

6 ways to speed up slow Wi-Fi

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(Photo: D-Link/handout)

We've all been there: Every gadget at home is running smoothly and we're streaming without a hitch. Suddenly, the dreaded digital slowdown and then, the mental meltdown occurs.

There are plenty of reasons your Wi-Fi acts up including signal congestion, bandwidth issues, and hardware limitations. The truth is, most households and offices can't get away with a basic single-band router anymore. Personal devices have started to stretch available bandwidth, and each smartphone, tablet, television, desktop, gaming console, smart appliance, and laptop is competing for the same signal.

Whatever your Wi-Fi hiccups, here are surefire ways to speed things up.

1. Update your router's software

Most people routinely update their apps and operating systems, but they forget about their router's firmware. The advantages are twofold: You may make your Wi-Fi more efficient and also protect yourself from newly discovered security breaches.

Using your web browser, type in your router's IP address to visit your router's administrator page and check for updates. You will have to enter a username and password to log in. Crazy, but router default passwords are readily available online. [Find just about any router's username and password.](https://www.komando.com/cool-sites/325751/find-your-routers-password-fast-then-change-it/all) (<https://www.komando.com/cool-sites/325751/find-your-routers-password-fast-then-change-it/all>)

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Fing is a network tool that you should have in your tech arsenal even if you know your router's IP address. Sure, you'll learn your router's IP address, but you can also see all devices connected to your network, check your Internet connectivity, monitor the network and detect intruders. [Here's more information and the links you need for both Apple and Android devices.](https://www.komando.com/apps/374974/powerful-network-analyzer-and-tool) (<https://www.komando.com/apps/374974/powerful-network-analyzer-and-tool>)

Be sure to restart your router once the update is complete for the changes to take effect. Set an appointment in your calendar to check for router firmware updates every three months. We probably won't have to do this task much longer. Some newer routers update themselves without owners having to do a thing.

2. Look for interferences

You might be surprised what kinds of household devices can affect your Wi-Fi speeds. Cordless phones are obvious. But what about microwave ovens? Did you ever suspect that a baby monitor could slow down your videos on Facebook?

This is particularly true for older routers running on a 2.4GHz frequency. This is the same frequency that many household appliances run on, so the signals tend to overlap. The easiest way to fix this problem is to move your router away from other 2.4GHz devices, or just upgrade your hardware.

If you're feeling ambitious, create a Wi-Fi "heat map," which can help you see where Wi-Fi signals are strongest (and weakest). [Here's a free program that will diagram the signals in your home or office.](https://www.komando.com/downloads/1994/pinpoint-wi-fi-issues-in-your-home-or-office) (<https://www.komando.com/downloads/1994/pinpoint-wi-fi-issues-in-your-home-or-office>)

More: [One mistake people make using public Wi-Fi](https://www.komando.com/story/tech/columnist/2017/08/18/one-mistake-people-make-using-public-wi-fi/577791001/) ([/story/tech/columnist/2017/08/18/one-mistake-people-make-using-public-wi-fi/577791001/](https://www.komando.com/story/tech/columnist/2017/08/18/one-mistake-people-make-using-public-wi-fi/577791001/))

3. Change channels

Another common tweak is to change the channel of your router. Again, this step is most helpful when you're running on a 2.4GHz frequency because these can get congested with other appliances. Moving from one channel to a less crowded one may speed things up.

How do you do this? The process is slightly different for Macs and PCs.

Macs

Apple provides a free tool called “Wireless Diagnostics.” To use it, hold the Option key while clicking on the Wi-Fi icon on the top right-hand side of the menu bar and then choose “Open Wireless Diagnostics.”

To access the Scan tool, ignore the actual Wireless Diagnostics window. Immediately go to the Window tab on the top left side of the menu bar and choose Scan.

You’ll see a list of the Wi-Fi signals in your vicinity and the channel they occupy, among other useful information.

Windows

For Windows, download a free Wi-Fi utility called Acrylic Wi-Fi Home. Similar to the Mac’s Scan tool, this application will instantly give you information about the Wi-Fi signals in your area, including the channels they occupy.

For Android users, there are a bunch of Wi-Fi scanning tools available, but a very popular one is Network Analyzer. [More details and download information.](https://www.komando.com/apps/271924/powerful-wi-fi-network-analysis-and-diagnostic-tool/all) (<https://www.komando.com/apps/271924/powerful-wi-fi-network-analysis-and-diagnostic-tool/all>)

Once you have the channel info you need, to prevent trampling on other channels, the recommended channels for 2.4GHz are 1, 6 and 11, which don’t overlap with each other.

More: [Virgin Media hack risk is a wake-up call to check your router \(/story/tech/2017/06/23/virgin-media-router-hacking-change-password/423882001/\)](/story/tech/2017/06/23/virgin-media-router-hacking-change-password/423882001/)

More: [Slow Internet downloads? Look to Wi-Fi first, then blame your ISP \(/story/tech/columnist/2017/07/23/slow-internet-downloads-look-wi-fi-first-then-blame-your-isp/501173001/\)](/story/tech/columnist/2017/07/23/slow-internet-downloads-look-wi-fi-first-then-blame-your-isp/501173001/)

4. Put the kids on their own network and enable QoS



Connecting smart home devices to a guest Wi-Fi network can increase security. (Photo: Netgear)

Many parents have specialized settings on their computers to prevent kids from getting into trouble. Similarly, you can put your kids on a separate network with its own rules and parameters.

The simplest method is to set up a separate Wi-Fi router. Alternatively, you can enable your router’s “Guest Network” option. Guest networks are designed to give visitors limited access to your home’s network and files, but it can also work for kids. A guest network has a lot of benefits, including the ability to shield your main devices from certain web-based attacks.

Related: Without proper security, your router opens the door to let others into your network and access your private data. [Read more on the critical steps to secure your Wi-Fi network.](https://www.komando.com/tips/379024/critical-steps-to-secure-your-home-wi-fi) (<https://www.komando.com/tips/379024/critical-steps-to-secure-your-home-wi-fi>)

Finally, adjust your router's QoS (Quality of Service) settings. QoS lets you prioritize traffic according to the type of data getting transmitted. You could set applications like Skype, streaming media, and online gaming to have higher priority than other activities.

5. Buy a new 802.11 AC router

If you're in the market for a new router and you want improved Wi-Fi speeds, look for a 802.11 AC router with dual or triple band capabilities.

What does all that mean? Put simply, newer Wi-Fi standards mean better features and increased performance. "AC" routers are a step up from the older "B," "G," and "N" models.

If you wanted to, you could keep your older 2.4GHz router on its own band and add the newer AC device on a higher band. This is essentially like having multiple routers in one and it can solve interference and congestion issues.

6. Mesh is the word



If you've had it up to here with Netflix buffering, you may need to invest in a new router. (Photo: Reviewed.com / Brendan Nystedt)

Some people have big houses, and they quickly find that the Wi-Fi only extends so far, especially when a lot of devices are attached to the same network. You may have heard of a "network extender," a cheap device that will help you expand your Wi-Fi reach. You may be tempted to invest in one.

Hold off and investigate a savvier option of a "mesh network." This system uses two or three different devices, which work together to "blanket" your environment. While a Wi-Fi extender might require several network names and give you uneven coverage, a mesh network is all part of the same system, so you should always get a consistent signal.

[Learn more about mesh networks. \(https://www.komando.com/tips/399168/why-youll-want-a-mesh-wi-fi-network-at-your-home-or-office\)](https://www.komando.com/tips/399168/why-youll-want-a-mesh-wi-fi-network-at-your-home-or-office)

If that sounds enticing, understand that a mesh network isn't added onto your current router; you will replace your router with at least two new devices. The transition isn't cheap, but you'll be astonished how much more powerful and far-reaching your Wi-Fi will become.

How else can you live a better digital life? Be sure to listen or download my podcasts, or [click here to find it on your local radio station \(http://station-finder.komando.com\)](http://station-finder.komando.com). You can listen to the [Kim Komando Show \(https://www.komando.com\)](https://www.komando.com) on your phone, tablet or computer. From buying advice to digital life issues, [click here for my free podcasts \(https://www.komando.com/listen/podcast-directory\)](https://www.komando.com/listen/podcast-directory).

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