

Family & Consumer Focus

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Cutting Down on the Cost of Driving

Lois Smith, Extension educator, consumer and family economics

For many of us, high fuel prices are having an impact on the household budget. Whether driving to work or taking the kids to their soccer game, there are a few things you can do to cut down on the amount of fuel you use. Regardless of the make and model of your car, how you fuel, drive, and maintain it makes a big difference in the amount of gas you use. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the nation's consumer protection agency, offers several tips to help you cut down the cost of driving.

At the Gas Pump

Making the right choice at the gas pump is an important first step to keeping your car running efficiently—and economically.

Follow your owner's manual recommendation for the right octane level for your car. For most cars, the recommended gas is regular octane. Using a higher octane gas than the manufacturer recommends offers no benefit—and costs you at the pump. Unless your engine is knocking, buying higher octane gas is a waste of money.

Gas saving gadgets? Steer clear. Be skeptical about any gizmo that promises to improve your gas mileage. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has tested more than 100 alleged gas-saving devices—including “mixture enhancers” and fuel line magnets—and found that few provided any fuel economy benefits.

Behind the Wheel

When it comes to stretching your gas budget, *how* you drive can be almost as important as *how far* you drive.

Stay within the posted speed limits. Gas mileage decreases rapidly at speeds above 60 miles per hour.

Avoid unnecessary idling. It wastes fuel, costs you money, and pollutes the air. Turn off the engine if you anticipate a wait.

Avoid jackrabbit starts and stops. You can improve in-town gas mileage by up to 5 percent by driving “gently.”

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Website Offers Practical Advice for New Parents

Milly Kaiser, Extension educator, family life

What month delivers the most births in the U.S.? Since 1990, August had the most total births except for a few years when it was edged out by July, according to federal statistics.

Having a baby, especially your first, brings the excitement of wanting to learn everything you can about what to expect. Unfortunately, newborns don't come with an "instruction manual."

New parents may be wondering when their babies will sleep all night, how often and how much to

feed them, and what makes them cry. The list of questions can go on and on.

Now, thanks to the Parenting 24/7 website from University of Illinois Extension, practical information and advice are just a click away at www.parenting247.org.

Parenting 24/7 provides a regular newsletter for parents of newborn to three-year-old children. These newsletters, which are monthly for the first year and bi-monthly through age 3, address issues children may face as they develop.

The website also provides feature articles, videos, current news items, parenting strategies, and other internet resources on a variety of infant care concerns. You'll even find advice from child development experts, family life specialists, and other parents who have experienced a particular problem.

Take a little time now to browse the website. If you know any expectant parents, tell them about this informative website. The Parenting 24/7 site offers around-the-clock support to answer their timely questions.

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Use overdrive gears and cruise control when appropriate. They improve fuel economy when you're driving on the highway.

The Tires

Keeping your tires properly inflated and aligned can increase gas mileage up to 3 percent.

Under the Hood

You don't have to be a great mechanic to keep your engine running at its fuel-efficient best.

Keep your engine tuned. Tuning your engine according to your owner's manual can increase gas mileage an average of 4 percent.

Change your oil. Clean oil reduces wear caused by friction between moving parts and removes harmful substances from the engine.

You can improve your gas mileage by using the grade of motor oil in your owner's manual and changing it according to the schedule recommended by your car manufacturer. Motor oil that says "Energy Conserving" on the performance symbol of the American Petroleum Institute contains friction-reducing additives that can improve fuel economy.

Regularly check and replace air filters. Replacing clogged filters can increase gas mileage up to 10 percent.

The Trunk

An extra 100 pounds in the trunk can reduce fuel economy by up to 2 percent. Removing non-essential stuff can save your gas dollars.

The Driver's Seat

The only sure-fire "equipment" guaranteed to get more from a gallon of gas is a fuel-conscious driver behind the wheel.

Combine errands. Several short trips taken from a cold start can use twice as much fuel as one trip covering the same distance when the engine is warm.

Consider carpooling. Many cities make it even easier by matching up commuters.

Bus it, bike it, or hoof it. Leave your car at home and use public transportation, ride a bike, or let your feet take you across town.

Master Grocery List: A Way to Save Time, Eat Healthier

Martha Winter, Extension educator, nutrition and wellness

Looking for ways to save time? Perhaps you've heard that it's a good idea to shop with a grocery list. Yet even when you make a list, you still forget to buy foods you need. Do some types of lists work better than others?

Many organizational experts recommend making a list with similar items placed together. Grouping foods by category on your grocery list helps you remember food items and avoid a return trip to the store. Also, by grouping foods together, you're less likely to double back in the store for a food missed in a particular section.

To save time, you can develop a master list, or a form, you can photocopy or print from your computer for weekly use. Keep your list in a central location where your family can add to it as needed. Some people keep it on their refrigerator with one of those strong magnetic clips. Other people store the list in a cupboard drawer.

Here are some tips for developing a master list:

- List foods by categories based on MyPyramid Food Groups—grains and cereals, vegetables, fruits, meat and meat alternates, and dairy. This helps assure that your meals include a mix of healthy foods.
- Some people like to arrange the categories in their list around the order in which foods are found in the store. The master list may include such headings as *canned goods*, *frozen food*, *fresh produce*, and so on.
- Include categories for non-food items that you buy at the grocery store such as health and beauty aids and household supplies. Grouping these items together lets you see how much of your “grocery” bill is going for items other than food. In reality, it may be toilet paper or toothpaste rather than tomatoes or tuna that add the most to your “food” costs.
- If there are foods and other items that you must have every week, give yourself a reminder by making them a permanent part of your master list. For example, if you always like to have some carrots in the house, write carrots under your Vegetable category heading. Then, if you need carrots that week, circle that item.

Play with your master list for at least a month to figure out what works best for you.

Remember that time spent developing a list is usually less than time spent returning to the store for a forgotten item. Having a list may also contribute to your overall meal quality. For example, do you really like to strain your coffee through a paper towel when you're out of filters?

Popsicle Treats

For quick and healthy snacks in reasonable portion sizes, try homemade popsicles. Just fill popsicle molds or small paper cups with your favorite concoction. To unmold, briefly hold the base of the mold under running water to loosen the edges. Here are some easy fillers for popsicle molds:

- 100% fruit juice
- Orange
- Apple
- Pineapple
- Grape
- Instant pudding, any flavor, made with skim milk according to package directions
- Your favorite smoothie recipe

This smoothie recipe, courtesy of the National Cancer Institute's Eat 5 to 9 A Day program, may become your favorite. For more recipe ideas featuring fruits and vegetables, visit www.5aday.gov.

Ingredients

- 1 cup unsweetened, frozen raspberries
- 3/4 cup 100% orange juice (if you use frozen juice, dilute it first)
- 1/2 cup fruit-flavored, low-fat yogurt (try peach)

Directions

Blend all ingredients well in blender and enjoy.

Variations

- Frozen strawberries, mixed berries, blueberries, mango, or peaches
- Pineapple juice, orange-tangerine juice, and other 100% juice blends
- Different yogurt flavors

When Lightning Strikes

Duane Friend, Extension educator, natural resources management

This time of year, thunderstorms always become a concern. Lightning reportedly kills an average of 67 people each year in the U.S.

Follow this advice to stay safe:

- When you see lightning, count the time until you hear thunder. If that time is 30 seconds or less, the thunderstorm is within 6 miles and is dangerous. Seek shelter immediately.
- Do not stand under or next to a tree. If you cannot get to an indoor location, crouch in the open, keeping twice as far from a tree as it is tall.

- If there is a group of people outdoors, keep several yards distance from each other. Open pavilions or other small shelters do not provide adequate protection unless they are well grounded.
- Lightning can enter a building through a direct strike, through wires or pipes that extend outside the structure, or through electrical, phone, plumbing, and radio/television antennas. If you are indoors, avoid contact with corded phones or contact with electrical equipment. Also avoid contact with plumbing, and do not lie or lean on concrete floors and walls. Stay

away from windows and doors, and stay off of porches.

- Typical surge protectors will not protect equipment from a lightning strike. During a storm, appliances and electronics, including antenna connections, should be unplugged to the extent possible.

If someone is struck by lightning, call 911 or other emergency services. Check the victim's breathing and pulse, and begin CPR if necessary and if you are trained to do so.

For more information, go to the National Weather Service lightning safety website at www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov/overview.htm



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