

# Basic Vehicle Maintenance Checklist

This checklist covers essential vehicle maintenance tasks that every beginner should know. Use this guide to keep your vehicle in top shape and ensure your safety on the road.

---

## 1. Tires

- ☐ **Check Tire Pressure:** Use a tire pressure gauge to check that all tires, including the spare, are at the manufacturer-recommended PSI.
- ☐ **Inspect Tread Depth:** Use the penny test or a tread depth gauge to ensure your tires have sufficient tread for safe driving.
- ☐ **Look for Damage:** Inspect tires for cracks, bulges, or foreign objects like nails.
- ☐ **Rotate Tires:** Rotate tires every 5,000-8,000 miles to ensure even wear.
- ☐ **Learn How to Change a Tire:** Practice removing and replacing a tire using the car's jack, lug wrench, and spare.

## 2. Brakes

- ☐ **Check Brake Pads:** Inspect brake pads for wear. They should be at least 1/4 inch thick.
- ☐ **Listen for Noises:** Pay attention to any squealing, grinding, or clicking noises when braking.
- ☐ **Check Brake Fluid:** Ensure the brake fluid is at the appropriate level and looks clean (amber or clear, not dark).

## 3. Oil

- ☐ **Check Oil Level:** Use the dipstick to check the oil level when the engine is cool, and top off if necessary.
- ☐ **Check Oil Color:** Oil should be amber or light brown. If it's dark and dirty, it's time for a change.
- ☐ **Change Oil Regularly:** Follow the manufacturer's recommendation, typically every 3,000-5,000 miles.

## 4. Belts and Hoses

- ☐ **Inspect Belts:** Check serpentine and timing belts for cracks, fraying, or wear. Replace them according to your car's maintenance schedule.
- ☐ **Inspect Hoses:** Look for signs of wear, cracks, or leaks in radiator and coolant hoses.

## 5. Fluids

- ☐ **Coolant/Antifreeze:** Ensure the coolant level is within the recommended range and looks clean (typically green, yellow, or orange, depending on the type).
- ☐ **Transmission Fluid:** Check the transmission fluid level and color (should be pink or red, not brown or burnt-smelling).
- ☐ **Power Steering Fluid:** Check the level and top off if necessary.

- ☐ **Windshield Washer Fluid:** Keep the windshield washer fluid reservoir full, especially before long trips.

## 6. Battery

- ☐ **Inspect Battery:** Check for corrosion on the terminals and clean if necessary.
- ☐ **Test Battery Voltage:** Use a multimeter to ensure the battery voltage is within the normal range (12.4-12.7 volts when the engine is off).
- ☐ **Check Battery Cables:** Ensure the cables are tight and free from cracks or wear.
- ☐ **Learn to Jump-Start a Car:** Know how to safely jump-start a vehicle using jumper cables.

## 7. Lights

- ☐ **Check Exterior Lights:** Inspect all exterior lights (headlights, brake lights, turn signals, and reverse lights) to ensure they're functioning properly.
- ☐ **Replace Burnt-Out Bulbs:** Learn how to replace a light bulb in your vehicle's headlights or taillights.
- ☐ **Check Interior Lights:** Make sure the dashboard and interior lights are working correctly.

## 8. Safety as it Relates to Maintenance

- ☐ **Parking on Level Ground:** Always perform maintenance tasks on level ground with the parking brake engaged.
- ☐ **Use Proper Tools:** Ensure you have the correct tools for the job, such as a jack stand, wheel chocks, and protective gloves.
- ☐ **Wear Protective Gear:** Use gloves and safety glasses when handling fluids, batteries, or sharp tools.
- ☐ **Know the Manual:** Refer to your vehicle's owner's manual for specific maintenance instructions and safety precautions.

## 9. Wipers and Windshield

- ☐ **Inspect Wiper Blades:** Check for wear and replace them if they're streaking or leaving marks on the windshield.
- ☐ **Clean the Windshield:** Regularly clean the windshield inside and out for better visibility.
- ☐ **Check for Cracks:** Inspect the windshield for cracks or chips and get them repaired promptly.

## 10. Exhaust System

- ☐ **Listen for Unusual Noises:** Any rattling or hissing under the vehicle may indicate an issue with the exhaust system.
- ☐ **Inspect for Rust or Leaks:** Check the exhaust system for signs of rust, holes, or leaks.

## 11. Air Filters

- ☐ **Check Engine Air Filter:** Inspect the air filter for dirt and debris and replace it if it's clogged.

- ☐ **Check Cabin Air Filter:** Ensure the cabin air filter is clean to maintain air quality inside the vehicle.

## 12. Regular Maintenance

- ☐ **Schedule Regular Inspections:** Take your vehicle in for regular inspections to catch any issues early.
  - ☐ **Follow the Maintenance Schedule:** Refer to the owner's manual and stick to the recommended service intervals.
  - ☐ **Know your vehicle:**
    - ☐ Tire wear: can lead to loss of traction especially on wet roads. Need to drive slower
    - ☐ Dimming Lights: could mean low battery or failing alternator
    - ☐ Squealing brakes: Pads need to be replaced
    - ☐ Car shaking when applying brakes: brake rotors are warped.
    - ☐ Going down steep hills: brake in intervals to save your brakes from overheating
    - ☐
- 

## Emergency Kit (Bonus)

Ensure your vehicle is equipped with an emergency kit that includes:

- ☐ Spare tire, jack, and lug wrench
- ☐ Jumper cables
- ☐ Tire pressure gauge
- ☐ Flashlight with extra batteries
- ☐ First-aid kit
- ☐ Roadside flares or reflective triangles
- ☐ Basic tool kit (screwdrivers, pliers, adjustable wrench)

This checklist will help you maintain your vehicle and keep it running safely and efficiently. Regular maintenance can prevent costly repairs and ensure your car is reliable on the road.