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LIFE SKILLS · EVERYDAY PRACTICAL

Change a Tire Without Panic, in 4 Days

In four short sessions, do one full practice tire change on your own car so that the real one, whenever it comes, is something you have already done.

4-day guide · 5 chapters · Self-Directed Learning Framework

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide was built with the Self-Directed Learning Framework (SDLF): every chapter gives you a short starting action, the one idea you actually need, a fully worked example, a checklist, and exercises done on your own car — no filler, no re-reading required.

Important: this is general practical guidance for an ordinary passenger car, not instructions for your specific vehicle. Your owner's manual overrides everything here, particularly the jacking points and the torque figure. If the car is on a motorway, on a slope, on soft ground, or you are in any doubt at all, stay behind the barrier and call roadside assistance — a tire is cheaper than you are. Work through the chapters in order; each takes 20–35 minutes.

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CHAPTER 1 OF 5 · DAY 1 · 25 MIN

Finding Out What Is Actually in Your Car

> **Outcome:** "I know where my jack, wrench and spare are, and I know whether the spare is usable."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Open the boot and lift the floor panel. Most cars hide the whole kit in the well under it. Two minutes, nothing else.

The minimum you need to know

Every roadside tire change depends on four things being present and working: a **spare**, a **jack**, a **wheel wrench**, and whatever **locking wheel-nut key** your car uses. Any one of them missing means the job is impossible no matter how much you know. Two of them fail silently: a spare loses pressure sitting in the boot for years, and the locking key is the single most commonly lost item in any car, often removed at a garage and never put back. Check all four now, while a missing one costs you an order rather than a tow. Note also which kind of spare you have — a full-size wheel, or a narrow **space-saver** with a speed and distance limit printed on it. Some cars carry no spare at all, only a sealant canister and a compressor, which changes the job completely.

Worked example: a typical boot inventory

Under the boot floor of a mid-size hatchback: a space-saver wheel bolted down in the well, a scissor jack clipped beside it, a combined wheel wrench and jack handle, and a towing eye. The locking wheel-nut key is not there — it turns up in the glovebox, still in its plastic sleeve. The spare reads 4.2 bar on the sidewall; a tire gauge shows 2.9, because it has been losing pressure slowly for three years. Total outcome of the session: nothing repaired yet, but two problems found that would each have ended a real roadside change before it started. The spare goes to the filling station that week; the key gets a permanent home in the boot with the jack.

Checklist

- ☐ Boot floor lifted and the whole kit laid out where you can see it
- ☐ Spare located and its type identified — full-size or space-saver
- ☐ Spare's pressure checked against the figure on its own sidewall
- ☐ Jack and wheel wrench present, and the wrench actually fits your wheel nuts
- ☐ Locking wheel-nut key found and stored with the jack, not in the house
- ☐ Owner's manual located and the jacking-point page marked

Exercises

1. Lay out all four items on the ground and photograph them, so you know what you are looking for in the dark.
2. Check the spare's pressure with a gauge and write the correct figure on a label in the boot.
3. Find the jacking-point diagram in your manual and note how many jacking points your car has.

CHAPTER 2 OF 5 · DAY 2 · 25 MIN

The First Sixty Seconds After a Flat

> **Outcome:** "I know what a flat feels like, where I am allowed to stop, and what I do before I touch the car."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Sit in your parked car and find the hazard-light switch without looking for it. If you had to hunt, you have just learned something useful.

The minimum you need to know

A tire rarely explodes; it usually goes soft, and the car starts pulling to one side with a rhythmic thumping that speeds up with the wheels. The right response is to **slow gradually** — no hard braking, no sharp steering — put the hazards on, and look for somewhere to stop that is **flat, firm and far from traffic**. Those three words decide whether the change is safe at all. A flat surface stops the car rolling off the jack; firm ground stops the jack sinking; distance from traffic is the one that actually kills people. Driving a few hundred extra metres on a flat tire ruins the tire and maybe the rim — both replaceable. Stopping in a live lane is not a trade worth making. On a motorway, the correct answer is almost always to stop on the hard shoulder, get everyone out on the non-traffic side, stand behind the barrier, and call for assistance rather than change it yourself.

Worked example: two stops, one good and one bad

A driver feels the thumping on a two-lane road. The first gap is a lay-by 200 metres ahead on a slight downhill slope with a gravel surface. The second is a supermarket entrance 600 metres further, level and paved. The gravel lay-by is closer, and the instinct is to take it — but a jack on loose gravel on a slope is exactly the combination that drops a car. Another 600 metres at 30 km/h costs the tire, which is already finished, and buys a level paved surface with no traffic beside it. Hazards on the whole way, handbrake on hard, first gear or P selected, everyone out on the kerb side, warning triangle out if the law where you are requires one.

Checklist

- ☐ Hazard lights on before you start looking for a place to stop
- ☐ Stopping place is flat, firm and away from moving traffic — all three
- ☐ Handbrake fully on, car in first gear or P, engine off
- ☐ Passengers out of the car and standing on the side away from the road
- ☐ Warning triangle placed if your country requires one, and a reflective vest on if you have one
- ☐ On a motorway: nobody stays with the car — go behind the barrier and call assistance

Exercises

1. Find your hazard switch, handbrake and warning triangle by feel, with the doors closed.
2. Look up the reflective-vest and warning-triangle rules for the country you drive in.
3. Save your roadside-assistance number in your phone under a name you will find while stressed.

CHAPTER 3 OF 5 · DAY 3 · 35 MIN

Loosening, Lifting, and Taking the Wheel Off

> **Outcome:** "I have loosened the nuts on the ground, jacked at the correct point, and removed one wheel."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

With the car on the ground, fit the wrench to one wheel nut and see whether you can move it at all. That single test tells you how much of a fight the real job will be.

The minimum you need to know

The whole chapter is one rule: **loosen the nuts before you lift the car, tighten them after you lower it.** Wheel nuts are done up hard, and a wheel in the air simply spins when you push against it. On the ground, the tire's grip holds it still. Crack each nut about a quarter turn — loosen, do not remove. Then find the **jacking point**, which is a reinforced part of the sill near each wheel, usually marked with a notch or arrow; your manual shows exactly where. Jacking anywhere else bends bodywork or slips. Raise the car until the flat tire is clear of the ground by a couple of centimetres — enough to swap wheels, no more, because a higher car is a less stable one. Then remove the nuts fully, keeping them together where they cannot roll away, and lift the wheel off. It is heavier than it looks; use your legs.

Worked example: the practice run on a driveway

Front left wheel, car on level concrete, handbrake on and rear wheels chocked with a brick. Wrench on the first nut, a firm steady push — nothing. Standing on the wrench arm with a hand on the wing moves it with a crack. Same for the other four, each a quarter turn, no further. Jack positioned under the notch in the sill 20 cm behind the front wheel arch, wound up slowly while watching that the jack head stays square and the base stays flat. Tire clears the ground, jack wound two more turns, then stopped. Nuts off and dropped into an upturned hubcap so none can roll into a drain. Wheel pulled straight off and laid flat under the sill beside the jack — which, if the jack ever fails, is the thing that stops the car reaching the ground.

Checklist

- ☐ All nuts cracked loose a quarter turn while the car is still on the ground
- ☐ Jack placed on the manufacturer's jacking point, not on the sill edge or the floor pan
- ☐ Jack base flat on firm ground and the head square to the car before lifting
- ☐ Car raised only enough to clear the tire — two or three centimetres
- ☐ Nuts removed and kept somewhere they cannot roll away
- ☐ Removed wheel laid flat under the car as a backstop against jack failure
- ☐ Nobody, at any point, has any part of their body under the car

Exercises

1. Crack all five nuts on one wheel and do them back up, without lifting the car.
2. Locate and photograph the jacking point nearest each of your four wheels.
3. Do one full lift and lower of the car with the wheel still bolted on, just to learn the jack.

CHAPTER 4 OF 5 · DAY 4 · 30 MIN

Fitting the Spare and Tightening It Properly

> **Outcome:** "The spare is on, tightened in the right order, and I know what the car can and cannot do now."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Pick up the spare and hold it against the hub for ten seconds. Lining up the bolt holes one-handed is the fiddliest part of the whole job, and knowing that in advance helps.

The minimum you need to know

Lift the spare on, start every nut **by hand** — if a nut will not turn easily by hand, it is cross-threaded and forcing it with the wrench ruins the stud. Snug them lightly, lower the car until the tire just touches, then tighten properly in a **star pattern**: never go round the circle in order. Opposite pairs pull the wheel squarely onto the hub; going round in sequence can seat it slightly tilted. Lower fully, remove the jack, and give each nut a final check in the same star order. If you own a torque wrench, use the figure in your manual — typically somewhere around 110 Nm for a passenger car, but check yours. If you do not, firm pressure on a standard wrench is close enough to get you to a garage, where you should have them checked. Then read the spare: a space-saver usually carries an **80 km/h limit and a distance limit**, printed right on it, and it is not a tire you keep driving on.

Worked example: the last five minutes

Spare lifted onto the studs, tilted until the top hole lines up, first nut spun on by hand three full turns before the wrench comes anywhere near it. Remaining four the same. All snugged lightly with the wheel still off the ground. Jack wound down until the tire touches but the car is not yet resting on it — now there is grip but no full weight. Tighten top, then bottom, then the two sides, then the fifth, each firmly. Jack all the way down and out. Final pass in the same star order and each nut moves a few degrees more. Flat tire, jack and wrench go back in the well; the loose flat gets strapped or wedged, because an unsecured wheel in a boot is a projectile in a crash. The space-saver's sidewall reads MAX 80 KM/H — so the trip to the tire shop happens in the next day or two, in the right-hand lane.

Checklist

- ☐ Every nut started by hand, several turns, before any tool touches it
- ☐ Nuts snugged with the wheel still slightly off the ground
- ☐ Car lowered until the tire touches, then nuts tightened in a star pattern
- ☐ Car lowered fully and the nuts checked once more in the same order
- ☐ Torque figure from the manual used if a torque wrench is available
- ☐ Space-saver's speed and distance limits read off the sidewall
- ☐ Flat tire, jack and tools stowed and secured, nothing loose in the boot

Exercises

1. Do one complete swap on your driveway: flat off, spare on, car down, nuts checked.
2. Write your car's torque figure from the manual on the same boot label as the spare pressure.
3. Book or plan where you would take the flat to be repaired or replaced — find the place before you need it.

Afterwards: Checks That Stop It Happening Again

> **Outcome:** "I have a monthly check that catches most flats before they strand me."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Walk around your car and look at all four tires from a metre away. Any one that looks lower than the others is telling you something.

The minimum you need to know

Most flats are not sudden. They are slow leaks from a nail or a corroded valve that had been losing pressure for weeks, and the pressure loss is what destroys the tire on the way to becoming a flat. A monthly check takes four minutes: pressures when the tires are **cold**, since driving heats the air and reads high, against the figure on the sticker in your door frame — not the figure on the tire, which is the tire's maximum. While the gauge is out, look at the tread. Tires carry **wear indicators**, small raised bars in the grooves; when the tread is level with them, the tire is at the legal limit and should already have been replaced. And put the spare on the same schedule, because a spare checked once a year is a spare that is flat when you need it.

Worked example: a four-minute monthly routine

First Saturday of the month, before the car has been driven. Door-frame sticker says 2.3 bar front, 2.1 rear. Gauge on each valve: 2.25, 2.2, 2.1, 1.7. The last one is the story — a rear tire 0.4 bar down when the others have barely moved is a slow leak, not normal seepage. It gets topped up and re-checked a week later; still dropping, so it goes to the shop, where a screw is found in the tread and plugged for the price of a coffee. The alternative version of that month ends on a verge in the rain. The spare gets checked at the same time and the tread bars get a glance on all four.

Checklist

- ☐ Pressures checked cold, once a month, against the door-frame sticker
- ☐ Spare included in the same monthly check
- ☐ Any tire losing pressure faster than the others treated as a leak, not topped up and forgotten
- ☐ Tread checked against the wear indicator bars in the grooves
- ☐ Sidewalls looked over for cuts, bulges or embedded objects
- ☐ A repaired or replaced tire followed by a torque re-check after 50–100 km

Exercises

1. Find the pressure sticker in your door frame and note the front and rear figures.
2. Check all five tires, including the spare, and write the readings down so next month has a baseline.
3. Find the wear indicator bars in one tire's grooves so you know what you are comparing against.

You've completed this guide.

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