

10 Must-Carry Items for Your Car This Winter

Winter driving presents its share of challenges, from icy road conditions to car batteries that strain due to the cold. If you live in a region where the temperatures dip down low and your car breaks down, you could find yourself stuck perilously in a freezing car for hours.

Thankfully, some forethought and preparation can help. Make sure you’re fully prepared for whatever winter throws at you and stock up on these must-carry items for your [emergency winter car kit](https://mycalcas.com/2020/01/emergency-winter-car-kit/) this season.

**#1: Ice scrapers, snow brushes, and a foldable shovel**

It’s important to clear your whole car before you drive. Snow and ice can slide from your vehicle’s roof and obstruct your view while driving. It also could fly off and hit another car. Choose scrapers and brushes with long handles that allow you to reach the top of your vehicle. Stock several so the kids can help, too! Get a portable snow shovel--one that folds and takes up less space. Use it to dig out your car, as needed.

*Tip: You can also use the shovel to add fresh snow or dirt around your tires to help them get more traction.*

**#2: A bag of sand or kitty litter**

Your car may get stuck in the snow or be unable to move past an icy spot. Pour some sand or kitty litter over your tires and/or on the slippery ground to help with traction.

*Tip: You can place your car’s floor mats down in front of your tires to get your car off slippery surfaces. Watch the* [*video*](https://www.firestonecompleteautocare.com/blog/driving/how-to-get-car-unstuck-in-mud/) *from Firestone.*

**#3: Hazard triangles and LED flares**

When you break down on the side of the road, hazard triangles and LED flares help you to be seen by other vehicles and by emergency personnel who can assist you. Hazard triangles and LED emergency flares are especially important when there is reduced visibility such as at night or during [snowstorms](https://mycalcas.com/2020/12/what-to-do-if-you-get-caught-driving-in-a-snowstorm/).

Place the reflective hazard triangles behind your vehicle starting at 10 feet and going as far as 100 feet. Road flares have traditionally been used to mark sites for emergency responders. Rather than the traditional flares that light with a match and ignite, choose the modern version—LED safety flares. They are designed to be waterproof, shatterproof, and crushproof, and some are even magnetic and can stick right to your car.

*Tip: To reduce the drain on your battery, use your car’s emergency flashers only when you hear vehicles approaching.*

**#4: A flashlight (and some extra batteries)**

A flashlight not only can help you find things in the dark, but it also can be used to signal passing cars. Choose an LED flashlight that offers plenty of light. If you can, pack several flashlights so that everyone in the family has one. Store batteries backward in the flashlight to prevent the light from accidentally switching on and burning out. Keep a spare set of batteries on hand just in case.

*Tip: Pack some glow stick necklaces for the kids. They’re great fun and an easy way to find everyone in the dark.*

**#5: Jumper cables and a battery charger**

Low temperatures put an additional strain on your car’s battery. In fact, the freezing cold can turn a weak battery into a dead one overnight. If your car breaks down due to a dead battery, jumper cables can help. These cables enable you to charge your car’s battery from another vehicle’s battery. You also may want to invest in a portable battery jump starter. These devices jump your battery without needing another car. They also can power your other devices such as cell phones or tablets.

*Tip: Find out how much battery life you have left with a free battery test at Firestone.*

**#6: A cell phone charger and portable power bank**

Your cell phone is your connection to the world—and to assistance in times of trouble. Keep it charged by connecting it to a charger in your car. However, if your car doesn’t start, the car charger won’t work either. Be prepared and carry a portable battery or power bank in your car, too.

*Tip: If you’re stuck and your cell phone is losing power, change your outgoing message to your current location, time and date, and any other important details. That way, if your cell phone stops working, callers will get that message.*

**#7: Blankets and cold weather clothes**

Keep a few blankets or sleeping bags in your trunk. If you want to save on room, choose pocket-size heat-reflective blankets. Then, stock some warm clothes for every member of the family: old sweatshirts, thick pants, warm socks, boots, mittens, and warm hats. Add some hand or feet warmers, which could provide much-needed warmth in an emergency.

*Tip: Don’t run your car’s engine unless you are sure the exhaust pipe is free of snow. Snow plugging your vehicle’s exhaust system can cause deadly carbon monoxide gas to enter your vehicle.*

**#8: Snacks and water**

If you’re spending a significant amount of time in your car, you’ll want take along food and water. Keep water bottles and non-perishable snacks in your car throughout the winter. Consider these ideas: prepackaged trail mix or nuts/seeds, dried fruit, granola bars, chocolate, dry cereal, crackers, cookies, peanut butter (or other nut butters), rice cakes, and pretzels. Choose kid-friendly snacks in case the kids are traveling with you; plus, you can enjoy them even if the kids aren’t there!

*Tip: For a more substantial snack, pack a can opener and a variety of canned foods that can be eaten cold. Don’t forget to includeplastic utensils.*

**#9: Entertainment**

Bringing along some games and activities while traveling helps keep kids from feeling bored or stressed (especially if you have car trouble) and helps pass the time. Pack a travel game bag: include decks of cards, puzzles, coloring books and crayons or paper for older kids, and travel games. Sing songs, tell jokes, and keep the time as light-hearted as possible.

*Tip: Make it a game. Take a poll on how long it will take to get home or what the tow truck driver will look like.*

**#10: First aid kit**

A first aid kit is especially important in winter because emergency response times may be longer due to icy or snowy conditions. You can buy one or make your own. Include bandages, gauze, adhesive tape, antibiotic ointment, scissors, saline solution for eye washing or cleaning wounds, aloe vera to treat minor burns, an antihistamine for allergic reactions, and anything else your family may need. Also carry must-have medicines and prescriptions for all family members and travelers.

*Tip: Add baby wipes, which will help if you or the kids have to go to the bathroom outdoors in nature. A garbage bag can also be a makeshift toilet if need be.*

You can save some steps and buy [emergency roadside safety kits](https://www.businessinsider.com/best-roadside-emergency-car-kit) that combine many of the items on this list.

Finally, should you have a winter-related accident or incident, know that your [collision and comprehensive insurance](https://mycalcas.com/2021/08/liability-collision-comprehensive-coverage-101/) will help protect you.

Safe travels!

*California Casualty has been serving the needs of educators since 1951 and is the only auto and home insurance company to earn the trust and endorsement of the National Education Association (NEA). As a result, NEA members qualify for exceptional rates, deductibles waived for vandalism or collisions to your vehicle parked at school, holiday or summer skip payment plans and free Identity Defense protection – exclusive benefits not available to the general public. Learn how to save by getting a quote at* [*www.calcas.com/neamb*](http://www.calcas.com/neamb)*, or by calling 1.800.800.9410.*