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You know you're supposed to take your car in for its regular service, but if it isn't convenient, it may not seem that important. However, neglecting to regularly care for your car can result in serious problems or, at the very least, impact its value over time-and getting back where you started could take expensive solutions. Keeping your car running smoothly, maintaining the interior and preparing for emergencies are things that might go to the bottom of your list, but if you spend a little time, you'll have peace of mind.

The Internet provides lots of information and tips on car care and car maintenance:

• Visit your mechanic and work out a schedule for visits. Many offer seasonal inspection services that check the basics including the cooling system, oil and transmission fluid. Also have your mechanic check out your tire tread, pressure and alignment, especially before long trips.

• Clean and protect your vehicle's interior and exterior. Many full-service detail shops can perform your cleaning, inspection and repair needs, but if you want to do it yourself, be sure to wash the underbody and wheel wells thoroughly, use protectants on surfaces to fix UV damage and wax paint to reduce fading.

• Inspect your car's exterior for blemishes and clean all glass including mirrors, headlights and other lenses for better visibility.

• Prepare for an emergency situation with an emergency kit. You can put one together yourself or purchase one from an automotive supply store. Essential items include jumper cables, tire sealant, first aid supplies and contact numbers for roadside assistance, a mechanic, a tire shop, a 24-hour tow service and a locksmith. If you already have a kit, check periodically to make sure all items are in working order.

• Ready to look for a vehicle still under warranty? Automotive sites such as AutoTrader.com make it easy to search for new, used or certified pre-owned vehicles, as well as offer tools to list your old car for sale. The site's Power Search allows you to search for vehicles by body style, vehicle year, price and more. You can view images of the vehicles and even do side-by-side comparisons. All these features allow you to find newer vehicles in better shape.

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