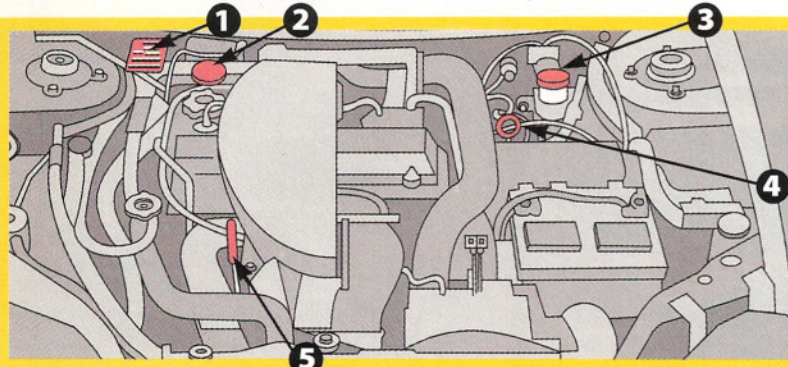


breakthrough

The Lazy Woman's Guide to Car Care

Cars cannot live on gas alone. In fact, there are five other fluids your auto depends on to keep moving, says mechanic Karen Valenti, who teaches a seminar for women at North Hollywood Complete Discount Auto Repair in California. To avoid a wheel ordeal down the road, here's what you should know.



1 RADIATOR COOLANT

WHAT IT DOES: Regulates the engine's temperature to keep your car from overheating.
CARE & FEEDING: About once a month, while engine is cold, make sure fluid level in coolant reservoir is at the "full" line. If your car doesn't have a clear reservoir, you might need a small flashlight to look inside. If you are low, head to the auto shop. A pro should flush out your radiator and add a new 50/50 mix of water and antifreeze every year (okay, if you let it go, don't wait beyond two years).
WARNING: Coolant (most often green or blue) leaking under your car is a sign of trouble with a hose, water pump, freeze plugs, thermostat or radiator; see a mechanic.

2 POWER STEERING FLUID

WHAT IT DOES: Puts pressure on steering mechanisms, adding power to your own steering movements.
CARE & FEEDING: Once a month, check power steering reservoir while engine is

cold. If you can see fluid, your level is fine. If not, see your mechanic.

WARNING: Most cars will alert you when they're low on power steering fluid by "groaning" or "whining," especially when you start out in the morning.

3 TRANSMISSION FLUID

WHAT IT DOES: Moves the car's gears, which then cause the wheels to rotate.
CARE & FEEDING: If you have a stick shift, ask your mechanic to look underneath the car when you get an oil change. Otherwise, with emergency brake set and engine running, pull out the transmission dipstick. Because the fluid will move, it'll be tough to get an accurate reading. Check three times, wiping stick with a paper towel before reinserting, and make your best guess, skewing low. If level seems to be below the indicator line—or if fluid smells or does not appear cherry-red or pink—get it changed immediately. Generally, it should be

changed, along with the filter, once a year.
WARNING: Never spend big bucks on a new transmission without first checking that the problem isn't low fluid level.

4 BRAKE FLUID

WHAT IT DOES: Gets pumped out whenever you hit the brake, forcing pistons to spring into position and create the friction to stop.
CARE & FEEDING: Check level in master cylinder (transparent in most cars) while engine is cold. If level is anywhere below "maximum," it's time for a brake check. Have a pro examine your brake system every six months—in many states, it's free.
WARNING: If your brake pedal feels spongy, vibrates or emits a squeaking or grinding noise, get a brake check ASAP.

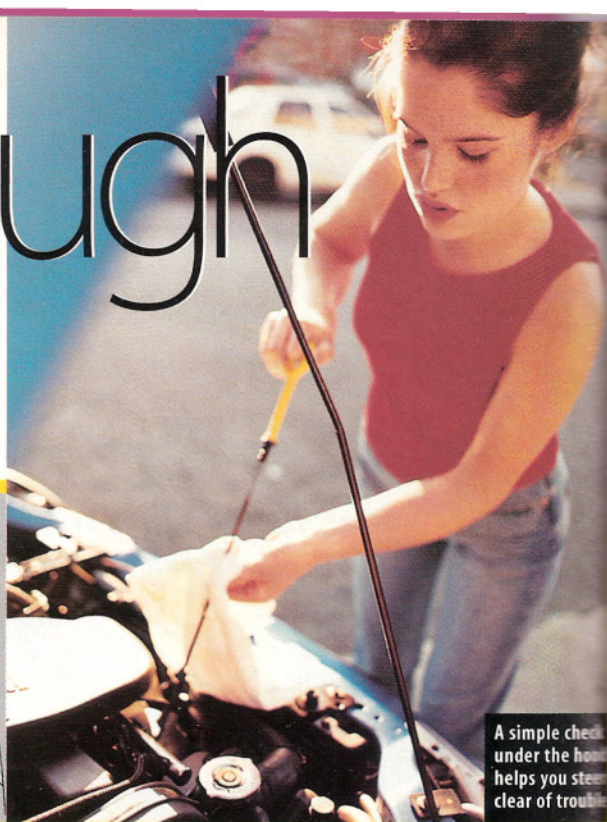
5 ENGINE OIL

WHAT IT DOES: Lubricates your car's moving parts so they don't wear down, filters contaminants and dirt, and helps cool the engine.
CARE & FEEDING: While engine is cold, check

the oil dipstick. Usually a "low" line indicates you are low one quart of oil. You can get away with that, but more than two quarts low is dangerous (since moving parts could fuse together). If you usually drive long stretches on the highway, you can probably go six months or 6,000 miles between oil and oil filter changes, but the safest bet is every three months or 3,000 miles (whichever comes first).

WARNING: If you drive mostly short distances or make frequent stops and starts, oil will get contaminated more quickly. Stick to a three-month oil-changing schedule, rather than judging by mileage.—*Laura Schiff*
NOTE: The diagram above, for the user-friendly Neon engine, may differ from your car. Always check your owner's manual.

► **mLle.Link** For free maintenance reminders—tailored to your car's make and year—via e-mail, go to www.carpoint.msn.com.



A simple check under the hood helps you steer clear of trouble.

SUPERSCRIPT

How to Be an Armchair Therapist

Ever feel like a counselor on call for friends and family? Next time you get the urge to offer wisdom, consider this: Advice, as most people tend to give it, "is never helpful," says Duke Robinson, author of *Good Intentions: The Nine Unconscious Mistakes of Nice People* (Warner, 1997).

"Solicited or not, when you make someone's decisions for them, you enable them to remain dependent on you," he explains. "And if they don't accept our advice, they're likely to feel as if they've disappointed or offended us."

But wait! You've spent a lifetime learning from all sorts of mistakes—you want to share the wealth! What's a supportive friend to do? Call it the EIO technique: Empathy, Information, Options. Take the classic dater's dilemma: A friend exchanged numbers with a potential keeper. It's

been three days. Nothing. Well? Should she call?

Of course she should call! This is the '90s! He could have lost her number! Men like assertive women! What does she have to lose?! Uh-oh. See how easy it is to slip into the Superwoman cape? Damned thing, it just looks so good on you. Nevertheless, let's try again:

Love-blind friend: "Should I call him?" Constructive you: "Wow, that's a tough problem." (Empathy.) "What's the worst thing that would happen if you called? Will you regret it if you don't? Would it be less stressful to e-mail him?" (Encouraging her to explore her options.) "I think if it were me, I'd figure, hey, why not?" (Information.) Same sentiment, different delivery. Kudos! Now you know how to help someone help herself. —*Jenna McCarthy*

Do you know how to give good guidance? Most people don't