How to create an image backup in Windows 10 and restore it, if need be

Safeguard everything on your hard drive with this guide.

Robin Hayes plans to create an image backup of his C: drive using Windows 10's own tools. But he's not sure how he can restore that backup should disaster strike. I'll cover both the backing up and the restoration.

An image backup copies everything on your drive—operating system, boot sector, programs, and data files—into one compressed but still very large file. If disaster renders your Windows installation useless, an image backup will allow you to get it up and running again quickly.

I recommend you create an image backup, saving it to an external hard drive, three or four times

Creating an image backup in Windows 10

1. Plug in your external hard drive—which should have enough free space to hold everything on your internal drive. Make sure Windows can access the drive.

2. In Windows' Search field, type `file history`, and select Control Panel's *File History* program.
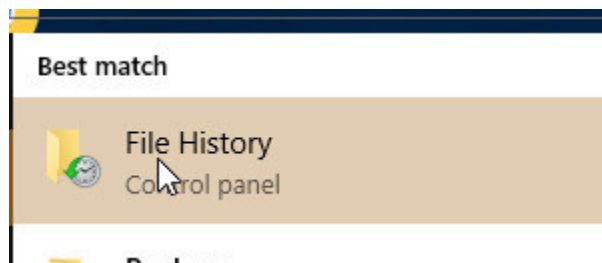
3. In the File History dialog box, click *System Image Backup* in the lower-left corner.
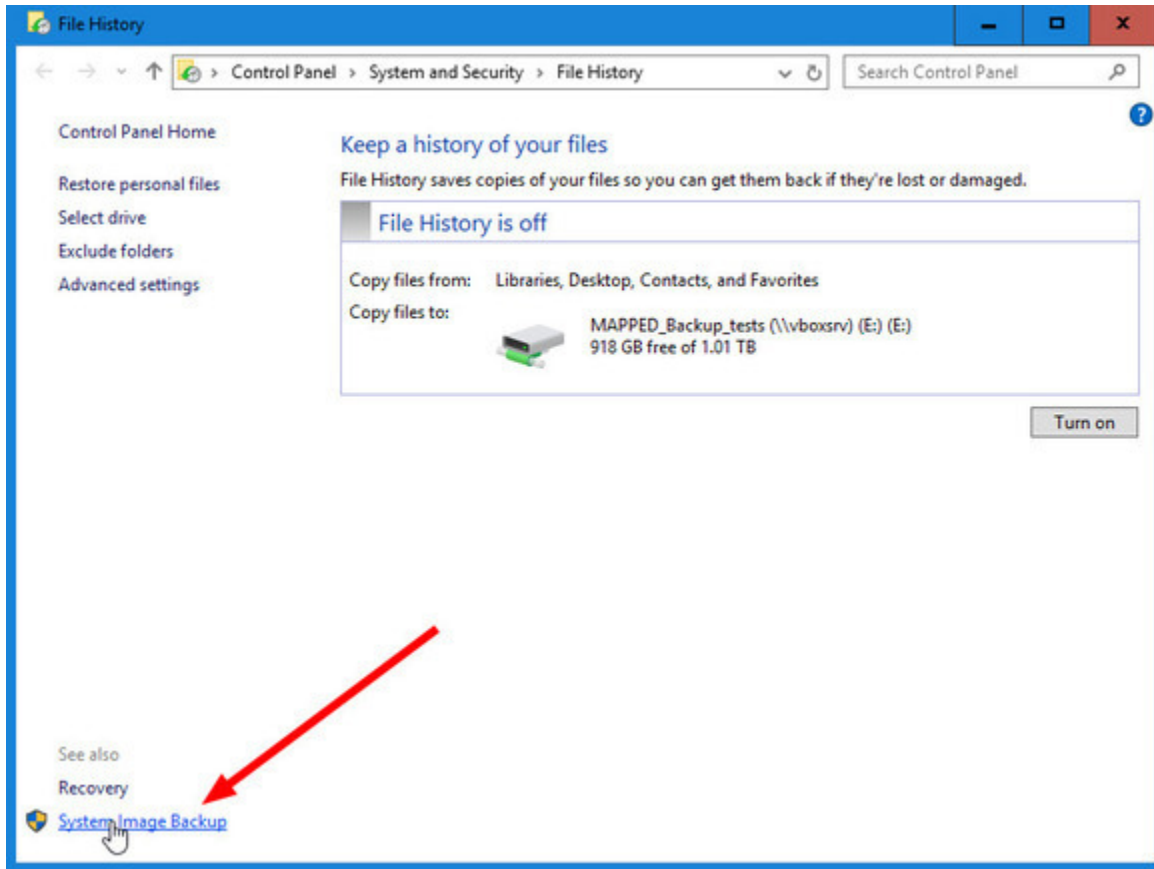
4. In the resulting Backup and Restore dialog box (don't worry about the "Windows 7" label), click *Create a system image*.
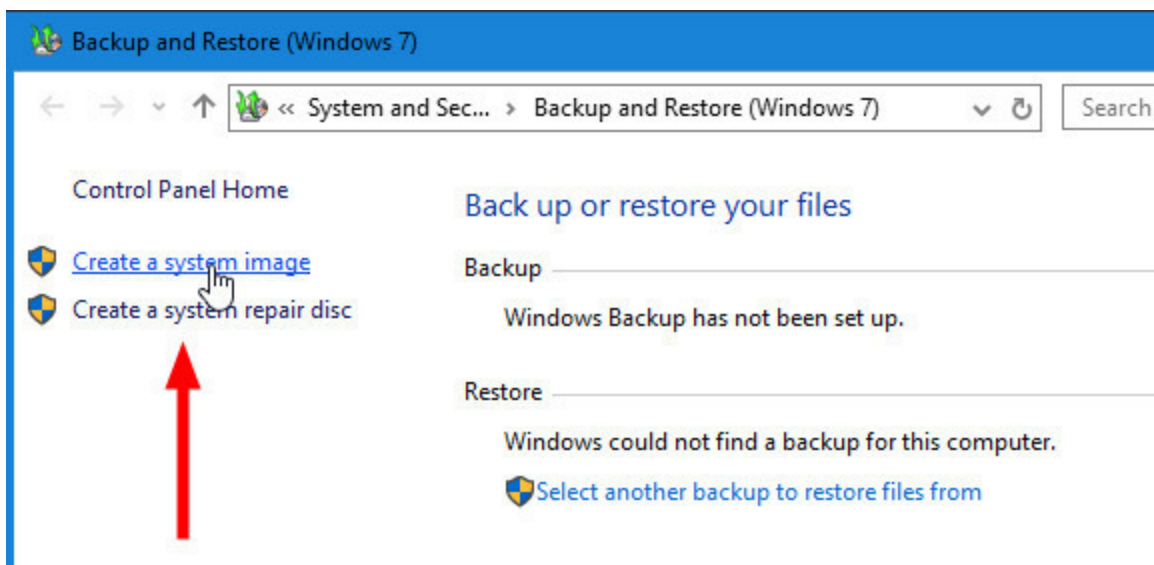
5. Follow the resulting wizard.

The backup may take a few hours. You can continue to work as it backs up. However, I prefer to start the backup at the end of the workday so it doesn't slow anything down.

When the backup is over, you may be asked if you want a System Repair Disc. If your PC has an optical drive, create the disc.

If not, create a Recovery Drive: Plug in a blank flash drive, open Control Panel's Recovery tool, click *Create a recovery drive,* and follow the prompts.

Restore the backup

When Windows is in a seemingly hopeless condition, you'll need to get into the recovery environment to restore the image. Here are three ways to do that:

- **If you can still boot into Windows:** Select *Start > Settings > Update & security.* Select *Recovery* in the left pane, then select *Restart now.*
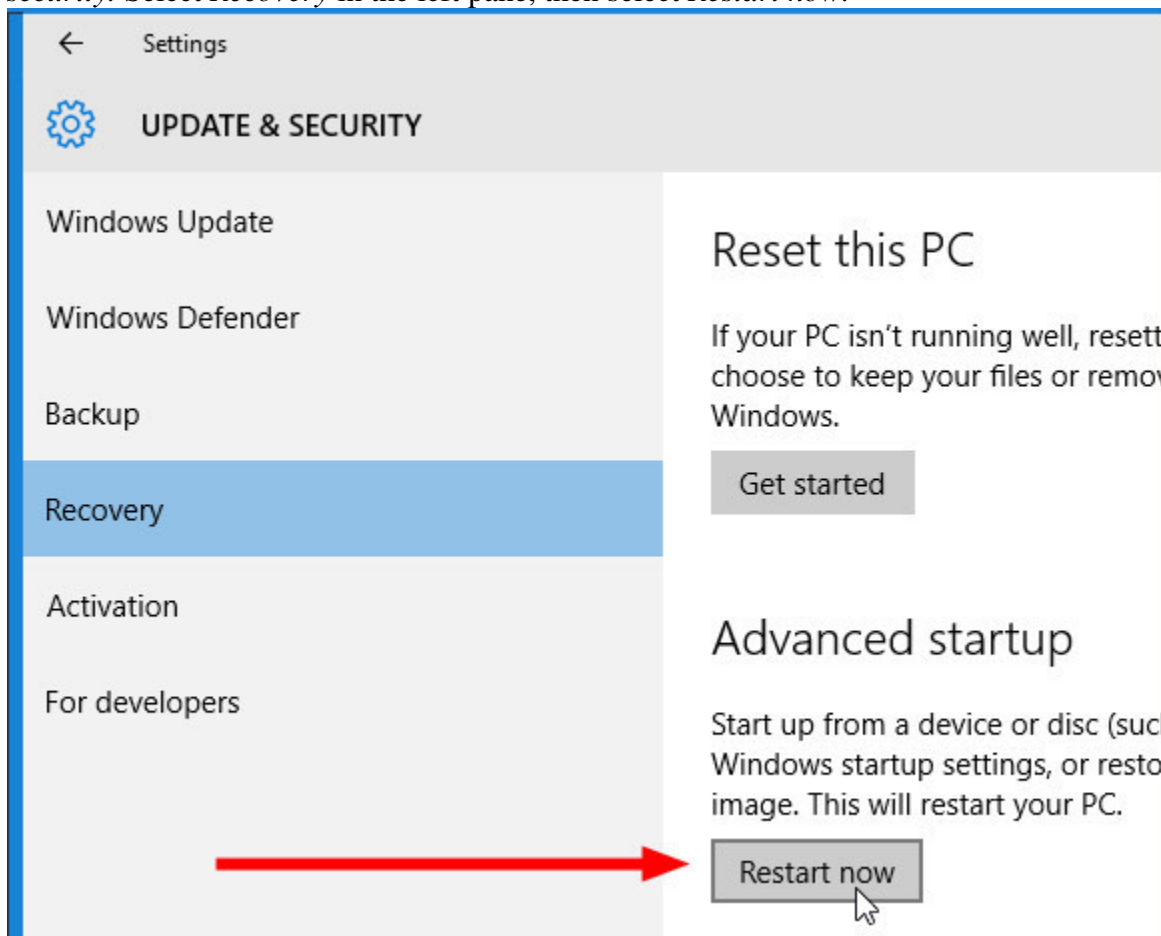
- **If Windows won't boot and you have a System Repair Disc:**Insert the disc into your optical drive and boot your PC. When you're asked to "Press any key…," press any key. Then pick a language.

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Press any key to boot from CD or DVD._
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- **If Windows won't boot and you have a Recovery Drive:** Insert the Recovery flash drive into a USB port and boot your PC. If your PC skips the flash drive and attempts to boot Windows, reboot and enter your Setup screen (**F2**usually works; if it doesn't, check your manual). Look for a boot or boot order option. Once you've successfully booted the flash drive, select a language.

  Once you're in a recovery environment, select *Troubleshoot*, then *System Image Recovery*. Follow the instructions.