



Choosing a Simple Backup Phone for Outages, Travel & Emergencies

Why a spare phone is cheap insurance — and how to pick one, keep it charged, and have it ready

————— **An Extended Guide · No. 1670** —————

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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What's Inside

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

1. A spare phone, for peace of mind	4
2. The whole guide, on one page	4
3. Why keep a backup phone at all	5
4. What makes a good backup phone	5
5. Option one: keep your old phone	6
6. Option two: an inexpensive prepaid phone	6
7. The big caution: old 3G phones no longer work	7
8. SIM cards and eSIMs, in plain English	7
9. Keeping it charged and ready	8
10. How service for a backup works	8
11. Saving your in-case-of-emergency contacts	9
12. Filling in a Medical ID	9
13. Old phone or prepaid: side by side	10
14. Two reasons for a backup, two ways to set it up	10
15. A backup for power outages	11
16. A backup for travel	11
17. When your main phone is lost or broken	12
18. Your backup-phone checklist	12
19. Keeping your backup current	13
20. Setting up your backup the right way	13
21. Common Questions	14

22. You don't have to do this alone 15

A Picture to Follow Along 16

A Second Look 17

A Note From Bill 17

Your Visit — and My Promise 18

WELCOME

1. A spare phone, for peace of mind

We lean on our phones for almost everything, which is exactly why it's worth having a simple spare tucked away. When the power's out, you're traveling, or your main phone breaks or goes missing, a backup phone can turn a crisis into a minor annoyance. I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. I've spent 30+ years helping people feel at home with their technology, patiently and in plain language. I don't sell phones and I earn no commission, so what follows is just honest guidance, the way I'd lay it out at your kitchen table. A backup phone doesn't have to be fancy or expensive. It just has to work when you need it — charged, able to call, and with your important numbers in it. This guide covers what to use, how to keep it ready, and the few details that trip people up, like the old phone in the drawer that quietly stopped working. Let's get you a spare that's ready. A backup phone is only useful if it's set up right and kept charged. If you'd like help choosing one or getting it ready, call or text me at (330) 200-8042. I'm glad to help.

THE 60-SECOND VERSION

2. The whole guide, on one page

If you remember only a handful of things, let it be these.

- A backup phone is cheap insurance for power outages, travel, and a lost or broken main phone.
- You can keep an old phone as a backup, or buy an inexpensive prepaid one — both work.
- Watch out: an old 3G phone from a drawer likely no longer works, because those networks were switched off.
- Keep it charged — a small power bank and a regular charging habit are the secret to a backup that's actually ready.
- Save your in-case-of-emergency (ICE) contacts and fill in a Medical ID so help can reach your people.
- Learn whether your phone uses a SIM card or an eSIM, so you know how to get it on a network when you need it. One idea to hold onto. A backup phone you never charge is no backup at all. The whole trick is keeping it ready, and that's mostly a simple habit.

WHY A BACKUP

3. Why keep a backup phone at all

It's one of those things you don't think you need — until the one day you really do.

- Power outages: if the lights go out for a day or two, a charged spare and a power bank keep you reachable.
- Travel: a simple second phone is handy on a trip, and losing it hurts far less than losing your main one.
- A lost or stolen phone: a spare means you're not cut off while you sort out a replacement.
- A broken phone: cracked screens and dead batteries happen; a backup bridges the gap.
- Emergencies: any charged phone can call 911, even one without a plan — so a spare is a safety net. None of these are everyday events, which is exactly why a backup is so easy to overlook. But each one goes from scary to manageable when you have a simple phone ready to go.

WATCH OUT

Any charged phone can call 911. Even a phone with no active plan can usually still call 911 as long as it's charged and has a signal. That alone is a good reason to keep an old phone charged in a drawer — but test it so you know it works.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD ONE

4. What makes a good backup phone

The best backup phone isn't the fanciest one — it's the simplest, most reliable one that you'll actually keep ready. Look for a few plain virtues: it holds a charge well, it's easy to use in a hurry, and it works on today's networks. A backup phone spends most of its life switched off or sleeping, so battery that lasts and a phone that starts up quickly matter more than a great camera or the latest features. Simplicity is a real advantage here. In a stressful moment — a storm, a lost phone — you want something you can pick up and use without thinking. A plain phone with big buttons, or your familiar old phone, beats a complicated one you'd have to relearn. Ready beats fancy. A simple phone that's charged and works is worth ten clever ones sitting dead in a drawer. Choose for reliability, not features.

KEEP YOUR OLD PHONE

5. Option one: keep your old phone

The cheapest backup is often the phone you just upgraded from. Don't trade it in without thinking twice. When you get a new phone, your old one can make a fine backup — you already know how it works, and it still has your photos and apps. Even without a cell plan, it can connect to home wi-fi for calls and messages through apps, and it can still call 911 on its own as long as it's charged and gets a signal. The one thing to check is its age. A phone from many years ago may be a 3G phone, and those networks have been shut off, so it may no longer connect at all. We'll cover that on the next page. If your old phone is reasonably recent, though, it's a ready-made backup at no cost. Wipe it only after you've moved everything. If you keep an old phone as a backup, you don't have to erase it — but if you plan to, make sure everything's safely on your new phone first. I'm glad to help you move it over.

A PREPAID PHONE

6. Option two: an inexpensive prepaid phone

If you don't have a spare, a cheap prepaid phone is a simple, no-commitment way to get one. A prepaid phone is one you buy outright and pay for service as you go, with no contract. You can get a plain phone inexpensively, keep a small amount of service on it, and set it aside until you need it. It's a tidy way to have a backup that's genuinely on a network and ready to call, without adding a big monthly bill. A simple flip or big-button prepaid phone is ideal for a backup — easy to use, long battery life, and nothing complicated to go wrong. For how prepaid plans and low-cost service work in more detail, see our guide on keeping a simpler phone on a simple, low-cost plan. A little service goes a long way. For a backup, you don't need an expensive plan — just enough service to make calls and texts when you need them. Prepaid lets you keep it small and simple.

THE 4G CAUTION

7. The big caution: old 3G phones no longer work

This is the mistake I most want to spare you, because it catches people at the worst possible moment. The old 3G cell networks have been switched off across the country. That means a phone from many years back — a 3G phone — may no longer connect to any network at all, no matter how well it's charged. People reach for the trusty old phone in the drawer in an emergency, only to find it can't make a call. What you want is a 4G LTE phone (or newer), which is what today's networks use. If you're not sure how old your spare is, the safest move is to turn it on, make sure it shows signal, and place a quick test call before you ever need to rely on it.

WATCH OUT

Test the old phone before you trust it. Don't assume the phone in the drawer still works. Charge it, check for signal, and make a test call. If it won't connect, it's a 3G phone that the networks no longer carry — time for a newer backup.

SIM & ESIM

8. SIM cards and eSIMs, in plain English

To get a phone onto a cell network, it needs an identity on that network. That comes in two forms, and it helps to know which yours uses. A SIM card is the little chip that tells the network which account a phone belongs to. For years, moving your service to another phone meant popping the small SIM card out of one and into the other. Many phones still work this way, and it's handy for a backup — you can move your SIM to your spare in a pinch. Newer phones often use an eSIM instead — the same idea, but built into the phone electronically, with no physical card to move. With an eSIM you set up service through software rather than swapping a chip. Neither is better or worse; you just want to know which your phones use, so you know how to get your backup on a network when the time comes. Know your plan before the pinch. Ask your carrier whether your phones use a SIM card or an eSIM, and how you would move your service to your backup in a hurry. Knowing the answer ahead of time saves a lot of stress later.

KEEPING IT CHARGED

9. Keeping it charged and ready

This is the heart of the whole thing. A backup phone's only job is to be ready, and ready means charged. Phones slowly lose their charge even when switched off, so a backup you stashed months ago may be dead when you reach for it. The fix is a simple habit: charge it up every so often — say, when you change the clocks, or on the first of the month — so it's always got power in reserve. A small power bank is the backup's best friend, especially for outages and travel. It's a portable battery you charge ahead of time, then use to top up a phone with no outlet in sight. Keep one charged alongside your backup phone and its cable, all in one spot. One drawer, everything together. Keep the backup phone, its charging cable, and a charged power bank together in one known spot. When you need them, you won't be hunting through the house in the dark.

PREPAID PLANS

10. How service for a backup works

A backup phone can be on a network all the time, or kept ready to activate — and the choice shapes the cost. One approach is to keep a small, inexpensive prepaid plan active on the backup at all times, so it's ready to call the instant you pick it up. Another is to keep the phone without service and rely on it only for 911 calls and wi-fi apps, planning to move your SIM or set up an eSIM if your main phone goes down. Both are reasonable; it depends on how quickly you'd need full service. Prices change and plans vary, so I won't quote numbers — our guide on keeping a simpler phone on a simple, low-cost plan walks through the current low-cost options. The key point is that a backup needn't cost much, if anything, to be genuinely useful. I'll help you pick the cheapest workable setup. There's no need to overpay for a backup. Tell me how you'd want to use it and I'll help you find the simplest, lowest-cost way to keep it ready. Call (330) 200-8042.

ICE CONTACTS

11. Saving your in-case-of-emergency contacts

A backup phone should carry your important people, so you — or someone helping you — can reach them fast. ICE stands for 'in case of emergency.' The idea is to save your key contacts in a way that's easy to find in a crisis — your spouse, a son or daughter, a close neighbor, your doctor's office. A simple way is to save them in your contacts with 'ICE' at the front of the name, like 'ICE Daughter Mary,' so they sort to the top and anyone can spot them. Put the same handful of numbers in your backup phone that you keep in your main one. If the backup is a plain phone, write your two or three most important numbers on a small card and tuck it with the phone, too — paper never runs out of battery. Paper backup for the backup Keep a small card with your two or three most important phone numbers alongside the backup phone. If all else fails, you can read a number off a card and call from any phone.

MEDICAL ID

12. Filling in a Medical ID

Most smartphones can show key health details and emergency contacts even from the lock screen — a quiet, valuable safety feature. A Medical ID is a short profile — your name, any conditions or allergies, medications, and emergency contacts — that first responders can view without unlocking the phone. On an iPhone you set it up in the Health app; on many Android phones you'll find an emergency or Medical information section in Settings. It takes a few minutes and can speak for you if you can't. If your backup is a smartphone, fill in its Medical ID just like your main phone's. Our guide on setting up Emergency SOS and Medical ID on a wearable covers this safety side in more depth if you'd like it.

WATCH OUT

Keep it accurate, not just filled in A Medical ID only helps if it's correct. If your medications or contacts change, update it — on both your main phone and your backup — so it never sends someone the wrong way.

SIDE BY SIDE

13. Old phone or prepaid: side by side

The two main backup options each have their place. Here's how they compare.

Your old phone A prepaid phone Cost Free — you own it Low, pay as you go Familiarity You know it already May be new to you Readiness Check it's not 3G On a network, ready Battery life Varies with age Often long on a flip Best for A recent spare No spare on hand If you have a reasonably recent old phone, it's the easiest and cheapest backup. If you don't — or your old one turns out to be a dead 3G phone — an inexpensive prepaid phone is a clean, simple answer. Either way, keep it charged Whichever you choose, the rule is the same: keep it charged, keep your numbers in it, and test it now and then. A ready backup is the whole goal.

TWO REASONS FOR A BACKUP

14. Two reasons for a backup, two ways to set it up

Most people want a backup phone for one of two situations, and that shapes what to keep and where. If you're bracing for outages and emergencies at home You want peace of mind for storms, power outages, and the day your main phone breaks — a reliable spare that's always ready in a known spot at home.

- Keep a charged backup and a power bank together in one drawer.
- Make sure it's a 4G phone, not a dead 3G one — test it.
- Save your ICE contacts and a paper card of key numbers.
- Charge it on a schedule so it's never dead when you need it. If you travel and want a simple spare along You want a second phone for trips — something to carry, lend, or fall back on if your main phone is lost, stolen, or broken while you're away from home.
- A simple prepaid phone is easy to carry and cheap to replace.
- Know whether you'd move a SIM or set up an eSIM on the road.
- Pack a power bank and cable, and keep both charged.
- Keep your key numbers saved, since you may not have them memorized. Not sure which setup fits you? Tell me how you'd most likely use a backup — mostly at home, or on the road — and I'll help you put together the simplest, most reliable spare. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

FOR OUTAGES

15. A backup for power outages

When the power goes out, your phone becomes your lifeline — so keeping it alive is the whole game. In an outage, you can't charge from the wall, and cordless home phones usually stop working too. A charged cell phone and a charged power bank let you keep in touch, check on family, and call for help. Your backup phone earns its keep here, especially if your main phone's battery runs low. Before storm season, top up both your main and backup phones and your power bank, and keep them where you can find them in the dark. A small flashlight in the same spot doesn't hurt. If the outage drags on, use the backup for calls and let the main phone rest to save its battery. Charge everything before the storm. When bad weather's in the forecast, charge your phones and power bank to full. It's a two-minute habit that pays off the moment the lights flicker.

FOR TRAVEL

16. A backup for travel

A trip is a common time to lose or break a phone, and being cut off far from home is no fun. A simple spare is cheap insurance. Carrying an inexpensive second phone on a trip means a lost or stolen main phone doesn't strand you. Keep it in a different bag or pocket than your main phone, so one mishap doesn't take both. Make sure it has your key contacts, a little service or a plan to add it, and a charged power bank along. If you're traveling far, ask your carrier ahead of time how calling will work where you're going, and whether your backup can get service there. Knowing before you leave beats puzzling it out in an unfamiliar place.

WATCH OUT

Don't keep both phones in one bag. If your spare is meant to survive a lost bag, it can't be in that same bag. Keep your backup separate from your main phone when you travel, so one loss doesn't become two.

A LOST OR BROKEN PHONE

17. When your main phone is lost or broken

This is the everyday emergency a backup is made for — and having one turns a very bad day into a manageable one. If your main phone is lost, stolen, or broken, your backup keeps you reachable while you sort out a fix or a replacement. You can move your SIM to the backup, or set up your service on it as an eSIM, so your number works on the spare. Then you've got time to deal with the main phone without being cut off. This is also why keeping your contacts backed up matters — so a new or spare phone can get your numbers back easily. If you're not sure your contacts are saved somewhere safe, that's worth checking before trouble strikes. I'll help you get your number onto the spare. Moving your service and number to a backup phone can be fiddly under stress. If it happens, call me and I'll help you get the spare working and your contacts back. (330) 200-8042.

THE CHECKLIST

18. Your backup-phone checklist

Here's the whole thing as a checklist. Tick these off and your backup is genuinely ready.

- Choose your backup: a recent old phone, or an inexpensive prepaid one.
- Confirm it's a 4G phone (or newer) and place a test call to be sure.
- Decide on service: a small prepaid plan always on, or a plan to move your SIM or set up an eSIM when needed.
- Save your ICE contacts and your key numbers in the phone.
- Keep a paper card of two or three key numbers with it.
- Fill in a Medical ID if it's a smartphone.
- Keep it charged, with its cable and a charged power bank, all in one spot.
- Recharge and test it on a schedule — when you change the clocks is easy to remember. Tie it to a date you'll remember. Pick an easy-to-remember day — the clocks changing, or a birthday — to charge and test your backup. A backup checked twice a year is a backup you can trust.

KEEPING IT CURRENT

19. Keeping your backup current

A backup phone can quietly fall out of date, so a little upkeep keeps it trustworthy year to year. Networks change, phones age, and your important numbers shift over time. Every so often, check that your backup still connects, that its contacts and Medical ID are up to date, and that it hasn't become too old for today's networks. When you upgrade your main phone, consider promoting the old one to backup and retiring the previous spare. The goal is simply that the phone you'd reach for in trouble is one you can count on. A few minutes of attention, once or twice a year, is all it takes to keep that true. Promote your old phone when you upgrade. Each time you get a new phone, your newest old phone makes the best backup. Rotate it in, and you'll always have a reasonably current spare without spending a thing.

SETTING IT UP WELL

20. Setting up your backup the right way

A few minutes of good setup now makes the backup effortless to use in a stressful moment later. Put your favorite people in first, and set a short favorites list so the folks you'd call most are one tap away. Turn the ringer and text size up so it's easy to use in a hurry. If it's a smartphone, fill in the Medical ID and emergency contacts. Then charge it, test a call, and put it away in its spot. If you're setting one up for a parent or relative, keep it dead simple — a plain phone with big buttons, their key numbers, and a card of instructions. Our senior starter-kit guide covers putting together a complete, easy setup for an older relative, backup phone included. I'll get your spare set up and tested. Setting up a backup phone — contacts, favorites, Medical ID, a test call — is a quick, worthwhile visit, and I'll leave it ready to go. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

COMMON QUESTIONS

21. Common Questions

The questions I hear most about keeping a simple backup phone.

Q: Can a phone with no plan still call 911? In most cases, yes — a charged phone with a signal can usually call 911 even without an active plan. That's a good reason to keep an old phone charged as a safety net, but test it so you know it works where you are. Q: Why won't my old phone connect anymore? If it's quite old, it may be a 3G phone, and those networks were switched off. A 3G phone can't connect no matter how charged it is. You'll want a 4G phone or newer for a backup — turn the old one on and test a call to find out. Q: Do I need to pay for service on a backup? Not necessarily. You can keep a small prepaid plan always active for instant use, or keep the phone without service and plan to move your SIM or set up an eSIM if your main phone goes down. Both are fine — it depends how fast you'd need it. Q: How do I keep it from being dead when I need it? Charge it on a schedule — say, when the clocks change — and keep it with a charged power bank and its cable in one spot. A quick test call twice a year tells you it's ready. Q: What's the simplest backup for an older relative? A plain prepaid flip or big-button phone with their key numbers, a loud ringer, big text, and a card of instructions. Our senior starter-kit guide walks through a complete easy setup, and I'm glad to help. Want help getting a spare ready? A backup phone is cheap insurance, and getting it set up right is quick. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and we'll make sure you've got a spare you can count on.

BILL'S HERE TO HELP

22. You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made choosing and setting up a backup phone feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it in a drawer with your other home papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything. When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I'm a tech helper, not a salesman — I don't sell phones and I earn no commission, so my advice is just advice. If you'd like help choosing a backup phone, checking that an old one still works, setting up service, or getting your contacts and Medical ID onto it, that's exactly what I do. Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

AT A GLANCE

A Picture to Follow Along

Two Simple Backup Phones

Keep your old phone, or buy an inexpensive prepaid one

	Your old phone	A prepaid phone
Cost	Free -- you own it	Low, pay as you go
Familiar?	You know it	May be new
Readiness	Check it's 4G	On a network, ready
Best for	A recent spare	No spare on hand

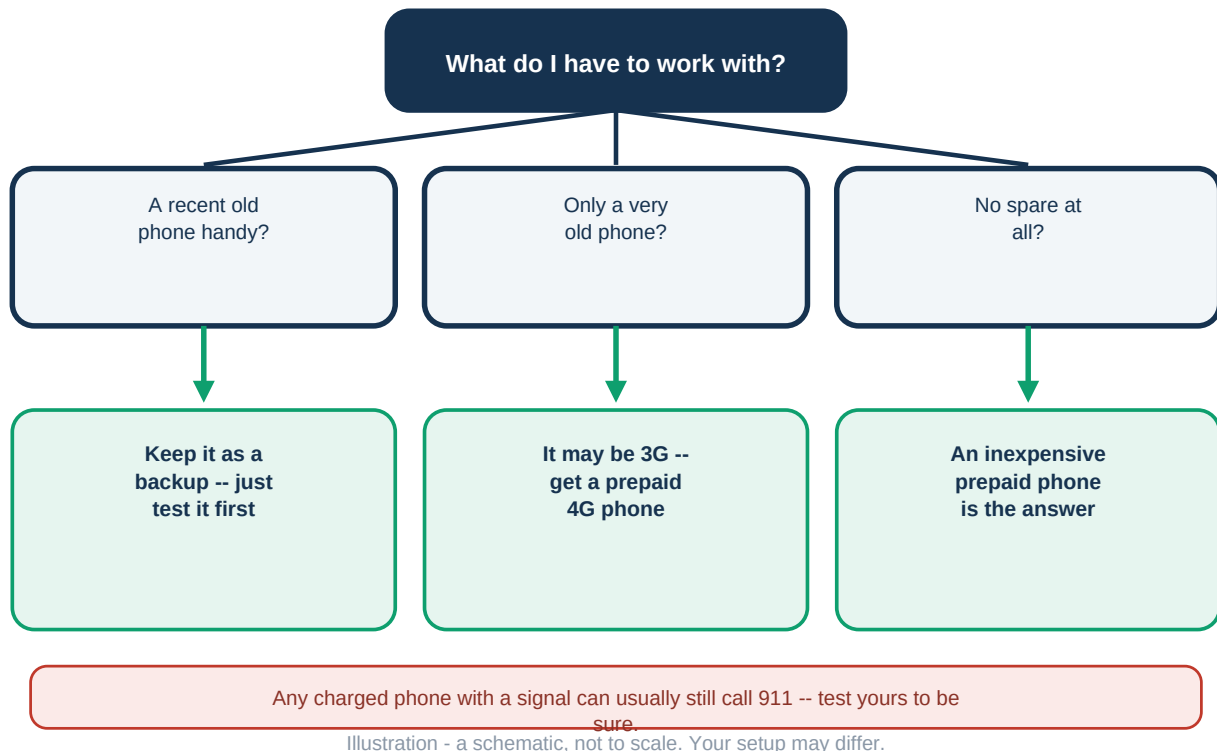
Whichever you choose, keep it charged and test it now and then.

AT A GLANCE

A Second Look

Which Backup Phone Is Right?

Let your situation point the way



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

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