

Choosing your broadband service



on your line. Speeds can vary for a variety of different reasons so before signing up ask for the actual speed you will be able to get. For more information, have a look at Ofcom's broadband speeds guide at <http://consumers.ofcom.org.uk/files/2010/07/Broadband-Speeds-July-2010.pdf> and our mobile broadband guide at <http://consumers.ofcom.org.uk/files/2009/07/mobilebb.pdf>.

Ofcom has also conducted research on broadband speeds which is available at www.ofcom.org.uk/research/telecoms/reports/broadband_speeds.

Quality of the service

It can be difficult to find out whether or not a provider provides a good, reliable service. Try asking your friends or colleagues about their provider, or search on the internet to see if they get good reviews from other customers. Remember though that your needs may differ from other people's. For example, having a high-speed connection may be more important to you than cost. Or you may want a service that has few restrictions on the amount you can download.

Some websites also have league tables or ratings of how satisfied customers are with different providers. Ofcom publishes data on the complaints we receive from customers which is available at: <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/other/telecoms-research/complaints>.

Switching ISP

If you've got fixed broadband already then you'll need to move your account over to your new ISP. There are a number of different ways of doing this. In general, the most reliable way to get information on how to switch is to get in touch with the ISP you want to move to. There's more information on Ofcom's website at: www.ofcom.org.uk/consumeradvice/internet/service/switch/.



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This guide provides information about what you should consider when choosing a broadband service.

Different types of broadband service

Broadband can be delivered to your home by a number of different means. There are currently four main types of broadband, though not all will be available everywhere:

- **ADSL:** broadband service provided over the telephone network by an internet service provider (ISP).
- **Cable:** around half of all households in the UK have access to cable broadband.
- **Fibre:** Many households and businesses already have access to superfast broadband delivered through fibre optic lines to the nearest street cabinet and copper lines to the premises.
- **Mobile:** where you use broadband through a special mobile device (often called a 'dongle').

Price

When choosing a broadband provider, think about all the costs involved:

| | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the monthly subscription | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• any one-off connection fee |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• whether you get a discount if you buy other services from the same company, such as a home or mobile phone, or TV package | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the costs of any equipment you might need to buy such as a modem/router or dongle |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the other things included in the package and whether you need them, e.g. email accounts | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• any additional charges, e.g. paying more if you don't pay by direct debit |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the costs of getting technical help, e.g. whether you have to use a premium rate phone line | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• any charges for going over your usage limit (see below) |

Also, have a think about how long the contract is and about whether you want to commit to a provider for a long time.

Ofcom has given accreditation to a number of broadband price comparison sites. See <http://consumers.ofcom.org.uk/2009/07/price-comparison-video> for more details.

Usage limits

Many broadband packages have a fixed amount of data that you can use every month. If you only use the internet for email and web surfing then these limits probably won't affect you. But they might affect you if you use the internet to download music or radio and TV programmes. Have a think about whether you are likely to exceed the usage limit and check what happens if you do - some providers charge you extra if you go over your monthly usage limit.

Even packages which are sold as 'unlimited' often have a restriction which means, for instance, that you won't be able to use them 24 hours a day, every day. Check what this limit is (it's often called a 'fair' or 'acceptable' use policy).

ISPs also often use traffic management which means they sometimes slow down particular types of internet traffic (such as peer-to-peer services). If they do, check what their rules are – they should be on ISPs' websites.

Speeds

Most people can now get superfast fibre or cable broadband. The more you want to use your broadband to download music or video, or the more people are using it at the same time, the faster the speed you'll probably need - as you can see from the table below. Check with your ISP to see if they offer a higher speed package and what the extra cost is – sometimes you can get a higher speed package without having to pay much more. And don't forget upload speeds (the speeds at which you send data from your computer) particularly if you often upload big files like photos or videos to sites such as Facebook and YouTube.

| | Download Speed | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| | 8Mbit/s | 16Mbit/s | 38Mbit/s | 60Mbit/s | 76Mbit/s | 100Mbit/s |
| Download 250kB webpage | 0.3 sec | 0.13 sec | 0.05 sec | 0.03 sec | 0.03 sec | 0.02 sec |
| Download 5MB music track | 5 sec | 3 sec | 1 sec | 0.7 sec | 0.5 sec | 0.4 sec |
| Download 25MB video clip | 26 sec | 13 sec | 6 sec | 3 sec | 2.5 sec | 2 sec |
| Download 4GB high quality film | 1 hour 11 min | 35 min | 15 min | 9 min | 7 min | 5 min |

Your broadband package might have a headline speed (e.g. 16 megabits per second), or your ISP might just commit to giving you the fastest speed they can