

7 Tips for Winterizing Your Car

While temperatures are plunging below freezing, it's important to make sure your car is properly prepared for anything the winter may throw at it, especially if you have a teen learning to drive in the snow for the first time. Read on for tips on how to combat the cold.

By **Caroline Mullen**



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First Thing's First: **Pack an emergency kit.** The last thing anyone wants is to be stranded in a blizzard unprepared, and definitely not with your kiddos. Here's what you should include:

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- Flashlight with extra batteries
- Warm blanket

- Small shovel
- Bag of sand (for snow/ice around your tires)
- Jumper cables
- Nonperishable snacks
- Ice scraper
- Extra jackets for you and your family members
- First Aid kit
- Gloves
- Basic toolkit
- Warning devices (flares or triangles)

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Get your battery checked: The cold isn't just tough on your dry skin, it's also tough on your car's battery, so it's recommended to get it tested by a trained technician to make sure it's in good condition. Older and weaker batteries tend to have a difficult time starting the engine in the cold, so replace the battery if need be.

Check your belts and hoses: Cold temperatures also take a toll on the drive belts and engine hoses in your car, so make sure that they are not frayed or cracked. Err on the side of caution and get them changed if you see signs of wear and tear.

Tires 101: If you live in an area with extreme winter conditions, the DMV recommends changing all four tires on your vehicle to snow tires. Snow tires are made of more flexible rubber and have treads specifically designed to better grip snowy and icy roads. If you don't feel the need to invest in snow tires, still check your all-season ones to ensure that the air pressure is at your owner's manual standard PSI, since cold temperatures tend to cause a drop in tire pressure. Also, make sure that the treads on your tires are not worn out, which would result in a poor grip on the road.

Check/Replace All Fluids: AAA recommends checking your coolant level when the engine is cold and if it's low, replace it with a solution of half water and half coolant to maintain antifreeze capability. Make sure you're full on windshield wiper fluid and that the formula is freeze resistant, since there's nothing quite worse than snow and salt blurring your vision in the winter. In addition, talk to your mechanic about maybe switching to a thinner oil for the winter. The cold thickens oil and makes it less effective, so refer to your owner's manual on what the viscosity of your oil should be.

Replace your windshield wiper blades: You may want to consider installing winter wipers, which wrap the blade in rubber to prevent ice and snow buildup. If not, make sure that your current wiper blades are up to snuff: according to AAA you should replace blades that leave streaks or miss spots.

Keep your gas tank at least half full: While letting your gas run down in the summer isn't a big deal, keeping your gas tank semi-full in the winter is. A full tank can help protect against gas line freeze-ups, as well as keep the car running and you warm just in case you get stranded.

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