48 Hour Winter Car Survival Kit

An itemized checklist and illustrated shopping guide for JScott Group Outdoors.

The scenario

You are stranded in winter weather. Your vehicle will not start or has shut off. Plan for one adult to wait up to 48 hours without engine heat, vehicle electricity or nearby services. Multiply personal supplies for every passenger. This kit supports waiting for rescue; it cannot guarantee safety in every temperature or location.

Your first actions

- Get as far out of traffic as the situation safely permits. Use hazard lights if available. Call 911 for immediate danger, injury, dangerous cold or being stranded in severe conditions; otherwise contact roadside assistance promptly. Do not wait 48 hours to request help.
- Tell responders the road, travel direction, nearest landmark or mile marker, coordinates if available, number of occupants and that the engine cannot provide heat. Notify a trusted contact and agree on check ins.
- Usually stay with the vehicle so rescuers can find you. Fire, rising water, collision exposure or another immediate hazard may require moving to a safer location. Do not walk into a storm searching for help.
- Put on dry layers early. Insulate beneath and around your body, use the sleeping bag and keep your head covered and face clear. Avoid sweating from heavy work. Eat and drink regularly.
- Use independent lights and power banks. Keep essential gear within reach. Preserve phone power while maintaining agreed communication; use low power mode and brief messages.

No flame heating inside the car

Never use a candle, stove, grill, fuel heater or open flame inside the vehicle. A cracked window does not make a combustion heater safe. Do not depend on USB blankets or small power banks for 48 hours of cabin heat.

If the engine later runs: follow responder advice, keep the exhaust clear, use it only intermittently and allow ventilation. Never sleep with it running. Do not run a damaged exhaust system or an engine in an enclosed space.

Urgent cold warning signs: shivering, unusual exhaustion, fumbling, confusion, slurred speech or drowsiness. Treat suspected hypothermia as an emergency and call 911; warm the person gently and follow dispatcher instructions.

Warmth without the engine



1 Sleeping bag

☐ **Winter sleeping bag — 1 per person.** Your main insulation when the heater is unavailable. Choose a documented comfort rating below the lowest temperature expected on your route; a survival or limit rating is not a comfortable sleeping temperature.



2 Blanket and insulation

☐ **Wool or fleece blanket — 1 per person.** Adds insulation around shoulders and legs and over the sleeping bag.

☐ **Closed cell foam sleeping pad — 1 per person.** Insulates beneath your body on a seat or sleeping surface. Trim or fold only if permitted by the maker; keep belts and exits usable.



3 Dry winter clothing

☐ **Thermal base layer and underwear — 1 spare set.** Replace damp clothing before you become chilled.

☐ **Insulated coat and warm trousers — 1 set worn or packed.** Provide the main wearable insulation.

☐ **Winter hat and neck gaiter — 1 each.** Cover exposed head and neck without covering the airway.

☐ **Mittens and liner gloves — 1 pair each.** Mittens conserve warmth; liners allow short tasks with less exposure.

☐ **Wool blend socks — 2 spare pairs.** Replace wet socks; avoid tight footwear.

☐ **Water resistant insulated boots — 1 pair.** Protect feet during a necessary brief exit.



4 Emergency warmth backups

☐ **Emergency bivy or reflective blanket — 1 per person.** A backup layer that reduces wind exposure and heat loss. It does not replace a winter sleeping bag; keep the face clear and manage condensation.

☐ **Air activated hand and toe warmers — 12 hand pairs and 4 toe pairs per person.** Supplemental warmth only. This is a stocking allowance, not guaranteed continuous 48 hour heat. Follow duration and placement instructions; avoid bare skin and sleeping with them unless specifically allowed.

Pictures are generic AI illustrations for identification, not photographs of selected Amazon products.

Water food power and light



5 Water

☐ **Sealed drinking water — 2 gallons per person for 48 hours.** General emergency planning allowance for drinking and basic hygiene. Carry more for individual needs and pets. Drink regularly; do not deliberately dehydrate yourself.

☐ **Insulated cooler or water bag — 1 vehicle sized.** Slows freezing but cannot prevent it indefinitely. Bring water from indoors before travel; keep some accessible in the cabin. Do not use flames to thaw bottles or rely on eating snow.



6 Food

☐ **Ready to eat meals and snacks — About 4000 to 5000 calories per adult total.** Planning allowance for two days; adjust for your usual needs and medical diet. Pack bars that stay edible in cold weather, nut butter, trail mix and easy open pouches. Check labels, allergies, storage limits and expiration dates.

☐ **Spoon and manual can opener — 1 each if needed.** Let you eat without a stove. Prefer packaging that avoids sharp opened cans and extra water requirements.



7 Phone and independent charging

☐ **Mobile phone and charging cable — 1 phone and 2 compatible cables.** Call for rescue and share your road, direction, nearest marker and GPS location. A phone is not a guarantee of coverage.

☐ **USB power bank — 1 charged 20000 mAh class unit.** Charges the phone without the car. Capacity is a suggested buying size, not a guaranteed number of charges in cold weather. Keep it insulated; follow temperature limits and do not charge a frozen battery.

☐ **Vehicle USB adapter — 1.** Useful only if the vehicle outlet has power. It is a backup, not the primary charging plan.



8 Lighting

☐ **LED headlamp — 1 per person.** Hands free light for finding supplies and caring for passengers.

☐ **LED flashlight — 1 backup per vehicle.** Independent backup light if the headlamp fails.

☐ **Spare batteries — 2 complete sets per device.** Use compatible cells rated for expected temperatures. Store protected from shorts and separate from metal objects.

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Information rescue and personal care



9 Weather information

☐ **Battery powered NOAA weather radio — 1 with 2 spare battery sets.** Receives weather and official updates where reception is available. Confirm local coverage beforehand. Hand crank or solar features are optional backups, not a dependable primary power supply.



10 Rescue visibility

☐ **Reflective safety vest — 1 per adult.** Makes you easier to see during a necessary brief exit. Keep it within reach.

☐ **Bright distress flag or cloth — 1.** Signals that the vehicle needs help; secure it where visible without compromising a window or door.

☐ **LED road beacons — 3 with spare batteries.** Battery independent warning lights. Deploy only if you can do so without entering traffic.

☐ **Emergency whistle — 1 per person.** Attracts nearby rescuers without shouting continuously.



11 First aid and personal needs

☐ **First aid kit — 1.** Include dressings, gauze, tape, antiseptic wipes and nitrile gloves. Learn how to use the supplies.

☐ **Required medicines and medical supplies — 48 hours plus a practical delay buffer.** Pack according to your clinician or pharmacist and storage requirements. Do not permanently leave temperature sensitive medicines in a freezing or hot vehicle.

☐ **Spare eyeglasses and medical information card — 1 if needed.** Allows safe vision and gives responders essential conditions, allergies and contact information.



12 Sanitation

☐ **Portable urinal or suitable toileting container — 1 per person or accessible shared setup.** Reduces the need to go outdoors. Select a usable design and practice before travel.

☐ **Absorbent toilet bags and sealable waste bags — 6 toilet bags plus 6 waste bags.** Contain waste during the wait; adjust for passengers and medical needs.

☐ **Toilet paper tissues wipes and hand sanitizer — 1 small pack or bottle each.** Support hygiene when no restroom is available. Wipes can freeze; keep accessible supplies insulated.

☐ **Opaque privacy cover — 1.** Provides toileting privacy without blocking ventilation, exits or your view of rescuers.

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Tools recovery and organization



13 Snow tools

☐ **Compact snow shovel — 1 sturdy model.** Allows limited clearing around an exit or tires when safe. Do not exhaust yourself digging; no exhaust clearing is needed while the engine remains off.

☐ **Ice scraper and snow brush — 1 combined tool.** Clears glass and exterior lights for visibility if conditions permit.



14 Traction supplies

☐ **Traction sand — 1 secured 10 to 20 pound bag.** Improves grip on ice around drive wheels during a safe recovery attempt.

☐ **Traction boards — 1 pair sized for vehicle.** May help a stuck vehicle regain grip after it is running. These cannot fix an engine that will not start. Follow placement instructions and stand clear of spinning wheels.



15 Vehicle recovery backups

☐ **Portable jump starter — 1 compatible fully charged unit.** May help a depleted starting battery. It cannot fix a mechanical breakdown. Match engine size, battery type and operating temperature; never jump a frozen or damaged battery.

☐ **Portable tire inflator and pressure gauge — 1 each.** Helps with a low tire if the unit has suitable power. A cordless unit has independent power; a 12 volt model may be unusable with a dead car battery.

☐ **Basic tool kit and work gloves — 1 kit and 1 pair.** Supports minor tasks you already know how to perform. Avoid roadside repairs near traffic or under an unstable vehicle.



16 Organization and offline information

☐ **Secured duffel or tote and waterproof pouches — 1 set.** Keeps gear dry and organized. Put lifesaving items in the cabin where reachable without opening a snow blocked trunk. Secure heavy tools and water.

☐ **Paper map emergency contacts notepad and pencil — 1 set.** Provides route references and a way to leave information when the phone fails. Store roadside assistance details here.

☐ **Duct tape — 1 small roll.** Allows temporary repairs to bags or loose gear. Never seal the vehicle airtight or obstruct safety equipment.

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Adapt and maintain your kit

☐ For every additional person: add their own sleeping bag, pad, blanket, dry clothing, 2 gallons of water, two days of suitable food, warmers and personal medical supplies.

☐ For children: use correctly fitting insulation and clothing; keep child restraints usable. Do not use loose bedding around an infant's face or improvise an unsafe sleep setup. Add age appropriate food, diapers and supplies.

☐ For pets: add water, food, leash or carrier, waste bags and suitable warmth. Do not count their water within the human allowance.

☐ For remote travel with limited cell service: consider a satellite messenger or personal locator beacon, compatible coverage and any required active subscription. Test it before travel.

☐ For mobility, diabetes, circulation conditions or temperature sensitive medicines: adapt access, toileting, food and storage before travel.

☐ Before every winter trip: check forecasts and road conditions, avoid unnecessary travel in severe weather, tell someone your route and arrival time, and bring charged devices and unfrozen water.

☐ Monthly in winter and before long trips: inspect batteries, recharge devices, check leaks, replace used supplies and review food and medicine dates. Follow manufacturer storage and charging temperature limits. Bring electronics and sensitive supplies indoors when needed.

Bag and packing plan

Start with a sturdy 60 to 90 liter zippered duffel with reinforced handles, a wide opening and water resistant material. This is a size range to test against your gear, not a promise that everything fits. Use labeled pouches for first aid, lighting, charging and hygiene. A large backpack is an alternative if carrying distance matters.

Keep the sleeping bag and blanket in separate dry storage if bulky; use an insulated cooler for water. Secure shovel, traction sand and tools separately. Keep a small essentials pouch and warm layers reachable from a belted seating position. Do a trial pack before buying the final bag; avoid one bag so heavy that you cannot lift it.

Kit record

Packed for _____ people Vehicle _____

Lowest expected route temperature _____ Bag comfort rating _____

Last checked _____ Next check _____

Roadside assistance _____ Trusted contact _____

Source notes

Prepared November 10 2026. Quantities other than the general water allowance are practical planning suggestions for this scenario, not official guarantees of endurance.

NHTSA Winter Driving Tips

National Weather Service Winter Storm Actions

CDC Emergency Water Supply

CDC Recognizing Hypothermia

Amazon Wish Lists