BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

AN EXTENDED GUIDE · NO. 1999

Updated November 2026

Google Privacy Checkup

Turn down the ad tracking and tidy your activity history — about twenty quiet minutes

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

Bill Davis — Bill's Home Tech

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

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1 The Short Version

Google quietly keeps a running record of a great deal of what you do — the things you search, the videos you watch, and often the places you go. The good news is that Google also gives you the dials to turn much of that down, and they're easier to find than most people expect. Google keeps three main kinds of information about you, each with its own settings page:

- The ads it tailors to you, based on a profile of your likely interests.
- A history of your activity — your searches, the videos you watch, the apps you open.
- A record of your location, if that's switched on.

In about twenty minutes you can turn off personalized ads, switch your activity history to delete itself automatically, and review or pause your location record. Nothing here deletes your email, your photos, or your accounts — it only changes what Google tracks and keeps about your habits. You can stop after any single step and come back later.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> This is the privacy checkup — the ad and tracking dials. It's a different thing from a security checkup, which is about passwords and two-step sign-in. Both are worth doing; I cover security in its own guide.

2 Privacy Checkup vs. Security Checkup

People mix these two up all the time, so let me draw the line clearly. They don't overlap — you could have a rock-solid password and still have years of searches and locations stored away:

- A security checkup is about who can get in: your password, your two-step sign-in, your recovery phone. It keeps strangers out of your account.

- A privacy checkup — the one you're reading — is about what Google itself collects and keeps while you use it normally: ads, activity, and location.

This guide handles that second half. If you haven't done the security side recently, put it on your list as a separate, equally worthwhile afternoon.

3 What Google Actually Keeps

It helps to know what we're dealing with before we start switching things off. Depending on your settings, Google may hold a surprising amount, built up quietly over years of ordinary use:

- The things you type into Google Search.
- The videos you watch on YouTube and what it recommends next.
- Apps you open and websites you visit while signed in.
- Where your phone has been, if location history is on.
- A profile of your likely interests, used to pick ads.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> None of this means someone is watching you personally. It's an automatic system, built to sell advertising and to make its products feel tailored. Knowing it's there is the first step to deciding how much of it you want.

4 Signing In to See Your Settings

Everything in this checkup lives inside your Google account, so the first step is simply to sign in on a device you're comfortable with. A computer makes the pages easier to read, but a phone or tablet works just as well:

1. Open your web browser and go to your Google account page.
2. If you're not already signed in, enter your email and password.
3. Look for your account picture or initial in the top corner.
4. From there you can reach the privacy and ad settings we'll visit.

TIP

If you have more than one Google account — say, one for yourself and one you use for shopping — check which one you're signed in to first. The settings are separate for each, so change them on the account you actually use day to day.

5 The Ad Dials: Turning Off Personalized Ads

Google's hub for advertising choices is called My Ad Center. You can reach it directly in your browser, often at an address beginning with myadcenter. If the web address has changed by the time you look — Google does rename things from time to time — search within your account settings for 'ads' or 'ad personalization.' Turning off personalized ads is the single biggest switch in the whole checkup, and it's refreshingly simple:

1. Open My Ad Center.
2. Look for the 'Personalized ads' control near the top.
3. Switch it to Off.
4. Confirm if it asks you to.

That one change tells Google not to use the profile it has built about you to choose ads, across every device where you're signed in to that account. It takes effect right away.

GOOD TO KNOW

Personalized ads are usually switched on by default. That's not something you chose; it's simply how the account arrives. Turning it off is a deliberate choice you're allowed to make.

6 What Changes When You Turn Ads Off

It's worth being honest about what this does and doesn't do, so you're not surprised. Turning off personalized ads does not make the ads disappear — you'll still see the same number of them. What changes is that they're no longer chosen based on your personal history, so they become more generic. The pair of shoes you looked at once will stop trailing you from site to site. For many people that alone is worth the trip, because it's the following-around that feels most unsettling.

WATCH OUT

Turning off personalized ads is not the same as blocking ads, and it doesn't stop other companies, outside Google, from tracking you. It's one important dial among several, which is why this guide has company.

Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

7 Steering Your Ads and Seeing Your Profile

If you'd rather not switch personalization off entirely, My Ad Center also lets you steer it, and it lets you see the picture Google has built of you — your likely age range, interests, and categories it thinks fit you. Folks are often amused, and sometimes annoyed, by how right or wrong it is:

- Browse the list of topics Google thinks interest you, and turn down any that feel too personal or simply unwanted.
- Block specific brands whose ads you're tired of seeing.
- Review the sensitive categories Google already limits by default.
- Correct or remove anything in your interest profile that's wrong.

WATCH OUT

This middle path suits folks who don't mind tailored ads in general but want to rein in a few. Reviewing your profile is a useful reality check — it makes plain, in your own case, exactly what 'personalized' means, which often settles whether to leave it on.

8 Your Activity: Finding My Activity

The second major area is your activity history. Google keeps a log of things you've done in its products, and the page that shows it is called My Activity — usually at an address beginning with myactivity. The first time you open it can be startling: you may see searches from years ago, videos you forgot you watched, and a long scroll of ordinary days. Take a breath. Everything on this page can be reviewed, deleted, and set to clear itself going forward.

GOOD TO KNOW

The main setting controlling that history has long been called 'Web & App Activity.' During 2026 Google began splitting and renaming these controls, so you may instead see labels like 'Search Services History' or 'Personalized Recommendations.' The wording is in flux, but the idea is the same: a switch that decides whether your searches and activity are saved. If the label on your screen doesn't match this guide, look for anything about activity, history, or recommendations.

9 Turning On Auto-Delete

Auto-delete is my favorite setting in this whole checkup, because you set it once and it quietly keeps things tidy forever after. Instead of returning to scrub your history by hand, you tell Google to erase anything older than a chosen age:

1. From My Activity, open the activity control you want to tidy.
2. Choose the auto-delete option.

3. Pick how long to keep activity — the shortest common choice is three months, with longer options of eighteen or thirty-six months.
4. Confirm, and let Google remove anything already older than that.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> Three months is plenty for most people. It keeps recent searches handy for a short while, then clears them automatically, so your history never grows into years again. If your history has already grown into a long tail of years, you can clear it in bulk first, then let auto-delete keep it short.

10 YouTube History, Voice, and Recordings

A couple of related histories are worth the same treatment. YouTube keeps its own record of what you've watched and searched, and uses it to decide what to recommend; and if you use 'Hey Google' or the Assistant, there may be a setting that saves recordings of what you say:

- YouTube watch history shapes the videos it suggests. You can pause it, set it to auto-delete on a schedule, or clear it to reset recommendations toward a clean slate.
- Voice and Assistant recordings can be switched off in your activity controls — the Assistant still works, and existing recordings can be reviewed and deleted on My Activity.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> Pausing YouTube history means your recommendations will become less tailored, which some people prefer and others miss. Try it for a week; it's easy to turn back on if you change your mind. As with everything in this checkup, there's no single right answer.

11 Location History, Now Called Timeline

The third big area is location. Google can keep a map of everywhere your phone has been, which it now presents as your 'Timeline.' This has changed in an important, reassuring way: for most people this information is now stored on your own phone rather than on Google's servers, which means you have more direct control than before. It's worth a look before you decide, because seeing it makes the choice concrete, and then turning it off is a single setting:

1. On your phone, open Maps or your account's location settings and find Timeline (sometimes shown as a calendar of days).
2. Tap a day to see the places and routes recorded, and delete a day, a range, or the whole history.
3. To stop new history, find the control for Location History or Timeline and switch it off.
4. Choose whether to delete the history already collected.

> **TIP**
>
> Turning off the Timeline doesn't harm the live map or driving directions — those use your location only in the moment. There's also a separate setting, often called Location Services or Location Access, that controls whether apps can see where you are right now; that's covered in the phone guide.

12 The Android Advertising Number and Connected Apps

Two bits of housekeeping round out the checkup. If your phone is an Android, it carries a hidden advertising number that apps use to track you for ads, separate from your Google account settings — so turning off personalized ads in your account doesn't reset it. And over the years you've probably signed in to other websites with that handy 'continue with Google' button, and each still has some access:

1. On an Android phone, open Settings and find the section about privacy or ads, where you can reset or delete the advertising number (the exact path varies — Samsung and Pixel arrange their menus differently).
2. In your account settings, find the section on connected or third-party apps.
3. Read the list of apps and sites that can use your account.
4. Remove access for anything you don't recognize or no longer use, and keep the few you rely on.

WATCH OUT

If you see a connected app you truly don't recognize, remove its access and consider changing your password as a precaution. Unknown connections are worth a second look, not a panic.

13 Handy Extras While You're Tidying

A few smaller tools pair nicely with the main checkup:

- Google's own Privacy Checkup is a guided walk-through of many of these same settings, pausing at each to let you decide. If you prefer being led by the hand, start there.
- The 'Why am I seeing this ad?' label — a small menu beside many ads — tells you, ad by ad, what triggered it, and lets you see fewer like it or block the advertiser. It's privacy you can do in the moment.
- Search settings (separate from account privacy) hold SafeSearch, which filters explicit results — useful on a shared or family device.
- Takeout lets you download a copy of what Google holds. You don't need it for the checkup, but some folks like to see the full picture. Making a copy doesn't delete anything.

GOOD TO KNOW

If a particular private search is weighing on you — a health worry, a medication — use the search box at the top of My Activity to find it and delete just that, right now, without waiting for the auto-delete clock. Google already treats sensitive categories like health more cautiously when choosing ads.

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14 Phone vs Computer, and Shared Devices

Every setting in this guide can be reached on either a phone or a computer, and the menu names are the same on both even if the layout differs. Changes on one device apply to the whole account. Do the reading-heavy parts on a computer if your eyes prefer a larger screen, and do the location parts on the phone, since that's where the Timeline is stored.

Many households share a tablet or computer, and that's fine — but if everyone uses the same signed-in account, everyone's activity blends together in the history.

GOOD TO KNOW

On a shared family computer, signing out when you're done keeps the next person from seeing your email and activity — a small habit that prevents a lot of accidental snooping. The cleaner arrangement is for each person to have their own account or profile.

15 Convenience vs. Privacy — Where to Set the Dial

Underneath all these switches is one honest trade-off, worth naming so you can make peace with your choices. The more Google remembers, the more convenient it can be — better suggestions, faster answers, a map of where you parked. The less it remembers, the more private you are. There's no universally correct setting. The aim of this guide isn't to push you to one end, but to make sure the dial is set where you want it, rather than where it arrived.

TIP

A comfortable middle ground for many folks: turn off personalized ads, set activity to auto-delete after three months, and turn off the location Timeline. You keep day-to-day convenience and shed the long-term record.

16 What Turning Things Off Does NOT Do

I want to be clear about the limits, because other guides will sell you on more than is true. Lowering these settings quiets what Google keeps. It does not make you invisible online, and it does not touch companies outside Google:

- Your internet provider can still see which sites you connect to.
- Other apps and websites keep their own separate tracking.
- People-search sites and data brokers are an entirely different matter, with their own guides.
- Turning off saving doesn't erase what others have already collected elsewhere.

GOOD TO KNOW

This checkup is one strong, worthwhile layer. It pairs with the others — ad controls on other services, a smaller data-broker footprint, a credit freeze — to add up to real protection. If you're not sure what to tackle next, Facebook's off-activity settings and your phone's ad and location settings are the natural companions.

17 Common Mistakes

A few small missteps trip people up during this checkup, and knowing them in advance saves a second trip. None are harmful; they just mean the job is half done:

- Changing settings on the wrong account when you have more than one.
- Confusing turning off ads with blocking ads — they're different.
- Deleting activity but forgetting to turn on auto-delete, so it piles up again.
- Assuming location is off because the Timeline is off, when live location access is a separate setting.
- Expecting the change to affect companies other than Google.

> **TIP**
>
> A careful pass through this guide avoids all of these. Doing Google's guided checkup once or twice a year — attached to a date you won't forget — is a tidy habit that keeps you from drifting.

18 Common Questions, Answered Plainly

Will this delete my emails or photos?

No. This checkup only changes what Google tracks about your habits. Your Gmail, your Google Photos, and your files are untouched.

Will I still be able to use Google normally?

Yes. Everything keeps working. Searches, maps, and YouTube all run the same; they simply remember less about you.

Will turning off history log me out or lose my passwords?

No. Saved passwords and sign-ins are a separate part of your account and aren't affected by the activity settings.

If I change my mind, can I turn things back on?

Yes, any time, with the same switches. Nothing here is permanent or one-way.

19 Helping Someone Else — and You're in the Driver's Seat

Often the person reading this is doing it not only for themselves but for a parent, spouse, or friend who finds the menus daunting. That's a kind and worthwhile thing to do, and a few gentle ground rules make it go smoothly:

- Sit together and let them make the choices; it's their account.
- Explain in plain words what each switch does before you change it.
- Write down what you changed, so they can remember and undo it if they wish.
- Don't sign in as them on your own devices unless they ask you to.

These are your settings, on your account, and every one of them bends to your choice. You don't have to do all of it today, and you don't have to get it perfect. Even turning off personalized ads and setting activity to auto-delete — two switches, ten minutes — puts you well ahead and quiets the part that bothers most people.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> If you'd rather not poke around the menus alone, this is exactly the kind of thing I'm glad to walk through with you, in plain English and at an easy pace. We can do the whole checkup together in one sitting — in person, or on the phone while you tap.

20 You Don't Have to Do This Alone

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio, with 30+ years of professional experience helping folks get comfortable with their technology. When you'd rather have a hand with any of this, 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 — free for Support Plan members. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee.

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

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this page by the computer. It's the whole twenty-minute checkup at a glance.

Task	What to do
Turn off personalized ads	Open My Ad Center (myadcenter), switch 'Personalized ads' to Off
Stop ads following you around	Same switch — ads stay, but they're no longer picked from your history
Tidy your activity history	Open My Activity (myactivity), turn on auto-delete, pick three months
Reset YouTube recommendations	Pause or clear YouTube watch history in your activity controls
Turn off the location map	In Maps on your phone, open Timeline and switch Location History off
Reset the Android ad number	Phone Settings > privacy or ads > reset advertising ID (separate from your account)
Prune connected apps	In account settings, remove 'continue with Google' apps you no longer use
Keep it tidy long-term	Run Google's guided Privacy Checkup once or twice a year
Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

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

You don't have to remember all of it — just that a friendly, patient person is one call away, whenever you'd rather have a hand.

KEY SPECS

In your home — $99 flat for the first visit, no contracts and no surprises, with a 30-day come-back-free follow-up. In-home visits cover Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities.
Outside the area? Remotely — $49 for a screen-share session (free for Support Plan members, $39/mo), refundable if I can't fix it — and credited toward a visit if you'd rather have me in person. Book either at billshometech.com/book.

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.

Whenever you're ready, I'll come to your home anywhere in Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities, at your pace. Too far for a house call? I also help remotely. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042. — Bill

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