

How to Make Your Tires Last Longer

By Dave Hoffman

As a driver, you know how important it is to keep your car in smooth running condition. One part that requires the most TLC is your tires. Your tires experience wear and tear the moment you move your car and since you don't directly interact with them they are easy to ignore. Tires are on the front line of safety and fuel economy, and of course, a flat tire will put your car out of commission. Fortunately, the steps to correct tire maintenance are simple to work into your weekly routine, and can expand the life of your tire by up to 50 percent.

The two attributes of your tires that you need to monitor to care for your tires are air inflation, and wear on the tread. A tire is designed to be inflated to a certain pressure amount of pressure, measured by pounds per square inch, or PSI. The correct PSI for your tire is located on the tire. It may also be located on a card located on either the driver's doorpost, gas tank door, or glove compartment. A tire gauge can be purchased at any auto parts store and will tell you what the pressure PSI of your tire is. Don't trust your own visual check as modern tires may appear inflated when they are not, or they may appear slightly low when they are fine. Rely on the gauge.

If your tire is under inflated it will develop more heat than tires that are inflated properly and excess heat leads to increased stress on the tire. Under inflation causes the treads on the outside edges of the tire to wear more quickly than the ones on the inside. It also produces more resistance to rolling which will cost you in fuel efficiency. It also restricts the responsiveness, which along with increased risk of blowout due to heat, causes a safety risk.

Over inflation is also a problem. Too much air pressure causes more wear in the center of the tire than on the sides, and also face the risk of blowout so it is important to make sure the tires are filled correctly in the first place. Bear in mind that healthy tires naturally lose air, and this happens more rapidly in cold weather.

When you check the pressure, bear in mind that air expands when it gets hot. As a consequence, your tire will measure higher when the car has been rolling. Your proper inflation recommendation reading refers to the tire when it's cold. If you check your pressure before driving your car and find it low make sure to add the amount of air that was missing when the tire was cold.

In addition to checking the tire pressure once a week it is a good idea to give the tires a once over to look at the treads. Tires have strips running across the treads known as “wear bars” which show through when the treads wear down beyond a drivable level. It is unsafe and illegal to drive with exposed wear bars. If you want to know how you’re doing, the treads in a tire should go down to Lincoln’s head on a penny inserted into the grooves.

You should have your tires rotated every 6,000 to 8,000 miles. Rotating which axle end the tire is on will make sure the tires wear down at a more or less even rate.

The treads should wear evenly. If they are wearing unevenly, it may be a sign that your alignment is off; they are out of balance or that you have bad shock absorbers or struts.

You should also know the load limits on your car. Putting too much weight into your car has an effect on the tires. Sudden, jolting starts and stops and turns that screech will also age your tires before their time.

If handled with care, your tires can last for 60,000 to 80,000 miles. That means a second set may even outlast your car.

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