BILL'S HOME TECH

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Why Your Phone Won't Update (It's Almost Always Space)

The real reason updates fail — and how to free just enough room to finish

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

An update does not just download — the phone has to unpack and install it, which temporarily needs several gigabytes of free room, so a nearly full phone makes updates fail. Check your free space first (iPhone: General, iPhone Storage; Android: Settings, Storage). Free a few gigabytes with the quick wins — delete big videos (backed up first), offload apps, clear caches, empty photo trash — then retry on Wi-Fi while plugged in.

If the phone is too full to update on its own, updating through a Mac or PC works because the computer does the heavy lifting. Keep a little space free so updates stop stalling.

1 The Short Version

An update is not just a small download — the phone has to download the new version and then unpack and install it, which temporarily needs several gigabytes of free space. If the phone is nearly full, there is nowhere to do that work, so the update quietly fails or refuses to start.

The fix is rarely about the update itself; it is about making a little room. Free up a few gigabytes, and the same update that kept failing usually installs on the first try. We will confirm space is the cause and then clear just enough.

- Updates need free working room, not just the download size.
- A nearly full phone is the most common reason updates fail.
- Freeing a few gigabytes usually lets the update finish at once.
- There is a clever way to update with less free space, using a computer.

GOOD TO KNOW

Before fighting the update, check your free space. On an iPhone, Settings, General, iPhone Storage; on Android, Settings, Storage. If you have less than a few gigabytes free, that is almost certainly why the update will not go.

2 Why Updates Need So Much Room

When your phone updates, it does more than download a file. It has to keep the download, unpack it into a much larger set of files, install those over the system, and keep the old version safe until it is sure the new one works. All of that happens in temporary space, which is why an update needs far more free room than the download size alone suggests.

So a phone with only a few hundred megabytes free cannot complete an update even if the download itself is small. It is like trying to wrap a large gift on a desk already covered in clutter — there is simply no room to work.

This is also why the amount of free space an update asks for can seem far larger than the update itself. The phone is being cautious, setting aside enough room to unpack everything and keep a safe copy of the old version until the new one is proven to work. That caution is a good thing — it is what lets an update recover gracefully if something goes wrong — but it does mean a tight phone has to be given some breathing room first.

GOOD TO KNOW

This is also why an update can start, run partway, and then fail: it got through the download but ran out of room during the unpacking stage. Freeing space and trying again almost always gets it through.

3 Confirm Space Is the Problem

A minute of checking saves you from chasing the wrong fix. The storage screen tells you plainly whether room is the issue, so you are not reinstalling things or fiddling with settings that were never the problem.

1. iPhone: open Settings, General, iPhone Storage and read the free space at the top.
2. Android: open Settings, Storage and read how much is free.
3. If free space is low — under a few gigabytes — space is almost certainly the cause.
4. If you have plenty free and it still fails, the cause is something else, covered later.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Some phones are honest about this and show a message like "not enough storage to update," sometimes offering to remove apps temporarily. Others just fail silently, which is why checking the number yourself is worth the minute.

4 Free Just Enough — the Quick Wins

You do not have to do a deep clean; you only need a few gigabytes of breathing room. Start with the fastest, safest wins, and stop once you have enough free for the update.

Keep an eye on the free-space number as you go, and the moment it climbs past a few gigabytes you can stop and try the update — there is no need to strip the phone bare. This is a rescue to get one update through, not a spring cleaning, so do just enough and get on with it.

1. Delete a few large videos you no longer need — these free the most, fastest.
2. On an iPhone, offload a couple of large apps you rarely use (this keeps their data).
3. On Android, clear the cache of a few heavy apps, and empty the Files and Photos trash.
4. Empty the photo trash: on iPhone, "Recently Deleted"; on Android, the Photos bin.
5. Delete finished downloads in streaming and podcast apps.

GOOD TO KNOW

Videos are the quickest way to free a lot at once — a few long ones can clear several gigabytes in seconds. If they matter, make sure they are backed up to iCloud or Google Photos first, then remove the local copies.

5 Then Try the Update Again

Once you have freed a few gigabytes, the update usually goes through on the next attempt. A couple of small habits make it more likely to succeed, and together they head off the other common reasons an update stalls.

1. Make sure the phone is on Wi-Fi, not cellular data.
2. Plug it into power, since many updates will only run while charging.
3. Open Settings and start the update again (iPhone: General, Software Update; Android: System, Software update).
4. Leave it alone to finish — it may restart itself once or twice, which is normal.

WATCH OUT

An update can take a while and the screen may go dark or show a progress bar or logo for several minutes. Do not unplug it or force it off during this time; let it finish, even if it seems to pause. Interrupting an update is one of the few things that can genuinely cause trouble.

6 The Clever Trick: Update Through a Computer

If you cannot free enough space no matter what, there is a way around it. Updating the phone through a computer lets the computer do the heavy unpacking, so the phone needs far less free room of its own.

This is the trick professionals reach for when a phone is so stuffed it cannot update itself — for instance an older phone whose storage is almost entirely photos. Because the computer shoulders the work, the phone can update with only a little free space,

which often breaks a frustrating deadlock without deleting anything at all.

- iPhone: connect it to a Mac (Finder) or a Windows PC (the Apple Devices app) and update from there.
- The computer handles the download and unpacking, easing the phone's space crunch.
- Your photos and data are not erased by a normal update done this way.
- This is the standard rescue when a phone is too full to update on its own.

WATCH OUT

Updating a too-full phone through a computer is a reliable fix, but it involves cables, the right software, and a careful eye to avoid accidentally erasing instead of updating. If you are not comfortable, this is a quick and safe one for me to handle on a visit.

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 When It Is Not About Space

If you have plenty of free space and the update still will not go, a few other things can be behind it. These are less common but worth knowing, so you can tell the difference between a problem you can fix and one that just needs patience.

Most of these resolve themselves with a little time or a stronger Wi-Fi signal, and none of them means your phone is damaged. The trick is to match the symptom to the cause rather than trying everything at once — a quick glance at where it stalls usually tells you which of the following is going on.

Symptom	Likely cause

Stuck on the download	Weak Wi-Fi — move closer to the router and retry
"Unable to verify update"	A busy server on release day — wait and try later
Won't start at all	Not plugged in, or battery too low — charge and retry
Very old phone	It may no longer support the newest version — that is normal

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> On the day a big update is released, millions of people try at once and the servers get overwhelmed, causing failures that have nothing to do with your phone. Waiting a day or two and trying again often just works.

8 Why Updating Matters

It is tempting to keep tapping "Later," but updates are worth doing, because they are how your phone gets its security fixes. Most updates quietly close holes that scammers and bad software try to use, which is the main reason to keep current.

It helps to think of an update less like a new set of features to learn and more like a locksmith quietly upgrading the locks on your doors. You may not notice anything different afterward, but the house is better protected than it was. That is why getting a stalled update through is worth a little effort — it is about safety, not novelty.

You do not have to install an update the moment it appears — waiting a few days for the first wrinkles to be ironed out is fine. But letting a phone fall many versions behind leaves it more exposed, so it is worth getting the stalled ones through.

> *Updates are mostly about safety, not new buttons. Keeping current is one of the simplest things you can do to stay protected.*

9 Keep Updates From Stalling Again

A little ongoing headroom means the next update just installs without any of this fuss.

- Keep a few gigabytes free as a habit, not just when prompted.
- Turn on photo backup (iCloud or Google Photos) so pictures do not hoard all your space.
- On an iPhone, turn on "Offload Unused Apps" so dormant apps clear themselves.
- Delete finished streaming downloads rather than letting them pile up.

WATCH OUT

If your phone offers automatic updates, turning them on lets it update overnight while charging and on Wi-Fi — as long as you keep a little space free, you may never have to think about this again.

10 Downloading Versus Installing

It helps to understand the two stages an update goes through, because knowing which one is stuck tells you what is wrong. First the phone downloads the update, which just needs internet. Then it installs it, which needs free space and usually a charge.

If the update gets stuck while downloading, the problem is almost always your internet — weak Wi-Fi or a busy server. If it downloads fine but then fails or will not install, the problem is almost always space or power. Watching which stage stalls turns a mysterious failure into an obvious fix.

Stuck at...	Means	Try
Downloading	An internet problem	Move near the router; wait if it is release day
Preparing / Installing	A space or power problem	Free a few GB; plug into power

11 A Quick Pre-Update Checklist

Running through a short checklist before you start an update heads off almost every common failure. Thirty seconds here saves a frustrating evening of retries.

1. Confirm you have a few gigabytes of free space.
2. Connect to Wi-Fi, not cellular data.
3. Plug the phone into power.
4. Make sure the battery is at least half full to be safe.
5. Start the update and leave it alone to finish.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> If you tick these four boxes — space, Wi-Fi, power, and a charged battery — the great majority of updates simply work. Most update failures are one of these four being missed, not anything wrong with the phone.

12 When to Call Bill

Most people can free a few gigabytes and get the update through with the steps here. But if the phone is so full that nothing seems to help, if the update keeps failing even with space free, or if you would rather not risk the computer method on your own, there is no need to struggle.

I come to you, free just enough room safely — making sure your photos are backed up first — and get the update installed, by computer if that is what it takes. You end

up current, protected, and with a phone that has room to update itself from now on.

- The phone is too full and you cannot free enough space.
- The update keeps failing even with space free.
- You would like the computer method done safely for you.
- You are unsure whether your phone is too old to update — I will tell you honestly.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this handy. Updates need working room, not just the download size.

I want to...	Do this...
Check if space is the cause	iPhone: General iPhone Storage; Android: Settings Storage
Free room fast	Delete a few big videos (back them up first)
Free more, keep data	Offload apps (iPhone); clear app caches (Android)
Retry the update	On Wi-Fi, plugged into power, then start it again
When too full to update	Update through a Mac or PC instead
Stop future stalls	Keep a few GB free; turn on photo backup
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.

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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.

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