

# GUIDE TO YOUR VEHICLE'S FLUID LEVELS



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You've made a good decision in choosing to download this *Guide to Your Vehicle's Fluid Levels*. Not only will this guide prepare you for your first round of routine and preventative automotive maintenance, but you'll get to know how several different systems in your vehicle work both with and without the required fluids.

In this guide, we'll walk you through the five major fluids that should be checked on within your vehicle, as well as some additional fluids to keep your eye on. You'll learn everything you need to know about keeping your car functioning at its highest level with frequent and necessary fluid checks and replacements.







## Why Should You Be Checking Your Fluids?

Your body runs better when you're completely hydrated, right? When you've been drinking the proper amount of water, you've consumed fluid-rich foods, and your temperature conditions have been ideal, your system functions better. Well, your car is the same way; it runs like a finely tuned machine when it has all of the fluids it needs.

Over time, the fluids in your vehicle will get lower and need to be replenished, or in some instances, replaced. However, your car isn't going to yell at you when it's thirsty like kids can, so you'll need to know how to tell when it needs something filled or when you need to make an appointment to change the oil.

## Engine Oil

By far one of the most important fluids in your vehicle, the engine oil needs to be closely monitored. At least once a month, you should get under the hood and make sure there is enough oil in your car and that it doesn't look filthy. Here's a brief tutorial on what you need to know about your oil levels.

## Signs of Low Engine Oil

- **Oil Light** – If the light that looks like a genie's lamp with a drip coming from it illuminates on your dash, this could be your first symptom of low engine oil. It may flicker as the remaining oil relocates itself around your engine and triggers the light sensor.
- **Strange Sounds** – You may begin to hear what sounds like a knocking from underneath the hood. This is another indication of low engine oil yet it's not one you want to encounter. This one means that the rods that hold your pistons are getting ready to fail, so if you're hearing the telltale knock, pull over and call for a tow.

## How to Check It

There is one final indication that your engine oil is running low; the dipstick will tell you. However, there's a catch and that is that you need to be able to check the oil in order to figure it out. Here's the basics on how to do it:

- **Pull the Dipstick and Wipe It Down** – When you pull the dipstick out, it's going to be covered (hopefully) in engine oil. Use your first clean rag and wipe off the stick. At this point, you'll notice two small notches, pinholes, or letters on the face of the stick itself.
- **Put It Back in and Pull Again** – This time, you're not wiping it down. You'll need to take a close look at your stick and see at what level the oil is. If the oil level falls between the two marks, you're good to go. If it's below the lowest mark, you'll need to add oil.

## Transmission Fluid

Transmission fluid is another important fluid for your car as it is used to lubricate all the parts of your transmission to keep it in perfect working order. The type that is used will depend on whether your vehicle is an automatic or a stick shift but checking the fluid should follow a similar process. Give this fluid a thorough inspection once a year to ensure proper functioning.

## Signs of Low Transmission Fluid

- **Slipping** – This is what happens when you shift into a gear or your automatic transmission shifts for you and you feel it go into the gear. However, almost immediately afterwards, it feels as though the car shifts back out of the gear.
- **Sticky Shifting** – If you're attuned to your car's sounds, you'll know when it is about to shift, but your car may be delayed in doing so. This is indicative that you require transmission fluid soon.
- **Overheating** – If you're noticing the smell of smoke coming from under the hood, you're potentially working with an overheating transmission. If this happens, pull over and let it cool down.

## How to Check It (Automatic Car)

- **Pull the Dipstick** – Your transmission has a dipstick too and you'll need to pull it out as well. However, there are certain conditions that need to be in place beforehand. First, put your car in park or neutral and pull the parking brake. Keep the engine running and make sure the vehicle is warmed up when you check.
- **Check the Color** – Wipe your finger against the dipstick and test the consistency between your fingers, sniff it, and check the color. It should be clear, not grainy, and it shouldn't have a burnt smell at all.
- **Wipe It Down, Reinsert, and Pull Again** – Using a soft towel or rag, wipe the dipstick down. Take another look at the fluid and make sure it's clear. Then, reinsert the dipstick and look at the lines to see if the fluid reaches the full line. If not, carefully fill it up to the line, but not above it.







## Brake Fluid

This fluid lubricates all the different parts of your vehicle's braking system. To stress the importance of this fluid may be slightly redundant in that most people are well aware that without brakes, their vehicle won't stop. Once a year, get under the hood to take a look at these fluid levels.

### Signs of Low Brake Fluid

- Surprisingly, low brake fluid is a symptom of a greater problem with the brakes themselves. Brake fluid should stay at a consistent level unless it's leaking from somewhere, which is indicative that your brakes need to be replaced.

### How to Check It

- **Locate the Master Cylinder Reservoir** – Check your manual and look for a diagram of where to find the master cylinder reservoir.
- **Check the Fluid Level** – This should be pretty easy considering that brake fluid is held in a clear housing in newer cars. There should be a line clearly marked that says FULL. If your brake fluid is at this line, then you're good to go. However, if it's below, call your mechanic and get your brakes checked on.
- **Fill the Fluid** – If your fluid is low, there's another step in the checking process. You'll definitely want to make sure you refill the reservoir and that your brake fluid is up to the FULL line.

## Power Steering Fluid

In your car, it should be easy to turn the wheel to the left or right when you have to make a turn. This wasn't always the case before power steering fluid came into play. Power steering fluid is pushed through the pistons by a pump, thus allowing you to turn more easily. Every two years, spot the tank and make sure it looks full.

### Signs of Low Power Steering Fluid

- **Whining** – When you turn the wheel, if you're hearing an annoying whining sound, it's likely that your power steering fluid is running low. To test this, simply turn the wheel a couple of times and try to detect the sound.
- **Difficulty Steering** – If you're noticing some hesitation when you try to turn your car, you may be having some issues with your power steering fluid level being too low.

### How to Check It

- **Get It Warm** – Turn your car on and after a couple minutes, start turning the steering wheel from lock position to lock position. This will heat the power steering fluid to the level it needs to be for checking. After a minute or two, cut the engine.
- **Find the Tank** – Use your owner's manual to locate the tank before beginning.



- **Check the Dipstick** – There should be a dipstick attached to the cap of your power steering fluid tank. If not, however, there will be a full line on the outside of the tank that should be fairly easy to locate. You'll be able to see the level through the side of the tank or on the attached dipstick.
- **Add Fluid** – If necessary, add fluid to the tank, but first make sure you're using the right fluid by consulting the internet or your manual. This ensures that you do no harm to the power steering system itself with the wrong fluid.

## Coolant

Though not talked about as often as the other fluids, coolant is actually a very important component of your vehicle. The coolant sucks up all the heat from the engine as it goes through the radiator. The air flow allows the radiator to cool the fluid as the name would indicate. Also known as antifreeze, you'll need to check this fluid with the entry of the summer and winter seasons.

### Signs of Low Coolant

- **Warning Light** – The temperature warning light will illuminate on your dash when the sensor is triggered that this fluid is too low. However, it could be indicative of another issue, such as a cracked tube or something similar.
- **No Heat** – Sometimes if your heat isn't functioning properly, it could be because there's an issue circulating coolant through the heater core. This assists in regulating the cabin temperature, so you'll know if there's an issue.
- **Leaks** – If you pull away from your normal parking spot and notice a puddle beneath it that is not water from your air conditioning system, then it could be coolant. It will be green, pink, or orange and shouldn't be ignored.





## How to Check It

- **Find the Coolant Reservoir** – Once you locate the coolant reservoir with the assistance of your manual, you should be able to see the level clearly.
- **Check the Levels** – If your fluid is not at the line indicating that the reservoir is full, then you'll need to create a 50/50 mix of coolant and water and add it to the tank.
  - **Note:** Some brand name antifreezes come premixed, so check your bottle before creating the mix.
- **Check the Color** – Your antifreeze should not be clear or brown in color, but rather yellow, green, or red. If there is anything floating in it, you'll need to flush the system and refill the fluid as soon as possible.

## Scheduling Service

If you're not comfortable adding these fluids on your own or if you've already noticed that you're experiencing issues as a result of low fluids, don't hesitate to schedule service with your trusted professionals today. At a routine service visit, you can request that the fluids be checked and refilled accordingly, thus removing the burden from your shoulders.

Proper car maintenance doesn't have to be difficult and checking your fluids will become second nature to you as you continue doing it with time. With the assistance of this guide, you'll be a fluids expert in no time and you'll be able to detect any issues before they start.



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