

# HELP: MY BATTERY IS DEAD AND MY KEY IS STUCK!



BY RAY MAGLIOZZI

## Dear Car Talk:

I have a Pontiac G5, and my key got stuck in my ignition. I believe my battery is dead. If I replace the battery, will the key be released from the ignition? — Linda

I'm not sure why the key was in the ignition when the battery died, Linda. Were you leaving it "ready to go," hoping somebody would steal it?

Anyway, your key problem may be related to the dead battery. There's something called an interlock solenoid on your car that locks the steering wheel when you put the car in park.

That solenoid is located near the shifter, in the center console. When you put the car in park, it actuates a pin that locks the steering wheel. If there's no power at all, that solenoid won't work, and you won't be able to unlock the steering wheel. And if the steering wheel is not in the exact right position, it'll prevent you from turning the key to the off position and removing it.

Now, it's possible that the pin is just stuck, and it has nothing to do

with your battery. The first thing we'd do at our shop is try violently shaking the steering wheel. Of course, we're animals, so that's to be expected. But if the pin is just stuck for mechanical reasons, sometimes physical force can get it to release. So, try moving the steering wheel back and forth as best you can while you jiggle the key and see if you can get the key to the off position.

If not, don't replace the battery yet. Try jump-starting the car first. If it is a battery problem, as soon as you hook up the jumper cables, the battery should have enough power to energize the solenoid and release the interlock pin. That'll tell you the dead battery was the problem.

Then, you can drive to your repair shop and have your charging system tested. The test will tell you whether you just need to charge your old battery, buy a new one or possibly replace your alternator if it isn't keeping your battery charged. I bet the jump start works, Linda. Good luck.

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*Got a question about cars? Write to Ray in care of King Features, 628 Virginia Drive, Orlando, FL 32803, or email by visiting the Car Talk website at [www.cartalk.com](http://www.cartalk.com).*

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