

**Wheels:** Joe writes, “A few years ago the check engine light came on in my 1999 Cavalier with the 2.4 engine. There was no change in performance or gas mileage, but I took it to the dealer anyway. They said the oxygen sensor needed replacing, but they did not have one in stock. I scheduled a return visit to have it changed. The check engine light was on as I left the dealer's after the diagnosis. After a few more starts, the light went out. So I called and cancelled on the installation of a new sensor.

I attributed the problem to the sensor connector not making good contact. I believe that the diagnosis procedure probably involved opening and closing the connector, which might have re-established a good connection. Since then, the light has gone on 2 -3 more times. My fix is to wiggle the connector. Then, after a few starts, the check engine light goes out and stays out for another several months. Again, performance and mileage have been normal.

Is there any reason I should be taking the car into the shop each time?

**Halderman:** I am going to assume that the check engine light was triggered by a fault code related to the oxygen sensor. You are correct that the fault could be related to the electrical connection but without the actual diagnostic trouble code (DTC) or related data, it is impossible for me to give you a reasonable answer. It is also possible that the check engine light comes on due to another fault, such as a loose gas cap. This code is very common and will often come on and go off as you describe, depending on how tight the gas cap was tightened. There are over 1599 DTCs and each one can cause the check engine light to come on. Check with a local shop or parts store to see if you can determine what code or codes may be causing the check engine light to come on. The DTC that was supposed to be the oxygen sensor could have been a code that indicates an oxygen sensor heater circuit fault. If this was the case, then the electrical connector could be the cause. To help prevent a loose gas cap code from setting, be sure to tighten the cap at least three clicks. These clicks do not cause harm, but rather are an indicator that the cap is being tightened enough.

