

15 Basic Car Maintenance Tips

Keeping your car running at its best isn't as simple as booking it in for a service once a year. If you want to catch small issues early and fix them before they develop into big problems, you've got to do some Do It Yourself car maintenance yourself.

Tip #1 — Battery changes

Dealers and mechanics will charge a lot just to swap out your battery for a new one. And this doesn't include tow truck fees if a dead battery causes you break down somewhere!

If the circumstances allow it (and you are comfortable changing your car's battery yourself), you can save money this way. Just be sure to use check the type of battery your car requires. To prevent a breakdown before it happens, replace your battery every two to three years.

Tip #2 — Brake pad changes

This is another tasks mechanics and brake specialists will charge a premium for. The industry wants consumers to believe that this is harder to do than it actually is and will charge a lot for parts and labour. New brake pads themselves are relatively cheap and with the right tools (wheel lug wrench, some basic wrenches, pliers, a jack and a set of jack stands) and level of comfort, it is possible to perform this change yourself.

Tip #3 — Oil change

This is one of the easiest maintenance tasks to do yourself. Modern cars do not need an oil change every 3,000 miles like cars of the past did. These days, it is safe to go 10,000 miles between changes. If you know the quality and quantity of oil to use, it's easy to save!

Tip #4 — Tune up

Just like with oil changes, modern cars do not require a lot of hands-on engine adjustments as many engines have electronic sensors and controls. Don't be fooled by dealers who charge to give your car a "full tune up" as they are likely just performing preventative maintenance, like the things I mentioned above. Unless you feel there is something more serious wrong with your vehicle, you can save a lot of money by keeping up with basic maintenance yourself.

Tip #5 — Check your fluids

You should know how to check the antifreeze, coolant and wiper fluid in your car. Always check the owner's manual but it's pretty common for cars to allow you to easily take a look. If you're running low, be sure to add more to avoid any problems. Furthermore, be sure to regularly check you don't have any leaks!

Tip #6 — Replace your cabin air filter

This simple tip will help you feel fresh and cool whenever there's some warmer weather. It's so easy to do that you shouldn't have to pay anybody else to do it for you, and you can get these filters at pretty much any auto parts store. It might not make a difference in how your car runs but it sure benefits you!

Tip #8 — Follow the recommended maintenance schedule

Follow the manufacturer's recommended maintenance schedule. I'll caveat this by saying that repair shops and dealers will often try to up-sell you on more stringent maintenance schedules. Don't listen to them. However, do study your manual's maintenance schedule and follow it to the letter. This will give you the best chance at prolonging the life of your car.

Tip #9 — High octane fuel

As your car ages, you may consider higher grade fuel. Carbon deposits in the engine can actually raise the engine's octane rating over time. These deposits happen over time so typically newer cars won't really benefit from the higher octane fuel (unless your manufacturer specifically recommends it). The higher octane gas also often has other additives that help clean out your carburettor.

Tip #10 — Rotate Tires

The front tires on a front wheel drive vehicle are put under more stress than those of the rear. The front wheels accelerate, brake and steer the vehicle. All these jobs cause additional wear to occur on the front tires.

The rear tires are basically just supporting the vehicle's backend so wear much more slowly.

Moving the rear tires to the front of the vehicle allows the extra wear and tear of the front end to be shared by all tires thus boosting their longevity. This is why tire rotation is recommended to be done at least every 5,000 miles by many sources.

Another reason why you should rotate tires is that it allows for a visual inspection of the brakes since they now can be easily accessed. With today's long oil change intervals, less rotations and brake inspections are getting done, resulting in premature tire wear and possible brake issues. I suggest getting your wheels rotated in between oil changes, especially if you're on a high mileage oil change interval.

Tip #11 — Replace Wipers

Seeing where you are going is pretty important when driving. During rain or snow conditions and situations where the windshield becomes obscured by dirt or dead bugs, your wipers come into play, making them an item that is high on the safety list. Crazy thing is many people don't change them until they are literally falling off the vehicle.

Losing a clear view during inclement weather is one of the consequences of having bad wipers but there are worse things that can happen such as the blade falling off and the wiper arm scratching the windshield. My recommendation for wiper replacement is twice a year. I prefer to do it in Spring and Autumn, which is also a good time to check those tire pressures.

A very basic way to make your wipers last is to take a clean damp rag and wipe the squeegee on each from end to end. At the same time clean the spot that the wiper parks at. Many times, this area will have dirt built up which affects the wiper blades.

Tip #12 — Use proper fuel type

Fuel comes in different grades and fuel companies inevitably want you to use their “ultra-fuel” in your vehicle for maximum performance. Of course, this fuel costs more and makes a better profit for the company. However, you probably don’t need it for your ride.

Most vehicles on the road are designed to run on the cheap petrol. Better yet, the cheap petrol has all the important additives that your vehicle needs. Using higher octane fuel (the ultra-fuel) in a vehicle does nothing for the vehicle if it is not designed to run on the more expensive fuels. You are just wasting your hard-earned money. Don’t do it.

There are vehicles out there that are designed for the higher-octane fuels and using the proper fuel in these vehicles is important. Vehicles requiring these fuels will usually be labeled in a few different places like inside the fuel cap cover letting you know what the minimum fuel rating to be used is.

Tip #13 — Keep car clean inside and out

Keeping your car clean does more than make it look good. It will also help the vehicle deal with all the elements it is exposed to and slow down the ageing process.

Another reason for cleaning your car is that it makes you look it over. You get a good visual inspection of it and are more likely to see issues when they first start not when they become real problems.

You may realise that there is a nail in your tire and it seems to be losing air, allowing you to catch it before you need to dig out and install the spare tire. Under the hood you may see an oil or coolant leak before they leave you stuck.

Tip #14 — Changing Headlight Bulbs

Another simple DIY car repair that can be done quickly and without needing any fancy equipment is changing your headlight bulbs. Although you will do this probably only when you notice a problem with your lights, it is still good to know how to do it, because you never know when the bulb in your headlights will go out.

Tip #15 — Changing Tires

And last but not least, if there is one DIY car repair everyone HAS to know how to do it is to change the tires. No matter if we are talking about changing a flat or just switching summer tires for winter ones and vice versa, you need to know how to do it. Or else you can get stranded on the side of the road for hours. So make sure you know the basics of tire replacement as well as have done it at least once under the supervision of someone who knows their tire change stuff. And you will be ready for that time when you have to replace the tire on your own.