

## 5 KEY STRATEGIES TO ENSURING YOUR CAR OPERATES SUCCESSFULLY THROUGHOUT THE WINTER

1. Put a “winter supply” box in your car.
2. Check your engine coolant and antifreeze levels.
3. Check your tire pressure and tread depth.
4. Use winter windshield wiper fluid.
5. Switch to a winter-grade oil at your next oil change.

### STRATEGIES EXPANDED...

**1. Put a “winter supply” box in your car.** This is the single most important thing you can do for your car and for your personal safety. Having a box full of winter supplies in your trunk can make all the difference when something goes wrong while traveling on a cold winter day.

Here’s a quick list of items you should include in that box: a flashlight, road flares, a first-aid kit, a few blankets, a change of warm clothes for the driver, a few extra pairs of gloves, a radio, a charged cellphone for 911 calls, a bag of sand (for traction), an extra ice scraper and some high-energy snacks (like nuts or jerky).

My family keeps a pair of large Rubbermaid containers in the garage through the spring, summer and fall. The containers always carry these items, and we put those containers in our cars during the winter months after checking them over at the start of the season.

**2. Check your engine coolant and antifreeze levels.** Antifreeze is the magical substance that keeps your engine from freezing during those times of the year when you feel like you are freezing. Without it, your engine *can* freeze, leaving you in a real pickle at a time when it’s dangerous to be stranded.

A kit for checking your engine coolant levels is available at almost every auto supply store. Using that kit can let you know quickly if you have an appropriate coolant mix. You can also directly check your antifreeze levels by following the instructions in your car’s manual. Adding more antifreeze is very simple, too, if you need to do it.

**3. Check your tire pressure and tread depth.** Good tires are the key to staying on the road and keeping safe when the weather is questionable and snow and ice are falling from the sky. You can do your part to ensure your tires are in good shape with just a few simple steps.

First, check your tire pressure with a simple gauge sold at any auto supply store. Follow your manual’s recommendations for pressure level, and if your tires need air, fill them up at the gas station. Most gas stations offer free tire air fill-ups.

You should also make sure your tires have appropriate amounts of tread on them. The simple test is the “Lincoln test” – just insert a penny into your tire’s tread with the top of Lincoln’s head pointing inward toward the tire. If you can see all of Lincoln’s head, you need to replace the tire before winter weather begins.

If you live in a particularly wintry climate, you may want to consider installing winter tires before the season begins, as they will make all the difference when it comes to getting around.

**4. Use winter windshield wiper fluid.** Not all windshield wiper fluid is the same. Ordinary fluid that you use in the spring, summer and fall often becomes worse than useless in the winter, as it freezes quickly upon contact with your windshield. When winter comes, switch out your fluid for “winter” fluid. Winter fluid is designed for the rigors of winter weather and won’t freeze on your windshield. In fact, it actually helps loosen ice and snow from your windshield, making it much easier to keep things clear.

**5. Switch to a winter-grade oil at your next oil change.** In general, the colder the weather, the thinner you want the oil in your engine to be. The viscosity of your oil in colder weather is indicated by the first number in the oil specification, with a lower number indicating better viscosity in cold weather. For example, a 5W-30 oil is better in the winter than a 10W-30 oil.

When cold weather begins to set in, you should consider switching to an oil with a lower cold weather viscosity grade. If you normally use a 10W-30 oil, switching to 5W-30 at your next oil change for the winter is a good move.

All these changes are useful for operating a motor vehicle in the winter months, but if you do nothing else, include an emergency box in your car. That one goes beyond keeping your car running well and actually keeps you and your family safe in the case of a winter car emergency.