **ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE** plan can help you out when a flat tire, an empty gas tank, or a leaky radiator cuts your drive short. It can defray the high cost of towing and even provide discounts on travel-related services.

Traditional roadside assistance plans include towing, jump-starting, locksmith services, fuel delivery, and help fixing or replacing a flat tire. Many also include winching, in case your car needs to be pulled out of a ditch or snowbank. Some plans include a mobile EV charging service for EV owners who run out of juice on the road.

Having been around since 1902, AAA may be the most familiar provider of roadside assistance services. But there are plenty of other options, including companies like Good Sam, that offer similar services. Many credit card and insurance companies also now sell roadside assistance membership plans, and some automakers include roadside assistance with the purchase of a new or certified pre-owned vehicle. Below are summaries of various types of plans to help you decide which one is right for you.

## Plans from a car manufacturer

Some new cars come with roadside assistance plans at no added cost. These remain in effect for the length of the factory warranty, usually a minimum of three years. Unlike many other plans, which will provide towing for your vehicle to the nearest repair shop, these typically will only take you to an authorized dealership.

**BEST FOR New-car owners.**

If you want to save money, this is a good, economical choice. "It's worth buying an additional basic full-service plan [see at right] so you're covered in case you break down when the dealership is closed or there isn't one nearby," says Chuck Bell, CR's financial policy expert.

## Plans offered by auto insurance companies

These roadside assistance plans can be added to your insurance premium and will cover all insured drivers and cars. The cost may be lower than purchasing a plan from another provider, and the claims process may be streamlined if you end up needing to file one. Allstate, for example, will allow you to tack roadside assistance onto your existing coverage for as little as \$25 per vehicle per billing period.

**BEST FOR Families with multiple drivers and cars.**

But read the fine print to make sure the company doesn't count calls for service as claims, which could raise your annual premium.

## Full-service plans

This choice, from companies including AAA, Better World Club, Good Sam, and National General Motor Club, usually offers the widest range of benefits and the most membership tiers. AAA has three plans, including one that provides four assistance calls per year and up to 3 miles of towing, and one with four calls per year and up to 100 miles of towing. Costs range from about \$40 to more than \$160 annually.

**BEST FOR Road warriors and drivers with older cars.**

A full-service plan also typically includes discounts on dining, hotels, shopping, and fuel at participating vendors. Good Sam also covers members driving in some locations outside the continental U.S.

## Plans from credit card companies

Some cards may cover basic roadside assistance, but many companies charge a flat fee per incident. For example, all Visa cards come with an à la carte roadside assistance option that costs \$79.95 per incident. Cards from individual banks, such as Bank of America and Chase, may also come with roadside assistance.

**BEST FOR Those who have no other coverage.**

Credit card plans generally aren't as good a value as a full-service plan. They're better than paying full price for towing if you don't want to pay for a yearly membership, but they don't include extra discounts that you'll find with other plans.



COMPACT ELECTRIC SUVs

## Subaru Solterra

A Mediocre First EV

75

OVERALL SCORE

**THE SOLTERRA**, Subaru's first EV, is essentially a twin of the Toyota bZ4X. It's a quick, roomy, and decent-driving vehicle. But its short range, slow charging times, and limited EV-specific features make it less appealing than the Kia EV6 and Hyundai Ioniq 5.

Front and rear electric motors give the Solterra its standard all-wheel drive. As with most EVs, it scoots off the line with smooth, instant power.

The EPA-estimated 222-mile driving range is significantly less than the competition's, and its skimpy 6.6-kilowatt onboard charger makes for slow charging at home. Its maximum acceptance rate at public DC fast chargers is also weak. Unlike most EVs, the Solterra doesn't conveniently display its current driving range and battery state-of-charge when the driver's door is opened. It also lacks an

ROAD-TEST SCORE 77

**HIGHS** Quick acceleration, agile and secure handling

**LOWS** Slow charging and limited driving range compared with other EVs, stingy EV-specific displays, no glove box

**POWERTRAIN** 215-hp, dual electric motors; 1-speed direct-drive transmission; all-wheel drive

**RANGE** 222 miles

**PRICE** \$44,995-\$51,995 base price + \$1,225 destination charge  
**Total MSRP as tested** \$50,432

LED indicator showing charge level and doesn't tell you the speed you're charging at.

On a more positive note, handling is agile and secure. Stopping distances are competitive, and we appreciate that the Solterra's brake pedal doesn't suffer from a spongy sensation as you're coming to a stop, as we've experienced in many other tested EVs.

The austere interior isn't befitting a \$50,000 car. There are lots of hard, unpadded surfaces, and some of the trim pieces feel cheap and hollow. The faraway instrument panel at the base of the windshield is oddly placed and easily blocked by the steering wheel. The omission of a glove box is inexplicable.

The Solterra comes standard with the updated EyeSight suite, which includes numerous active safety and driver assistance features.



LUXURY ELECTRIC CARS

## Lucid Air

Thrilling to Drive but Lacks Polish

66

OVERALL SCORE

**THE AIR** is the first model from the startup automaker Lucid Motors. It has a long driving range, super-quick acceleration, superb handling, a luxurious cabin, and an ultra-rich price to match. But we're not fans of its perplexing controls, obstructed outward visibility, and excessive wind noise. Plus, buying a car from a manufacturer with no history is a giant leap of faith in terms of reliability.

With 620 hp and all-wheel drive, the Touring model we tested builds speed in an effortless fashion, sprinting from 0 to 60 mph in 3.5 seconds. Driving range is an impressive 384 miles. At-home charging can be done on a powerful 80-amp circuit.

The Air needed only 120 feet to stop from 60 mph, which is in sports car territory, and it's equally adept through curves, posting a phenomenal 57.5 mph in

ROAD-TEST SCORE 94

**HIGHS** Blistering acceleration, sharp handling, short braking distances, smooth ride, rear-seat room, large trunk

**LOWS** Electric motor whine, wind noise, unintuitive controls, restricted outward visibility

**POWERTRAIN** 620-hp, dual electric motors; 1-speed direct-drive; AWD

**RANGE** 384 miles

**PRICE** \$87,400-\$179,000 base price + \$1,650 destination charge  
**Total MSRP as tested** \$128,550

avoidance-maneuver speed. (It has grippy summer tires.)

The cabin looks dazzling, decked out in leather and suede. But we did notice a fair amount of rough edges and cheap-feeling plastic trim. The front seats are firm and mostly comfortable, though some drivers wished for more side support. The rear seat has generous room, and the doors open almost 90 degrees to aid access.

But the controls are far from user-friendly. Having to adjust the steering wheel and mirrors through the touchscreen is a nuisance, some EV-specific information is buried within menus on the touchscreen, and it's annoying that some steering-wheel controls aren't labeled.

Lucid's DreamDrive suite of active safety and driver assistance features is comprehensive, as expected at this heady price.



MIDSIZED SUVs

## ✓ Honda Pilot

A Functional Family Hauler

**79**

 OVERALL  
SCORE

**THE REDESIGNED PILOT** is comfortable and quiet, with user-friendly controls, lots of interior storage cubbies, and a hospitable third-row seat. We also enjoy its smooth, powerful engine. These assets make it an excellent choice for families and have helped move the Pilot closer to the top of our three-row midsized SUV rankings.

Unlike some competitors that have switched to turbo four-cylinders, Honda is sticking with a conventional V6. The 285-hp engine is smooth and packs plenty of reserve power. The 10-speed automatic upshifts with precision, although there's some initial abruptness off the line. Its 21 mpg overall is a 1-mpg improvement over the previous model, and par for the course for this class.

Handling is sharper than before, with well-controlled body roll through corners,

**ROAD-TEST SCORE 85**

**HIGHS** Smooth powertrain, comfortable ride, short braking distances, roomy interior, adult-sized third row, user-friendly controls

**LOW** Short on handling agility

**POWERTRAIN** 285-hp, 3.5-liter V6 engine; 10-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

**FUEL** 21 mpg on regular

**PRICE** \$36,300-\$52,380 base price + \$1,345 destination charge  
**Total MSRP as tested \$50,240**

but we don't like the steering's overly light feel. Braking performance is commendable, with some of the shortest stopping distances in the class. The firm suspension absorbs most bumps nicely.

Most Pilots come with an eight-passenger seating configuration, with a flat-folding third-row seat and a second-row middle seat that can be removed and stored in a well behind the third row. A beautifully simple push-button tilt-and-slide mechanism on the second-row seats creates a clear path to the roomy third row.

Most controls are easy to use, including the 9-inch touchscreen, and we love the solid feel of the physical climate-control knobs and buttons.

Active safety features include AEB with pedestrian detection and AEB that operates at highway speeds.



MIDSIZED LUXURY SUVs

## Range Rover Sport

Convuluted Controls in the Lap of Luxury

**58**

 OVERALL  
SCORE

**THE REWORKED** Range Rover Sport has a smoother ride, quieter cabin, and more luxurious interior than the previous model. It glides majestically down the highway and is a composed handler on a curvy road. But the convuluted controls can be frustrating to use. We're unable to recommend the Sport due to the brand's below-average reliability.

Somehow, even with a turbocharger and supercharger generating 355 hp from the inline-six engine, the Sport can be bogged down with an initial delay off the line, followed by a rather abrupt burst of power. Once underway, the smooth engine moves the Sport down the road with ease, although our test numbers indicate that it's noticeably slower than the competition. Still, the eight-speed automatic has buttery-smooth upshifts.

Handling is surprisingly

**ROAD-TEST SCORE 81**

**HIGHS** Supple ride, quiet cabin, agile handling, comfortable seats, high-quality fit and finish

**LOW** Complicated controls, below-average reliability

**POWERTRAIN** 355-hp, 3.0-liter turbocharged and supercharged 6-cylinder engine; 8-speed automatic transmission; AWD

**FUEL** 20 mpg on premium

**PRICE** \$83,000-\$121,500 base price + \$1,475 destination charge  
**Total MSRP as tested \$92,170**

agile for such a substantial vehicle. It turns into corners with verve and exhibits little body roll, although the steering is vague. Even with our test car's optional 22-inch tires, the ride is composed and comfortable, thanks in part to the standard air suspension.

The cabin is impressively hushed and super-swanky, with top-notch leather and beautiful wood trim. The front seats are comfortable and supportive, and the rear seat is roomy and well cushioned.

But the push/pull/turn climate knobs are cumbersome, some of the climate and steering-wheel buttons don't always respond when pressed, the cruise control buttons are confusing, and the front seat adjustments are buried in the touchscreen.

The Range Rover Sport comes loaded with active safety and driver assistance features.



**Ratings** ➤ **Midpack Models** All four tested vehicles this month fall shy of category leaders, though the Honda Pilot and Subaru Solterra score well enough to be recommended.

Make & Model	Overall Score	Survey Results		Road-Test Results										Active Safety Features		
		Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	Range, miles	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.	AEB, pedestrian

**3-ROW SUVs \$40,000-\$55,000**

✓ <b>Kia Telluride 3.8L</b>	<b>87</b>	↓	↑	92	21	390	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	53.5	7.2	127	S	S	S
✓ <b>Toyota Highlander 2.4T</b>	<b>80</b>	↑	↑	82	22	400	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	52.0	7.7	133	S	S	0
✓ <b>Hyundai Palisade 3.8L</b>	<b>80</b>	↓	↑	85	21	395	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	52.5	7.1	132	S	S	S
✓ <b>Honda Pilot 3.5L</b>	<b>79</b>	↓	↑	85	21	380	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	51.5	7.7	129	S	S	0
✓ <b>Chevrolet Traverse 3.6L</b>	<b>78</b>	↓	↓	90	20	435	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	50.5	7.3	130	S	0	0
✓ <b>Subaru Ascent 2.4T</b>	<b>76</b>	↓	↓	90	22	420	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	52.0	8.0	129	S	S	0
✓ <b>Volkswagen Atlas 3.6L</b>	<b>71</b>	↓	↓	80	20	370	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	51.0	8.7	135	S	S	S
<b>Jeep Grand Cherokee L 3.6L</b>	<b>53</b>	↓	↓	71	19	445	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	50.5	8.8	141	S	S	S
<b>Ford Explorer 2.3T</b>	<b>49</b>	↓	↓	74	21	370	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	51.5	7.4	136	S	S	S
<b>Nissan Pathfinder 3.5L</b>	<b>45</b>	↓	↓	81	21	385	↑ / ↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	52.5	7.6	138	S	S	S

**2-ROW SUVs OVER \$70,000**

✓ <b>BMW X5 3.0T</b>	<b>87</b>	↓	↑	94	23	495	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	52.0	6.0	129	S	0	S
✓ <b>Porsche Cayenne 3.0T</b>	<b>70</b>	↓	↑	84	21	510	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑	49.5	6.5	131	S	S	0
<b>Land Rover Range Rover Sport 3.0T</b>	<b>58</b>	↓	↑	81	20	480	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	50.5	7.2	133	S	S	S
<b>Mercedes-Benz GLE450 3.0T</b>	<b>53</b>	↓	↓	76	20	455	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	51.5	6.0	132	S	S	S

**ELECTRIC SUVs \$45,000-\$55,000**

✓ <b>Kia EV6</b>	<b>91</b>	↑	↑	90	105 <sup>mpg</sup>	282	↑ / ↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	54.5	4.7	126	S	S	S
✓ <b>Hyundai Ioniq 5</b>	<b>76</b>	↓	↑	91	98 <sup>mpg</sup>	256	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	53.0	4.7	131	S	S	S
✓ <b>Subaru Solterra</b>	<b>75</b>	↓	↑	77	102 <sup>mpg</sup>	222	↑ / ↓	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑	53.0	6.4	135	S	S	S
<b>Ford Mustang Mach-E</b>	<b>66</b>	↓	↑	78	90 <sup>mpg</sup>	277	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑	52.0	5.3	136	S	S	S
<b>Volkswagen ID.4</b>	<b>65</b>	↓	↑	83	93 <sup>mpg</sup>	255	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	52.5	5.8	134	S	S	S

**ELECTRIC CARS OVER \$70,000**

<b>Mercedes-Benz EQS</b>	<b>67</b>	↓	↑	95	94 <sup>mpg</sup>	340	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	55.5	4.0	133	S	S	S
<b>Lucid Air Touring</b>	<b>66</b>	↓	↑	94	121 <sup>mpg</sup>	384	↑ / ↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	57.5	3.5	120	S	S	S
<b>Tesla Model S</b>	<b>62</b>	↓	↑	88	120 <sup>mpg</sup>	405	↑ / ↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↓	58.0	3.2	125	S	S	-
<b>Porsche Taycan</b>	<b>61</b>	↓	↑	86	77 <sup>mpg</sup>	235	↑ / ↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	52.5	4.0	130	S	S	0

➤ 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:** Overall Score combines road-test results, survey data for predicted reliability and owner satisfaction, and advanced safety,

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

spot warning, and rear cross traffic warning. A dash (-) means no such safety system is offered; 0 means 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.



<sup>mpg</sup> Miles-per-gallon equivalent (MPGe).

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# Here's a Hot Mess

The best summer ever? Maybe not where these signs were seen.



### Finally, Truth in Advertising

It looks like humility is on the menu at this Maine restaurant.

Submitted by Joan Ryan, Berwick, ME

### Um, Where's the Water?

There's not much a lifeguard could do for you here.

Submitted by Scott Nielsen, Roseville, CA



### Better Call the SWAT Team In ...

We're not convinced there are genius mosquitoes out there.

Submitted by Lex Youngman, via email

### What IS Allowed, Anyway?

The main rule at this lake seems to be "no fun."

Submitted by Paul Baker, Westmoreland, TN



SHARE

Be on the lookout for goofs and glitches like these. Share them with us—by email at [SellingIt@cro.consumer.org](mailto:SellingIt@cro.consumer.org) or by mail to Selling It, Consumer Reports, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers, NY 10703—and we might publish yours. Please include key information, such as your name and location.

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