

How Much Internet Speed Do I Need?

If you've been shopping for a new internet plan recently, you've likely noticed that internet providers are now offering connection speeds that range from 50 Mbps all the way up to 1,000 Mbps, which is also known as gigabit speed.

But what does Mbps mean? And while internet companies are offering you more and more Mbps, do you really need them?

These are legitimate questions that almost all internet users have, and if you don't know the answers, it can be easy to be talked into signing up for something that costs more than you want to spend and gives you more than you need.

However, there's also nothing more frustrating than having an internet connection that's too slow, and not being properly informed can just as easily lead to you not getting enough speed for your home.

To help you avoid both of these scenarios and find the internet connection that's ideal for you, we've put together this guide that will help you figure out exactly how much internet speed you need. In the event you think you've got the right connection but still aren't getting the velocity you want, we've also outlined some tips that will help you improve the speed of your connection.

How is Internet Speed Measured?

Before we go too far into figuring out exactly how much internet speed we need, it's important to know how internet speed is measured.

As mentioned, internet companies advertise speeds in Mbps, which stands for megabits per second. Megabits are a way of measuring data, and so Mbps refers to how much data can be transferred on your internet connection at one time. So, to give you an idea, if you try to download a file that is 256 Mb on a connection that runs at 250 Mbps, it will take a little more than a second to access the file.

As such, the more Mbps your connection offers, the faster your internet will be. But, as we will discuss in a minute, you don't always need more.

One thing you should keep in mind is that there are two types of internet speeds, upload and download. Upload speed refers to how much data can travel from your device "up" to the internet in a second, and download speed refers to how long it takes to access data that's stored on web servers.

Most internet companies only advertise download speeds, and upload speeds tend to be quite a bit slower, as most people don't spend a lot of time uploading stuff to the internet. However, if you're running a website or doing a lot of file transfers on your connection, then it's important to keep an eye out for how quickly stuff uploads.

How Much Internet Speed Do You Need?

To determine how much internet speed you need, the first thing you need to do is figure out which type of internet user you are – light, medium, or heavy.

Light users are those who do simple things online, such as sending and receiving email, browsing, social media, reading, etc. For this, you don't need much more than 15 Mbps, but you could even get away with as little as 10 Mbps.

Moderate users are those who do the same things as light users but who also stream videos on popular sites such as YouTube and Netflix. For these users, the FCC recommends between 12-25 Mbps, but in this case, the faster your connection, the more quickly you will be able to stream these videos, reducing the amount of load time and also limiting the chance that your video gets stuck buffering, which we all know can be incredibly frustrating.

Heavy users are those who stream videos in Ultra HD 4k, which is standard on Hulu and Amazon Prime and included in the most popular Netflix plan. People who do lots of file sharing, video conferencing, and intense gaming, such as graphics-heavy RPG games, are also considered heavy users. And for this type of activity, you will want to have at least 25 Mbps, but to be safe, it's probably best to try and get a connection that is closer to 50 Mbps.

That's it. There are some other factors to consider, which we will discuss in a bit, but generally speaking, if you figure out which one of these categories you fall into, you will know exactly how much internet speed you need.

What Type of Internet Do You Need?

Another common question people have when shopping for internet is what type of internet connection you should get – cable, DSL, fiber optic, or satellite.

Which one you choose will depend slightly on the area you live in – some connections are better in some areas than others, and in some cases, there are only certain types available – but it also matters what you need your internet for.

Here's a breakdown of each one:

Cable

This is one of the most common forms of high-speed internet out there, and it also offers some of the fastest speeds. It runs through cable lines, so it's also pretty widely-available and reliable.

One minor downside to cable internet is that your bandwidth is often shared with other people in your area. So, in theory, if everyone in your neighborhood is using the internet at the same time, you could experience slower speeds. However, cable companies are usually pretty good about predicting this and so this shouldn't happen too often.

Fiber Optic

Fiber optic networks represent the latest technology and allow more data to travel, meaning they often provide users with much faster speeds. However, because it's still a relatively new technology, fiber optic internet is usually less available. And it often costs more. But if you have the chance to get it for a similar price as other networks, you should definitely consider getting this type of connection.

DSL

Also known as direct service line, DSL was the first version of high-speed internet. It runs through a direct phone line that runs from the ISP's service center directly to your home, and while it can be quite fast, the speed you get will depend on how close you are to this service center. In other words, the further you are, the slower your internet will be.

However, DSL internet is often a cheaper option, so if you can get the speed you need with DSL, it could be a nice option for you.

Satellite

Last on the list is satellite internet. As the name suggests, it operates through satellites. It tends to offer considerably slower speeds than the other connection types on this list, but it can be accessed pretty much anywhere in the world. As a result, it's an ideal option for those living in remote areas where other types of internet aren't available, but it's not an attractive option for those who have other choices.

Another issue with satellite internet is that its connection depends on the receiver in your home making a direct connection with the satellites flying in the sky. This means bad weather can weaken or even wipe out your internet, something that simply doesn't happen with the other connection types on this list.

Shopping for Internet

If you've been shopping for internet recently, you are probably aware that most internet companies offer you way faster connections than what you actually need.

There are a couple of reasons for this, which we will detail below, but one somewhat cynical motivation is that internet companies, which at one time were cable companies, are having to rely more and more on their internet subscriptions to make money. As a result, they are offering faster and faster connections, under the guise this is necessary, to charge more money, even though you won't ever possibly need 500 or 1,000 Mbps.

Some of the other reasons why there is such a big discrepancy between what you need and what internet companies offer include:

Actual Speed vs. Top Speed

The speeds that internet providers offer are the maximum speeds that that network can deliver. However, it's extremely likely you will never experience that type of velocity when you're actually surfing the web.

This is usually because you, in some ways, share your internet connection with other people in your area. But most informed users still believe this is a regular phenomenon.

As a result, when looking at an internet plan, it's important to also spend some time researching what average speeds are for the area in which you are living.

If you currently have internet, you can do this pretty easily by using tools such as [Speed Test](#). Simply check the connection speed at different points throughout the day and record them. Then, after a week or so, find the average. Then, compare this to what was advertised to you.

If you're moving to a new area or trying to change companies in the same area, then you can also do a search for average speeds in your area.

Bandwidth vs. Speed

Another reason why advertised speeds are so much higher than what most people use is that internet companies often don't list bandwidth when they are providing details for your plan.

Bandwidth refers to the total amount of data that your network can handle at one time. A useful analogy is to think of the water pipes running into your home. The main pipe coming from the street determines how much water can come in. This is like the bandwidth. But each faucet or tap can only handle so much water, and if all the water were to go through one tap, then the others would run dry.

Your internet works the same way. It may be able to handle a certain amount of data, but if there are multiple users, and one or two are consuming a lot of data, then other people using the network will likely experience slower speeds.

When advertising internet plans, most providers simply tell you how many users can access the network at once. They are referring to bandwidth, but they don't ever give any specific numbers. As a result, it's likely the internet speeds they are listing are not even calculated by taking into account the fact that multiple users will be on the network at once.

This makes it difficult to know which connection is right for you. After reading this, you might be tempted to go for something a bit slower, but this might leave you with too little bandwidth to handle all the activity occurring on your network at once.

In general, it's easy enough to upgrade your plan – internet companies will always allow you to spend more money – so one thing you could do is start with a slower plan and then see how it goes. If you find you don't have enough, you can always increase your overall speed (bandwidth), which should lead to a faster internet experience.

How to Increase the Speed of Your Internet

If you're not getting the connection speed you want, or you find your internet is running too slow for your needs, your first instinct might be to upgrade your connection or switch companies. But before you go through this hassle and expense, consider some of the following tricks.

Move Closer to Your Router

Most of us connect to the internet these days exclusively through WiFi. Its convenience is simply too great to beat. However, the further away you are from your router, or the more obstacles between you and the router, the slower your connection will be.

So, before jumping for a new connection, consider moving closer or removing some of the things in your way. Another thing you can do is to get a WiFi extender, which will allow your signal to reach around some of these obstacles and allow you to get higher speeds wherever you are.

Update Your Router

If you try moving closer to your router but the connection still isn't good, then consider testing to see if your router is the best one for your connection type. Routers are equipped to handle certain connection speeds, and if yours is faster than what your router can handle, you will be repeatedly disappointed by your connection.

To test this, plug a computer into your router directly using an Ethernet cord. Then, test your connection and compare it to what you were getting when you were connected via WiFi. If it's considerably faster, then you will want to replace your router, and this should unlock faster speeds.

But before you go out and buy a new router, consider reaching out to your internet company. Their networks run better overall when the equipment on them is up-to-date, and so many will replace your router for you at no additional cost (you usually pay for this anyway).

Or, of course, you can simply buy a new one and enjoy the faster speeds it provides.

Check Your Computer for Malware and Viruses

Another thing you should do if your internet is slower than you want it to be is to check your devices. Malware, spyware, and viruses can considerably slow down your machine and make your internet run much more slowly than you want.

To do this, you can use the anti-virus software already installed on your computer (if you have one), or you can use a free tool such as [Malwarebytes](#).

If you have a problem and don't know how to remove it on your own, then you'll probably want to take it to a professional who can clean it up and get you back to full speed in no time.

Change Browsers

The browser you use also impacts how quickly you can access the internet. The fastest browsers at the moment are Google Chrome – Mozilla Firefox. Microsoft Edge isn't bad, but Safari – Apple's proprietary browser – is quite slow.

If you're using Chrome and still aren't happy, consider switching since Chrome consumes a lot of your computer's resources, hurting it's all-around performance and slowing down your internet.

To be fair, this might not produce a dramatic result, but it's worth a try since it can be a free and easy way to boost the speed with which you access the internet.

Upgrade Your Internet

If you try all of these things and your internet speed still doesn't improve, then it's probably time to upgrade your connection. But when you call your internet provider to do this, make sure you make it clear how displeased you are with your service and why (something you should be able to explain now that you know exactly how much internet speed you genuinely need).

It's also a good idea to research alternatives so that when you call up your provider you can threaten them with your departure from the company. This is often enough to scare them into action and can usually get you a better connection without spending too much more money.

Be Informed

We hope that you now have all the information you need to determine how much internet speed you need and how to get the most out of your connection. But remember, you can negotiate with internet companies to get the best deal, and the more information you have, the better you can negotiate. So, use what you've learned here to bargain and get the internet connection you not only need but can afford.

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