

Driving in Snow and Ice

Everything you need to know to prepare you for the rough winter roads.

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Be Prepared

Winter weather can make driving difficult and dangerous, so follow these guidelines to make sure you're safe and properly prepared on the road.

If You're Stuck in Snow or Ice

- Do not accelerate hard in an attempt to pull away. The spinning of the wheels will compact the snow and make gripping even more difficult; snow may also become packed into the tire treads, lowering their gripping ability.
- Ensure that the wheels are straight so that the treads are in the best position for gripping the surface.
- Find something to pack under the driving wheels to improve their grip, such as sand, grit, sacking or twigs.
- To lessen the risk of wheel spin, start in second gear so that there is less torque (turning effort) applied to the wheels.
- Press the accelerator gently, just enough to move the car forward slowly, and slip the clutch as necessary to keep the engine revving.
- If there are any passengers in the car, they may be able to help by pushing the car forward as you drive off. Tell them to stand at the sides - so that the car does not roll or slide into them - but well away from the driving wheels or they will be sprayed with dirt, snow and packing material.
- Once the car gets moving, do not stop to pick up passengers or gear until you have reached a firmer, level surface.

Getting Out of Deep Snow

- It is sometimes possible to drive out of snow about 12 inches or so deep by moving the car backward and forward to build up a track - a technique known as rocking.
- Try to move forward a few inches by engaging first gear and then revving gently, slipping the clutch as necessary to avoid stalling.
- While the car is as far forward as it will go, quickly engage reverse and move slowly backward for a few inches.
- Repeat the backward and forward movements until you can mount the piled-up snow and drive out of the trough.
- If this method fails, the alternative is to dig the snow away from in front of all four wheels, and use the techniques recommended above for moving off on hard snow and ice.

Planning Ahead

If You're Trapped in a Snowbound Car

- Driving is usually impossible in a blizzard, or if snow becomes deeper than about 12 inches. In a snowbound car, the main things to concentrate on are keeping warm and keeping awake.
- Stay in the car; it will give you shelter. Do not try to walk for help - you risk falling into a snowdrift or getting lost in a blizzard, and could die of exposure only a few yards from a building.
- Before the snow gets too deep, try to clear the area around the exhaust tailpipe. Otherwise, poisonous fumes are likely to enter the car when you run the engine to use the heater.
- Keep warm by wrapping yourself up in clothing, rugs, blankets, or carpet. Wrap your head up as well.
- Newspaper wrapped around limbs or stuffed into clothing helps to conserve body heat; it can also be used to improvise a hat.
- Run the engine and heater to help you warm up for only about ten minutes every hour. Do not run them constantly; not only will the warmth make you drowsy, but you need to conserve fuel in case you are trapped for a long time. There is also a higher risk of exhaust fumes entering the car.
- Keep awake. If you doze off, you are more likely to succumb to frostbite or hypothermia (excessive loss of body heat). Or you could suffocate if the car became buried by snow.
- Open a window to let in air occasionally. Use a window on the side away from drifting snow.
- Avoid drinking alcohol in the hope that it will warm you up. It dilates the blood vessels and so encourages the loss of body heat. It may also make you sleepy.
- Exercising gently from time to time will help you keep awake and keep your blood circulating. For example, stretch or wiggle our toes, fingers, knees, shoulders and neck.
- Do not attempt violent exercise, as this will increase your need for oxygen, use up your body heat and make you tired.
- Do not keep the radio or car lights on constantly, or you may drain the battery.
- If the car gets completely buried by snow, open a window and poke an air channel through the snow. Use an implement such as an umbrella if necessary. Keep the channel clear.
- If a number of cars are snowbound together, join forces with the other occupants. Sitting together in one vehicle generates warmth, boosts morale and helps you to keep awake.

What to Carry in a Survival Pack

When motoring in snowy weather, make sure your car is well-equipped to keep you moving on a slippery surface and to keep you occupied if you break down or become snowbound in cold, icy conditions. This is a list of useful equipment to keep in the car.

- Shovel
- Sand
- Snow chains
- Boots
- Extra clothing, rugs and blankets
- Flashlight and spare batteries

If you are going on a long trip -- especially at night -- in conditions where you anticipate you might be delayed, consider taking some additional items:

- A hot drink in a flask.
- Emergency high-energy rations such as chocolate or Power Bars.
- Something to pass the time -- for example, a novel, a battery-powered tape player or radio, a quiz book, a book of crosswords or pencil and paper.