

The best treadmill of 2020: NordicTrack, Nautilus, Peloton and more

I spent three months testing treadmills so you don't have to.

Raise your hand if you love running on a treadmill. Yeah, me either. But there are plenty of valid reasons you might want to get one for your home. Bad weather, safety concerns or even the fear of judgement can keep you from hitting the gym or pavement outside for cardio, and make a treadmill a more appealing fitness equipment purchase. If your gym-based workout session is only spent jogging, buying your own treadmill might end up being more cost-effective.

The treadmills that I tested are suited for all fitness levels and give you exercise options ranging from light jogging to an intense cardio workout.

There are hundreds of treadmills you can buy online, ranging from a few hundred bucks to expensive treadmills costing well over \$15,000. Through my research, I learned what kinds of features to look for both a both light and intense workout, what price range is best and which are the best treadmill options for the money. Now I'm sharing that with you.

How I picked

I'm a casual runner who's used her fair share of treadmills over the years and much prefers running on solid ground. I've been running for exercise off and on for about 10 years, and have participated in several races too. While I'm far from being an expert on running, I have about as much experience as the average person (not elite athlete or ultra marathoner) who wants to buy a treadmill.

In narrowing down which treadmills to review, I picked the best value for the top brands -- Nautilus, NordicTrack, Proform, Bowflex, Schwinn and Sole -- which meant getting the treadmills with modern features but still within a price range of \$1,000 to \$3,000. I purposefully didn't pick the highest-end option from each brand, because I reasoned most people want to spend less money and want to know if the cheaper option is just as good.

I threw in the ultra-cheap Sunny Fitness model as a wildcard because it is a best seller on Amazon and Walmart.com, and I thought it would be interesting to see exactly what you get for much less money.

How I tested

Over almost the entire summer, I had treadmills coming in and out of the CNET office for training sessions. I was primarily judging these machines on quality, features and usability. Did it feel stable, and well put together?

Is it particularly loud? How easy is it to start a workout, and are the buttons or screen responsive when you're moving? What kind of workout programs does it have?

For each treadmill, I did a few exercise sessions -- both walking and running. I did free-form workouts and used at least one of the preprogrammed workouts, where available. I compared many of these models side-by-side, when I was able to have as many in the same room as possible.

For the most part, I did not consider the overall footprint of the machines in my reviews, because everyone is going to have different space restrictions. However, all of these machines fold up when not in use and I did consider how bulky the machine looks and feels.

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