

Defensive Winter Driving Tips



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Your vacation travel, job duties, and commuting may take you through some dangerous driving conditions. These tips have helped me over the past 50+ years and they may help you, too, during or after a snow or ice storm. gel

Just For Starters

1. **Before turning on the ignition, make sure the wipers are not frozen to the glass.** Always stop the wipers with the wiper switch and wait until they go into their "park" position before turning off ignition. This is necessary because your wipers will finish one cycle when you turn on the ignition, when you turn on the ignition the next morning. If you don't let your wipers go to the park position and they freeze to the glass, damage to them may occur the next time you start your car.
2. **Let your engine warm up while you clear off snow or ice from all window surfaces.** Put heater fan on *high*, heat on *hottest*, and selector on *defrost*. Be sure to clear off any snow accumulated on the hood and front fenders. This can make it easier to judge distance. Turn on electric rear window defroster if you have one. (In-glass defrosters improve rearward visibility under all moisture-producing conditions, including summer rain.)
3. **Check all lights, including headlights, parking lights, tail lights, backup lights, and lane-change signals.** Make sure they are free of snow or road grime. Even if you don't wash your car all winter, keep your lights clean. Keep a roll of paper towels and a spray bottle filled with washer fluid in the trunk. These will be handy for cleaning road grime off all light lens.
4. **If visibility is anything less than normal, turn headlights on low beam, even during daylight hours.** Although this may not improve your ability to see, it will make it easier for the other guy to see you and to judge your speed and distance. **NEVER, NEVER, NEVER** use parking lights on the highway for any reason. As the name indicates, they are for **PARKING**. When used on the highway, they tend to distort the other drivers' perception of your speed and distance, especially if most other cars are using headlights.

Traction Tips

1. **If your car will be parked for some time while it is snowing, try to back into the garage or parking space.** When it's time to move, pulling out will be easier than backing out. For rear drive cars, the bare spot where the car is standing may provide enough initial traction to get you going. For front drive cars, backing in snow is more difficult than for rear drive cars so plan ahead.

2. **If you have rear drive, load your passengers from back to front.** If you have just one passenger, have him/her sit in the middle of the back seat. You want as much weight as possible over the drive wheels.
 3. **If you appear to be stuck in your parking spot, try rocking the car with gentle backward and forward motions.** (Never change gears while moving or accelerating.) If you move forward/backward for a limited distance, stop, reverse your direction in your own tracks and hit it again a little harder. Avoid sitting in one spot and spinning your tires. This only heats up the tires and digs you in deeper. If you have standard differential, without traction control, it will be possible for one wheel to spin while the other is motionless. A burlap bag, grocery bag, or cardboard carton under that spinning wheel may get you going. Carry a bag of unused cat litter in the trunk. A little under the tire may provide assistance for a spinning wheel.
 4. **Make all moves slowly and carefully:** starting, stopping, turning, speeding up, slowing down. Sudden moves cause trouble when the traction is poor.
 5. **If the main traffic lane is very slippery and you're having trouble getting up a hill,** try driving slowly with 2 wheels on the edge of the roadway.
 6. **Try to avoid going up a hill right behind another car.** If it loses traction and starts to slow down, you're licked, too. When approaching a hill, follow the other car at a significant distance and then pick your own pace and maintain it. Inertia is your friend while going up a hill with poor traction. Inertia is your enemy when trying to stop.
 7. **If your drive wheels start to spin or slide while going up a hill,** ease off on the accelerator slightly and then gently resume speed.
 8. **To correct a skid TURN WHEEL IN THE DIRECTION OF THE SKID.** If your rear end starts sliding to the right, turn the wheel to the right. If your rear end starts sliding to the left, turn your wheel to the left. Do not apply brakes while in a skid. When your wheels are locked, your car is a toboggan.
 9. When buying a new car, look for one with *all wheel drive*. When ordering a new car with front drive, be sure to ask for the *traction control*.
 10. Of course, the best possible option is a car with all wheel drive, or four-wheel drive.
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Bits on Braking

1. If you don't have ABS, brake gently and in an on/off pattern. Power brakes require an especially light touch on the pedal.

If you have ABS (automatic braking system) designed to prevent your wheels from locking up when braking, check your owner's manual about stopping under poor traction conditions. As a general rule, continuous pedal pressure will be better than on/off braking. When the ABS engages, you'll hear a rumble from the brakes and the brake pedal will vibrate under your foot. The ABS computer is controlling which wheel is braking in order to prevent a skid. NOTE: Resist the temptation to take your foot off the brake while ABS is engaged; maintain constant pedal pressure.

2. Decelerate well in advance of a turn or stopping point. Try to avoid using brakes while turning; slow down in advance of the turn and then accelerate very gently while going through it.
3. When descending a hill, pick your maximum safe speed while at the crest and then stay under that speed throughout the descent with gentle on/off braking. Don't expect to do all your braking at that stop sign at the bottom.
4. If you are approaching a stop with alternate patches of ice and bare pavement between you and the stop, brake firmly as you cross the bare spot and coast over the ice.

SPECIAL NOTE: Use your four-way flashers if you are moving much slower than other traffic, stopped in or near a traffic lane, or making an unusual maneuver.

I have never owned a four wheel drive vehicle. Consult your owner's manual for tips about braking and traction for such a vehicle.