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Coin test for tires

Download Article Download Article The penny test is an easy way to check the tread on your vehicle's tires. Just place a penny with Lincoln's head upside down between 2 ribs on your tire. If you see his entire head, it's time for new tires. Proper tread allows your vehicle to gain traction and wick water away from the tires. If your tread is worn down, your vehicle is more likely to slide around in the rain and get stuck in the snow or mud. Your tires are also more likely to burst if you drive on weathered tread, which can lead to a crash. While the penny test will let you know if your tread is dangerously low, you may be better off doing this test with a quarter if you want to be more proactive about replacing your tires—especially if you live in an area that gets a lot of rain.[1] Place a penny in between 2 ribs on your tire with Lincoln's head pointing down into the tread. If only part of his head is covered, it means your tires are in good shape. If you see his entire head, your tread is 2/32" or deeper and it's time for a tire replacement. For popular FAQs on checking tire tread with a penny, jump to more common questions. 1 Do the penny test every month to make sure your tires are safe. Your tread wears down as you drive, so checking it every month is key to staying safe on the road. This test involves sliding a penny in between the tread on your tires to measure how worn down your tires are. By holding Abraham Lincoln's portrait towards the hubcap and checking how high the rubber reaches on the coin, you can tell if your tires need to be replaced. Monitor the tread using the penny test to make sure your tread doesn't get dangerously low. The ideal tread for most tires is around 10/32 inch (0.79 cm), which is roughly the distance from the top edge of a penny to Abraham Lincoln's eyes when he's right-side up. The distance between the top of Lincoln's hair and the top edge of the coin is 2/32 in (0.16 cm), which is when you need to replace your tires. In the United States, tire tread is typically measured in 32nds of an inch. 2 Grab a clean penny to perform the test on your tires. Dig around in your wallet, purse, or coin jar for a clean, shiny penny. If the penny is too dirty, it may be hard to get an accurate measurement with your coin. Variation: If you live in a rainy area, drive a vehicle with larger tires, or you want to be more proactive when it comes to replacing your tires, grab a quarter instead of a penny. On a quarter, the distance between the top of George Washington's hair and the tip of the quarter is 4/32 in (0.32 cm), which gives you an extra 2/32 in (0.16 cm) of breathing room.[2] Advertisement 3 Rotate the penny so Abe's head is pointing at the tire. You can start on any tire you'd like. Turn the penny in your hand so that Abraham Lincoln's portrait is facing you and his hair is pointing down at the center of the tire.[3] If you're using a quarter, do the same thing with George Washington's face. 4 Slide the penny in between the tread to measure it. The tread is the widest groove in the middle of your tire. It wraps around your tire, parallel to the sides of the rubber, and your vehicle likely has multiple treads. Choose any tread to start with and slide the penny in between it so the edge of the coin rests directly against the space between the tread.[4] Keep Abe Lincoln's hair pointing towards the center of the tire. It doesn't matter if you do this on the side or top of the tire. Just choose an area where you'll be able to see the penny. 5 See how high the rubber gets on Abraham Lincoln's portrait. Note the location where the rubber that sticks up past the side of the penny sits in relation to Abe's portrait. This will give you a general estimate of how worn down your tire is. 6 Check the tread on other portions of the same tire. Once you've noted where the rubber meets the coin, pull the coin out of the tread. Then, repeat this process on 2-3 other lengths of tread on the same tire. Finish the tire by repeating this process 2-3 times on the other sides of the same tire to find any inconsistencies. Each time you check another portion of the tire, rotate the coin so that Abraham Lincoln's hair is always pointing towards the center of the rim. 7 Repeat the penny test on your other tires to make sure they're safe. Once you've finished checking your first tire, work your way around the vehicle and check the other 3 tires. Repeat the entire process by sliding the penny in between the tread on different portions of the rubber.[5] If you've never had a tire replaced, the tread should be identical on all 4 of your tires. However, if you've had your rear tires replaced or you had a single tire replaced after a blowout, the tread may be different. Advertisement 1 Purchase new tires if you can see the top of Lincoln's head. If at point during your inspection you can see the top of Abraham Lincoln's hair when the penny is in the tread, your tires need to be replaced. Drive your vehicle to the mechanic or auto shop on a day when there's no rain and at a time when there's very little traffic. Drive slowly and take it easy. At the shop, pay to have your tires replaced.[6] For uniformity reasons, it's best to replace all of your tires at the same time if you can. This will avoid uneven wear and tear on your vehicle. If you're using a quarter, get your tires replaced when you can see the top of George Washington's hair. This is roughly 4/32 in (0.32 cm), but the goal of using a quarter is to replace the tires before the tread becomes dangerously low. 2 Continue driving on your tires if Lincoln's hair is completely obscured. If your penny goes deep enough into the tread that the rubber meets Lincoln's eyes and his hair is covered by the rubber, you're good to go. Your tires still have life in them and you can continue driving safely.[7] When the penny is right-side up, Lincoln's eyes are roughly 10/32 in (0.79 cm) from the top edge of the coin. For the quarter test, so long as the rubber meets George Washington's forehead, you're good. This is roughly 12/32 in (0.95 cm). 3 Get an alignment if the tread is different on one or more of the tires. If you noticed that Lincoln's portrait was meeting the rubber at different locations on one or more of your tires, it means that your tires aren't wearing out evenly. This is usually a sign of an alignment issue, but you must have a mechanic take a closer look. Drive your vehicle over to your mechanic and explain the problem.[8] If your vehicle needs a realignment, it's no big deal. This often costs \$50-100 and can be done in under 2 hours if the mechanic isn't busy. Unfortunately, this isn't a repair you can make from home since it requires an alignment rack. 4 Replace your tires every 6-10 years, even if the tread appears fine. While the tread is generally a good indicator of your tire's health, the rubber breaks down over time on its own. Read your vehicle's instruction manual to see how often you need to replace the tires. On most vehicles, it's either every 6 or 10 years.[9] If your tires are past their expiration date, replace them even if the tread looks fine.[10] Tip: If you aren't sure how old your tires are but they were made after 2000, look for a string of embossed letters and numbers printed directly on the tire. Then, inspect the last 4 numbers in this row. The first 2 digits are the week and the last 2 digits are the year that your tire was manufactured. For example, if your tire has "2415," it was made on the 24th week of 2015.[11] Advertisement Is the penny test for tires accurate? According to some studies, the penny test for tires is outdated, especially if rain and wet roads are a concern for you.[15] Instead, use a quarter to test your tire tread depth, and replace your tires when they reach 4/32 of an inch or deeper. What is the quarter trick for tires? Place a quarter into the tread groove with Washington's head facing downward. If you can see the top of his head, it means your tires are worn below 4/32 of an inch and you need to replace them.[16] What is a safe tire tread depth? Brand new tires have a tread depth of 10/32" or 11/32" of an inch, but good tire tread depth is 6/32 of an inch or deeper. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, you need to replace your tires when the tread reaches 2/32 of an inch.[17] Thanks Advertisement Thanks Thanks Advertisement Co-authored by: Automotive Tire & Repair Specialist This article was co-authored by Howard Fleischmann and by wikiHow staff writer, Eric McClure. Howard Fleischmann is an Automotive Tire and Repair Specialist and the CEO of Community Tire Pros & Auto Repair, with ten locations throughout Phoenix, Glendale, Yuma, and Casa Grande, Arizona. Howard specializes in full-service auto repair and tire replacement and care for domestic/imported vehicles and large trucks. Howard's dedication to Community Tire Pros & Auto Repair has earned their team multiple awards and features including the 2021 Phoenix Magazine AZ State 48 "Best of the Best!", the 2020 "Best of Phoenix" in Auto Repair, the 2013 Master SBD award, the 2013 National "Top Shop" award by Tire Review, the 2012 Diversity Champions Phx Business Journal, the 2009 BBB Ethics award, the 2008 Phx Chamber of Commerce Impact Award - "Small Business of the Year", and the 2008 ASU Spirit of Enterprise award. Howard is often referred to as "The Car Guy" for local TV stations and is a regular on TV's Channel 3 Sunday, Good Morning Arizona monthly. This article has been viewed 351,419 times. Co-authors: 13 Updated: February 24, 2025 Views: 351,419 Categories: Featured Articles | Tires and Suspension Print Send fan mail to authors Thanks to all authors for creating a page that has been read 351,419 times. I knew about the penny test on a tire. But it has been so long I forgot how to read the penny upside down to test and see if the tire needs replacing. I'm very impressed with the information you gave. And you really went out of your way with full details. Thank you.", "... more Share your story When it comes to checking tire tread, there are a number of methods that can help you know if it's time to replace a tire. Heavily worn tread will prevent a tire from performing as designed and can lead to unsafe driving conditions. One of the simplest, most common ways to check tread depth requires nothing more than a penny and a few moments of your time. In the United States, tire tread depth is measured in 32nds of an inch. New tires typically come with 10/32" or 11/32" tread depths, and some truck, SUV and winter tires may have deeper tread depths than other models. The U.S. Department of Transportation recommends replacing tires when they reach 2/32", and many states legally require tires to be replaced at this depth. The idea of the penny test is to check whether you've hit the 2/32" threshold. Here's how it works: Place a penny between the tread ribs on your tire. A "rib" refers to the raised portion of tread that spans the circumference of your tire. Tire tread is composed of several ribs. Turn the penny so that Lincoln's head points down into the tread. See if the top of his head disappears between the ribs. If it does, your tread is still above 2/32". If you can see his entire head, it may be time to replace the tire because your tread is no longer deep enough. When performing the penny tire test, remember not only to check each tire, but to check various places around each tire. Pay special attention to areas that look the most worn. Even if parts of your tread are deeper than 2/32", you should still replace the tire when any areas fail the penny test. Consistent wear around the whole tire is normal, but uneven tread wear could be a sign of improper inflation, wheel misalignment, or a variety of other things. If you see uneven tread wear, you should have a technician inspect your vehicle. OTHER WAYS TO CHECK TIRE TREAD TREAD DEPTH GAUGE A simple way to check your tire tread depth is by using a tread depth gauge. You can find tire tread depth gauges at your local auto parts store. There are many models available, but an inexpensive simple graduated probe gauge will work just fine. All you have to do is stick the probe into a groove in the tread and press the shoulders of the probe flat against the tread block and read the result. All gauges should measure in both 32nds of an inch and millimeters. TREAD WEAR INDICATOR BARS Another indicator of worn out tread already lives in your tires themselves. Every performance, light truck, or medium commercial tire comes equipped with indicator bars (or wear bars) embedded between the tread ribs at 2/32". They're there to help you monitor tread depth and make decisions about tire replacement. Just look to see if the tread is flush with the indicator bars. If they are, it's time to replace the tire. DON'T WAIT UNTIL IT'S TOO LATE While the penny tire test does deliver on what it promises - indicating whether tread has reached the legal limit - it may not be the best indicator of whether your tires are safe for the road. Tire performance can diminish significantly before your tread hits 2/32". Even though the law deems fit for safe driving may not prevent you from hydroplaning or losing control in rainy, slushy conditions. If you think your tires may be close to needing replacement, have them checked out by a licensed mechanic. December 20, 2020 If you own a car, you're probably familiar with basic maintenance and safety checks that can improve your car's performance without requiring a trip to the auto shop. One big focus of routine maintenance is the condition of your tires, which can include managing tire pressure, knowing how to spot or change a flat tire, and determining if it's time to purchase new tires. Even if you're uncomfortable changing a flat or even checking tire pressure on your own, tread depth is something that anyone can measure. Thanks to a nifty, widely used penny trick, tires and their tread can be easily checked in just a few seconds. Read on to learn more about the penny test, as well as a newer test that replaces pennies with quarters. The Importance of Proper Tread on Tires The concept behind both the penny tire test and the quarter tire test is based on using tire tread depth to gauge tire performance. While there are other factors involved in the overall performance of a tire, including internal tire pressure and cracks along the sidewall, tread directly correlates to your vehicle's ability to gain and maintain traction on the road. This is especially important to check when slippery conditions like rain, snow, ice, or even loose gravel exist. Unlike tire pressure, you can't adjust the depth of tire treads over the life of your tires. These treads wear down with use, and as the tires smooth over, they present an increased risk of slipping on roadway surfaces. For this reason, drivers should be vigilant of the miles driven on their tires, as well as their own wear and tear. The use of simple tire coin tests provides an easy option to measure tire tread depth at home and can be done as frequently as needed to prevent those bad conditions. How to Conduct the Tire Tread Penny Test The penny tread test is simple and is based on a commonly used tire tread measurement to identify tires that need to be changed. Conventional wisdom suggests that, in good driving conditions, tire treads should be at least 2/32nds of an inch deep. On a U.S. penny, 2/32nds is also the same distance between the top of President Lincoln's head and the edge of the penny. To check tire tread with a penny, stick the edge of the penny in between your tire's treads. Make sure President Lincoln's head is pointed toward the tire. When the coin is between the treads, look from the side to see if the top of President Lincoln's head is visible. If the top of his head isn't visible, this means your tire tread is more than 2/32nds of an inch, and you may be able to drive farther on your tires before swapping them out. If the top of his head is visible, this means your tire tread is less than 2/32nd of an inch and may be unsafe to drive on. At this point, tire experts recommend that you visit a tire shop to replace these worn tires with a new set. If you check tires with a penny and you can see the top of Lincoln's head, that might not mean you're safely out of the blue, though. Try the quarter test next. Using the Quarter Tire Test The penny tread test has been a longstanding trick to quickly measure tire tread and evaluate the health of your tires. In recent years, though, tire experts have cautioned that there's a problem with this test: by the time you check tires with a penny and discover that the tread depth is less than 2/32nds of an inch, you're already driving on smooth tires that present a safety risk. This is especially true in inclement weather, where road conditions are less than ideal. To ensure that car owners are changing their tires before the treads become a safety issue, some tire experts now advocate for what's called the quarter tire test. This test is performed the same way as a penny, pressing the edge of a quarter into the tire tread to compare the height of the treads to the head of President Washington on the U.S. quarter. The difference in this test is that, on the quarter coin, the top of President Washington's head is about 4/32nds of an inch from the edge of the coin—double the distance of a penny. With this measurement, drivers can check their tread and identify depths that fall below 4/32nds of an inch, at which time it's wise to consider a tire replacement in the near future. But even when that tread depth falls below the 4/32nds of an inch mark, tires still offer a good measure of performance and safety, which means you aren't at immediate risk of wrecking your vehicle on treadbare tires. While these tire tread tests are simple, they're very effective at gauging tread depth and simple enough for any driver to use. If your tire coin test reveals tire treads that have worn thin, contact your local tire shop near you to outfit your vehicle with some brand-new replacements. Download Article Download Article The penny test is an easy way to check the tread on your vehicle's tires. Just place a penny with Lincoln's head upside down between 2 ribs on your tire. If you see his entire head, it's time for new tires. Proper tread allows your vehicle to gain traction and wick water away from the tires. If your tread is worn down, your vehicle is more likely to slide around in the rain and get stuck in the snow or mud. Your tires are also more likely to burst if you drive on weathered tread, which can lead to a crash. 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Howard's dedication to Community Tire Pros & Auto Repair has earned their team multiple awards and features including the 2021 Phoenix Magazine AZ State 48 "Best of the Best!", the 2020 "Best of Phoenix" in Auto Repair, the 2013 Master SBD award, the 2013 National "Top Shop" award by Tire Review, the 2012 Diversity Champions Phx Business Journal, the 2009 BBB Ethics award, the 2008 Phx Chamber of Commerce Impact Award - "Small Business of the Year", and the 2008 ASU Spirit of Enterprise award. Howard is often referred to as "The Car Guy" for local TV stations and is a regular on TV's Channel 3 Sunday, Good Morning Arizona monthly. This article has been viewed 351,419 times. Co-authors: 13 Updated: February 24, 2025 Views: 351,419 Categories: Featured Articles | Tires and Suspension Print Send fan mail to authors Thanks to all authors for creating a page that has been read 351,419 times. I knew about the penny test on a tire. But it has been so long I forgot how to read the penny upside down to test and see if the tire needs replacing. I'm very impressed with the information you gave. And you really went out of your way with full details. Thank you.", "... more Share your story The penny test is a quick way to test your tire tread depth. In today's world, pennies are virtually worthless. They can't buy anything, they take up too much space in our wallets and they trick us into thinking our spare change jars are much more valuable than they really are. While one cent might not buy much for most people, learn how a single penny is enough to buy you peace of mind.For years, car owners have been using the "penny trick" to determine when they need new tires. This is important as worn tires can affect safety, performance and fuel efficiency. Keep reading for a step-by-step guide on how to perform the penny test. Why Checking Your Tire Tread is ImportantSafety ConcernsYour car's tire tread is essential for its safety, providing traction between the car and the road's surface. When this wears down, it reduces the grip on the road, making it dangerous in certain conditions, especially on wet roads and when there is snow and ice. It can also impact its braking performance and the ability to maintain consistent contact with the road, reducing the control you have over your car. Worn tread can also increase the risk of tire blowouts as the tire will be more susceptible to damage from the road such as debris and potholes. Impact on Fuel Efficiency and PerformanceWorn tires reduce your car's fuel efficiency because the rolling resistance increases, forcing the car's engine to work harder. This decreases fuel efficiency and increases fuel consumption. In addition, worn tires will also affect your car's handling, making it unpredictable when driving at high speeds or in bad weather. What is the Penny Test?The penny test is a quick test to check the tread depth of your tires to determine whether they need to be replaced or not. Understanding Tread Depth and Tire WearTread depth is the measurement of the grooves and channels on the surface of your tires, which is measured in millimeters or 32nds of an inch. New tires typically have a tread depth of around 10/32" to 12/32". The grooves in your tires help to channel water away from the tire's contact patch, improving traction and grip. As tires wear down, the tread depth decreases, reducing the tire's ability to grip the road, especially in wet weather. Tire wear happens naturally over time as your tires come into contact with the road. You should make a note of how your tires are wearing down as excessive or uneven tire wear can signal underlying issues such as suspension issues, tire inflation problems or improper alignment. Step-by-Step Guide to Performing the Penny TestWhat You'll NeedAll you'll need to perform the penny test is your car's tires and a penny!How to Measure Tread Depth Using a PennyTo check the tread depth, simply hold a penny with Abraham Lincoln's head facing down into one of the tire's tread grooves. You'll be able to measure the tread depth by how much of Lincoln's head is still visible. It's important to measure multiple grooves around your tires as tread wear is not always consistent. What the Results Mean (Pass or Fail)If part of Lincoln's head is covered by the tread, it means your tire tread depth is still at least 2/32" deep and your tire has passed the penny test. If however, you can see the top of Lincoln's head or most of his forehead, this means that your tread has worn to less than 2/32". At this depth, your tires are considered unsafe and should be replaced. Alternative Methods to Check Tire Tread DepthUsing a Tread Depth GaugeIf you prefer to use a more accurate tool to measure tread depth, then you could use a tread depth gauge. You can use this in the same way as a penny and it will give you a reading in millimetres or 32nds of an inch. As with the penny test, a reading less than 2/32" indicates that you'll need to replace your tires.The Quarter Test: Is It More Accurate?You can also use a quarter to measure tread depth. You need to place the quarter into the tire's tread grooves with George Washington's head facing down. If the tread covers most of his head, it is at least 4/32", however if his head is fully visible it means the tread depth is below 4/32" and you should replace your tires. The quarter test uses a deeper coin so it provides a clearer indication of the tire's tread depth than a penny. However, it is still not as precise as using a tread depth gauge. Checking Wear Indicators on the TiresMany modern tires have built-in tread wear indicators designed to monitor your tires' condition. These are small, raised bars of rubber located in the grooves of the tires' tread. Once the tread wears down to a certain level, these indicators make themselves visible and indicate that the tire needs replacing. When to Replace Your TiresLegal Tread Depth Requirements in Different StatesUS laws dictate the minimum allowable tread depth for tires, typically around 2/32", as is the federal minimum tread depth. However, state-specific laws can differ. For instance, states like Michigan and Minnesota which have harsh winters, both recommend replacing tires when the tread depth is at 4/32". This is because it will allow for better traction in snowy and icy conditions. Signs of Uneven Wear and Other IssuesYou should also pay attention to uneven wear as this affects your tires' lifespan and makes them less safe. Look out for the following:Uneven treadwear:Center wear: If your tires are more worn in the middle then this could signal overinflation as the tires have less contact with the road. Edge wear: This tends to mean that your tires are underinflated. Make sure your tires are properly inflated or replace them if they are significantly worn. Cupping or scalloping: If your tires have a wavy or bumpy surface it could be a sign of alignment issues, suspension problems or improper tire balancing. This can affect handling so should be replaced if significant. Patchy wear: If the tread wear is uneven, this may also signal alignment or suspension issues. These tires should be replaced and your car should be checked for alignment and suspension issues. Tire damage:Sidewall: Cracks or punctures on the tire's sidewall are often a sign of damage and should be replaced immediately. This compromises the tire's structural integrity and can lead to sudden tire failure or blowouts.Punctures and large cuts: Large punctures can't be fixed. You should also look out for deep cuts or tears in the tire's surface as these can lead to air loss or a dangerous blowout.Bulges: This is an indication of internal damage or weakened structural integrity, often after hitting a pothole or curb. It can cause a blowout at high speeds and should be replaced immediately.Age and rubber cracking:Age: Even if the tread on your tires looks good, they should be replaced every 6 to 10 years, depending on the manufacturer's guidelines. Tire rubber degrades over time, leading to reduced performance and increased risk of failure.Cracking: Cracks in your tires are a sign of aging and that they may not be as effective at gripping the road. They should be replaced, even if the tread appears to be in good condition.Tips to Extend Tire LifeProper Inflation and RotationMaintaining proper tire pressure is one of the most effective ways to extend the life of your tires. Both underinflated and overinflated tires can affect your tires' wear, reducing their lifespan. Use a tire pressure gauge to check your tire pressure regularly and before long trips. Your car's owner manual should display your car's recommended tire pressure. It's important to ensure all four tires are inflated to this level. It's especially important to check after weather changes as temperature can affect tire pressure. You should use a reliable air compressor if you need to add air to avoid overinflating your tires. Tire rotation can also extend your tires' life span. This is where you move the tires on your car to different positions to promote even wear. This is useful because the tires at the front of the car usually wear more quickly than those at the back. When rotating your tires, follow the guidelines in your car's owner manual. The usual rotation interval is around 6,000 to 8,000 miles and you should ensure that you are rotating your tires in the correct pattern. When you are rotating them, you should use the opportunity to inspect them for signs of wear or damage. Avoiding Common Driving Habits that Wear Out Tires FasterThe way you drive can affect how quickly your tires wear out. Here are a few tips to help your tires last longer:Aggressive driving: Hard breaking, rapid acceleration and sharp cornering all increase friction on the tires, leading to faster wear. Excessive weight: Always check your car's maximum load capacity as excessive weight can put strain on your tires and cause them to wear out more quickly. Unpaved roads: Rough or unpaved roads can cause your tires to wear unevenly. If it is unavoidable, it's best to drive slowly to avoid damage. In addition, potholes and other road debris can also damage your tires. Misalignment: Misaligned wheels can cause uneven tire wear, especially on the edges. If your tires are wearing unevenly you should have your alignment checked.Suspension: Worn-out suspension can lead to uneven weight distribution and cause your tires to wear more quickly. Have your suspension system checked regularly, especially if you notice unusual tire wear.