

Is Your Router Too Old?

How to tell in five minutes whether your router still gets security fixes, and what to do if it doesn't.



your router



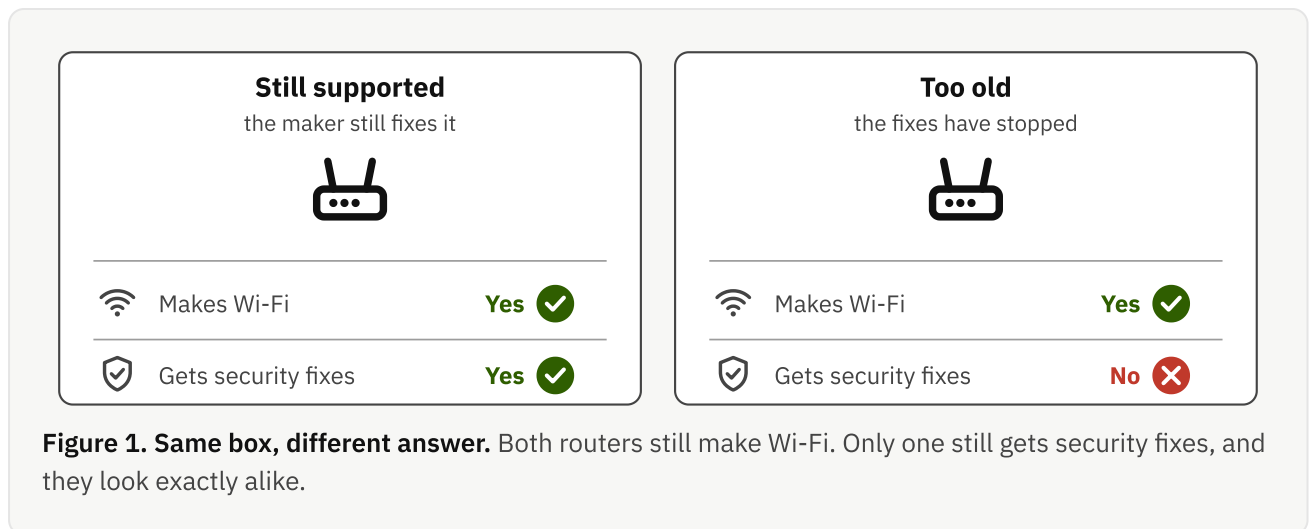
still getting fixes



no more fixes

The short answer

A router is too old when it stops getting security fixes. It may still work fine. That isn't the test.



This guide answers three questions. What does your router do? How can you tell if it's too old? And what should you do about it?

The one idea to remember

A router's age isn't counted in years. It's counted by whether it still gets fixes.

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A word on the words

Router: the box that connects your home to the internet. It usually makes your Wi-Fi too. **Firmware:** the software inside the router. **Security fix:** a new version of that software that closes a hole.

What your router does

Every phone, TV and doorbell in your home goes online through one box. It's the front door of your home network.

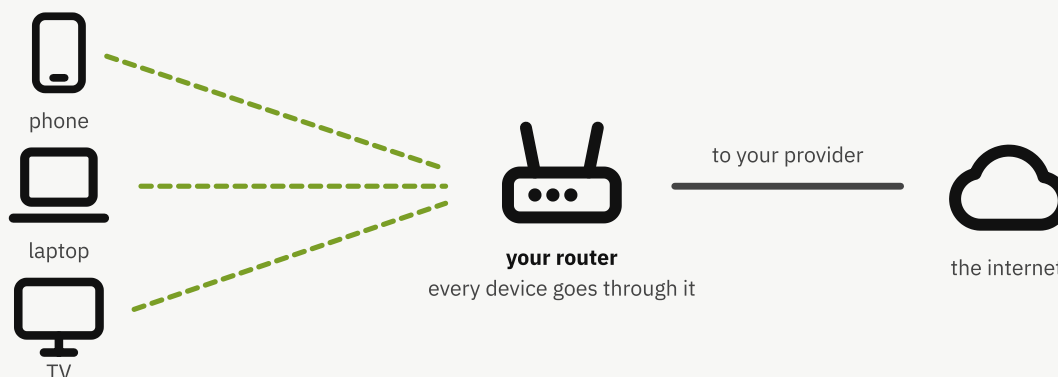


Figure 2. The front door. Everything your devices send or receive passes through the router. That's why an old router matters more than an old gadget.

The router runs its own software. Most people never think about it again after the day it was plugged in. Some routers update themselves. Some only update when someone presses a button. Some stopped getting updates years ago, and nobody noticed.

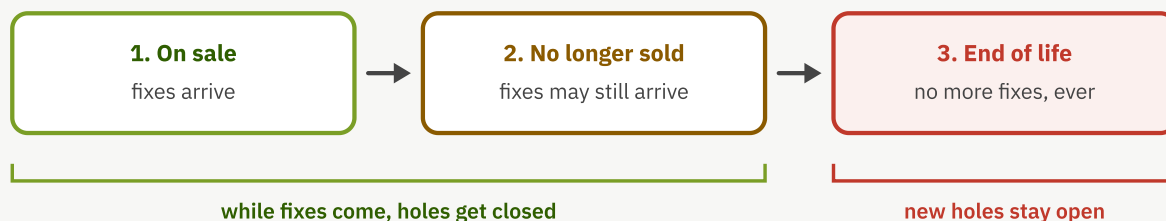
⚠ STOP

"It still works" is not the test

A router that no longer gets fixes can still stream movies just fine. So can a router a stranger has taken over. You can't tell by looking at it.

When a router gets too old

A router goes through three stages. What counts is whether it has reached the end, when the fixes stop.



Not to scale. How long each stage lasts is up to the maker, and it varies.

Figure 3. Three stages. In the last stage the router still turns on and still makes Wi-Fi. It looks exactly the same. It just stopped getting fixes.

Once the fixes stop, any hole someone finds stays open for good. The FBI has warned that criminals take over old routers like this. They use your router as a disguise, so their traffic looks like it came from your home.

That's why the question isn't how old your router is. It's whether its maker still fixes it.

The five-minute check

You need the router in front of you and a phone that's online. You don't have to change anything yet.

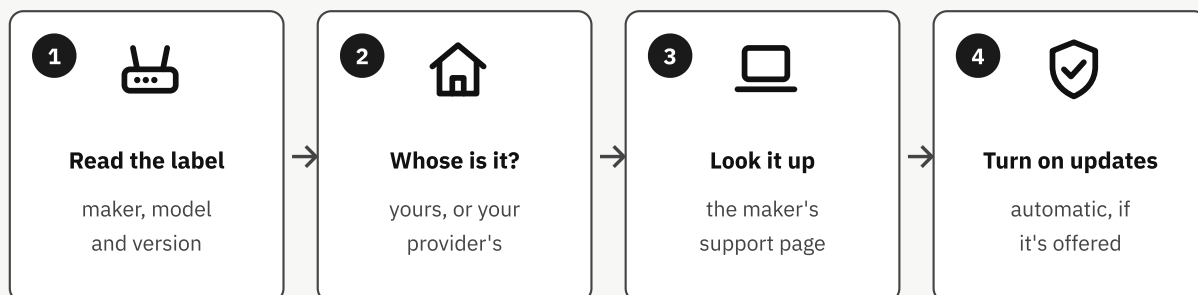


Figure 4. Four steps, about five minutes. Start with the label on the router. End with automatic updates turned on.

- 1 Read the label.** Turn the router over. Write down the maker, the model and any version, like "V2".
- 2 Decide whose it is.** If your internet company's name is on it, it's probably theirs. Ask them.
- 3 Look it up.** On the maker's website, search for your model. Look for words like "end of life" or "no longer supported".
- 4 Turn on updates.** In the router's app or settings, look for automatic updates. If it's there, turn it on.

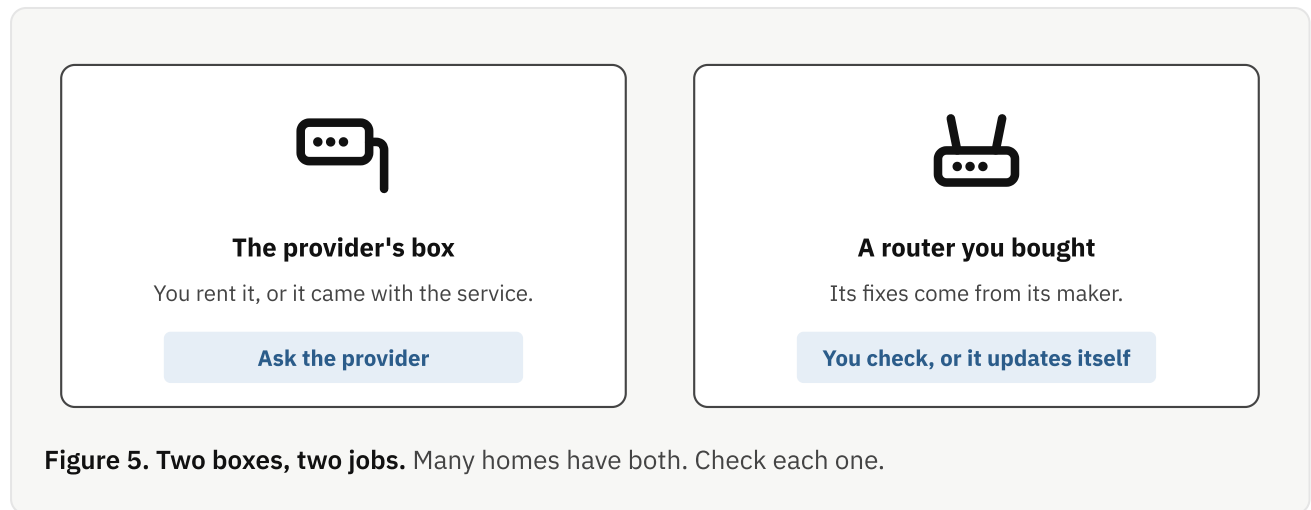
CAUTION

Can't get into the settings? Don't press reset yet

The reset button erases your Wi-Fi name and password. Every device in the house then has to join again. Try the maker's app or the details on the label first.

Who updates it?

It depends on who owns the box.



If you rent the box from your internet company, updates are usually their job. Don't assume, though. Ask them two things: do you update my box, and is this model still supported?

If you bought the router yourself, the company doesn't touch it. Its fixes come from its maker. The five-minute check shows you where it stands.

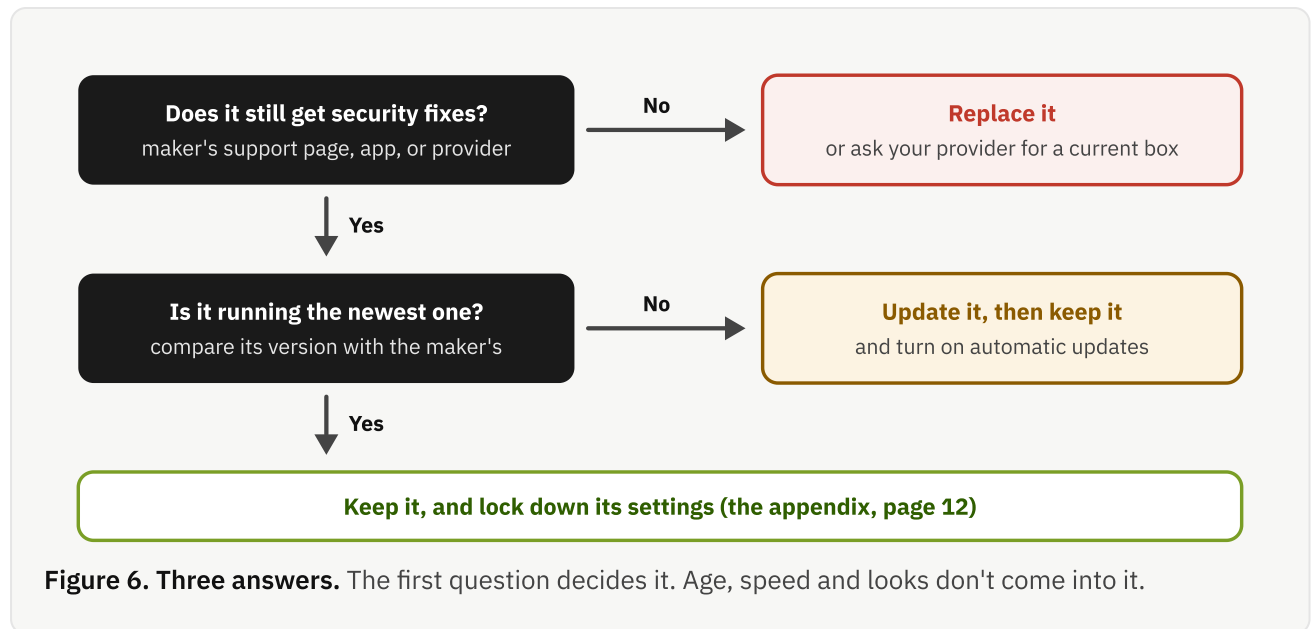
More than one Wi-Fi unit?

A mesh system's little units all update together, and they usually get too old together too. Check the main unit. *Mesh, Extenders and Wired Access Points, Explained* covers how those systems work.

DECIDE

Keep, update or replace

Your five-minute check lands on one of three answers.



If it still gets fixes, keep it and turn on automatic updates. If it's too old, the FBI says to replace it if you can.

What the 2026 rule means for you

Headlines called it a router ban. For the router you own, almost nothing changes.

About the 2026 router rule

In 2026 the US stopped approving most new router models made in other countries. The router you own stays legal. Stores can still sell models approved before, and those routers can still get updates.

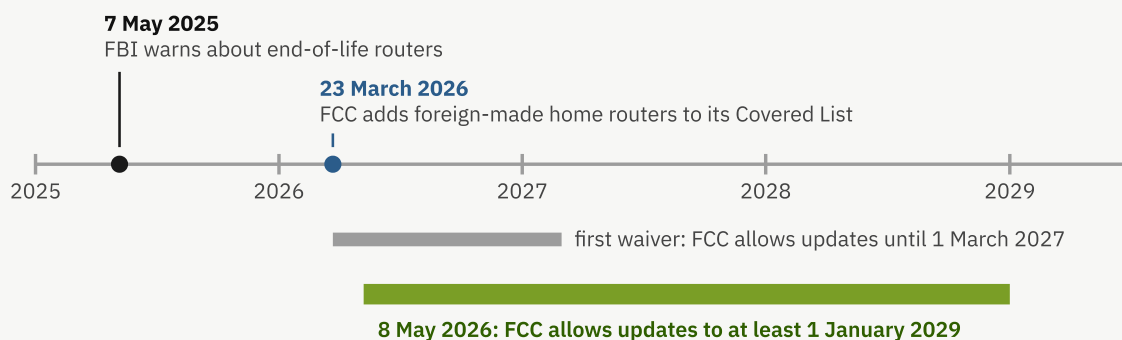


Figure 7. How long updates are allowed. The US lets makers keep fixing routers it approved before the rule, until at least 2029. Whether your maker does is still up to them.

What to look for in the next one

This guide names no brands. Check these on any router's box or website.

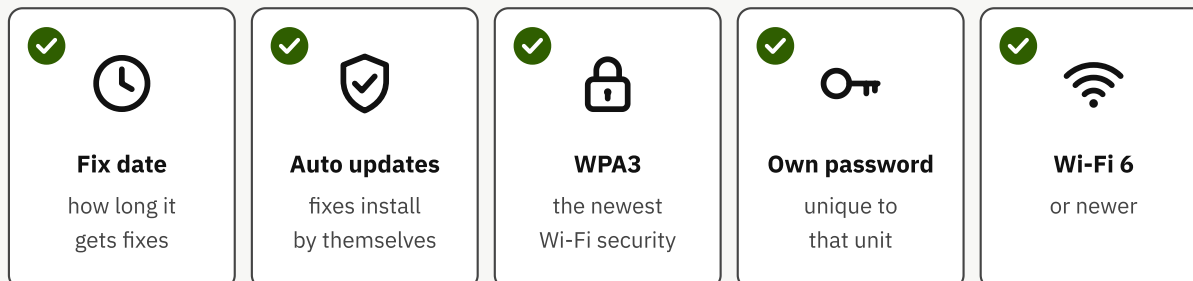


Figure 8. Five things to look for. Tick all five before you buy. The list below says what each one means.

- ☐ **How long it gets fixes.** Look for a date on the maker's website. If you can't find one, ask before you buy.
- ☐ **Automatic updates.** Fixes install without you having to remember.
- ☐ **WPA3.** The newest Wi-Fi security. Almost every new router has it.
- ☐ **Its own password.** A password printed on that one unit, or a setup that makes you pick one.
- ☐ **Wi-Fi 6 or newer.** For most homes, Wi-Fi 6 is the sensible minimum for a router bought today.

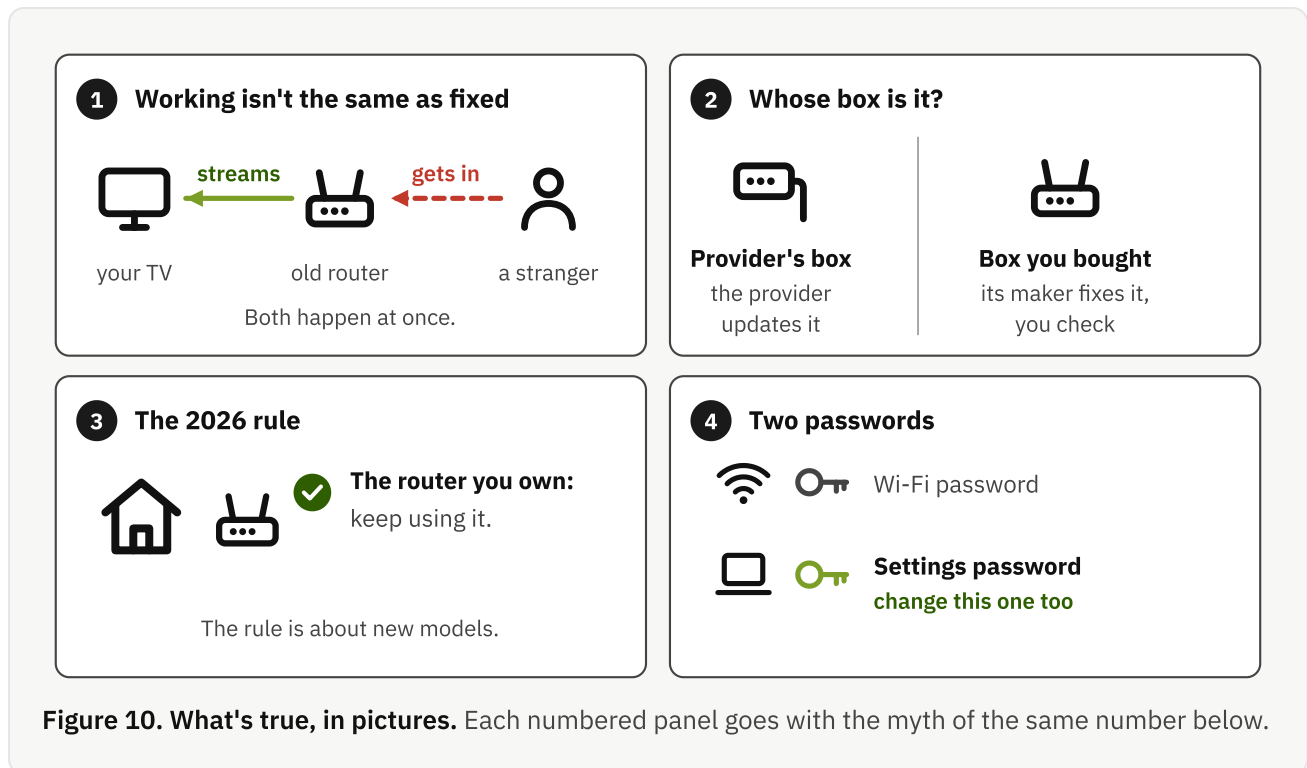
		2.4 GHz	5 GHz	6 GHz	Widest channel
Wi-Fi 4	802.11n	●	●	○	40 MHz
Wi-Fi 5	802.11ac	○	●	○	160 MHz
Wi-Fi 6	802.11ax	●	●	○	160 MHz
Wi-Fi 6E	802.11ax + 6 GHz	●	●	●	160 MHz
Wi-Fi 7	802.11be	●	●	●	320 MHz

Figure 9. Which radio bands each Wi-Fi generation uses. A filled dot means it uses that band. Wi-Fi 6E and 7 add the newest band, called 6 GHz. Your phone or laptop needs 6E or 7 too to use it.

A new router won't speed up a slow internet plan. If one room has always been bad, a second unit in a better spot may help more. *Mesh, Extenders and Wired Access Points, Explained* covers that.

Four things people get wrong

Each myth is followed by what's true.



MYTH If it still works, it's fine.

FACT Working and getting fixes are different things. A router can work fine and still be open to strangers.

MYTH My internet company keeps my router updated.

FACT Only if it's their box. A router you bought yourself gets its fixes from its maker.

MYTH The 2026 rule makes my router illegal.

FACT It doesn't. You can keep using any router you already own.

MYTH A strong Wi-Fi password is all I need.

FACT The router has a second password, the one that opens its settings. Change that one too.

Do this now

About fifteen minutes, with the router's app or settings open.

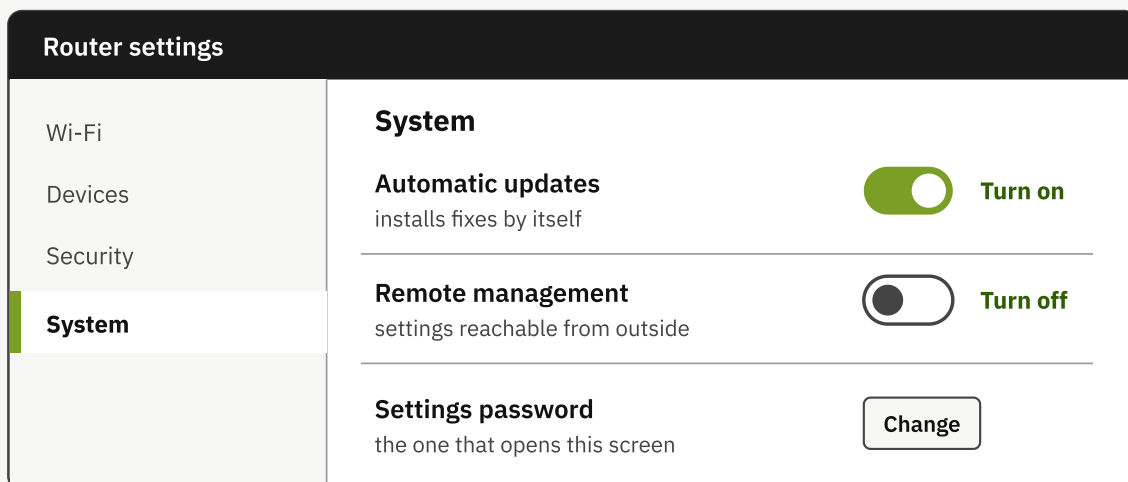


Figure 11. The two switches that matter most. Automatic updates on, remote management off. Every maker's screen looks different, so the menu may have another name, such as Administration or Advanced.

Update it

- 1 Sign in to the router's app or settings. The details are often on the label.
- 2 Install the newest update. Don't unplug the router while it updates.
- 3 Turn on automatic updates if the setting is there.

Do this now, continued

Lock it down

- 1 Change the settings password to a long one that's all your own.
- 2 Turn off remote management. That stops strangers reaching the settings from outside your home.
- 3 Set Wi-Fi security to WPA3. If an older device can't join, use the WPA2/WPA3 setting instead.
- 4 If your Wi-Fi still has the name it came with, rename it. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) suggests this, because a factory name tells a stranger what router you have. Pick a name that doesn't give away your name or address. Every device will need to join again.
- 5 Turn off WPS, the push-button connect feature, as the FTC recommends.

Write it down

- 1 Put the model and today's date on a sticky note under the router. Check the maker's page again in six months.

SOURCES

Where this comes from

Checked on 28 September 2026.

- FBI Internet Crime Complaint Center, "Cyber Criminal Proxy Services Exploiting End of Life Routers," Public Service Announcement I-050725-PSA, 7 May 2025. ic3.gov/PSA/2025/PSA250507
- FCC, "FACT SHEET: FCC Updates Covered List to Include Foreign-Made Consumer Routers, Prohibiting Approval of New Models," 23 March 2026. docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-420034A1.pdf
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- Federal Trade Commission, "How To Secure Your Home Wi-Fi Network," consumer.ftc.gov (admin username and password, WPA3, remote management, WPS, UPnP)
- Apple, "Recommended settings for Wi-Fi routers and access points," support.apple.com/en-us/102766 (automatic updates, backing up settings, rejoining after changes, WPA3 Personal, WPA2/WPA3 Transitional)
- Wi-Fi Alliance, "Driving widespread adoption of WPA3," February 2026 (WPA3 required in new Wi-Fi CERTIFIED devices since 2020, mandatory in 6 GHz)

SOURCES

About this guide

Written for people who aren't technical and want to know whether the box on the shelf is still safe to use. It names no router maker or model on purpose: the question that matters is whether a router still gets fixes, and that's true of every brand. It isn't legal advice. The guide is independent and isn't affiliated with any maker or provider.

About the author

Keith Parsons, CWNE #3, has designed, installed and troubleshot Wi-Fi for over 25 years. He runs Wireless LAN Professionals and the WLPC conferences.