

What Is Internet Throttling And How Can You Test It?

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Picture this: You sit down to work, only to have the internet refuse to load all of your web pages. More than a frustrating feeling, this can be a legitimate problem for remote workers. If you've ruled out other reasons for a [slow internet connection](#), such as trouble with your router, the issue may be internet throttling from your [internet service provider](#) (ISP).

Signs of internet throttling can also show up if you notice more buffering while streaming shows or experience lags while downloading files. This could be due to your ISP subtly capping your bandwidth in an effort to conserve the company's network traffic. But, when you're paying for the internet with a certain expectation of internet speed, it can be disappointing to suspect your internet is getting throttled.

Also known as data throttling or bandwidth throttling, internet throttling is legal if your ISP expresses the possibility of limiting your internet speed in the fine print of your contract. The exception is if your ISP falsely advertised unlimited data but went on to place a cap on your service.

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How Does Internet Throttling Happen?

Internet service providers may intentionally slow down customers' service to limit the total amount of bandwidth consumed. This, in turn, can allow ISPs to minimize network congestion or charge more for the privileges of higher bandwidth. Internet throttling is most common with mobile and wireless ISPs.

Network Congestion

You may notice symptoms of internet throttling at certain times of day, but not at others. For example, if you're sitting down to watch a Netflix movie around 8 p.m., there is a good chance many of your neighbors have the same idea. That results in network congestion, which some ISPs combat through internet throttling. By restricting individuals' bandwidth, more people can use the internet service at the same time—just with slower loading speeds.

Data Caps

If you pay for a set amount of data per month, your ISP may begin to throttle your internet as you approach that cut-off point. This can be an effective way to help you conserve your data so that you don't completely run out. But, if you truly need **faster internet**, you may need to upgrade to a plan with more data or **unlimited data**.

Paid Prioritization

Also known as “fast lane internet,” paid prioritization refers to when companies pay ISPs to help their sites or content load faster than competitors' data on a network. This practice definitely has critics, but it was legalized by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in 2018.

How to Test for Internet Throttling

There are several factors that can contribute to slower internet speeds—and bandwidth throttling isn't always to blame. If you've ruled out problems like slow internet connection, router issues or old technology, the next step is testing for internet throttling.

1. Test Your Baseline Internet Speed

There are many free options for running an **internet speed test**. Google partners with Measurement Lab (M-Lab) to offer a free test of users' connection speed, including download and upload speed. To use this, go to

one minute that can serve as your control information.

If you experience slower internet speed or more buffering at a certain time of day (possibly due to network congestion), run a speed test at this time.

2. Install a VPN

Now, to determine if your internet is getting throttled, you will want to compare your control internet speed results against your internet speed when you are protected from throttling. To do this, download and activate a reputable virtual private network (VPN), which protects you from internet throttling.

3. Test Internet Speed with the VPN

Once you've installed the VPN, run another speed test. For the most accurate results, perform the speed test at approximately the same time as the control test. This can help account for internet throttling due to network congestion. If the results from your VPN-run speed test are much faster, that's your evidence that your internet is getting throttled.

How Can I Stop Internet Throttling?

One way to avoid internet throttling is to use a virtual private network (VPN), which keeps your activity private even from your ISP. As a result, the ISP shouldn't throttle your internet service. The downside of using a VPN is that it may cost a fee (especially for quality services) and some websites don't allow VPN users.

If internet speed is your top priority, it may be better to look into alternative ISPs or switch to a plan with a higher data cap. **Fiber**, DSL and cable networks are good bets as these ISPs generally don't throttle users' internet.

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