

before you buy | repair or replace



Repair or Replace?

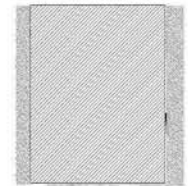
When is an old appliance worth fixing? More than 27,000 subscribers help you decide—and save.

Fix it or ditch it? It's a question debated by anyone who's ever pulled a dirty dish out of a "clean" dishwasher load or found an empty icemaker bucket 5 minutes before a party. Our general rule of thumb: If the repair will cost more than half the price of a comparable new model, replace the appliance. Remember, though, since even a minor glitch can sideline a major appliance, repairs may make sense even on models that are five or more years old. For example, a fried circuit board is often to blame for a broken range or oven, and a

damaged water inlet valve for an inoperable dishwasher. Those parts are all fairly easy to replace.

When should you call a pro?

Check our advice for each appliance on the pages that follow. And if you do decide to ditch the dishwasher or kick the cooktop to the curb, check our lists of the most reliable brands, based on our latest national surveys of tens of thousands of appliance owners. We found that when respondents did opt for repair, they were more satisfied with



GETTY IMAGES

Refrigerator

TOP-FREEZER

1-3 yr. REPAIR	4-6 yr. CONSIDER REPAIR	7+ yr. REPLACE
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Median repair cost \$168
TIP Top-freezers are the least expensive type, so if your fridge is four to six years old, you should lean toward replacing it.
Reliable brands Frigidaire, Whirlpool; Kenmore (with icemaker)
Repair-prone brands GE (with icemaker), Maytag (without icemaker)

BOTTOM-FREEZER

1-7 yr. REPAIR	8 yr. CONSIDER REPAIR
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Median repair cost \$188
TIP Models with icemakers fail more often than those without.
Reliable brands Jenn-Air, Kenmore, KitchenAid (with icemaker); Amana, Kenmore, LG (without icemaker)
Repair-prone brand GE

SIDE-BY-SIDE

1-5 yr. REPAIR	6-8 yr. CONSIDER REPAIR
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Median repair cost \$190
TIP Side-by-sides almost always have an icemaker in them, which explains why it's the most repair-prone type of refrigerator.
Reliable brands Kenmore, Whirlpool
Repair-prone brand LG

*Survey data allows recommendations through eight years of ownership.



New appliances use less energy and water than older models—another incentive to upgrade.



Is It Really Dead?

Finding out can easily cost you \$50 for the service call alone. So before you contact a repair shop, make sure your appliance is really broken. Check the troubleshooting section of your owner's manual and look online at the manufacturer's website for repair instructions or for free technical support that can walk you through diagnosing the problem and making the fix. Sites such as repairclinic.com and pcappliance.com offer extensive repair advice, including videos, in hopes of selling you the necessary parts.

independent service shops than with factory or factory-authorized facilities. Not only were repairs done more quickly but they also cost less. If you prefer factory service, ask whether the technician who does the work on your machine—and not just his or her boss back at the office—has been properly trained for the specific line or model you own.

Suppose your broken appliance falls in the "Consider Repair" zone. Pricier models are usually worth keeping longer, because replacing them with something

comparable costs more than cheaper models. If an item has already broken down once before or isn't performing well, lean toward replacing it. Also consider energy efficiency: Today's refrigerators and dishwashers use less energy and/or water than older models, another incentive for an upgrade. But our tests continue to find significant differences from model to model, so check our Ratings carefully.

And remember to dispose of old appliances properly. Many retailers offer free haul-away when you buy a

new appliance. ApplianceSmart, Best Buy, and Sears participate in the Environmental Protection Agency's Responsible Appliance Disposal Program, which ensures that any harmful chemicals will be reclaimed or destroyed and that all metal, plastic, and glass will be recycled. Your utility company may even pay you to get rid of an old energy-wasting appliance—so take the time to check their policies. Also consider contacting the Steel Recycling Institute at recycle-steel.org to find an appliance-recycling program in your area.

before you buy **repair or replace**

Cooktop

GAS

1-3 yr. REPAIR	4-5 yr. CONSIDER REPAIR	6+ yr. REPLACE
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Median repair cost \$171

TIP Repairs of gas cooktops are more problematic than most. If a burner has stopped working, you might need a new valve or an igniter module.

Reliable brands Kenmore, Whirlpool
Repair-prone brands Dacor, Jenn-Air



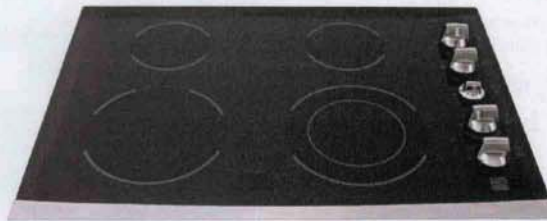
ELECTRIC

1-3 yr. REPAIR	4-6 yr. CONSIDER REPAIR	7+ yr. REPLACE
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Median repair cost \$169

TIP Survey respondents reported a high satisfaction rate with repairs to this appliance, although the parts were not always easy to find.

Reliable brands Frigidaire, GE, Kenmore
Repair-prone brand Jenn-Air



Get Social to Get Help

Social-media tools have become some of the best ways to get a manufacturer's attention. More companies have started using monitoring software to scan Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and the like. So there's a good chance they'll pick up your complaint (or praise, for that matter, should you broadcast a positive experience). Just ask Adam Fort of Baltimore, who told *The Consumerist*, our sister website, that after he posted comments on his Facebook page about his dead Whirlpool oven, he received a message from a customer-service representative for the manufacturer. "Even though the unit was not within its warranty period, [the representative] agreed to split the costs of both the parts and the labor," he wrote. Direct e-mail can also do the trick, as it did for the Koeppel family of Los Angeles, who wrote the CEO of Home Depot about their dysfunctional LG dishwasher. Home Depot responded within 12 hours, saying it would replace the dishwasher.



Dishwasher

1-3 yr. REPAIR	4-6 yr. CONSIDER REPAIR	7+ yr. REPLACE
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Median repair cost \$137

TIP If your home has hard water, a whole-house water softener could improve cleaning results.

Reliable brands Bosch, Hotpoint, Kenmore, Whirlpool
Repair-prone brands Fisher & Paykel, LG





Wall Oven

ELECTRIC

1-3 yr. REPAIR	4-6 yr. CONSIDER REPAIR	7+ yr. REPLACE
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Median repair cost \$239
TIP It's one of the toughest appliances to fix. Repairs are pricey and tend to take a long time, and parts are hard to find, so it really pays to buy a reliable brand.
Reliable brands Frigidaire, GE, Kenmore
Repair-prone brands Jenn-Air, Thermador

Range

GAS

1-4 yr. REPAIR	5-7 yr. CONSIDER REPAIR	8+ yr. REPLACE
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Median repair cost \$156
TIP Dual-fuel models are pricey, so they're often worth fixing.
Reliable brands Frigidaire, GE, Hotpoint, Kenmore (gas); GE (dual-fuel)
Repair-prone brands KitchenAid (gas), Jenn-Air (dual-fuel)

ELECTRIC

1-3 yr. REPAIR	4-5 yr. CONSIDER REPAIR	6+ yr. REPLACE
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Median repair cost \$170
TIP Parts for electric ranges can be hard to find. Check the manufacturer's website for free technical support.
Reliable brands GE, Hotpoint, Whirlpool
Repair-prone brands Jenn-Air, KitchenAid

Rule of thumb:
 If the repair will cost more than half the price of a comparable new appliance, consider replacing.



Microwave

OVER-THE-RANGE

1-2 yr. REPAIR	3 yr. CONSIDER REPAIR	4+ yr. REPLACE
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Median repair cost \$139
TIP Some top-rated models are in the \$200-to-\$300 range, so you might be better off with a replacement if you're facing an expensive repair bill.
Reliable brands Frigidaire, LG, Whirlpool
Repair-prone brand KitchenAid



Buying Used Can Mean Big Savings

We generally don't recommend buying used appliances because you'll miss out on the latest efficiencies and innovations. Case in point: A refrigerator made today uses some 50 percent less energy than one made 20 years ago, and it's likely to have better storage features. But homeowners sometimes ditch fairly new appliances if they're remodeling and the existing units don't match the new décor. So if the age of the appliance is in the repair zone of our Repair-or-Replace timeline, the price is less than half that of a comparable new model, and it's a brand with a low repair rate, you might consider buying secondhand. Habitat for Humanity's ReStores are one source for used appliances; proceeds go to help local affiliates. You can also search online for used-appliance outlets in your area.