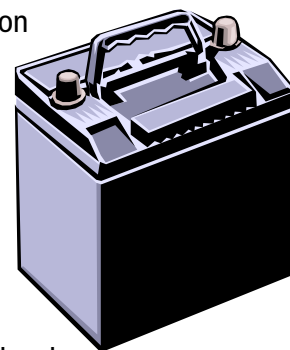


## Battery-buying basics: how to shop for your car's start-me-up

We've all heard it: that telltale *reh-reh-reh-reh-reh* sound of a cold engine struggling to start on an equally cold winter's morning. That ominous sound may mean that your battery hasn't enough power.

As the temperature drops so too does your battery's output. Consequently, a battery that merrily got you on your way in the summer could well leave you stranded when the mercury slips below freezing.

If a weak battery is making your car hard to start, replace the battery before it lets you down says Car Care Canada. You can pick up a new battery from a variety of retailers or from your local automotive parts wholesaler.



You'll have several batteries to choose from, so which one is best for you and your car? In addition to price, you should consider three factors: cold-cranking amps, reserve capacity, and warranty.

Cold-cranking amps (CCA) refer to the engine starting (or cranking) output at -17 degrees C for 30 seconds. A starter may draw 400 amps, so at -17 degrees C, you could quickly drain a battery rated at 300 cold-cranking amps. The higher the CCA rating, the easier your car will start when winter comes around—assuming all else in your engine works well. Consult your owner's manual for the minimum CCA required for your car and select an appropriate battery for you needs. Buying one with an excessive CCA rating is a waste of money.

Reserve capacity (RC) indicates how long your car's accessories can run without robbing your battery of sufficient power to start the engine. The more reserve capacity, the better, and this capacity is usually expressed in amperes of output per so many minutes. When evaluating different batteries, you should compare output and reserve on the same amperage-per-time basis. Typically, reserve capacity ratings will refer to the length of time a battery can produce 26 amps at 27 degrees C. (Headlights may draw about 15 amps and a tail light 1.5 amps.)



Warranties vary by length and type, so look for one that suits your situation and budget. What distinguishes, say, a three-year warranty from a five-year warranty? The size and number of plates in a battery determine how many amps it can deliver. Batteries with larger plates or more plates last longer than those less well endowed. These characteristics determine the difference in battery life and hence warranty period as well.

Car Care Canada encourages you to dispose of your battery properly. The average car battery contains 7.7 to 10.4 kilograms of lead. A half a kilogram of lead from a battery or other source can contaminate more than 31 million litres of water, making it unfit for drinking. Canadian automotive battery manufacturers take part in environmentally safe battery recycling programs across the country.

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And finally, you might want to buy an AC-powered battery charger and keep it at home. You can use this device to jumpstart your car if you leave a car door open or your trunk lid up all night, both of which can cause lights to whittle down your battery's reserve. Powered by a household electrical outlet, these battery chargers usually provide enough juice to start most batteries that have been drained overnight.