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Cloudflare: when it helps, how to switch it on, and the cache that fools you

Cloudflare

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Cloudflare sits **in front of** your site: visitors reach it first, and it comes to us for what it needs. That brings three things at once - pages served from nearby, attack filtering, and a certificate at the door. The free plan does all of this.

With our servers in Europe, it is the single best improvement for anyone with visitors in Angola - see **where our servers are**.

How to switch it on

1. Create an account at **cloudflare.com** and add your domain. It reads your current records by itself.
2. **Check the list it imported** before going further. This is where records get lost - e-mail ones especially.
3. It gives you **two nameservers**. Replace ours with those, in the panel where you manage the domain - see **how to configure a domain DNS**.
4. Wait for propagation - see **how long it takes**. Cloudflare e-mails you when it is live.

! **Check the MX before changing nameservers.**
If the domain's e-mail is with us, the **MX** records must appear in Cloudflare exactly as they are here, and the cloud icon beside them must stay **grey** (DNS only), never orange. An orange cloud on an MX breaks e-mail immediately, and it is mistake number one in this move. The same goes for the SPF record - see **DNS records explained** and **SPF, DKIM and DMARC**.

Orange cloud	Grey cloud
The website (www and the domain)	Goes through Cloudflare: it gains caching, filtering, and the real address stays hidden.
MX, mail, SPF, DKIM	**Always grey.** Mail does not go through Cloudflare.
FTP and cPanel access	Grey. Only web traffic can be proxied.

The cache that fools you - and the fix

Once switched on, Cloudflare keeps copies of your pages. That is what makes it fast - and that is what makes you keep seeing the old version after editing the site. It is not a fault: it is the cache doing its job.

To clear everything: log into the Cloudflare dashboard, pick the domain and use *Caching → Purge Everything*. There is also a custom purge for specific addresses, if you only changed one page.

If you are going to spend the afternoon working on the site.
Turn on **Development Mode**, in the *Caching* tab or on the overview screen. It disables the cache for **3 hours** and switches itself back on - you see every change live without purging after each save. After 3 hours everything returns to normal; if you finish earlier, turn it off by hand.

Do not forget the other cache.
If the site is WordPress with the LiteSpeed plugin, there are **two** caches: the server's and Cloudflare's. A change that will not appear may be stuck in either - clear the site's first, then Cloudflare's. And the browser holds a third: try a private window before concluding it is broken. See **the site is slow: what actually makes a difference**.

When the site is under attack

In the *Security* tab there is **«I'm Under Attack»** mode. With it on, every visitor passes a few-second check before reaching the site - which stops automated traffic almost entirely. It does inconvenience real visitors, so it is for use during an attack and switching off afterwards.

What Cloudflare changes on our side

Two things worth knowing before writing to us that something looks odd:

1. **Visitor addresses become Cloudflare's.** Depending on how the server is set up, cPanel statistics and logs may show Cloudflare addresses instead of your visitors' real ones. If they do, that is the proxy at work: the real visitor address travels in a header, and Cloudflare's dashboard has its own statistics.

2 **The server's address stops being visible**, which is good - but when you ask us for help, say you use Cloudflare. It saves us half an hour working out why what we see does not match what you see - see **what your hosting IP address is**.

NEED A HAND?

Want help switching Cloudflare on without breaking e-mail?

Talk to us →

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