



Highlights: Buying Secondhand Stuff

Buying used items won't just save you lots of money; it keeps those purchases out of landfills. And getting an already manufactured product saves resources and energy. **Chicago Consumers' Checkbook** (Checkbook.org) dove into the secondhand market and shares its findings in a new report. Some highlights:

How much can you save?

There are many ways to find and buy previously owned goods: local message board and listservs; websites and apps; friends and neighbors; yard and estate sales; thrift and consignment stores; and well-known retailers. Checkbook's shoppers went hunting for a variety of items and found big savings. For example:

- Step2 LifeStyle PartyTime Kitchen: \$150 new, \$70 used, in good condition
- 2017 Specialized Hotrock 20' Hardtail bike: \$360 new, \$250 used, in excellent condition
- Adidas Gazelle women's sneakers: \$80 new, \$20 used, but only worn once
- iPhone X 256GB: \$1,049 new, \$899 refurbished by Apple
- Dell Latitude laptop model E7270 with a 256GB hard drive: \$1,300 new, \$800 refurbished by Dell
- Keiser M3 stationary bike: \$2,000 new, \$500 used, in excellent condition
- Room & Board "Ian" sofa in Orla gray: \$1,339 new, \$840 used, in like-new condition
- 1.01 carat round-cut diamond, no setting, GIA-graded, excellent cut, VS1 clarity, F color: \$7,000–\$11,000 new, \$5,901 used, in excellent condition
- GE 7.5 cu. ft. electric clothes dryer model #GFD45ESPMDG: \$999 new, \$599 scratch-and-dent
- TaylorMade lightweight stand golf bag: \$120 new, \$30 used, in good condition

General advice for buying used

- Be safe. If you're meeting up with a private seller you found online, take along a friend. If possible, meet in a public place, and keep your phone handy. Trust your instincts.
- The best way to prevent used-purchase snafus is to inspect the item before you buy it—but that's not often an option when shopping online.
- If you receive something that doesn't work or is in worse condition than advertised, you may or may not have recourse, depending on where you bought it and how you paid.
- If you can pay via credit card, that's best, since you can dispute the charge with your company if there's a problem. Online marketplaces like eBay and Amazon offer dispute resolution services. PayPal also lets you discuss problems directly with the seller and, if necessary, allows you to file claims; eBay decides if you deserve a refund.
- If you pay a private seller using cash (often the only payment they'll accept) or via Venmo, which doesn't allow you to dispute transactions, you're likely stuck.

What not to buy used

- You can buy used mattresses, vacuum cleaners, rugs, makeup, hats, bathing suits, and well-worn shoes, but to Checkbook's staff, the yuck factor voids the potential savings.
- Bike helmets. Old ones aren't as effective, and any that are tested by accidents should be discarded.
- Avoid paying much for used items made of rubber (tires, rain boots) or with watertight seals.
- Checkbook suggests buying used TVs and laptops only from well-known retailers.
- Unless you will test wiring and rewire if needed, avoid old lamps, which are sometimes fire hazards.
- Upholstered furniture can be bargains secondhand but calculate the costs to reupholster or steam clean. To avoid bedbugs, consider isolating items until you can thoroughly inspect and clean them.
- Don't buy a used car seat unless it is relatively new and you'd trust the previous owner with your kid's life.

Checkbook's editors are available for interviews. Please contact Jamie Lettis at 202-454-3006 or jlettis@checkbook.org to schedule.