

Tackling Telstra's black spots

PLUS The cars and health services tracking your data

Macro madness

Protein marketing is everywhere these days

The world of nutrition is a terrifying place. I should know.

Before I succumbed to what I lovingly call “the dad zone”, I was obsessed with rock climbing. For strength-to-weight ratio, eating correctly was almost mandatory.

Rock climbing is incredibly fun, but it could also be frustrating. Unfortunately, weight absolutely mattered. After Christmas, for example, carrying a few extra kilos, I’d feel it on the wall. Conversely, if I happened to lose a few kilos for whatever reason, perhaps sickness, climbing suddenly felt a little easier.

Because of this, plenty of people involved in climbing struggle with disordered eating. In hindsight, I was possibly one of them. I currently walk around at a healthy 85kg, but back then, when I was trying to push it, I got as low as 64kg.

I went through my diet with a fine-tooth comb. No sugar, no dairy, no liquid calories, little-to-no carbs if I could help it. I was in the midst of a self-induced macro madness. I did juice fasts, keto diets, I counted kilojoules constantly. I was so obsessed with climbing my dream routes, achieving the goals I set for

myself, that I was willing to sacrifice anything. Including my general health.

It was grim.

Looking back at photos from that time, it’s a little scary. I don’t recognise the face staring back. People would often make comments about how skinny I looked, or how I was taking things too far but, in my head space, I took those comments as compliments.

Nowadays, it feels like the world has followed me down the rabbit hole and gone nutrition crazy. Take the concept of “protein”. These days it feels as though we’re constantly being told to consume vast amounts of protein. Walk into any supermarket and it’s hard to avoid the marketing. Protein bars and protein shakes are one thing – but now we have protein yoghurt, protein chocolate, protein cheese, protein ham... Protein ham? I draw the line at protein ham.

These products grasp at an impulse I recognise all too well. I understand the need to feel like the products I consume are propelling me towards some arbitrary target. But it’s sort of... not true. Many of these protein snacks are highly processed, drowning in sodium and aren’t really that good for your body.



I’ve been there, fighting against cravings – normal, healthy cravings – and trying to satiate them with overpriced, potentially unhealthy products because they have a solid protein-to-kilojoule ratio.

We’ve taken a good look at the impact of protein marketing on food prices on page 18, but I’ll give you the top-line message right here: the situation is not ideal. In some ways, protein marketing is just another way to make you pay more for less.

In the meantime, can I suggest a boiled egg? A tin of tuna? There are plenty of ways to hit your protein “macros” without breaking the bank (or flooding your system with salt).

Enjoy the issue!

Mark Serrels
CHOICE Editorial Director
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CHOICE

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CHOICE magazine provides a selection of our top product reviews. We can't always include all the models we've tested, but you'll always find the products that scored the best. To view complete results for all our tests, go to choice.com.au, or call Customer Service on 1800 069 552 to add digital access to your subscription package.

The latest consumer news in brief
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Car insurers not upfront about premium price rises

The Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) has found that certain car insurance providers are leaving out key details for consumers that would explain why their insurance premiums are increasing.

In its report, *Road testing transparency in car insurance premiums*, ASIC investigated multiple insurance brands representing around 72% of the market, and found none were providing consumers with clear information about why prices were rising.

This includes information on how premiums are calculated, why they are increasing, and why they may have changed from previous years. This means Australians are being charged more without being informed why.

Many consumers accept the increases, thinking that contacting their insurer to inquire or complain won't lead to a better outcome. But the corporate regulator found that 31% of people had their premium reduced after questioning it.

ASIC Commissioner Alan Kirkland says this figure "shows it pays to ask, with some consumers who challenged their premium increase ending up with a better deal".

"Clearer disclosure will help all consumers, not just those who know how to push back," Kirkland says.

RILEY DEZELAK

City Beach button battery appeal dismissed

Popular Australian retailer City Beach, which operates an online website and over 65 retail stores across Australia, will face a \$14 million penalty for selling non-compliant button battery products marketed towards children.

In December 2025, the Federal Court found the retailer sold more than 60 product types with non-compliant button batteries between June 2022 and October 2024. That's 54,000 transactions that were not compliant with Australia's button battery standard. The current standard, introduced in 2022, requires products to have secure battery compartments, reducing the risk of exposure to children.

City Beach failed to meet these requirements in some of their products that were seemingly advertised for children, including colourful key rings and light-up shoe accessories.

The retailer's appeal, which claimed the penalty was "manifestly excessive", has been dismissed by the Federal Court.

ACCC Commissioner Luke Woodward says, "The ACCC will continue to take strong enforcement action where appropriate against businesses that fail to comply with the mandatory button battery safety standards."

RILEY DEZELAK



IMAGES: GETTY

Product safety reform back on the agenda

Commonwealth, state and territory ministers responsible for Consumer Affairs met in Darwin in late July for the Consumer Ministers Network meeting, where they set shared national priorities for consumer protection. A key outcome was a commitment to prioritise general safety protections – a long-overdue reform that would help prevent unsafe products entering the market and causing harm to consumers.

This commitment is welcome news for consumers and marks an important step towards fixing Australia's largely reactive product safety system. The last comprehensive review took place back in 2019.

Consumers shopping in Australia should be able to trust that the products they buy are safe, regardless of where they are purchased from. General safety protections would place a clear legal responsibility on all businesses to ensure products are safe before they are sold.

The ministers' commitment is an important step, but the real test will be whether the government acts quickly to deliver stronger protections for consumers.

BEA SHERWOOD

FIRST
LOOK

Tour de lounge room with Zwift's new ride

The Zwift Ride with Kickr Core 2 is an all-in-one, ready-to-ride indoor smart bike system by two fitness technology companies. It combines Zwift's bike frame and virtual fitness platform with the Kickr Core 2 direct-drive smart trainer by Wahoo Fitness, to replicate a range of real-world locations and terrains.

The Zwift app offers a large range of training programs for everyone from beginners to seasoned road warriors. It delivers fairly intense workouts with very good power accuracy, ergometer control and feedback ($\pm 1-2\%$).

One of the most attractive things by far about this set-up is the convenience of being able to just jump on and go. Zwift bases its courses on actual environments, so you get the physical benefits at any time of day without any traffic, poor weather or red lights.

But the app has very few rest periods. One hour on the trainer feels roughly equivalent to 1.5 hours on the road.

Smart functions add competitive elements to improve motivation. You can compete against other Zwift users, virtual racers, or the good old clock when chasing a new personal best.

Zwift also runs larger "tours" with other users throughout the year, such as "Tour de Zwift", which follows the same mountains in the Tour de France. These are designed to replicate major cycling events, with long, standard and short distances available for various stages depending on the schedule.

The system is quite compact, compared to mounting the Kickr Core 2 on an existing bike (which is also possible). As long as you have a clear space of around 140cm x 60cm, you can do a workout.

Assembly is straightforward with easy-to-follow instructions and a range of micro adjustments to fine tune. You can quickly set up the frame for multiple users, which is much easier than detaching and attaching the Kickr Core 2 to different bikes depending on who's ready to work out.

However, very short and tall riders may feel limited by the seat's fore and aft (forward and back tilting) adjustments, so that may be a factor to consider.

Also at 35kg, the set-up is also quite heavy to move and not really designed to be stored away between workouts.

Stability can be a bit of an issue depending on how you like to ride. Cyclists that prefer to climb out of the saddle may not feel as stable as they do on the road and you may have to resort to a seated climbing position by default, for example.

Also, the absence of music-powered workouts feels like an oversight if you're used to training sessions that integrate music, like a spin class. It would be great if Zwift incorporated great music-driven workouts in the future.

Overall, this isn't a system for newcomers or casual users. It's a serious enthusiast/semi-competitive set-up that requires a commitment from the user. But you should start to see improvements after a few weeks if you're prepared to stick with it.

DENIS GALLAGHER

ZWIFT RIDE WITH KICKR CORE 2 SMART TRAINER

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CONTACT au.wahoofitness.com



Big changes to private health insurance?

The Australian Government is considering some of the biggest changes to private health insurance in years, and CHOICE is pushing to make sure the reforms deliver a fairer and simpler system for consumers.

The government is looking at removing low-value Basic policies, as well as confusing “Plus” products such as Bronze Plus and Silver Plus. We support these changes, but we think the government should go further. We’re calling for clearer and more consistent rules around what each tier is called, what it covers and what consumers can expect when they buy it.

We’re also pushing to finally end the single parent penalty. In 2024, CHOICE exposed how some health insurers were charging single parents dramatically more than couples to add a child to their policy. The practice was so unfair that we gave NIB a Shonky Award, and we’ve been campaigning for change ever since.



With families already under pressure from the cost of living, unfair and confusing health insurance pricing only makes things harder. We support the government’s push for reform, but this is also an opportunity to go further and build a private health insurance system that is simpler, fairer and works for everyone.

HARSHINI SHANMUGAKANI

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Does your pet need a ‘wellness plan’?

Vet wellness plans claim to help pet owners budget and pay for ongoing expenses associated with pet ownership. We compared three of these plans to see what they offered and if they provided value. Two of the plans were from the big veterinary providers: “Best for Pets” from VetPartners and “Healthy Pets Plus” from Greencross, both of which restrict use to their own vet networks. The third was an independent plan called “Thriving Pets” that pet owners can use at any veterinary clinic.

Unlike pet insurance, which is designed to cover big, unexpected costs associated with accidents or illnesses, pet wellness plans contribute to the cost of vet consultations, annual check ups, vaccinations and preventative medicines like flea and tick treatments.

Some give you free access to tele-vet or emergency clinics, while others restrict their re-imbursements to regular clinic hours. The Greencross and VetPartners plans offer 24/7 tele-vet services, and the Greencross plan also included unlimited emergency consultations. All three plans also offered discounts on food and other products and services.

The plans we looked at cost around \$600 to \$700 per year, so it’s vital to do the sums on what you would usually spend versus what you would save with these plans to make sure you’re getting value.

JANE BARDELL



More illegal gambling websites blocked

Illegal gambling websites Casea and Crown96 have joined the long list of illegal gambling sites blocked in Australia.

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) found these services were in breach of gambling laws for providing online casinos or slot games, and has asked internet providers to block them.

Since the ACMA first issued blocking requests in 2019, there have been 1788 illegal gambling and affiliate marketing sites blocked. Additionally, over 230 illegal sites have withdrawn from Australia since new gambling rules came into place in 2017.

In addition to online ads, illegal gambling sites have co-opted influencers on social media to spruik their services.

ACMA member Carolyn Lidgerwood says internet personalities and their agents have been put on notice. In July 2026, ACMA issued its first enforcement action to an influencer, giving a formal warning to mixed martial arts influencer Jamie Mullarkey for promoting illegal offshore gambling sites on his Instagram account.

“Athletes and social media personalities with large online followings can have significant influence over their audiences and can encourage the use of illegal gambling services,” Lidgerwood says.

Individuals promoting illegal gambling sites can be fined up to \$59,400, while those directing users to the sites or providing hyperlinks can face fines of almost \$2.5 million.

JAMES WORSFOLD

Austrac orders Cryptolink ATMs offline

Australia's anti-money laundering regulation and policing body has suspended the registration of cryptocurrency ATM company Cryptolink for three months, forcing their 96 crypto ATM machines offline. Austrac says the company had failed its basic reporting obligations under money laundering and counter-terrorism financing laws.

“The company failed to submit these required reports or respond to Austrac's request for information, thus we've deemed it too high risk to continue operating at present,” Austrac CEO Brendan Thomas says. The company had previously been subject to a court enforceable undertaking and paid a fine.

As a CHOICE investigation earlier this year found (see ‘Scam machines’, *CHOICE* May 26), crypto ATMs are being used as a vector for scam, fraudulent and criminal activity, with older Australians increasingly being targeted by criminals who use these machines to facilitate crypto scams.

Advocates such as the Consumer Action Law Centre have called for the government to step up and ban crypto ATMs altogether across Australia in order to protect consumers.

JARNI BLAKKARLY



Shonky Harvey Norman and Latitude deal leads to whopping fine

The Federal Court has imposed a whopping \$55 million fine on Harvey Norman and Latitude Finance for misleading consumers in a shonky partnership deal. The appliance retailer was ordered to pay \$35 million in penalties and the finance company \$20 million for a misleading advertising campaign run in 2020 and 2021.

In 2020 CHOICE gave Harvey Norman a Shonky Award for its questionable partnership with Latitude and promises of 'interest-free' deals that failed to account for massive fees included in the cards and loans being offered.

"The substantial penalties and the corrective advertising orders imposed on Harvey Norman and Latitude is a significant outcome for consumers and sends a strong warning to the market about the importance of truthful and transparent advertising," ASIC Chair Sarah Court says.

Federal Court Justice O'Bryan said that both companies were equally

responsible for the misleading ads; however, Harvey Norman was ordered to pay a higher penalty because "the defendants have ... exhibited a different level of contrition".

JARNI BLAKKARLY



Debt collector fined almost \$60k for harassment, misleading consumers

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has fined debt collection company Marshall Freeman \$59,400 for harassing and providing false information to consumers.

Although people have a right to question a collection agency about an alleged debt or ask for more information, the ACCC was concerned that between July 2024 and July 2025, Marshall Freeman ignored such requests and harassed debtors by continuing to demand payment.

The watchdog also alleged the debt collector falsely told consumers via letters it had instructions from creditors to commence legal proceedings to recover the debts.

ACCC Commissioner Luke Woodward says it is in breach of Australian Consumer Law for a debt collector to send letters threatening legal action that they are not permitted to take.

"Harassment by debt collectors is unacceptable under any circumstances as it places significant pressure on consumers, in some cases including those experiencing vulnerability, and impacts their ability to resolve disputed debts fairly," Woodward says.

Marshall Freeman is not the only debt collector in trouble this year for misleading consumers, with the ACCC taking Credit Clear Limited to the Federal Court for allegedly demanding money from debts that were actually paid or expired.

JAMES WORSFOLD





AI scams target investors

The Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) warns about the rise of generative AI being used to trick Australians into investing their money into scams.

Scammers are using generative AI to create 'deepfake' videos and images to impersonate trusted public figures. The most impersonated, according to ASIC, are political figures such as Anthony Albanese, Jacqui Lambie and Angus Taylor.

The technology is also used to create fake news websites and social media posts to promote scam "investment opportunities".

ASIC Chair Sarah Court says caution needs to be taken when appraising these websites and images.

"Before investing, consumers should verify website addresses, check whether a person or company is legitimate and who they claim to be, and be wary of urgent calls to act," she says.

ASIC encourages Australians to check that any investment opportunities they see promoted are verified to have an Australian Financial Services Licence.

RILEY DEZELAK

'I lived on \$36 a day — don't you lecture me about budgeting': Jacqui Lambie destroys Angus Taylor on Insiders

Jacqui Lambie

Just in

22h ago



The moment Angus Taylor walked off the Insiders set — Jacqui Lambie watches as the Opposition Leader retreats.

Who will get your super when you die?

Have you got a will in place? If yes, that's a great step towards getting your affairs sorted for the future. But did you know that your superannuation sits outside of your estate and isn't automatically covered by your will? For your super to be distributed according to your wishes when you die, you need to nominate a valid beneficiary with your super fund. If this is news to you, you're not alone.

Super Consumers Australia's latest 'Your Say on Super' survey found that over 15 million Australians may not have a binding death benefit nomination. Without one, the super fund trustee will choose who gets your money.

The death benefit claims process can be long and arduous for grieving families. In 2025, ASIC found that delays were common, especially when a valid nomination was not in place.

Our survey found that funds are not doing enough to help people

put a binding nomination in place. We think that the government should require them to do so. But you can act now to ensure your super is distributed according to your wishes

when you die by visiting your fund's website and downloading, completing and submitting the binding death benefit nomination form.

ANTOINETTE DYCE





Subaru in court for alleged failure to share information

The Australian Competition Consumer Commission (ACCC) has begun Federal Court proceedings against Subaru Australia over alleged failures to give independent car repairers equal access to information needed to repair their cars.

Between July 2022 and August 2024, Subaru allegedly did not offer to supply independent

repairers with the necessary software and technical information that it gave to Subaru Australia dealerships, in breach of the Motor Vehicle Service and Repair Information Sharing Scheme. “

“We allege Subaru Australia failed to comply with the Motor Vehicle Service and Repair Information Sharing Scheme, which is designed to promote competition between

Australian car repairers,” ACCC Commissioner Luke Woodward says. “As a result, consumers may have been unable to use an independent, local or family-run repairer rather than using Subaru’s dealerships.”

This is the first court proceeding the ACCC has taken for alleged breaches of the service and repair information sharing scheme.

JARNI BLAKKARLY

Panda Mart facing shutdown for unsafe toys

Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) is seeking an injunction from the Supreme Court to force Victorian discount retailer Panda Mart to close its stores over the selling of unsafe products.

The injunction follows inspections at Panda Mart stores in Preston and Cranborne earlier this year where CAV officers found dangerous, incorrectly labelled or banned products.

Shonky products include light-up keychains with improperly secured button batteries, scented candles with decorations that caught alight, and pool floaties without mandatory warning labels.

CAV Director Nicole Rich says Panda Mart continued to sell dodgy products despite repeated warnings.

“Being cheap isn’t a licence to skimp on safety standards. People should be able to shop for a good bargain without putting their or their kids’ safety at risk,” Rich says.

The Supreme Court is expected to rule on CAV’s application in September. If successful, Panda Mart will be required to stop trading until employees complete training and the business implements a strict compliance program.

“Panda Mart should not be allowed to operate until it can demonstrate that it meets its product safety responsibilities under the Australian Consumer Law,” Nicole Rich says.

JAMES WORSFOLD





Is AI setting the price you pay?

As more and more businesses use opaque algorithms and AI to set prices, how can consumers be sure if they're being charged the same price as everyone else for the same products and services?

Businesses are collecting more information about us than ever – everything from our personal preferences, habits and mood, to our location and information like our age and gender. Meanwhile, the emergence of powerful algorithms driven by artificial intelligence means businesses are increasingly able to use this information to judge exactly how much a customer would be willing to pay for something – and to charge different people different prices accordingly.

This practice is called surveillance pricing, and as it's started to become more common, there's increasing concern that it's unfair and could make it even harder for consumers to know if they're being ripped off. If you suspect that you've spotted surveillance pricing in action, we'd be interested to hear more about your experience – please email us at campaigns@choice.com.au.

JORDAN CORNELIUS

Real estates fined over money management

Dozens of real estate businesses across NSW were fined a total of more than \$200,000 in the state government's latest crackdown on poor management of client funds.

Real estate agents receiving money for rent, lease bonds or sales deposits on behalf of property owners must place it in a trust account. A condition of their licence is to conduct audits of these accounts.

"Trust account audits ensure money being held on behalf of consumers is properly managed and accounted for," says NSW Strata and Property Services Commissioner Angus Abadee. "While most property professionals comply with their obligations, those who ignore trust account requirements risk significant consequences."

Under the latest blitz on auditing by NSW Fair Trading's Strata and Property Taskforce, one Sydney agency lost its licence and was fined \$22,000 for failing to provide audits despite multiple reminders and deadline extensions. Another was fined \$5500 for failing to submit an audit, then a further \$11,000 for repeating the same breach.

In addition to the fines, 34 NSW businesses were put on notice and faced licence suspension, 32 received warnings and three got industry bans.

JAMES WORSFOLD





RANTS AND RAVES

Email overload: Can companies give my inbox a break?



Did you hear Mad Mex now serve hot chips? I did, because the Mexican fast food chain

bombarded me

with five emails in a fortnight to spruik this earth-shattering news.

“FREE FRIES MONDAY” the first member email proclaimed recently, before a damning “Jason you missed it” rebuke landed a few days later. The next week, they were at me again – “Did you forget something?”. Then came the ultimatum – “Jason, you get one last chance!” – which they hilariously sent me twice.

In the end I didn’t get any fries, but I did get mad. Sure, it may seem like a trivial issue to spit chips about, but such incessant spamming is symbolic of a growing trend as companies carpet-bomb our inboxes to flog even more stuff.

These days, smarter, AI-assisted marketing platforms make it easier than ever for companies to nag us continuously. Designed to optimise e-commerce sales, they can blast out automated emails and phone texts based on your individual buying behaviour. In marketing speak, it’s called a “customer journey”, but often it’s more like a crappy road trip where you’re constantly being asked “are you gonna buy this?!” instead of “are we there yet?!”.

Of course, I’m well aware I could just hit the unsubscribe button. But the truth is I like a bit of Mad Mex now and then and don’t mind the occasional informative update. I just don’t want to get serially

spammed and chip-shamed because I haven’t put their newest potato product at the top of my to-do list.

By law, companies need to have an unsubscribe opt-out, but some also need a “hey, just back off a bit, I’m having a hectic week” option.

As anyone who has an inbox knows, email overreach comes in many forms. The creepiest has to be the “See something you like?” emails that some retailers send as soon as you don’t buy from their online shop.

“We noticed you didn’t complete your order,” they helpfully prompt like a sales-sniffing cyber-stalker. Yeah, because the only size left was extra-extra-small and then you tried to charge me \$20 for postage to send it five suburbs over. It reminds me of over-cafeinated sales staff in real-life stores that descend upon you as soon as you take a step inside. “Can I help you?! What are you looking for?! Are you gonna buy it? Well, are you?! C’mon. Please. It’s the last one left!”

Other over-emailing offenders include the news outlets spruiking “BREAKING NEWS!” that broke the day before simply to clock up more clicks, streaming services begging to know why I left them like a disgruntled ex, or LinkedIn repeatedly sending notifications urging me to “connect” with some random in another country.

Then there are the retailers auto-requesting a Google review after you make a purchase, which can get weird when the product hasn’t even arrived, or if you’ve just bought some



Then came the ultimatum – “Jason, you get one last chance!” – which they hilariously sent me twice

half-priced undies on sale (“Good fit, handy five-pack, questionably fluoro waistbands, 8 out of 10!”)

And if they don’t want your reviews, they instantly want your feedback on your customer experience, no matter how menial. My favourite has to be the time I got contacted by Revenue NSW asking me for my “invaluable feedback” on paying a parking fine online (“Worst \$138 ever spent, would not recommend, 0 out of 10!”).

Anyways, I must run, I just got an email from Mad Mex promoting their new brand-new burrito, loaded with – you guessed it – hot chips. Somebody, please help me!

JASON TREUEN

ASK THE EXPERTS

Got a niggling question our team can help with?



Q I've had a queen mattress in storage under my house for a while. I'm now wanting to use it in the spare room, but I'd like to give it a "freshen up" (it's been stored in plastic but it's been under there for a few years). Any advice?



A CHOICE mattress expert Chris Barnes:

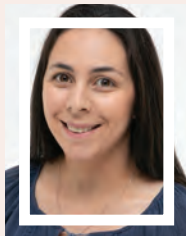
Freshening it up is a great idea. Firstly, I'd recommend checking it over carefully for any signs of mould or other damage. Minor mould spots can be treated with diluted vinegar. Then give the

ASK US

Email your question to asktheexperts@choice.com.au or write to Ask the Experts, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Rd, Marrickville, NSW 2204. You can also tap into the 'brains trust' at www.choice.community.

whole mattress a once-over with your vacuum (using the upholstery attachment). Next, sprinkle some bicarb soda across the surface of the mattress and leave it for a few hours at least or up to 24 hours if you can. If it's possible, leave it outside in the direct sunlight for at least some of this time. Finally, vacuum the mattress again to suck up the bicarb. This should leave your mattress much fresher and far less dusty.

Q I am looking for an air fryer that doesn't use non-stick surfaces, as I'd rather avoid them. It seems like glass air fryers are the obvious option, but I have limited strength and dexterity in my wrists and hands, so I'm worried they might be a bit heavy for me to lift. Can you recommend any models that might be suitable?



A CHOICE kitchen expert Rebecca Ciaramidaro:

Unfortunately, when it comes to air fryers they can all get a little heavy and awkward to lift and shake when they're loaded with food. Of the models we've tested, Breville's The Air Fryer Chef Compact has a ceramic coating and a small



capacity, potentially making it easier to lift and shake the basket when it's loaded. It's also recommended by our experts. Alternatively, if lifting is an issue, you could consider a multi-function oven with air fryer functionality – these have a door that opens

and small (relatively light) trays that slide out. We've tested the Sunbeam 22L Multi-Function Oven and Air Fryer and the Sunbeam Nutricrisp 17L Air Fryer Oven, which both have stainless steel interiors and receive good cooking performance scores.

Q My son is going into high school next year and I need to get him a laptop. But everything seems so expensive, it doesn't look like there are many new ones for under \$1000. Is this what laptops cost in 2026? What can we do if we can't afford to spend over \$1000 on one?



A CHOICE
computer
expert Peter
Zaluzny:

Unfortunately, the cost of computer components has skyrocketed in

recent years, which is driving up the price of laptops. You can still find some more affordable options that have enough power for school assignments and basic day-to-day tasks, but they may not be the best long-term solution. Computer programs are regularly updated and cheaper laptops may not be able to keep up with increasing software requirements over time. This can become a big problem if your son picks up some specialised subjects that require a more powerful computer – like graphic design or photo/video editing.



The best option is to do your research now, then wait for a sale. Discounts on tech are still usually pretty good and you may find that a \$1400 laptop drops down to \$900 during major sales periods. You can also buy a slightly older, mid-range laptop released in the last one to two years. These are still suitable for school and are most likely available

at a reduced price. Try to avoid computers that are older than this, as they may not be eligible for long-term system support. Otherwise, you can try the second-hand market but treat it like buying a used car. Try before you buy or shop with a well-known or well-regarded retailer who will accept returns if the unit is faulty.

Q I'm quite baffled by the "single-slice score" in the toasters review. How or why is this different to the 2- or 4-slice score? I can't see how there would be any difference in performance based on how many slices you put in. Kindly let me know what I'm missing here!

A CHOICE
home
appliances
expert Kim

Gilmour: We do find some differences in toasting results where we use one slice only. This



is likely due to the radiant heat in the other empty slot that could affect how hot the toast gets and can cause differences in the browning results. It is a good test to see how the toaster copes with



a partial load and whether it can still toast evenly or not on the preferred settings. As you can see in the photos above of one toaster's single slice results, one side is OK and the other is very light.