Dash Warning Lights + Check Engine

Color tells you how urgent it is. RED = stop and check now. YELLOW/ORANGE = get it checked soon. GREEN/BLUE = just information (lights on, cruise set).

Light	What it means	What to do
Check engine - steady	The engine computer saw a fault (could be a loose gas cap, could be serious)	Get the code read soon. Safe to drive gently in most cases.
Check engine - FLASHING	Active misfire - raw fuel can overheat and destroy the catalytic converter	Ease off now. Avoid hard throttle. Get it scanned ASAP.
Oil pressure (oil can)	Low oil pressure - engine damage can happen in minutes	Pull over safely and shut it off. Check oil level. Don't keep driving.
Temperature (thermometer)	Engine overheating	Pull over, shut off. Let it cool before opening anything.
Battery	Charging system problem (alternator, belt, wiring)	Car is running on battery only - head somewhere safe soon.
Brake (red, "BRAKE" or !)	Parking brake on, low brake fluid, or a brake system fault	Check parking brake. If it stays on, get brakes checked before driving.
ABS	Anti-lock system off - normal brakes still work	Drive carefully, have it scanned.
Tire pressure (TPMS)	Steady: a tire is low. Flashing then steady: sensor fault	Set tires to the door-sticker pressure (cold).
Airbag / SRS	Airbag system fault - airbags may NOT deploy	Get it checked. Don't ignore this one.
Traction / stability	Flashing: working on slippery road. Steady: system off or faulty	Slow down on slick roads; get scanned if it stays on.

Trouble code basics

Codes look like **P0420**. The letter is the system: **P** = powertrain (engine/trans), **B** = body, **C** = chassis (brakes/steering), **U** = network/communication. A code tells you WHAT the computer saw - not always which part is bad. A P0171 "lean" code is usually a vacuum leak or dirty MAF sensor, not an O2 sensor.

Top 5 codes I see every week

- **P0420** - Catalyst efficiency. Fix misfires and exhaust leaks before buying a converter.
- **P0300-P0308** - Misfire. Swap the coil to another cylinder - if the misfire follows it, that's the part.
- **P0171 / P0174** - Running lean. Check for vacuum leaks and clean the MAF sensor.
- **P0455 / P0456 / P0457** - EVAP leak. Start with the gas cap.
- **P0128** - Thermostat stuck open - poor heat and fuel economy.

Look up any code free with Ask A Mechanic on the DETAILGUY317 Garage site.