

Getting the best value internet deal

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This guide has been written by [Broadband Savvy](#) for Digital Unite and provides practical advice on choosing the right home broadband service.



In this guide you will learn:

- How to find out what your broadband need are.
- The options available for you to get connected at home.

Where to start: finding out how fast your broadband should be

If you go to any broadband comparison website and type in your postcode, you'll likely see a large number of broadband packages advertised. The higher-speed deals in particular can often be very expensive. The truth is most households don't need an expensive ultra-fast broadband deal. You only need ultra-fast speeds if you have a lot of people at home, who all use the internet at the same time.

[Zoom](#) recommends a broadband download speed of 2 megabits per second (Mbps) to talk to another person with your webcams on without buffering. To watch Netflix, [you only need a 5 Mbps download speed](#) for high definition video. **To put this in context, most broadband packages for sale in the UK have an advertised speed of 36 Mbps or more, provided you have good fibre infrastructure in your local area.**

Broadband Savvy's [internet speed needs calculator](#) will help you get a rough idea of how much speed you really need, given the number of people in your household, and how you use the internet. Although you may only need 2 Mbps for Zoom or 5 Mbps for watching videos, **we recommend buying a package with at least 10 Mbps**, to give yourself a bit of a buffer.

If you're interested to learn how much speed you currently have, you can use an internet speed testing website such as [speedtest.net](#). On this site, click the big "Go" button in the middle of the screen. After the test finishes, your download speed will be shown, under "Download Mbps".



How to get the best broadband deals

Broadband discount packages for people on low incomes

Provided you only need a basic broadband package, the first place to look is the special discounts available with specific internet service providers (ISPs).

Although they don't advertise these deals prominently, some ISPs offer cheap, basic broadband packages called [social tariffs](#) for those on certain government benefits.

- [BT Home Essentials](#) offers broadband and free weekend calls for around £15-£20 per month. It's available to those on income support, the Jobseeker's allowance, Pensions Credit, Employment and Support Allowance, and Universal Credit.

- [Virgin Media Essential](#) broadband is available for £15 per month, offering 15 Mbps on a month-to-month contract. You need to be receiving Universal Credit to be eligible. However, Virgin Media isn't available everywhere. You can put your postcode in on [their website](#) to see if you can get it at your address.
- For those in Hull and the surrounding areas, KCOM offers a number of special [Flex packages](#). They're available for those on a number of different government assistance credits and allowances, at a cost of between £9 to £20 per month. However, there are strict limits on how much data you can download per month on the cheaper Flex packages.

Regular broadband deals

If you can't get basic discounted broadband, and mobile broadband isn't going to meet your needs, you will need to look for a regular broadband deal.

Here are some tips to save money when shopping for a broadband package.

- **Choosing a longer-term 18 or 24 month contract can often result in a lower per-month cost.** These long term contracts sometimes have no setup fees, helping you save even more money overall. Be aware though that leaving a broadband contract before it ends will result in you having to pay a break fee. So make sure that you can commit to an 18 or 24-month contract before putting pen to paper. Unfortunately, month-to-month broadband contracts don't exist anymore.
- **Look for deals from cheaper, more basic providers.** In general, BT and Virgin Media are the most expensive, while providers such as Plusnet and John Lewis are cheaper.
- **Avoid phone add-ons.** With phone calls, it's often cheaper to pay the per-minute rate, unless you make a lot of calls from your landline each month. Once your internet is up and running, you might be able to save money by keeping in touch with friends and family over Zoom or using WhatsApp on your phone. Using these apps to keep in touch won't cost anything extra, since all fixed-line broadband packages now come with unlimited data.
- **Avoid TV add-ons** as they will lock you into paying a significantly higher price for the duration of your contract. To watch your favourite shows, it's normally best to sign up with a streaming service directly.

Dongles and mobile broadband are often a cheaper alternative

With mobile broadband, you connect to the internet wirelessly via the mobile phone network, just like your phone does, rather than through a cable. This means that if you have very poor broadband service in your local area, you might be able to get a faster, more stable connection with mobile broadband.

There are two types of devices used to access mobile broadband. Dongles are the most popular type. With a dongle, you plug it into a USB port on your computer, and you can immediately get online on that specific device. The second type of **mobile broadband device is a “mobile Wi-Fi” (or “Mi-Fi”) device.** Mi-Fi devices and dongles are similar, in that they both take a SIM card, just like your phone, and use that to get online. The benefit of a Mi-Fi device is it creates a local internet hotspot, to which multiple devices can connect to get online at the same time. The downside to Mi-Fi devices is they need charging. Since they don't plug into your computer directly, they draw power from a battery instead.

Dongles and Mi-Fi devices are often cheaper than fixed-line broadband. They give you the option of paying on a monthly basis, rather than having to commit to a long-term contract. The catch is, mobile broadband packages often come with data caps, unlike fixed-line broadband deals. Once you've used a certain amount of data each month, you'll either be charged more, or will have your broadband slowed down.

The biggest use of data is streaming videos - for example on Facebook, YouTube, and streaming services such as Amazon Prime. Watching videos will use up about [1.65 gigabytes \(GB\) per hour](#), when viewing in high-definition. Applications such as [Zoom and Microsoft teams use a similar amount of data](#), but can use up to 2.4 GB per hour if there are multiple people in the call with their webcams turned on at the same time.

Depending on how you use the internet, you might be able to use a mobile broadband package with a 40-50 GB monthly data cap. There are also unlimited mobile data packages, which can still be cheaper than fixed-line broadband, provided you don't mind entering a long-term contract. Or, you can go for a month-to-month mobile broadband deal, which may cost a bit more, and normally has a setup fee.

Read the Broadband Savvy [mobile broadband guide](#) to learn more about the ins and outs of dongles and Mi-Fi devices, and what mobile broadband packages are currently available.

This guide is one of three guides written by Broadband Savvy for Digital Unite. The other two follow on from this guide and cover [Setting up a new broadband connection](#) and [Troubleshoot a connection problem](#).

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Next steps

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- ▶ [How to set up a new broadband connection](#)
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