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Slimming the WordPress database: revisions, spam and expired transients

Errors & Troubleshooting

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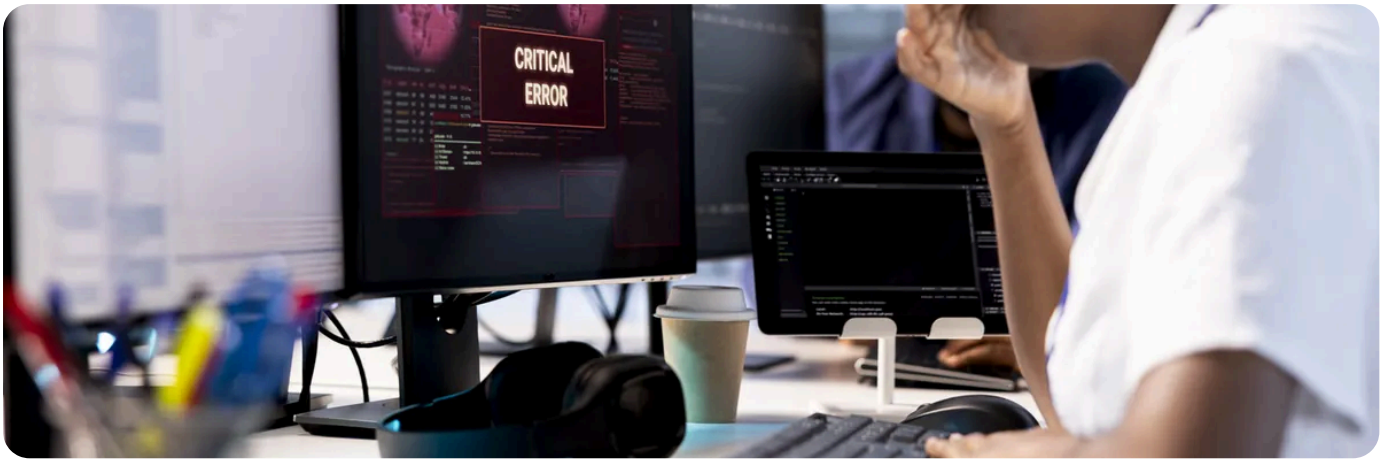
Slimming the WordPress database: revisions, spam and expired transients

Errors & Troubleshooting Created on **October 15, 2026** 2 min read



The short answer: over time the WordPress database fills with things nobody uses any more: **revisions** of every text, **spam** comments, items in the **trash**, expired temporary data (**transients**) and leftovers of plugins you deleted. Clearing them makes the database smaller and the backups lighter. It rarely makes a site fast on its own, but it is good housekeeping, **as long as you take a copy first**.

What each thing is

What	What it is	Can you delete it?
Revisions	Every save of a page or post leaves a copy, so you can go back.	The old ones, yes. Keep the recent ones.
Spam and trash	Comments marked as spam and items you put in the trash.	Yes, after a look.
Expired transients	Temporary data plugins store, with a deadline.	Yes, the expired ones. WordPress should delete them itself, but does not always.
Data from deleted plugins	Tables and rows left behind when a plugin is removed.	With care: confirm the plugin is gone and will not come back.

Before you start

1. **Take a full copy of the database.** See **What to back up before you update**. If something goes wrong, it is what saves you.

2 **See how much each table weighs,** to know where the weight is: `wp db size --tables` (with WP-CLI, see **WP-CLI over SSH**) or, in phpMyAdmin, the size column. If the weight is in a plugin's tables and not WordPress's, the fix is elsewhere.

Clearing with WP-CLI

To	Command
Delete expired transients	`wp transient delete --expired`
Delete revisions	`wp post delete $(wp post list --post_type=revision --format=ids) --force`
Delete spam	`wp comment delete $(wp comment list --status=spam --format=ids) --force`

Without SSH access, phpMyAdmin will do (see **Cleaning and optimising the database in phpMyAdmin**), or a well-known cleanup plugin. With a plugin, read carefully what each option deletes before you press the button.

To keep it from filling up again

In the `wp-config.php` file, before the line that says "That's all, stop editing", you can limit revisions and the time in the trash:

```
define( 'WP_POST_REVISIONS', 5 );
define( 'EMPTY_TRASH_DAYS', 7 );
```

Take a copy of the file before editing it.

! **Do not delete tables by hand**
if you are not sure what they are. A table with a strange name may belong to a plugin still in use. And optimising does not replace the rest: for a slow site, start by measuring (see **Measuring your site speed**).

NEED A HAND?

Want help seeing what is filling your WordPress database? Open a ticket with the domain.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

Cleaning and optimising the database in phpMyAdmin →

- **WP-CLI over SSH: updating and fixing WordPress from the command line**
- **What to back up before you update WordPress, plugins or PHP**
- **WordPress Heartbeat: what it is and why it keeps calling the server**

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