

## Save Money with Basic Auto Maintenance

Okay, I'll be the first to admit that I have absolutely no idea what goes on under my car's hood – I'm content to know that I put gas in the tank and the car drives. But even if you're as clueless as I am, there are some basic maintenance tasks that you can and should be performing on your own that can save you money in the long run.

Once a week, check your tire's air pressure and condition. I like to do this when I'm filling up on gas. Use a gauge to check the air pressure in each tire (the recommended pressure should be printed on your tire). Check the tread by inserting a penny into the tire tread with Lincoln's head facing down. If you can see all of his head, or if you see any cracking or flaking of the rubber, it's time for new tires. Keeping your tire in tip-top shape will help improve your gas mileage and extend the life of the tire.

Look under your car once a week to check for any fluid leaks. Fluid leaks are one of the most common causes of vehicle failure. Just like the human body needs blood and other fluids to function, your car needs all of its fluids to run properly. You can check and fill some of the fluids on your own. Reference your car's owner's manual for the correct procedure and consult a reputable auto supply store to be sure you're refilling with the right fluids.

\* Oil: If you think you might be losing oil, use your owner's manual to locate the oil dipstick. With the car off, pull the stick out once, wipe it off on a towel, replace the stick in the engine and then pull it out again to check the level. If your oil level is low or the oil looks dirty, take it into an oil change shop to be taken care of. Changing your own oil can save you money, but you'll need equipment to get under the car and you'll need to pay for proper oil disposal. In the end, it's cheaper for most people just to take the car in to a service shop.

\* Brakes: Use your owner's manual to locate the brake master cylinder (usually mounted on the fire wall just on front of the driver). You'll see a flat cap on it that pops right off. Make sure your brake fluid is kept full at all times and add more if your level is low. If you have to add fluid frequently, visit a service shop and have them check for a leak in the brake system. Don't take risks with your brakes – always keep them in proper working condition for your safety.

\* Coolant: Your coolant (also called your radiator fluid or antifreeze) is another important fluid in the operation of your vehicle. If you notice the level is low, you can add more on your own. You can pick up standard coolant from any gas station (check first whether or not your car requires a different type), but you'll need to dilute it according to the climate of your area. Fill the reservoir to the hot fill or cold fill line depending on the temperature of your engine and watch for any slow leaks. If you're frequently refilling the coolant, or if it's turned a murky brown, it's time for professional service.

Try to use common sense when working on your car - if you're poking around in your engine, be careful! Turn the engine off before checking your fluid levels and, if possible, give it time to cool down. Some of those parts can get hot! Wearing gloves and protective eyewear while working on your engine will help prevent burns and other injuries. Following these simple guidelines will help keep you safe, while helping you to save money and extend the life of your car.

## About the Author

Sarah Russell, aka "The Sexy Secretary," is a connoisseur of living the good life on a budget. Check out her website at [www.thesexysecretary.com](http://www.thesexysecretary.com) for more fabulous ideas on how to trim down your expenses without reducing your quality of life.

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