BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

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Restart Modem AND Router in the Right Order

The two minute fix for most internet hiccups — done in the order that actually works

Plain-English home-network help from:

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

Restarting clears most internet hiccups, but order matters when you have separate boxes. Unplug both the modem and router, wait 30 seconds, then plug the MODEM back in first and wait one to three minutes until its lights are steady — especially the "Internet" or "Online" light. Only then plug the router back in and wait another minute or two.

If you have one combined box, just restart it and wait two to five minutes. Always use the power cord, never the recessed reset pinhole, which wipes your Wi Fi settings. If you have to restart every day or two, that signals a deeper problem worth looking at.

1 The Short Version

"Have you tried turning it off and on again?" is a cliche because it works — a huge share of internet problems clear up the moment you restart your equipment. But there is a right way and a wrong way, and the order matters. Done in the wrong order, a restart can leave you worse off for ten minutes while everything re sorts itself. Done right, it is a reliable two minute cure.

The golden rule: restart the modem first and let it fully come back before you restart the router. The modem is the box that talks to your provider; the router shares that connection to your home. The modem has to be awake and settled before the router can get a good connection from it. This guide shows the exact order, how long to wait, and how to tell when each box is ready.

- Restart fixes a big share of "it was working yesterday" internet problems.
- Order matters: modem first, let it fully settle, then the router.
- Unplug, wait 30 seconds, plug back in — and be patient while the lights come back.
- If restarting does not help, the restart has at least ruled out a simple glitch.

TIP

Before you unplug anything, take a quick phone photo of the lights on each box while they look normal. Later, when you are waiting for them to come back, you will know exactly what "all good" is supposed to look like — which colors and which steady versus blinking pattern mean ready.

2 Modem, Router, or Both in One?

To restart in the right order, you first need to know what you have. Some homes have two separate boxes; many now have a single combined unit from the internet provider that does both jobs. Take a moment to identify yours — it decides whether there is an order to follow at all.

- Modem: the box where the cable, phone line, or fiber from outside plugs in. It talks to your provider.
- Router: the box your devices connect to by Wi Fi or cable. It often has antennas or a Wi Fi name on a sticker.
- Combined unit ("gateway"): one box that does both — common from cable and phone companies.
- If you have one box with the outside line AND your Wi Fi, you have a combined unit and there is only one thing to restart.

GOOD TO KNOW

If you have a combined unit, this whole "order" question disappears — you just restart the one box and wait. The order only matters when the modem and router are separate, because then one must wake up before the other.

3 Why the Order Matters

The modem's job is to establish the connection with your provider — a handshake that can take a minute or two of negotiating before the line is solid. The router's job is to take that solid connection and share it out. If you bring the router back before the modem has finished its handshake, the router grabs an incomplete connection and may serve up Wi Fi that says "connected" but has no real internet behind it.

Restarting modem first, and waiting for it to fully settle, means the router wakes into a healthy, ready line and distributes it cleanly. It is the difference between pouring the coffee after it has brewed versus mid drip — wait for the first step to finish and the rest goes smoothly.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> The most common restart mistake is impatience — plugging the router back in before the modem's lights have stopped blinking. If you rush it, you often end up with "connected, no internet" and have to start over. The waiting is not wasted time; it is the fix doing its work.

4 The Right Order, Step by Step (Separate Boxes)

If you have a separate modem and router, follow this exact sequence. The whole thing takes about five minutes, most of which is patient waiting.

1. Unplug the power from BOTH the modem and the router (and turn off any battery backup).
2. Wait a full 30 seconds — count it out — so both boxes fully reset.
3. Plug the MODEM back in first. Do nothing else yet.
4. Wait until the modem's lights are solid and settled — usually one to three minutes, sometimes longer.
5. Now plug the ROUTER back in and wait another one to two minutes for its lights to settle.

6. Test the internet on a device; if it works, you are done.

> **TIP**
>
> If your boxes are plugged into a power strip, unplug each one individually rather than flipping the strip — that way you control the order they come back on, which is the whole point of the exercise.

5 The Right Way (Combined Unit)

If you have a single combined unit, the order question goes away, but patience still matters. Give it the full time to re establish its connection with your provider before you judge whether the restart worked.

1. Unplug the power from the combined unit (and any battery backup).
2. Wait a full 30 seconds.
3. Plug it back in and leave it completely alone.
4. Wait two to five minutes for all its lights to settle — this box is doing two jobs, so give it time.
5. Test the internet once the lights look normal.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Many combined units have a small reset pinhole as well as the power cord. For a normal restart, use the POWER — never the pinhole. The pinhole wipes all settings, including your Wi Fi name and password, and creates a much bigger problem than the one you started with.

6 Reading the Lights While You Wait

The lights on your equipment are a progress bar, if you know how to read them. You do not need to know every light — just the general story they tell as the box comes back to life.

- Blinking usually means "working on it" — the box is negotiating or syncing; keep waiting.
- Steady (solid) usually means "ready" — that part of the job is done.
- A power light plus a steady internet/online light is the pair that matters most.
- Red or orange on a key light often means it has not connected yet — give it more time before worrying.

> **TIP**
>
> The light you most want to watch is often labeled "Internet," "Online," "WAN," or a little globe icon. When that one goes from blinking to steady, the modem has made its connection with your provider — that is your cue that it is safe to bring the router back.

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 How Often Should You Restart?

A restart is a fine fix for an occasional glitch, but if you find yourself doing it every few days, the restart is treating a symptom of a deeper problem that deserves attention.

- Once in a while, when the internet acts up: perfectly normal and healthy.
- Every day or two to keep things working: a sign of failing equipment, overheating, or a line problem.
- On a timer or schedule: unnecessary for most homes and not a substitute for fixing a real fault.

WATCH OUT

If you are restarting your equipment constantly just to keep the internet alive, that is not something you should have to live with. It usually points at an aging modem, a box that overheats, or a line issue — all things worth having looked at rather than endured.

8 When a Restart Doesn't Fix It

If a proper, in order restart does not bring the internet back, you have still learned something valuable: the problem is not a simple glitch. The next steps narrow it down.

1. Check whether the outage is just you: look for a provider outage notice on your phone's cellular data, or call their automated line.
2. Confirm the cables are snug — the line from the wall into the modem, and the cable from the modem to the router.
3. Try a computer plugged straight into the modem with a cable to see if the internet itself is up.
4. If the modem never shows a steady "online" light, the problem is between the modem and your provider — call them.

WATCH OUT

Resist the urge to press the recessed reset pinhole out of frustration. That factory resets the box and erases your Wi Fi name and password, turning a connection hiccup into a full reconfiguration job. When a normal restart fails, the next step is a phone call, not the pinhole.

9 Make Restarts Easier Next Time

A few small preparations turn the next restart from a scavenger hunt into a calm two minute routine.

- Label each box with a small sticker: "1 — modem (plug in first)" and "2 — router."
- Keep the boxes somewhere you can actually reach the plugs without crawling behind furniture.
- Keep that phone photo of the normal lights so you know what "ready" looks like.
- Make sure the boxes have air around them — a box that overheats needs restarting far more often.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Giving your equipment breathing room is an underrated fix. Boxes crammed into a closed cabinet or stacked on top of each other run hot, and heat is one of the top reasons a modem or router starts dropping and needing constant restarts.

10 If You Rent Your Equipment

Many people rent their modem or combined unit from their internet provider for a monthly fee. That changes a few things worth knowing when it comes to restarts and replacements.

- A rented box is the provider's to fix — if it keeps failing, insist they replace it at no charge.
- You can still restart a rented box normally with its power cord; that is always allowed.
- Do not use the recessed reset pinhole on a rented box — it can require a call to re activate.
- If you rent, ask what the monthly fee is — buying your own equipment often pays for itself within a year or two.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> I often find people paying a monthly rental fee for an old, tired box that is the very reason they keep losing internet. If that is you, it can be worth owning the right equipment instead — I'll tell you honestly whether it makes sense for your setup and help you pick, so you stop paying rent on your own frustration.

11 Give Your Equipment Room to Breathe

Heat is one of the quiet, under appreciated reasons a modem or router starts dropping and needing constant restarts. These boxes run warm, and when they cannot shed that heat they get unstable — exactly the symptom a restart only briefly relieves.

1. Pull the boxes out of any closed cabinet, drawer, or tight shelf.
2. Leave a few inches of open air on every side, and never stack boxes directly on each other.
3. Keep them out of direct sun and away from heat vents or radiators.
4. If a box is hot to the touch and drops often, better airflow alone may cure the dropouts.

WATCH OUT

A box crammed into a warm, enclosed spot can overheat enough to drop the connection every afternoon as the room warms up. If your internet reliably fails at the hottest part of the day, heat is the prime suspect — and the fix is simply giving it air, not a bigger plan.

12 Quick Questions About Restarting

A few things come up every time, so here are the plain answers.

- "How long should I leave it unplugged?" Thirty seconds is plenty; longer does no extra good.
- "Will I lose my Wi Fi name and password?" No — a power restart keeps all your settings. Only the reset pinhole wipes them.
- "Should I restart on a schedule?" Not needed for most homes; constant restarts point at a real fault.
- "Do I need to restart my devices too?" Usually not, but a phone or computer that still won't connect after the boxes are back often just needs its own quick restart.

GOOD TO KNOW

If a single device refuses to come back online after everything else is fine, the problem is that one device, not your internet. Restart just that device, or forget and rejoin the Wi Fi on it — no need to restart the whole network again.

13 When to Call Bill

A restart is the right first move for almost any internet hiccup, and now you know how to do it properly. But if restarting has become a daily ritual, if the lights never settle the way they should, or if you are not confident which box is which, that is worth a steady hand.

I come to you, sort out exactly what your equipment is doing, and fix the reason you keep having to restart — whether that is an overheating box, a tired modem, a loose line, or a setting that needs correcting. The goal is internet that simply stays on, so a restart goes back to being a once in a blue moon thing.

- You are restarting every day or two just to stay online.
- The lights never settle to a steady, healthy pattern.
- You are not sure which box is the modem and which is the router.
- A proper restart did not help and you would rather not keep guessing.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this by your equipment. Modem first, patience always.

I want to...	Do this...
Know what I have	One box with the outside line + Wi Fi = combined unit (restart just the one)
Restart (separate boxes)	Unplug both, wait 30s, plug in MODEM first, let it settle, THEN the router
Restart (combined unit)	Unplug, wait 30s, plug back in, wait 2–5 min for lights to settle
Know when it's ready	Watch the "Internet/Online" light go from blinking to steady
Avoid the big mistake	Use the POWER cord — never the recessed reset pinhole
Restart constantly?	That's a deeper problem — overheating, tired modem, or the line
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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