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What to back up before you update WordPress, plugins or PHP

Making Backups

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What to back up before you update WordPress, plugins or PHP

Making Backups Created on **October 10, 2026** 3 min read



Before an update, save three things: **the database, the `wp-content` folder (plus `wp-config.php` and `.htaccess`)** and **a note of the versions** you have now. It takes five minutes and is the difference between undoing the update in an afternoon and losing the site. The daily copy we make before dawn is the net underneath, but **it does not have today's changes**: if you work late morning, what you did that morning is not in it.

The five-minute routine

1. **Note the versions.** WordPress's, the plugins you are about to touch, and PHP's (under Select PHP Version). A screenshot of the updates page will do. Without this, you do not know which version to go back to.

2. **Export the database.** In phpMyAdmin, quick method, SQL format (**exporting a database with phpMyAdmin**). If you do not know which one it is, see **finding out which database this WordPress uses**.

3. **Copy the files.** In File Manager, compress the site folder, or at least `wp-content`, `wp-config.php` and `.htaccess` (with hidden files shown), and download. Or use cPanel's WordPress tool, which makes its own copy (**the WordPress tool in cPanel**).

4. **Confirm the overnight copy.** In JetBackup, check that last night's copy exists (**restoring with JetBackup**). It gives you a second net.

5. **Update one thing at a time.** One plugin, open the site, then the next. If something breaks, you know which. WordPress core separately (**updating WordPress itself**), and PHP last, per folder and with a way back (**changing your PHP version without breaking the site**).

If it goes wrong, how to undo

What broke	Quick undo
A plugin broke the site, or left a blank screen	In File Manager, rename that plugin's folder under `wp-content/plugins`. WordPress deactivates it and the dashboard returns. Then put the previous version back.
The new or updated theme broke the design	Rename the theme's folder under `wp-content/themes`. WordPress falls back to a default theme.
An error after changing PHP	Go back to the previous version in Select PHP Version, for that folder.
Core stuck halfway, or the site stuck in maintenance	See **common WordPress errors**.
Data changed (orders, posts) and you want to go back	Restore the database AND the files from the same moment, together. See **restoring only the database**.

Restoring only the files after an update that touched the database may not be enough.
An updated plugin can change the tables; if you put the old files back against the new database, the old plugin may fail. The database and the files go back together, from the same moment.

On a shop, rehearse first on a test site
(**a test site before touching what is live**) and update outside peak hours. And mind **how many plugins you install**: the fewer, the less there is to break.

NEED A HAND?

The update broke the site and you cannot go back? Tell us the domain and what you did.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- **Making and keeping your own backup, and testing that it works** →
- **Updating WordPress itself** →
- **A test site before touching what is live** →

Common WordPress errors: white screen, critical error and how to find the cause →

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