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Safe Driving in Winter Weather

Driving can be dangerous no matter what the conditions are, but winter weather poses a whole new set of concerns for drivers. Cars tend to break down more in the winter as liquids in your car can freeze and parts of your car become more brittle. During times of dangerous weather, roads become slippery with snow and ice, and visibility plummets because of gray skies and rain. You might wish you could just hibernate for the winter, but you know that eventually you will have to drive.

Winter Car Care

To help prevent your car from malfunctioning, it is essential that you pay special attention to car care during the winter months. As the cold weather sets in, have your car inspected by a mechanic. You may request that they check the following things: the battery, the ignition and exhaust systems, the brakes, all lights (interior and exterior), the thermostat, heater, and defroster, the wiper blades, and the fluids such as the antifreeze, oil, and windshield washer fluid. To keep your engine running smoothly, you may want to replace the oil with winter-grade oil.

Install winter tires with treads that are suited to the environments in which you plan to drive. This will ensure better traction, making unintentional swerving and accidents less likely. Check the tire pressure once a month to prevent flat tires.

To prevent the gas from freezing or getting stranded, always maintain at least a half tank of gas during the winter season.

Winter Car Kit

In case you do get stuck or have an accident during the winter months, you'll want to have certain items to help you make it while you're stranded. Pack a winter emergency kit and keep it in your car at all times. Include items such as:

- Food and water
- Flashlights with extra batteries
- A first-aid kit
- A pocketknife
- All necessary medications
- Several warm blankets
- Mittens and hats
- Extra jackets and socks
- Tissues
- A small shovel
- Matches

As always, make sure that you have a fully-inflated spare tire, a carjack and a lug wrench, flares, and jumper cables with you. Keep an ice scraper and snow brush in easy reach at all times.

On the (Slippery) Road

Always check weather and travel conditions before heading out. Don't take chances if the weather is bad; it is simply not worth the risk.

Give yourself extra time for travel. Go slowly especially if precipitation is falling or if there is ice or snow on the road. It's okay to go under the speed limit when conditions are bad. In fact, it's the smart thing to do. Take turns slowly to avoid losing traction. If you find that you are skidding out of control, take your foot off the brake, step on the clutch or shift to neutral,

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then look where you want your vehicle to go and steer in that direction.

Allow extra space between your car and other vehicles. It takes longer to stop on a slippery road, so double or triple the space you usually leave between you and the car in front of you.

Lastly, it is important that you stay alert. While you may be driving safely, others may not be. Pay attention and be prepared for others to make mistakes.

-- *Bailey Stoler*

Related Links:

- [FEMA Factsheet: Winter Driving](#) 