



Vehicle Maintenance Myths

Over the years, many of us pick up tips and tricks that we think will save gas or cut car maintenance costs. While some of this “common wisdom” is useful, other tips may no longer be valid due to changes in technology. Here are some car-related myths that may be costing you money:

The myth: Replace it all

At one time, filters, spark plugs, and other components wore out at a faster rate than they do today. Rather than having replacements made at random, keep a detailed service record and cross-reference it with your owner’s manual. This will help you to keep track of when different items need to be replaced.

The myth: Substitute other cleaners for windshield wiper fluid

Some people will tell you that you can substitute a different cleaner for windshield wiper fluid. Unfortunately, those other cleaners are likely to strip your car’s finish in the process, so stick with the liquid the manufacturer recommends.

The myth: Winterize or else!

If you live in a place that has extremely cold temperatures, you may need to take special precautions



for the colder months. However, in many places you won’t need to do more than switch to your snow tires (if you use them) and update your winter weather emergency kit.

The myth: Let your car warm up before you drive

Until recently, cars needed to warm up for a bit before the engine could run at optimal efficiency. However, unless you drive a classic car, you are only wasting gas by leaving

your car idle prior to driving. Instead of leaving it sit for a long time, start driving right away and go slowly until your engine comes up to full temperature.

The myth: Flush it

Often, mechanics will offer extra services, such as transmission, radiator, or engine oil flushes. However, on most vehicles these services are rarely needed. Consult your owner’s manual to determine if or when these types of services are necessary.

The myth: Put your car in neutral at a stoplight

In theory, if you put a car with an automatic transmission in neutral at a stoplight, it will decrease strain on the transmission. In reality, shifting into neutral over and over will actually wear out your transmission, leading to a costly repair.

The myth: Top off the brake fluid and forget it

If your vehicle is low on brake fluid, either the fluid is leaking or your brakes are becoming dangerously worn out. Don't wait — get your brakes redone as soon as you are able. At the end of the day, being safe is better (and cheaper) than taking a chance that you might not be able to stop when you need to.

Whenever someone gives you a piece of car advice, research the tips to make sure you're not just creating more expenses down the line. Your car will thank you — and so will your bank account!

Recommended Reading

Start Me Up: A Practical Guide to Understanding Your Vehicle
By Mike Davidson, 2013

If you don't know much about cars, "The Auto Guy," as Mike Davidson is known, can help you fill a vital gap in the knowledge base for car owners. Davidson's tips for preventing problems will help you avoid major repairs. In addition, the book's safety suggestions will put you in a better position to avoid costly accidents.

While this book has sage advice regardless of age or experience level, it is especially recommended for new drivers and their parents. If you fall into one of these categories, consider this book an alternative to "learning the hard way." Taking shortcuts with your vehicle may make sense in the short run, but over the long term it will cost you more.

Car Maintenance Savings Tips

1. Do not use high-octane gas unless your car requires it.
2. Inflate your tires to the level listed in your owner's manual, not the maximum on the tires. This will result in better mileage, less wear, and increased safety.
3. Have your fluid levels checked before every long drive. Change oil on the schedule recommended in your owner's manual.
4. Research online reviews of local mechanics to find the best option. An independent mechanic may charge less and offer the same level of service as a dealer's service department.
5. Get your tires rotated at the frequency recommended in your owner's manual. Most experts recommend this be done approximately every 7,000 miles.
6. Install a vehicle service app for your mobile device to help you keep track of your car's maintenance schedule.
7. Avoid "jackrabbit" driving (rapid acceleration and abrupt braking).
8. Make sure your spare tire is present and in working shape. This may help you avoid needing a tow in the case of a flat tire.
9. Change your own air filter and wiper blades instead of paying a mechanic to do it.

"Always focus on the front windshield and not the rearview mirror."

~ Colin Powell