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Updating WordPress itself

WordPress & CMS

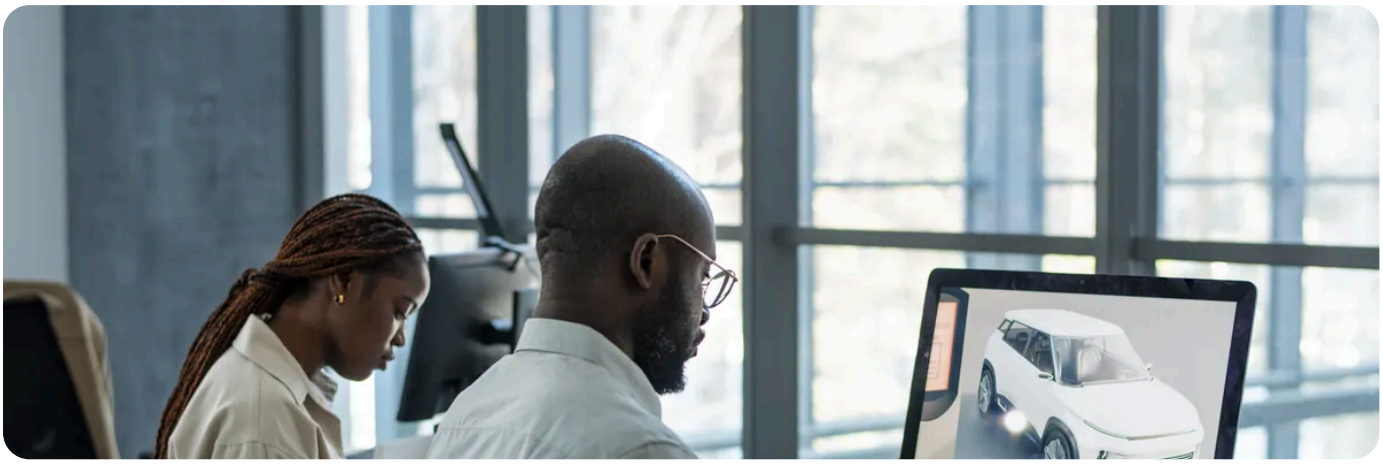
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Updating WordPress itself

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The WordPress core is the part that is identical on every site in the world, which is exactly why flaws in it are worth so much to people hunting for sites to break into. Keeping it current is the bare minimum, and it is not hard.

Two speeds

Kind	What it is	How it is handled
Minor release	Security and bug fixes. Nothing you can see changes.	WordPress installs these by itself by default, and that is the right setting.
Major release	New features, editor changes, internal changes.	It asks you to confirm. This is the one worth preparing for.

Before a major release

1. **Back up the files and the database.** See **keeping your own backup**.
2. **Check your PHP version.** New WordPress releases drop support for old PHP versions, and the dashboard warns you when that applies. See **how to change your PHP version** and, to do it calmly, **changing it without breaking the site**.
3. **Update themes and plugins first.** An up-to-date plugin is far likelier to be ready for the new core than one that has not moved in a year.
4. **Look for abandoned plugins.** Those are the ones that break on a new release, and no fix is coming.
5. **Pick a quiet hour.** The update puts the site into maintenance mode for a short while.

Running the update

1. In the WordPress dashboard, open **Dashboard** and then **Updates**.
2. Press the button to update WordPress and wait. Do not close the tab and do not press it twice.
3. When it finishes, open the site: front page, an inner page, a post and the contact form.
4. Sign in to the dashboard and check the plugins that matter are still working.
5. Clear the cache, if you run a caching plugin, and reload with the browser ignoring its own cache.

The WordPress tool in cPanel, in the **Domains** section, updates core as well, and does it without asking for the site password. That is the road when you have several sites, or when the dashboard will not open.

If it goes wrong

Symptom	What to do
It is stuck in maintenance mode	A file called `.maintenance` was left in the site folder. Delete it in File Manager, **Files** section of cPanel.
Blank screen or critical error	Nearly always a plugin or the theme. See **common WordPress errors**.
The dashboard will not open	See **the six usual causes**.
The site works but looks wrong	Cache. Clear the plugin cache and the browser cache before anything else.
Errors that say nothing useful	The PHP error log does say something. See **where the PHP error log is**.

Never edit core files.
Any change you make in them disappears at the next update, and while it is there it stops WordPress updating itself properly. Anything you want to change is done with plugins or with a child theme.

NEED A HAND?

Updated and lost the site? We hold yesterday's backup and can get you standing again.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- **WordPress hosting** →
- **Support Policy** →
- **Frequently asked questions** →

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