BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

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Nothing Charges — Cable, Port, or Battery?

Plugged in but not charging? Here's how to find the real culprit before buying anything

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

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

When something won't charge, the battery is the least likely culprit — far more often it's the cable, the port, or the adapter. Test the chain from the wall inward: confirm the outlet is live, then try a different charger and cable you know work, which alone solves most cases. Check the cable for fraying and wiggle-test it, and gently clear pocket lint from the charging port with a wooden toothpick, never metal.

A completely flat battery can sit dark for twenty minutes before showing a charging symbol, so be patient. Signs the battery is finally aging: fast draining, dying early, running hot. Anything swollen or hot — stop, unplug it, and have it checked safely.

1 The Short Version

When something won't charge, there are really only four things in the chain to check: the outlet, the adapter (the block that plugs into the wall), the cable, and the port on the device. The battery itself is the least likely culprit, and the easiest to wrongly blame.

The smart approach is to test each link from the wall inward, swapping in things you know work. Nine times out of ten you'll find a tired cable or a lint-clogged port — both cheap or free to fix — long before you reach the battery.

- The four suspects: outlet, adapter, cable, and the device's port. Battery is last.
- Cables fail far more often than anything else — they're the usual answer.
- A port packed with pocket lint is a surprisingly common and free fix.
- Test by swapping in a charger and cable you know work, to isolate the culprit.

> **TIP**
>
> Before anything else, try a completely different charger and cable that you know works — on a family member's or from another device. If it charges with those, you've found your answer: the original cable or adapter was the problem, not your device.

2 Meet the Four Suspects

Understanding the chain makes the whole thing logical instead of mysterious. Power travels from the wall, through the adapter, along the cable, into the port, and finally to the battery. A break anywhere in that chain stops the charging.

- The outlet: is it live? Power strips and switched outlets catch people out.
- The adapter (wall block): these can fail quietly, especially cheap ones.
- The cable: the most failure-prone part, as it's bent and tugged constantly.
- The port: the socket on your device, which collects lint and can loosen.
- The battery: genuinely last on the list, and usually fine.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> People instinctively blame the battery because it's the part they can't see — but it's sealed away and protected, while the cable and port take daily abuse out in the open. That's exactly why the battery is the least likely culprit.

3 Start at the Wall: Outlet and Adapter

Begin at the very start of the chain, because an outlet or adapter problem is quick to check and easy to overlook. It's a little embarrassing how often this is the whole answer.

1. Make sure the outlet works — plug in a lamp or another charger to confirm it's live.
2. If it's a switched outlet or a power strip, check the switch is on.
3. Plug the adapter directly into a known-good wall outlet, not a strip, for the test.
4. Try a different adapter (wall block) if you have one — they fail more often than people realize.
5. Make sure the cable is pushed fully into the adapter; a loose connection there stops charging.

TIP

Charging from a weak source — an old low-power USB port on the back of a TV, a nearly-dead power bank, a car socket that's acting up — can look like "not charging" when it's just charging too slowly to notice. A proper wall adapter gives the fairest test.

4 Test the Cable — The Usual Culprit

The cable is the single most common reason things won't charge, because it's flexed, coiled, yanked, and pinched every single day until the wires inside quietly break. It often looks perfectly fine on the outside.

1. Try a different cable that you know works — this alone solves most charging problems.
2. Inspect your cable for kinks, fraying, or bends, especially right at each end where it meets the plug.
3. While plugged in, gently wiggle the cable at the device end; if charging flickers on and off, the cable is failing.
4. Avoid very cheap no-name cables as replacements; a decent cable is worth it for reliability and safety.

WATCH OUT

A cable that's frayed enough to show the wires inside, or that gets hot in one spot, should be thrown away, not used. A damaged cable is both unreliable and a genuine safety hazard — replace it rather than nursing it along.

5 Clean the Charging Port

Here's the fix that delights people because it's free and surprisingly common: the little port on your phone fills with pocket lint, packed in tighter each time you plug in, until the cable can no longer reach the contacts. Cleaning it out can restore charging instantly.

1. Turn the device off first.
2. Shine a light into the charging port and look for a gray fuzzy plug of lint at the bottom.
3. Gently tease it out with a wooden toothpick or a plastic pick — never anything metal.
4. Work slowly and softly; the goal is to lift the lint out, not to poke at the contacts.
5. Plug in again and see if it charges, often much more snugly than before.

WATCH OUT

Never use a metal pin, needle, or paperclip in a charging port — you can damage the delicate contacts or cause a short. A wooden toothpick or plastic pick is safe; metal is not. If you're nervous, this is a gentle thing to let someone experienced do.

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6 Isolate the Culprit by Swapping

The surest way to pin down which link is broken is to swap one thing at a time, changing only one piece between tries. It turns guesswork into certainty.

1. Known-good cable + known-good adapter on your device: if it charges, your old cable or adapter was the problem.
2. Your cable + your adapter on a different device: if that device charges, your cable and adapter are fine — the problem is your device's port or battery.
3. If nothing charges your device but your charger charges other things, suspect the port (clean it) then the battery.
4. Change only one piece at a time, or you won't know which fixed it.

GOOD TO KNOW

This swapping method is exactly how a professional isolates a charging fault — there's no magic to it, just patience and one change at a time. By the end you'll know precisely which part to replace, and you won't waste money replacing the wrong one.

7 If It's a Phone or Tablet

Phones and tablets have their own quirks worth knowing when charging seems stuck. A few are software rather than hardware, and clear with a restart.

1. After trying a known-good cable and adapter, give it fifteen minutes plugged in before judging — a very flat battery takes a while to show signs of life.
2. Restart the device; occasionally charging sticks because of a software hiccup, not a hardware fault.
3. Check the port for lint as above.
4. If it charges from a wall adapter but not a computer's USB port, that's normal — computer ports charge slowly.

TIP

A phone that was completely drained can sit dark for ten or more minutes after you plug it in before any charging symbol appears. That blank screen isn't a dead battery — it's an empty one waking up. Give it twenty minutes before worrying.

8 If It's a Laptop

Laptops add a couple of links to the chain — a larger power brick, sometimes a detachable cable in two parts, and a charging light. Each is worth checking in turn.

1. Check the laptop's charging light comes on when plugged in; no light points to the adapter, cable, or outlet.
2. If the power brick has a cable in two parts, make sure both halves are firmly joined.

3. Feel whether the power brick is completely dead cold after being plugged in for a while — a working one is usually slightly warm.
4. Try the charger on the laptop from both a direct wall outlet and a different one.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> Laptop chargers, especially the cable where it enters the brick or the plug, are a very common failure point because of the constant flexing. A laptop that only charges when the cable is held at a certain angle has a failing charger, not a failing laptop.

9 Wireless Charging Pads

If you charge by setting the phone on a pad, there's a different set of things to check — alignment and cases matter more than cables here.

1. Make sure the pad itself is powered (it usually has its own light) and plugged into a proper adapter.
2. Center the phone on the pad; wireless charging needs the coils to line up, and being off-center stops it.
3. Remove a thick case, a wallet case, or anything metal between the phone and pad.
4. If the pad never works, test the phone with a regular cable to confirm the phone itself still charges.

> **TIP**
> Wireless charging is fussy about position and anything in between. A credit card or a thick case between phone and pad can block it entirely. If a pad suddenly stopped working, start by re-centering the phone and slimming down the case.

10 Let a Dead Battery Recover

A battery that's run completely flat sometimes needs coaxing back, and people often give up right before it would have worked. Genuine patience is the fix here.

1. Plug into a reliable wall adapter and cable you trust.

2. Leave it completely alone for twenty to thirty minutes — don't keep pressing buttons.
3. Watch for a charging or low-battery symbol to appear; that's the sign it's reviving.
4. Once it has a little charge, try turning it on or doing a force restart.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Very drained batteries have a protective sleep that takes a while to wake from. Twenty minutes of quiet charging before expecting any response is normal, not a sign the battery is finished.

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11 Is the Battery Actually Wearing Out?

Batteries do age, and after a few years they hold less charge than they used to. This is normal wear, not a defect — and there are tell-tale signs that the battery, not the charger, is finally the issue.

- It charges fine but drains unusually fast, or dies suddenly at 20 or 30 percent.
- It gets noticeably hot while charging or in use.
- On a phone, the battery-health setting shows a low maximum capacity.
- It only lasts a fraction of the time it did when newer.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> If a battery or the device around it looks swollen, bulged, or puffy, or if the case is bowing, stop using it and don't charge it. A swollen battery is a safety hazard — set the device somewhere safe, away from anything flammable, and have it dealt with properly.

12 Prevent Future Charging Trouble

A few gentle habits make cables and ports last far longer, and spare you most charging headaches down the road.

- Pull cables out by the plug, not the cord, to save the wires where they meet the connector.
- Avoid sharp bends and don't wrap cables tightly around things.
- Keep a spare, decent-quality cable on hand so a failed one isn't an emergency.
- Blow out or gently clean the charging port now and then, especially if you carry the phone in a pocket.
- Don't leave a device charging on soft surfaces that trap heat.

> **TIP**
>
> Keeping one good spare cable in a drawer turns the most common charging failure into a thirty-second swap instead of a scramble. It's the single best bit of charging insurance you can have.

13 Reading the Charging Signs

Part of the confusion around charging is simply not being sure whether it's happening. Each device shows it differently, and knowing the signs stops you from "fixing" something that was working all along.

- Phone/tablet: a lightning bolt on the battery icon, or a large battery symbol when the screen is off, means it's charging.
- A small light near the port (amber or green) on many devices shows charging status.
- Laptops: a charging light and a plug or lightning symbol on the battery icon on screen.
- A quick buzz or chime when you plug in usually means it registered the charger.

TIP

If the battery percentage is slowly climbing over a few minutes, it's charging — even if it feels slow. Checking the percentage at the start and again ten minutes later is a sure way to confirm power is actually flowing.

14 Charging From Computers, Cars, and Power Banks

Not all power sources are equal, and charging from something other than a wall outlet brings its own quirks. A "not charging" worry is sometimes just a weak source doing its slow best.

- A computer's USB port charges slowly, and only when the computer is awake — a sleeping laptop may not charge your phone.
- A car socket may only work when the engine is running, and some are weaker than a wall adapter.
- A power bank that's itself nearly empty won't charge much; charge the power bank first.
- Older or low-power USB ports (on a TV, an alarm clock) trickle power too slowly to keep up with use.

GOOD TO KNOW

If a device charges fine from a wall outlet but not from a computer, car, or power bank, nothing is broken — that source is simply weaker. For the fairest test and the fastest charge, a proper wall adapter is always the one to trust.

15 When to Call Bill

You can safely work through every one of these checks, and most charging problems turn out to be a tired cable or a lint-packed port — cheap or free to fix. But if you've swapped in a known-good charger, cleaned the port, and it still won't charge, if the battery shows signs of wearing out, or if anything looks swollen or gets hot, you don't have to puzzle over it.

I come to you, test each link the way a pro does, clean a port safely, and tell you plainly whether it's a cheap cable, a port repair, a tired battery, or time for a new device — and I'll make sure nothing unsafe is going on first.

- It won't charge even with a known-good charger and a cleaned port.
- The battery drains fast, dies early, or the device runs hot.
- Anything looks swollen, puffy, or bowed — stop and have it checked.
- You'd rather someone safely clean the port or confirm what needs replacing.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Won't charge? Check the chain from the wall inward — the battery is the LEAST likely cause.

I want to...	Do this...
Find the culprit fast	Try a known-good charger and cable first — if it charges, that was the problem
Rule out the start	Confirm the outlet is live and the adapter and cable are pushed fully in
Check the usual cause	Swap the cable; wiggle-test it — flickering charge means it's failing
Try the free fix	Gently remove pocket lint from the port with a wooden toothpick (never metal)
Revive a flat battery	Charge 20-30 minutes before expecting any sign of life
Stop and get help	Anything swollen, puffy, or hot — unplug it and don't charge it
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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