



Person of Non-Interest

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What is a firewall?

A filter that decides what network traffic is allowed in and out.

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In short: a firewall sits between your device (or your home network) and the internet, and blocks traffic you didn't ask for. Your computer and your home Wi-Fi router very likely already have one. The main thing to do is make sure it's turned on.

How it works, in plain words

Think of a firewall as the front-desk guard of a building. Messages from the internet arrive all the time. The firewall checks each one against its rules and turns away the ones that weren't invited or look harmful. U.S. cybersecurity guidance (CISA) describes firewalls as shielding your computer or network from "malicious or unnecessary network traffic."

The two kinds you probably already have

- **In your router.** Many home Wi-Fi routers include a firewall that protects every device on your network at once.
- **On your computer.** Windows and Mac both come with a built-in firewall that protects that one computer.

CISA's advice: having a firewall matters more than which kind you use.

What a firewall doesn't do

A firewall can't stop you from being tricked. If you click a link in a [phishing](https://beaponi.com/learn/spot-phishing) (<https://beaponi.com/learn/spot-phishing>) message or install something harmful yourself, the firewall usually lets it through, because you asked for it.

That's why habits like the [10-second pause](https://beaponi.com/checklist#rushed) (<https://beaponi.com/checklist#rushed>) still matter.

What to do

- **Windows:** open the **Windows Security** app, choose **Firewall & network protection**, and check that the firewall is on. [Microsoft's guide](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/firewall-and-network-protection-in-the-windows-security-app-ec0844f7-aebd-0583-67fe-601ecf5d774f) (<https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/firewall-and-network-protection-in-the-windows-security-app-ec0844f7-aebd-0583-67fe-601ecf5d774f>)
- **Mac:** open **System Settings**, then **Network**, then **Firewall**. [Apple's guide](https://support.apple.com/guide/mac-help/block-connections-to-your-mac-with-a-firewall-mh34041/mac) (<https://support.apple.com/guide/mac-help/block-connections-to-your-mac-with-a-firewall-mh34041/mac>)
- **Home router:** if you're not sure, check your router's instructions or ask your internet provider whether its firewall is on.

Common questions

Do I need to buy a firewall? Usually not for a home. Your computer and most home routers already include one.

Can a firewall stop all hackers? No. It blocks a lot of unwanted traffic, but it's one layer. Updates, strong passwords, and [two-step verification](https://beaponi.com/learn/two-step-verification) (<https://beaponi.com/learn/two-step-verification>) are the others.

Which kind of firewall is best? According to U.S. cybersecurity guidance (CISA), having one turned on matters more than which kind you use.

Sources

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- [Understanding Firewalls for Home and Small Office Use](https://www.cisa.gov/news-events/news/understanding-firewalls-home-and-small-office-use) (<https://www.cisa.gov/news-events/news/understanding-firewalls-home-and-small-office-use>) (CISA)
- [Glossary: firewall](https://csrc.nist.gov/glossary/term/firewall) (<https://csrc.nist.gov/glossary/term/firewall>) (NIST)
- [Firewall and network protection in the Windows Security app](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/firewall-and-network-protection-in-the-windows-security-app-ec0844f7-aebd-0583-67fe-601ecf5d774f) (<https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/firewall-and-network-protection-in-the-windows-security-app-ec0844f7-aebd-0583-67fe-601ecf5d774f>) (Microsoft) · [Block connections to your Mac with a firewall](https://support.apple.com/guide/mac-help/block-connections-to-your-mac-with-a-firewall-mh34041/mac) (<https://support.apple.com/guide/mac-help/block-connections-to-your-mac-with-a-firewall-mh34041/mac>) (Apple)

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