

Should You Repair or Replace Your Sunken Driveway?

If you're asking "should I repair or replace my sunken driveway," you're already ahead of most homeowners who assume a sunken driveway automatically means a full replacement. That assumption can cost several thousand dollars more than necessary. The real decision, repair or replace, almost always has a smarter answer than tearing everything out and starting over. Concrete lifting specialists regularly restore driveways that homeowners were convinced were finished, at a fraction of what a full pour would have cost.

This guide walks you through the four factors that actually drive that decision, breaks down what each repair option costs, and gives you a clear checklist so you can stop guessing and take action.

What's Actually Driving Your Driveway Down?

Before you call anyone for a quote, you need to understand why the slab is sinking. Most homeowners skip this step entirely, which is exactly why they get sold on unnecessary replacements. The cause shapes the repair decision more than anything else.

The five most common culprits are:

- **Poor sub-base compaction**, the soil beneath the slab was never dense enough to hold it long-term, and voids form as it shifts.
- **Water erosion from drainage problems**, physically washes soil away, creating hollow pockets under the concrete.
- **Freeze-thaw soil movement**, cycles push soil up and down repeatedly, cracking and dislodging slabs over years.
- **Tree root disturbance**, roots displace the soil under sections closest to the tree.
- **Heavy repeated loads**, especially vehicles parked in the same spot, compressing weak subgrade beyond its capacity.

The reason the cause matters is simple: if the problem is still active, lifting the slab won't hold. A leaking downspout that's been washing soil out from under your driveway for three years will keep washing it out after a repair. Fix the drainage first, then lift the slab. A localized soft spot from a one-time pipe leak is a very different situation from soil failing beneath the entire length of the driveway. That distinction is the first filter in any sinking driveway repair decision.

Should I Repair or Replace My Sunken Driveway? The 4 Factors That Decide It

These four variables, evaluated honestly, will give you a clear answer in most cases. Run through them in order.

How Bad Is the Damage, Really?

Localized sinking with mostly intact slabs is a strong repair candidate. Widespread cracking, multiple fault lines, and crumbling edges signal that the slab itself is compromised, not just displaced. The practical test: walk every crack and try to map it to two or three discrete sections. If the cracking runs everywhere in a random pattern, replacement deserves a serious look. Hairline surface cracks from age are normal and don't affect liftability. **Cracks wider than about 1/8 inch that run through the full depth of the slab** are a different story, those indicate structural compromise, not just surface wear.

Concrete Age and Remaining Surface Life

A driveway that's 5 to 15 years old and sinking is almost always a better repair candidate than one that's 25 or more years old. Older concrete that's also spalling, pitted, and stained may not benefit much from lifting because the surface itself is near the end of its life. A useful rule of thumb: if the concrete has another 10 to 15 good surface years left, investing in a concrete leveling or slabjacking repair makes financial sense. If the slab is already deteriorating on its own, you're lifting a surface that'll need replacement soon anyway.

Budget and Timeline

Mudjacking runs \$3 to \$6 per square foot, and the driveway is typically usable within 24 to 72 hours. [Polyurethane injection](#), sometimes called polyjacking, runs \$5 to \$25 per square foot, with cure times as short as 15 to 30 minutes. [Full concrete replacement](#) runs \$8 to \$18 per square foot once you factor in demolition, haul-off, and new concrete. For a 500 sq ft driveway, that's roughly \$1,500 to \$3,000 for mudjacking versus \$4,000 to \$9,000 or more for a full re-pour.

Timeline matters too. If you're listing the home or need the driveway back the same day, a lifting repair beats a week-long replacement project by a wide margin.

Whether the Root Cause Has Been Fixed

A lifted slab over unresolved drainage or unstable fill is a temporary fix. If your driveway has already been lifted once and settled again within a few years, that's a signal the underlying problem was never addressed. In that case, repair without fixing the source is money wasted. Address the drainage, regrade if needed, and then decide whether lifting or replacement makes more sense on the corrected sub-base.

Your Main Repair Options and What Each One Actually Costs

There are three realistic paths for sunken driveway repair. Here's what each one delivers and what it costs in 2026.

Mudjacking: The Proven, Affordable Workhorse

[Mudjacking works](#) by pumping a cement-soil-water slurry under the slab through small drilled holes. The slurry fills the voids and lifts the concrete back to grade. **It's the most cost-effective concrete lifting option for larger sunken areas and heavier residential slabs.** Cost runs \$3 to \$6 per sq ft; a typical 200 sq ft sunken section costs roughly \$600 to \$1,200. You'll need to stay off it for 24 to 72 hours before parking a vehicle on it.

When you hire a mudjacking contractor, what separates a legitimate operation from a one-truck outfit is transparency and a real warranty. [Top Notch Mudjacking](#) offers free, no-obligation estimates and backs their mudjacking work with a 2-year limited warranty. For homeowners in the Quad Cities region of Illinois and Iowa, that combination of local expertise and a written guarantee takes a lot of uncertainty out of choosing a contractor.

Polyurethane Injection: Faster Cure, Higher Price

Polyurethane foam injection, also called polyjacking, works through even smaller holes. The expanding foam fills voids, lifts the slab, and cures in minutes rather than days. It's significantly lighter than mudjacking slurry, which makes it a better fit for areas where added weight is a concern or for smaller, more precise repairs. Cost runs \$5 to \$25 per sq ft depending on job complexity, and in many residential jobs, the driveway is ready for vehicle traffic the same afternoon.

The trade-off is straightforward: polyurethane costs more upfront. For very large or deep voids, the heavier mudjacking mix is often the more practical and economical choice. For small repairs where downtime is the primary concern, polyurethane wins on convenience.

Cost Comparison at a Glance

Option	Cost per sq ft	Total cost (500 sq ft)	Cure time	Disruption level
Mudjacking	\$3 to \$6	\$1,500 to \$3,000	24 to 72 hours	Low to moderate
Polyurethane injection	\$5 to \$25	\$2,500 to \$12,500	15 to 30 minutes	Low
Full concrete replacement	\$8 to \$18	\$4,000 to \$9,000+	7 to 10 days	High

For most driveways with sound slabs and localized sinking, repair costs a fraction of replacement and gets the job done faster. The case for full replacement only becomes compelling when the slab itself is structurally compromised.

When Full Replacement Is the Only Honest Answer

Some driveways are done. Trying to lift a slab that's past saving is a waste of money, and a straight-shooting contractor will tell you that directly rather than take the job anyway.

Replacement becomes the right call when you're looking at multiple through-cracks dividing the driveway into a puzzle of independent fragments, or when concrete is crumbling and spalling across a large portion of the surface. **A driveway that's already been lifted once or twice and keeps settling** is telling you the sub-base problem was never fixed, and lifting it again is delaying the inevitable. Active drainage flooding the sub-base repeatedly, combined with concrete that's 25 or more years old and showing all of the above at once, points clearly toward a new pour.

What a full re-pour actually costs in 2026: expect \$8 to \$18 per sq ft including demolition, which puts a 400 to 600 sq ft driveway at roughly \$4,000 to \$9,000 or more depending on your region and slab thickness. New concrete needs 24 to 48 hours before foot traffic and up to 7 to 10 days before heavy vehicle loads. One critical caveat: replacing the concrete without addressing the drainage or sub-base problem means the new driveway will face the same issues in 5 to 10 years. The concrete isn't the problem. The ground underneath is.

Should I Repair or Replace My Sunken Driveway? A Quick Decision Checklist

Run through these five questions honestly before you talk to a single contractor. Answer based on what you can see and know.

1. Is the sinking limited to one or two sections, rather than running the full length of the driveway? *(Yes = repair-friendly)*
2. Are the cracks surface-level only, with no cracks going all the way through the slab? *(Yes = repair-friendly)*
3. Is the concrete less than 20 years old with a mostly intact surface? *(Yes = repair-friendly)*
4. Has this area been repaired before and re-sunk within a few years? *(Yes = root cause likely unresolved, address that first)*
5. Is there an active drainage problem that hasn't been fixed yet? *(Yes = fix drainage before any repair or replacement)*

If you answered yes to questions 1, 2, and 3, you're a strong candidate for concrete leveling or mudjacking. If you answered yes to question 4 or 5, address the root cause first, then reassess. A contractor who tells you the same thing is one worth trusting.

What to Look for in a Contractor Before You Hire

Ask whether they're licensed, bonded, and insured. That's non-negotiable. Get a written estimate with a clear scope of work, not a ballpark number over the phone. Ask specifically about their warranty on lifting work and compare what's covered, warranty terms vary, and the length and scope of coverage matter.

A contractor who walks the driveway with you, explains what caused the settling, and gives you both repair and replacement options is a better sign than one who immediately pushes the most

expensive solution. The goal of a good contractor is to solve your problem correctly, not to maximize the invoice.

The Bottom Line

So, should you repair or replace your sunken driveway? For most homeowners, the answer leans toward repair. Sinking concrete does not automatically mean a new driveway. Homeowners who act before small settlement becomes full structural failure typically have a solid repair option that costs far less than replacement and can be completed the same day. The key is diagnosing the problem honestly, understanding what each repair path delivers, and hiring a contractor who stands behind their work.

For most driveways with intact slabs and localized settling, concrete lifting is a faster and more cost-effective path than full replacement. If you're in the Quad Cities area and want to know which option fits your situation, Top Notch Mudjacking offers free, no-obligation estimates backed by a 2-year limited warranty on mudjacking work. Call them before you assume the worst.

Frequently Asked Questions

Should I repair or replace my sunken driveway if it has already been lifted once?

If your driveway was lifted previously and has settled again within a few years, the underlying cause, usually a drainage or sub-base issue, was likely never resolved. Lifting it again without fixing the root problem is a short-term patch. Get a contractor to evaluate the sub-base and drainage before committing to another repair or a full replacement.

What is mudjacking, and how does it compare to polyjacking?

Mudjacking pumps a cement-soil-water slurry under the slab to fill voids and lift the concrete. Polyjacking (polyurethane injection) uses expanding foam through smaller holes and cures in minutes. Mudjacking is generally more economical for larger, heavier slabs. Polyjacking costs more but works faster and is better suited to smaller or more precise repairs.

How do I know if concrete leveling or slabjacking will hold long-term?

Concrete leveling holds well when the underlying cause has been corrected and the remaining slab is structurally sound. If drainage has been fixed, the sub-base is stable, and the concrete itself isn't crumbling or deeply cracked through its full thickness, a properly executed lift should [last many years](#). Ask your contractor about their warranty, a written guarantee on the lifting work is a reasonable expectation.