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Clearing the cache: the browser’s, the computer’s, and the site’s

Caching

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Clearing the cache: the browser's, the computer's, and the site's

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"Clear your cache" is the most given and least useful advice, because there is no such thing as *the* cache. There are at least **three**, kept in different places for different reasons, and clearing the wrong one changes nothing. Worse: clearing all three every time loses you sessions and teaches you nothing.

This article does not teach you to install any cache. It teaches you to **find out which of the three is guilty**, which takes half a minute, and only then to clear that one.

The three, and what each one keeps

Which	Where it lives	What it keeps
The browser's	On your computer or phone, inside the browser.	Page files: images, stylesheets, scripts. The usual culprit when the text changed and the look did not, or when it is only wrong for you.
The computer's DNS cache	In the operating system, and also in the router and at the provider.	**Names, not pages.** It remembers which IP address each domain points to. It only matters when you *moved* server or nameservers.
The site's	On the server, in the caching plugin, and in whatever sits in front (a CDN).	Pages already built, so they need not be built again. The culprit when the old content shows up for **everybody**.

The thirty-second test

Two things separate the three with no tools at all: a **private window** and a **phone on mobile data**, with Wi-Fi off. The private window does not use the normal browser cache; the phone on mobile data is a different computer, a different DNS cache and a different network.

What you see	Who is guilty
Private window shows the new one, the normal window the old one	The **browser cache**. Section below.
Every browser on the computer shows the old one, but the phone on mobile data shows the new one	The **DNS cache** of the computer or the network, if what changed was the address. If the address did not change, suspect a proxy on that network.
Everything shows the old one, everywhere, for everyone	The **site cache**, or whatever sits in front of it.
Everything shows the old one and no cache is installed at all	Then it is not cache: the change was not saved, or it was saved somewhere else.

1. The browser's

1. **For a single page**, and this is nearly always enough: `Ctrl` + `F5` on Windows and Linux, `Cmd` + `Shift` + `R` on Mac. It reloads ignoring what was stored.

2. **To check without clearing anything**, open the same page in a private window. If it is correct there, the site is fine and the problem is only yours.

3. **To clear it properly**, go into the browser settings, to the section that deletes browsing data, and select **only** cached images and files.

> **Do not clear everything out of habit.**
> Include the cookies and you are signed out everywhere, on every site, including the accounts whose password you no longer remember. To see an updated page, a private window is enough.

2. The computer's DNS cache

This one only matters after you **change where the domain points**: new server, new nameservers, an edited record. If none of that changed, do not waste time here.

System	Command
Windows	`ipconfig /flushdns`, in a Command Prompt opened as administrator.
macOS	`sudo dscacheutil -flushcache` and then `sudo killall -HUP mDNSResponder`.
Linux	Depends on the system. With *systemd-resolved*, `resolvectl flush-caches`.

Clearing yours does not clear the rest of the world's. Every DNS record has a TTL, which says how long everyone else may keep the old answer, and there is no way to hurry it. The two articles that explain this are **DNS records explained** and **how long propagation takes**.

Close and reopen the browser after clearing.
Browsers keep a name cache of their own, independent of the system's, and that one only empties when the program is fully closed.

3. The site's

If the old content shows for everybody, the site stored the page already built. The order you clear in matters, because there are layers:

1. **The site's caching plugin.** They all have an option to empty everything. Installing and tuning one is in **installing and tuning a page cache**, and the rules that keep the dashboard visible are in **cache rules for a WordPress site**.

2. **Whatever sits in front.** With a CDN, it holds its own copy, and clearing the site's does not touch it. See **Cloudflare and the cache that fools you**. If you no longer want the CDN at all: **switching the CDN off**.

3. **Check afterwards in a private window.** Checking in the browser you have been working in proves nothing, because that one has a cache of its own.

If you have to empty the cache after every single change, a setting is wrong.
A properly configured cache notices the page changed. If it does not, either the plugin is not integrated with whatever edits your pages, or there are two caching plugins at once, which is the combination that causes the most damage.

There is a fourth one, and it is off by default.
PHP can keep your code already compiled, through the `opcache` extension. It is present on your account but not active: you only have it if you switched it on in "Select PHP Version" in cPanel. If you did, and a change to a `.php` file takes a moment to show, you know where to look.

When it is not cache at all

Symptom	What it really is
You edited and it does not show even in a private window	The change was not saved, or it was saved somewhere else (another domain, another folder, a staging site).

Symptom	What it really is
Another site's page shows up, or a list of files	That is where the domain points, not cache. See **seeing the site before the domain points here**.
The site is slow but up to date	No cache fixes a page that is slow to build. See **the site is slow**.
It is the social media preview that is stale	That is *their* cache, and it clears differently: **the wrong preview**.

NEED A HAND?

Cleared all three and still seeing the old one? Tell us the address and what should appear.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- **Hosting plans and what each one includes** →
- **Support Policy** →
- **Frequently asked questions** →

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