

Auto Repair Guide

1



How to Talk to a Mechanic
and Avoid Being Scammed

How to Avoid a Scam from Auto Mechanics

[Edit Article](#)

It's important to keep your car in good repair, for safety, efficiency, and the longevity of your car. Unfortunately, some shops are more interested in making money than in servicing your car. Here's how to make sure you're paying for the service you need, and getting the service you pay for.

Steps

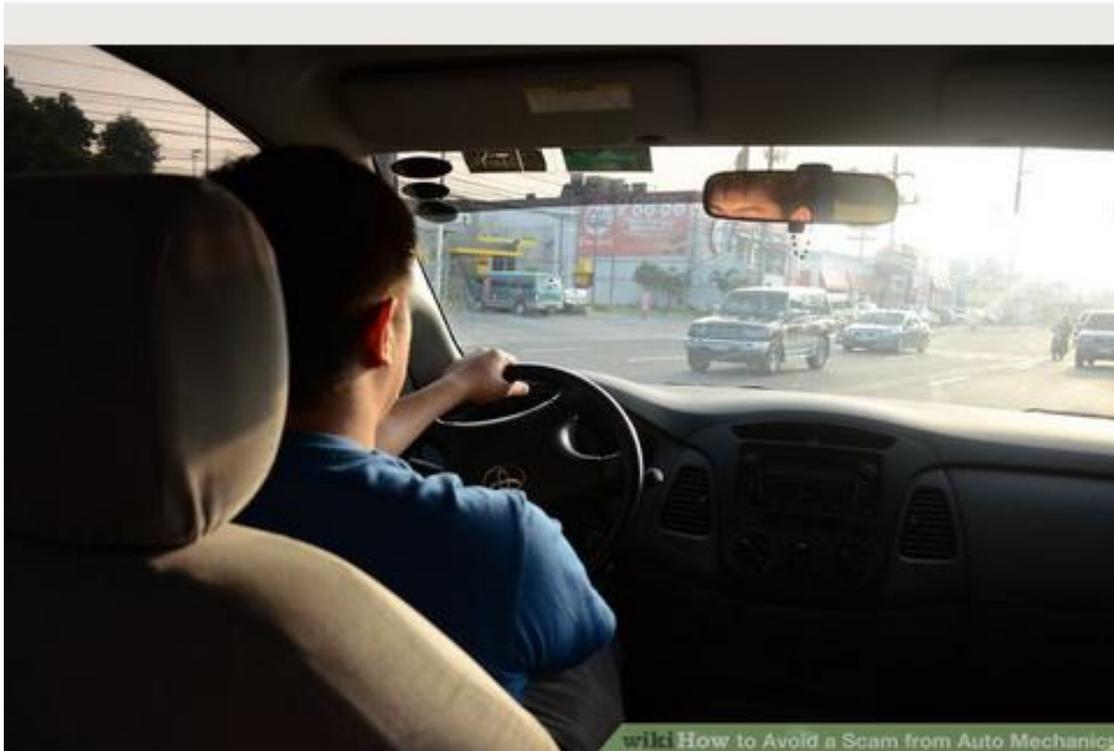
[Edit](#)



- 1** Ask friends, co-workers, anyone who might know, for shops they have worked with and what feelings they had about them. If they felt like they were ripped off, they may have been.



2 Identify the reason you're taking your car in before you take it in. If you've noticed a problem, gather as much information about it as possible. What speed does that noise start? Does it make the noise when sitting still, moving, or both? What were you doing, and the car doing when the light first came on? Knowing details about your symptoms will, if nothing else, make figuring out the problem easier. Writing down those details will also help you to be able to say whether the service fixed the problem.



3 Swing by your local auto parts store, especially if your check engine light is on. They will likely be more than happy to plug "the machine" into your car, and tell you why the light is on. Usually this is done free of charge, and they can often tell you right then and there if you need a new sensor. You might even get them to show you where it is and what it looks like.



wiki How to Avoid a Scam from Auto Mechanics

4 Armed with this knowledge, it's time to go to the shop. Tell him what you observed before you came in, let them hook up the scan tool (the machine) and tell you what they think it is.

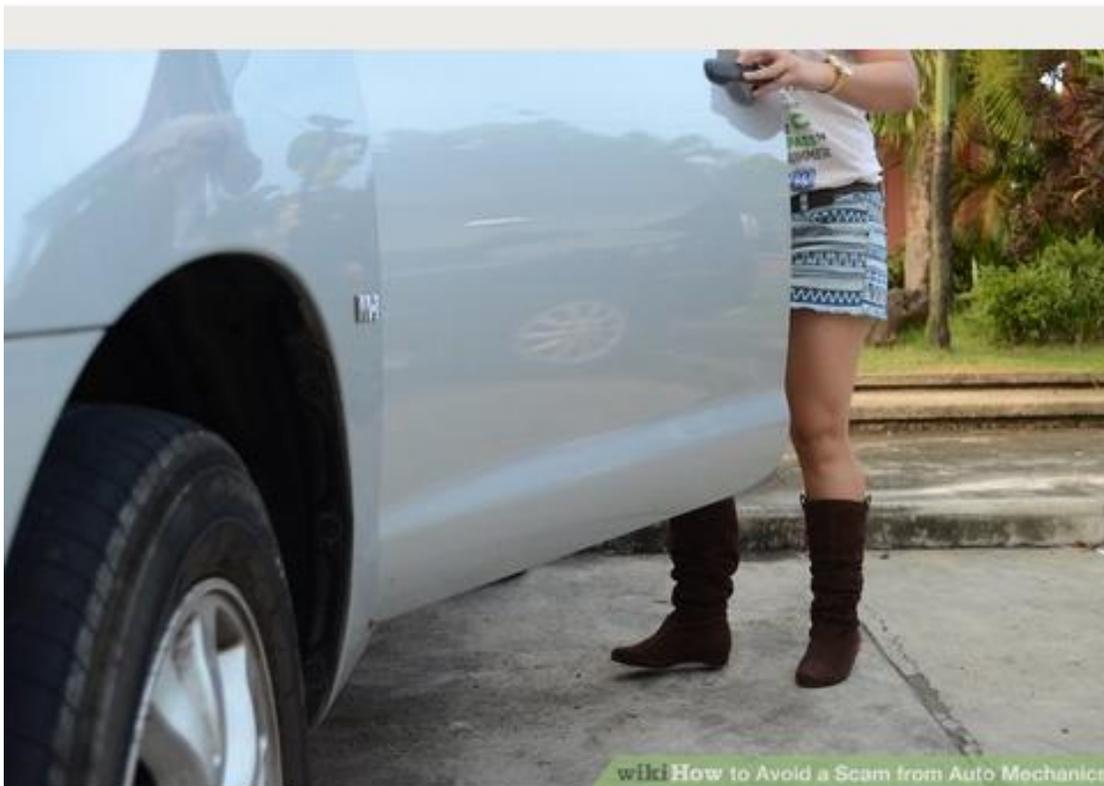


wiki How to Avoid a Scam from Auto Mechanics

5 Ask questions. Ask them to explain what that means, how it works, etc. He should be able to give you some understanding of how your car is supposed to work. If it sounds like they are talking in circles, this might be cause for alarm.



- 6** Ask to have the old parts before your mechanic begins work. Maybe your friend's son is "really into stuff like this". Whatever the reason, if he knows you want the broken stuff, he's more likely to actually do the work.



- 7** Get a quote in writing before the work is performed. Mechanics should not perform repairs without consulting you, and a written quote should eliminate "extra" services being performed. If the work includes an oil change, agree in advance on what kind (regular or synthetic) and what viscosity of oil will be used, and check it against your owner's manual.

Tips

Edit

- Keep your own log of what service has been performed, and when. If somebody is recommending something that has just been done, it's a pretty good indication that they haven't even checked.
- Watch the work, if possible. Many chains have windows onto the work bays so you can see what is (or isn't) getting done.
- Make sure you keep your car's maintenance up to date.
- Get a second opinion. If something doesn't sound right or if you feel like you're getting a hard sell or simply the runaround, see another mechanic.
- Check your fluids before you go in. You'll know firsthand how your fluids look, so you'll know immediately if a sample of dirty fluid you're handed really came out of your vehicle.
- There are several websites that can recommend reputable shops in your area.
- Even with the advances in diagnostic equipment, fault isolation and troubleshooting is a complicated process. Your mechanic might not get it right the first time. If that happens, it doesn't mean he's scamming you; however, any follow-up trips to the shop shouldn't be nearly as pricey as the first. You may be able to get the rest of the job done for free.
- Consider doing your own work, at least for basic maintenance. It's not that hard to change your oil or your air filter. You might save money, and you'll know for certain when and how the work was performed. You'll also learn basic things about your car that will help you make informed decisions when you talk to your mechanic. However make sure you have a friend on hand that can coach you through the work, otherwise the work may end up costing you a ton later if it is not done correctly.
- If you're going in for routine maintenance, such as an oil change or emissions check, be wary of attempts to up-sell; that is, to sell additional services beyond what you request. Be familiar with your manufacturer's recommended service intervals, which should be listed in your car's owner's manual, and with what service is (and is not) recommended. In particular, engine flushes, fuel injector cleaning, and transmission flushes are not only unnecessary but potentially damaging.^[1] Transmission fluid should be changed in some cars, but it's usually a very long interval, compared to the oil.

Warnings

Edit

- Not all mechanics are disreputable. Be diligent and do your homework, but be respectful, too. When you find somebody who is honest and hardworking, recommend that person to your friends.
- If a part that was "replaced" doesn't look new, that doesn't mean the mechanic is trying to rip you off. He may have found a used part to install. These are always a lot less expensive than new parts, but your mechanic should tell you that he's using used parts before installing them. If you see a used part, make sure you didn't pay for a new part. Do this simply by asking.