

## **Winter Safety: How to Prepare Your Car**

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Winter storms have the potential to bring a plethora of problems along with them. Cold temperatures, power failures, loss of communication services, and icy roads are challenges you might face this winter. To keep yourself and your loved ones safe on the road this season, you should know how to prepare your car before a winter storm hits. The CDC recommends the following preparation steps:

### **First, create an emergency car kit.**

It is best to avoid traveling during a storm, but if travel is necessary, keep the following items in your car:

- Cell phone, portable charger, and extra batteries
- Items to stay warm such as extra hats, coats, mittens, and blankets
- Windshield scraper
- Shovel
- Battery-powered radio with extra batteries
- Flashlight with extra batteries
- Water and snack food
- First aid kit with any necessary medications and a pocketknife
- Tow chains or rope
- Tire chains
- Canned compressed air with sealant for emergency tire repair
- Cat litter or sand to help tires get traction, or road salt to melt ice
- Booster cables with a fully charged battery or jumper cables
- Hazard or other reflectors
- Bright colored flag or help signs, emergency distress flag, and/or emergency flares
- Road maps
- Waterproof matches and a can to melt snow for water

### **Next, get your car ready.**

Have maintenance service performed on your vehicle as often as the manufacturer recommends. Additionally, you should consider doing the following:

- Have the radiator system serviced or check the antifreeze level yourself with an antifreeze tester. Add antifreeze as needed.
- Replace windshield-wiper fluid with a wintertime mixture.
- Make sure the tires on your car have adequate tread and air pressure. Replace any worn tires and fill low tires with air to the proper pressure recommended for your vehicle (typically between 30-35 psi).
- Keep the gas tank near full to help avoid ice in the tank and fuel lines.
- Keep your car in good working order. Be sure to check the following: heater, defroster, brakes, brake fluid, ignition, emergency flashers, exhaust, oil, and battery.

### **If you must drive in the snow, read these tips.**

Again, it's recommended to stay home during a snowstorm. You should only go out if it is necessary. Remember, even if you can drive well in bad weather, it is better to avoid taking unnecessary risks by venturing out. However, if you must drive in the snow, AAA suggests the following tips:

- Drive slowly. Always adjust your speed down to account for lower traction when driving on snow or ice.
- Accelerate and decelerate slowly. Apply the gas slowly to regain traction and avoid skids. Do not try to get moving in a hurry and take time to slow down for a stoplight. Remember: It takes longer to slow down on icy roads.
- Increase your following distance to five to six seconds. This increased margin of safety will provide the longer distance needed if you must stop.
- Know your brakes. Whether you have antilock brakes or not, keep the heel of your foot on the floor and use the ball of your foot to apply firm, steady pressure on the brake pedal.
- Do not stop if you can avoid it. There is a big difference in the amount of inertia it takes to start moving from a full stop versus how much it takes to get moving while still rolling. If you can slow down enough to keep rolling until a traffic light changes, do it.
- Do not power up hills. Applying extra gas on snow-covered roads will just make your wheels spin. Try to get a little inertia going before you reach the hill and let that inertia carry you to the top. As you reach the crest of the hill, reduce your speed, and proceed downhill slowly.
- Do not stop going up a hill. There is nothing worse than trying to get moving up a hill on an icy road. Get some inertia going on a flat roadway before you take on the hill.

### **What if you become trapped in your car during a winter storm?**

If you are stopped or stalled due to winter weather, follow these safety rules from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA):

- Stay with your car and do not overexert yourself. When digging out your vehicle, listen to your body and stop if you become tired.
- Put bright markers on the antenna or windows and keep the interior dome light turned on.
- To avoid asphyxiation from carbon monoxide poisoning, do not run your car for long periods with the windows up or in an enclosed space. If you must run your vehicle, clear the exhaust pipe of any snow, and run it only sporadically — just long enough to stay warm.
- If power lines fall on your car, warn people not to touch the car or power lines. If power lines are down, call your local utility and emergency services.

Hopefully, we have a mild winter season this year. However, these guidelines can help you prepare your car, be more ready for driving in the snow, and understand what to do in an emergency. Please stay safe this winter!