

EcoDriving Practices

Subtle changes in driving habits can produce significant benefits, such as saving money at the gas pump and reducing CO2 emissions. Here are best practices for green driving:

Believe You Can Reduce Fuel Use and Emissions

Tip #1 Many of the best practices for green driving are subtle, but they can add up over a year. Making small changes in your driving can be the most effective way to reduce fuel use and carbon dioxide emissions, and the best part is you can do it today, with whatever vehicle you are currently driving. What you monitor, you manage...so start adapting a "lead foot" to a "feather foot" and keep track of the savings over several tanks of gas. Typically, practicing moderate levels of EcoDriving can reduce fuel use by an average of 15%.

Avoid Rapid Starts and Stops

Tip #2 Rapid starts and stops, often called "jack rabbit" starts and stops, use fuel and costs money at the gas pump. Gentle acceleration and braking can save more than \$1 per gallon, according to the U.S. EPA, because smart driving can improve fuel economy by up to 33%. A few seconds of high-powered driving can use as much gas as driving for several minutes at more measured speeds. Ease into accelerations and brake smoothly, especially around corners, to raise your mileage the most. Avoid tailgating. When EcoDrivers avoid rapid starts and stops, they are not only practicing safe driving habits, but they're also reducing the energy required to get the vehicle moving again.

Keep on Rolling in Traffic

Tip #3 Slow-and-go is always better than stop-and-go, and not just to reduce traffic congestion woes. Maintaining a constant speed in your commute increases fuel economy, because it takes much more energy to move a stopped vehicle than to keep a vehicle moving. In fact, it can take 20 percent more fuel to accelerate from a full stop than from 5 miles per hour. Many truckers practice this approach to reduce shifting ten-speed truck transmissions. Drivers who try to achieve the highest mileage possible, often called "hypermilers", practice looking ahead down the road to anticipate stops and to coast as much as possible.

Ride the "Green Wave"

Tip #4 Traffic lights are often synchronized so that a motorist driving at a specific speed will pass through a series of green lights without stopping. Driving more quickly means you arrive sooner at a light and need to stop. Engineers optimize the traffic light timing to reduce congestion and improve traffic slowly. A steady speed often can help drivers avoid red lights, therefore keeping the car moving more efficiently.

Use Air Conditioning at Higher Speeds

Tip #5 Air conditioning can reduce mileage significantly, by as much as 20%. In fact, your air conditioner can consume up to one gallon of gas per tank to cool the vehicle. But driving with your windows open can produce aerodynamic drag, which reduces fuel economy. What's a driver to do? When driving at slower speeds (less than 40 mph), such as driving in urban areas, open windows are better. At higher speeds (over 40 mph), open windows use more fuel than the air conditioner, so close the windows and turn on the air conditioner. Another good idea is to take advantage of the "recycle inside air" feature. The air that is already cooled in the car is reused by the air conditioning system, instead of drawing hot air from the outside to be cooled.

Maintain an Optimum Highway Speed for Good Mileage

Tip #6 Highway driving that exceeds 60 miles per hour uses more fuel. According to the U.S. EPA, every 5 miles over the 60 mph level is equivalent to paying 20 extra cents per gallon for gas. Observing the speed limit and not exceeding 60 mph (where legally allowed) can improve mileage by 7-23%.

Use Cruise Control

Tip #7 During highway driving, cruise control helps maintain a steady speed. According to a test conducted by

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Edmunds.com, cruise control can provide a 7% average fuel savings, compared to driving without the device operating. These benefits come largely from driving on flat terrains, according to Edmunds. Cruise control maintains a constant vehicle speed. If you are driving on hilly roads, cruise control may cause your engine to speed up on climbing hills and slow down on the other side, reducing mileage, so use cruise control selectively. Using cruise control on 10,000 of the miles driven in a year could save you nearly \$200 and save more than 60 gallons of fuel, according to the Department of Transportation (assuming \$3 a gallon for fuel, 20 MPG, and 15,000 miles driven annually).

Navigate to Reduce Carbon Dioxide

Tip #8 Planning driving trips, even Saturday shopping, can help reduce fuel use and CO₂ emissions. One of the easiest ways to plan trips is to purchase a navigation system to find the shortest distance to your destination. And, it can make the Saturday shopping trip more relaxing, too.

Avoid Idling

Tip #9 Idling uses gas, but because the car is going nowhere, it translates into 0 mpg. An automobile may burn more than half a gallon of fuel for every hour spent idling, so turn your engine off for long stops. How long is long? As a rule, shutting off your engine for any stop anticipated to be longer than 30-60 seconds saves gas and reduces carbon dioxide emissions. But make safety your highest priority, and only shut off your engine in situations where you are not in traffic, such as waiting to pick up the kids or when you're making a quick drop off or pick up.

Buy an Automated Pass for Toll Roads

Tip #10 Computers make our lives easier in many ways, including reducing fuel use. By purchasing an "E-Z" pass for a toll road or bridge, a driver avoids stopping and starting the vehicle and idling in lines. Special lanes allow drivers to maintain a cruising speed through the toll. This saves time and money at the pump.

Use the Highest Gear Possible

Tip #11 Automobiles are designed to start in the lowest gear possible, because that's where they have the most power, however, power means fuel consumption, according to Edmunds.com. By using overdrive gearing where possible, such as on the highway, your vehicle's engine speed goes down, saving fuel and engine wear while reducing CO₂ emissions.

Drive Your Vehicle to Warm It Up

Tip #12 Today's automobile does not need a warm-up period before driving it. Even on the coldest morning, running your engine for 30 seconds is all you need before your vehicle is ready to drive, according to J.D. Power. This is enough time for the oil to circulate throughout the engine. Your vehicle will reach its optimum operating temperature much faster when you are driving, rather than idling. Today's engines are designed to run most efficiently when warmed up, so you want to warm up the vehicle by driving it. During the first few minutes of driving when an engine is cold, try to avoid sudden or severe acceleration. Also, you don't need to step on the gas pedal before starting the engine. Take advantage of a warm engine by "trip chaining", or grouping your trips together. For more information, visit www.DriveLessSaveMore.com.

Keep Your Cool

Tip #13 The inside of a vehicle heats up quickly in summer sun, reaching 120 - 130 degrees Fahrenheit in just 10 minutes. That can mean more air conditioning use, and that means more fuel use. Now, keeping your cool reduces carbon dioxide emissions too. So, always roll down the windows when getting into a hot car to blow out the hot air. Try to park in the shade. And consider investing in a heat reflector or window shades to shield your vehicle's interior from the sun. Parking in your garage instead of outdoors can help keep your vehicle cooler in the summer.

Obey your Check Engine Light

Tip #14 Today's automobiles have sophisticated onboard diagnostics (OBD) systems that continually monitor the operation of your vehicle. When the OBD alert light comes on, there is the possibility that your emissions are increased and your fuel economy is going down. An example would be if the oxygen sensor has failed and the engine controller goes to a default setting - increasing fuel consumption. Replacing a faulty oxygen sensor could result in a fuel economy improvement of as much as 40%. When the OBD light goes on, see your auto dealer for more information.

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