

OTTAWA HVAC PRO

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# HVAC Maintenance

Preventive maintenance and tune-ups

21 Expert Answers from Construction Brain

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## Q1

### What maintenance can I do myself on my HVAC?

**You can safely perform several basic HVAC maintenance tasks yourself, but it's important to know where to draw the line for safety and warranty reasons.**

The most important DIY maintenance task is **changing your furnace filter regularly** - typically every 1-3 months depending on the filter type and your home's conditions. A dirty filter restricts airflow, making your system work harder and potentially causing damage. You can also keep your outdoor AC unit or heat pump clean by gently hosing off debris and ensuring at least 2 feet of clearance around the unit.

**Indoor maintenance** you can handle includes keeping vents and returns unobstructed, checking that your thermostat is working properly, and doing visual inspections for obvious issues like loose ductwork or unusual sounds. You should also test your carbon monoxide detectors monthly and replace batteries annually - this is critical safety equipment in any home with fuel-burning appliances.

In Ottawa's climate, it's particularly important to **clear snow and ice** from around your outdoor heat pump or AC unit during winter months. However, never attempt to chip ice off the unit itself, as this can damage the coils.

**What you should NOT attempt** includes any work on gas connections, electrical components, refrigerant lines, or internal furnace components. In Ontario, only TSSA-licensed technicians can legally work on gas appliances, and DIY work on these systems can be dangerous and void your warranty.

**Professional annual maintenance** is still essential even with good DIY care. A licensed technician can safely inspect gas connections, test combustion efficiency, check refrigerant levels, and catch potential problems before they become expensive repairs. For a comprehensive tune-up of your Ottawa HVAC system, consider scheduling professional maintenance before each heating and cooling season.

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## Q2

### How do I know if my furnace needs a new ignitor?

**A failing furnace ignitor typically shows clear warning signs before it completely fails.** The most common symptoms include the furnace not starting consistently, clicking sounds without ignition, or the system cycling on and off repeatedly without producing heat.

**The telltale signs of ignitor problems** include hearing your furnace attempt to start (you'll hear the blower or clicking sounds) but no heat actually comes out of the vents. You might notice the furnace tries to light multiple

times before giving up, or it starts but shuts down after a few minutes. Some homeowners report seeing a faint glow from the ignitor that appears dimmer than usual, or no glow at all when the furnace attempts to start.

**In Ottawa's climate, ignitor issues often surface during the first cold snap** when your furnace hasn't run for months. Modern hot surface ignitors typically last 3-7 years, and they're more prone to failure after sitting idle through summer. If your furnace is over 5 years old and showing these symptoms, the ignitor is often the culprit.

**Safety is critical with ignitor problems** - never attempt to bypass or repair the ignitor yourself. A faulty ignitor can cause dangerous gas buildup or carbon monoxide issues. If you suspect ignitor failure, turn off your furnace and call a licensed HVAC technician immediately. The repair typically costs \$200-400 in Ottawa, including the service call and parts.

**If your furnace isn't starting reliably, don't wait for complete failure** - especially during Ottawa's harsh winters. A quick diagnostic by a TSSA-licensed technician can confirm if it's the ignitor or another component, preventing you from being left without heat when you need it most.

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Q3

## Should I have my chimney cleaned if I have gas heat?

**Yes, you should still have your chimney cleaned and inspected regularly, even with gas heat.** Gas furnaces and fireplaces produce combustion byproducts that need proper venting, and chimneys can develop issues that affect safety and efficiency.

**Gas appliances produce water vapor and carbon dioxide** that must be safely vented outside. Over time, this moisture can cause corrosion in metal chimney liners, and debris like leaves, bird nests, or ice can block proper venting. A blocked or damaged chimney can cause dangerous carbon monoxide to back up into your home instead

of venting safely outside.

**In Ottawa's climate, chimney issues are particularly common** due to freeze-thaw cycles that can crack masonry and ice formation that can block vents. The TSSA (Technical Standards & Safety Authority) requires that gas appliance venting systems be properly maintained and inspected. Most HVAC professionals recommend annual chimney inspections for gas appliances, especially if you have an older chimney or notice any signs of moisture, rust, or unusual odors.

**Professional chimney cleaning for gas systems** typically costs \$200-400 in the Ottawa area and includes inspection of the liner, checking for blockages, and ensuring proper draft. This is much less expensive than dealing with carbon monoxide issues or water damage from a compromised chimney system.

**Schedule your chimney service before heating season begins** - ideally in late summer or early fall. If you notice any rust stains, white staining on exterior brick, or moisture around your furnace, have it inspected immediately. Always ensure your carbon monoxide detectors are working, as they're your first line of defense against venting problems.

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### How do I test my carbon monoxide detector?

**Most carbon monoxide detectors have a test button that you should press and hold for 2-3 seconds.** You'll hear a loud beep or series of beeps if the detector is working properly. If there's no sound or a weak beep, replace the batteries immediately or replace the unit if it's hardwired.

**Test your CO detector monthly** to ensure it's functioning correctly. The test button only checks the alarm sound and electronics - it doesn't verify the actual carbon monoxide sensor. Look for a small button labeled "TEST" on the front or side of the unit. When you press it, the alarm should sound within a few seconds with a loud, piercing tone similar to what you'd hear during an actual emergency.

**Replace the batteries at least once a year**, even in hardwired units that have battery backup. Many detectors will chirp intermittently when batteries are low. If your detector is more than 7-10 years old, replace the entire unit as the sensors lose sensitivity over time. Check the manufacture date on the back of the detector.

In Ottawa's climate, carbon monoxide risks are highest during heating season when furnaces, fireplaces, and other fuel-burning appliances are running frequently. **Never ignore a CO alarm** - even if you think it might be a false alarm, evacuate immediately and call 911. Carbon monoxide is odorless and colorless, making working detectors your only early warning system.

**Schedule annual HVAC maintenance** to reduce CO risks from your heating system. A qualified technician will check for proper ventilation, cracked heat exchangers, and other issues that could lead to dangerous carbon monoxide buildup in your home.

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## How often should I have my AC serviced?

**Air conditioning systems should be professionally serviced once per year, ideally in late spring before the cooling season begins.** This annual maintenance helps ensure your AC runs efficiently, prevents breakdowns during hot summer days, and extends the system's lifespan.

**Annual AC maintenance** typically includes cleaning the evaporator and condenser coils, checking refrigerant levels, inspecting electrical connections, lubricating moving parts, and testing system performance. A clean system runs more efficiently, which translates to lower energy bills and better cooling comfort. Dirty coils and clogged filters force your AC to work harder, leading to higher electricity costs and potential component failures.

In Ottawa's climate, where we rely heavily on air conditioning during humid summers, regular maintenance becomes even more critical. The spring pollen, summer dust, and occasional severe weather can impact your outdoor condenser unit. **Professional technicians** will also check for refrigerant leaks, ensure proper airflow, and verify that safety controls are functioning correctly.

Between professional services, homeowners should **change air filters every 1-3 months** during cooling season and keep the outdoor unit clear of debris, leaves, and vegetation. However, tasks involving refrigerant, electrical components, or internal system components should always be handled by licensed HVAC technicians for safety and warranty reasons.

**Signs your AC needs immediate attention** include weak airflow, warm air from vents, unusual noises, or ice formation on the unit. Don't wait for your annual service if you notice these issues - addressing problems early prevents more expensive repairs and ensures reliable cooling when you need it most.

For a comprehensive AC tune-up and to keep your system running efficiently through Ottawa's summer heat, consider scheduling your annual maintenance with Ottawa HVAC Pro before the busy cooling season begins.

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## What happens if I skip furnace maintenance?

**Skipping furnace maintenance will lead to higher energy bills, more frequent breakdowns, and potentially dangerous safety issues.** Your furnace will work harder to heat your home, components will wear out faster, and you risk carbon monoxide exposure from a dirty or malfunctioning system.

**Energy efficiency drops significantly** when your furnace isn't maintained. A dirty air filter alone can increase your heating costs by 15-20%, while a dirty heat exchanger or blower can push that even higher. In Ottawa's cold winters, this translates to hundreds of extra dollars on your Hydro Ottawa and natural gas bills. Your furnace has to run longer cycles to reach the desired temperature, putting extra strain on all components.

**Component failures become much more common** without regular maintenance. The heat exchanger, blower motor, and ignition system all accumulate dirt and debris over time. What might have been prevented with a simple cleaning and tune-up becomes a \$300-600 repair call. In Ottawa's harsh winter climate, having your furnace break down during a -30°C cold snap isn't just expensive - it's potentially dangerous for your family and your plumbing.

**Carbon monoxide safety is the most serious concern.** A dirty or cracked heat exchanger can leak this odorless, deadly gas into your home. Annual maintenance includes checking for cracks, ensuring proper venting, and testing safety controls. This is especially critical in Ottawa homes with older furnaces or those that have been neglected.

**Most Ottawa HVAC companies recommend annual maintenance** in the fall, before heating season begins. A typical tune-up costs \$150-200 but can prevent much more expensive repairs and keeps your family safe. If your furnace hasn't been serviced in over a year, it's worth scheduling an inspection to catch any developing issues before winter arrives.

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## What MERV rating filter should I use

**Most Ottawa homes should use MERV 8-11 filters**, which provide excellent filtration without restricting airflow in your HVAC system. MERV 8 captures dust, pollen, and pet dander effectively, while MERV 11 also filters out smaller particles like smoke and smog.

**MERV ratings explained:** The scale runs from 1-16, with higher numbers capturing smaller particles. MERV 1-4 are basic fiberglass filters that barely filter anything. MERV 5-8 are pleated filters good for most homes. MERV 9-12 offer superior filtration for families with allergies or pets. MERV 13-16 are hospital-grade filters that can restrict airflow in residential systems.

**For Ottawa's climate and air quality**, MERV 8 works well for most homes, providing good filtration without straining your furnace fan. If you have allergies, asthma, or pets, consider MERV 10-11. These higher-efficiency filters capture more allergens while still allowing proper airflow through your system.

**Avoid going too high** - MERV 13+ filters can reduce airflow significantly in residential systems, making your furnace work harder and potentially shortening its lifespan. Your system wasn't designed for that level of restriction. Also, change filters every 1-3 months depending on usage, pets, and dust levels in your home.

**Check your furnace manual** for manufacturer recommendations, as some newer high-efficiency units can handle higher MERV ratings better than older systems. When in doubt, start with MERV 8 and monitor your system's performance. If you notice reduced airflow or your furnace cycling more frequently, drop down to a lower MERV rating.

For personalized filter recommendations based on your specific HVAC system and indoor air quality needs, Ottawa HVAC Pro can assess your setup during a maintenance visit.

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## How much does HVAC maintenance cost

**HVAC maintenance in Ottawa typically costs \$150-\$200 for an annual tune-up**, which is a small investment that can prevent costly breakdowns and extend your system's lifespan.

**What's included in professional HVAC maintenance** varies by contractor, but a comprehensive service should include cleaning and inspecting your furnace or heat pump, checking gas connections and combustion, testing safety controls, changing filters, and verifying proper airflow. For air conditioning systems, maintenance includes cleaning coils, checking refrigerant levels, and testing electrical components.

**The timing matters for Ottawa's climate** - ideally, you want furnace maintenance in early fall before heating season begins, and AC maintenance in late spring before summer heat arrives. Many Ottawa homeowners opt for annual maintenance plans that cover both heating and cooling systems, which can provide priority service and discounts on repairs.

**Regular maintenance is especially important for safety** with gas-fired equipment. A qualified technician will check for carbon monoxide leaks and ensure proper venting - critical safety checks that homeowners cannot perform themselves. In Ontario, only TSSA-licensed technicians should service gas appliances.

**The cost of skipping maintenance** far exceeds the annual service fee. A well-maintained furnace or heat pump runs more efficiently (lowering energy bills), lasts longer, and is less likely to fail during Ottawa's harsh winters when you need heat most. Emergency repairs during peak season can easily cost \$400-\$800 or more.

For a comprehensive maintenance plan that keeps your HVAC system running safely and efficiently year-round, request a quote from Ottawa HVAC Pro.

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## How do I maintain my HVAC system between service calls

**Regular maintenance between professional service calls can significantly extend your HVAC system's lifespan and improve efficiency.** The most important tasks are simple enough for homeowners to handle safely, while others require professional attention.

**Filter maintenance is your most critical task.** Check your furnace filter monthly and replace it every 1-3 months depending on usage, pets, and air quality. A dirty filter restricts airflow, making your system work harder and potentially causing damage. In Ottawa's dusty spring months or during heavy furnace use in winter, you may need to change filters more frequently. Always turn off your system before changing the filter and ensure the new filter faces the correct direction (arrow pointing toward the furnace).

**Keep your outdoor units clean and unobstructed.** For air conditioners and heat pumps, clear leaves, grass clippings, and debris from around the outdoor unit, maintaining at least 2 feet of clearance on all sides. Gently rinse the condenser coils with a garden hose from the inside out (never use a pressure washer). In winter, keep snow and ice away from heat pump units - they need airflow even in cold weather.

**Monitor your system's performance regularly.** Listen for unusual sounds like grinding, squealing, or banging, which often indicate developing problems. Watch for uneven heating or cooling between rooms, higher energy bills, or frequent cycling on and off. Check that all vents are open and unblocked by furniture or curtains. In Ottawa's climate, pay attention to ice buildup on heat pumps - some frost is normal, but excessive ice may indicate a problem.

**Simple thermostat and safety checks help prevent issues.** Test your thermostat by adjusting the temperature and ensuring the system responds appropriately. Replace thermostat batteries annually (a good reminder is when we change clocks for daylight saving time). Most importantly, test your carbon monoxide detectors monthly and replace batteries as needed - this is critical safety equipment for any home with fuel-burning appliances.

**Professional maintenance remains essential** even with good homeowner care. Annual tune-ups catch problems early, maintain warranties, and ensure safe operation. TSSA regulations require licensed technicians for any work involving gas connections or internal furnace components. For a comprehensive maintenance plan or to schedule your annual service, Ottawa HVAC Pro offers thorough inspections that complement your between-service care.

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## What causes HVAC systems to fail prematurely

**HVAC systems typically fail prematurely due to poor maintenance, improper installation, and neglecting air filter changes.** The most common culprit is simply not changing filters regularly, which forces your system to work harder and can lead to expensive breakdowns.

**Poor maintenance** is the leading cause of premature HVAC failure. When homeowners skip annual tune-ups, small issues go undetected and turn into major problems. Dirty coils reduce efficiency, worn belts can snap unexpectedly, and low refrigerant levels cause compressors to overheat and fail. In Ottawa's climate with extreme temperature swings, regular maintenance becomes even more critical as systems work harder during both summer cooling and winter heating seasons.

**Improper installation** causes countless premature failures. Undersized ductwork, incorrect refrigerant charges, poor electrical connections, and improperly sized equipment all stress your system beyond its design limits. This is why choosing TSSA-licensed technicians matters - proper installation following manufacturer specifications and Ontario codes ensures your system operates as designed. DIY installations or unlicensed work often void warranties and create safety hazards.

**Neglected air filters** are surprisingly destructive. A clogged filter restricts airflow, causing your furnace heat exchanger to overheat or your AC evaporator coil to freeze. This leads to cracked heat exchangers (expensive and potentially dangerous), damaged blower motors, and compressor failures. In Ottawa's dusty conditions and with pets or allergies, filters may need changing every 1-2 months rather than the standard 3 months.

**Environmental factors** in Ottawa also contribute to premature wear. Our freeze-thaw cycles stress outdoor units, road salt corrodes components, and extreme cold temperatures challenge heat pumps and furnaces. Power surges during storms can damage control boards and motors, while poor indoor air quality from construction dust or smoking accelerates component wear.

**For maximum system lifespan, schedule annual maintenance with licensed HVAC technicians** who can catch problems early, ensure proper operation, and maintain your warranty coverage. Want to discuss a maintenance plan for your specific system? We offer comprehensive tune-ups designed for Ottawa's challenging climate conditions.

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Q11

## What is included in an HVAC tune-up

**An HVAC tune-up includes a comprehensive inspection and cleaning of your heating and cooling system to ensure safe, efficient operation.** Most tune-ups take 1-2 hours and should be performed annually before the heating season begins.

**For furnaces**, the technician will inspect and clean the heat exchanger, check gas connections for leaks, test the ignition system, and verify proper combustion. They'll examine the blower motor and fan, lubricate moving parts, and check electrical connections. The flue pipe and venting system get inspected to ensure proper exhaust flow, which is critical for preventing carbon monoxide buildup.

**Air conditioning components** receive attention during cooling season tune-ups. This includes cleaning the evaporator and condenser coils, checking refrigerant levels, testing the compressor, and inspecting the condensate drain. The technician will also examine ductwork for leaks and ensure proper airflow throughout your home.

**Safety testing** is a crucial component of any tune-up. In Ottawa, TSSA-licensed technicians must test for carbon monoxide levels, verify proper gas pressures, and ensure all safety controls are functioning correctly. They'll also replace your air filter and check your thermostat calibration.

**During Ottawa's harsh winters**, a properly tuned furnace is essential for both safety and efficiency. A well-maintained system typically uses 10-15% less energy and experiences fewer breakdowns. Most Ottawa HVAC companies charge \$150-\$200 for annual maintenance, which often includes priority service and discounts on repairs.

**The best time to schedule your tune-up** is early fall, before you need your heating system. This ensures any issues are caught before the cold weather arrives, and you're not waiting for emergency service during peak season.

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Q12

## Why is regular HVAC maintenance important

**Regular HVAC maintenance is essential for safety, efficiency, and preventing costly breakdowns** - it's like getting regular oil changes for your car, but even more critical since your HVAC system affects your family's comfort and safety year-round.

**Safety is the top priority**, especially in Ottawa where we rely heavily on gas furnaces through long winters. During annual maintenance, licensed technicians check for carbon monoxide leaks, inspect heat exchangers for cracks, and ensure proper venting. A cracked heat exchanger can leak deadly carbon monoxide into your home - something that's virtually impossible to detect without professional equipment. We also test your carbon monoxide detectors and check gas connections for leaks.

**Energy efficiency drops significantly without regular maintenance.** A dirty filter alone can increase your energy bills by 15-20%, while a neglected system can lose 5% efficiency each year. In Ottawa's climate, where your furnace runs heavily from October through April, this translates to hundreds of dollars in wasted energy costs. Clean coils, calibrated thermostats, and properly lubricated components keep your system running at peak efficiency.

**Preventing major breakdowns** is another huge benefit. Most HVAC failures happen during peak demand - the coldest day in January or hottest day in July. Regular maintenance catches small issues before they become expensive emergencies. We typically find problems like worn belts, failing capacitors, or dirty flame sensors during routine tune-ups, fixing them for under \$200 rather than dealing with a \$500+ emergency repair when your system fails completely.

**In Ottawa's harsh climate**, maintenance is especially important due to extreme temperature swings and seasonal demands on your equipment. Your furnace works harder here than in milder climates, and air conditioning systems face challenges from our humid summers and temperature fluctuations.

**Schedule annual maintenance in early fall for heating systems and late spring for cooling systems.** For a comprehensive tune-up and safety inspection, contact Ottawa HVAC Pro - we'll ensure your system is ready for whatever Ottawa weather brings.

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## When should I schedule furnace maintenance

**Schedule furnace maintenance annually, ideally in early fall (September-October) before the heating season begins.** This timing ensures your system is ready for Ottawa's cold winters and helps prevent breakdowns when you need heat most.

**Annual maintenance is essential** for keeping your furnace running safely and efficiently. During a professional tune-up, a licensed technician will clean components, check gas connections, test safety controls, inspect the heat exchanger for cracks, and ensure proper combustion. They'll also change your filter, lubricate moving parts, and verify that your carbon monoxide detectors are working properly.

**In Ottawa's climate**, where furnaces run heavily from October through April, this preventive care can extend your system's lifespan by 5-10 years and reduce energy costs by 10-15%. Regular maintenance also helps maintain your manufacturer's warranty and ensures compliance with insurance requirements. Most importantly, it identifies potential safety issues like carbon monoxide leaks or cracked heat exchangers before they become dangerous.

**Beyond the annual tune-up**, you should change your furnace filter every 1-3 months during heating season, depending on the type of filter and your home's conditions. Homes with pets, smokers, or family members with allergies may need more frequent filter changes. Also, keep your furnace area clear of storage and debris, and listen for unusual sounds that might indicate problems developing.

**Don't wait for problems to develop** - preventive maintenance costs around \$150-\$200 but can prevent expensive repairs or dangerous situations. If your furnace is over 15 years old or you've skipped maintenance for several years, it's especially important to schedule service before winter arrives. For reliable furnace maintenance in Ottawa, request a quote from Ottawa HVAC Pro to keep your system running safely and efficiently all winter long.

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## Should I get my ducts inspected

**Yes, you should have your ducts inspected every 3-5 years, or sooner if you notice signs of problems.** Most Ottawa homeowners overlook their ductwork, but it's a critical component that affects your energy bills, indoor air quality, and system efficiency.

**Signs your ducts need inspection** include uneven heating or cooling between rooms, higher than normal energy bills, excessive dust accumulation, musty odors when the system runs, or visible mold around vents. If you've recently renovated, had pest issues, or it's been more than 5 years since your last inspection, it's definitely time for a professional assessment.

**Professional duct inspection** involves checking for air leaks, insulation problems, blockages, mold growth, and overall system balance. In Ottawa's climate, poorly sealed ducts can waste 20-30% of your heating and cooling energy - that's hundreds of dollars annually. Leaky ducts in unconditioned spaces like crawlspaces or attics are especially problematic during our harsh winters and humid summers.

**During an inspection**, HVAC technicians use specialized cameras and pressure testing equipment to identify issues that aren't visible from your vents. They'll check ductwork connections, insulation levels, and air flow balance throughout your home. This typically costs \$200-400 in the Ottawa market and can identify problems before they become expensive repairs.

**Safety considerations** include checking for disconnected ducts that could allow carbon monoxide to enter living spaces, or damaged ducts that might harbor mold or pests. Only qualified HVAC professionals should perform comprehensive duct inspections, as they know what to look for and can safely access all areas of your system.

For a thorough duct inspection and cleaning assessment, request a quote from Ottawa HVAC Pro - we'll help you determine if your ductwork is operating safely and efficiently.

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## How do I prepare my AC for summer

**Start preparing your AC for summer about 2-4 weeks before you'll need it regularly.** This gives you time to address any issues before the hot weather hits and HVAC companies get swamped with emergency calls.

**Begin with the basics that you can safely handle yourself.** Replace your furnace filter with a fresh one - a dirty filter restricts airflow and makes your AC work harder. Clear any debris, leaves, or vegetation from around your outdoor unit, maintaining at least 2 feet of clearance on all sides. Remove the outdoor unit's cover if you installed one for winter, and gently rinse the condenser coils with a garden hose to remove dirt buildup.

**Check your thermostat and test the system before you need it.** Switch your thermostat to cooling mode and set it a few degrees below room temperature to see if the AC kicks on. Listen for unusual sounds like grinding, squealing, or banging - these indicate problems that need professional attention. Make sure cool air is coming from all vents and that airflow feels strong.

**In Ottawa's climate, spring AC preparation is especially important** because our systems sit idle for 6-7 months. During this downtime, seals can dry out, refrigerant can leak, and small animals sometimes damage components. Many Ottawa homeowners discover AC problems on the first hot day in May or June, which is peak season for HVAC service calls.

**Schedule professional maintenance if your system is over 3 years old or had issues last summer.** A licensed technician will check refrigerant levels, test electrical connections, clean coils thoroughly, and catch potential problems before they become expensive repairs. This is especially crucial for older systems or if you noticed higher energy bills last cooling season.

**If your AC doesn't start up properly or isn't cooling effectively during your test, don't wait - call for service immediately.** Spring is the best time to address AC repairs because you'll get faster service and avoid emergency rates. For a comprehensive AC tune-up or to address any cooling issues, Ottawa HVAC Pro offers spring maintenance services to keep your system running efficiently all summer long.

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## How do I know if my HVAC technician did a good job

**A good HVAC technician should leave clear signs of professional work, proper testing, and thorough documentation.** You can evaluate their work quality through several key indicators that demonstrate both technical competence and professionalism.

**Professional conduct and preparation** are your first clues. A quality technician arrives on time with proper identification, explains the work needed, provides written estimates for major repairs, and uses appropriate tools and safety equipment. They should wear shoe covers or remove shoes, lay down drop cloths to protect your floors, and treat your home with respect.

**Technical work quality** becomes evident through their systematic approach. Good technicians test system operation before and after their work, check gas connections with leak detection solution, measure temperatures and pressures, inspect electrical connections, and verify proper airflow. For furnace work, they should test the heat exchanger, check venting, and ensure proper combustion. They'll also replace or clean filters and check your thermostat operation.

**Documentation and follow-up** separate professionals from amateurs. Quality technicians provide detailed invoices showing parts used and work performed, explain what they found and what they fixed, offer maintenance recommendations, and ensure you understand how to operate your system properly. They should also clean up completely, removing all packaging and old parts unless you request to keep them.

**In Ottawa's HVAC market**, reputable contractors carry TSSA licensing for gas work, maintain WSIB coverage, and provide warranties on their work. They'll pull proper permits when required and can show you their credentials. A good technician will also educate you about your system, pointing out potential future issues and explaining maintenance needs specific to Ottawa's climate.

**Red flags include** rushing through the job, inability to explain the problem clearly, pressure tactics for expensive repairs, cash-only payment requests, or leaving without testing the system. If your technician can't show proper licensing or seems unfamiliar with TSSA requirements, that's a serious concern.

For peace of mind with your HVAC work, consider working with established Ottawa contractors who offer transparent pricing and stand behind their work with solid warranties.

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Q17

## What is a heat exchanger inspection

A **heat exchanger inspection** is a critical safety check where an HVAC technician examines the metal chamber inside your furnace that separates combustion gases from the air that circulates through your home. This inspection looks for cracks, corrosion, or other damage that could allow dangerous carbon monoxide to leak into your living space.

During the inspection, a licensed technician will visually examine the heat exchanger using specialized tools like borescopes or cameras to see inside the chambers. They're looking for **stress cracks, rust-through spots, or warped sections** that compromise the integrity of the heat exchanger. Modern furnaces have multiple heat exchanger sections, and even hairline cracks can be dangerous because they allow combustion gases to mix with your home's air supply.

**Heat exchanger failure is one of the leading causes of carbon monoxide poisoning** from furnaces. In Ottawa's climate, where furnaces run heavily during our long winters, the repeated heating and cooling cycles put significant stress on these components. Older furnaces (15+ years) are particularly susceptible to heat exchanger problems due to metal fatigue and corrosion over time.

This inspection should be performed annually as part of your furnace maintenance, typically before the heating season begins. In Ontario, **TSSA regulations require that any furnace with a cracked heat exchanger be immediately shut down** until repairs are made or the unit is replaced. A cracked heat exchanger usually means furnace replacement, as repair costs often exceed the value of older units.

If your technician discovers heat exchanger damage, don't delay addressing it - carbon monoxide is odorless and deadly. For peace of mind with your Ottawa home's heating safety, schedule your annual furnace inspection before winter arrives.

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## Is an HVAC maintenance plan worth it

**Yes, an HVAC maintenance plan is typically worth the investment** - it saves money long-term, prevents emergency breakdowns, and keeps your family safe from carbon monoxide risks.

**Annual maintenance costs around \$150-200 in Ottawa, but prevents much larger repair bills.** During a professional tune-up, technicians clean components, check gas connections, test safety controls, and catch small issues before they become expensive problems. A well-maintained furnace or heat pump lasts 15-20 years versus 10-12 years without regular service.

**The safety benefits alone justify the cost.** HVAC technicians check for carbon monoxide leaks, cracked heat exchangers, and blocked vents - issues that can be life-threatening. They also verify that gas connections are secure and combustion is clean. In Ottawa's harsh winters, you can't afford to have your heating system fail unexpectedly.

**Maintenance plans typically include priority service and discounts on repairs.** If your furnace breaks down on a -30°C January night, plan members often get faster response times and reduced emergency service fees. Many Ottawa HVAC companies also offer 10-15% discounts on parts and labor for plan members.

**Energy efficiency is another major benefit.** A dirty furnace filter or heat exchanger can increase your heating bills by 10-20%. Regular cleaning and adjustments keep your system running efficiently, which is especially important with Ottawa's high winter heating costs.

**For a free consultation about maintenance plans that fit your specific HVAC system, request a quote from Ottawa HVAC Pro.** We'll assess your equipment age, usage patterns, and help you determine the best maintenance schedule for your home.

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## How often should I service my HVAC system

**Your HVAC system should be serviced annually, ideally twice per year** - once in spring for air conditioning and once in fall for heating equipment. This preventive maintenance schedule helps ensure optimal performance, energy efficiency, and safety throughout Ottawa's extreme seasonal temperature swings.

**Annual furnace maintenance** is particularly critical in Ontario because TSSA regulations require proper maintenance of gas-fired equipment for safety and warranty compliance. During a fall tune-up, a licensed technician will inspect the heat exchanger for cracks, test carbon monoxide levels, clean the burner assembly, and verify proper venting. They'll also check your furnace filter, which should be changed every 1-3 months depending on the type and your home's dust levels.

**Spring air conditioning maintenance** involves cleaning the outdoor condenser coils, checking refrigerant levels, testing electrical connections, and ensuring proper airflow. In Ottawa's climate, where AC systems work hard during humid summers, this maintenance prevents costly breakdowns during peak season. Heat pump systems, which run year-round, especially benefit from bi-annual service since they handle both heating and cooling duties.

**Beyond professional maintenance**, homeowners should perform monthly filter checks, keep outdoor units clear of debris, and listen for unusual sounds or notice changes in performance. If your system is over 10 years old or you notice increasing energy bills, more frequent inspections may be warranted.

**Regular maintenance typically costs \$150-200 per visit in the Ottawa market** but can prevent expensive emergency repairs and extend your equipment's lifespan significantly. Most HVAC companies offer annual maintenance plans that include priority service and discounts on repairs. For a comprehensive maintenance plan tailored to your specific equipment, request a consultation from Ottawa HVAC Pro.

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## What should I do to prepare my furnace for winter

**Start preparing your furnace for winter in early fall by replacing the air filter, checking your thermostat, and scheduling professional maintenance.** This proactive approach helps ensure reliable heating when Ottawa's cold weather arrives and can prevent costly emergency repairs during peak season.

**Filter replacement** is the most important step you can take yourself. A dirty filter restricts airflow, making your furnace work harder and potentially causing it to overheat or cycle on and off frequently. Check your filter monthly during heating season - most standard filters need replacement every 1-3 months depending on your home's dust levels and whether you have pets.

**Thermostat testing** should be done before you need heat. Switch from cooling to heating mode and test that your furnace responds properly. If you have a programmable thermostat, review your winter schedule settings. Consider upgrading to a smart thermostat if yours is over 10 years old - modern thermostats can improve efficiency and provide better temperature control during Ottawa's variable winter weather.

**Professional maintenance** is crucial for gas furnaces in Ontario. A licensed HVAC technician will inspect the heat exchanger for cracks (a carbon monoxide safety concern), clean the burner assembly, check gas connections, test safety controls, and ensure proper venting. This annual service typically costs \$150-\$200 but can prevent expensive repairs and ensure your family's safety.

**Additional preparation steps** include clearing vents and returns of furniture or debris, checking that your carbon monoxide detectors have fresh batteries, and ensuring your outdoor venting isn't blocked by leaves or snow buildup. If your furnace is over 15 years old or had frequent repairs last winter, consider having it evaluated for replacement before heating season begins.

**Safety reminder:** Never ignore warning signs like strange odors, unusual noises, or yellow flames in gas furnaces. These can indicate serious problems requiring immediate professional attention. For comprehensive furnace preparation and maintenance in Ottawa, consider scheduling your annual tune-up with a TSSA-licensed technician who understands Ontario's heating requirements.

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## How do I improve my HVAC system efficiency

**Improving your HVAC system efficiency starts with regular maintenance and addressing air leaks, which can reduce your energy bills by 10-30% while extending your equipment's lifespan.**

The most impactful step is **changing your furnace filter regularly** - every 1-3 months depending on the type. A dirty filter forces your system to work harder, increasing energy consumption and potentially causing expensive repairs. Beyond filters, **annual professional maintenance** is crucial for peak efficiency. During a tune-up, technicians clean components, check refrigerant levels, calibrate your thermostat, and identify potential issues before they become costly problems.

**Sealing air leaks** throughout your home makes a dramatic difference in efficiency. Focus on areas around windows, doors, electrical outlets, and where pipes or wires enter your home. Weather stripping and caulking are inexpensive solutions that provide immediate results. Don't forget about **ductwork leaks** - damaged or poorly sealed ducts can waste 20-30% of your heated or cooled air before it reaches your living spaces.

In Ottawa's climate, **upgrading to a programmable or smart thermostat** can save 10-15% on heating and cooling costs. Set temperatures back 7-10 degrees when you're away or sleeping. For our harsh winters, consider **upgrading to a high-efficiency furnace** (96%+ AFUE rating) if your current unit is over 15 years old. Modern furnaces are significantly more efficient than older models.

**Proper insulation and ventilation** work hand-in-hand with your HVAC system. Ensure your attic has adequate insulation (R-50 minimum for Ottawa) and that bathroom and kitchen exhaust fans are working properly to manage humidity levels.

For a comprehensive efficiency assessment of your Ottawa home's HVAC system, consider scheduling a professional evaluation. We can identify specific improvements that will provide the best return on investment for your particular situation.

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