

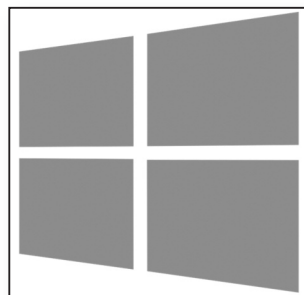
Don't Get Left Behind! Upgrade Your PC to Windows 10 While You Still Can

This article shows you how to:

- Check whether your PC is compatible with Windows 10
- Find your 25-character Windows product key
- Upgrade to Windows 10 in straightforward steps

Are you still using the elderly Windows 8.1, or the even-older Windows 7? If you are, you're being left behind. Windows 7 is no longer supported and Windows 8.1 is fast heading in the same direction, so it's time to do something about it. But what?

Somewhat surprisingly, Microsoft still allows you to upgrade to Windows 10 free of charge, and that's well worth considering. In this article, I'll explain exactly how to go about it.



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Why Upgrade to Windows 10?

You avoided the upgrade to Windows 10

When Windows 10 was released in 2015, it was a free update and Microsoft encouraged all Windows 8.1 and Windows 7 users to upgrade to it. In fact, 'encouraged' is putting it mildly: they tried to push you into it repeatedly, reluctant to take 'no' for an answer.

Now it's time to think again

If you're still using one of those older versions, you obviously managed to pick your way through that minefield. But now, perhaps the time has come to think again:

Windows 7 is no longer supported

- Support ended for Windows 7 in January 2020, roughly two years ago. That means Windows 7 no longer receives any security updates, and that's not a good situation to be in.

Windows 8.1 support ends soon

- Windows 8.1 loses its support in January 2023, just a year away. And while it may be familiar to you, it's an oddly-designed and cumbersome version to be stuck with.

The upgrade to Windows 10 is still free

Although they don't publicise it widely, Microsoft still allows you to upgrade to Windows 10 for free. And Windows 10 continues to be supported until 2025, meaning you can squeeze a few more years of life out of your PC before having to replace it.



Why not upgrade to the new Windows 11 instead? Well, the latest news from the always-inscrutable Microsoft is that only Windows 10 users will be eligible to upgrade to Windows 11 for free. So if Windows 11 is what you want, you'd have to upgrade to Windows 10 first anyway.

Another spanner in the works is that your PC may not meet the specifications required for Windows 11. It's been estimated that as few as 40% of Windows 10 computers will be compatible, so your older PC is even less likely to fit the bill.

Before You Start: Make Sure Your PC is Compatible

If you agree that an upgrade to Windows 10 is a sensible move, let's start by making sure your PC is compatible. It almost certainly is, but it doesn't hurt to check. Follow these steps:

1. Press **Win+Pause** to open the System page of Control Panel.
2. First you want to know whether you're using a 32-bit or 64-bit version of Windows (known as the 'bitness'). Look alongside the words **System type** to see whether it says **32-bit Operating System** or **64-bit Operating System**. You'll be upgrading to the same 'bitness' of Windows 10, so if your current version of Windows is 64-bit, for example, you'll be upgrading to 64-bit Windows 10. You have no choice in that.
3. Now check what it says beside **Installed memory (RAM)**. *Check RAM...* For 32-bit Windows you need at least 1 GB of memory; for 64-bit Windows it must be at least 2 GB.
4. Finally in this window, look at the far end of the **Processor** line. *... and processor speed* You're hoping to see a figure of at least 1.00 GHz, and you almost certainly will.



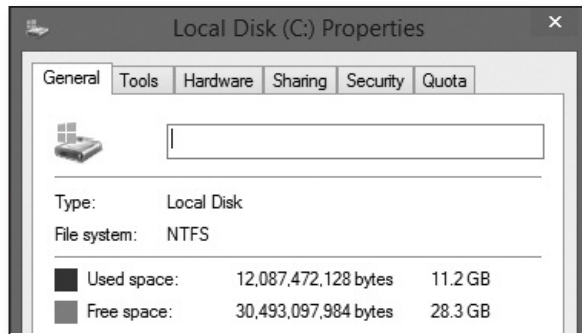
System	
Processor:	Intel(R) Core(TM) i5-8400 CPU @ 2.80GHz 2.81 GHz
Installed memory (RAM):	2.00 GB
System type:	64-bit Operating System, x64-based processor
Pen and Touch:	No Pen or Touch Input is available for this Display

5. Click the **x** in the top-right of this Control Panel window to close it.
6. Assuming your PC met the criteria noted above, there's just one last check to make: whether your

hard drive has enough free space. Press **Win+E** to open Windows Explorer, right-click the icon for your main hard drive (named **C:**) and choose **Properties**.

Check there's enough free space

7. Look at the far end of the **Free space** line. Here you're hoping to see at least 16 GB for 32-bit Windows, or 20 GB for 64-bit Windows.



If you come up short in the free space department, this is the one aspect you may be able to do something about; it really depends how far short you are.

Need to clear some extra space?

The first job is to get rid of unnecessary space-wasting files. Start by clicking the **Disk Cleanup** button a little lower down this dialog, and when the Disk Cleanup window appears, click the **Clean up system files** button to ensure you'll be able to remove as much as possible. When the window reappears, a note near the top will tell you the maximum amount of space you can regain. Tick the boxes below to specify which files you want removed, then click **OK**. You might then like to repeat steps 6 and 7 to see if this has made sufficient difference.

Beyond that, the only way to regain space is to uninstall programs, and/or to move large files to a different disk. The second of those is certainly quite a palaver, and unless you're short by less than 1 GB (or you have a lot of very large files), you're probably out of luck.

Don't Know Your Windows Key? How to Find It

With luck, you've come through the compatibility checks successfully, and there's just one more thing you'll need before you start: the product key for your current version of Windows. You may have to type this during the upgrade to Windows 10, and if you don't know it, you'll be in a pickle. It's a 25-character code consisting of letters and numbers that looks something like this:

12AB3-DEF45-6GH7J-KL8MN-P9QRS

You should find this on a little sticker somewhere on your PC's case. Alternatively, if you have a Windows 8.1 or Windows 7 installation DVD, the product key should be somewhere on the DVD's packaging.

No luck? Don't worry, you can find it a different way: there's a free program named Magical Jelly Bean KeyFinder which can tell you. Here's what to do:

1. Start your favourite web browser and visit this address:

www.magicaljellybean.com/keyfinder

2. On the web page that opens, you'll see a choice of two programs, each with a column of features below it. Click the **Download** button below the 'Magical Jelly Bean KeyFinder' column (which you'll see is noted as 'Free').

3. When the download is complete, run the KeyFinderInstaller program you've just downloaded, and follow the steps through the setup program. Besides noting that you accept the agreement at the beginning, there's nothing you need to change along the way. In the final step, leave a tick in the **Launch KeyFinder** box and click **Finish**.

You may need to know your product key

This free program can tell you

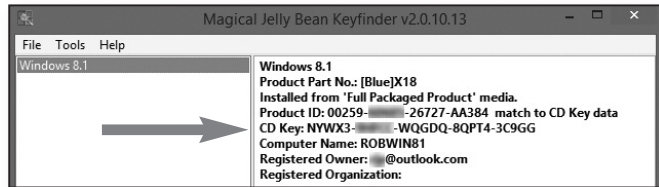


Run the KeyFinder program

4. Click **Yes** to the User Account Control security warning and you'll see the KeyFinder window. At the left, select the Windows item (if some other item is currently selected).

Carefully note down your key

5. On the right you'll see various details about your copy of Windows, but the item you need is noted as **CD Key**. Note this 25-character code down somewhere carefully. Make absolutely sure that what you've written matches what's shown in the window, because when you come to type this code, it will be too late to consult this KeyFinder program again!



6. When you've written down and double-checked this product key, you can close the KeyFinder window.

Step by Step: Upgrading to Windows 10

That's got everything prepared, and now you're just about ready to begin upgrading. It's a mostly-automatic process in which you largely just leave your PC to get on with it.

Make sure you have enough time!

Just one word of warning, though: it's a job to start when you've got at least a couple of hours to spare. It probably won't take quite that long, but once you start, you need to keep going to the end – you can't easily pause the process partway through. If you're using a notebook or tablet PC, make sure it's plugged into the mains so that there's no chance of its battery dying before you finish!

Right, let's get started. Here's what to do:

1. Start your favourite web browser and visit this address:

www.microsoft.com/en-gb/software-download/windows10



2. We're going to download something named the Media Creation Tool, and you'll see a button marked **Download tool now**: click that button.

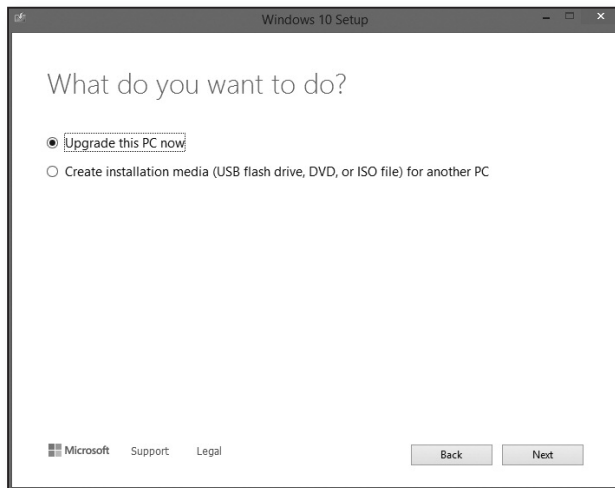
Download the Media Creation Tool

3. This fairly-small program will download in a matter of seconds. Find and run the program you've just downloaded.

4. Click **Yes** to the User Account Control security warning and the 'Windows 10 Setup' window will appear showing the license terms. Click **Accept**.

5. After a short pause while this setup program 'gets things ready', you'll see the step pictured below. The selected option should be **Upgrade this PC now**. (If it isn't for some reason, be sure to select that option.) Click **Next**.

Choose the option to upgrade

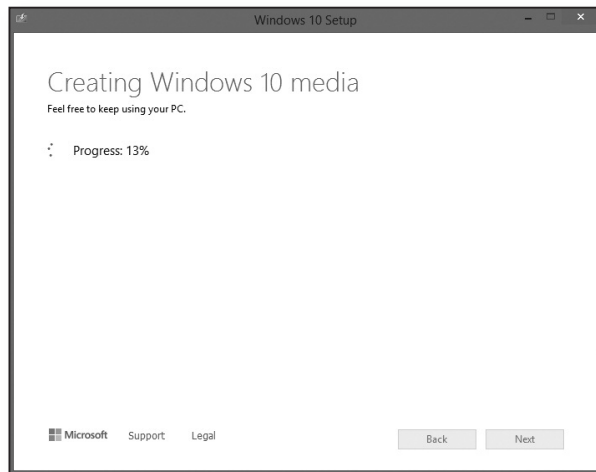


Windows 10 is downloaded

6. The next step is headed 'Downloading Windows 10' and you'll see the progress so far noted as a percentage. This is one of the longer jobs of the procedure: the data being downloaded is around 4 GB, so it will take 20–30 minutes, and perhaps longer if your Internet connection isn't terribly speedy.



As the window notes, you can carry on using your PC while this download is happening. Just be aware that if you decide to browse web pages or do something else involving the Internet, things might happen rather more slowly due to the large download going on in the background.



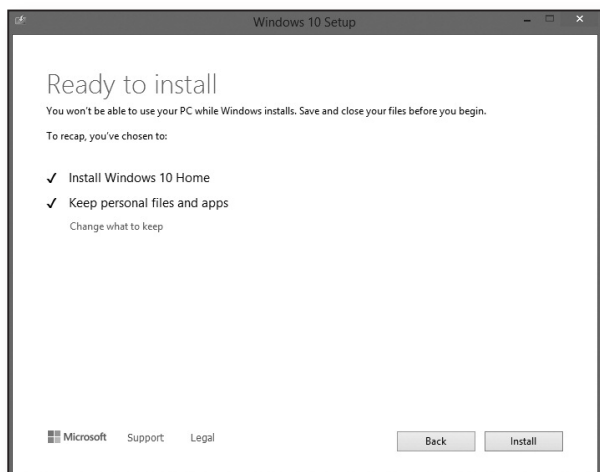
7. As soon as the data has been downloaded, the setup program starts its next procedure, headed 'Creating Windows 10 media', again with a progress percentage displayed. This is a quicker job, but it might take 10 minutes.

The setup program closes briefly

8. Next, rather disconcertingly, setup announces that it's cleaning up before it closes, then the window disappears, and nothing happens for a few moments.

This might make you fear that something has gone wrong, but don't worry: after a short pause, you'll see a small panel that says 'Preparing', again showing a percentage, and a short time later the 'Windows 10 Setup' window reappears. Once again, you'll have to click **Accept** to agree the license terms.

9. In the next step, the setup program announces that it's 'Getting updates', yet again keeping you posted with a percentage, and this will usually take 5–10 minutes. *Updates are downloaded*
10. The setup program next carries out a couple of quick checks that your PC meets the system requirements for Windows 10 and that you have enough free disk space, both of which you checked earlier, so there shouldn't be any surprises here.
11. At this point you may be prompted to enter your Windows product key. If so, type the key you noted down earlier and click **Next**.
12. Lastly for this part of the process you'll see the window pictured below, confirming that you're about to install Windows 10 while keeping your files and apps: *Ready to install Windows 10*





This is your last chance to change your mind about upgrading: if you wanted to, you could click the **x** button in the top-right corner, confirm that you want to cancel setup, and be returned to your existing version of Windows. If you were to do that, and then change your mind again and decide you do want to upgrade after all, you don't have to start again from the beginning. Open Windows Explorer, go to `C:\ESD\Windows` and double the program named 'setup' and you'll pick up the process from the 'Preparing' panel noted in step 8 above.

I'm sure you haven't changed your mind, so save any files you were working on while the preceding steps were taking place, close any programs you were using, and click the **Install** button.

The first step of installation

13. Your whole screen now turns blue and you'll see the first step of the installation itself, with a percentage to keep you posted on how it's going.

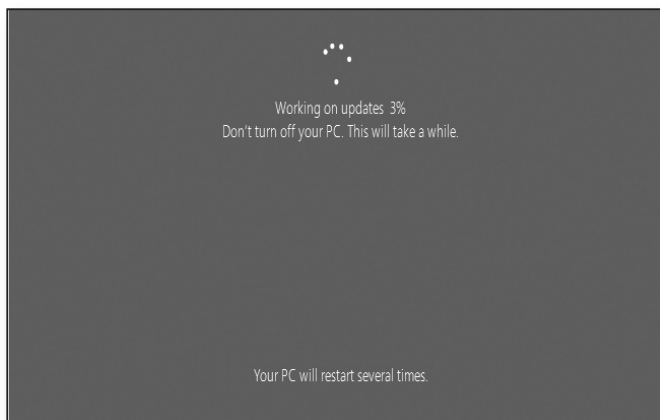


Your PC restarts itself

14. After this percentage reaches 100%, you'll suddenly be returned to your Windows desktop, but only for a moment. The first half of the installation is complete, and your PC restarts itself.

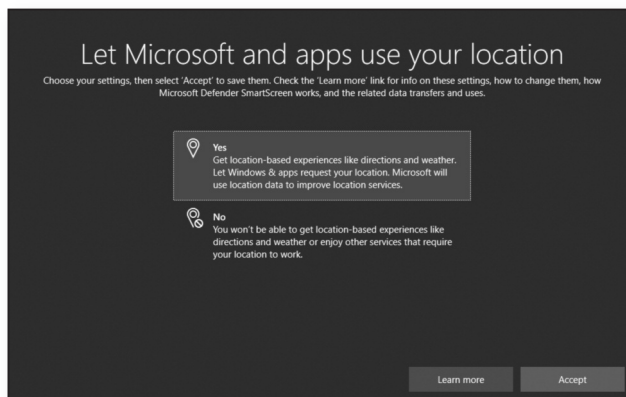
15. Straight after the restart you're launched into the second half of the installation – another blue screen with the words 'Working on updates' and the traditional percentage. This is another long job, taking a good 20 minutes. At the 30% mark your PC will restart itself, and it will do so again at the 75% mark. Just sit tight and let it all happen.

The 'Working on updates' screen appears



16. Once this stage of the installation is complete, you'll arrive at Windows 10's lock screen – a colourful picture with the date and time in the bottom-left corner. Click the picture, or press the **Space** key on your keyboard, and you'll arrive at the sign-in screen. Type your usual password from Windows 8.1 or Windows 7 and press **Enter** to sign in.
17. Despite appearances, you're not quite finished yet. Windows tells you it's almost there and that this might take a few minutes, so again just sit and wait. After this short pause you'll arrive at the first of half-a-dozen screens asking you to choose a few options about how Windows 10 works. In each case, you choose your preferred option and click **Accept** to move to the next.

Click through the lock screen and sign in



Choose options about Windows 10

In each of these options, it's up to you what you choose, but I'll run through them and give you my own suggestion:

- **Let Microsoft and apps use your location:** it's helpful to choose Yes to this one, so that (for example) the Weather app shows the forecast for your own area, and the Maps app pinpoints your location when you want to find directions.
- **Find my device:** this obviously has no point for a PC that always sits on your desk and doesn't go anywhere, but you might like to choose Yes for a notebook or tablet PC.
- **Send diagnostic data to Microsoft:** I see no reason to send anyone any data I don't have to, so I always choose 'Send Required diagnostic data'. (There's no option to send no data at all.)
- **Improve inking & typing:** again you're being asked if you want to help Microsoft by sending data. Perhaps it's churlish of me, but again for privacy reasons, I always choose No.
- **Get tailored experiences with diagnostic data:** can Microsoft use the data it collects about you to give you

personalised tips and ads? That might sound attractive, and as always the choice is yours. Yet again, I choose No.

- **Let apps use advertising ID:** some free apps in Windows 10 display ads, and you can choose whether those ads are personalised to you. The data Microsoft collects about you is linked to an anonymous 'advertising ID' (essentially a reference number), and that data results in those personalised ads. You can't prevent that data being collected: it's a question of whether you want to see ads that are based upon what Microsoft knows about you. I tend to choose No, but I think it makes little difference either way.

When you've made your choices and clicked **Accept** at the last of these options, you'll arrive at the Windows 10 desktop. Congratulations – you've successfully upgraded to Windows 10!

You reach the Windows 10 desktop

You've Finished – What Now?

Now it's time to get yourself acquainted with Windows 10. If you've arrived here from Windows 7, everything should look fairly familiar: this new version is much like what you already know, but with a lick of paint.

If you've come from Windows 8.1, the big difference is that the desktop is now a permanent fixture: clicking the Start button opens the Start menu, where you'll find all your programs, rather than whisking you away to a separate Start screen. Also gone is the Charms bar, and the main items you would have used on there were Search and Settings: to search, you now use the text box on the taskbar; to find the Settings app, open the Start menu and click the cog-shaped icon near the bottom-left corner.

Notable differences from Windows 8.1

Keeping Windows 10? You have 10 days to decide!

There's just one final thing I should point out. Now that you've upgraded, Microsoft gives you 10 days to decide whether you're happy with Windows 10. If you're not, your old version of Windows is still sitting on your hard drive, and you can go back to it if you choose to. I'm sure you won't, but for the sake of completeness I'll quickly explain how: you open the Settings app (by pressing **Win+I**), click on **Update & Security**, then **Recovery**, and on the left you'll see a 'Go back to Windows 7' (or '8.1') heading. Click the **Get started** button and follow the steps presented.

You can recover that wasted disk space immediately

That old version of Windows is occupying 9 GB or more of space on your hard drive. In around 10 days' time, it will be removed and you'll get that missing space back, but if you know you won't want to go back again, you might choose to delete it and recover that space now. If so, here's what to do:



1. Open the Start menu, type **disk** and click on **Disk Cleanup**.
2. In the Disk Cleanup window, click on **Clean up system files**. The window disappears and then, after a pause, reappears.
3. In the list of checkboxes, find and tick the item **Previous Windows installation(s)**, which you'll see from the figure to its right is the big one. Besides that item, tick or untick the other boxes according to whether or not you want those categories 'cleaned up' too.
4. Click **OK**, then click **Delete Files** when asked if you're sure, and leave Disk Cleanup to get on with the job. It can take a surprisingly long time, but it needn't stop you getting on with other things.