

Winter Car Checklist

A checklist for preparing a car for winter weather.

Battery and electrical

- ☐ Test the battery's charge and health before the cold arrives.
Cold cuts battery capacity; a marginal battery often fails in winter.
- ☐ Clean corrosion from terminals and confirm they are tight.
- ☐ Check the alternator is charging and belts are sound.
- ☐ Confirm the battery is securely mounted with no case damage.
- ☐ Carry jumper cables or a portable jump starter.
- ☐ Replace a battery older than four to five years before winter.

Tires and traction

- ☐ Fit winter tires as a set of four if your climate warrants them.
- ☐ Check tread depth; winter grip drops sharply on worn tires.
- ☐ Set tire pressures, since cold air lowers them noticeably.
Check pressures on a cold morning and top up to the door-jamb spec.
- ☐ Carry chains or traction aids where required by law or conditions.
- ☐ Confirm the spare is inflated and accessible.
- ☐ Verify the TPMS light is off after adjusting pressures.

Fluids and cooling system

- ☐ Check coolant and confirm the antifreeze mix suits expected lows.
Test the freeze protection rating; weak coolant can freeze and crack the engine.
- ☐ Switch to winter-grade windshield washer fluid that resists freezing.
- ☐ Check engine oil; consider a winter-appropriate grade per the manual.
- ☐ Verify brake and power steering fluid levels.
- ☐ Inspect hoses and belts that stiffen and crack in the cold.
- ☐ Top up and test the heater and defroster operation.

Visibility and exterior

- ☐ Replace worn wipers or fit winter blades that shed ice.
- ☐ Test all lights — they matter more in short winter days.
- ☐ Keep an ice scraper and snow brush in the car.
- ☐ Check door and window seals to prevent freezing shut.
- ☐ Apply a lock de-icer or treat seals against freezing.
- ☐ Keep headlights and indicators clear of snow and salt grime.

Winter emergency kit

- ☐ Pack a warm blanket, gloves, hat and spare warm clothing.
- ☐ Carry a small shovel and sand, salt or traction mats.
- ☐ Stock a flashlight, warning triangle and reflective vest.
- ☐ Bring water, non-perishable snacks and any medications.
- ☐ Pack a first-aid kit and hand warmers.
- ☐ Keep a phone charger and power bank fully charged.

Cold-weather driving readiness

- ☐ Keep the fuel tank at least half full to reduce condensation and ensure heat.
- ☐ Clear all snow and ice from the roof, windows and lights before driving.
- ☐ Confirm roadside assistance and insurance are current.
- ☐ Practice gentle braking and longer following distances on ice.
- ☐ Check weather and road conditions before each trip.
- ☐ Tell someone your route and expected arrival in severe weather.