

## Fix that Flat: Common Sense Tips for Using a Tire Jack

When you need to jack your car up to change a tire, it may not always be under ideal conditions. Regardless of whether you're on the side of a highway or in the relative comfort of your own garage, the process of lifting a vehicle weighing thousands of pounds entails some risk. By following a few simple procedures, you can minimize any hazards to yourself and your vehicle.

### Know Your Jack

Most vehicles come equipped with a small scissor jack. This jack will be functional enough for an emergency tire-change on the roadside. Before you're in an emergency situation, familiarize yourself with your specific jack and how it works.

### Secure the Area

When possible, ensure that vehicle is parked on a level surface. Make sure that the car is secure. The emergency brake should be firmly set. Vehicles with automatic transmissions should be in "park," while ones with manual transmissions should be left in gear. Wedge bricks or blocks to the front and back of the tire on a diagonal from the tire to be lifted.

### Pick Your Battleground

Determine an appropriate place to set the jack. A common novice mistake is to set the jack under a bumper or body panel. These areas aren't designed to hold the weight of the entire car; they can break under the strain and allow the car to fall. The jack must go under the vehicle's frame, otherwise known as the chassis. Most cars are designed with a specific location for jack placement. When in doubt, check your owner's manual.

### Keep it Steady

Make sure that the jack is placed on a stable, even surface. If the ground is rough or covered with gravel, place a broad, sturdy board underneath the jack. This is especially important with small, factory-provided tire jacks, which may very have narrow bases.

### Proceed with Caution

Crank the jack up slowly. Although you may be in a hurry, take your time. Be careful to not have any part of your body underneath the car, so as not to be injured if the vehicle should fall. Once the car is lifted enough for the tire to clear the ground, push on it a bit to verify its stability on the jack.

### Lower the Vehicle

Now that the tire has been changed, bring the car back down just as you jacked it up: slowly and with care. Once again, no part of your body (or anyone else's) should be underneath the vehicle. If there are other people present or assisting, have them step back away from the car and out of the way. Finally, remove the blocks from the chocked wheel.

By working at an even pace and using common sense, you should be able to raise a vehicle, change its tire, and lower it again safely. Keep in mind that these instructions only apply to lift a car to change a tire, not to any kind of repair work that requires you to get underneath the car; for that, further precautions will be necessary.

## About the Author

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