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IMAP or Exchange ActiveSync: what changes for e-mail, calendar and contacts

Comparisons and alternatives

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The short answer: IMAP handles mail only; sending goes over SMTP, and calendar and contacts travel over two other protocols (CalDAV and CardDAV). **Exchange ActiveSync** is a Microsoft protocol that carries mail, calendar and contacts in a single account, and lets the organisation set rules for phones. The mailboxes we provide work with both: **IMAP, POP and SMTP**, with calendar and contacts through cPanel, and also **Exchange ActiveSync**. You choose on each device.

What each one does

Point	IMAP (with SMTP, CalDAV and CardDAV)	Exchange ActiveSync
What it carries	Mail only. Sending is SMTP. Calendar goes over CalDAV and contacts over CardDAV: separate settings.	Mail, calendar and contacts, and often tasks, in the same account.
Where it comes from	Open standards that almost every mail program speaks. Our mailboxes speak them.	A Microsoft protocol, used by Exchange and Microsoft 365. Our mailboxes accept it too.
Setting up the phone	One IMAP mail account and, if you want the diary, a CalDAV/CardDAV account.	One Exchange-type account, with server, user name and password.
New mail arriving	Depends on the app: some keep the connection open, others check every so often.	Designed to push new mail to the phone as soon as it arrives.
Control over devices	No rules imposed by the server. The control is the password: changing it cuts off every device.	The organisation can require a lock code on the phone and, depending on the service, wipe a lost device remotely.
Desktop programs	Outlook, Thunderbird, Apple Mail and practically every other one.	Not every desktop program supports it.

What to do with your mailbox here

1. **Know what you have:** mail over IMAP (or POP) and over Exchange ActiveSync, sending over SMTP, and calendars and contacts created in cPanel. You can use one on one device and the other on another.

2. **For mail only on the phone, add the mailbox as IMAP: on iPhone or iPad** or **on Android**.

3. **For the diary and contacts,** create them in cPanel and add them to the phone as CalDAV and CardDAV: **calendars and contacts on your own domain**.

4. **In Outlook for Windows,** remember that on an IMAP account the calendar and contacts stay “This computer only”: **why IMAP does not sync them**.

5. **For mail, calendar and contacts in one account,** choose the **Exchange** type on the phone, with the full address and the mailbox password; the server and settings are in cPanel, in the mail client configuration of the account. Advanced device rules belong to a full Exchange service, such as Microsoft 365: **Google Workspace or Microsoft 365 on your own domain**.

Do not add the same mailbox twice on one phone (once as Exchange and once as IMAP): you get every mail twice and repeated notifications. Pick one type per device. If the Exchange type gives a server error, check the server name in cPanel or use IMAP while you ask us for help.

In Outlook for Windows and on the Mac IMAP is still the safest choice; on the phone, the Exchange type saves setting up the calendar and contacts separately.

Not sure which type to pick on each device? Tell us which devices you use and what you want to sync.

Open a support ticket

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Where to see it in your account

In cPanel, open Email Accounts and, next to the mailbox, use the button that shows the mail client settings (Connect Devices). That page lists the server names, the ports and the user name for the account, which is the full e-mail address. Use the values it shows rather than guessing them.

- **IMAP and SMTP:** the incoming and outgoing server, with the secure ports listed there.
- **Exchange type:** the phone asks for the server, the user name (the full e-mail address) and the password of the mailbox. Take the server name from that same page.
- **Many devices:** e-mail accounts are unlimited on every plan, but all devices of one mailbox share the same password. Changing it cuts them all off.

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SEE ALSO

Calendars and contacts on your own domain

Calendar and contacts marked This computer only in Outlook: why IMAP does not sync them

POP or IMAP: which to choose, and what you lose by picking wrong

Google Workspace or Microsoft 365 on your own domain: MX records, and keeping your website with us

The Gmail app or the Outlook app for your domain mailbox: phone and computer compared

How to set up your e-mail on iPhone or iPad

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