



Tire Safety Basics

You made it through another winter! No more inching through traffic, snow covered roads or slippery intersections. However, the slush, salt and cold temperatures took a toll on your car – from the underbody to the wiper blades. With spring finally arriving, it's the perfect time to take a close look at your vehicle and give it a thorough once-over to determine just how well it survived the winter. One vital component you should be sure to check is your tires. As always, know your limitations and consult a professional as needed.

Read your tires

A close examination of the tire tread can tell you if the tire is wearing properly. Common [wear patterns](#) can indicate if the tire pressure is correct or can even reveal wheel or suspension problems.

Tires have a story to tell

All tires manufactured in recent years have markings molded into the sidewall. The [coded information](#) includes the tire's size, load rating, wear (the relative wear rate—the higher the treadwear number, the longer it should take for the tread to wear down), temperature (represents the tire's resistance to heat) and traction rating, among others. This information can guide you when making replacement tire decisions and help ensure that you obtain the right tire for your car.

It's your tires' birthday!

An important, yet often overlooked sidewall marking is the [manufacture date](#). Tires are marked with the week and year they were manufactured. Most tires have an expected **total** service life of about 10 years from date of manufacture. For example, if a tire has been sitting in a warehouse for six years, the remaining service life is approximately four more years. Don't forget to check the manufacture date, even when purchasing "new" tires. Unsold tires may remain in a dealer's inventory for years, particularly for uncommon styles or sizes.

Under pressure

Maintaining proper tire pressure is critical to tire life, fuel economy and your car's handling characteristics. Be mindful that the pressure recommendations on the tire are usually the *maximum* inflation pressure and not normal operating pressure. Inflate your tires to the recommended pressure as listed in the vehicle owner's manual and on the [Tire and Loading Information Label](#) found on the driver's door or doorjamb. For the most accurate readings, always measure air pressure when the tires are cold.

Time to measure

Measuring tread depth can determine a tire's remaining tread life. Tires are measured in 32nds of an inch with most new tire tread depth averaging from 10 to 12/32nds of an inch. Replace your tires when the usable tread measures less than 2/32nds of an inch. Always use a tire depth gauge to determine tread depth. Remember to avoid placing the gauge on the wear bars that are contained within the tire tread.

Do I need two or four?

Most experts agree that tires should be replaced either in sets of two on the same axle, or on all four wheels. When replacing just two tires, the new tires should always be mounted on the rear axle for better stability. Your installation professional should be able to help you determine which two old tires to move to the front axle (i.e., the two with the least wear).

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