

How to Check & Top Off Your Engine Oil

Checking your engine oil is one of the easiest and most important things you can do for your car. Engine oil keeps the moving parts inside your engine lubricated, helps control heat, and reduces wear. Driving with oil that is **too low can seriously damage your engine**. This guide is for vehicles that use a traditional **engine oil dipstick**, not an electronic oil-level system.

1. Park the Vehicle Safely

Park your vehicle on **flat, level ground**. Put the transmission in Park, set the parking brake, and turn the engine off. For many vehicles, waiting about **5–10 minutes** after shutting the engine off allows the oil to drain back into the oil pan and gives you a better reading. Always check your owner's manual because some vehicles have different procedures.

2. Find the Engine Oil Dipstick

Open the hood and locate the **engine oil dipstick**. It usually has a bright yellow, orange, or colored handle. Make sure you have the correct dipstick and are not checking the transmission fluid dipstick. If you are unsure, check your owner's manual.

3. Remove, Wipe & Recheck

Pull the dipstick completely out of its tube. Use a clean shop rag or paper towel to **wipe all the oil off the end of the dipstick**. Push the dipstick completely back into its tube until it is fully seated. Wait a second, then pull it back out again. This second reading is the one you want to check.

4. Read the Oil Level

Look at the end of the dipstick. Most dipsticks have two marks, dots, holes, lines, or a crosshatched area showing the acceptable oil range. The lower mark normally means **LOW/MIN**, while the upper mark normally means **FULL/MAX**. Ideally, the oil level should be near the FULL mark without going above it.

LOW/MIN → Add oil

Between LOW and FULL → Usually acceptable

At FULL/MAX → Do not add more oil

Above FULL/MAX → The engine may be overfilled

While checking the level, also look at the oil. Used engine oil naturally becomes darker with use, so dark oil by itself does not always mean something is wrong. However, oil that looks milky, foamy, contaminated, or unusual should be inspected further.

5. Top Off the Engine Oil

If the oil level is low, locate the **engine oil filler cap** on top of the engine. Make sure you use the **correct oil viscosity and specification for your vehicle**. This information may be printed on the oil cap, but your owner's manual is the best reference.

Remove the oil filler cap and use a clean funnel. Add a **small amount of oil at a time**. Do not pour a large amount in without checking the dipstick. Give the oil a little time to drain into the oil pan, then repeat the dipstick checking procedure.

Add a little → Wait → Check dipstick → Repeat if needed.

Stop adding oil when the level reaches the FULL/MAX mark. **Do not overfill the engine.** Too much engine oil can also cause engine problems.

SAFETY

Never work around moving belts, pulleys, cooling fans, or other moving engine parts. Be careful around a hot engine because the engine, exhaust, coolant system, and surrounding components can cause serious burns. Keep loose clothing, jewelry, hair, tools, and rags away from moving parts.

Checking your engine oil regularly only takes a few minutes, but it can help you catch a low-oil condition before it becomes an expensive engine repair.

Check it. Keep it full. Protect your engine.

Dirty Junky Car

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