

The maintenance schedule

Easy · 15 min to plan, 10 min a month · Free to plan; a tire gauge costs a few dollars

Use the schedule in your owner's manual for your type of driving, not the shop's (some push extra service). Monthly: check all four tires and the spare when cold, using the pressure on the driver's door label, not the tire, and check tread with a penny; replace at 2/32 inch. Rotate tires every 5,000 to 8,000 miles if the manual says to. Use the oil grade the manual lists. Get check-engine lights looked at. Before any repair, get a signed written estimate, and keep every repair order.

YOU'LL NEED

- ☐ Your owner's manual (or the maker's website)
- ☐ A penny
- ☐ A tire pressure gauge to keep in the car
- ☐ Your phone calendar

WHAT TO KNOW

- 1 **Find the maintenance schedule in your owner's manual for your type of driving.** Some shops make their own schedules that call for more frequent service than the maker recommends, so compare, and ask the shop to explain anything extra.
- 2 **Put the next few items (oil change, tire rotation, inspections) in your calendar by date or mileage.**
- 3 **Check tire pressure monthly.** Check all four plus the spare when the tires are cold, meaning the car hasn't been driven for at least three hours. Use the pressure on the label on the driver's door edge or in your manual, not the number on the tire. Don't rely on the dashboard warning: it only comes on when a tire is significantly low.
- 4 **Check tread the same day.** Tires should be replaced at 2/32 of an inch. Put a penny in the tread with Lincoln's head upside down and facing you. If you can see the top of his head, it's time for new tires.
- 5 **Rotate tires if your manual recommends it, generally every 5,000 to 8,000 miles or sooner if they wear unevenly.** Some cars shouldn't be rotated, like those with different front and rear tire sizes.
- 6 **Use the oil grade in your manual.** Using 10W-30 in an engine built for 5W-30 can lower gas mileage by 1% to 2%.
- 7 **Don't ignore the check-engine light.** It could be as small as a loose gas cap or something that leads to costly repairs, so have a mechanic look.
- 8 **Run your VIN at [NHTSA.gov/recalls](https://www.nhtsa.gov/recalls) twice a year.**

Watch out Skipping simple maintenance like oil changes or coolant checks can lead to poor fuel economy, breakdowns and costly repairs, and may void your warranty.

DAD NOTE *The manual's in the glovebox for a reason. Read the maintenance page once.*

Full lesson: aptkeys.com/your-place/car-ownership/the-maintenance-schedule/

Checked October 2, 2026. Sources: Federal Trade Commission; National Highway Traffic Safety Administration; FuelEconomy.gov (U.S. DOE and EPA).