

CAR CARE

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Keep It Up

MAINTENANCE CAN MAINTAIN THE VALUE OF YOUR CAR



PHOTO: DISCOVERY / YAYMICRO.COM

Servicing your car according to its maintenance schedule and keeping good records can help you get a better resale price for it down the road.

Properly maintaining your car can keep it running longer, smoother and more efficiently. Did you know it can boost the value of your car, too?

Well-maintained cars hold their value better than ones that have let the required maintenance slip. You might think it's OK to skip or delay your car's 60,000-mile checkup, for example, but that can end up costing you more money down the road.

SMART MONEY

Aside from the fact that fastidious

maintenance can help to keep your car out of the garage for repairs, it can also make a difference when it comes time to sell your car.

Think about it. When you're shopping for a used car, you'd always rather have one that's been perfectly, meticulously maintained than one that's had sporadic oil changes and an unknown history.

A well-maintained car translates

into confidence for the next owner — and that translates into dollars in your pocket.

KEEP THE RECORDS

As you have the regular maintenance done on your car, it's a good idea to keep all the records and receipts in a file. Some drivers like to keep them in the glove box so they're

always accessible.

Not only will it help you keep track of your car's upkeep over time, but it's also an excellent tool when it comes time to sell your car.

If the buyer can see hard evidence that every oil change, every checkup and every major overhaul has been performed exactly on schedule, that's going to make your car worth more in the marketplace.

Breathing Clean Air

AIR FILTERS AREN'T JUST FOR THE ENGINE; CHECK THEM FOR THE CABIN, TOO

Just like us humans, cars need clean air to stay healthy.

Since engines are powered by thousands of tiny explosions per minute, they need plenty of oxygen to burn efficiently.

If you want to give your car a breath of fresh air, pay close attention to the air filters' condition and replacement schedule.

ENGINE AIR FILTER

Every engine uses a filter to clean the air before it enters the combustion chamber.

These filters play two vital roles. One, they keep dust, dirt and grime out of your engine, which makes it last longer. And two, they make sure the air is as clean as possible when it enters the combustion chamber, which helps with gas mileage.

If you've noticed your car getting worse mileage lately, one of the first places to look is your engine air filter. A dirty filter can make it harder for the engine to "breathe," so always follow the replacement schedule and use the factory-recommended filter type.

CABIN AIR FILTER

More and more new cars are using a second type of air filter, but it has nothing to do with the engine. This filter cleans the air entering the cabin.

While it started years ago on very expensive, high-end luxury cars, many more moderately priced cars are equipped with cabin air filters these days.

The idea is simple: Just like your air filters at home, a cabin air filter will remove dust and pollen from the air — and sometimes unpleasant scents, too — to make it healthier to breathe the air inside your car.

People who have allergy problems often love these filters because they can eliminate allergens on long road trips. A clean filter can also make the air inside the car smell fresher.

Check your vehicle's owner's manual to see whether your car has a cabin air filter, along with how often it needs to be replaced.



Signs Your Brakes are Going Bad

It's every driver's nightmare: the thought of your brakes suddenly failing.

While brake failures are extremely rare, there are some signs of brake problems that every vehicle owner should be aware of. If you experience any of these, it's important to get your brakes checked right away.

SQUEAKS

Most cars are designed to emit a high-pitched squealing noise when the brake pads are dangerously thin. A small, metal clip will rub up against the brakes, telling you it's past time for a brake job.

Even if your brakes feel just fine, and stop the car without a problem, ignoring this squeal can lead to permanent brake damage. It's a good idea to have your brakes inspected by a professional any time you hear noises when stopping. Good, healthy brakes will always work quietly on modern cars.

VIBRATIONS

If you sense any unusual vibrations when stopping, this can also mean it's time to get your brakes checked.

Some people will feel a slight vibration in their steering wheel and assume it's a problem with the suspension or tires, but that's not necessarily the case. Brakes that are worn unevenly can manifest themselves through the steering feel, especially if the vibrations get worse when you step on the brake pedal.

You may also feel a slight vibration in the pedal itself, often caused by brake rotors that aren't perfectly smooth. This will get worse over time and can wear your brake system out prematurely.

SQUISHY PEDAL

One of the most dangerous symptoms of all can be a squishy feel at the brake pedal.

If the pedal doesn't seem to exert much pressure, or even lets you push it all the way to the floorboard, your brakes could be on the verge of total failure due to a loss of brake fluid, air or water in the brake lines, or a leaky or broken power brake system.

If the brake pedal feels considerably softer than usual



PHOTO: DASEAFORD / YAYMICRO.COM

when you step on it, consider this an emergency and stop driving the car. Get it checked out by a brake expert right away.

SMELL

Finally, some brake problems can manifest themselves in an unusual way: through your nose.

If you smell a metallic burning scent, especially after hard stops, there's a good chance it could be coming

from your brakes. You're either overworking them, or there could be a major mechanical problem causing them to overheat. Either way, you should get a brake inspection to check it out.

A Simple Checkup

QUICK AND EASY FLUIDS TO CHECK UNDER THE HOOD

Some people can be intimidated when they look under the hood of their car. There are so many hoses, wires and moving parts under there that it can quickly feel overwhelming.

But fear not. One of the most important parts of vehicle maintenance is also the simplest: checking your fluids.

OWNER'S MANUAL

The first place you should start is by opening the owner's manual for your vehicle. Not only will it tell you where to look under the hood to check each of the fluids, but it also will specify exactly what type of fluid to buy.

Every car is different, and buying the exact fluid that your manufacturer recommends can extend the life of your car by thousands of miles.

OIL

Perhaps the most important fluid of all is your engine oil. It keeps the moving parts inside your engine lubricated, but oil that gets too low or dirty can lead to complete engine failure — something your wallet definitely doesn't want to see happen.

Find the dipstick under the hood. It's usually marked with "engine oil" or comes with a brightly colored handle, and it's typically easy to access.

Pull out the dipstick, wipe it clean with a rag or paper towel, and then slide it back into place. Pull it out a second time, and that's when you can read your oil level on the dipstick.

COOLANT

Your engine's coolant, a mixture of

water and anti-freeze, helps keep the engine from overheating, and it's something that needs to be checked often — especially if you're thinking about going on a long road trip.

Most newer cars have a coolant reservoir, a plastic container where excess coolant is collected. It should have a raised "fill" line that shows how much liquid it should hold when the engine is cool.

BRAKES

Both old brake fluid and a lack of brake fluid can pose a serious danger.

To check your brake fluid, look for the brake fluid reservoir under the hood. It's often, but not always, located toward the back of the engine compartment.

Make sure the fluid looks clean and is filled to the "fill" line. Be careful not to allow any water to enter the brake system, so it's best not to add fluid when it's raining if you can avoid it.

WINDOW WASHER

Finally, check to see if your window washer fluid is full before taking off on any long trips.

It might seem like a luxury, but running out of washer fluid can be a serious safety concern in wet or snowy weather. Splashes of mud and muck from the road can be blinding on your windshield, so always keep the washer fluid topped off.



Do You Need New Tires?

SIGNS THAT IT'S TIME FOR A NEW SET OF RUBBER

When it comes to maintaining your car, few things are as important as your tires — quite literally where the rubber meets the road.

Not only do your tires keep you safe, providing the traction you need on the road and in bad weather, but they also play a big role in the comfort of your car. Good tires with the proper air pressure will give you the best ride and handling, not to mention better gas mileage.

Here are four signs your car needs new tires:

TREAD DEPTH

The first and most obvious thing to check is the depth of the treads.

All tires wear down over time, and it's important to check them regularly to be sure the treads are still in good condition.

An old rule of thumb involves using a penny to measure the depth. Rotate it so that the top of Abraham Lincoln's head is pointed in toward the tire. If the tread is shallow enough to see Abe's head without any obstruction, it's past time to get new tires.

NOISE & VIBRATION

If you've noticed a new noise coming from the wheel wells or a vibration that changes with the speed of the vehicle, there's a good chance you could have a problem with your tires.

Even if your tires look perfect, sometimes they can have problems internally. Layers could be separating inside the tire, it could be wearing unevenly, or it might have a flat spot from prolonged skidding.

CRACKS

Extreme temperatures, prolonged exposure to sunlight and changes in humidity can all eventually lead to the sidewall of your tires breaking down.

Good tires will have a rubbery, supple texture to them. If they look dry and cracked, you could be risking a blowout, even if the tread depth is still thick.

BLISTERS

When you look at the tire from in front or back, it should have a smooth, even surface. If you see any blisters or bulges on the tire, they could be weak spots that could lead to a blowout at any time.



Get Ready for a Storm

While thunderstorms can be sudden and unpredictable, most drivers can predict one thing with certainty: They're going to face nasty weather at some point this year.

Getting your car ready for bad weather isn't difficult or expensive, but it does require some forethought. Here are some things to check to make sure your car is ready to face a storm.

WIPER BLADES

Most drivers forget about their windshield wiper blades until they need them the most: in the middle of a heavy rainstorm.

Don't wait until a storm hits to think about your wipers. While it's dry and sunny, check the condition of your wiper blades. The rubber should be soft and easily bendable. If it seems hard, dry, cracked, torn or peeling, get new blades right away.

The Car Care Council recommends you replace the blades every six months to make sure they're in good condition.

WINDSHIELD WASHER FLUID

Have you ever had a big truck splash mud and grime onto your windshield after a storm? If so, you know how nerve-racking it can be to see your frontal vision completely obscured on the highway — even for just a few seconds.



PHOTO: NAUMOID / YAYMICRO.COM

It's important that you're able to clear your windshield very quickly, which is why keeping your washer fluid topped off can actually be a big safety advantage for drivers.

While you should use special de-icing washer fluid during the winter months, there are more specialized washer fluids that can do a better job during the summer driving season for removing

bugs or sticky mud from your windshield.

TIRES AND ALIGNMENT

Finally, nothing provides more confidence in wet conditions than a set of good, all-weather tires.

You should always keep your tires in top condition, but it's especially important in areas that see a lot of

stormy, rainy weather. The deeper your tire treads are, the more water they'll be able to displace on wet roads, which gives you added traction and better handling in the rain.

For even more confidence, you can opt for tires that are specially designed for wet-weather driving. These tires will funnel extra water away from the driving surface as they roll, which keeps the

vehicle firmly planted during storms.

It's also a good idea to check your car's alignment. Over time, your suspension can get out of adjustment, which can result in worse handling and sometimes unpredictable skids. A professional tire shop can precisely check the alignment to make sure it's within factory specs to give you the safest handling in all types of weather.

Car Care Schedule

HOW OFTEN TO INSPECT YOUR VEHICLE

Taking care of your car is easier if you can mark it on your calendar. While your car's owner's manual is the best place to look for specifics about your vehicle, the Car Care Council has released some guidelines as a general rule of thumb for car owners.

CHECK MONTHLY

- Check Engine Light On
- Cleaning Lights
- Tire Inflation and Condition
- Windshield Washer Fluid

CHECK EVERY 3 MONTHS/ 3,000 MILES

- Automatic Transmission Fluid
- Battery and Cables
- Belts
- Check Engine Light On
- Engine Air Filter
- Engine Oil and Filter
- Exhaust
- Fuel Filter
- Hoses
- Lights
- Power Steering Fluid
- Tire Inflation and Condition
- Windshield Washer Fluid

CHECK EVERY 6 MONTHS/ 6,000 MILES

- Automatic Transmission Fluid
- Battery and Cables
- Belts
- Chassis Lubrication
- Check Engine Light On
- Polish
- Engine Air Filter
- Engine Oil and Filter
- Exhaust
- Fuel Filter
- Hoses
- Lights
- Power Steering Fluid
- Tire Inflation and Condition
- Windshield Washer Fluid
- Wiper Blades

CHECK EVERY 9 MONTHS/ 9,000 MILES

- Automatic Transmission Fluid
- Battery and Cables
- Belts
- Check Engine Light On
- Engine Air Filter
- Engine Oil and Filter
- Exhaust
- Fuel Filter
- Hoses
- Lights
- Power Steering Fluid
- Tire Inflation and Condition
- Windshield Washer Fluid

CHECK EVERY 12 MONTHS/ 12,000 MILES

- Automatic Transmission Fluid
- Battery and Cables
- Belts
- Brakes
- Cabin Air Filter
- Chassis Lubrication
- Check Engine Light On
- Polish
- Coolant (Antifreeze)
- Engine Air Filter
- Engine Oil and Filter
- Exhaust Fuel Filter
- Hoses
- Lights
- Power Steering Fluid
- Spark Plugs
- Steering and Suspension
- Tire Inflation and Condition
- Windshield Washer Fluid
- Wiper Blades

