



# fall CAR CARE

2020

## TIRE MAINTENANCE KEEPS DRIVERS SAFE

Maintaining tires is an important component of safe driving. Tires are some of the hardest working parts on a car or truck and are subjected to wear and tear every time rubber meets the road. Tires affect many components of driving, including handling, braking and the comfort of the ride. Maintaining tires makes driving safe not only for drivers and their passengers, but also for fellow motorists. Poor tire maintenance can lead to premature wear and potentially result in a

blowout. AAA notes it is important to visually inspect tires as often as possible. Drivers should look for overall tread wear. Pay special attention to tread wear on one edge of the tires, which could indicate poor alignment. Erratic tread wear may mean tires are out of balance. Drivers also should pay attention to how their cars drive and sounds. Unusual vibration or thumping noises suggest issues with the tires. A car that pulls in one direction also may be experiencing

tire problems. Vehicle owners should be aware of the routine maintenance steps that can keep them safe and improve the life expectancy of tires.

- **TIRE PRESSURE:** Keeping tires properly inflated is one of the most important steps to maintaining them. Tires lose around 1 psi per month, and underinflated or overinflated tires can contribute to unusual wear, blowouts and even excessive fuel consumption.
- **ROTATION:** Check the owner's manual or recommendations from the tire

manufacturer, but know that most mechanics advise having tires rotated every 5,000 miles. Rotation helps distribute wear more evenly on tires.

- **BALANCING:** AAA says balancing also helps minimize uneven wear and tear. Balanced tires are achieved by using small weights attached to the wheels to limit vibration of the tire and wheels as they turn. New tires should be balanced, and tires also should be balanced after one or more is removed to repair a puncture.

- **ALIGNMENT:** Vehicles have wheel alignment measurements that pertain to manufacturers' specifications. Alignment that falls outside of the range can impact handling, fuel economy and tread wear. A drift or pull suggests alignment problems and should be addressed.

Vehicle owners should keep tire inspection and maintenance in mind as part of their overall car care plan.



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### WHAT NOISY BRAKES MAY BE TELLING YOU

The only noises many drivers ever want to hear coming from their vehicles are the sounds of their favorite songs blasting from their car stereos. But cars sometimes make noises that aren't nearly as inviting as music. Noises that seem to pop up when applying the brakes can be especially scary for motorists. No one wants to drive a vehicle with faltering or suspect brakes, so learning to distinguish between the two most common brake noises can be a wise move for drivers.



from their vehicles or those of fellow motorists. That squeal, while certainly not music to the ears, might be a good thing. That's because some brake pads are equipped with small steel clips that serve as wear indicators. When brake pads have worn down, these devices produce a squealing sound to let drivers know it's time to get new brake pads. But squealing can be indicative of other things as well. Squealing noises are sometimes heard immediately after brake pads or rotors have been replaced. In such instances, the noise typically subsides within a day or two once the pads have been broken in. Glazed pads also can create a squealing sound. When calipers stick, the brakes stay partially applied, producing excessive friction or heat. The heat causes the brake pads to glaze. No one wants to hear noises coming from their brakes. However, such noises are often a car's way of telling drivers that brakes need to be serviced.

**GRINDING** noises indicate a serious problem with the braking system. According to CarsDirect.com, there are two major causes behind the grinding noise made by brakes. If the grinding sound is audible when pressing on the brake pedal, this likely because the rotor disc is coming into contact with part of the caliper. This typically occurs because the brake pads or rotors are extremely worn down, causing the steel backing of the worn out pad to grind against the

rotor. In such instances, Pep Boys® recommends replacing the brake pads immediately. If the grinding noise is audible while the vehicle is in motion, debris might be stuck inside the brakes. Drivers might be able to dislodge this debris by repeatedly moving their cars forward and backward in a safe place, such as a driveway. If that does not work, have the brakes serviced by a qualified mechanic.

**SQUEALING**- Many drivers are familiar with the high-pitched squealing sound that comes

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**SIGNS HEADLIGHTS MAY NEED TO BE REPLACED**

Automobiles require a little TLC to stay on the road and operate efficiently. When vehicle maintenance is ignored, vehicles operate less efficiently and, in many instances, less safely as well. Jerking and stalling is a telltale sign of engine trouble, but some vehicle problems are more subtle. One such problem is fading headlights. Fading headlights can pose a significant threat to drivers and their passengers as well as fellow motorists. According to the National Safety Council, drivers do only one-quarter of their driving at night. However, the NSC notes that 50 percent of traffic deaths occur at night. Such figures highlight the potential dangers of nighttime driving, which only becomes more dangerous if headlights are not operating at optimal capacity. Since drivers do most of their driving during the daytime, it's easy to overlook headlight performance. However, it's important that drivers learn to recog-

nize the signs that headlights need to be replaced. DIMMING headlights do not necessarily require replacement. In some instances dimming headlights are a byproduct of a dirty car. The buildup of dirt and grime can reduce light output even when the headlights are otherwise fine. If your car is dirty, take it to the car wash and make sure the headlights are scrubbed clean of dirt and grime. Then drive at night to see if the light output of your headlights is still dim. If so, the headlight bulbs may need to be replaced. FLICKERING headlights can indicate anything from worn out headlight bulbs to a weak car battery to loose connections. Flicker-ing is one of the more dangerous headlight issues, as it can lead to headlights suddenly going dark while drivers are on the road at night. If headlights are flickering, take the car to a mechanic as soon as possible to have the issue resolved.

ONE LIGHT OUT- When one headlight goes dark, chances are the other is not far behind. Automotive experts recommend replacing headlight bulbs in pairs, even if only one bulb has gone dark, because this ensures equal light output. *Headlight maintenance tends to be overlooked. But recognizing the signs of fading headlights can help drivers avoid accidents and vastly improve the safety of nighttime driving.*

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**SIGNS TRANSMISSION FLUID IS LOW**

Vehicles require all sorts of maintenance to operate safely and efficiently. Motorists need not be amateur mechanics to keep their vehicles running strong. Major vehicle repairs are best left to the professionals, but drivers can learn to identify the causes of relatively minor issues that, if left untreated, can cause significant damage. For example, vehicles may exhibit certain signs that indicate their transmission fluid needs replenishing. In many of the following

instances, drivers may only need to top off the transmission fluid in their vehicles. However, if issues persist, schedule an appointment with a mechanic. • OVERHEATED TRANSMISSION: Smoke billowing from a car is a sight no driver wants to see. But as bad as it may look, smoke coming from a car may only indicate the transmission is overheating due to lack of fluid. Smoke also can be indicative of a host of other problems, so if transmission fluid levels are not low, consult a mechanic. Loss of power and a burning smell also may indicate low transmission fluid levels. • ERRATIC SHIFTING: Drivers can notice how their vehicles shift whether the cars or trucks have automatic or manual transmissions. Transmission fluid may be low if shifts appear to be delayed or faster than normal or if the vehicle appears to be slamming into a new gear. Shifting issues related to transmission fluid may indicate the presence of a leak. If the issue disappears after refilling transmission fluid but then reappears shortly there-

after, consult a mechanic. • PAUSING WHEN ENGAGING GEARS: A two- to three-second pause when shifting into drive and reverse is another indicator that transmission fluid levels are low. The automotive experts at Firestone note that manual transmissions require fluid to keep gears lubricated, while automatic transmissions rely on fluid to create the hydraulic pressure necessary to power movement within the transmission. When fluid levels are low, shifting from park to drive or reverse can take longer than it should. • SLIPPING TRANSMISSION: Vehicles that are not staying in gear also may be in need of transmission fluid. However, a slipping transmission also may indicate significant damage to the transmission has already occurred, so this issue should be brought to the attention of a mechanic. Low transmission fluid levels can contribute to various symptoms. Keeping an eye on fluid levels and recognizing low fluid symptoms can keep cars running smoothly.

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## HOW TO INSPECT AND MAINTAIN VEHICLE BELTS

Responsible vehicle ownership involves taking inventory of the automobile and ensuring it is working at peak capacity. Hundreds of parts work together to keep vehicles on the road, but quite often drivers do not look under the hood until something is amiss.

Routine maintenance is widely acknowledged as a critical component of responsible vehicle ownership, but many motorists may not know how to care for their cars. Belts are one example of components that are integral to efficient, well-running vehicles. The automotive resource iDriveSafely.com indicates that belts are some of the most crucial moving parts in the engine. Belts transmit power between shafts, and all belts, from serpentine belts to V-belts to timing belts, all serve important functions.

• Serpentine belt: Firestone® Complete Auto Care says a serpentine belt is a long, snaking, winding belt that keeps parts such as the water pump, alternator, power steering



pump, and air conditioning running smoothly. Serpentine belts transport power to automotive accessories. A failing serpentine belt can cause enormous and expensive headaches, including overheating and loss of steering power.

• V-belts: Also known as drive belts, these are usually found in older vehicles. Unlike serpentine belts, which run through various parts, V-belts run through one or two accessories. Older cars with many belts and whistles will have multiple V-belts, and should one break, it may not cause as much of an issue as if a serpentine belt were to falter.

• Timing belt: Advance Auto

Parts says that most cars have interference engines in which the clearance between moving parts is so small that they can end up bumping into each other if they're not running on the same timing as one another. That is where the timing belt comes into play. It connects the crankshaft to the camshaft, helping them stay in sync. Failing to pay attention to a timing belt can result in an expensive engine repair.

Belts have finite service lives, and heat and wear and tear are usually their nemeses. It is important to look for fraying or cracking of belts. Even belts that look new may have worn out grooves that lose their grips on matching pulley grooves. Mechanics often use special gauges to check belts.

Belts also may need to be replaced due to oil or grease contamination that can damage the rubber or synthetic rubber. It is important to check the owner's manual and seek advice from a qualified mechanic about when belts should be serviced.

## CHARGE UP YOUR CAR BATTERY KNOWLEDGE

Vehicles consist of many essential components to keep them running efficiently and effectively. Car and truck owners should have an understanding of how their vehicles function so they can diagnose and address problems as they arise.

Car batteries are an important component of any vehicle. Even though engines are the powerhouse of any car or truck, without a battery, the engine wouldn't be able to work. According to Firestone Complete Auto Care, car batteries work by providing a jolt of electricity necessary to power all the electrical components of the vehicle. This is achieved through a chemical reaction that changes chemical energy into the electrical energy needed to deliver voltage to the starter. In addition to initially starting the car, the battery also keeps electric current steady to keep the engine running.

The battery also works in conjunction with the alternator to power the electronics in the car, according to the automotive

information blog Autosessive.

While the car is running, the alternator reverses the current produced by the battery, recharging it as a result. This happens during long journeys, so people who drive for short bursts of time may find that their batteries will not have a chance to recharge and may not have the longevity desired. There is quite literally a lot riding on a functioning battery. No one wants to be caught stranded by a dead battery, so drivers may wonder if there are any indicators that may signal the battery needs replacement.

• Slow turnover: If a vehicle does not immediately start or if the cranking is sluggish and takes longer to start, it may mean the battery is starting to fail.

• Frequent, short trips: Drivers who make frequent, short trips may find their car batteries do not have time to fully recharge. This, coupled with overtaxing thanks to a lot of accessory use, may cause the battery and the alternator to have shortened life spans.

• Low battery fluid levels: If the fluid level is below the energy conductor inside, it is often indicative of overcharging and excessive heat.

• Corrosion: Corrosion buildup, dust, dirt, and grime on battery connections may cause performance problems. Inspecting and cleaning the terminals can prolong the battery life.

• Odors and leaks: Battery leaks can produce a sulfur odor similar to the smell of a rotten egg. This can become problematic over time, and leaks may indicate an aging or damaged battery.

• Age: Most batteries have a finite life span. A well-maintained battery can last up to five years. Neglect can reduce that life expectancy considerably.

• Bloated or cracked battery case: Replace the battery immediately if the case is cracking, as it could be because excessive heat is swelling the battery. Understanding how car batteries work can help drivers keep their cars running smoothly.

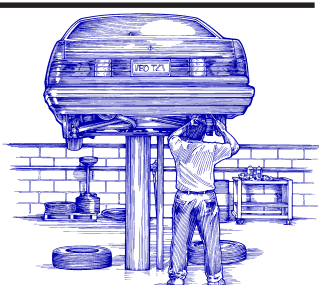
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