

Reactivating Windows after a hardware change

 support.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/reactivating-windows-after-a-hardware-change-2c0e962a-f04c-145b-6ead-fb3fc72b6665

Activation helps verify that your copy of Windows is genuine and hasn't been used on more devices than the Microsoft Software License Terms allow.

When installing Windows 11, the digital license associates itself with your device's hardware. If you make significant hardware changes on your device, such as replacing your motherboard, Windows will no longer find a license that matches your device, and you'll need to reactivate Windows to get it up and running.

To activate Windows, you'll need either a digital license or a product key. To find out which you need, see "What activation method do I use, product key or digital license?" in [Activate Windows](#). Then, use the following info to help you successfully prepare for a hardware change and reactivate Windows.

Prepare your Windows 11 device for a hardware change

First, follow these steps to find out if Windows 11 is already activated.

Select the **Start** button, then select **Settings** > **System** > **Activation** .

[Open Activation settings](#)

If you're not activated, complete the activation process with the steps you see on the Activation page. If you experience an error while activating, see [Get help with Windows activation errors](#).

Once you've confirmed that Windows 11 is activated, follow these steps:

In Windows 11, it is essential that you link your Microsoft account with the Windows 11 digital license on your device. Linking your Microsoft account with your digital license allows you to reactivate Windows using the Activation troubleshooter whenever you make a significant hardware change.

First, you'll need to find out if your Microsoft account ([What is a Microsoft account?](#)) is linked to your Windows 11 digital license. To find out, select the **Start** button, then select **Settings** > **System** and then select **Activation** . The activation status message will tell you if your account is linked.

[Open Activation settings](#)

Activation status

Description

Windows is activated with a digital license

This means that your Microsoft account is not linked to your digital license.

Follow instructions for **Add an account**.

Windows is activated with a digital license linked to your Microsoft account

This means that your Microsoft account is already linked to your digital license.

No further action is required. You are ready to use the activation troubleshooter.

If your Microsoft account is not linked to your digital license, follow these steps to **Add an account**:

1. Sign in as an administrator to add your Microsoft account. To confirm that you're using an administrator account, select the **Start** button, then select **Settings** > **Accounts** > **Your info** . Under your name, you'll see **Administrator**. If you're not an administrator, see [Create a local user or administrator account](#).
[Go to Your info in Settings](#)
2. Confirm that the administrator account is also your Microsoft account by checking to see if an email address is displayed above **Administrator**. If an email address is displayed, this is a Microsoft account. If not, you're logged in using a local account. If you don't yet have a Microsoft account, see [How to create a new Microsoft account](#).
3. Once you confirm that you're an administrator and using your Microsoft account, go back to the **Activation** page, select **Add an account**, enter your Microsoft account and password, then select **Sign in**.

After your Microsoft account has been added, the message on the **Activation** page will change to: **Windows is activated with a digital license linked to your Microsoft account**.

Make sure that the edition, Windows 11 Home or Windows 11 Pro, is the same before and after your hardware change. Your digital license and product key will reactivate only if the edition remains the same.

You can see your edition on the same Activation page where you checked your activation status. To see which edition you have, select the **Start** button, then select **Settings** > **System** > **Activation** .

[See your edition of Windows](#)

If you used a product key to get to Windows 11, then you'll need that key again after the hardware change. To find out how to locate your key, see [Find your Windows product key](#).

For more info about product keys and digital licenses, see [Activate Windows](#).

Reactivate Windows 11 after a hardware change

When you're ready to reactivate, make sure that your device is connected to the internet and then follow the steps for either a digital license or product key.

You'll need to first add your Microsoft account and link your account to the digital license on your device. After linking your Microsoft account, run the Activation troubleshooter to reactivate Windows 11.

This troubleshooter will only be available if your copy of Windows 11 isn't activated.

To use the Activation troubleshooter:

1. Sign in as an administrator. For more info, see [Create a local user or administrator account in Windows](#).
2. Select the **Start** button, then select **Settings** > **System** > **Activation** > **Troubleshoot** . The troubleshooter will show **Windows can't be activated on your device**.

[Open Activation settings](#)

3. Select **I changed hardware on this device recently**, then select **Next**.
4. Enter your connected Microsoft account and password, then select **Sign in**. The troubleshooter will only work with the connected Microsoft account.
5. From the list of devices that are linked to your Microsoft account, select the check box next to **This is the device I'm using right now**.
6. Select **Activate**.

If you don't see the device you're using in the list of results, make sure that you signed in using the same Microsoft account you associated with the Windows 11 digital license on your device.

If you continue to experience errors while activating, see [Get help with Windows activation errors](#) and locate the error you're getting.

If you didn't link your Microsoft account to the digital license before the hardware change AND you used a product key to upgrade to Windows 11, then continue to next section.

If Windows 11 wasn't pre-installed on your device when purchased and you used a product key to upgrade to Windows 11, then you'll need that same product key after the hardware change.

Select the **Start** button, then select **Settings > Update & Security > Activation > Change Product Key**, then enter the product key.

[Enter your product key in Settings](#)

If you installed a retail copy of Windows 11 on your device using a Windows 11 product key and then made hardware changes, follow this same process using your Windows 11 product key.

If you continue to experience errors while activating, see [Get help with Windows activation errors](#) and locate the error you're getting.

If you don't have a digital license or product key

If you don't have a product key or digital license, you can purchase a Windows 11 digital license after installation finishes. Follow these steps to make a purchase:

Select the **Start** button, then select **Settings > Update & Security > Activation** . Then select **Go to Store** to go to the Microsoft Store app where you can purchase a Windows 11 digital license.

[Go to Store](#)

Need more help?

If you need additional help reactivating Windows on your device, contact [customer support](#).