

Article

Buy Used, but Protect Your Health and Safety

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? Do you have buyer's remorse and wonder if you should have bought the item used? You aren't alone; 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's hygiene is in question, whether the item is important for personal safety, 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 has been owned by someone you don't know and trust. Likewise, bedbugs can lurk in used mattresses and pillows—buying those items used is not a chance worth taking. Upholstered furniture can present cleanliness problems, too, because it can be extremely difficult to remove odors and stains from the fabric.

Next, you are better off buying new when an item is related to personal safety. For example, used bicycle or motorcycle helmets might 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 might have been damaged in some way unknown to you; because these products are essential to children's safety, it is better to purchase them new. Used car tires are a bad idea for safety reasons; used tires might have worn treads that can lead to blowouts and other serious problems.

Finally, it makes sense to ask whether the item is essentially the same whether you buy it used or new. A book has 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. A \$2 used CD plays the same songs as a new \$15 CD; the first season of your favorite TV series will include the same episodes in a \$10 used set as it will in a \$49 new set. Hand tools such as hammers and wrenches are very durable and are a good bargain bought used because they tend to last a long time. A certified used car (that has not been in an accident) can provide the same driving experience as a new car for much less money. In fact, you may even be able to afford a better car with more features when you buy a used car.

Many factors should weigh into your decision to buy either a new or used product, 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. So, the next time you pick up that new DVD at your local retailer, think twice—you might find a used copy of that same DVD on the Internet for less than half the price.