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One of the most overlooked parts of a vehicle, and one of the most common automotive repairs is the timing belt. Your carâ€™s timing belt may look like an accessory, but the fact is that if it fails, your car will suddenly stop, and, if youâ€™re lucky, you will find yourself stranded on the side of the road waiting for a tow truck.

Timing belts are typically made of nylon reinforced rubber, with square teeth located on the inside surface. While you drive, the belt transfers the rotation of the crankshaft the camshaft, which in turn activates the valves that provide air and fuel to the cylinders and expel combustion gases to the exhaust system.

Inside your car, the valves and pistons move up and down rapidly, and most engines are not built to allow clearance between a valve that is down and a piston that is up and this is where the timing belt comes in, since it is what keeps the valves and pistons for colliding.

If your timing belt fails, and a collision occurs, the damage to the cylinder head, cylinder walls, valves, and pistons can be extensive, and expensive, as well.

During an automotive repair, the timing belt is often overlooked, since they are typically protected by a cover, and a quick visual inspection isnâ€™t a possibility. Over the past several years, cars have been built to rely on a timing chain as opposed to a belt.

While these are typically longer lasting, they operate on essentially the same principal, and require replacement and maintenance, which varies by car. Typically, you can expect to have to replace your timing belt or chain every 60,000 to 90,000 miles.

Replacing a timing belt or chain requires the removal of the engine drive belt, the component responsible for operating the alternator, water pump, power steering pump, and air conditioner.

When you visit your mechanic, be sure to ask them about how often the timing belt or chain on your car should be replaced. Your vehicleâ€™s owners manual will also be able to provide guidelines as to timing belt replacement and maintenance.

Remember, the care you take of your car today ensures its continued health, and your safety while on the road. Automotive repair problems, if caught early, are less expensive and require less time to repair than those that are overlooked in the initial stages. Doing a good job with preliminary care and maintenance can really help your automobile to go along way.

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