

Winter driving tips

The dark and long winter months can make road conditions challenging and very different to other times of the year. Breakdowns and accidents are more common in the winter when road conditions are challenging. Conditions such as ice, snow, heavy rain and fog require additional considerations. So here are our top tips to ensure both you and your vehicle are prepared for driving in the winter.

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Assess

If the weather is very bad, or it's forecast to get worse, you should avoid driving completely or consider alternative methods of travel such as public transport.



Prepare

If you really have to make the journey then there are some key preparations and considerations for both you and your vehicle:

Vehicle

- Keep your vehicle well-maintained, ensuring you complete regular checks, keep up-to-date with servicing and have a valid, up-to-date MOT.
- Check your tyres regularly – a change in weather and temperature can quickly change your tyre pressure.
- Check your wiper blades regularly.
- Ensure you have anti-freeze in your windscreen washer and radiator.
- Make sure you have an ice-scraper and de-icer in your vehicle.
- Ensure that ice, snow and condensation has been completely removed from your vehicle before you begin your journey.

Driver

- In the season of winter colds, don't drive with a cold if you are feeling unwell and have taken medication that might make you drowsy and so affect your ability to drive safely.
- Check the weather forecast and your route before setting off.
- Allow plenty of time to get to your destination.
- Carry a winter safety kit in your vehicle in case you run into trouble and are stranded. The kit should include torch, a small shovel, blankets, a coat, gloves, hat, first aid kit and food/water supplies.
- Carry a fully charged mobile phone and power bank – that way you can let friends/relatives know if your journey is taking longer than usual or you need to call for help in an emergency.

Most of us have very little experience of driving in extreme conditions, so it's important to consider how this can affect your driving and then adapt the way in which you drive in different conditions.

On the road

The roads can be dangerous in winter when there's snow, ice or sleet – the best advice is not to travel unless you absolutely have to, and if you do, you need to be prepared and take it slow.

Stopping distances are longer in bad conditions and reduced visibility – due to snow, fog and the low winter sun. **Braking distances can be doubled in wet conditions** and increased by at least **10 times on snow or ice!**

Gentle manoeuvres and slow speeds are the key to safe driving in ice and snow.

Tips for keeping you and your vehicle safe on the roads in winter:

- ✓ Allow extra time for winter journeys.
- ✓ Try to get up at least 10 minutes earlier to give you time to de-ice your vehicle thoroughly.
- ✓ Clear all your windows using a scraper and de-icer and wait until the windscreen is fully demisted – air-con demists the screen faster and reduces condensation.
- ✓ Clean snow from the roof – it can fall onto the windscreen and block your view.
- ✓ Make sure all car lights are working and the lenses are clean.
- ✓ Use your headlights when visibility is seriously reduced – if you use fog lights make sure you turn them back off when visibility improves so they don't dazzle other drivers or obscure your brake lights.
- ✓ Check fuel levels – always have at least a quarter of a tank in case of unexpected delays.
- ✓ Wear comfortable, dry shoes for driving so your feet don't slip on the pedals.
- ✓ Think about getting winter tyres or all-season tyres – these are made from a special rubber that provides better grip in cold, wet conditions.
- ✓ On snowy/icy roads, pull away in second gear, easing your foot off the clutch gently to avoid wheel-spin.
- ✓ When using brakes, apply them gently and gradually.
- ✓ Leave plenty of room between your own and other vehicles.
- ✓ Keep a constant, safe speed when driving uphill and try to avoid changing gear on the hill.
- ✓ Slow down before driving downhill, use a low gear and try to avoid braking.

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