

9 Tips For Saving On Fuel Costs

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Except for the selection of the car itself, most tips on saving fuel will not save that much by themselves on a day-to-day basis. However, combining several tips with time can result in significant weekly, monthly, and annual savings, depending on the type of car you drive, the way you drive it, how often you drive it, and where you drive it. Almost anyone should be able to cut fuel costs dramatically by implementing as many of the following tips as possible.

1. **Driving Habits:** As a general rule, speed probably has the most effect on fuel economy. Most cars today begin to lose fuel efficiency significantly once you pass 55 mph. The faster you go, the faster the fuel goes. If you have the option of driving 65 mph or 75 mph, for example, you will use over 20% more fuel by driving the higher speed. You will drive a little longer going the slower speed, but the overall savings can be anywhere from \$5 to \$10 per extra hour the trip takes. While this might not be much of a savings on the next trip to grandma's house, people who drive a lot can save a lot simply by slowing down, leaving earlier, and planning an effective route.

One driving habit which burns fuel, but which seems to be common is rapid acceleration, staying on the gas until the last minute, and then slamming on brakes. My wife and I often comment on the number of people who get to the red light ahead of us. Professional truck drivers often increase their fuel economy by "playing the lights", that is, watching what is happening with the traffic lights ahead, and beginning to slow down when the light turns red, rather than running up and braking rapidly. It requires less fuel to speed a moving vehicle back up than it does to accelerate from a full stop, and less fuel is burned approaching the light or intersection if the car begins slowing sooner.

2. **Tires:** Properly inflated tires, in addition to being safer than under or over inflated tires, can save fuel. Use a tire gauge and check the tire for the proper inflation pressure. A tire, particularly a radial, can be badly under inflated and still appear normal. Proper inflation will also help insure the longest life for your tires, saving you the costs of early and frequent replacement, and saving the environment in terms of the energy and resources needed to produce those extra tires.

3. **Use Higher Gears:** This might not be of particular importance to those driving automatic transmissions, but getting a car up to cruising speed and putting it in the highest effective gear available uses a lot less fuel. Beware, however, accelerating too quickly. Shoving the pedal to the floor in an effort to get to cruising speed quickly can, particularly with older cars, push more fuel through the system than is needed, resulting not only in increased fuel use, but in fouling of the engine due to build ups from partially combusted fuel.

4. **Air Conditioning:** We all used to drive with the windows down, all the time. Use your air conditioner when it is needed, and you could save a couple miles per gallon.

5. **Planning and Sharing:** Planning any trip can result in fuel savings. However, many people overlook the short trips to the mall, the cleaners, and the bakery. Maybe some of these trips can be combined into one rather than several which require you to leave your house, for example, and get to your destination and then return home from where you begin your next trip. Shopping online is also becoming more popular, and many things from televisions to cell phone service to groceries can be ordered on line. Many retailers such as Wal-Mart and Target have online stores. Of course, be careful that the shipping on the item doesn't offset the fuel you save. Sharing errands with your neighbors and carpooling to and from work can save a lot.

6. **Automobile Maintenance:** A properly maintained car tends to operate more efficiently than one that is not. Tune-ups and regular oil changes both can contribute to increased fuel savings. Synthetic motor oils can contribute to more efficient engine operation and last longer, thus saving on fuel costs while decreasing maintenance costs. Learning to do such simple things yourself as oil changes can also save a lot of money if you have been paying someone else to do them. Such simple things as changing air filters and worn belts can also increase engine efficiency, thus contributing to fuel economy.

7. **Alternative Transportation:** Let's face it. Walking and bicycle riding have been common forms of transportation in other countries for years. Not only that, if you have been wanting to start an exercise or weight loss program, what better way than to make it a part of your daily activities such as the trip to and from work or the grocery store which is a mile or so away? Public transportation such as intra-city rail lines and buses can not only save money and fuel as your vehicle is no longer sitting in the line of traffic, but the time that you would have to spend controlling your vehicle is now given back to you. A few years ago, my wife got tired of commuting 45 minutes each way, sitting in creeping traffic for most of the time feeling frustrated and battling road rage...hers and the other drivers'. She tried the bus for a week and not only saved money on fuel costs, but arrived at work and back at home rested and calm. She soon had a small collection of books and tapes that went with her for entertainment and relaxation on the trip.

8. **Hybrids:** It is obvious that choosing a fuel efficient car is one of the first and most important steps that can be taken in saving on fuel costs. Many companies are already producing hybrid vehicles which can produce fantastic saving compared to the fuel consumption of standard cars. While day-to-day driving results are not as good, test vehicles have achieved over 70 mpg in city driving, the type of driving that eats fuel up. For those who can't let go of their SUV or high-end vehicle, Lexus has entered the hybrid market as has Ford, which has a broad selection of hybrid vehicles

to choose from.

9. Alternative Fuels: Much research is being done on fuels such as natural gas, ethanol, bio-diesel, hydrogen and hydrogen fuel cells. These show much promise for the future although they are not as commonly available as gasoline, which can be used in hybrid cars which are on the market today. Eventually, however, some of these technologies will be refined to the point where it becomes economically feasible to consider using them regularly. The author is retired from the Army after 21 years of service, has worked as an accountant, optical lab manager, restaurant manager, over-the-road longhaul truck driver and truck driving instructor. He has been a member of Mensa for several years, and has written and published poetry, essays, and articles on various subjects for the last 40 years. His experiences as a longhaul truck driver who owned his own truck led him to follow-up on various methods of saving money on operating costs while prolonging the life of his equipment. You may learn more on this subject at <http://lube2005.com>