BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

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My Laptop Won't Connect to Wi-Fi — The Fix List

The calm, in-order checklist that gets a laptop back online — Windows and Mac

Plain-English tech help from:
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Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

First, the magic test: if other devices work on the Wi-Fi, the problem is your laptop; if nothing works, it's the network. Assuming it's the laptop, check the obvious — a physical Wi-Fi switch or function key, and make sure Airplane mode is off. Then re-type the password slowly (a mistyped password, with its O-versus-0 and l-versus-1 traps, is the number-one cause).

If it still won't go, forget the network and rejoin, toggle the Wi-Fi off and on, and restart the laptop. Try the other network name if you have a 2.4GHz and a 5GHz. For deeper fixes, Windows has a Network troubleshooter and Network reset; a Mac can Renew DHCP Lease and forget-and-rejoin.

Only get Wi-Fi drivers from Windows Update or the maker's site — never a random download.

1 The Short Version

Your laptop won't join the Wi-Fi — maybe it can't find your network, maybe it says "can't connect," or maybe it joins and then nothing loads. It is frustrating, especially when your phone sitting right next to it is perfectly fine. The good news is that laptop Wi-Fi problems come from a short, predictable list of causes, and you can work down that list calmly and get connected again, whether you're on Windows or a Mac.

This is a fix list, in the order a professional would try it — the quick, obvious things first (a switch, a toggle, the right password), then the slightly deeper ones. You almost certainly won't need the whole list; most laptops are back online within the first few steps.

- First, the magic test: do OTHER devices work on the same Wi-Fi? If yes, it's the laptop. If no, it's the network.

- Check the simple things first: a physical Wi-Fi switch, airplane mode, and the right network name.
- Re-type the password carefully — a mistyped password is the single most common cause.
- Forget-and-rejoin, toggle the Wi-Fi, and a restart clear most of the rest.
- When it's genuinely stubborn, it's an easy and welcome call for Bill.

> **TIP**
>
> Works on Windows and Mac. Where the steps differ, both are spelled out — just follow the one that matches your laptop. If you're not sure which you have, a Mac has an Apple logo; most other laptops run Windows.

2 The One Test That Tells You Everything

Before you change a single setting on the laptop, run this one test, because it instantly tells you whether you're even looking in the right place. Pick up your phone, or try a tablet or another computer, and see if it can get online over the same Wi-Fi.

- If other devices DO work on the Wi-Fi the network is healthy and the problem is your laptop. This whole guide is for you.
- If other devices DON'T work either the problem is the network, not the laptop. Resetting the laptop won't help.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> If nothing in the house can get online, you'll save yourself a lot of pointless poking at the laptop. The fix there is to triage the network — check the router lights, rule out an outage, and power-cycle the modem and router. Bill's Home Tech has a dedicated guide, "My Wi-Fi Isn't Working — Start Here," for exactly that. Come back to this guide once you've confirmed the Wi-Fi itself is working.

3 Check the Obvious First — Wi-Fi Switch & Airplane Mode

An astonishing number of "my laptop won't connect" problems are simply Wi-Fi being switched off, often by accident. A key gets brushed, a setting gets toggled, and the laptop goes quiet. Rule this out first — it takes ten seconds and it is the most common culprit of all.

1. Look for a physical Wi-Fi switch or button on the laptop's side or along the top row of keys (often a key with a little antenna or airplane symbol, used with the Fn key).
2. On Windows, click the Wi-Fi/network icon near the clock and make sure Wi-Fi is turned ON and Airplane mode is OFF.
3. On a Mac, click the Wi-Fi icon in the top menu bar and make sure Wi-Fi is turned on.
4. If airplane mode is on, turn it off — that single switch blocks all wireless at once.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> Laptop function keys (the F1-F12 row) often double as a Wi-Fi or airplane-mode toggle, and they're easy to hit by accident while reaching for something else. If your Wi-Fi vanished suddenly for no reason, a bumped key is the first thing to suspect.

4 Make Sure You're Picking the Right Network

With Wi-Fi on, the next thing is to be sure the laptop is aiming at YOUR network and not a neighbour's, a guest network, or an old one it half-remembers. It is easy to connect to the wrong name without noticing, especially if several nearby names look similar.

1. Click the Wi-Fi icon (near the clock on Windows, top menu bar on a Mac) to see the list of available networks.
2. Find YOUR network name exactly — check the spelling against the sticker on your router if you're unsure.

3. If your network has two similar names (one may end in something like "-5G"), note both; we'll come back to which to pick.
4. Click your network and choose Connect.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> If your network name isn't in the list at all, but it shows on your phone, the laptop may be too far from the router, or its Wi-Fi may still be off, or it may only be seeing one of your two Wi-Fi bands. Move closer and re-check before assuming something is broken.

5 Re-type the Password — Carefully

A mistyped Wi-Fi password is, hands down, the most common reason a laptop won't connect. Wi-Fi passwords are case-sensitive and often mix in characters that look almost identical, so it is worth slowing right down for this one step.

1. When the laptop asks for the password, type it slowly and deliberately.
2. Watch for look-alikes: a capital O versus a zero (0), a lowercase L (l) versus the number one (1), a capital I versus a lowercase l.
3. Use the "show password" option if offered (an eye symbol) so you can see what you're typing.
4. Make sure Caps Lock isn't on, which would flip every letter's case.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> The password is the one printed on your router's sticker only if it was never changed. If you (or whoever set up your Wi-Fi) created your own password, the sticker is wrong and will keep being rejected. Find the real password — written on a card, saved in a phone, or from whoever set it up — before trying again and again.

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.

6 Forget the Network and Rejoin

If the laptop keeps failing to connect, or connects and then drops, telling it to "forget" the network and join fresh clears out any stale, confused settings. It is completely safe — you are only wiping the laptop's memory of that one Wi-Fi, then re-entering it cleanly.

1. Windows: click the Wi-Fi icon, or open Settings Network & internet Wi-Fi Manage known networks; find your network and choose Forget.
2. Mac: open System Settings Wi-Fi Details (or the "..." beside your network) Forget This Network.
3. The laptop will stop joining that network automatically — that's expected.
4. Now pick your network from the list again and type the password carefully.
5. Confirm it connects and that a web page loads.

TIP

Forget-and-rejoin is the step that quietly fixes the most mystery cases, because it clears out a saved connection that had gone subtly wrong. If you only try one of the "deeper" fixes, make it this one — but have your password ready first, since forgetting the network also forgets the password.

7 Turn Wi-Fi Off and On — and Toggle the Adapter

A simple off-and-on of the laptop's Wi-Fi often shakes loose a stuck connection, and it is gentler than a full restart. If that doesn't do it, turning the Wi-Fi "adapter" (the laptop's internal Wi-Fi part) off and on is the next notch up.

1. First, just toggle Wi-Fi off and back on from the Wi-Fi icon, wait ten seconds between.
2. On Windows, you can also toggle Airplane mode on for a few seconds, then off — a quick reset of all wireless.
3. If needed, disable and re-enable the Wi-Fi adapter: Windows Settings Network & internet Advanced network settings find your Wi-Fi adapter Disable, wait, then Enable.
4. On a Mac, turning Wi-Fi off in the menu bar, waiting, and turning it on again does the same gentle reset.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> You don't need to understand what an "adapter" is to use this. It's just the laptop's built-in Wi-Fi radio, and switching it off and on again clears temporary glitches the same way restarting any device does — a nap for the Wi-Fi part specifically.

8 Restart the Laptop

It sounds almost too simple, but a full restart clears a remarkable range of connection problems, because it resets everything the laptop was holding onto at once. A proper restart — not just closing the lid or letting it sleep — is worth doing before the deeper fixes.

1. Save anything you're working on.
2. Windows: open the Start menu, choose Power, then Restart (not just Shut down — Restart gives a cleaner reset on modern Windows).
3. Mac: open the Apple menu and choose Restart.
4. Let it come fully back up, then try to connect to Wi-Fi again.

> **TIP**
>
> If your whole network was restarted too (the modem and router), bring the laptop back online AFTER the router has fully settled — a laptop that wakes up before the router is ready will report it can't connect, when really it just needs to try again a minute later.

9 2.4GHz vs. 5GHz — the Band Your Laptop Can See

Most home Wi-Fi quietly broadcasts on two "bands" — a 2.4GHz band that reaches farther, and a 5GHz band that's faster up close. Sometimes they have separate names (one may end in "-5G" or "-5GHz"). A laptop can occasionally latch onto the wrong one for where it's sitting, or fail to see one of them, which looks like a connection problem.

- If your router shows two network names, try the OTHER one — if you're far from the router, the plain (2.4GHz) name usually reaches better.
- If you're close to the router and want speed, the 5G name is better.
- If one band's name simply doesn't appear on the laptop, that's a clue to mention when you call for help.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> You can't harm anything by trying the other network name — at worst it won't connect and you switch back. On a laptop that only struggles in a far room, moving to the 2.4GHz (plain-named) network, or simply moving closer to the router, often clears it right up. Bill's Home Tech has a fuller guide on Wi-Fi bands if you'd like to understand them.

10 Windows: Network Reset & the Troubleshooter

When the simpler steps haven't worked on a Windows laptop, Windows has two built-in helpers that are safe to use. Start with the troubleshooter; keep the network reset as the heavier option because it clears all saved Wi-Fi networks.

1. Run the troubleshooter: open Settings System Troubleshoot Other troubleshooters, and run the Network/Internet one. Let it check and apply any fixes it suggests.
2. If that doesn't do it, the fuller option is a Network reset: Settings Network & internet Advanced network settings Network reset.

3. A network reset reinstalls the Wi-Fi parts and removes all saved networks, so the laptop will restart and you'll need to rejoin your Wi-Fi and re-type the password afterward.
4. After it restarts, pick your network and enter the password to reconnect.

WATCH OUT

A network reset is a bigger step than it sounds, because it forgets every Wi-Fi network the laptop knew and any special network settings. Only reach for it after the simpler fixes, and make sure you have your Wi-Fi password written down first. If you're uneasy about it, this is a fine moment to call rather than press on.

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11 Mac: Renew the Connection & Reset Network Settings

On a Mac, the equivalent gentle-to-firmer fixes live in the Wi-Fi settings, and they're straightforward. Start by renewing the connection before anything heavier.

1. Renew the address: System Settings Wi-Fi Details (beside your network) TCP/IP Renew DHCP Lease. This asks the router for a fresh address and clears many stalls.
2. If it still won't behave, forget the network (System Settings Wi-Fi Details Forget This Network) and rejoin fresh.
3. Restart the Mac from the Apple menu and try again.
4. As a firmer step, create a new network "Location" (System Settings Network the "..." or options menu Locations) and reconnect, which gives the Mac clean network settings to start from.

GOOD TO KNOW

"Renew DHCP Lease" simply means asking your router for a fresh house-number address on your network. It sounds technical, but it's a common, harmless fix for a Mac that's connected to Wi-Fi yet can't load pages — it often clears the stall in one tap.

12 Update the Wi-Fi Driver on Windows — Carefully

On a Windows laptop, the Wi-Fi "driver" is the small piece of software that lets Windows talk to the laptop's Wi-Fi radio. Very occasionally it gets out of date or corrupted, and updating it fixes a laptop that connects to nothing while every other device is fine. This is a deeper step, so take it slowly — or hand it off.

1. The safe, built-in way: open Settings Windows Update and install any pending updates, which often include the right driver automatically.
2. If you're comfortable, you can also let Windows look: open Device Manager, expand Network adapters, right-click your Wi-Fi adapter, and choose Update driver Search automatically.
3. Restart the laptop afterward and try to connect.

WATCH OUT

Here's the important part: get Wi-Fi drivers ONLY from Windows Update or the laptop maker's official support site. Never download a "driver updater" tool or a driver from a random website that a search turns up — several are traps that install junk or worse. If a driver is genuinely the problem, this is exactly the kind of step I do safely with you, so there's no need to risk the wrong download.

13 "Connected, No Internet" on a Laptop

Sometimes the laptop joins the Wi-Fi perfectly — the icon shows connected — but web pages still won't load and you may see a "no internet" note. If other devices are also offline, this is a network problem, not a laptop one. But if the laptop alone shows it while everything else is fine, a couple of laptop-specific nudges usually clear it.

1. Confirm with another device: if everything is "connected, no internet," it's the network — triage that instead.
2. On the laptop, forget-and-rejoin your network (earlier chapter) to get a fresh connection.
3. Windows: renew the connection via the troubleshooter, or restart. Mac: renew the DHCP lease (earlier chapter).
4. Restart the laptop once more if needed, then test a web page.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> This message means the laptop reached your router but couldn't get out to the wider internet through it. On a single laptop, that's usually a stale address the forget-and-rejoin or lease-renew fixes. If every device shows it, the problem is out at the router or your provider, not on the laptop.

14 When the Laptop Keeps Dropping Off

A laptop that connects fine but keeps dropping the Wi-Fi every so often is its own particular annoyance, and it usually has a findable cause. The most common one is a power-saving setting that quietly switches the Wi-Fi off to save battery, then is slow to switch it back on.

1. First, rule out signal: does it drop only in a far room? If so, it's coverage — move closer or consider mesh, rather than chasing a laptop setting.
2. On Windows, there's a power setting that can turn the Wi-Fi radio off to save energy; turning that off for the Wi-Fi adapter often cures the dropping. It lives in the adapter's power-management options.

3. On a laptop that drops mainly on battery, try it plugged in — if it holds steady on power, a battery-saving setting is the likely cause.
4. Make sure the laptop isn't quietly hopping to a weaker neighbour network or an old saved one; forget networks you don't use.

> **WATCH OUT**
> The exact Windows power-management checkbox is tucked a few menus deep and is easy to change the wrong one by mistake. If a dropping laptop is driving you to distraction, this is a quick, sure fix for me to make with you rather than hunting through adapter settings on your own.

15 A Few Odd Blockers — VPN, Date & Time, Security Software

Once in a while a laptop won't get online for a reason that has nothing to do with the Wi-Fi itself, and these are worth knowing about because they send people chasing the wrong fix for hours. They're uncommon, but quick to check.

- A VPN app: if you use one, turn it off temporarily and try again — a VPN that's stuck or expired can block the connection while making it look like a Wi-Fi fault.
- The laptop's date and time: if they're badly wrong, secure web pages can refuse to load. Setting the clock to update automatically fixes it.
- Over-eager security software: a firewall or antivirus set too strictly can occasionally block the connection; a restart or a careful check of its settings can clear it.

> **WATCH OUT**
> Only turn a VPN or security tool off briefly, as a test, and turn it back on afterward — they're protecting you. If turning one off fixes the connection, that tells you where the real problem is, and it's worth sorting the setting properly rather than leaving your protection off. That's a good one to do together on a visit.

16 When to Call Bill

This is a genuinely complete fix list, and most laptops are back on the Wi-Fi within the first handful of steps. But some of the deeper moves — a Windows network reset, a driver update, untangling a laptop that connects to everything except the internet — are quicker, safer, and far less stressful with someone beside you who does them every week, and who will never steer you to a risky download.

I come to you here in Portage County, work through this exact list, find out whether it's the laptop or the network, and get you reliably back online — on Windows or a Mac — then leave you with the simple steps to try first if it ever acts up again. With 30+ years of professional experience, laptop Wi-Fi gremlins are everyday work for me, and no question is too small to ask.

- Other devices work fine but the laptop simply won't join, no matter what you try.
- You've reached the driver-update or network-reset step and would rather not risk it alone.
- The laptop connects but never reaches the internet, while everything else is fine.
- It connects and then keeps dropping off.
- You'd simply rather have it sorted properly, once, by someone you trust.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this by the laptop. Work down in order; stop as soon as you're online.

I want to…	Do this…
Know where the problem is	Do OTHER devices work on the Wi-Fi? Yes = laptop. No = network
Rule out the obvious	Check the Wi-Fi switch/key and that Airplane mode is OFF
Fix the most common cause	Re-type the password slowly — watch for O vs 0, l vs 1
Clear a stuck connection	Forget the network, then rejoin and re-enter the password
Give Wi-Fi a reset	Toggle Wi-Fi off/on, then restart the laptop
Windows deeper fix	Run the Network troubleshooter; last resort: Network reset
Mac deeper fix	Wi-Fi Details Renew DHCP Lease; then forget-and-rejoin
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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