Fuel Savings: Family Transportation

Donna Bittiker  
*South Dakota State University*

Liz Gorham  
*South Dakota State University*

Dick Nicolai  
*South Dakota State University*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://openprairie.sdstate.edu/extension_extra](http://openprairie.sdstate.edu/extension_extra)

**Recommended Citation**

[http://openprairie.sdstate.edu/extension_extra/476](http://openprairie.sdstate.edu/extension_extra/476)
Fuel Savings: Family Transportation

Donna Bittiker, Extension educator, family and consumer sciences
Liz Gorham, Extension family resource management specialist
Dick Nicolai, Extension farm machinery and safety specialist

It costs to drive, yet how we love it. We can cut transportation costs. We can improve vehicle maintenance, use some wise practices, make smart purchases, and modify how we operate our vehicles.

Vehicle maintenance
Keep the engine tuned. A poorly tuned engine can increase fuel consumption by up to 20% depending upon the vehicle’s condition.

Read the owner’s manual and follow the recommended maintenance schedule. Consult a reliable vehicle repairman. Not only will you save money on fuel costs, but your vehicle will run better and longer.

Keep tires properly inflated. Underinflated tires can increase fuel consumption by as much as 6%.

Not only do underinflated tires decrease fuel efficiency, they also can pose a serious safety hazard. Tires with too little air can experience failure, tread separation, and dangerous blowouts.

Wise practices
Plan ahead. Numerous trips taken from a cold start can use twice as much fuel as one trip over the same distance when the engine is warm.

Combine errands to conserve fuel. Exchange errands with a neighbor or family member who has similar objectives.

Try carpooling. Find someone going the same direction and share a ride. Encourage school-aged youth to ride the bus when available. Carpooling requires additional planning to make it work, but the fuel savings make it worthwhile.

Dust off your bicycle. Is your destination within walking or biking distance? You know what the additional benefit is: physical activity while decreasing fuel costs at the same time.

Smart purchases
Buy a fuel-efficient vehicle. Selecting the vehicle is the most important fuel economy decision you will make.

If you're not in the market for a new car and are a multiple car family, the simplest way to get better fuel economy might be to drive your most fuel-efficient vehicle more of the time. Visit http://www.fueleconomy.gov for information on fuel-efficient vehicles. Information is also available through Consumer Reports magazine, available at most local libraries.
Be skeptical of “gas-saving” advertising claims. Be wary of any claims for devices and oil, and gas additives that supposedly save gas. Claims often tout fuel savings ranging from 12 to 25%. However, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) tested more than 100 products advertised as gas-saving devices and found no product that significantly improves gas mileage. Visit http://www.ftc.gov for more information on gas-saving devices.

Use the right octane level for your vehicle. Read your owner’s manual to find the most effective octane level for your vehicle. For most vehicles regular octane will be recommended. Using a higher octane fuel will offer no benefit.

Operating your vehicle
Drive more efficiently. Give yourself plenty of time to get to your destination and drive as steadily and smoothly as possible. Avoid quick starts and stops. Anticipate what’s coming up so you can avoid unnecessary braking, acceleration, and idling.

Stay within posted speed limits. For highway driving, every 5 mph you drive over 65 mph represents a 7% decrease in fuel economy.

Decrease the load. Don’t carry unneeded items. An extra 100 pounds in the trunk can result in a 1 to 2% fuel economy reduction. If you have a roof rack or roof carrier, install it only when absolutely necessary. Not only does the carrier add extra weight, but it also increases the aerodynamic drag on the vehicle, which further contributes to a loss of fuel economy.

Financing
Plan ahead for emergencies. Put money away regularly into an emergency savings account to draw interest. The money may be needed later for an unexpected repair or a new set of tires. An emergency savings account will also help when fuel prices fluctuate. Check fuel prices in your area at http://www.fueleconomy.gov/feg/gasprices/states/index.shtml

Avoid purchasing fuel on credit. For individuals and families already living paycheck to paycheck, a lump-sum bill for fuel can be a shock.

It is tempting to charge fuel purchases on credit cards as a way to stretch funds until the next paycheck. But that’s just putting off the day of reckoning. Using credit cards to purchase fuel can make finances even tighter at the end of the month. And if you only make the minimum payment on a high-interest credit card, you will be paying for the gas purchased today for years into the future. With interest added in, gas will cost you significantly more money.

By keeping to a budget, you can plan for fuel purchases and other necessities. You may have to cut spending somewhere else, but you will have the money to buy fuel when you need to get to work, and you won’t be paying high credit card interest.

Explore fuel discount cards. Some gasoline stations offer discount cards for gas purchases. Usually it is only valuable to those customers who continually fill up at their pumps and make large purchases.

Compare prices at other stations; they may be lower elsewhere, even without a discount! Look for a brochure to explain the details of a discount card at participating gas stations.

References

South Dakota State University, South Dakota counties, and U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. South Dakota State University is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer and offers all benefits, services, education, and employment opportunities without regard for race, color, creed, religion, national origin, ancestry, citizenship, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or Vietnam Era veteran status.