Car maintenance checklist

Quick checks you can do yourself, plus winter and road trip lists.
Your owner's manual sets the service intervals for your car.

mealot.com/templates/car-maintenance-checklist/
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Vehicle (year, make, model) _____ VIN _____ Odometer today _____

Every month

- [ ] Tire pressure, tires cold, all four plus the spare (target: door jamb sticker or owner's manual, not the number on the tire)
- [ ] Tread: penny test (Lincoln's head showing = under 2/32") or quarter test (Washington's head showing = under 4/32")
- [ ] Sidewalls: no bulges, cuts, or cracks
- [ ] Lights: headlights, high beams, brake lights, turn signals, hazards
- [ ] Engine oil level and washer fluid
- [ ] Coolant and brake fluid between the marks
- [ ] Wipers wipe clean; no growing chips in the glass
- [ ] No warning lights stay on after starting

Every few months or at each oil change

- [ ] Oil and oil filter, at your manual's interval or the oil-life reminder
- [ ] Tire rotation, at your manual's interval
- [ ] Engine air filter and cabin air filter: check, replace on schedule
- [ ] Belts and hoses: no cracks, fraying, bulges, or leaks
- [ ] Battery terminals clean and tight
- [ ] Brakes: no squeal or grinding; pedal feels firm
- [ ] MPG: a drop with no reason is worth a look

Once a year

- [ ] Brake inspection: pads, rotors, brake fluid
- [ ] Battery test, before winter
- [ ] Cooling system: coolant, radiator, hoses
- [ ] Alignment if tires wear unevenly or the car pulls
- [ ] New wiper blades if needed
- [ ] Open recalls by VIN: nhtsa.gov/recalls
- [ ] Tire age: last 4 digits of the DOT code (2419 = week 24 of 2019); tire makers say replace at 10 years
- [ ] State inspection or emissions test, if required

Winter (CDC advice)

- [ ] Radiator serviced, or antifreeze checked with a tester
- [ ] Winter washer fluid
- [ ] Tire tread and pressure; replace worn tires
- [ ] Gas tank kept near full
- [ ] Heater, defroster, brakes, ignition, flashers, exhaust, oil, battery
- [ ] Kit: phone charger, blankets and warm clothes, scraper, shovel, flashlight, radio and batteries, water and snacks, first aid kit, jumper cables, sand or cat litter, reflectors or flares

Road trip (a few days before)

- [ ] Tire pressure (cold), tread, and the spare or repair kit
- [ ] Oil, coolant, brake fluid, washer fluid
- [ ] Service due during the trip? Do it before you leave
- [ ] Lights and wipers
- [ ] Battery: slow start = have it tested
- [ ] Open recalls by VIN
- [ ] Load under the limit on the door sticker
- [ ] Emergency kit: jumper cables, flashlight, first aid, water, charger

From my owner's manual

Item	Every ___ miles	or ___ months
Oil and filter		
Tire rotation		
Engine air filter		
Cabin air filter		
Brake fluid		
Coolant		

Sources: CDC, Preparing for a winter storm; Michelin, Tire safety tips and When do I need new tires; AAA, When to replace tires; 49 CFR 574.5 (tire date code). General information: follow your owner's manual, and check with a tire shop or mechanic about anything that looks wrong. Free template from mealot.com. Mealot for iPhone (coming soon) turns each item into a reminder by miles or by date.