BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

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How to Reset Your Router — and Set It Back Up Without Fear

Restart vs. factory reset, when each is right, and how to put everything back

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

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

"Reset" means two different things. A restart (power-cycle) means unplug the router 30 seconds and plug it back in — it keeps every setting and fixes most glitches, so always try this first. A factory reset uses the hidden Reset button to erase everything back to new; only use it as a last resort, and write down your Wi-Fi name and password first because they get wiped.

If you have a provider's combo box, a factory reset may change your Wi-Fi back to the sticker name. After any factory reset, reuse your old Wi-Fi name and password so most devices rejoin on their own. Never reset because an unexpected call or pop-up told you to.

1 The Short Version

Your internet is acting up, and somewhere you have heard the advice: "just reset the router." It is good advice — but the word "reset" actually covers two very different things, and doing the wrong one can turn a two-minute fix into an afternoon of setting your whole house back up. This guide makes the difference crystal clear, and walks you calmly through each one so you never have to guess.

The short answer: nine times out of ten, the fix you want is a simple restart (unplug it, count to thirty, plug it back in), not a full factory reset. A restart clears glitches and keeps all your settings. A factory reset wipes everything back to the day it came out of the box. You will know exactly when each one is right by the end of this guide.

- "Restart" (power-cycle) = unplug, wait, plug back in. Keeps all your settings. Try this first, almost always.
- "Factory reset" = press the hidden reset button to erase everything back to new. Only a last resort.
- Before any factory reset, write down your Wi-Fi name and password — you will need them to put things back.

- If the box came from your internet company, there are a few extra things to know — covered here.
- When it feels like too much, this is a very common and very welcome call for Bill.

> **TIP**
> If you only remember one thing: try the 30-second power-cycle first. It fixes the large majority of "the internet is being weird" problems and it cannot hurt anything or erase a single setting.

2 Restart vs. Factory Reset — The Difference That Matters Most

These two words get used as if they mean the same thing, and that mix-up is behind a lot of unnecessary stress. Here is the plain-English difference, and it is worth getting clear before you touch anything.

A restart (also called a power-cycle or reboot) simply turns the router off and on again. Everything it remembers — your Wi-Fi name, your password, every device you have ever connected — stays exactly as it was. It is the gentle one.

A factory reset is the drastic one: it erases the router's memory completely and returns it to the state it was in when it was brand new, as if you had just unboxed it. Your custom Wi-Fi name and password are gone, and you (or your internet company) have to set it all up again.

	Restart (power-cycle)	Factory reset
What it does	Turns it off and on	Erases everything back to new
Your Wi-Fi name & password	Kept	Wiped — must be set up again
How long it takes	About 2-3 minutes	15-45 minutes to rebuild

When to use it	First, for almost any glitch	Last resort, when told to

GOOD TO KNOW

Think of a restart as waking someone with a nap and a factory reset as giving them amnesia. You almost always just want the nap. The amnesia is only for when the router's settings have become so tangled that starting fresh is genuinely the cleanest path.

3 What's Really Going On

It helps to know why restarting works so often, because then it stops feeling like a magic trick you are afraid to get wrong. A router is a small computer that runs every hour of every day for years without a break. Like any computer, little errors can quietly pile up in its memory — a connection that got stuck, a temporary address that expired, a bit of traffic that jammed. None of this is a fault you caused, and none of it means the router is broken.

When you power-cycle it, all of that temporary clutter is swept away and the router starts its day fresh, reconnecting cleanly to your internet company. That is why "turn it off and on again" became the famous first step — not because it is lazy advice, but because it genuinely resolves the single most common category of home-internet trouble.

> *A restart clears the clutter. A factory reset clears everything. Reach for the first long before the second.*

4 First, Write Down What You'll Need

Before you do anything more involved than a restart, spend two minutes gathering a few details. This is the single best way to make sure a reset never leaves you stranded, because the thing most people lose in a factory reset is simply the knowledge of how to get back on their own Wi-Fi.

- Your Wi-Fi network name (the name you pick from the list on your phone).
- Your Wi-Fi password (the one you type to join).
- If you have never changed them, the factory name and password are usually printed on a sticker on the router itself.
- The name of your internet company and, ideally, their support phone number.
- If your box is a combined modem-and-router from your provider, any setup card or account login they gave you.

> **WATCH OUT**
> If you plan to do a factory reset, do NOT rely on remembering the Wi-Fi password "because every device already knows it." After the reset, the router forgets it too, and if nobody wrote it down, nobody can rejoin. Write it on a card and tape it to the router before you reset anything.

5 The 30-Second Power-Cycle — Try This First

This is the gentle restart, and it is the right first move for almost any internet hiccup: slow pages, a device that dropped off, "no internet" warnings, or things just acting strange. It keeps every setting and takes about three minutes.

1. Find your equipment. You may have one box, or two stacked together (a modem and a router).
2. Unplug the power cord from the back of the router — and the modem too, if it is a separate box.
3. Wait a full 30 seconds. Counting slowly to thirty matters; it lets the box fully power down and lets your internet company's end register that it went away.

4. If you have two boxes, plug the modem back in FIRST and wait two to three minutes until its lights stop blinking and settle.
5. Then plug the router back in and wait another two to three minutes for its lights to settle.
6. Try the internet again on your phone or computer.

> **TIP**
>
> No buttons, no menus, no settings — just the power cord. This is why the power-cycle is safe to do any time: there is nothing to erase and nothing to get wrong.

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 When a Restart Isn't Enough

If you have power-cycled and the trouble is still there, don't jump straight to a factory reset. There is a short list of calmer things to check first, because a factory reset is a lot of work and often not the real cure.

- Is it just one device, or every device? If only one gadget is misbehaving, the problem is that gadget, not the router — resetting the router will not help.
- Are the router's lights normal, or is an internet/online light red, off, or blinking in a way it usually isn't? That often points to your internet company, not your settings.
- Did this start right after a storm or a power blip? A second power-cycle after everything has fully settled often does the trick.
- Is there a known outage in your area? A quick check (next chapters cover both) can save you a pointless reset.

GOOD TO KNOW

A factory reset only helps when the problem is the router's own saved settings — a password you can't recall, a setting that got changed, a setup that has become hopelessly tangled. For "the internet is slow or down," it usually changes nothing, so it is worth ruling out the simpler causes first.

7 ISP Gateway vs. Your Own Router — Know Which You Have

This is the most important thing to sort out before a factory reset, because it changes what the reset does and who has to set it back up. There are two common setups in a home.

- A provider "gateway" or "combo box": one box from your internet company (Spectrum, AT&T, and the like) that is both the modem and the router in one. Factory-resetting it wipes the Wi-Fi settings the company (or you) configured.
- Your own separate router: a modem from the provider, plus a router you bought (such as an eero, Netgear, or TP-Link) plugged into it. Here you would usually reset the router you bought, not the provider's modem.

WATCH OUT

If you have a provider gateway and you factory-reset it, the Wi-Fi name and password often change back to whatever is printed on the box's sticker — not the name you have been using. Every device in the house then has to be pointed at the new (sticker) name. This surprises people, so if you are unsure which setup you have, it is a good moment to call me before you press anything.

8 How to Do a True Factory Reset

If you have decided a factory reset really is warranted — you cannot get into the settings, the Wi-Fi password is truly lost, or support has specifically told you to — here is how to do it properly. Almost every router does this the same way: with a small recessed button.

1. Make sure the router is plugged in and powered on.
2. Find the Reset button. It is almost always a tiny hole on the back labeled "Reset," recessed so you cannot press it by accident.
3. Straighten a paper clip, press gently into the hole, and hold the button down. You will feel it click.
4. Keep holding for about 10 to 30 seconds — until the lights blink all together or go off and come back. (The exact time varies by brand; holding 30 seconds is a safe bet.)
5. Release and wait several minutes while the router rebuilds itself. The lights will cycle before settling.

WATCH OUT

Hold the button steadily — a quick tap often does nothing, or only restarts the router. And be sure it really is the Reset button and not a WPS or pairing button next to it. If there are two buttons and you are not sure which is which, stop and check the label, or call for help, rather than guess.

9 Setting It Back Up After a Factory Reset

After a factory reset, the router is a blank slate, so you have to introduce it to your internet and give it a Wi-Fi name and password again. Take it one calm step at a time — there is no rush, and you cannot break anything by going slowly.

1. Give it a few minutes to fully come back to life after the reset before you start.
2. Connect to its starting Wi-Fi: look on the router's sticker for the default network name and password, and join that from your phone or computer.

3. Open the maker's setup app or the setup web page (the sticker or the quick-start card tells you which). Many modern routers, like eero, walk you through it entirely in their phone app.
4. Follow the prompts to create your Wi-Fi name and a strong password. You can reuse the old name and password so your devices rejoin on their own — just type them exactly as before.
5. Let it apply the settings and confirm you have internet before moving on to your other devices.

> **TIP**
>
> Reusing your old Wi-Fi name and password is a lovely shortcut: if you set them back to exactly what they were, most of your devices — phones, TVs, printers, smart speakers — reconnect automatically, with nothing more to do on them. Getting even one character different is what forces you to redo every device, so type carefully.

10 Reconnecting Your Devices

If you changed the Wi-Fi name or password (or a provider gateway reset them for you), each device needs to be pointed at the new network once. It is the same simple routine on everything, and you only do it one time per device.

1. On the device, open its Wi-Fi settings (on phones and tablets this is in Settings; on a TV or printer it is in the network menu).
2. Pick your Wi-Fi name from the list.
3. Type the password carefully — it is case-sensitive, so capital letters matter.
4. Wait for it to confirm it is connected before moving to the next device.

- Start with the devices you use most — your phone, your computer, your TV.
- Don't forget the quiet ones: smart speakers, video doorbells, thermostats, and printers all remember Wi-Fi and will need rejoining if the name or password changed.
- If a smart device has no screen, its phone app is the way to reconnect it.

GOOD TO KNOW

This is exactly why writing the password on a card first pays off: reconnecting ten devices is easy when the password is sitting in front of you, and miserable when you are trying to recall it from memory.

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11 When NOT to Reset

A reset is not always the answer, and reaching for it too quickly can create new problems. Here are the times to pause and look elsewhere first.

- When only one device is having trouble — fix or restart that device, not the whole network.
- When your internet company is having an outage — no reset on your end will bring back service that is down at their end.
- When everything is actually working fine and you are resetting "just in case" — there is no benefit, and a factory reset would cost you your settings for nothing.
- When you do not yet have your Wi-Fi name and password written down and you are considering a factory reset — gather those first.
- When a pop-up, phone call, or email is pressuring you to reset your router "for security" — that is a common scam tactic; never follow reset instructions from an unexpected message.

WATCH OUT

Be especially wary of anyone who contacts you out of the blue and urgently tells you to reset or reconfigure your router. Real internet companies do not cold-call you to walk you through router settings. When in doubt, hang up and call your provider back on the number on your bill — or call me.

12 Troubleshooting After a Reset

Occasionally the internet does not come straight back after a reset, and that is usually nothing serious. Work down this short list and most hiccups clear on their own.

1. Give it more time. After a factory reset especially, a router and modem can take five to ten minutes to fully reconnect to your internet company. Patience alone fixes a lot.
2. Check the cables. Make sure the cord from the wall or modem is snug in the right port on the router (the one usually labeled "Internet" or "WAN," often a different color).
3. Power-cycle the pair again, modem first, then router, waiting a few minutes between them.
4. If the internet light stays red or off, the issue may be at your provider — call them and tell them you reset your equipment.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> If your internet company's box needs to be "re-activated" after a reset, their support line can do it from their end in a couple of minutes once you tell them the equipment was reset. It is a routine request for them.

13 Make It Easier Next Time

A few minutes of setup now means a reset never has to be stressful again. These small habits are the ones I set up for people so a future hiccup is a non-event.

- Write your Wi-Fi name and password on a card and tape it inside a cupboard or to the bottom of the router.
- Keep the router's quick-start card or the maker's app installed on your phone, so setup is a tap away.
- Jot down which box is the modem and which is the router, and the order to restart them (modem first).

- Save your internet company's support number in your phone under a name you'll recognise.
- If you use a provider gateway, note the sticker Wi-Fi name and password too, since a reset falls back to those.

> **TIP**
>
> A strong Wi-Fi password is worth keeping even through a reset — just reuse the same good one. There is a separate Bill's Home Tech guide on choosing a strong, shareable Wi-Fi password if you would like a hand making one you can actually remember.

14 Resetting a Mesh System Is a Little Different

If your Wi-Fi comes from a mesh system — several matching units placed around the house, such as eero, Netgear Orbi, or TP-Link Deco — the rules change in a helpful way. You rarely use the little button. Almost everything is done through the system's phone app, which is gentler and harder to get wrong.

- A restart is usually a button in the app, or simply unplugging the main unit and plugging it back in.
- A factory reset of the whole system is also done from the app, which then walks you through setting it up fresh.
- Because the app remembers your account, a mesh system is often quicker to rebuild than a traditional router.

1. Open the system's app (eero, Orbi, or Deco) on your phone.
2. Look under Settings or the main unit's options for Restart or Reboot — try that first.
3. Only if truly needed, look for Factory Reset or Delete Network, and let the app guide the rebuild.
4. You can usually reuse your old Wi-Fi name and password so devices rejoin on their own.

TIP

For a mesh system, reach for the app before the button — the physical reset button on a mesh unit can remove just that one unit from the network, which creates a new puzzle rather than solving one. There are Bill's Home Tech guides for the common mesh systems if you'd like the step-by-step for yours.

15 What the Lights Do While It Comes Back

After you restart or reset, the lights will put on a little show before settling, and knowing that's normal saves a lot of needless worry. A blinking or color-changing light during the first few minutes does not mean something went wrong — it means the router is waking up and reconnecting, step by step.

- Right after power returns, expect blinking, cycling, or color changes for a minute or two — this is normal waking-up behaviour.
- A steady "internet" or "online" light (often white, green, or blue) is the sign it has reconnected successfully.
- If a light is still red or off after five to ten minutes, that's when it's worth acting — see the troubleshooting chapter.

GOOD TO KNOW

The temptation is to restart again the moment you see blinking, but interrupting the router mid-wake-up only starts the clock over. Give it the full few minutes to settle before you decide anything is wrong — patience is genuinely part of the fix here.

16 When to Call Bill

Resetting a router is well within reach for most people, and this guide is written so you can do the whole thing calmly on your own. But there is no prize for wrestling with it, and a few of these steps — telling a gateway apart from your own router, rebuilding the setup after a factory reset, getting every device back on afterward — are faster and far less stressful with someone beside you who does it every week.

I come to you here in Portage County, sort out whether a simple restart or a true reset is what you actually need, set the router back up cleanly, and get every device in the house reconnected before I leave — then I write down the Wi-Fi details and the restart steps so you are never stuck again. With 30+ years of professional experience, routers hold no mystery for me, and no question is too small.

- You are not sure whether you have a provider gateway or your own router.
- A factory reset left you unable to get back online or back on your Wi-Fi.
- The internet light stays red and you are not sure if it is your gear or the provider.
- Someone contacted you urgently telling you to reset your router and it felt off.
- You would simply rather have it done right, once, with nothing left to worry about.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this by the router. Try the gentle restart first; save the factory reset for last.

I want to…	Do this…
Fix a glitch (keep settings)	Power-cycle: unplug 30 seconds, plug modem back first, then router
Know which reset I need	Restart for slow/dropped internet; factory reset only to wipe settings
Protect myself before a reset	Write down your Wi-Fi name and password first — tape it to the router
Do a true factory reset	Hold the recessed Reset button with a paper clip ~30 seconds
Set it back up after	Join the sticker Wi-Fi, open the setup app, reuse your old name & password
Reconnect a device	Its Wi-Fi settings pick your network type the password carefully
Avoid a mistake	Don't factory-reset for an outage, or because a stranger told you to
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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