

Auto Repair Guide

4



How to Change the Oil

How to Change the Oil in Your Car

Five Parts: [■ Jacking up the Vehicle](#) [■ Draining the Oil](#) [■ Replacing the Oil Filter](#) [■ Adding New Oil](#)
[■ Disposing of Oil](#) [? Community Q&A](#)

Regularly changing your car's engine oil and filter are one of the most important things you can do to keep your car running well. Over time, your oil will break down and your filter will become clogged with contaminants. Depending upon your driving habits and type of vehicle, this may take as few as 3 months or 3,000 miles (4,800 km), or be as long as 20,000 miles (32,000 km) or 24 months (consult your owner's manual for service intervals). Fortunately, changing your oil is both easy and inexpensive, so the sooner you change the oil in your car if it needs it, the better.

Part 1

Jacking up the Vehicle

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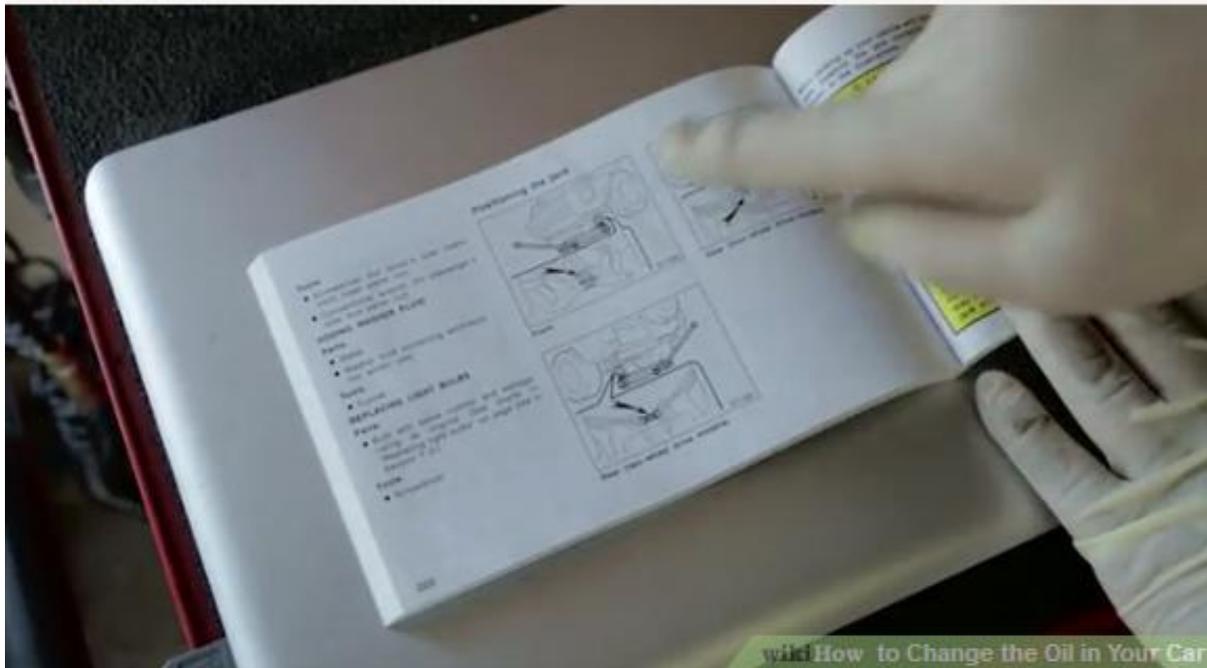
- 1** Pull the car into a driveway or space with level ground and enough working area.
 - Leave the car idle for 5-10 mins to get the oil warm. Be sure to exercise caution when draining warm or hot oil.



- 2** Place car in park, remove the keys and apply the parking brake. Exit the vehicle.



- 3** Install wheel chalk/blocks to restrain tires. Tire restraints (wheel blocks) should be placed on the tires that will remain on the ground.



- 4** Locate the jacking points on the vehicle. If you are unsure, check the owners manual for specifics.



- 5** Jack up the vehicle.
- You will only need to do this on one side.



6 Place jack stands on jacking points.



7 Restrain the vehicle. Apply force by rocking the vehicle to assure it is safe.

Part
1

Jacking up the Vehicle

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8

Place the oil recovery pan (drain pan) underneath the engine.

- Let the car sit for 10 mins to cool down. Engine/exhaust could be hot, be careful.

Part
2

Draining the Oil

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- 2** Remove the oil cap. Open the hood and locate the oil cap on top of the engine.



- 3** Find the oil pan. Under your car, look for a flat metal pan closer to the engine than the transmission.
 - Locate engine drain plug.
 - Verify that is the engine oil drain plug, not the transmission drain plug. If you are unsure which is which, look for the exhaust. The exhaust is always attached to the engine, as is the tube that travels from the front of the vehicle to the back. The oil pan and drain plug will be located below the engine.



- 4** **Remove the oil plug.** Loosen the plug counter-clockwise using the proper sized socket or a crescent wrench if you have room to maneuver. You should also remove and replace a paper or felt drain plug gasket. A metal washer can be re-used in good condition.



- 5** **Wait.** It will take several minutes for all the oil to drain out of the car. When the oil has ceased running out of the crankcase, replace the plug. Put the new washer in the drain plug. Inspect and clean 3 areas: drain, plug, and gasket. Put the new gasket on the drain plug.



- 1** **Locate the filter assembly.** Filters are not put in a standard position, so they can be on the front, back or side of the engine depending on the model.
 - Look at the replacement filter you purchased to have some idea of what to look for. Typically, they're white, blue, or black cylinders about 4–6 inches (10.2–15.2 cm) long and 3 inches (7.6 cm) wide, like a soup can.
 - Some vehicles such as BMW, Mercedes, and newer Volvos may have a filter element or cartridge as opposed to the simpler spin-on type. They require you to open the cap of a built-in reservoir and lift out the filter element itself.



- 2** **Unscrew the oil filter.** First, try by hand to get a good grip and twist slowly and steadily, counter-clockwise. If you are unable to remove the filter by hand, you will need an oil filter removal tool to do this. Make sure the drain pan is underneath the filter before fully removing the filter. This will help prevent spillage.
 - To avoid spilling too much oil as you remove the filter, you can wrap a plastic bag around the filter, which will catch any oil that escapes as you remove it. Let it sit upside down in the bag to drain as you complete the job.
 - Make sure the pan is still under the car catching the spilling oil. There will be some trapped in the filter that will come out when you unscrew it.



3 Prepare the new filter. Dip the tip of your finger in the new replacement oil and smear it on the gasket ring of the new filter. This will lubricate the gasket and create a good seal for the new filter, and ensure that you'll be able to get it off the next time.

- You can also pour a tiny amount of oil into the filter prior to installing it. This will reduce the amount of time your car takes to regain proper oil pressure. If your filter is mounted vertically, you may be able to fill it almost to the top. If mounted at an angle then a small amount of oil will spill just prior to spinning the filter on.



4 Carefully screw on the new, lubricated filter, being careful to not cross the threads. The filter will generally say how tight to tighten it; look to the specifications on the box for more specific instructions. In general, you'll tighten the filter until the gasket touches, then a quarter-turn more.



- 1 Add new oil to the car at the fill hole.** The amount you need is in the owner's manual, usually listed under "capacities."
 - If you hold the bottle with the spout on top, it will pour more smoothly, without bubbling.
 - Make sure you're adding the correct oil. Typically, you can safely add 10W-30 to most cars in a pinch, but you should consult your owner's manual or the experts at an auto shop before adding oil.
 - Don't always rely on the dipstick for an accurate measurement; it can be off, especially if the engine has just been run (the stick will read low because there is still oil in the galleries). If you want to check the stick accurately, just check it first thing in the morning, parked on a level surface, when it's cold and settled.



- 2 Replace the fill cap.** Check around for any loose tools you might have left around and close the hood.
 - Look under the car to make sure nothing is leaking. It's a good idea to wipe up any spills as best you can. While it's not dangerous to get a little oil on the crankcase as you're pouring, it may smoke as the engine heats up, leading to that burning oil smell that can be momentarily frightening. It can also make your interior smell bad.



3 **Start the engine.** Watch to be sure the oil pressure light goes off after start-up. Put your car in park or neutral with the parking brake on to check for any drips and look carefully under the car to check for any leaks or drips. If the filter and drain plug aren't tight, they may leak slowly. Run the engine for a minute or so to get the pressure up and ensure you've installed everything correctly.

- Optional: Reset the oil change light. This will differ depending upon the make and model of your car, so you should consult the owner's manual to figure out the specific set of steps. On most GM cars, for instance, you'll need to shut the car off and then turn the ignition on without turning the car over. Next, pump the gas pedal three times in ten seconds. When you start the car back up, the lights should be reset.



4 **Check oil levels by pulling out the dipstick.** Once vehicle has been turned off again and the oil has settled for 5 to 10 minutes, recheck the dipstick to ensure that the levels are where they need to be.



1 Transfer the oil to a sealing container. Now that you've changed your oil, get the sludgy gunk into a more permanent container. Adding it to the new container you've just emptied is the safest bet. Use a plastic funnel in the bottle and pour slowly to ensure you don't spill any. Clearly mark the bottle "used oil" so you don't mistake it for the real thing.

- Other options include old milk jugs, windshield washer-fluid jugs, or other plastic bottles. Be very careful anytime you're using old food bottles to clearly mark it.
- Don't put old oil in containers that held chemicals like bleach, pesticides, paint, or antifreeze. These will contaminate the recycling process.



2 Make sure your oil filter is drained. You can add this oil (sometimes as much as 8 oz.) to the old oil. Filters are also recyclable, so hang onto them.



- 3** Find a designated collection site in your area. Typically, all places that sell motor oil will have this information on hand. Retailers that sell more than 1,000 filters in a year are required to accept old filters.^[1] Many service stations that do oil changes will also take your used oil, though sometimes for a small fee.



- 4** Try recycled oil next time. Used motor oil is refined until it meets the same certifications and specifications of virgin oil. The process requires less energy than pumping and refining new oil and recycling motor oil helps to reduce the need of foreign oil imported. In some cases, recycled oil also costs less than "new" oil.

Quick Summary

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To change the oil in your car, start by parking your car on a level surface and putting on the parking brake. Jack the car up, place the oil drain pan underneath the engine, then give your engine about 10 minutes to cool down. Once it's cool, remove the oil plug underneath your car and allow the oil to drain out into the pan. Then, unscrew the old oil filter and screw in a new, lubricated replacement. Consult your owner's manual to see how much and what kind of oil your car takes, then add the new oil to the fill hole.

Did this summary help you? [Yes](#) [No](#)

Tips

[Edit](#)

- Consider having a green, eco-friendly oil absorbent product on hand in case you spill some oil. They will absorb oil and will keep your garage and driveway clean. Kitty litter or clay-based products are not effective solutions for this. You can find a wide variety of eco-friendly oil absorbent products online. They are extremely absorbent, easy to use and renewable.
- There are some oil drain valves on the market that replace your normal drain pan bolt. These can make oil changes much more convenient and can reduce the amount of mess you make.
- To avoid getting oil all over your arm when removing the drain plug bolt, apply inward force (as if you are trying to push the plug back into the hole) while removing it. When you know that bolt is fully unscrewed, quickly pull it away from the opening. If you're lucky only a few drops will get on your hand. Tie a rag around your wrist when you remove the oil plug.
- Use disposable nitrile gloves. The used motor oil contains many toxic contaminants and can be easily absorbed through your skin.
- For a very stubborn filter, use a hammer and a chisel to push the filter counter-clockwise. Be advised: once you punch a hole in this thin filter wall, the engine cannot be started until it's replaced.

Warnings

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- Don't get the oil inlet confused with the transmission fluid inlet. You can ruin your transmission if you put oil in it.
- Be careful not to burn yourself. Your engine, the used oil inside it, and other parts of the car can stay hot enough to burn you for a long time after you turn the ignition off.

Things You'll Need

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- 4–6 liters (1.1–1.6 US gal) of oil. Make sure you use oil that meets the API performance rating for your vehicle. Most vehicles made since 2004 require rating "SM", which is better than the oil that was available when older cars were made.
- Socket wrench. For European or Japanese cars you will likely need a metric set.
- Oil filter. Some come with a grippy coating that makes the filter easier to install and tighten.
- Oil filter wrench (optional). There are different size oil wrenches available depending on the diameter of the filter. The expensive one that is double articulated is the surest one to use.
- A way to get your car off the ground. Ramps or a jack stand are the safest bets.
- A pan to catch the used oil in, and a funnel and sturdy gallon jugs to transport it.
- Oil rags or paper towel.
- Some vehicles require you to remove top or bottom panels, which might require additional tools.

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