Reinstall Windows – Microsoft Support

Windows 11 · https://cleversupport.ca/docs/windows-11/reinstall-windows-microsoft-support/

Reinstall W

If you're having problems with Windows 11 on your PC or you want a fresh copy of Windows 11 without the clutter of old files or apps, you can reinstall Windows 11 to try and fix your issues and return your PC to a cleaner state.

Check your disk space

If your PC isn't performing as expected or if you're having issues with Windows 11, it may be because of low disk space. Before you reinstall Windows 11, try freeing up disk space to see if that helps. For more info, see Free up drive space in Windows.

Before you begin

Make sure you back up your data

If you have personal data and files that you want to save, back them up to an external hard drive, USB thumb drive, SD card, or cloud location (such as OneDrive) before you begin to reinstall Windows 11.

Make sure Windows 11 is activated

Windows 11 must be activated after it’s reinstalled. Usually this happens automatically after you go online. For more info, see "Activating after reinstalling Windows" in Activate Windows.

You’ll need to link your Microsoft account to your digital license before you reinstall Windows

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You'll need to reactivate Windows 11 if you've made a significant hardware change to your PC

If you reinstall Windows 11 after you make a significant hardware change to your PC (such as replacing the motherboard), it may no longer be activated. You can use the Activation troubleshooter to reactivate Windows. For more info, see Using the Activation troubleshooter.

You'll need to reinstall the edition of Windows that matches your license

When you reinstall Windows 11, you'll need to select the edition of Windows that matches your digital license. For example, if you're running Windows 11 Home, you'll need to install Windows 11 Home again.

To see which edition of Windows you're running, go to **Start** > **Settings** > **System** > **About** . Your edition is listed under **Windows specifications**.

Types of reinstalls for Windows 11

The following chart provides info about the different options that you can choose for each type of reinstall including what happens to your apps, files, personal data, and how much disk space is required for the reinstall. Use this chart to help you decide which option to use to reinstall Windows 11.

We recommend that you first try to "Reset Windows 11," then, if needed, "Reinstall Windows 11 using installation media," and then, if needed, try a "Clean install of Windows 11 using installation media."

Notes:

- Reinstalling Windows 11 using installation media while choosing to 'Keep nothing' (a clean install) will automatically enable reserved storage if the partition you reinstall Windows to is 20GB or larger. Reserved storage sets aside disk space to be used by updates, apps, temporary files, and system caches, thus improving the day-to-day function of your PC by ensuring that critical OS functions always have access to disk space.
- For devices with reserved storage, a reset or reinstall will first use the reserved storage space before using other disk space. For more info, see How reserved storage works in Windows.

Reinstall type	Reinstall options you can choose	What happens to your apps	What happens to your personal data stored under \Users	What happens to data stored in other folders or drives	Disk space required
Reset Windows 11	Keep my files	Apps that didn't come with your PC are removed.	Preserved	Preserved	Medium
Reset Windows 11	Remove everything	Apps that didn't come with your PC are removed.	Deleted	Deleted	Low
Reinstall Windows 11 using installation media	Keep Everything (Default)	All apps and settings are preserved.	Preserved	Preserved	High
Reinstall Windows 11 using installation media	Keep Personal Data	All apps are removed.	Preserved	Preserved	Medium
Reinstall Windows 11 using installation media	Keep Nothing	All apps are removed.	Deleted	Deleted	Low

Clean install of Windows 11 using installation media	N/A(This reinstall option deletes and recreates all disk partitions.)	Deleted	Deleted	Deleted	Very low

Reset Windows 11

This option will take your device back to a state similar to when you turned it on for the first time, removing programs you have installed and removing personal files, depending on which option you select. Windows will handle everything automatically, and you won't need to use an external storage device. Resetting your device is less impactful than the clean install option, though it will require sufficient disk space.

You can reset your PC from Settings or the Windows Recovery Environment (WinRE), which can be accessed through the sign-in screen. For the steps to reset Windows 11, see Reset or reinstall Windows.

If your PC doesn't have sufficient space available to reset Windows 11, you'll receive a notification. In this scenario, either free up additional space or use the steps in the next section to reinstall Windows 11.

Reinstall Windows 11 using installation media

This option will use a tool to create installation media which you can use to completely wipe the disk and install a fresh copy of Windows 11. This option requires you to use an external storage device such as a USB drive, and will give you an option to choose what to keep during installation.

Before you begin, make sure you have the following:

- An internet connection
- An external storage device such as a USB drive, SD card, or external hard drive with at least 8GB of available space.

Create the installation media

First, create the installation media that you'll use to reinstall Windows 11.

1. Make sure you've backed up any files on your device that you wish to save onto an external storage device such as a USB drive, SD card, or external hard drive, or upload your files to OneDrive.**Note:** If you use an external storage device to back up files, make sure it’s a different one than the one you’ll be using to download Windows 10 installation media.
2. Download the Windows 11 installation media to a separate external storage device that has at least 8GB of available space. Everything on this drive will be deleted to complete the download, so make sure it’s empty before you proceed. Here's how:
    a. On a working PC, go to the Microsoft software download website and select **Download tool now**.
    b. When the download is complete, open the tool from your desktop, and then select **Yes** when asked if you’d like to allow the app to make changes to your device.
    c. When the Windows 11 Setup guide appears, accept the license terms and agreements.
    d. Select **Create installation media (USB flash drive, DVD, or ISO file) for another PC**, and then select **Next**.
    e. Choose a language, edition, and architecture (64-bit or 32-bit), and then select **Next**.
    f. Select **USB flash drive**, and then select **Next**.
    g. Follow the steps to create installation media, and then select **Finish**.

Use the installation media to reinstall Windows 11

Connect the installation media you created to your PC and reinstall Windows 11.

1. Open **File Explorer** and select the drive with the installation media.
2. From the root directory of the drive, double-click setup.exe, and then select **Yes** when asked if you’d like to allow the app to make changes to your device.
3. Select **Change** to determine what to keep: Select one of the following options, and then select **Next**:
    - **Keep personal files and apps** – This will preserve your personal data, apps, and settings.
    - **Keep personal files only** – This will preserve your personal data and settings, but all your apps will be removed.
    - **Keep nothing** – This will remove all personal data, settings, and apps.

Warning: You cannot undo a reinstallation of Windows 10. Be sure to back up your files first if you choose the **Keep nothing** option.

4. To finish, select **Install** to start reinstalling Windows 11 on your PC.

Your PC will restart several times during the reinstallation.

Clean install of Windows 11 using installation media

Warning:

- A clean installation is an advanced option to help you start fresh on your device. We recommend following the below steps only if you're confident in making these changes. For more help, contact support.
- This will remove all your personal files, apps and drivers you installed, apps and customizations from your PC manufacturer, and changes you made in Settings.

This option will use a tool to create installation media which you can use to completely wipe the disk and install a fresh copy of Windows 11. This option requires you to use an external storage device such as a USB drive, and may take a few extra steps, though it will delete everything for the cleanest installation. This type of clean install deletes and recreates system partitions. It will delete all personal files on your device and the partition on your hard drive currently being used for your recovery drive.

Before you begin, make sure you have the following:

- An internet connection
- An external storage device such as a USB drive, SD card, or external hard drive with at least 8GB of available space

Create the installation media

First, create the installation media that you'll use to perform a clean install of Windows 11.

1. Make sure you've backed up any files on your device that you wish to save onto an external storage device such as a USB drive, SD card, or external hard drive, or upload your files to OneDrive.**Note:** If you use an external storage device to back up files, make sure it’s a different one than the one you’ll be using to download Windows 11 installation media.

2. Download the Windows 11 installation media to a separate 8GB-sized external storage device. Everything on this drive will be deleted to complete the download, so make sure it’s empty before you proceed. Here's how:
   a. On a working PC, go to the Microsoft software download website and select **Download tool now**.
   b. When the download is complete, open the tool from your desktop, and then select **Yes** when asked if you’d like to allow the tool to make changes to your device.
   c. When the Windows 11 Setup guide appears, accept the license terms and agreements.
   d. Select **Create installation media (USB flash drive, DVD, or ISO file) from another PC**, and then select **Next**.
   e. Choose a language, edition, and architecture (64-bit or 32-bit).
   f. Follow the steps to create installation media, and then select **Finish**.

Use the installation media to perform a clean install

Connect the installation media you created to your PC and perform a clean install of Windows 11.

1. Select **Start** > **Settings** > **System** > **Recovery** .

   Open Recovery settings
2. Next to **Advanced startup**, select **Restart now**.
3. Select **Use a device**, and then choose the device corresponding to the external storage device you’re using.**Note:** If the **Use a device** option isn’t available, visit your device manufacturer’s website for details on how to boot from a USB flash drive.
4. When the first Windows screen appears, choose the options that best suit your needs, and then select **Next**.
5. Select **Install now**, and then check the **I accept** box. Select **Next**, and then select **Custom: Install Windows only (advanced)**. Your device will now display a list of drives and partitions. If multiple disks are displayed, you’ll only need to delete all partitions from the disk where you want to install Windows.
6. Highlight each drive/partition in the list and select **Delete**. When the Windows Setup notification appears, select **OK**.

7. Complete step 5 for every drive in the list except the one that says **Unallocated Space**. When you’re finished, only Drive 0 Unallocated Space should remain.
8. Select **Next**.
9. The Windows setup screen will now display **Installing Windows**. When the installation is complete, your device will restart. When this happens, it may try to restart from the external storage device. If the initial Windows setup screen requests you choose you language/keyboard layout, remove the external storage drive from your device and select **OK**. This will restart your device.
10. Once the installation is complete and your device has restarted, select the preferences and settings you’d like for your device.