

Bring Your Own Phone

START HERE

- 1 The universal way: open the phone app as if to make a call, and dial star, pound, zero, six, pound — that is `*#06#` — then your IMEI appears on the screen instantly. This works on nearly every phone, iPhone or Android.
- 2 On an iPhone: go to Settings, then General, then About, and scroll down. You will see the IMEI listed there, where you can read it carefully.
- 3 On most Android phones: go to Settings, then About phone, and look in the status or IMEI area. The exact wording varies a little by brand.
- 4 Older phones often also print the IMEI on a label in the SIM tray or, if the back comes off, under the battery.

Stuck? Call or text Bill — real help, no rushing.

Call or text: (330) 200-8042

Book a visit: billshometech.com/book · \$99 flat first visit



Bring Your Own Phone — Using the Phone You Already Have

Check compatibility, find your IMEI, and keep the phone you already have.

————— **An Extended Guide · No. 1694 · BYOD** —————

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

Bill Davis — Bill's Home Tech

(330) 200-8042 · bill@billshometech.com · Atwater, Ohio

Book a visit — billshometech.com/book

What's Inside

Everything in this guide, with page numbers. Skip to whichever chapter answers your question right now.

1. The Phone You Have Is Probably Fine	5
2. Three Questions It Comes Down To	5
3. Finding Your IMEI	6
4. Using the Compatibility Checker	7
5. Unlocked Versus Locked	8
6. Network Bands — Why Some Phones Half-Work	8
7. VoLTE — The Calling Setting That Matters Now	9
8. Old Networks That Were Shut Off	10
9. eSIM or Physical SIM on Your Phone	11
10. Features That May Not Carry Over	11
11. iPhone Specifics	12
12. Android, Samsung, and Pixel Specifics	13
13. Buying a Used Phone to Bring	14
14. BYOD Versus Financing a New Phone	15
15. Getting a SIM and Activating Your Phone	15
16. First-Day Checklist on Your Phone	16
17. When Bringing Your Phone Is Not Worth It	17
18. Traps People Fall Into	18
19. Questions I Hear A Lot	18
20. Checking the Carrier Certified Your Phone for Calling	19
21. Bringing an Apple Watch or Tablet When You Switch	20

22. When Only Some Things Work After You Switch 21

23. Working With Bill — Your Support Plan 22

24. Your Notes 23

A Picture to Follow Along 24

A Second Look 25

A Note From Bill 25

Your Visit — and My Promise 26

1. The Phone You Have Is Probably Fine

Do not let anyone sell you one you do not need.

When you walk into a carrier store to switch, the first thing many of them want to do is put a brand-new phone in your hands, often dressed up as free with a plan. Here is the plain truth: most of the time you do not need a new phone at all. The one you already own and know how to use will almost certainly work on the new carrier, and keeping it can save you the entire cost of a new phone — which is often hundreds of dollars baked quietly into your bill over a couple of years.

Using your current phone on a new carrier has a name in the industry: BYOD, which stands for Bring Your Own Device. It is common and well supported — every carrier and budget brand has a way to do it, because plenty of people prefer to keep the phone they have already learned. There is a real comfort in not having to figure out a new phone at the same time you are figuring out a new carrier.

That said, bringing your own phone is not quite automatic. There are a few things worth checking first, so you do not switch and then discover a problem. This guide walks through those checks in plain steps. None of them is hard, and most phones from the last several years sail through. By the end you will know, for sure, whether your phone can come along — and you will only buy a new one if you actually want to.

GOOD TO KNOW

Keeping your phone pairs perfectly with keeping your number. Do both and a carrier switch changes almost nothing you can feel — except the bill. I have separate guides on keeping your number and on unlocking.

2. Three Questions It Comes Down To

Answer these and you have your answer.

Whether your phone can move to a new carrier really comes down to three questions. The rest of this guide just helps you answer each one, but it helps to see the whole map first.

- Is the phone unlocked? A locked phone is tied to the carrier that sold it and will not accept a new one until it is freed. This is the most common sticking point.
- Is the phone compatible with the new network? Phones are built to work on certain networks and radio frequencies. Most recent phones work broadly, but it is worth confirming with the new carrier.

- Is the phone modern enough? Very old phones can miss features that today's networks require — chiefly a thing called VoLTE for calls, and support for the current generations of service after older ones were shut off.

The happy news is that a phone bought in the last several years, from a major brand, almost always answers yes to all three with little fuss. The checks are quick. The one that trips people up most often is the first — locked versus unlocked — and I have a whole separate guide devoted to unlocking, because it has its own rules by carrier.

So think of this guide as walking the three questions in order: find out if the phone is unlocked, confirm it is compatible using a free checker, and make sure it is modern enough for today's networks. Pass all three and your phone comes along for free. Let us take them one at a time, starting with the single most useful number on your phone.

TIP

If you are buying a used phone to bring, run these same three checks before you pay. A clean, unlocked, compatible used phone is a great deal; a locked or blacklisted one is a headache.

3. Finding Your IMEI

The one number that answers most questions.

Every phone has a unique identifying number called an IMEI. Think of it as the phone's serial number for the cellular world. Carriers use it to tell exactly which phone you have and whether it will work on their network. You will need it for the compatibility checker in the next chapter, so let us find it first — it is easy, and there are a couple of ways.

- 1 The universal way: open the phone app as if to make a call, and dial star, pound, zero, six, pound — that is `*#06#` — then your IMEI appears on the screen instantly. This works on nearly every phone, iPhone or Android.
- 2 On an iPhone: go to Settings, then General, then About, and scroll down. You will see the IMEI listed there, where you can read it carefully.
- 3 On most Android phones: go to Settings, then About phone, and look in the status or IMEI area. The exact wording varies a little by brand.
- 4 Older phones often also print the IMEI on a label in the SIM tray or, if the back comes off, under the battery.

The IMEI is a long string of numbers — around fifteen digits. Write it down carefully or, easier, use the `*#06#` screen and take a moment to read it slowly. If your phone can show

two IMEIs (some dual-SIM phones do), the first one is usually the one you want, but having both does no harm. You will type this into the carrier's free checker next, and that will tell you in seconds whether the phone is welcome on their network.

GOOD TO KNOW

The IMEI does not reveal anything private or risky about you — it just identifies the phone hardware. It is safe to type into an official carrier compatibility checker.

4. Using the Compatibility Checker

A free tool that answers in seconds.

Every carrier and budget brand has a free tool on its website, usually called a bring your own phone checker or a compatibility checker, where you type in your phone's IMEI and it tells you whether that exact phone will work on their network. This is the most reliable way to know before you switch — better than guessing from the phone's age or brand.

- 1 Go to the new carrier's website and look for bring your own phone, BYOD, or a compatibility checker, often under a shop or activate heading.
- 2 Type in your IMEI, the number you found in the last chapter.
- 3 Read the result. It usually comes back one of three ways: fully compatible, partially compatible, or not compatible.

A fully compatible result is the green light — your phone will work for calls, texts, and data on that network. A not compatible result means that phone cannot work there, usually because it was built for a different network or is too old, and you would need a different phone for that carrier. The tricky one is partially compatible: it means the phone will work for some things but maybe not all — perhaps data works but a particular calling feature does not. A partial result deserves a closer look before you commit, and it is a good moment to ask the carrier exactly what will and will not work.

Run the checker before you spend a dollar or move your number. It takes two minutes and it is the single best way to avoid an unpleasant surprise. If the result is anything other than a clean fully compatible, that is your cue to slow down and confirm the details — or to call me and have me read it with you.

WATCH OUT

Use the official carrier checker, not a random website. Some lookalike sites exist to collect your information. Start from the carrier's own site, and if the address looks odd, stop.

5. Unlocked Versus Locked

The most common thing standing in the way.

The most common reason a perfectly good phone will not move to a new carrier is that it is locked. A locked phone is tied to the carrier that sold it, by that carrier, so it will not accept another company's service until it is unlocked. If you bought your phone outright, it is very likely already unlocked. If you got it free or on a payment plan with a carrier, it may still be locked.

Here is the quick way to check. On an iPhone, go to Settings, then General, then About, and scroll to a line called Carrier Lock. If it says No SIM restrictions, your phone is unlocked and free to move. Any other message there means it is still locked. On Android the wording varies, but you are looking in the About or SIM status area for whether the SIM is locked to a carrier; if you cannot tell, the carrier can tell you.

If your phone is locked, it is not the end of the road — you request an unlock from the carrier that locked it, and once certain conditions are met (the phone paid off, a bit of time on service) they free it. The rules differ by carrier and have been changing recently, so I have devoted a whole separate guide to unlocking. The important thing for bringing your own phone is simply to check the lock status early, because it is the step most likely to need a little lead time.

WATCH OUT

Check your lock status before you sign up with the new carrier, not after. An unlock can take a little time, and you do not want to be stuck mid-switch waiting for it.

6. Network Bands — Why Some Phones Half-Work

The quiet reason a phone can be picky.

Here is a technical thing explained plainly, because it is behind a lot of confusing partial-compatibility results. Cell networks broadcast on different radio frequencies, called bands. A phone has to be built to use the particular bands a network relies on. Most modern phones support a wide range of bands and work broadly across carriers. But some phones — often ones sold specifically for one carrier, or certain models made for other countries — are built for a narrower set of bands and may miss the ones a new network leans on.

When that happens, the phone might work but poorly — maybe fine in strong-signal areas and flaky where the signal is weaker, because the band that reaches farthest is one your phone does not support. This is often what is behind a partially compatible result in the checker, and it is why two phones of similar age can have different luck on the same carrier.

You do not need to learn the bands — that is deep in the weeds. What you need to know is just this: the carrier's own compatibility checker already accounts for bands when it judges your IMEI. So if the checker says fully compatible, the bands are handled. If it says partial, bands may be part of the reason, and it is worth asking the carrier what specifically will be limited. A phone sold unlocked by its maker, rather than tied to one carrier, usually supports the widest range of bands and travels between carriers most easily.

GOOD TO KNOW

This is why a phone bought directly from Apple or Samsung, unlocked, tends to be the most flexible — it is built to work broadly, not tuned narrowly for a single carrier.

7. VoLTE — The Calling Setting That Matters Now

The modern requirement that catches older phones.

There is one modern requirement worth understanding because it catches a lot of older phones: VoLTE. It stands for Voice over LTE, and in plain terms it means making phone calls over the newer data network instead of the old call network. The reason it matters is that the carriers have shut off the old networks that used to carry calls, so today your calls ride the newer system — and your phone has to support VoLTE to make and receive calls at all.

Most phones from the last several years support VoLTE and have it switched on automatically. But an older phone, or one brought over from a different carrier, might support data just fine while stumbling on calls, because its VoLTE support is not enabled or not recognized by the new network. That is a classic case where the checker says partial — data works, calls are the question.

There is usually a VoLTE setting in the phone, often worded as VoLTE, Voice over LTE, or 4G calling, in the mobile or cellular settings. On a compatible phone the new carrier typically turns it on for you during activation. If calls are not working after a switch but data is, an un-enabled VoLTE setting is a prime suspect, and it is often a simple fix — either a

toggle in settings or a quick call to the carrier to enable it on their end. This is exactly the kind of small thing I sort out in a couple of minutes.

WATCH OUT

If a phone is too old to support VoLTE at all, it simply cannot make calls on today's networks, no matter the carrier. That is one of the few cases where a phone truly has to be replaced.

8. Old Networks That Were Shut Off

Why a very old phone may simply not work anymore.

Cell networks come in generations, and the carriers eventually switch off the old ones to make room for the new. The oldest systems — the ones many basic phones relied on years ago — have been turned off entirely. More recently, even the plain older calling network was retired, which is why VoLTE became a must. The upshot is that a phone that is quite old may simply not be able to connect anymore, through no fault of the carrier you are moving to.

This mostly affects two groups: very old smartphones from many years back, and older basic flip or button phones that were never updated for the newer networks. If a parent or neighbor has quietly used the same little flip phone for a decade, it is worth checking whether it still connects, because some of those have gone dark as the old networks were retired.

The compatibility checker catches this — an old phone that relies on a shut-off network will come back not compatible. And it is genuinely a case where a replacement is needed; there is no setting that brings back a network that no longer exists. The good news is that plenty of simple, senior-friendly phones are available that do work on today's networks, so a loved one who likes a basic phone does not have to give up that simplicity, just update the hardware.

GOOD TO KNOW

If a phone from the last five or six years comes back not compatible, it is usually a lock or band issue, not age. Age is mainly a problem for phones closer to a decade old or basic phones that were never updated.

9. eSIM or Physical SIM on Your Phone

How your phone will connect to the new carrier.

Once you know your phone is unlocked and compatible, the last hardware question is how it will connect to the new carrier — through a physical SIM card in a tray, or a digital eSIM built into the phone. This affects how quickly you can get going, so it is worth knowing which your phone uses.

The newest iPhones sold in the United States are eSIM only — they have no card tray at all, so there is nothing physical to insert and the carrier activates them digitally. Most phones from the last several years can do both eSIM and a physical card. Older phones use a physical SIM only. If your phone does eSIM, activation can happen in minutes by scanning a code; if it is physical only, you wait a few days for the card to arrive in the mail.

For bringing your own phone, this mostly affects the logistics of switching day. With an eSIM phone, you can often sign up and be running the same morning. With a physical-SIM phone, plan your switch for after the card arrives. Either way your phone works the same once connected — the SIM is just the method. And if your phone is eSIM only, be sure not to order a physical SIM kit by mistake, because it will arrive with nowhere to go.

TIP

Not sure which your phone uses? The latest iPhones are eSIM only, most phones from the last several years do both, and older ones use a card. Text me the model and I will tell you in a minute.

10. Features That May Not Carry Over

The small conveniences worth confirming.

Even when your phone works for calls, texts, and data on the new carrier, a few smaller conveniences sometimes need setting up again on the new service. None is a dealbreaker, but it is good to know so you can confirm they work in your first few days rather than discovering a gap later.

- Wi-Fi calling — making calls over your home internet when cell signal is weak. It is tied to the carrier, so it may be off after a switch. Turn it back on in settings and re-register your home address for 911.
- Visual voicemail — the on-screen list of voicemails you can tap, rather than dialing in to listen. Most carriers support it, but it sometimes needs enabling after a move.

- Hotspot — sharing your phone's data with a laptop or tablet. Confirm it is included and turned on in your new plan.
- Satellite texting or emergency features — newer phones have these, and some tie to the carrier or plan. Confirm what you have if you rely on it.
- Carrier spam-blocking apps — each network has its own, so the old carrier's one stops and you set up the new carrier's if you want it.

The pattern here is that anything handled by the carrier, rather than by the phone itself, may need re-doing on the new service. Anything stored on the phone — your contacts, photos, apps, settings — stays exactly as it is when you keep the same phone. So the carryover worries are limited to these service features, and each one is a quick fix if it does need attention.

GOOD TO KNOW

Wi-Fi calling is the one most worth confirming for a rural home, since it rescues weak indoor signal. Make it your first check after a switch if your house has spotty bars.

11. iPhone Specifics

What to check if you have an iPhone.

iPhones are among the easiest phones to bring to a new carrier, because they are made to work broadly across networks. But there are a few iPhone-specific things worth knowing so your switch is smooth.

- Check the lock status under Settings, General, About, at the Carrier Lock line. No SIM restrictions means unlocked and ready.
 - Find the model and IMEI in the same About screen — the model name helps determine whether yours is eSIM only.
 - Remember that the newest US iPhones are eSIM only, so plan for a digital activation rather than a mailed card.
 - After the switch, if blue-bubble messages or FaceTime act up, turn iMessage and FaceTime off and back on in settings to re-link them to your number on the new carrier.
- Generally, an iPhone from the last several years that is unlocked will move to any major carrier or budget brand with very little fuss. Its wide band support means the compatibility checker usually comes back fully compatible, and VoLTE is standard and on. The main things to watch are the lock status and, after the move, the brief iMessage and FaceTime re-linking — both of which are easy.

One reassurance for iPhone owners switching to a budget brand: you keep all of it — your apps, your photos, your settings, your Apple account, your familiar way of doing things. Bringing your iPhone to a cheaper carrier changes the bill and almost nothing else about how the phone looks and works day to day.

TIP

If you are not sure whether your iPhone is eSIM only, the simplest tell is the SIM tray: the newest US models have none. If there is no slot on the side, it is eSIM only.

12. Android, Samsung, and Pixel Specifics

What to check on an Android phone.

Android phones — Samsung Galaxy, Google Pixel, and others — also bring over well, though there is a bit more variety between brands, so the checks matter a little more. The biggest variable is where a phone was originally sold: one bought unlocked from the maker travels easily, while one sold tied to a specific carrier may be narrower in its band support and more likely to be locked.

- Find the IMEI by dialing `*#06#`, or under Settings, About phone, in the status area.
- Check lock status under Settings, About or SIM status; if it is unclear, the carrier that sold it can tell you.
- Confirm VoLTE or 4G calling is available in the mobile network settings, since calls depend on it.
- A Samsung Galaxy or Google Pixel from the last several years, bought unlocked, is usually a smooth bring-over; a carrier-branded model may need unlocking first.
- Most recent Samsung and Pixel phones support eSIM as well as a physical card, giving you flexibility on activation.

Because Android covers so many models and price points, the compatibility checker is especially worth running for an Android phone — it removes the guesswork that comes from the sheer variety. A mid-range or older budget Android, in particular, is more likely to be physical-SIM only and to support a narrower set of bands, so confirm rather than assume.

As with iPhones, everything on the phone stays put when you switch carriers — your apps, photos, contacts, and Google account all remain. The move changes your service, not your phone's contents, so there is nothing to transfer and nothing to relearn when you keep the Android you already have.

GOOD TO KNOW

Pixels have a special relationship with one budget brand's network-switching feature, but for a plain carrier move, any unlocked, compatible Pixel or Galaxy works like any other Android.

13. Buying a Used Phone to Bring

How to do it safely if you do want a different phone.

Sometimes bringing your own phone means buying a gently used one rather than keeping your current phone — maybe yours is failing, or you want a newer model without paying new-phone prices. That can be a great deal, but a used phone carries a couple of risks worth guarding against before you hand over money.

- 1 Get the phone's IMEI from the seller before you buy, and run it through the carrier's compatibility checker to confirm it will work on your network.
- 2 Make sure the IMEI is clean — not reported lost, stolen, or blacklisted. A blacklisted phone will not activate no matter what. Reputable resale sites check this for you.
- 3 Confirm the phone is unlocked, or can be, so it is not tied to someone else's old carrier.
- 4 Make sure it is fully paid off and not still on someone's payment plan, which can get it blocked later.
- 5 Check that it is signed out of the previous owner's account, so you are not locked out of setting it up.

The safest sources are established resale companies that verify the IMEI and the lock status for you and offer some return protection, rather than a stranger meeting in a parking lot. The small premium over a private sale buys you the assurance that the phone is clean, unlocked, and compatible. A used phone that passes all these checks is one of the best values in technology; one that fails them is a brick waiting to happen.

WATCH OUT

A deal that is too good on a phone from a stranger often means it is still financed, locked, or blacklisted. If the seller will not give you the IMEI to check first, walk away.

14. BYOD Versus Financing a New Phone

The honest money comparison, in plain words.

Carriers are very good at making a new phone feel free. They offer it with the plan and spread the cost across your monthly bill, often with a credit if you stay a certain number of years. It can be a reasonable deal — but it is worth seeing the trade honestly against simply keeping or buying the phone outright, because free rarely means free.

When a phone is financed through a carrier, the cost is baked into your monthly bill, usually with a markup, and that financing typically keeps the phone locked to that carrier and ties you to them until it is paid off. So the free phone comes with strings: a higher monthly bill than a bring-your-own plan, and a commitment that makes it harder to switch to a cheaper carrier later. For someone whose real goal is to lower the bill, financing a new phone often works against that goal.

Bringing your own phone, by contrast, lets you get onto a lean, low-cost plan immediately, with no device payment and no lock-in. If your current phone is working well, keeping it is almost always the cheaper path — you save the entire price of the new phone and get the lower monthly bill on top. Buying a phone outright, when you do need one, costs more up front but keeps you unlocked and free to choose any carrier, which usually wins over a few years. The question to ask is not is the new phone free, but what does keeping my current phone save me, in words: often the price of a whole phone, plus a lower bill every month.

TIP

If your phone still does everything you need and holds a charge through the day, keeping it is almost certainly the smart money. Shiny is not the same as necessary.

15. Getting a SIM and Activating Your Phone

The short final step once the checks pass.

Once your phone has passed the three questions — unlocked, compatible, modern enough — actually getting it onto the new carrier is the easy part. Here is how it goes, so nothing surprises you.

- 1 Sign up with the new carrier and tell them you are bringing your own phone. They will have asked for your IMEI already through the checker.
- 2 Choose eSIM if your phone supports it, for near-instant activation, or a physical SIM to be mailed if that is what your phone uses.

- 3 If eSIM, scan the code they send you and your phone downloads the new line. If a physical SIM, swap the card into the tray when it arrives.
- 4 If you are also keeping your number, that port happens at the same time — the new carrier pulls your number over. (See my guide on keeping your number.)
- 5 Restart the phone if prompted, then run a quick test call, text, and web page to confirm all three work.

During activation the carrier usually enables the behind-the-scenes settings for you, including VoLTE for calls. If something does not work right afterward — calls fail but data works, or the reverse — that is almost always a settings nudge away, not a sign your phone is wrong. The checks you did earlier mean the hard part is already behind you; activation is just flipping the switch.

GOOD TO KNOW

Keep your old SIM, if it was physical, in a labeled envelope for a week in case a security code lags. After everything has settled you can toss it.

16. First-Day Checklist on Your Phone

A few minutes to confirm everything works.

Once your phone is active on the new carrier, spend a few minutes confirming the things that matter. Doing this on day one catches any small gap while it is easy to fix, rather than discovering it during an important moment.

- 1 Make a call out and have someone call you back. Confirm both directions are clear.
 - 2 Send and receive a text.
 - 3 Turn off Wi-Fi briefly and open a web page or your email to confirm cellular data works.
 - 4 If you rely on Wi-Fi calling at home, confirm it is turned on and your home address is registered for 911.
 - 5 Check that voicemail works, and set up visual voicemail if your carrier offers it.
 - 6 Log in to your bank or email once to confirm the texted security code arrives normally.
- On an iPhone, also glance at your messages over the next day to be sure blue bubbles and FaceTime are working with other Apple users; if not, the off-and-on toggle fixes it. On any phone, if calls fail but data works, suspect the VoLTE setting and either toggle it or ask the carrier to enable it on their end.

That is the whole of it. Everything on the phone — your apps, photos, contacts, and settings — is exactly as it was, because you kept the same phone. The only things to

confirm are the service features, and this short checklist covers them. Once it all checks out, you are done, with the phone you know and a lower bill.

TIP

Save this checklist. If you ever add a line for a spouse or switch again, the same six checks confirm any bring-your-own switch in minutes.

17. When Bringing Your Phone Is Not Worth It

The honest cases for a new one.

I am firmly on the side of keeping the phone you have when it still serves you. But honesty cuts both ways, and there are a few cases where bringing your current phone is not the right move, and a new one genuinely makes sense.

- The phone is too old to connect. If it relied on a network that has been shut off, or cannot do VoLTE, it simply will not work on today's networks, and no setting fixes that.
- It comes back not compatible on the new carrier and cannot be unlocked. If it is built for the wrong network, forcing it is not worth the frustration.
- The battery no longer lasts the day, or the phone is slow and struggling. A switch is a natural time to replace a phone that is already failing you.
- It no longer receives security updates. A phone too old for updates is a quiet safety risk, especially for banking, and that can justify replacing it.
- You truly want a new one. That is allowed. Just buy it with eyes open, ideally unlocked and outright, so you stay free to choose carriers.

Even in these cases, you do not have to take the carrier's financed phone. Buying a phone outright, or a verified used one, keeps you unlocked and keeps your monthly bill lean. The goal is to replace the phone only when it truly needs replacing, and to do it in a way that does not quietly tie you down for years.

GOOD TO KNOW

If your phone fails the checks, there are plenty of inexpensive, senior-friendly phones that work on today's networks. Needing a new phone does not mean needing an expensive one.

18. Traps People Fall Into

The bring-your-own mistakes I see most.

A few mistakes come up repeatedly when people bring their own phone. Knowing them ahead of time keeps the switch smooth.

- Not checking the lock status first. A locked phone stalls the whole switch. Check it before you sign up, because unlocking can take time.
- Skipping the compatibility checker and assuming. Two minutes with the IMEI prevents an unpleasant surprise.
- Buying a used phone without checking the IMEI. It may be locked, financed, or blacklisted. Always verify before paying.
- Ordering a physical SIM for an eSIM-only phone. The card arrives with nowhere to go. Match the SIM type to your phone.
- Taking the free carrier phone to save money, then ending up on a higher bill with a locked phone. Do the real math first.
- Forgetting to turn Wi-Fi calling back on after the switch, then blaming the new carrier for weak indoor signal.

WATCH OUT

The costliest trap is accepting a financed free phone when your goal was a lower bill. It usually raises the bill and locks you in. Keep your phone if it works.

19. Questions I Hear A Lot

Short, honest answers.

Q: Will I lose my photos and contacts if I switch carriers but keep my phone?

A: No. Keeping the same phone means everything on it stays — photos, contacts, apps, settings. A carrier switch changes your service, not your phone's contents.

Q: My phone is three years old. Is it too old to bring?

A: Almost certainly not. Phones from the last several years are usually fine. Run the free compatibility checker with your IMEI to be sure, but three years is young in this regard.

Q: The checker said partially compatible. What do I do?

A: Slow down and ask the carrier exactly what will be limited — often it is a band or a calling feature. Sometimes it is fine for your needs, sometimes not. It is a cue to confirm,

not necessarily a no.

Q: Do I need a new phone to get 5G?

A: Only if your current phone does not support 5G, and even then, for most everyday use regular service is plenty fast. Do not buy a phone just for a label most seniors never need.

GOOD TO KNOW

If any result confuses you, read it to me over the phone. I can usually tell you in a minute whether your phone is good to go.

20. Checking the Carrier Certified Your Phone for Calling

Why compatible is not quite the whole story.

Here is a wrinkle that surprises even careful people. The compatibility checker can come back with a cheerful your phone is compatible, and yet calls still do not work right once you switch. The reason is that behind the scenes each carrier keeps its own list of phone models it has tested and approved for its calling system — a kind of guest list. If your exact phone is not on that list, the network may let it on for data but hold back the modern calling feature, VoLTE, that today's calls depend on.

The carriers build these lists by the phone's identifying number, the IMEI, or the first part of it that marks the model. A phone that was sold directly by that carrier is always on the list. A phone you bought unlocked, or brought from a different carrier, may or may not be, even if it is a fine, modern phone. This is exactly why two seemingly identical phones can have different luck, and why a plain compatible result is reassuring but not a promise that every calling feature will light up.

So the extra step worth taking, especially if you are moving an unlocked phone or one from another carrier, is to ask the new carrier directly: is my specific model certified for VoLTE and HD calling on your network? A support person can look it up by your IMEI. It takes a few minutes and it heads off the most common post-switch headache — the phone that texts and browses fine but drops or garbles calls.

GOOD TO KNOW

The big-brand phones — recent iPhones, Samsung Galaxy, and Google Pixel models bought unlocked from the maker — are almost always on every major carrier's approved list. The ones that need a closer look are off-brand phones, phones from overseas, and older models.

TIP

If you are about to switch an unlocked phone, ask the new carrier to confirm your model is certified for calling before you move your number, not after. It is a two-minute question that saves a day of frustration.

21. Bringing an Apple Watch or Tablet When You Switch

The extra devices that ride on your plan too.

If you carry more than just a phone — a cellular Apple Watch on your wrist, or a tablet that works on the cell network — those devices have their own little lines on your plan, and they need to come along when you switch carriers. People forget them in the rush of moving the phone, then wonder why the watch has gone quiet. A bit of planning keeps everything moving together.

Here is the thing to understand: a watch or tablet line is tied to your phone line. When you switch carriers, those extra lines do not automatically follow — you set them up fresh on the new carrier once your phone is active. So the order matters. Get your phone switched and working first, confirm calls and texts, and then add the watch or tablet line on the new carrier, usually right through the device's own setup app the same way you added it the first time.

- Check first that the new carrier supports a watch line for your model. The big three support the popular watches; budget carriers support a shorter list, and a few do not offer watch lines at all.
- Make sure the new plan allows number sharing for the watch, since some prepaid plans do not.
- For a tablet, decide whether you even need a paid line on the new carrier, or whether your phone's hotspot will do — moving carriers is a natural moment to drop a tablet line you were not really using.
- Set the watch or tablet up after the phone is live, not at the same time, so each step is clean.

If a cellular watch is a genuine safety tool for you — fall detection, calling for help from the wrist — confirming the new carrier supports it is worth doing before you commit to the switch, not after. It would be a shame to save a little on the phone plan only to find the watch cannot ride along.

WATCH OUT

Do not assume your cellular watch will simply work on the new carrier. Watch-line support varies a lot, especially on budget carriers. Confirm it before you switch if the watch matters to you, and I have a whole separate guide on watch and tablet lines.

22. When Only Some Things Work After You Switch

Texts fine, calls flaky — here is the fix order.

The most common bring-your-own puzzle is not a phone that is completely dead on the new carrier — it is a phone where some things work and some do not. Data and texts come through fine, but calls fail or sound garbled. Or calls are fine but texts to family show up green instead of blue. These partial problems look alarming but are almost always a quick settings matter, not a sign your phone is wrong. Here is the order I work through them.

- 1 Restart the phone once. This alone clears a surprising share of after-switch hiccups, because the phone re-checks in with the new network.
- 2 If calls fail but data works, look for the VoLTE or Voice over LTE or 4G calling setting in your mobile settings and make sure it is on. If it will not turn on or is missing, the carrier may need to certify your model on their end — call them.
- 3 If signal is weak indoors, turn Wi-Fi calling back on and re-register your home address for 911, since it does not carry over from the old carrier.
- 4 On an iPhone, if texts from family come through green or group chats drop you, turn iMessage and FaceTime off, wait, and back on in settings.
- 5 If data is slow or missing, check that the new carrier's data settings, sometimes called APN, came through — usually automatic, occasionally a quick call to fix.

The pattern behind all of these is the same: anything the carrier controls — calling features, Wi-Fi calling, messaging, data settings — can need a nudge after a switch, while everything stored on the phone stayed put. So a partial problem is good news in disguise. It means the phone is fine and only a service setting needs catching up.

TIP

If you work through the restart and the VoLTE and Wi-Fi calling toggles and calls still misbehave, stop tinkering and call the carrier — the fix is often on their side, certifying your phone for calling, and no amount of toggling on your end will do it. Or call me and I will sort it with them for you.

23. Working With Bill — Your Support Plan

If you would rather I check your phone for you.

I have been doing hands-on technology work for more than thirty years, and I have saved a lot of folks the price of a phone they did not need by confirming the one in their pocket would work just fine. Checking a phone for a carrier move is quick for me and fiddly to do alone, so if you would rather hand it over, that is exactly what I am here for.

A visit to your home is a flat 99 dollars. I will find your IMEI, run it through the new carrier's checker, confirm the phone is unlocked and modern enough, turn on the right settings like Wi-Fi calling and VoLTE, and tell you honestly whether keeping your phone is the smart move or whether a new one is genuinely warranted. If anything we set up is not working right within thirty days, I come back and make it right at no extra charge. That is my come-back-free guarantee.

- Check whether your current phone will work on the new carrier, for sure.
- Confirm it is unlocked, or help you get it unlocked.
- Turn on Wi-Fi calling, VoLTE, and visual voicemail so nothing is missed.
- Give you a straight answer on keep-it versus replace-it, with the real money math.

The number is (330) 200-8042. If you call after hours and I cannot pick up, you will reach Sophie, my AI helper and receptionist. Sophie is friendly, takes down your name, number, and what you need, and texts it straight to me so I can get back to you. She is not a person, and she will tell you so — she is just there to make sure your message reaches me.

GOOD TO KNOW

If this guide saved you from buying a phone you did not need, a short review really helps a local one-man shop. You can leave one at g.page/r/CSFv0jbCfFINEAE/review. Thank you.

24. Your Notes

Write down your phone's details — keep this page.

Every phone is a little different, so here is a page for yours. Fill it in as you check, or I will fill it in with you on a visit. Keep it with your other switch notes so you have the details in one place.

- Phone make and model: _____
- IMEI: _____
- Unlocked? (yes/no): _____
- Compatibility checker result: _____
- eSIM or physical SIM: _____
- VoLTE / 4G calling on? (yes/no): _____
- Wi-Fi calling on, 911 address set? (yes/no): _____
- New carrier and plan: _____
- Keeping this phone or replacing: _____
- Things to revisit later: _____

Bill Davis — Bill's Home Tech, Atwater, Ohio, serving all of Portage County. Phone and text (330) 200-8042. If your phone acts up on the new carrier in the first few weeks, call me and we will sort it out together.

AT A GLANCE

A Picture to Follow Along

Three Questions

Answer these and you know

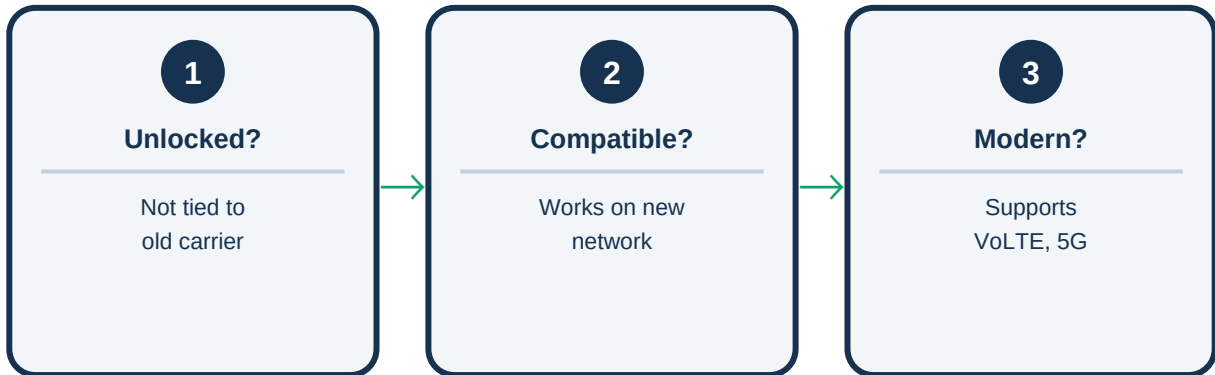
**Pass all three and your phone comes along.**

Illustration — layout and details vary by model. Check your own device.

AT A GLANCE

A Second Look

Find Your IMEI

Two easy ways on any phone

Phone	Where	Also
Any phone	Dial *#06#	Shows on screen
iPhone	Settings, About	Scroll down
Android	Settings, About	Status area

The IMEI is your phone's ID for the checker.

Illustration — layout and details vary by model. Check your own device.

BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.



HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

In-home visit — \$99 flat for your first visit. No contracts and no surprise charges, and a 30-day follow-up is included.

Remote Support — \$49 for a screen-share session. I only connect with your permission, you watch the whole time, and you can end anytime. If I can't fix it over the screen-share, I refund the \$49 — and if it turns out you need me in person, that \$49 goes toward your visit. It's included free for Support Plan members (\$39/mo).

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full \$99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Call or text **(330) 200-8042** · Book a visit: **billshometech.com/book** · **bill@billshometech.com**

This free guide is for general information only — not professional advice, and no substitute for your device's own manual. Any prices or outside products mentioned can change; please confirm current details before you buy. Please use your own good judgment and follow it at your own risk — for anything involving electricity, gas, water, or heights, stop and call a licensed professional. Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results. © 2026 Bill's Home Tech, LLC.