

Signs that your car needs service

As much as we may try, not every car owner gets their vehicle serviced as frequently as needed. It's easy to forget how many miles it was since that last oil change, or if you needed a tune-up every 30,000 miles (or was it 40,000 miles?). However, there are some sure-fire indicators when you should absolutely have your **car inspected** or repaired by an auto service technician – or risk more costly damage if you don't.

Check engine light or other dashboard warnings. As ambiguous as a "**check engine**" light may be, your car's on-board diagnostic system is essential to keeping the engine running efficiently. Flashing or blinking warning lights or check engine indicators should be addressed as soon as possible.

Oil spots under the car. Have you noticed dark brown oil spots on your garage floor or driveway? Not only are the stains unsightly, they indicate your vehicle is leaking precious motor oil. The problem could be as minor as an oil filter or drain plug not secured tightly or as major as compromised gasket somewhere in the engine.

Greenish fluid under the car. Your car is leaking radiator fluid. It could be a small issue like a bad fitting on a hose that leads to or from the main radiator body or a major issue such as a cracked or penetrated radiator. Get this problem fixed as quickly as possible or risk overheating your engine and causing permanent damage.

Squealing or squeaking when braking. Many vehicle manufacturers and brake components maker engineer their brakes to emit a high-pitch squeal or squeak when **brake pads** are near the end of their service life. Squealing or squeaking can also indicate that brake hardware has become too worn. Putting off simple brake repairs can quickly cause more costly damage.

Grinding when braking. Typically indicate the brake pads weren't replaced in a timely manner or that the brake rotor surface has become marred or damaged. The brake pads may be beyond their wear limit, causing other parts of the braking system to come in contact with the brake rotor. Get brake repairs immediately.

Louder than normal operation, or rumbling or sputtering from beneath the car. There's a problem with the **exhaust system**. It could be a minor problem such as a hole or disconnected pipe or something more serious such as a bad muffler or catalytic converter.

Chirping or screeching from under the hood. Drive belts, also known as serpentine belts, direct engine power to accessory systems like the power steering or AC. But these belts can become frayed, brittle or glazed as they wear, which can create a chirping or screeching sound, especially on start-up. Belt replacement a simple repair that's relatively cheap.

Humming, growling or roaring when driving. If you notice these noises, your tires may be worn or deformed, which mean it's time to replace them (which should help improve fuel economy). Another cause, especially if you notice the sound only when turning or changing lanes, is a bad wheel bearing. If you suspect a bad bearing, get the issue checked out immediately, as a seized or damaged bearing could leave you stranded.