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4 tips to choose the right tires

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Think of tires as part of your car's basic safety equipment. "Tires are the contact with the road, determining how fast you stop and start," says Bob Toth of Goodyear's auto tires division. "They have to transmit grip, traction, cornering performance, braking and ride comfort on any surface." Pay attention to the following points:

Where you live and what you drive matter. Tires appropriate for the rain-slick roads of Seattle are different from the ones you need for scorching Phoenix. Small commuter cars, high-performance sports cars and trucks carrying heavy loads require altogether different tires. Regardless of climate or vehicle type, your tires should meet or exceed the load-bearing capacity range recommended by your carmaker, says Greg L'Hommedieu of Les Schwab Tire Center in Kirkland, Wash.

Get the right size tire for your car. That information can be found on the placard located on the inside of the driver's side door, in your owner's manual or on the sidewall of your current tires. Tire dealers also should have it.



Check the tread on your tires in several spots about every 3,000 miles

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Buy new tires as soon as you need them. Because a given model's estimated longevity varies, check the tread every 3,000 miles, Toth says. Stick a penny in several different spots (Lincoln's head should be upside down). If the tread is so worn that the top of Honest Abe's noggin is visible, you need to buy new tires. Replacing tires before they are bald not only will improve your stopping distance and keep you safe, but it also can help ensure you get the best mileage possible.

Shop around for a good tire at a good price. For many people, all-season tires are the best value, L'Hommedieu says. "They aren't going to be the cheapest, but they offer the safest option with the most mileage and the lowest cost per mile. Most of the time, the quality of the tire will be relative to the price you pay. Premium choices will have more raw material and state-of-the-art design that will give you maximum wear, safety and traction." Spend some time researching what is available and appropriate at tire company websites or on independent sites like tirerack.com or cars.com.

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