



An Extended Guide · No. 1991

Swollen Phone or Laptop Battery: What to Do Right Now

Calm, safe steps for a
puffy or bulging battery

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! A swollen or damaged lithium battery is a fire risk

If a phone, tablet, laptop, or power bank battery looks puffy, bulging, or has pushed the case apart, stop using it and stop charging it right now. Do not press on it, bend it, or try to poke a hole in it, and never toss it in the regular trash or recycling — a damaged lithium battery can catch fire. Set the device somewhere away from anything that burns, like on a concrete floor or in a metal container, and take it to a proper battery-recycling drop-off or your county household-hazardous-waste site. If it is hot, hissing, smoking, or leaking, get away from it and call 911.

A swelling battery — let's handle it calmly and safely

If your phone, tablet, or laptop battery looks puffy and you're feeling a flutter of worry, you did the right thing opening this. A swollen battery is a real hazard, but handled calmly it's very manageable.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. In 30+ years I've learned that the scary-sounding problems are usually the ones with the clearest, simplest steps. This is one of them. We'll go slow.

The short version: stop using it, stop charging it, don't press on it, and get it to the right place for safe recycling. The rest of this guide walks each of those steps so you feel sure, not rushed.

★ You can call me while you do this

If you'd feel better with someone on the line, call or text me at (330) 200-8042. I'll stay with you while you set the device somewhere safe and figure out where to take it.

What to do right now, in order

If you remember nothing else, remember these steps — in this order.

- ❑ **Stop using it and stop charging it.** Unplug it now.
- ❑ **Power it off** if you safely can.
- ❑ **Don't press, bend, or puncture** the battery or the bulging case.
- ❑ **Move it away from anything that burns** — onto bare concrete or into a metal container.
- ❑ **Don't put it in the trash or recycling bin** — a damaged lithium battery can catch fire.
- ❑ **Take it to a battery-recycling drop-off or your county hazardous-waste site.**
- ❑ **If it's hot, hissing, smoking, or leaking — get away and call 911.**

! The one thing never to do

Never try to 'pop,' flatten, or puncture a swollen battery to let the air out. There's no air — it's gas from a chemical reaction, and breaking the battery open can start a fire that's very hard to put out.

What a swollen battery actually is

A little plain-English background makes the safety steps make sense — and takes some of the fear out of it.

The rechargeable battery inside a phone, tablet, or laptop is a lithium battery. As it ages, is damaged, overheats, or simply wears out, it can start a chemical reaction inside that makes gas. The gas has nowhere to go, so the soft battery pouch puffs up like a little pillow.

That swelling is the battery telling you it's no longer safe to use. It isn't going to be fixed, and it won't settle back down. The goal now isn't to save the battery — it's to handle it safely and move on to a repair or replacement.

✓ Swelling is a warning, not an emergency by itself

A battery that's puffy but cool, quiet, and not leaking is a problem you have time to handle carefully. It becomes urgent only if it gets hot, hisses, smokes, or leaks — then it's a 911 call.

How to tell a battery is swelling

Sometimes it's obvious; often it's subtle. Here are the signs I tell everyone to watch for.

- The back of the phone or tablet is **bulging or no longer flat**.
- The screen is **lifting at an edge or corner**, or looks slightly raised.
- A laptop **won't sit flat** and rocks on the table, or the trackpad is hard to click or pushed up.
- The case feels like it's **coming apart at the seams**.
- You can spin the laptop or phone and it **wobbles on a curved back**.
- Rarely, a faint chemical or sweet smell — treat that as more serious.

! Don't keep using a device that shows these signs

It's tempting to finish 'just one more thing,' but a swelling battery under pressure from a tight case is exactly where trouble starts. Set it down safely and read on.

Step one: stop and unplug

The first move is the easiest and the most important. Take the energy out of the situation.

Unplug the device from the charger right away. Charging a swollen battery adds energy and heat to a battery that's already struggling, which is the last thing it needs. Then, if the device will let you and it's safe to touch, power it all the way off.

Don't set it back on a charger 'just to check,' and don't keep it in your pocket or bag. From this moment on, the device is something to move carefully to a safe spot, not something to use.

✓ Cool and quiet is what you want

Leave it somewhere cool, open, and away from clutter. Heat is the enemy, so never put it in sunlight, a hot car, or — despite what you may have heard — the freezer. The freezer doesn't help and can make things worse.

Step two: move it somewhere it can't start a fire

If the worst did happen, you want the device somewhere that a small flare-up can't spread. This is simple to do.

Set the device on a surface that won't burn and away from anything that will — a bare concrete garage floor, a ceramic tile, or inside an empty metal container like a cookie tin or an old pot. Keep it clear of paper, bedding, curtains, furniture, and anything flammable.

Leave it there, undisturbed, until you can take it in for recycling. You don't need to watch it every second — just give it a safe home for a day or two rather than leaving it on the nightstand or kitchen counter.

! Don't seal it up tight

A metal tin with the lid resting on, or set in an open spot, is good. Don't wrap it airtight or bury it in a drawer — a little ventilation and a non-flammable surface are what you're after.

The things that make it worse

Most of staying safe here is simply not doing a few tempting things. Here's the 'never' list.

- **Never puncture, cut, or flatten it** to 'let the swelling out.'
- **Never press hard, bend, or pry** at the bulging case.
- **Never keep charging or using it** once you've seen the swelling.
- **Never put it in the freezer** — condensation and stress can make it worse.
- **Never throw it in the trash or the regular recycling** — that's how battery fires start in trucks and plants.
- **Never mail it** without following the recycler's special instructions for damaged batteries.

! If it's venting, it's a 911 situation

A battery that's hot to the touch, hissing, smoking, leaking, or swelling fast in front of you is past the careful-handling stage. Get yourself and others away from it and call 911. Don't carry a burning or smoking device through the house.

If the battery is a separate, removable pack

Most modern phones and laptops have the battery sealed inside — don't try to open those. But some older laptops and tools have a battery that pops out.

If — and only if — your device has a battery that's designed to come out by hand (a latch or release, no tools, no prying), and the battery and device are cool and quiet, you can remove it and set the battery itself somewhere safe. If it takes force or tools, or anything is warm, leave it in and take the whole device in as it is.

If you do remove a loose battery and its metal contacts are exposed, put a strip of electrical or masking tape over them so they can't touch other metal. Then give the battery the same safe, non-flammable spot.

★ When in doubt, don't open it

There's no prize for taking a device apart. If you're unsure whether a battery is meant to come out, leave it sealed and bring the whole thing to me or to a repair shop. Call (330) 200-8042 and I'll tell you which kind you have.

Two kinds of households, two sets of needs

The steps are the same, but the right next move depends on whether you're handling your own device or helping someone else from a distance.

If it's your own phone or laptop

You can see it, touch it, and act right now. Your job is to work the steps calmly and get it to a recycler.

- Unplug and power down before anything else.
- Move it to a cool, non-flammable spot away from clutter.
- Look up the nearest battery-recycling drop-off while it rests safely.
- Plan the repair or replacement — back up your photos first if you can.

If you're helping a parent or friend by phone

You can't touch it, so you're their calm voice. Talk them through the 'stop' steps first and don't let them experiment.

- Have them unplug it immediately and set it down — don't keep inspecting.
- Walk them to a safe surface: concrete floor, tile, or a metal pot.
- Be clear about the 'nevers' — no pressing, poking, or freezer.
- If anything is hot or smoking, tell them to leave it and call 911.

★ I can guide either one of you

Whether it's your device or you're helping a loved one across town, I'm glad to be the steady voice on the phone. Call or text (330) 200-8042 and we'll handle it together, one step at a time.

Where to take a swollen battery for safe disposal

This is the step people get stuck on, so let's make it concrete. A swollen battery needs a proper recycler, not your curb.

Many home-improvement stores, phone shops, and battery stores host free battery-recycling bins through a national program called Call2Recycle. Your county also runs a household-hazardous-waste collection site. Because a swollen battery counts as damaged, it's safest to call ahead — some drop-off bins take only undamaged batteries, while the hazardous-waste site will take the damaged ones.

If the device is going to a repair shop for a new battery, the shop will usually take the old swollen one off your hands and recycle it correctly. That's often the simplest path of all.

✓ A quick phone call saves a wasted trip

Before you drive anywhere, call the drop-off and say plainly, 'I have a swollen phone battery — do you take damaged lithium batteries?' Two minutes on the phone means you go to the right place the first time.

Getting your photos and data off safely

Naturally you want what's on the device. If it's still cool and working, you may be able to rescue your things — carefully and briefly.

If the device still turns on and is not hot, you can connect it to a computer or let it back up to the cloud long enough to save your photos, contacts, and messages. Keep the session short, keep an eye on the temperature, and don't leave it charging unattended. The moment it warms up or acts strange, stop.

If it won't turn on, don't force it. A repair shop can often recover your data when they replace the battery, and that's far safer than nursing a failing battery through a long backup.

★ Let me help you get your photos first

Losing the pictures is what most folks dread. On a visit, or even on a quick screen-share, I can help you back up everything safely before the device goes in for a new battery. Call (330) 200-8042.

Is the device worth saving?

Once the battery is out of the picture, you face a simple question: new battery, or new device? Here's how I think it through with folks.

Many phones, tablets, and laptops can get a fresh battery from a reputable repair shop or the maker's service, and then they're good as new for years. If the device is otherwise in good shape and still does what you need, a battery replacement is usually the sensible, thrifty choice.

If the device was already old, slow, or struggling, a swollen battery may be the nudge toward replacing it. There's no single right answer — it depends on the device and on you.

✓ Insist on a quality replacement battery

Whoever does the work, ask that they use a genuine or certified replacement battery, not the cheapest copy. The battery is the one part where quality really matters for your safety — a point we make in our charger-shopping guide too.

Keeping it from happening again

You can't make a battery last forever, but a few gentle habits make swelling far less likely.

- **Keep devices out of heat** — no hot cars, sunny windowsills, or under a pillow while charging.
- **Use a good charger and cable** from a reputable maker; cheap no-name ones are a common culprit.
- **Don't leave it charging on soft surfaces** like a bed or couch that trap heat.
- **Retire a battery that no longer holds a charge** rather than nursing it for years.
- **Charge removable packs** where you can see them, not overnight unattended.

✓ Old gadgets in a drawer, too

A forgotten tablet or power bank in a drawer can swell quietly over the years. When you sort your cables, give any old battery-powered gear a quick look-over and recycle what's puffy.

A special word about power banks

Portable chargers — power banks — hold a big lithium battery, and they've been a repeat source of trouble. They deserve the same care.

A swollen, dented, or damaged power bank follows exactly the same rules: stop using and charging it, don't puncture it, keep it off anything flammable, and recycle it at a proper drop-off — never the trash. Because power banks have been recalled fairly often for fire risk, it's also worth checking whether yours is on a recall list.

Our guide on charger and battery recalls shows you how to look that up in a couple of minutes, and our rechargeable-battery guide covers buying and storing them safely.

! Don't carry a damaged power bank in a bag

A damaged power bank jostling loose in a purse or carry-on is a genuine fire risk. If yours is swollen or dented, set it aside safely at home and recycle it — don't travel with it.

Common mistakes people make

A few understandable instincts actually make a swollen battery more dangerous. Now you'll know to skip them.

- **Trying to keep using it** until a replacement arrives — don't; the risk isn't worth the few days.
- **Pressing the case back together** or taping it down flat — that stresses the battery.
- **Freezing it** in hopes of calming it down — it doesn't work.
- **Tossing it in the trash** to be done with it — a dangerous, and in many places illegal, move.
- **Charging it overnight** after noticing swelling — exactly the wrong time to leave it unattended.

! When in doubt, treat it as the more serious case

If you're ever unsure whether a battery is 'just puffy' or actually dangerous, err toward caution: keep it isolated on a non-flammable surface and, if anything feels off, call for help. No device is worth a fire.

If you look after an older parent's devices

Swollen batteries often turn up in the devices that get used gently for years — exactly the ones an older parent might keep. A little watching goes a long way.

When you visit, give their phone, tablet, and any old laptop a quick once-over: does the back sit flat, does the laptop rock, does the screen lift at a corner? Older folks may not notice a slow bulge, and may keep using a device that's well past its battery's life.

Make sure they know the one rule that matters most: if a device looks puffy, set it down, stop charging it, and call you or me. The steps in this guide are easy to follow with a calm voice on the phone.

★ I'm happy to do that check-up

On any visit I'll look over the household's devices for swelling and other battery trouble, and sort out safe recycling for anything that's aged out. It's a quiet bit of peace of mind. Call (330) 200-8042.

Your quick reference

The whole response on one page, for when you need it fast.

- ❑ Unplug it and power it off.
- ❑ Don't press, poke, bend, or puncture it.
- ❑ Set it on concrete, tile, or in a metal container, away from anything flammable.
- ❑ Keep it cool — no heat, no sunlight, no freezer.
- ❑ Don't trash it or put it in curbside recycling.
- ❑ Call a battery-recycling drop-off or hazardous-waste site; ask if they take damaged batteries.
- ❑ Hot, hissing, smoking, or leaking? Get away and call 911.

★ Keep this page where you'll find it

You don't need to memorize this. Keep it with your home papers, and if a battery ever puffs up, I'm one call away at (330) 200-8042.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most about swollen batteries, answered plainly.

Q: Is a swollen battery going to explode?

It usually won't if you leave it alone — the danger comes from pressing, puncturing, or charging it. A puffy but cool, quiet battery is a handle-it-carefully problem, not an instant emergency. Hot, hissing, or smoking is the time to call 911.

Q: Can I just keep using it until my new phone arrives?

Please don't. Every charge and every use adds heat and stress to a battery that's already failing. The few days of convenience aren't worth the fire risk — set it aside safely and recycle it.

Q: Why can't I throw it in the trash?

A damaged lithium battery can catch fire from being crushed or jostled, and battery fires in garbage trucks and recycling plants are a serious problem. It must go to a proper recycler, and in many places trashing it is against the rules.

Q: The freezer trick — does that help?

No. Cooling it in the freezer doesn't fix the chemistry, and the condensation and stress can actually make matters worse. Keep it cool and dry at room temperature instead, and recycle it.

Q: Can the device be saved?

Often, yes — many phones, tablets, and laptops take a fresh battery from a reputable repair shop and run like new. Whether it's worth it depends on the device's age and condition. Insist on a quality replacement battery.

★ Still worried about a puffy battery?

This is exactly the kind of thing I'm glad to talk through, calmly, start to finish. Call or text (330) 200-8042 and we'll make sure it's handled safely.

What about other kinds of batteries?

This guide is about the built-in rechargeable batteries in phones, tablets, laptops, and power banks. A quick word on how other batteries differ.

Ordinary alkaline AA and AAA batteries don't swell like this; when they fail they tend to leak a crusty residue instead, which our leaking-batteries guide covers. Coin and button batteries carry their own danger — especially around children — which our button-battery safety guide handles.

The common thread is simple: any battery that's damaged, leaking, or puffy should be handled carefully and recycled, never forced or tossed in the trash. When you're unsure which kind you've got, that's a fine moment to call.

✓ One safe habit covers them all

Keep a small 'to recycle' bag or box for dead and damaged batteries, out of reach of children and away from heat. When it's full, take it to a battery drop-off. Simple, and it keeps everyone safer.

A last word on staying calm

I want to leave you reassured, not rattled. A swollen battery is a known, manageable situation.

Tens of millions of these batteries are in homes, and the vast majority live and die quietly. When one does swell, the people who get hurt are almost always the ones who pressed, punctured, or kept charging it. You now know not to — which puts you well ahead.

So take a breath. Stop, isolate, recycle. That's the whole job, and you can do every step of it. And if you'd rather not do it alone, that's what I'm here for.

★ You've got this — and you've got me

Whether it's talking you through the steps or taking care of the recycling and a replacement, I'm a friendly call away at (330) 200-8042. No question is too small.

Before you close this guide

A couple of things worth doing today, while it's on your mind.

If a battery is swelling right now, you've got your steps — go set it somewhere safe. If you're reading this just to be ready, take a moment to note where your nearest battery-recycling drop-off is, so you won't have to hunt for it in a worried moment later.

And if you look after anyone else's devices, pass this along or show them the one rule: puffy means stop, unplug, and call. A little knowing-ahead takes all the fear out of it.

✓ Jot the drop-off on this page

Write your nearest battery-recycling spot and its phone number right here, in the margin. Future you will be grateful.

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 handling a swollen battery 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.

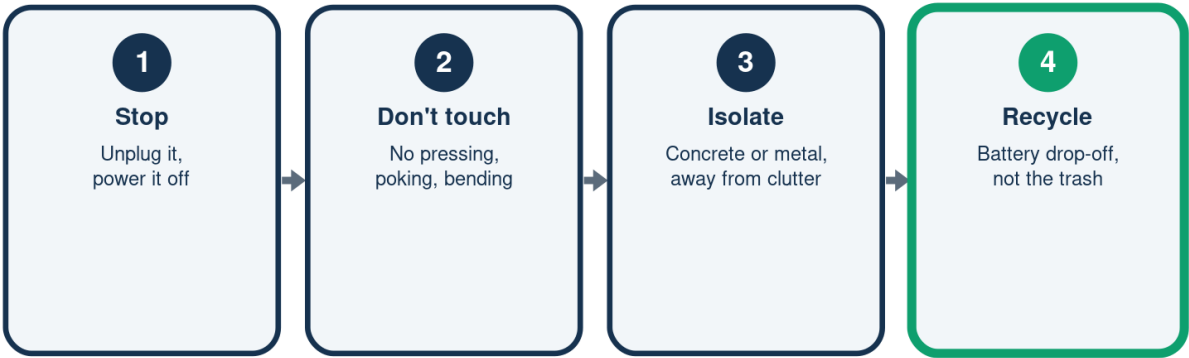
When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I don't do licensed electrical, gas, or appliance-repair work myself — for that 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

What to Do Right Now

Four calm steps for a swollen battery



Hot, hissing, smoking, or leaking? Get away and call 911.

Signs a Battery Is Swelling

What to look for on each kind of device

	Device	The tell-tale sign
Phone	Back bulges,	screen lifts
Tablet	Case bows,	won't lie flat
Laptop	Rocks on table,	trackpad raised
Power bank	Puffy, dented,	or split seam

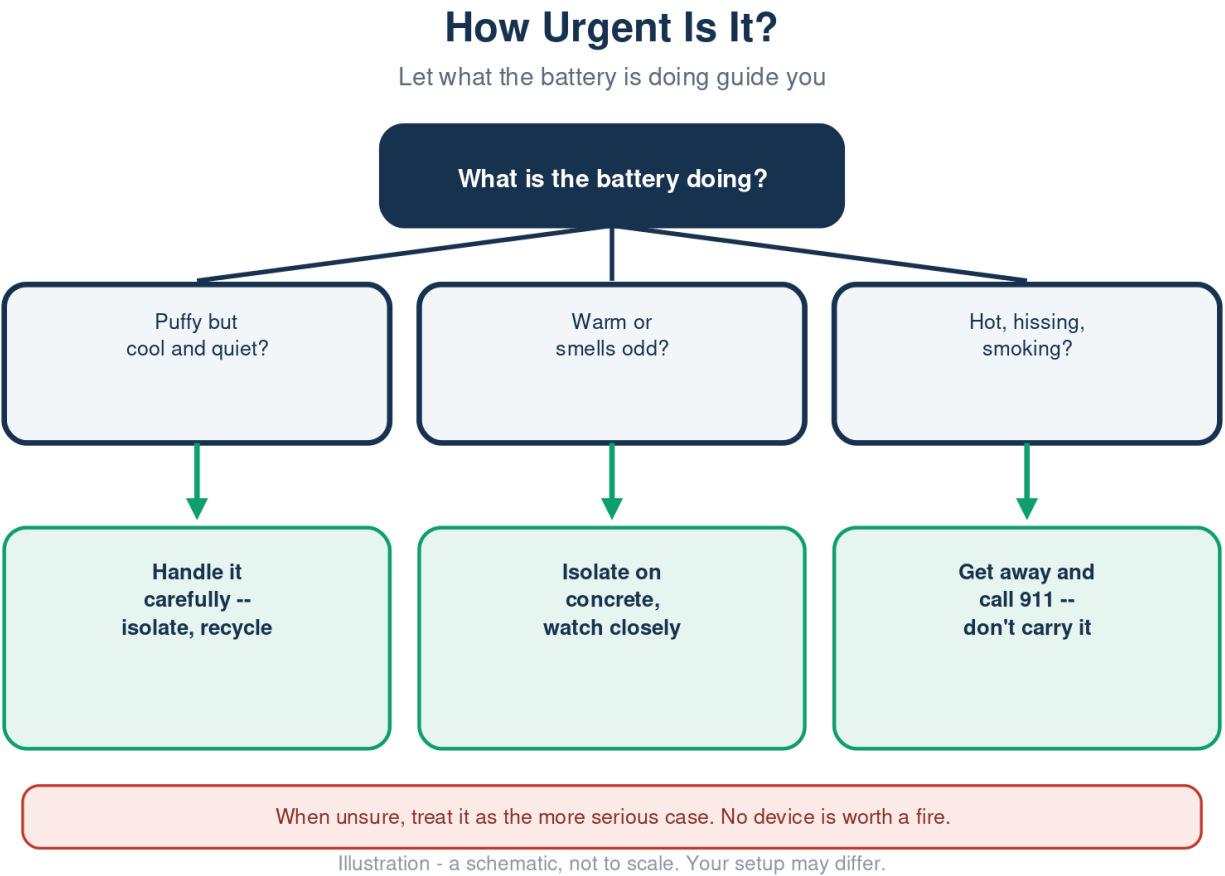
Noticed any of these? Stop using and charging it.

Do This, Not That

The safe choice versus the risky instinct

	Do	Never
Energy	Unplug it	Keep charging
Handling	Leave it be	Poke or flatten
Cooling	Room temp	The freezer
Disposal	Recycle it	Trash bin

Most injuries come from pressing, puncturing, or charging it.





Need a Real Person?

You do not have to remember all of it.
You just have to remember you can call.
Friendly, in-home tech help -- I come to you.

BILL'S PROMISE

If you are not 100% happy with a visit, I will make it right -- or refund it. No awkwardness, no fine print. That is how I would want to be treated.

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Prefer help without a visit?

Bill can screen-share and fix many things remotely — a flat \$49, free for Support Plan members.



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.

— *Bill*



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