



An Extended Guide · No. 1959

Headsets & Speakerphones

Hearing and being heard on
calls — in plain English

Tech Made Simple — Service Made Personal

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★ Read this first — you really can't break anything

Before we start, a promise: you cannot break anything just by reading, looking, or trying a setting. Screens, keyboards, and cables are made to be plugged and unplugged, and almost anything you change can be changed right back. Go at your own pace, skip to the page you need, and if you ever feel stuck, that is exactly what I am here for — there is no such thing as a silly question. With calls, the goal is simple: you hear them clearly, and they hear you clearly. Everything in here serves that one goal, and nothing you try can harm your ears or your gear.

Let's make calls easy to hear — and easy to be heard on

Whether it's a video call with the grandchildren, a doctor's office, or an old friend, this guide helps you pick the right thing to hear clearly and sound clear — a headset, earbuds, or a desk speakerphone — without the jargon.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. I've spent 30+ years helping folks get comfortable with the gear in their homes, patiently and in plain language. Think of this as me sitting at your kitchen table, helping you choose one thing at a time.

There's no single right answer here, and that's good news — it means we get to pick what suits your ears, your comfort, and your hearing aids if you wear them. We'll go slowly and keep it friendly.

★ A gentle note before we begin

This is practical advice, not medical advice. If your hearing has changed, the kindest first step is a chat with your doctor or audiologist. For the gear side — what to buy and how to set it up — that's exactly what I'm here for. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, free and with nothing to sell you.

The whole guide, on one page

If you remember only these things, you're already most of the way to calls that are comfortable to hear and clear to be heard on.

- ❑ There are three good choices: a headset (over both ears or just one), earbuds, or a desk speakerphone. Each suits different folks.
- ❑ A good microphone matters as much as good sound — being heard clearly is half the call.
- ❑ A speakerphone sits on the desk and needs nothing in or on your ears, which is often the easiest choice if you wear hearing aids.
- ❑ Look for adjustable volume you can reach easily, and a comfortable fit you'd happily wear for an hour.
- ❑ If you wear hearing aids, ask your audiologist whether they can stream call sound straight to your aids by Bluetooth — some can.
- ❑ Wired is simple and never needs charging; wireless frees you from the cord but needs a battery topped up. Both work well.

✓ One idea to hold onto

Pick for comfort and for your ears, not for a long list of features. The best device is the one you'll actually reach for when the phone rings.

Your three good options, side by side

Before the details, here's the lay of the land so the rest of the guide makes sense.

A headset is an earpiece (or two) with a microphone on a small arm or built in. It keeps the sound close to your ears and your voice close to your mouth, so both are clear even in a noisy room. It can cover both ears or just one.

Earbuds are tiny pieces that sit in or just at your ears, usually wireless. They're light and discreet, and most have a microphone built in. They're popular, though they can be fiddly for smaller or arthritic fingers and easy to misplace.

A desk speakerphone is a small speaker-and-microphone that sits on your desk. Nothing goes in or on your ears at all — you simply talk toward it and listen, like an old speakerphone but much clearer. For many folks, especially hearing-aid wearers, this is the easiest of all.

✓ You can own more than one

There's no rule that says pick just one. Some folks keep a speakerphone on the desk for long calls and a simple earbud for quick ones. Start with the one that fits your most common call.

Hearing them clearly

Half of a good call is the sound reaching your ears cleanly. Here's what actually helps.

Clear sound is not the same as loud sound. A device that merely gets louder can turn muddy and tiring. What you want is a device that keeps voices crisp and natural at a comfortable level — so you catch the words without straining or cranking it up.

Having the sound close to your ears helps a great deal. A headset or earbud puts the voice right where you need it and shuts out some of the room, which is why they can be easier to follow than a speaker across the desk. A good speakerphone makes up for this with clever, clear speakers aimed right at you.

Both ears or one?

Covering both ears blocks out the room and helps you concentrate on the voice. Covering just one ear lets you still hear the doorbell, a spouse, or a pet — which many folks prefer at home. Neither is better; it's about how you like to listen.

✓ Volume you can find without hunting

Whatever you choose, make sure the volume control is easy to reach and easy to feel — a wheel or clear buttons, not a tiny hidden switch. You'll want to nudge it mid-call without fumbling.

Being heard clearly — the microphone matters

It's easy to focus on what you hear and forget the other half: how well the other person hears you. A good microphone is worth as much as good sound.

The most common complaint I hear about calls isn't the listening — it's 'they kept asking me to repeat myself.' That's almost always the microphone. A built-in laptop or tablet microphone sits far from your mouth and picks up the whole room, so your voice arrives thin and echoey.

A headset solves this neatly: the microphone rides close to your mouth on a little arm, so your voice comes through full and clear while the room stays out of it. Earbuds do a fair job too. A good speakerphone uses microphones designed to pick up a voice across a desk and quiet the rest.

✓ Test your voice, not just your ears

When you try any device, record a short voice memo or ask a patient friend 'can you hear me clearly?' before you rely on it for an important call. The microphone is the half people forget to check.

Headsets: over-ear or single-ear

A headset is the classic choice for clear calls, and for good reason. Here's how to pick one that's comfortable.

An **over-ear** or on-ear headset rests on a headband across the top of your head, with a soft cushion over one or both ears. It's secure, it won't fall out, and the microphone sits right by your mouth. If you wear it for long calls, comfort of the headband and ear cushions is what matters most — try before you commit if you can.

A **single-ear** headset covers just one ear and leaves the other open to the room. Many folks find it lighter and less closed-in, and it's a friendly choice if you like to stay aware of what's around you.

- **Soft, roomy ear cushions** are kinder over glasses and for long calls.
- **A microphone on a small boom arm** that swings near your mouth gives the clearest voice.
- **An easy-to-reach volume and mute control** on the earpiece or cord saves a lot of fumbling.
- **A light overall weight** matters more than you'd guess after twenty minutes on a call.

✓ Mind your glasses and your aids

If you wear glasses, a plush over-ear cushion is gentler than a hard pad pressing the arm of your frames. If you wear hearing aids, read the next pages carefully — a headset over an aid can whistle, and there are easy ways around it.

Earbuds: small, light, and discreet

Earbuds are everywhere these days. They can be a fine choice — with a couple of honest cautions for older hands and ears.

Earbuds tuck into or rest at the opening of your ear and are usually wireless, pairing to your phone or computer over Bluetooth. They're light, they travel well, and most have a microphone built in that does a reasonable job for everyday calls.

The honest cautions: they're small, so they can be fiddly to handle and easy to lose, and some folks find them uncomfortable or insecure in the ear. If your fingers are stiff or your eyesight makes tiny controls hard, a headset or speakerphone may be the gentler pick.

! Earbuds and hearing aids usually don't mix

You generally cannot wear an earbud and a hearing aid in the same ear at once — there isn't room, and it can whistle. If you wear aids, a speakerphone, or aids that stream the call directly, is almost always the better path. More on that in a moment.

Desk speakerphones: nothing in your ears

For a lot of folks — and especially hearing-aid wearers — this is the quiet winner. Let's see why.

A desk speakerphone is a small, self-contained speaker and microphone that sits in front of you. You talk toward it and listen to it, hands free, with nothing on your head or in your ears. Modern ones are far clearer than the echoey speakerphones of old.

The appeal is comfort and simplicity. There's nothing to fit over your ears or your hearing aids, nothing to charge if you choose a plug-in model, and the controls are usually big and obvious — a clear volume knob and a mute button you can find at a glance.

- **Easiest alongside hearing aids** — your aids keep doing their job and the room sound reaches them naturally.
- **Hands free** — good if you like to take notes or move about.
- **Big, simple controls** on most models.
- **Shared calls are easy** — a spouse can listen and join in without a second earpiece.

✓ A quiet room helps a speakerphone most

Because a speakerphone listens across the desk, it does its best work in a calmer room. If your call spot is noisy, a headset keeps the microphone closer to your mouth. Match the device to the room.

Using these alongside hearing aids

If you wear hearing aids, this is the most important page in the guide. The good news: you have several comfortable options.

Hearing aids already shape sound for your ears, so the trick is letting a call reach them cleanly rather than fighting them. A headset clamped over an aid can press on it or cause a whistle (that's called feedback), so for aid wearers the two gentlest paths are usually a speakerphone or aids that receive the call directly.

- **A desk speakerphone** lets your aids simply do their job — no earpiece to fit over them, no whistle. Often the easiest choice.
- **Aids that stream by Bluetooth** can receive the call sound straight from your phone or computer, right in your ears, at a volume you set.
- **A single-ear headset on the aid-free side** can work if you hear well enough in one ear.

! Protect your ears — clear beats loud

If you find yourself turning the volume up and up to understand, that's a sign to change the device or the setup, not to keep cranking it. Uncomfortably loud sound is hard on anyone's ears. Aim for clear at a gentle level, and ask your audiologist if voices still seem muddy.

Two ways people come to this

Call gear gets chosen two ways: by the person who'll be on the calls, and by an adult child setting a parent up to see the grandchildren. The device is the same; the worries are different.

If you're setting this up for yourself

You know whether you'd rather have something on your ears or nothing at all, and whether you wear your aids all day. Trust that, and buy for your own comfort.

- If you wear hearing aids, lean toward a speakerphone, or ask about streaming before anything goes on your ears.
- Pick controls you can find by feel — a real volume wheel, a clear mute.
- Test your own voice ('can you hear me?') before an important call.
- If a return is easy, try one on a few real calls before deciding.

If you're setting it up for a parent or loved one

You want Mom or Dad on video calls without a fight — clear sound, a microphone that works, and as few steps as possible. Aim for 'foolproof' over 'fancy.'

- A plug-in speakerphone is often the simplest thing to leave on their desk — nothing to fit, nothing to lose.
- If they wear aids, ask their audiologist about Bluetooth streaming before you buy anything with an earpiece.
- Set the volume to a good level and show them the one button for mute.
- Write the two controls on a sticky note next to the computer.

★ Setting a parent up for video calls?

This is one of the most common calls I get from adult kids. Tell me what computer or tablet your parent uses and whether they wear hearing aids, and I'll help you choose something they'll actually find easy — and set it up so it just works. Call (330) 200-8042.

Wired or wireless?

This choice trips people up, but it's really a simple trade. Neither is better — they suit different habits.

Wired means a cord runs from the headset or speakerphone to your computer or phone. It's wonderfully simple: plug it in and it works, and it never needs charging. The only downsides are the cord itself and making sure the plug matches your device.

Wireless frees you from the cord, usually over Bluetooth, so you can lean back or step away. The trade is that it has a battery to keep charged, and it must be paired the first time — a one-time setup we can walk through. For many folks that's a small price for no cord.

If you like plug-and-go and never want to think about a battery, go wired. If you value moving freely and don't mind popping it on a charger, go wireless. We explain pairing and dongles in plain steps in the wireless keyboard and mouse guide, and the same ideas apply here.

✓ A dropped call is sometimes a dead battery

The most common wireless gripe — 'it cut out' — is often just a low battery. Get in the habit of charging it on a set day, the way you'd wind a clock, and most of those troubles disappear.

Hearing aids that stream the call to your ears

This is a wonderful option many folks don't know they have. If your aids can do it, a call can arrive right in your ears, clear and at your level.

Bluetooth is just a way for two devices to talk to each other without a wire. Many newer hearing aids can pair with a phone or computer the same way earbuds do, so the call sound streams directly into the aids — shaped for your hearing, with nothing extra to wear.

Whether your particular aids can do this, and how to switch it on, depends on the make and the fitting. Some aids need a small go-between device; some work straight from a phone. This is exactly the kind of thing your audiologist can set up or explain in a few minutes.

★ Ask your audiologist this one question

Next time you see them, ask: 'Can my hearing aids stream phone or computer calls by Bluetooth, and will you help me set it up?' If yes, it may be the most comfortable answer of all — and I'm glad to help with the computer side once your audiologist has the aids ready. Call (330) 200-8042.

Comfort and controls you can live with

A device you'll happily wear or reach for beats a clever one that frustrates you. Here's what to feel for.

- **Adjustable, easy volume** — a wheel or large buttons you can find without looking, so you can fine-tune mid-call.
- **A mute button you can find by touch** — handy for a cough or a word to someone in the room.
- **Light and well-padded** if it's a headset — weight and hard pads are what make long calls tiring.
- **Clear status lights or tones** — a simple way to know it's on, charged, and connected.
- **Controls that aren't too small** — a real concern if fingers are stiff or eyesight is low.

✓ Sit with it for twenty minutes

In the store or at home within the return window, wear it or use it for a good twenty minutes — not two. Comfort problems and fiddly controls only show up once the novelty wears off.

Video calls and voice calls — any difference?

Folks often ask whether they need something special for video calls. Mostly, no — but here's the honest picture.

For a voice call, you only need to hear and be heard, so any of the three choices works. For a video call — the grandchildren, a telehealth visit — the sound part is exactly the same; you just also want the camera and a bit of light on your face, which we cover in the video-call setup.

One small point: on a video call, a speakerphone lets you sit back naturally so the camera sees your whole face, while a headset keeps your voice clearest if the room is busy. Pick for your room and your comfort, the same as for a voice call.

✓ The device doesn't care which app you use

The same headset or speakerphone works across whatever calling program your family uses. You don't need a different device for each one — set it up once and it serves them all.

A simple shopping checklist

Bring this to the store or keep it open while you shop online. Check each box before you buy.

- ☐ It matches how I like to listen — on my ears, in my ears, or nothing at all.
- ☐ If I wear hearing aids, it works with them (a speakerphone, or streaming my audiologist has set up).
- ☐ It has a good microphone so I'll be heard clearly, not just hear well.
- ☐ The volume and mute controls are easy for me to find and use.
- ☐ It plugs into (or pairs with) the computer or phone I actually have.
- ☐ Wired or wireless — I've chosen the one that fits my habits.
- ☐ It can be returned if it's not comfortable on a few real calls.

✓ Photograph your device's sockets

If you're going wired, snap a photo of where you'd plug it into your computer or phone and text it to me. Two minutes of a second opinion saves a return trip over a mismatched plug.

Getting it working the first time

Setup is quick, and you can't harm anything by trying. Here's the calm order.

For a **wired** device, you plug it in, then tell the calling program to use it — there's usually a simple menu that lists your microphone and speaker so you can pick the new one. That's the step people miss: plugging in isn't always enough; you often choose it in the app too.

For a **wireless** device, you pair it once (put it in pairing mode, then find it on your phone or computer), and after that it reconnects on its own. Then, as with wired, pick it in the calling program's sound settings.

★ I'll get it right on the first call

Choosing the device in the app's sound settings is exactly the little step that trips folks up — and it's a two-minute fix I'm glad to do on a visit, or often right on your screen for \$49 without coming over. We'll test your sound and your voice together. Call (330) 200-8042.

Common mistakes people make

A few avoidable slip-ups account for most call-gear regret. Now you'll know them in advance.

- **Buying earbuds when you wear hearing aids** — they rarely share an ear. A speakerphone or streaming is the friendlier path.
- **Forgetting the microphone** and buying for sound alone, then being asked to repeat yourself on every call.
- **Plugging it in but not choosing it in the app**, so the computer keeps using its own tinny microphone and speaker.
- **Cranking the volume to understand** instead of fixing the device or setup — hard on the ears and it never really works.
- **Picking tiny controls** that are a struggle to find mid-call.

! If you're always turning it up, something's off

Reaching for more and more volume is a signal, not a solution. Try a device closer to your ears, a quieter room, or streaming to your aids — and let your audiologist know voices sound muddy. Clear at a gentle level is the goal.

Keeping it working over time

A few easy habits keep call gear reliable for years, not just the first week.

- **Charge wireless gear on a set day** so a dead battery never surprises you mid-call.
- **Wipe ear cushions and earbuds gently** with a barely damp cloth; keep earbuds in their little case so they aren't lost.
- **Keep the cord tidy** on a wired device so it isn't yanked or tripped over.
- **Re-check the app's sound settings** if a call suddenly uses the wrong microphone after an update — a quick re-pick usually fixes it.

If you wear hearing aids, your audiologist can also fine-tune how calls sound in them over time — it's worth mentioning at your regular visits.

✓ A home for small things

Earbuds and little dongles love to wander. Give them one spot — a dish by the computer, their own case — and you'll spend far less time hunting.

Spending wisely, not the most

You do not need the priciest device to hear and be heard well. Here's where your money actually helps.

The things that make calls comfortable — a clear microphone, easy controls, a good fit, and sound that's crisp at a gentle level — are found across plenty of sensibly priced devices. Many of the costly extras are aimed at office workers or music listeners, not at someone who wants an easy video call with family.

If a budget is tight, put it toward comfort and a good microphone before anything else. And if you wear hearing aids, remember the most comfortable answer — streaming to your aids — may already be built into the aids you own, at no extra cost but a visit to your audiologist.

★ I don't sell any of this — so it's just advice

I earn no commission on anything, so my only interest is your comfort. Tell me how you like to take calls and whether you wear aids, and I'll help you spend where it counts. Call (330) 200-8042.

Questions to ask before you buy

Whether you're talking to a salesperson, your audiologist, or me, these questions get you to the right device.

Q: Will this work if I wear hearing aids?

For a headset or earbud, ask honestly. Often the better answers are a desk speakerphone or — ask your audiologist — streaming the call straight to your aids by Bluetooth.

Q: How good is the microphone — will I be heard clearly?

A microphone close to your mouth (a headset boom) or one made to pick up a voice across a desk (a good speakerphone) beats a device built only for listening.

Q: Are the volume and mute controls easy to find and use?

Favor a real volume wheel or large buttons you can work by feel, especially if your fingers are stiff or your eyesight is low.

Q: Wired or wireless — and can I return it?

Wired never needs charging; wireless frees the cord but needs a battery. Either way, make sure you can try it on a few real calls and bring it back if it's not comfortable.

✓ There's no silly question

If a salesperson makes you feel rushed or foolish for asking about hearing aids or comfort, that's a reason to walk away, not to buy. A plain answer is the least you should expect.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most from folks sorting out call gear, answered plainly.

Q: I wear hearing aids. What's the easiest thing to buy?

Very often a desk speakerphone — nothing goes over your aids, and they keep doing their job. The other fine answer is streaming the call straight to your aids; ask your audiologist whether yours can do it.

Q: People keep asking me to repeat myself. What's wrong?

Almost always the microphone. Your device's built-in one sits too far away. A headset with a boom microphone, or a good speakerphone, usually fixes it at once.

Q: Can I use earbuds with my hearing aids?

Usually not in the same ear — there isn't room and it can whistle. If you wear aids, a speakerphone or streaming is the better path.

Q: Do I need different gear for video calls than voice calls?

No. The sound part is the same for both. A video call just adds the camera and a little light on your face, which we cover in the video-call setup guide.

★ Still weighing it up?

Hearing and being heard clearly on calls is exactly the kind of thing I love to help with. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and let's find something that's comfortable from the first call — with nothing to sell you.

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 hearing and being heard clearly on calls 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. For anything that calls for licensed electrical work, I'll help you line up a trustworthy local pro.

★ 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

Three Ways to Hear and Be Heard

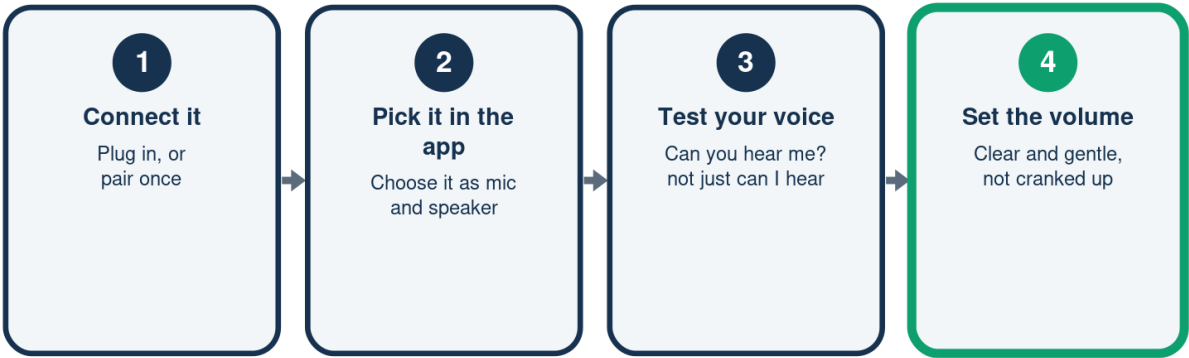
Each suits different folks -- there's no single best

	Where it sits	Best for
Headset	On your ears	Noisy rooms
Earbuds	In your ears	Light, on the go
Speakerphone	On the desk	Hearing-aid wearers

A speakerphone is often the easiest if you wear hearing aids.

Getting It Working the First Time

The calm order for a clear first call



Choosing it inside the calling program is the step folks miss.

Wired or Wireless?

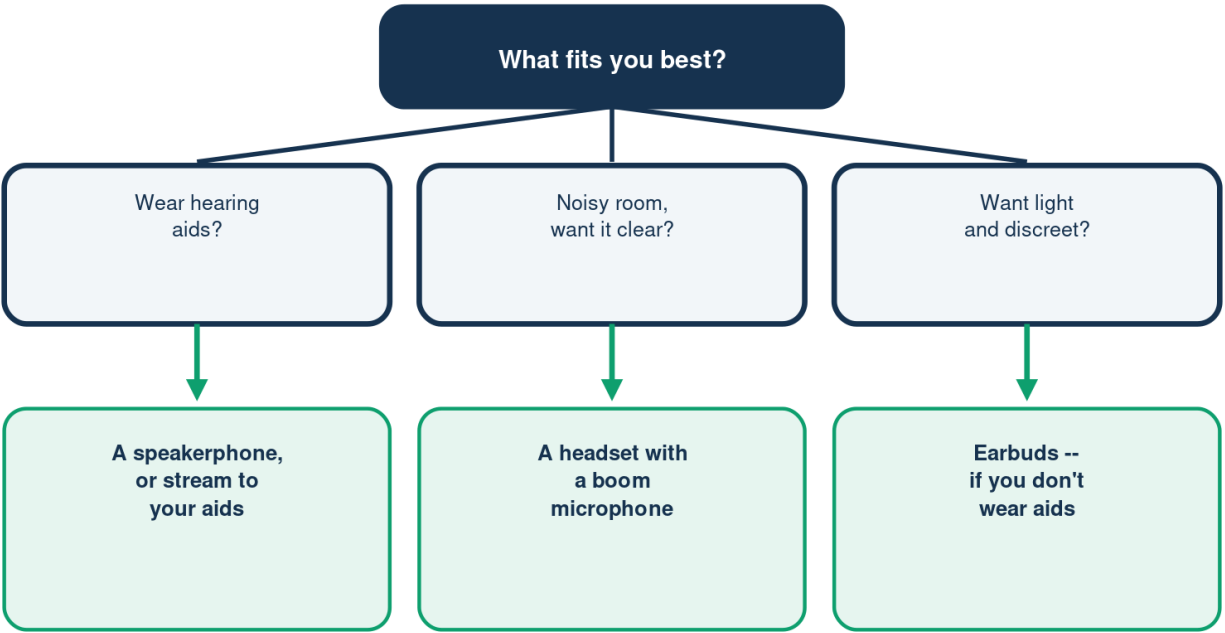
Neither is better -- they suit different habits

	The good part	The trade
Wired	Plug and go	A cord to manage
Wireless	No cord	Keep it charged
Both	Clear calls	Pick it in app

Go wired for simplicity, wireless to move freely.

Which Should You Pick?

Let your ears and your habits point the way



Ask your audiologist whether your aids can stream calls by Bluetooth.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.



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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 comes from using these guides. Thanks for reading, and stay safe out there.

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