



Winter driving advice

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winter driving tips

Do you know what the weather's going to be like this winter?

None of us do. But you can be prepared for the worst and change your driving style to suit the conditions.

We are here to help you get through the winter safely. We've got driving techniques for every adverse weather condition and will help you prepare your car for winter.

If you enjoy driving then the IAM is for you. Our members, groups and coaches across the country have your safety at heart. If you want to know more about advanced driving, improving your skills or have a question about driving in the winter, just ask us:

drivingadvice@iam.org.uk.

And if you take one tip from us, make it this one:

If the weather's bad, ask yourself if you really need to make the journey

see, amid the winter snow: getting your car ready

Shorter daylight hours and bad weather can make driving in winter dangerous. A little preparation will help you get the most out of your car, but ask yourself, do you really need to make the journey?

before you set off:

- plan your route according to the driving conditions
- make sure your wipers are in good nick
- clean your windows inside and out

- top up the washer fluid with winter strength screen wash which has a freeze-resistant additive
- check last year's scraper and de-icer are up to the job
- check your tyres, especially the tread depth. For optimum safety opt for at least 3mm instead of the legal minimum of 1.6mm
- check all lights
- pack an emergency kit – high-viz jacket, food and water, boots, de-icer, scraper, torch, shovel and charged mobile phone with your breakdown emergency number
- if you are on regular medication, take enough with you in case you get delayed

once you set off:

- use the 'ice' setting if your car has one
- slow down and accelerate smoothly and gradually
- drive in the highest gear possible, starting off in second
- make sure you can stop within the distance you can see to be clear
- increase your following distance by ten times even if you have ABS
- light steering and reduced road noise could mean you are driving on ice
- frost, ice and snow remain for longer under trees, on bridges, and in areas exposed to wind
- make sure your wipers are in the off position when you stop – they can freeze to the window

winter tyres, snow socks and chains

In countries where severe winters are guaranteed, it is quite normal for drivers to switch to winter tyres. This is becoming more common in the UK because of harsh winters over the last two years.

Winter tyres

- if you want to fit winter tyres, do it as early as possible to beat the rush. By the time the snow hits they will be difficult to find
- winter tyres have a different tread pattern to give better grip on snow and use a winter grade rubber which stays flexible and maintains grip to well below freezing
- winter tyres have a snowflake on a mountain as a symbol on the sidewall
- winter tyres are not suitable for all year round – regular tyres give better performance when temperatures are higher and roads
- don't rely just on your tyres – always drive so you don't need to make an emergency stop
- keep your tread depths up to 3mm instead of the legal minimum of 1.6mm

Chains

- snow chains can be fitted when required, but must be removed when the snow is gone
- chains increase the width of the tyre and can affect the suspension, brakes and wheel arches on a turn, so check suitability with your handbook or with your local dealer
- expect to pay around £50 for a set of economy chains to carry in the boot for emergencies, and up to a couple of hundred pounds for a heavy duty set suitable for regular use
- chains should be washed as soon as is practical after use to get rid of dirt and salt that will otherwise damage them

Snow socks

- an alternative is snow socks which are made of a strong fabric which grips snow – they stretch to fit over the tyre
- these can be used with standard tyres and they fit quite easily into a corner of the boot, or corner of the garden shed in summer
- socks should be washed as soon as is practical after use to get rid of dirt and salt that will otherwise damage them
- snow socks are cheaper to buy than chains, and will give sufficient grip for most snowy conditions in the UK

in the bleak midwinter – winter weather

snow and ice

Driving in snow is challenging. Even on local and familiar roads, cars can get stuck, and can skid at very low speed. We've all seen images of abandoned cars and people forced to spend the night on the roadside, so ask yourself, do you really need to make the journey?

snow and ice – setting off

- make sure you clear the windows for all round visibility, as well as the snow from the roof of your car
- a squirt of WD-40 will prevent your door locks freezing up

snow and ice – on the road

- get your speed right – too fast reduces control, too slow loses momentum
- set off gently in second gear, avoiding high revs. High gears improve control
- plan your journey – busier roads are more likely to be gritted
- on bends, reduce speed early, before you turn the wheel
- slow down before you descend a hill
- keep moving, even if it is only at walking pace

if you skid

- take your foot off the pedals and steer to regain control
- only use the brake if you can't steer out of trouble
- increase your following distance by ten times

snow and ice – if you break down

- keep a track of where you are so you can tell the emergency services your location if you break down
- if you need to leave the car, stand well away from the traffic flow
- on motorways and dual carriageways it's always best to get out of the car – stand behind it and on the other side of the safety barrier or up the bank where possible

snow and ice – if you get stuck

- don't keep trying to move if the wheels spin. This will only dig you in deeper
- turn your wheels from side to side a few times to push snow out of the way
- be sparing with the accelerator to ease your car out
- use a shovel to clear snow away from the wheels and the underside of the car
- pour sand, gravel or salt in the path of the wheels, to help get traction
- shift from forward to reverse, and back again. Each time you're in gear, give a light touch on the gas until the vehicle gets going

rain

In stormy conditions, it is more difficult to see other vehicles, road signs and the road itself. Make sure you can see and be seen.

rain – setting off

- make sure the wipers are clean and in good condition
- keep the windscreen washer filled
- clean the windows – inside and out
- torrential rain makes the car mist up in seconds – set the heater or demister controls before you set off

rain – on the road

- slow down and give yourself more time
- drop back from the spray from the vehicle in front
- turn on your headlights whenever you need to use your wipers
- slow down, look ahead and increase your following distance
- make allowances for other road users
- a suddenly very wet road surface increases your chances of slipping when braking or steering
- if you see water pooling or streaming across the road, don't brake or accelerate onto it

- on water, ease off the accelerator, grip the steering wheel firmly and try to steer straight ahead
- on motorways, put your wipers on their fastest setting before overtaking
- don't use cruise control on wet roads – it may create problems if you start to aquaplane

flood

Even if water on the road appears shallow, it may be much deeper than you realise. Less than a centimeter of water can cause you to lose control.

flood – setting off

- do you really need to make the journey?

flood – on the road

- drive on the highest section of the road
- don't set off if a vehicle is approaching you
- give room to other cars and pedestrians
- drive slowly and keep going once you have started
- in a manual car, keep the revs high by "slipping the clutch" (keeping the clutch partly engaged) while in the water
- never take your foot off the accelerator in deep water, as this could allow water to travel up the exhaust pipe

- once you're out of the water, dry the brakes by lightly applying them, after checking behind for traffic first

wind

In high wind our advice is the same as for driving in all extreme weather conditions – do you really need to make the journey?

wind – setting off

- think about where you are going – is there a route with less exposure to the weather, and less risk of fallen trees?
- allow for delays caused by accidents

wind – on the road

- slow down – you are more vulnerable to side winds at higher speeds
- keep plenty of distance between you and the car in front
- be ready for the gust of wind when you pass a large vehicle or buildings
- give cyclists and motorcyclists more room than usual
- keep an eye out for objects being blown into your path
- watch what is happening to other vehicles – where they are affected will give you a warning
- winds can be gusty, and not constant. Drive to deal with the gusts

low sun

Driving into low sun is hazardous and a contributory factor in road accidents.

low sun – setting off

- keep sunglasses in the car all year round
- low sun and dirty windscreens means more risk of being dazzled as the sun catches the dirt on the screen
- clean you windows – inside and out -- and mirrors at least once a week
- keep your washer bottles topped up with screenwash
- change your windscreen wipers every year

low sun – on the road

- if you can't see, slow down
- keep an eye on the vehicle behind, in case you're not seen against the sun
- if the sun is behind you, it's in the eyes of drivers coming towards you and they might not see you
- low sun behind can dazzle you through your mirrors so be ready to dip the mirror and check over your shoulder for vehicles in your blind spot
- don't look directly at the sun

- if you see shadows ahead across your path, make sure you can see into them – slow down before you reach them

fog

Fog is a dangerous condition for drivers to deal with and freezing fog is especially difficult.

fog – setting off

- clean your windscreen and windows
- check all the lights
- check that the wipers are in order
- top up your windscreen wash
- in freezing fog your windscreen washer fluid will freeze on contact with the screen unless it's mixed with winter strength screen wash fluid as this has an additive to help reduce the chances of freezing
- can you avoid the worst problem areas? Fog often collects near water first
- know your route before you start – signs will be harder to read
- satnav directions less easily applied without good vision
- keep high-viz clothes in the car in case you break down

fog – on the road

- if you cannot see clearly use dipped headlights

- you should only use front and rear fog lights in fog where visibility is 100 metres or less
- use the windscreen wipers and washers as you need them
- drive so that you can always stop in the distance you can see to be clear in front of you
- check your speedo – it's easy to go too fast
- do not accelerate to get away from a vehicle which is following too closely
- brake early and gently so that your brake lights warn drivers
- at junctions wind the window down and listen for traffic
- fog varies in thickness – don't be caught out by a change in density

if you break down

- keep clear of traffic
- pedestrians can be hard to see
- wear high-viz clothes
- listen as well as look for traffic
- use a warning triangle, but not on a motorway

potholes – there may be rubble ahead

- leave plenty of room between you and the car in front so that you can see the road surface
- if you hit a pothole, check your tyres once you've stopped
- check the inner as well as the outer tyre wall

- check your mirrors before pulling out to avoid a hole
- bikers and cyclists need to look well ahead and change direction early
- potholes tend to reappear in the same place again – remember the trouble spots
- extra pressure is put on the road surface wherever heavy vehicles stop, start or turn, so roads are likely to be in poorer condition here

gathering winter fuel

fuel-saving tips

- de-ice the windows before you start the engine
- drive the car as soon as you start the engine
- keep the car warmer in the garage
- it takes two miles for an engine to warm up, so walk short distances
- wear warm clothes

window heaters burn fuel so:

- don't keep wet clothes in the car – they cause misty windows
- dry out your floor mats
- clean inside and outside your windows to help stop condensation and ice

pop goes the diesel

- diesel starts freezing in very low temperatures, which can damage your engine
- lorries with exposed fuel tanks are most at risk
- keep the tank full to avoid freezing condensation on the inside
- diesel sold in winter contains chemicals to stop it freezing

Christmas

Don't turn your car into a shop window for thieves.

- Always park in a well-lit open area
- Keep your valuables, and Christmas presents, out of sight
- Remove all traces of your satnav including cradles and ring marks
- Secure your steering lock if you have one

Christmas – drink and drugs

Winter is the season for parties as well as colds and flu. But did you know that driving while unfit through drugs, whether illegal, prescribed or over-the-counter, is an offence which carries the same penalty as drink driving?

Christmas – drink

- Watch the swift half after work
- You are likely to be breathalysed if you are involved in an accident. Don't take the chance or somebody else's mistake might become your problem
- A drinking session the night before can put you over the limit the morning after
- Don't try and calculate yourself whether or not you are over the limit

- Drinks poured at home are usually larger than stingy pub measures

Christmas – medicine

- When you take a new medicine, ask the doctor or chemist about side effects
- Check the labels for side effects
- Many medicines may affect your driving even when you feel fine
- Tell your doctor or chemist if you drive for work
- If your medicine makes you dizzy or drowsy and you need to drive, talk to your doctor about taking another medicine which doesn't have these effects

Christmas – drugs

- just don't drive
- the effects vary from person to person and can last for days
- the effects can be difficult for you to judge

The IAM

As the UK's leading road safety charity, we are dedicated to improving the skills of all road users, raising driving and riding standards and helping to save lives on our roads. Becoming part of the IAM is a great way to improve your driving and riding skills in a safe, enjoyable and educational environment.

Skill for Life

www.drivingadvice.org.uk

Thousands of drivers take our advanced driver programme – Skill for Life – every year. Their feedback is impressive - they find the experience enjoyable, the observing excellent, and often say it was one of the best things they have ever done. Many also go on to receive substantially reduced motor insurance premiums.

So, let us help improve your technique, increase your ability and confidence, and ultimately get the most out of your driving experience. It will also help improve your safety on the road.

Momentum

Momentum is an IAM assessment designed exclusively for under 26 year-old car drivers. It will help you find out how good your driving really is and where you can improve.

Win

We have a free Skill for Life course and three Momentum courses (under 26s only) to give away. Just complete our short online survey at www.drivingadvice.org.uk and you will be entered into our prize draw.