

How to buy a safe new or used vehicle

Whether you are in the market for a new or used vehicle here are key things to consider:

Size and weight

Smaller, lighter vehicles generally offer less protection than larger, heavier ones. There is less structure to absorb crash energy. People in lighter vehicles also experience higher crash forces when struck by heavier vehicles. If safety is a major consideration, pass up very small, light vehicles.

A crashworthy design

That means:

- a strong occupant compartment,
- crumple zones to absorb the force of a serious crash,
- side structure to manage the force of a striking vehicle or struck object, and
- a strong roof that won't collapse in a rollover.

Seat belts and airbags need to work well together to keep occupants in position and manage forces on the body.

Crash avoidance features

These include things as basic as headlights as well as advanced driver assistance systems such as automatic emergency braking.

Consult our lists

For new vehicles, start with our list of **TOP SAFETY PICK** and **TOP SAFETY PICK+** award winners.

<https://www.iihs.org/ratings/top-safety-picks>

To find the safest models in each vehicle class consult the list of current award winners. We evaluate vehicles for both crashworthiness and crash avoidance and we raise the bar every year.

For used vehicles start with our [recommended used vehicles for teens](#).

This list is good for drivers of any age. Recommended vehicles must offer a certain level of crashworthiness and standard electronic stability control. Only midsize cars or larger are included.

Note that some of our awards and recommendations only apply to vehicles built after a certain date because of changes made in the middle of a model year. You can tell when a specific vehicle was manufactured by looking at the certification label typically affixed to the car on or near the driver door.

Go Deep

Want to drill down on individual vehicles? Looking for information on a model that isn't on one of our lists? Search our vehicle ratings (<https://www.iihs.org/ratings>) to find information on performance in six crashworthiness tests:

- driver and passenger side small overlap front,
- moderate overlap front,
- side strength,
- roof strength,
- head restraints, and
- evaluations of front crash prevention systems including forward collision warning and automatic emergency braking, and headlights.

Consumers with young children will want to pay attention to our LATCH ease-of-use ratings, which tells you whether the vehicle's child restraint anchors are easy to find and attach a seat to.

Our ratings also include information on the availability of daytime running lights, blind spot warning, lane departure warning and lane departure prevention.

Check for recalls

Before buying a used vehicle, always check the National Highway Traffic Safety site for recalls and make sure all necessary repairs are completed.

<https://www.nhtsa.gov/recalls>