

Windows 10: We Answer Your Most Pressing Questions

Readers want to know about cost, compatibility and the risks of upgrading

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Windows 10 [fixes most of what we hated about Windows 8](#), and is in many ways a worthy alternative to the Mac OS X. We're especially happy for the return of the classic Start menu (which, like Journey, we never stopped believin' in). More than [14 million devices downloaded Windows 10](#) in its first day last week. But any upgrade to software used on over a billion computers is likely to raise a few concerns. We've heard from hundreds of readers about compatibility, cost and the risks of upgrading. Here are the top questions you asked, and answers to get you up and running.

How Do I Upgrade

I currently have Windows 7 on my laptop, but am unable to download Windows 10 on it. What am I doing wrong? —C. T.

The easiest way to upgrade to Windows 10 is to use the Get Windows 10 app available on Windows 7 and 8. A Windows icon for this app should show up automatically on the lower right corner of your screen. If you don't see it there, you may need to update your computer manually. (Look for Windows Update in the Control Panel.)

The Get Windows 10 app will check whether your existing computer is compatible, and then put you in line for the free download. It's not instant, but you should get an email with further instructions in the following days or weeks. (This won't work on existing Enterprise editions of Windows; those require a special volume license.)

If you have multiple computers to update, or want to skip the download queue, [Microsoft](#) offers a link you can use to create your own upgrade USB drive or DVD right away. Or, you can buy Windows 10 on a USB Flash Drive for \$120 from the Microsoft Store, Amazon and other retailers.

What if I'm still on Vista...or XP?

I have Windows XP on a 7-year-old computer. Can I get a free download of Windows 10 and would that be a smart thing to do? —B. A.

There's no free ride for XP and Vista. You might be able to put Windows 10 on one of these older systems, but it will cost you at least \$120 to buy a copy.

The bigger question is whether you really want to upgrade an old machine. We tested an upgrade on an eight-year-old [HP](#) laptop, and it worked fine except for an unsupported fingerprint reader. The older your machine, the more likely you are to run into problems with unsupported hardware. PC prices have plummeted in the past decade, so you might be pleasantly surprised how far that \$120 will go towards a new PC running Windows 10.

Do I need to upgrade right now?

Can I delay the upgrade until some of the bugs have been dealt with? —T. T.

Upgrading to Windows 10 isn't like a Black Friday sale. You won't miss anything if you wait a few weeks. If you're worried about possible incompatibility, you could wait a bit. While Windows 10 is a great operating system, there are some bugs, such as some Windows Store and Edge browser issues, that Microsoft is working hard to fix. If you're already waiting to receive your Windows 10 download invite, not to worry, it won't expire.

While Windows 10 apparently isn't causing a Vista-like driver nightmare, there have been complaints about some driver incompatibilities with particular [graphics cards](#), [wireless cards](#), printers, etc. that may take time to fix. Soon, there should be better documentation from both users and customer service representatives alike about these trouble spots. In the meantime, your best resource is the compatibility report for drivers and your installed software, which is generated when you run the Get Windows 10 app. If you do wish to upgrade, though, bear in mind that the free upgrade runs out next year.

Will Windows 10 always be free?

When the 'freebie' year is up for Windows 10, has Microsoft spoken about charging an annual fee for Windows 10? —A. R.

For the first year, it is free to upgrade from Windows 7 or Windows 8 to Windows 10. Microsoft has clarified that "[once](#) you upgrade within the first year for free, it's yours forever at no additional cost." That means it won't require a subscription, and no features should be limited down the road.

However, if you don't upgrade to Windows 10 within the first year—through July 29, 2016—the company plans to charge the regular one-time [\\$120 price](#) to upgrade from Windows 7 or Windows 8.

ENLARGE

The easiest way to upgrade to Windows 10 is to use the Get Windows 10 app, available on Windows 7 and 8. A Windows icon for this app should show up automatically on the lower right corner of your screen. *PHOTO:MICROSOFT*

Is it a space hog?

How big is the new operating system and how much will it slow my computer down? —R. R. Windows 10 is a large file—about 3 GB. And you'll need at least 16 GB of total storage on your computer to run it.

In general, Windows 10 shouldn't be more taxing on your system than Windows 7 or 8. Microsoft [spells out the system requirements online](#), but those aren't the only factors. Most—but not all—hardware and software that worked in Windows 7 should work in 10. Microsoft doesn't have a list anywhere of everything supported by Windows 10, so if you want to know for sure before you upgrade, check with your hardware manufacturer or software publisher, or check online forums for more niche products.

Will my office come along for the ride?

If/when I upgrade to Windows 10, will my currently-installed Office 2010 programs be transferred or will I have to reinstall after I've upgraded? —C. S.

When you upgrade from Windows 7 or Windows 8 via the Get Windows 10 upgrade tool, most of your programs and files including Office will remain on the computer and appear in your new Windows 10 operating system. (Media Center, as you'll read below, won't come along.)

We still suggest doing a full backup of your system before beginning the upgrade. You just don't know what could happen, and it's better to be safe than sorry. Microsoft includes in Windows 7 and Windows 8 a System image backup tool that can be found in the Control Panel. If you do need to reinstall Microsoft Office just make sure to have your Office product key handy. If you have misplaced this alphanumeric code, a free program called [Keyfinder](#) can help retrieve it.

O Windows Media Center, where art thou?

The way I understand it, when I upgrade to Windows 10, Microsoft will uninstall my Windows 7 Media Center. How can I keep it? —E. S.

We are sorry to confirm the sad news: Windows Media Center has died and gone to software heaven. And even worse, when you upgrade to Windows 10, the software will be removed. Microsoft said decreased usage of the software prompted the decision.

But all is not lost. If you relied on the software to play DVDs or CDs, Microsoft will be releasing Windows DVD Player very soon. It will be available through Windows Update for those upgrading from Windows 7 or 8. It will cost \$15 in the Windows Store for new Windows 10 PC buyers and those upgrading from older computers. We suggest [VideoLAN's VLC media player](#), an open-source program that supports playback of various types of files, as an alternative.

If you counted on Windows Media Center to watch and record TV shows using a TV tuner, try [MediaPortal](#), a free alternative that has support for various tuners. If you're mostly looking for a way to play computer media on your TV, your best bet is to invest in a set top box like the Roku HD, and software such as [Plex](#).

Is it a privacy and security risk?

When I researched the ‘upgrade,’ there seem to be unpleasant security and privacy issues. —J. T.

A few have [dubbed Windows 10 a Microsoft spy tool](#), but that overstates the reality. The new operating system certainly builds Microsoft’s own Internet services into its core. The Cortana virtual assistant works by tracking activity like email and Web searches, but in general the service doesn’t go further than what many people already willingly surrender to [Google](#) and [Facebook](#).

If you don’t want Microsoft in your personal life at all, you can choose not to link Windows 10 to a Microsoft account. You can also turn off Cortana or other information collection in the settings. But beware, that would prevent you from using Cortana and other features like OneDrive cloud storage.

There has also been some concern about a [Windows 10 feature called Wi-Fi Sense](#) that’s supposed to make it more convenient to join Wi-Fi networks by letting you share passwords with friends. This isn’t necessarily a problem, but you should understand what’s going on.

When you log in to a new Wi-Fi network with Windows 10, it lets you check a box to share the ability to login with your Outlook.com, Facebook and Skype contacts. When you do that, the password gets stored on an encrypted Microsoft server, where it’s handed off to friends who need it when they’re nearby. Your friends don’t see the passwords—they just get the ability to log in automatically when they are physically nearby. You can stop sharing any particular network inside Wi-Fi settings.

If you don’t want anybody to be able to store and share the password of your own home network, type it into your friends’ computers yourself and turn off the share checkbox. You can also completely avoid Wi-Fi Sense sharing by adding “_optout” to your network’s name.