

# Money for Life

July 2004

Dear Readers,

The high cost of gasoline has consumers looking for ways to improve car fuel efficiency. This month's newsletter includes practical steps you can take to increase gas mileage and information about "gas-saving devices."



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## Money-Saving Tips

There are numerous no- or-low-cost ways to combat high gas prices. The most important is to start at the gas pump; buy only the octane level gas you need. All gas pumps must post the octane rating of the gas under the FTC's Fuel Rating Rule. The higher the octane, the higher the price. Check your owner's manual to determine the right octane level for your car. Below are some additional tips from the EPA to help you get better gas mileage.

### Drive more efficiently

*Stay within posted speed limits.*

The faster you drive, the more fuel you use. For example, driving at 65 mph, rather than 55 mph, increases fuel consumption by 20 percent.

*Use overdrive gears.* Overdrive gears improve the fuel economy of your car during highway driving. Your car's engine speed decreases when you use overdrive. This reduces both fuel consumption and engine wear.



*Use cruise control.* Using cruise control on highway trips can help you maintain a constant speed and, in most cases, reduce your fuel consumption.

*Anticipate driving situations.* If you anticipate traffic conditions, you can avoid unnecessary braking and acceleration, and improve your fuel economy by 5 to 10 percent.

*Avoid unnecessary idling.* Turn off the engine if you anticipate a lengthy wait. No matter how efficient your car is, unnecessary idling wastes fuel and costs you money.

*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.

*Remove excess weight from the trunk.* Avoid carrying unneeded items, especially heavy ones. An extra 100 pounds in the trunk reduces a typical car's fuel economy by one to two percent.



### Maintain Your Car

*Keep your engine tuned.* Studies have shown that a poorly tuned engine can increase fuel consumption by as much as 10 to 20 percent depending on a car's condition. Follow the recommended maintenance schedule in your owner's manual; you'll save fuel and the car will run better and last longer.

*Keep your tires properly inflated and aligned.* Car manufacturers must place a label in the car stating the correct tire pressure. If the label lists a psi (pounds per square inch) range, use the higher number to maximize your fuel efficiency. Underinflated tires cause fuel consumption to increase by six percent.



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

Change your oil as recommended by the vehicle manufacturer.

*Check and replace air filters regularly.* Your car's air filter keeps impurities in the air from damaging internal engine components. Not only will replacing a dirty air filter improve your fuel economy, it will also protect your engine. Clogged filters can cause up to a 10 percent increase in fuel consumption.

### **Buy a Fuel Efficient Vehicle**

Deciding which vehicle to buy may be the most important fuel economy decision you make. Visit [www.fueleconomy.gov](http://www.fueleconomy.gov) for more information. You'll find gas mileage estimates and other data from the EPA for 1985-2004 model year cars.

For information about the costs of owning and operating a car, see ISU Extension's publication, "Money Mechanics: Owning a Car" (Pm 1461a) and the worksheet, "Calculating Your Car Costs," (Pm 1461b).

### **Gas-Saving Products**

Be skeptical of the advertising claims for gas-saving products. Claims usually advertise savings ranging from 12 to 25 percent. However, the EPA has evaluated or tested more than 100 alleged gas-saving devices and has not found any product that significantly improves gas mileage. Some products may damage a car's engine, void a manufacturer's warranty, or cause substantial increase in exhaust emissions.

Many ads for these devices feature glowing testimonials by satisfied customers. Yet, few consumers have the ability or the equipment to test for precise changes in gas mileage after installing a gas-saving product. Many variables affect fuel consumption, including traffic, road and weather conditions, and the car's condition.



Some devices claim to be approved by the Federal government. No government agency endorses gas-saving products for cars.

The most that can be claimed in advertising is that the EPA has reached certain conclusions about possible gas savings by testing the product or by evaluating the manufacturer's own test data. If the seller claims that its product has been evaluated by the EPA, ask for a copy of the EPA report, or check [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov) for information. In some instances, false claims of EPA testing or approval have been made.

The Better Business Bureau recommends that you always check with your mechanic before adding any fuel-saving device to your vehicle. If you're dissatisfied with a gas-saving product, contact the manufacturer and ask for a refund. Most companies offer money-back guarantees. Contact the company, even if the guarantee period has expired. If you're not satisfied with the company's response, contact the Consumer Protection Division of the Iowa Attorney General at 515-281-5926 or the Better Business Bureau at 1-800-222-1600.

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