

Article

Buy Used, But Protect Your Safety and Health

Do you love the retail experience, where you leave your house empty-handed and come home with a new, beautifully packaged item in a shiny and chic shopping bag? Each year, Americans spend billions of dollars on new products without even considering the idea of buying something used instead of new. However, as people look for ways to make the dollar stretch farther, more Americans are seeing the value in buying gently “pre-owned” items. These used items can be as small and inexpensive as a book or as large and costly as a car, truck, trailer, or RV. You can use three key criteria to decide whether to buy something new or used: whether the item is important for personal safety, whether the item's hygiene is in question, and whether the item is basically the same whether it is used or new.

First, some items may simply be unclean or have hidden hygiene problems. Lice can lurk in caps and hats, so stay away from used headwear, especially when it's been owned by someone you don't know and trust. Likewise, bedbugs can lurk in used mattresses and pillows--that's not a chance worth taking. Upholstered furniture can present cleanliness problems, too; it can be extremely difficult to remove odors and stains from such furniture. That retro couch from the 1970s may look appealing, and you may think it'll clean up nicely--but you could end up spending a lot of money on getting it professionally reupholstered. You'd be better off buying new furniture.

Next, you are better off buying new when the item is related to personal safety. For example, used bicycle and motorcycle helmets may have been involved in accidents that compromised the helmets' structure or safety features. Another example is car seats and cribs for infants and children, which may have been damaged in some way; because these products are essential to children's safety, it is better to purchase them new. Used car tires are also a bad idea for safety reasons; used tires may have worn treads that can lead to blowouts and other serious problems.

Finally, it makes sense to think about whether the item is essentially the same whether you buy it used or new. A book is going to have the same words printed on the same paper whether you buy it new in the bookstore for \$24.95 or used on the Internet for \$5.00.

Many factors should weigh into your decision whether to buy new or used, but you can't go wrong by following a few simple guidelines. Buy new when you need a guarantee that the product will be fresh and clean. Also buy new when individual safety is essential. Buy used when you can get an item that provides the same content or same experience for substantially less money.