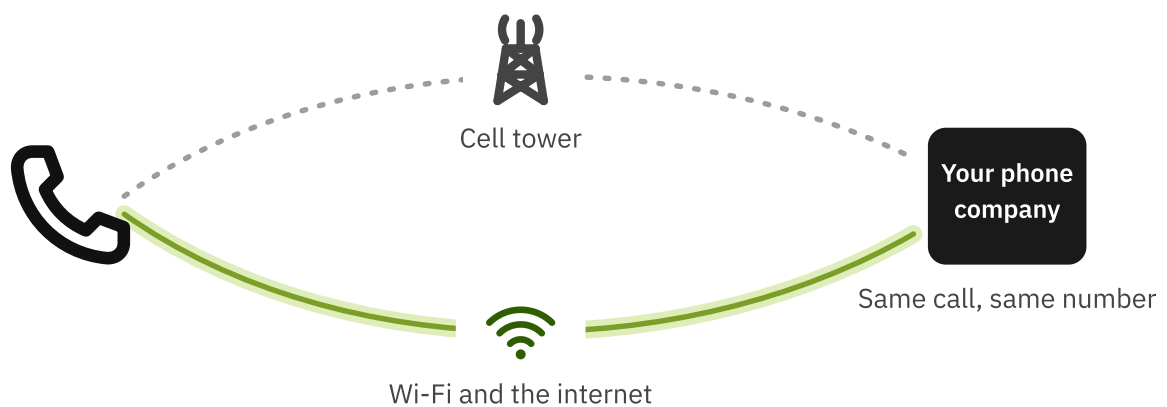


Wi-Fi Calling, Explained

How your phone makes a normal call over Wi-Fi, when that helps, what it means for emergency calls, and what to set up before your next trip.



The short answer

Wi-Fi Calling lets your phone make a normal call over Wi-Fi when the cell signal is weak. Same phone app. Same phone number. Your phone company still carries the call.

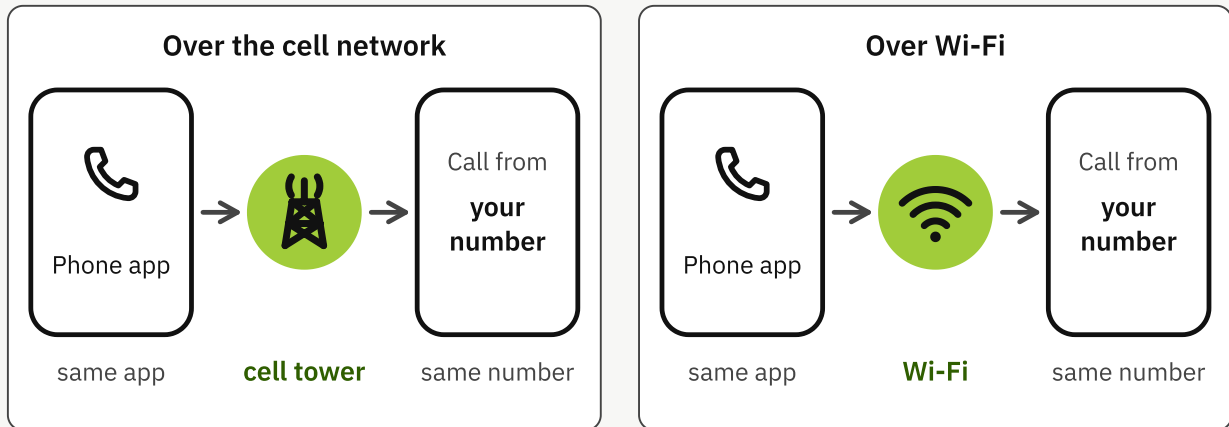


Figure 1. Same phone, same number, same app. Only the road in the middle changes. The person you call sees your normal number either way.

Not an app

It's built into your phone. You just switch it on.

Your carrier decides

Your phone company decides if you get it and where it works.

A word on the words

Your **carrier** is your mobile phone company. **Cellular** means the cell tower network. A **tunnel** is a locked, private path across the internet.

What's inside

Two roads to the same phone company	3	Wi-Fi Calling vs WhatsApp and FaceTime	9
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HOW IT WORKS

Two roads to the same phone company

A normal call goes from your phone to a cell tower. A Wi-Fi call goes across the Wi-Fi and the internet instead. Both end up at your carrier.

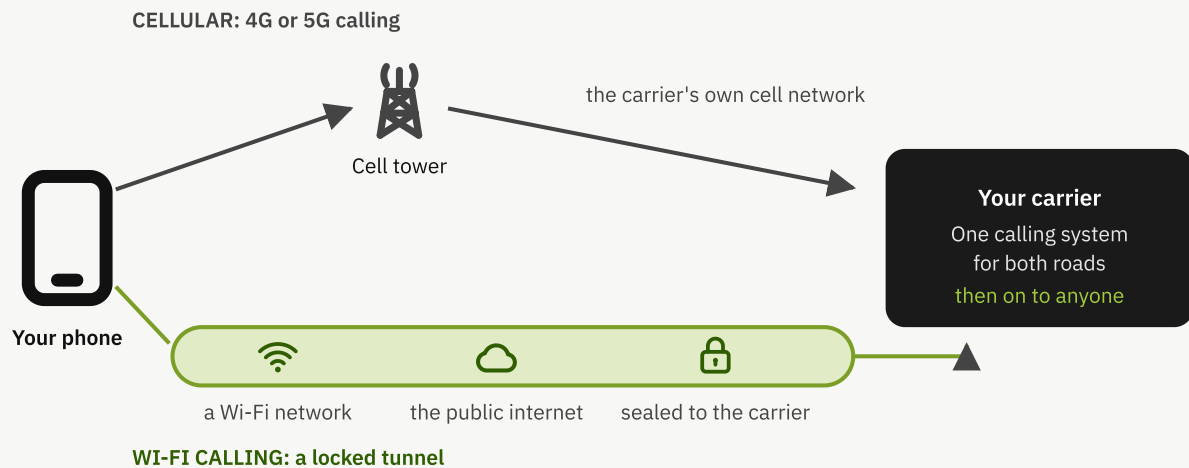


Figure 2. Two roads, one phone company. The person you call can't tell the difference. The only change is who carries the first part of the trip.

The locked tunnel

Your phone seals the call in a private tunnel to your carrier. The hotel or coffee shop can see that a tunnel is there. It can't see who you called or hear what you said.

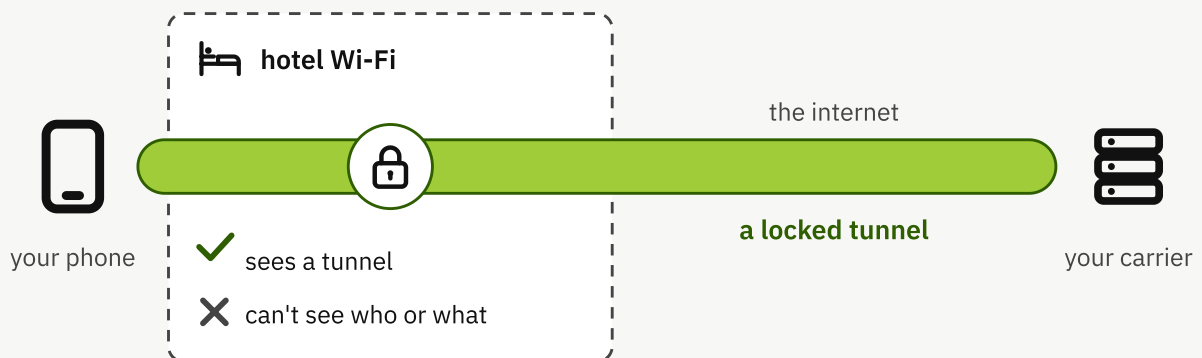
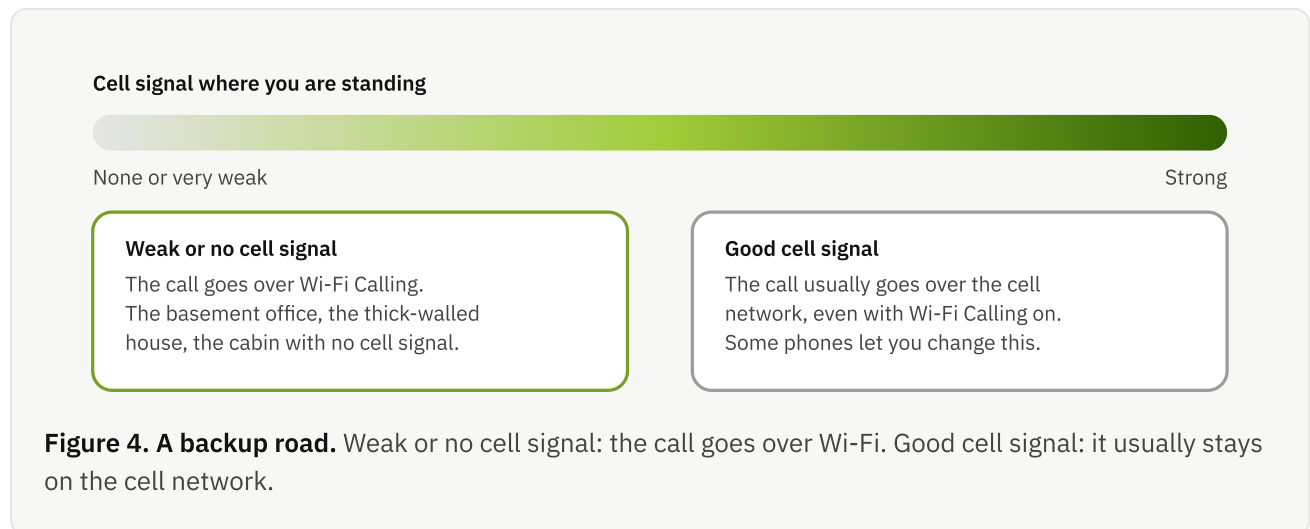


Figure 3. The hotel sees a tunnel, not your call. The call stays locked inside the tunnel all the way to your carrier.

HOW IT WORKS

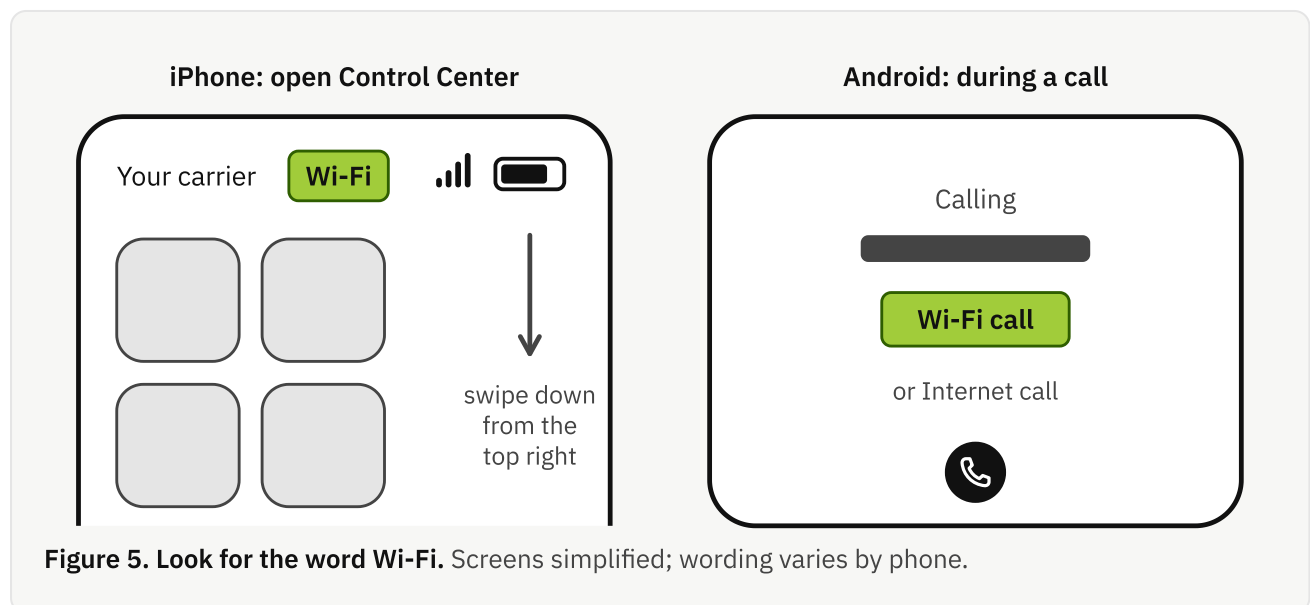
When your phone uses Wi-Fi

Turning Wi-Fi Calling on doesn't send every call over Wi-Fi. At home, your phone mostly uses it when the cell signal is weak or missing.



How to tell

On an iPhone, open Control Center and look for "Wi-Fi" next to your carrier's name. On Android, the call screen usually says "Wi-Fi call" or "Internet call".



Walking out the door mid-call

A Wi-Fi call can carry on when you walk outside. It needs good cell coverage waiting for it. At my house it isn't: the tower is behind a hill.

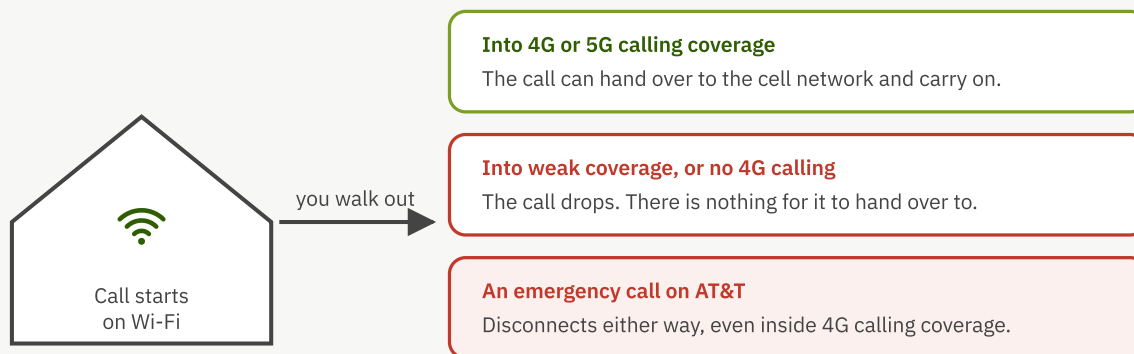


Figure 6. Handing the call over. Walk into good coverage and the call can move to the cell network. Walk into weak coverage and the call drops, because there's nothing to hand it to.

KEITH'S NOTE

The drop that isn't your carrier's fault

Walking from room to room inside a house is a different thing. Moving between two Wi-Fi access points, or two mesh units, is a Wi-Fi hand-over, and the carrier never sees it. If that hand-over is slow, the tunnel stalls and the call breaks up or drops, and most people blame the carrier. It is usually the Wi-Fi.

Keith Parsons, 2026-09-27



Figure 7. Moving between two Wi-Fi points. Inside a house with two Wi-Fi points, the phone hands the call from one to the other as you walk.

Emergency calls

In an emergency, your phone tries the cell network first. It only uses Wi-Fi Calling when there's no cell network at all.

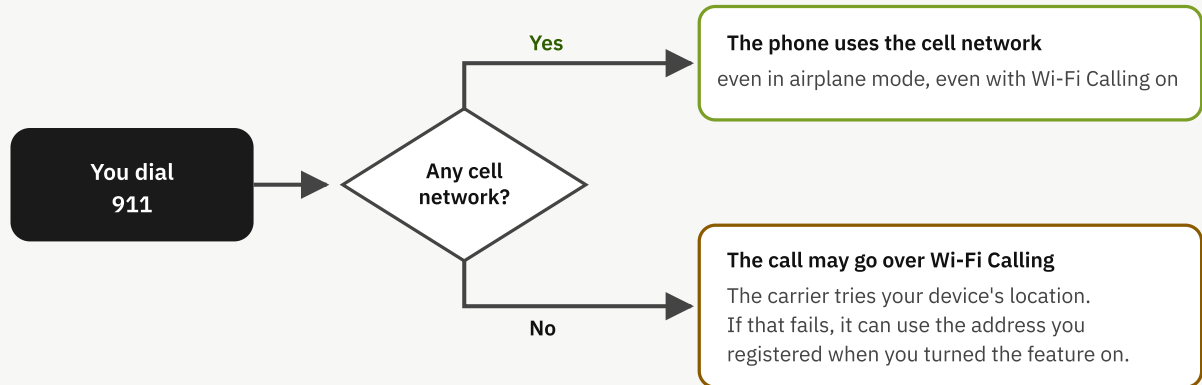


Figure 8. How an emergency call finds you. Over Wi-Fi, your carrier tries to find your location. If that fails, it may use the address you entered when you switched the feature on.

⚠ STOP

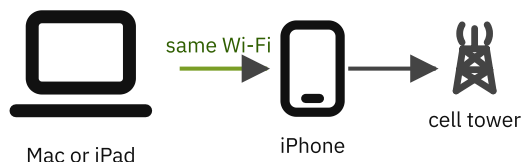
Three things to do before you rely on Wi-Fi Calling

- 1 When you move house, update the emergency address in your Wi-Fi Calling settings the same day.
- 2 If you ever call for help over Wi-Fi, **say where you are**. Don't assume the dispatcher can see it.
- 3 Abroad, the address your carrier holds is still your home address. Dial the local emergency number, and use a local cell network if you can.

iPad, Mac and Apple Watch

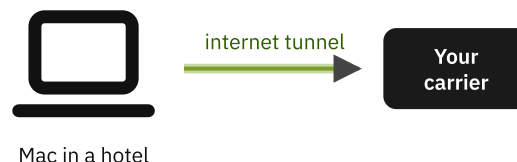
Your iPad, Mac or Apple Watch can make calls too. There are two ways it can work.

1. Calls from iPhone (relay)



The iPhone places the call. The Mac or iPad is just a speaker and microphone. The iPhone must be switched on, nearby, on the same Wi-Fi.

2. Wi-Fi Calling on the device itself



The iPhone can be off, or at home. The call goes straight to the carrier. Only some carriers offer it, and 911 may use your registered home address.

Figure 9. Who places the call? In the first, your iPhone makes the call and the other device is just a speaker and microphone. In the second, the device calls through your carrier on its own. Only some carriers offer the second.

KEITH'S NOTE

The emergency trap

Your carrier holds one registered emergency address for your line, usually your home. A Mac or a Wi-Fi-only iPad has no cell radio, so an emergency call from it goes over Wi-Fi Calling. Apple says your device's location may be used, and that the registered address helps emergency services find you. If the location doesn't get through, the dispatcher may see your home address while you are in a hotel across the country.

Keith Parsons, 2026-09-27



STOP
Say where you are.

Calling home from abroad

Wi-Fi Calling can save money on a trip. Calling home is often free. Abroad, many phones try Wi-Fi first. Calling a local number usually costs extra.

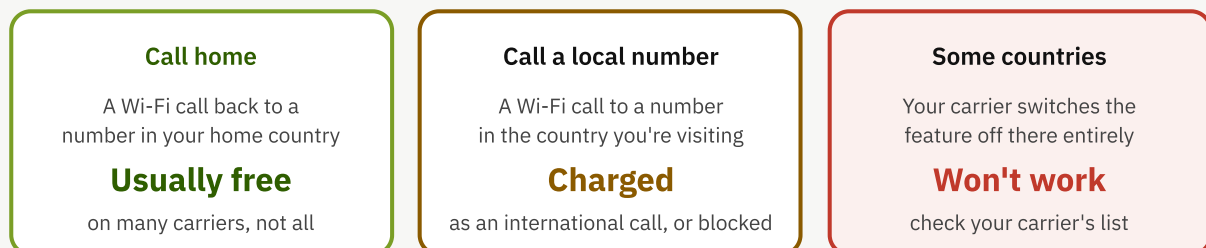
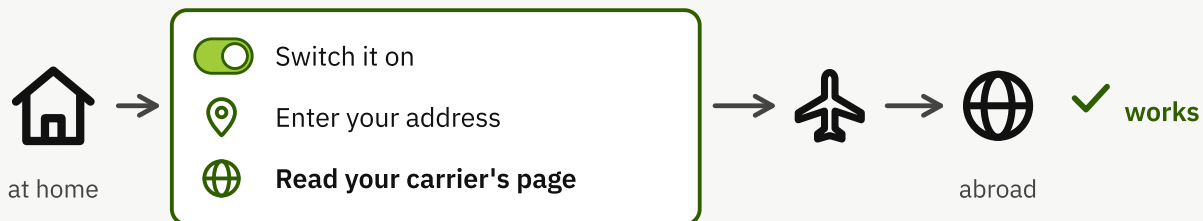


Figure 10. Three things that can happen. Calling home is usually free. Calling a local number is charged or blocked. And in some countries, your carrier switches the feature off.

Check before you go

The rules change from carrier to carrier and country to country. Read your own carrier's Wi-Fi Calling page before you travel.

Do this at home



Don't wait until you land

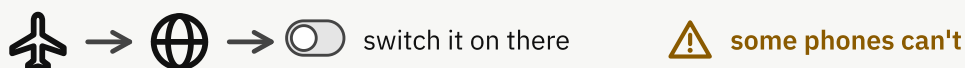


Figure 11. Set it up at home, and check your carrier.

⚠ CAUTION

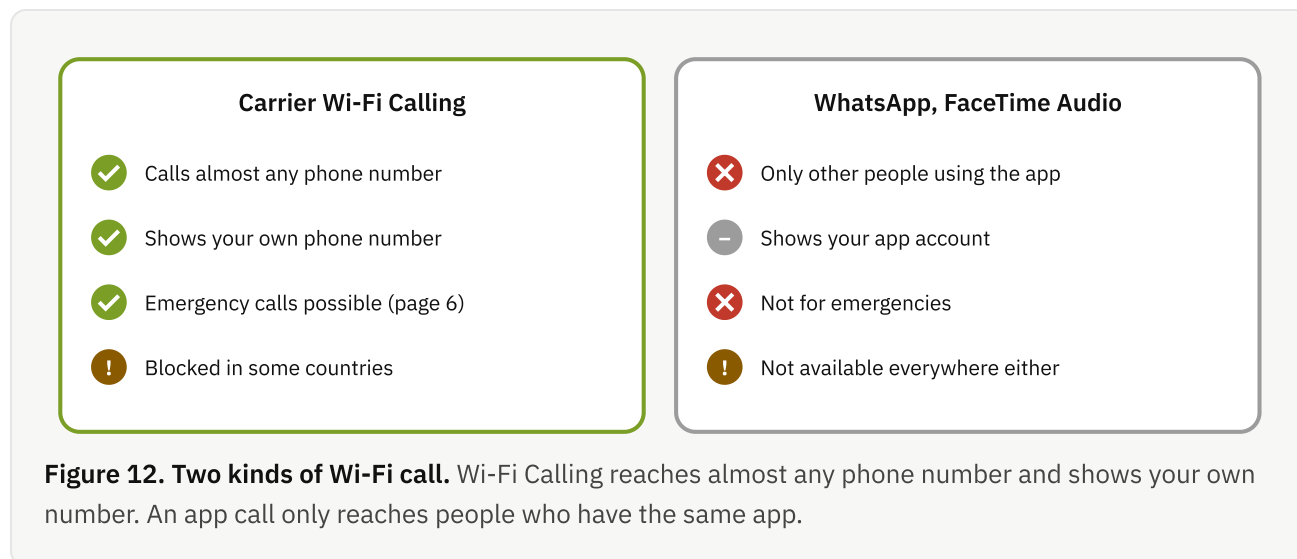
Set it up before you leave

Turn it on and enter your address while you're at home. Some phones can't switch it on once you're abroad.

COMPARED

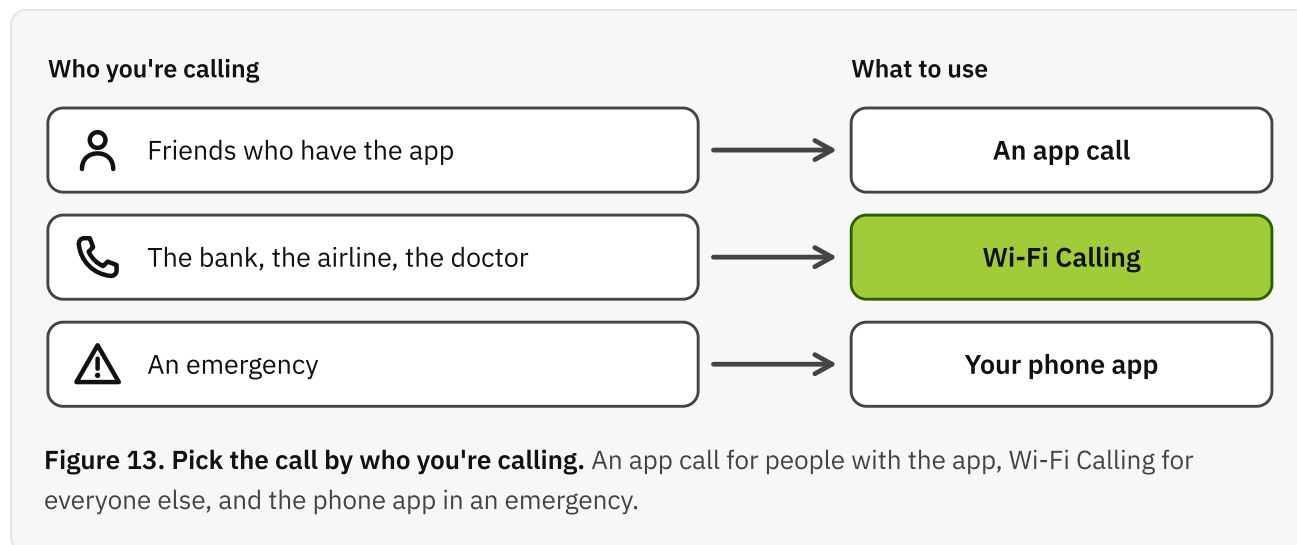
Wi-Fi Calling vs WhatsApp and FaceTime

Both use Wi-Fi. Only one is a real phone call on your phone company's system.



A good travel habit

Use an app call for people who have the app. Use Wi-Fi Calling for everyone else: the bank, the airline, the doctor's office. Keep the phone app for emergencies.



What your Wi-Fi owes a phone call

A phone call needs a steady connection more than a fast one. Every part of the trip adds a little delay, and they all share one budget.

The whole trip, mouth to ear: 150 milliseconds or less feels natural



Every part of the trip spends from the same budget. When someone uploads photos on the same connection, the internet-line slice can grow by hundreds of milliseconds on its own.

Wi-Fi's four lanes (WMM, Wi-Fi Multimedia)

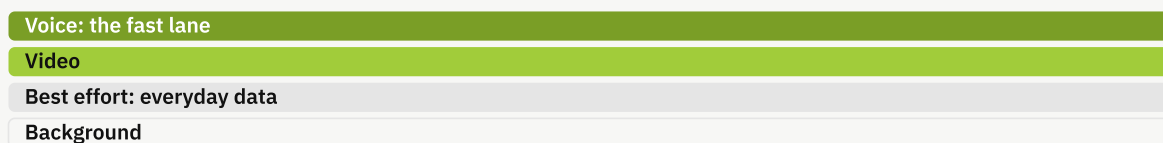


Figure 14. Delay adds up, and voice gets the fast lane. Your Wi-Fi, your internet line and the rest of the trip all add delay. Wi-Fi can put voice in its own fast lane, ahead of downloads.

Three things to check on your router

- 1 Leave the setting called **WMM** switched on. It gives voice the fast lane.
- 2 Keep the router's software up to date.
- 3 If calls won't connect at all, check your carrier's page. Some routers block the tunnel.

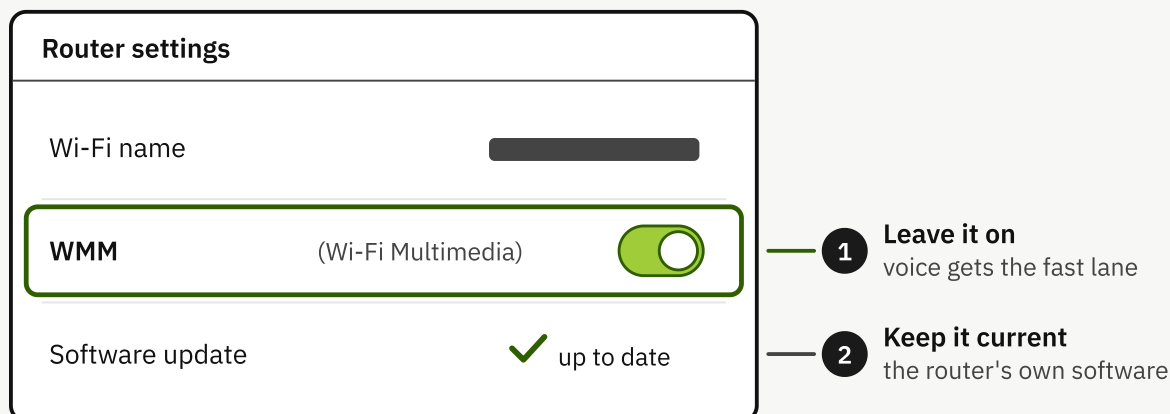


Figure 15. Leave WMM on. It is usually on already, and the name varies by router. Screen simplified.

Five things people get wrong

Each myth is followed by what's true.

MYTH It's on by default.

FACT You have to switch it on, usually with an emergency address.

MYTH Once it's on, all my calls go over Wi-Fi.

FACT At home, your phone mostly uses it when the cell signal is weak.

MYTH I'll turn it on when I land.

FACT Some phones can't switch it on abroad. Set it up at home.

MYTH Hotel Wi-Fi works right away.

FACT Not until you finish the hotel's sign-in page.

MYTH I need a VPN to keep my calls private.

FACT The call is already sealed in a locked tunnel to your carrier.

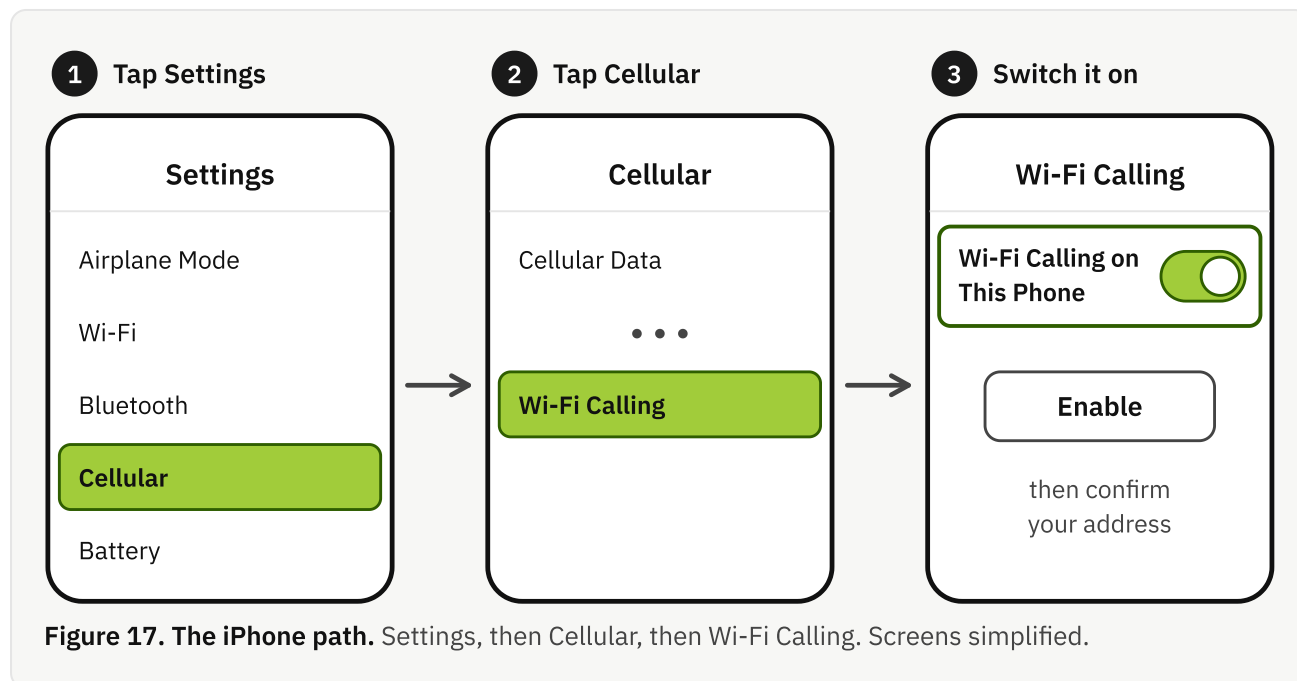


Figure 16. The five facts in pictures. Each picture matches a myth above, in the same order.

DO THIS

Turn it on, and a checklist

It takes about a minute. Look for Wi-Fi Calling in your phone's settings.



iPhone

Settings, then Cellular, then Wi-Fi Calling. Switch it on and confirm your address.

Android

Look in Settings under Network or Connections, or in the Phone app's settings. Switch on Wi-Fi Calling.

No switch at all? Your phone or your plan doesn't support it.

Before a trip

- 1 Switch Wi-Fi Calling on at home, and make sure it works.
- 2 Check your carrier's page for the country you're visiting.
- 3 Learn the local emergency number where you're going.
- 4 At the hotel, finish the Wi-Fi sign-in page before you expect calls to connect.

SOURCES

Where these facts come from

Checked against each company's own pages on 27 September 2026. Carrier rules and country lists change often, so read your carrier's current page before you travel.

- 3GPP TS 33.402 (ETSI TS 133 402): IKEv2 and IPsec between the phone and the ePDG
- Apple 108066, make a call with Wi-Fi Calling; Apple iPhone User Guide, make calls using Wi-Fi
- Apple 102405, calls on iPad and Mac from iPhone; Apple FaceTime User Guide for Mac, set up phone calls
- Apple, Wi-Fi Calling & Privacy (apple.com/legal/privacy/data/en/wi-fi-calling)
- Apple 102766, recommended Wi-Fi router settings (WMM)
- Google Phone app Help 2811843, Wi-Fi calling; Google Fi Help 16710124, web calls
- Samsung UK, activate Wi-Fi Calling on a Galaxy; Samsung US ANS10001614, Call & text on other devices
- AT&T KM1063258 and Wi-Fi Calling legal terms; KM1401809, international; KM1114459, LAN and VPN configuration
- Verizon Wi-Fi Calling FAQs; Verizon international and Wi-Fi Calling terms
- T-Mobile, Wi-Fi Calling from T-Mobile; Wi-Fi calling troubleshooting; international roaming
- WhatsApp Help Center, emergency calls
- ITU-T G.114, one-way transmission time
- Wi-Fi Alliance, Wi-Fi CERTIFIED WMM

About this guide

Written for people who aren't technical and want to know what Wi-Fi Calling does before they need it. Product and company names are trademarks of their owners.

This guide is independent and isn't affiliated with or endorsed by any carrier or device maker.