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## Tire Blowouts on the Highway

Many parts of a car must be in proper working order to ensure a safe trip, but maybe none more than your tires.

How important are your tires? Without them providing friction with the ground, it would be impossible to accelerate, brake or steer. A tire's tread channels away water to prevent your car from hydroplaning and dissipates the heat that destroys tires and leads to blowouts.

In normal driving, the tire area in contact with the ground is about the size of your palm. Under heavy cornering, that patch may shrink to the size of your thumbprint. Now you know the importance of keeping your tires in good condition.

### Preventing Blowouts

Regular inspection and monitoring wear and tear of tires will help prevent a blowout. Any tire with cuts, bubbles on the sidewall, or tread that is worn away should be replaced.

Proper tire inflation is also critical. Most blowouts are caused by underinflated tires that become overheated and explode. Running over a sharp object also can cause blowouts, but proper inflation can prevent this from occurring. In addition, the correct tire inflation will provide better traction and braking, easier steering, and better cornering.

Measure your tire pressure at least once a month, especially during cold weather. For every 10 degrees that the temperature drops, your tires lose about two pounds of air pressure.

Rotating your tires as prescribed by the owner's manual and keeping your wheels properly aligned also will prevent uneven tread wear and tire damage.



### Managing a Blowout

Regardless of what you do to prevent them, a blowout can still occur when you're on the road. If it does, take the following steps:

- Don't panic
- Instead of braking, ease off the gas; the rapidly deflating tire will slow down your vehicle
- Hold the wheel firm and try to steer as straight as possible
- Avoid quick maneuvers that can send the vehicle into a rollover
- Coast to a stop, carefully steering to a safe stopping place
- While driving on a flat tire may damage a wheel, this is preferable to full-vehicle or bodily damage
- Turn on the emergency flashers and exit the vehicle cautiously

Once you are in a safe area, use police flares, warning flags, or reflectorized triangles behind your vehicle to alert other drivers. If you know how to change the tire, and can do so safely, then go ahead. If not, call for help or wait for a police officer or tow-truck operator.

If you're waiting for help, never stand behind or next to the traffic-side of your vehicle. Sometimes the median is the safest place to pull over, thus making the right side of the car the traffic-side exposure.

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-- *Kenneth Krause*

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