



CARY COMMUNICATIONS INSIGHTS

The Best Mac Troubleshooting Tips

By Karen Bluestein

Even the most reliable Macs run into problems from time to time. Whether it's slow performance, Wi-Fi issues, or apps that refuse to open, certain Mac problems are more common than others.

Most Frequently Reported Mac Issues

- **Mac is running slow** – System lag, beachball cursor, and delayed responses.
- **Apps keep freezing or crashing** – Programs become unresponsive or won't launch.
- **Wi-Fi connectivity issues** – Slow internet speeds, dropped connections, or no Wi-Fi detected.
- **Mac won't turn on** – Black screen, no startup chime, or power issues.
- **Battery draining quickly** – MacBook loses charge faster than normal.
- **Overheating and loud fan noise** – Mac gets hot, and fans run at full speed.
- **External devices not recognized** – USB drives, printers, or external monitors won't connect.
- **Bluetooth not working** – Can't pair with wireless devices or frequent disconnections.
- **Startup disk is full** – Not enough storage space, leading to slow performance.
- **Mac won't shut down properly** – Stuck on a black screen or apps won't close.

If you're experiencing any of these issues, don't worry: you can fix most Mac problems with simple troubleshooting. Here's how to get your system running smoothly again.

Top Free Mac Troubleshooting and Repair Tools

If built-in macOS troubleshooting steps aren't enough, these free tools can help diagnose and fix common issues.

ONYX

- A powerful Mac maintenance tool that can clean system junk, repair permissions, and optimize performance.
- Download: Titanium Software

DISK UTILITY (BUILT-IN)

- Checks and repairs disk errors using **First Aid** to fix corrupted system files.
- Found in **Applications > Utilities > Disk Utility**.

ETRECHECK

- Scans your Mac for performance issues, malware, and hardware problems.
- Provides an easy-to-read report on your system health.
- Download: [EtreCheck](#)

MALWAREBYTES FOR MAC

- Detects and removes adware, spyware, and malware that can slow down your Mac.
- Free version available with on-demand scanning.
- Download: [Malwarebytes](#)

APPCLEANER

- Completely removes unwanted apps, including leftover system files that take up space.
- Drag and drop apps for a thorough cleanup.

- Download: [AppCleaner](#)

KNOCKKNOCK

- Scans for persistent malware, keyloggers, and unwanted background processes.
- Helps detect security threats before they become a problem.
- Download: [KnockKnock](#)

COCONUTBATTERY

- Monitors battery health, charge cycles, and capacity to detect early battery issues.
- Useful for tracking battery wear over time.
- Download: [CoconutBattery](#)

MACS FAN CONTROL

- Adjusts fan speeds and monitors system temperature to prevent overheating.
- Useful for older Macs that run hot.
- Download: [Macs Fan Control](#)

GRANDPERSPECTIVE

- A visual disk usage analyzer that helps find large files taking up space.
- Great for freeing up storage on a nearly full drive.
- Download: [GrandPerspective](#)

ISTAT MENUS (FREE TRIAL)

- Monitors CPU usage, memory, battery health, and system temperature in real time.
- Free trial available with essential diagnostics.
- Download: [iStat Menus](#)

Best Troubleshooting Tips for Common Mac Problems

1. RESTART YOUR MAC FIRST

It sounds simple, but restarting your Mac **resolves most common issues**—from sluggish performance to unresponsive apps.

Click the Apple menu and select **Restart**, or press **Control + Command + Power** to force a restart.

2. FORCE QUIT UNRESPONSIVE APPS

If an app freezes and won't close, force quitting can stop it without restarting your Mac.

- Press **Command + Option + Escape**, select the unresponsive app, and click **Force Quit**.
- Alternatively, open **Activity Monitor** (found in Applications > Utilities), select the app, and click **Quit Process**.

3. CHECK FOR MACOS UPDATES

Outdated software can cause performance issues, compatibility problems, and security risks.

- Go to System Settings > General > Software Update and install any available updates.

4. FREE UP DISK SPACE

A nearly full hard drive can slow down your Mac significantly.

- Go to Apple Menu > About This Mac > Storage to see what's taking up space.
- Remove large files, old downloads, and unnecessary apps.
- Use Optimize Storage to automatically delete system junk.

5. RESET THE SYSTEM MANAGEMENT CONTROLLER (SMC)

The **SMC controls power management, battery, and hardware functions**. If your Mac won't charge, randomly shuts down, or has display issues, resetting the SMC may help.

For Intel-based Macs:

- Shut down your Mac.
- Hold Shift + Control + Option + Power for 10 seconds, then release.
- Turn your Mac back on.

For **M1/M2 Macs**, simply restart your Mac—SMC resets automatically.

6. RUN APPLE DIAGNOSTICS

If your Mac is acting strangely and you suspect a hardware issue:

- Restart your Mac and hold **D** until you see the diagnostics screen.
- Follow the on-screen instructions to check for hardware issues.

7. CHECK AND REPAIR DISK ERRORS

Use **Disk Utility** to check and repair your disk.

- Open **Disk Utility** (Applications > Utilities).
- Select your main hard drive (**Macintosh HD**) and click **First Aid**.

8. FIX WI-FI ISSUES

If your Mac has trouble connecting to Wi-Fi:

- Restart your router and Mac.
- Forget and reconnect to the Wi-Fi network (**System Settings > Wi-Fi > Forget This Network**).
- Run **Wireless Diagnostics** (hold **Option** and click the Wi-Fi icon in the menu bar).

9. BOOT INTO SAFE MODE

Safe Mode loads only essential macOS files, helping diagnose issues caused by third-party apps.

- Restart your Mac and hold **Shift** until the login screen appears.

For **M1/M2 Macs**:

- Shut down your Mac, hold the power button until you see “Loading startup options,” then select Safe Mode.

10. REINSTALL MACOS AS A LAST RESORT

If nothing else works, reinstalling macOS may be necessary.

- Restart and hold Command + R to enter macOS Recovery Mode.
- Select Reinstall macOS and follow the instructions.

This won't delete your files, but it's always smart to back up your data first with Time Machine.

Final Thoughts

Mac problems can be frustrating, but most are quickly fixable with the right troubleshooting steps.

- Use built-in macOS tools like Disk Utility and Safe Mode.
- Download free troubleshooting apps to diagnose and fix problems.
- Keep your Mac updated, free of clutter, and properly maintained.

By following these proven troubleshooting steps, you can keep your Mac running smoothly and avoid unnecessary downtime.

Got Tips?

Have any other great tips? Please let us know. This is a living document and is updated over time.

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