

Ditch Your LANDLINE

Make 2023 the year you finally hang up your old home phone. **Robert Irvine** explains how to prepare for the Copper Switch Off and save money by switching your broadband now



WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Learn why and how the Copper Switch Off is happening
- Discover how to make landline calls over the internet
- Check if you can receive full-fibre broadband in your area
- Get a Government grant to speed up your broadband
- Compare the cheapest and fastest broadband-only deals
- Find out if mobile broadband might better suit your needs
- Make calls over Wi-Fi when you can't get a phone signal

It's nearly the end of the line for the UK's telephone network. By December 2025, the ageing copper cables that let us make and receive phone calls at home will be permanently retired. In what BT is calling the Copper Switch Off, all analogue landlines will be replaced with digital ones, which means you'll need an internet connection to make calls.

ISPs that previously charged for line rental have already stopped offering phone services to new customers and those renewing their contracts, which means that from 2023 onwards you won't be able to sign up for a traditional landline.

Although we've covered this subject in our news section, many people still don't

realise that their landline will be disconnected at the end of 2025. Recent research by Uswitch found that 69 per cent of UK residents aged 65 and over are currently unaware of the Copper Switch Off (www.snipca.com/44483). This is obviously very worrying to those of us who have elderly and vulnerable relatives and friends who rely on their home phones.

In this feature, we explain everything you need to know about the changes to landlines and suggest how to prepare for the Copper Switch Off. We reveal the main options for ditching your landline for a broadband-only deal, and examine each one's pros and cons, so you can switch and save money now without losing speed.

YOUR LANDLINE SWITCH-OFF QUESTIONS ANSWERED

What's happening to landlines and when?

The analogue technology used by landline phones is being replaced with a digital version. Landline services in the UK – and around the world – have for a long time been delivered through copper cables over the public switched telephone network (PSTN). In December 2025, this network will be switched off and all landlines in the country will use VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) technology.

Why is this happening?

The PSTN has been around since Victorian times and our communication needs are now much more demanding. The equipment used by the existing landline network, which was installed in the 1980s, can no longer deliver the reliability or capacity we require, so it needs to be upgraded and modernised. Because broadband connections in the UK are increasingly using fibre-optic networks, which offer much faster speeds, there's little point in installing more copper cables, so landlines are being changed to the superior fibre system.

BT's Openreach division, which controls the PSTN, is leading the Copper Switch Off, supported by other phone and broadband providers and the communications regulator Ofcom.

Will I lose my landline connection?

Yes and no. The aim is to move everyone with a landline to the new VoIP system by December 2025. Your phone provider will let you know when the migration will take place. BT has already switched customers in Salisbury, Wiltshire, and Mildenhall in Suffolk, to its Digital Voice service, though a further rollout is currently 'paused' – BT says it's likely to restart this spring. Other broadband providers are now offering digital phone services when you upgrade to a full-fibre plan.

Once your landline is moved from PSTN to VoIP, your phone will generally work in the same way, but instead of plugging it into a wall socket, you connect it to your broadband router. You can make and receive calls in the same way you always have, and charges won't change, though call quality should be clearer.

Can I keep my phone number?

Yes, you can keep your current phone



BT is offering this free cordless handset to new Digital Voice customers

number, and this will be automatically transferred from your analogue landline to your digital one.

Do I need new equipment?

Not necessarily. Your broadband provider will give you a new router if the one you have isn't compatible with VoIP services. Your existing phone should work with your digital landline, but you may need an adapter that connects the old phone to your network.

BT customers can request a free Digital Home Phone (pictured above) when they switch to Digital Voice – enter your landline number at www.snipca.com/44411 to check if you're eligible yet.

What if I don't have broadband?

Because the new system works over the internet, you won't be able to make calls without a broadband connection. This aspect is what's worrying people with elderly or financially vulnerable relatives and friends who don't have or want the internet in their homes.

Phone companies should give these customers the option to have a simple broadband connection just for making calls. This shouldn't cost any more than they currently pay for their landline – BT has committed to not raising prices above inflation for 'voice only' customers. No one will be forced to pay for a high-speed broadband plan just to make phone calls.

Will my telecare device still work?

Some telecare devices such as panic alarms may not function properly once



This Taking Care personal alarm is compatible with a digital phone line

your landline is switched off, though healthcare companies, including Taking Care (whose personal alarm is pictured above), have been working with BT to test their products – see the list at www.snipca.com/44413. Contact your telecare provider and, if it foresees a problem, it will upgrade your device or give you an adapter that connects it to your digital network.

Will my phone work during a power cut?

No, and this is another major concern about the Copper Switch Off, particularly with regard to emergency calls. Because your phone is connected to your router, which is powered by mains electricity, a power outage will leave you without a landline service. You can use a mobile phone instead, but not everyone has one or gets reliable reception and you won't be able to charge your handset with no power.

BT is supplying vulnerable customers with a battery backup to ensure their digital phone service continues to work for at least an hour in the event of a power cut, and other companies should provide similar options.

Do I need to have a digital landline?

No. As we explain in this feature, there are now more broadband-only deals than ever, which let you use the internet without having to pay for a landline – analogue or digital. Switching to one now will prepare you for the Copper Switch Off in 2025 and save you money and hassle.

SWITCH TO FULL-FIBRE BROADBAND

Most broadband users in the UK pay for line rental even if they no longer use their landline phones. Many homes still have ADSL connections, which use traditional copper telephone wires, both because ADSL remains the most widely available type of broadband – covering 99 per cent of the UK – and because it's the cheapest.

However, in the last five years, ADSL has been overtaken in popularity by fibre-to-the-cabinet (FTTC) broadband, which is considerably faster, offering download speeds of up to 80Mbps (compared to ADSL's maximum of 24Mbps), and reaches almost as many areas (96 per cent of the UK).

FTTC uses fibre-optic cables to deliver speedy internet from the phone exchange to your nearest street cabinet, but it then connects the cabinet to your home over a copper line (1 in BT's illustration above right). This means, like ADSL, it also requires you to have and pay for a landline.

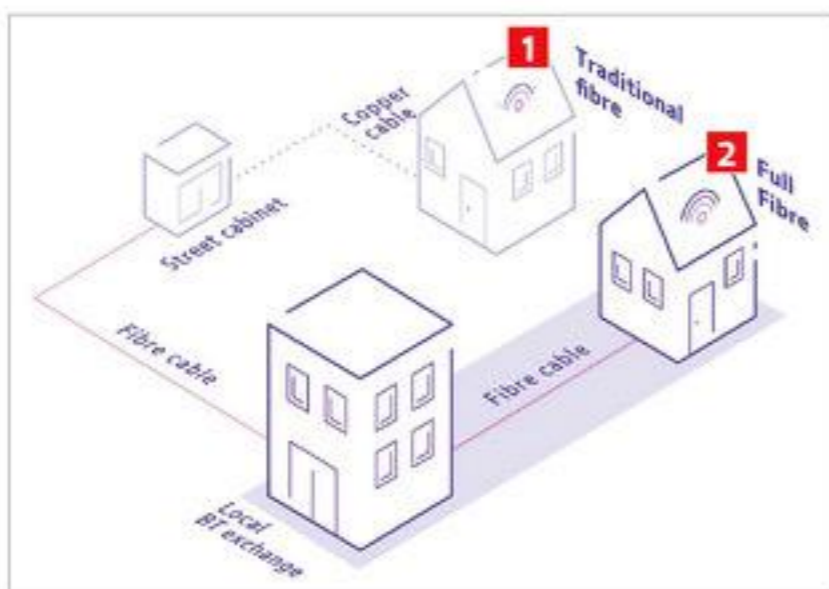
In contrast, fibre-to-the-premises (FTTP) broadband – better known as 'full fibre' – bypasses the copper network and street cabinets, to connect your home directly to the broadband exchange through fibre-optic cables (2). This allows it to deliver 'ultra-fast' download speeds of up to 1Gbps, makes it much more reliable than FTTC – which is prone to the problems that plague copper wires – and means you can use the internet without needing or paying for a phone line.

There are two downsides to ditching your current broadband package for a full-fibre FTTP plan. First, it's generally more expensive than 'super-fast' FTTC, though the price gap is constantly narrowing and some of the latest full-fibre deals cost only a few pounds more per month for much faster speeds.

At the time of writing, TalkTalk's cheapest FTTP option, Fibre 65 – Full Fibre, actually costs the same as its most expensive FTTC plan, simply called Fibre 65, at £26 a month for the first two years. The former has an average download speed of 77Mbps, with "no phone line – just pure broadband", while the latter offers 67Mbps and includes a landline (see www.snipca.com/44422).

Can you get full-fibre broadband now?

The second, more frustrating problem, is that fibre-to-the-premises is currently only available to around 42 per cent of UK homes and businesses, which means



Unlike traditional fibre, full fibre connects your home directly to the phone exchange

more than half of us don't yet have access to its benefits. Broadband providers are heavily promoting their amazingly fast full-fibre deals, but when you enter your postcode on their websites to check availability, you may be disappointed.

The Government wants FTTP coverage to increase to 85 per cent of the country by the end of 2025, when the Copper Switch Off will happen. BT Openreach – the biggest provider of full fibre – has set itself the target of 25 million premises by December 2026, including more than six million in rural areas.

To find out if you can get FTTP now, enter your postcode in Openreach's new Fibre Checker tool (www.snipca.com/44424) and select your address. The site will tell you if Ultrafast Full Fibre Broadband is available to you, as well as Superfast Fibre Broadband (FTTC) and Standard Broadband (ADSL). If not, it will

Use Openreach's Fibre Checker to find out if full fibre is now available to you

say 'Build not announced' (1 in our screenshot below left). Click 'Keep me updated' (2) and enter your contact details to receive an email, text message or letter when Openreach plans to provide FTTP to your area. If full fibre is already available to you, click 'Register my interest' to receive details of the latest deals from various providers. Read on for our own recommendations.

If your area isn't included in Openreach's FTTP rollout plan, and you and your neighbours are impatient to get faster broadband and ditch your landlines, you can try to speed up the process by signing up for the Fibre Community Partnership programme (FCP). This lets you club together with other residents to pay for your own fibre-optic cables to be laid, with Openreach contributing some of the costs.

Your community may qualify for a Gigabit Voucher from the Government. This scheme from the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport gives homes in rural locations a grant of up to £1,500 each to support the cost of installing FTTP connections, which is being tripled to £4,500 in early 2023. Enter your postcode on the Project Gigabit website (www.snipca.com/44429) to see if your area is eligible and whether suppliers have active projects ongoing.

Openreach has already upgraded 2,239 communities to full-fibre broadband as part of the FCP, but the scheme is currently on hold due to high demand. Register your interest on the FCP website (www.snipca.com/44430) to be notified when it reopens.

Which companies offer the best full-fibre deals?

As the owner of Openreach and the company spearheading the Copper Switch Off, BT unsurprisingly offers the broadest choice of full-fibre deals (www.snipca.com/44432), but it's far from the best value provider.

Its cheapest no-landline plan – Full Fibre Essential – costs £29 a month (plus a £30 setup fee), but the maximum download speed is only 36Mbps and the 'stay fast guarantee' a mere 18Mbps – about the same as the average FTTC connection. More appealing is its Full Fibre 100 plan, which costs £31 a month and delivers speeds of up to 150Mbps (guaranteed at 100Mbps), though if you switch now the price will rise in line with inflation plus 3.9 per cent on 31 March.

Sky has two FTTP deals (www.snipca.com/44433) – Ultrafast Broadband (£35 a month with a £20 installation fee) for speeds of up to 145Mbps and Ultrafast Plus (£45 a month) for 500Mbps, but is only available to 24 per cent of UK households. Sky can increase prices annually by up to 10 per cent, so you could end up paying a lot for your extra speed.

We've already mentioned TalkTalk's bargain 'Fibre 65 – Full Fibre' deal, but if you need more speed its 'Fibre 150 – Full Fibre' is also great value. This costs £32 a month, with no setup fee, and includes an Amazon Eero Wi-Fi 6 mesh router (worth £109 – see screenshot below) so

TalkTalk includes an Amazon Eero mesh router with most of its Full Fibre plans

Can you keep your landline after 2025?

You don't need to be a maths genius to work out that if full fibre will only be available to 85 per cent of homes by the time of the Copper Switch Off in December 2025 – assuming Openreach and other providers hit that target – that potentially leaves 15 per cent of the country without internet or phone services.

Thankfully, this won't be the case because it's only the copper cables that run from telephone exchanges to street cabinets that are being replaced. The copper lines that connect cabinets to homes will remain live until residents

have a full-fibre service, even after the switch-off. This means that if you have FTTC broadband, rather than FTTP, at the end of 2025, you won't lose your internet or landline service.

However, if you have ADSL broadband or no broadband at all, you will need to upgrade to a fibre connection – even if it's just for phone calls – or you won't have any form of landline.

It's your phone provider's responsibility to migrate you to VoIP as painlessly as possible, and give you all the equipment required. If it doesn't, you should complain to Ofcom at www.snipca.com/44437.

Vodafone Full Fibre costs from £26 a month and reaches eight million homes

you can make the most of its 150Mbps download speeds.

Even cheaper is Vodafone Full Fibre, which costs from £26 a month for up to 100Mbps (guaranteed at 50Mbps) with no upfront fee (www.snipca.com/44434 – see screenshot above). Confusingly, the website asks if you want to keep your phone number and add call packages to your landline when you sign up, even though the deal is broadband-only, but you can skip these steps. Vodafone claims to be the UK's largest full-fibre provider, available to more than eight million homes, because it uses the CityFibre network as well as Openreach.

One ISP that doesn't use Openreach is Hyperoptic, which offers excellent deals on FTTP plans that don't require a landline (www.snipca.com/44435). The cheapest provides a minimum download

speed of 50Mbps for £20 per month over a two-year contract, while the most expensive delivers 900Mbps for £35 a month. If you don't want to commit to a contract, choose a monthly 'rolling option' that you can cancel any time, though this costs a little more.

Hyperoptic promises "no in-contract price hikes" and if you're still within contract with your current provider it will provide nine months of service for free, depending on how long you have left (see screenshot below). The catch is that Hyperoptic is currently only available in 57 UK towns and cities – use its postcode checker to see if you're in luck.

As with all broadband deals, the prices we've quoted may only be available to new customers and will rise considerably once the introductory offer or your contract ends. However, with ISPs keen to move their customers to full fibre as soon as possible, it's worth asking if you can ditch your landline and switch to a cheaper, faster deal. You can compare the latest 'broadband without landline' deals at GoCompare (www.snipca.com/44436) and filter the results by speed, price, contract length and provider.

Hyperoptic offsets the cost of exiting your contract early with your current ISP

SWITCH TO VIRGIN MEDIA BROADBAND

Virgin Media's cable network delivers internet, TV and phone services to around 55 per cent of the UK (nearly 16 million households). Rather than rely on copper ADSL lines, it connects its exchanges to street cabinets with fibre-optic cables, then uses **coax** cables to connect these cabinets to homes. This allows it to offer much faster speeds than Openreach's FTTC network – even the slowest Virgin Media plan has an average download speed of 54Mbps – though its upload speeds aren't quite as impressive.

Although most Virgin Media packages include line rental, it also offers broadband-only deals without a landline – indeed, until FTTP became more widely available, it was the only big UK ISP to do so. Previously, these plans weren't much cheaper than combining phone and internet services, but Virgin Media currently has some tempting offers (see www.snipca.com/44441) – provided it covers your area and you check the details carefully.



M125 Fibre Broadband

Virgin Media offers a choice of broadband-only plans that don't include a landline

For example, its M125 Fibre Broadband plan (see screenshot above), which has an average download speed of 132Mbps (nearly double the national average of 79Mbps) costs £21 for the first six months, with no setup fee, but then doubles to £42 a month for the rest of your contract. That's only slightly cheaper than its Gig1 Fibre Broadband plan, which offers incredible speeds of

more than 1Gbps and costs £45 per month for the whole of your 18-month contract (then £62 a month). It includes up to three Wi-Fi pods for creating a mesh network around your home.

Virgin Media is testing its own FTTP network using a technology called XGS-PON, which allows for download speeds of up to 10Gbps. Trials have already been conducted in 50,000 premises in Salisbury and Stoke, and recently began in Yorkshire, with plans to reach seven million properties by 2027 – see www.snipca.com/44442 for details.

Virgin Media is in the process of moving all its home phone services from traditional landlines to its fibre network. This means you'll be able to make calls over the internet after the Copper Switch Off by plugging your phone into your Wi-Fi hub, though only if you pay for a phone service with your broadband. Existing customers should already have received a letter about this change – you'll find more information at www.snipca.com/44443.

SWITCH TO MOBILE BROADBAND

Mobile broadband, which connects you to the internet over a 4G and 5G mobile network, is a great option if you want to ditch your landline – and it has several advantages over fibre-broadband plans. For starters, you don't need to pay for installation because none is required: you simply insert a SIM card into the router the provider sends you to start receiving mobile signals in the same way you do on your phone. You then set up your home Wi-Fi network by connecting your computer and other devices to the router, with no need for a landline or any other cable.

Some 4G and 5G broadband deals don't commit you to lengthy contracts, but work on a rolling monthly basis so you can cancel at any time. Because plans aren't tied to your home address or phone number, and the routers are small and light, you can take the internet wherever you go, which is useful if you're moving house or going on holiday.

The main problem with 4G and 5G broadband plans is that they rely on mobile reception, so if you live in an area where connectivity is patchy or unreliable, your internet connection will be slow and prone to drop. For this



Check 4G and 5G coverage in your area before you switch to a mobile provider

reason, it's important to check the signal coverage where you live, before you ditch your current plan for a landline-free deal. All four of the main UK mobile networks – EE, O2, Three and Vodafone – offer coverage checkers on their websites (see screenshot above), which tell you whether 4G and 5G are available for your postcode, and the quality of service indoors and outdoors.

Recent research by Ofcom (www.snipca.com/44444) found that around 92 per cent of the UK can now get 4G from at least one operator – EE claims to cover 99 per cent of the population – but the

download speed you experience will be much slower than full fibre: around 20-30Mbps on average. 5G is almost 10 times faster, typically delivering speeds of 150-200Mbps, which makes it better suited to home networks that have multiple connected devices. 5G's coverage has expanded significantly in the last year, and Ofcom estimates that it's now available to around 70 per cent of UK properties.

If you are able to get 5G broadband, the good news is that prices have recently dropped significantly. Three's 5G Home Broadband, which is the fastest in the UK with a median speed of 292Mbps (www.snipca.com/44445) costs the same as its 4G plan: £10 a month for the first six months (then £20), with no charge upfront, unlimited data and a 30-day money-back guarantee (www.snipca.com/44447 – see screenshot below). Sign up for updates on Three's 5G rollout at www.snipca.com/44446.

EE claims to be faster when figures for 4G and 5G speeds are combined, but it's also more expensive and restrictive. Its 5G Wi-Fi router costs £100 upfront and its best-selling plan, which costs £22 a month, imposes a monthly data limit of 25GB and a maximum download speed of 100Mbps. For unlimited data, you need to pay £55 per month, which is pricier than most full-fibre deals.



Three's 5G Home Broadband costs just £10 a month for the first six months

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JUST SO YOU KNOW...

This offer can be used by one person only, and expires at midnight on **18 January, 2023**. It's a lifetime licence for one computer.



Should you switch to satellite broadband?

If full fibre, cable and 5G aren't available in your area, another option to consider is satellite broadband. It's mainly designed for people in remote areas who can't access a fixed-line connection or get a reliable mobile signal, and aren't eligible for the Government's Project Gigabit scheme (see page 52).

The latest technology uses lasers – rather than radio waves – to 'beam' data from low-orbiting satellites to dishes attached to homes. The leading provider in the UK is Starlink, which is operated by Elon Musk's SpaceX company and now has more than 3,200 satellites in orbit. Starlink's service doesn't have the same low latency problems suffered by previous forms of satellite broadband, which can cause stuttering when streaming and gaming.

In tests last year, Starlink delivered a median download speed of around 105Mbps to UK customers, with a latency of 66 milliseconds (www.snipca.com/44460), which is slow compared to



full fibre but faster than ADSL.

Compared with other types of broadband, Starlink is expensive. You need to pay £460 for the initial hardware, which includes the satellite dish (pictured), base, router and cables, then £75 a month for the service. As you can see from its coverage map at www.snipca.com/44459, Starlink is now available across the UK, with only the Shetland Islands still waiting.

Previously, BT was working with a rival satellite service called OneWeb, which was part owned by the Government. However, this was bought by French company Eutelsat last July, and the Government is now backing Starlink.

SWITCH YOUR PHONE TO VoIP NOW

Rather than wait for your ISP to change your analogue landline to a digital one, you can switch to VoIP now to make all your calls over the internet. This gives you the freedom to shop around for a cheaper and faster broadband-only deal, and save money and time in the long run. If you sign up with a VoIP provider today, you can 'install' your phone number on both your home phone and your mobile (using an app), so you can make and receive landline calls wherever you are.

Most VoIP services use a system called Session Initiation Protocol (SIP) to let you make and receive phone calls, though their prices vary considerably and some are aimed more at businesses. Sady, our favourite free option for home users, Spigate Starter (formerly Spigate Basic), is no longer available to new customers, so instead we recommend Vonage For Home (www.vonage.com/44466). This lets you 'port' (transfer) your existing landline number for free, though the process can take up to a month, so don't cancel your current phone contract in the interim – you'll be given a temporary Vonage number while you're waiting. See our box below for more about porting your number.

The cheapest Vonage plan, Talk UK 1000, costs £6.99 a month (see screenshot above) and includes 1,000 minutes of calls to UK landlines – calls to mobiles cost 10p per minute, that aren't included in your plan. For unlimited calls to UK landlines and mobile phones, and to six other countries, you can pay £16 per month for Premium Unlimited.

Your monthly subscription also includes voicemail, call forwarding and

The cheapest Vonage plan costs £6.99 a month for 1,000 minutes of landline calls

simultaneous ringing on your landline and mobile phones. Additionally, unlike cheaper rivals such as Localphone (www.localphone.com), you can make emergency service numbers. On the downside, Vonage charges a £10 activation fee for some plans, and ties you into a one-year contract. You also need to pay £5 for delivery of its VoIP adapter, which connects your home phone to your router so you can use Vonage's service over your broadband connection. The adapter itself is actually free, whereas other VoIP providers charge over £50.

Vonage offers a choice of contract-free plans to suit your call needs, including Flex

A more flexible option is Voipfone, which has no contract and offers a choice of plans to suit your calling needs (www.voipfone.com/44466), which all include voicemail, call divert and use of its mobile app. The cheapest plan, Voipfone Flex (see screenshot below left), costs just £1.50 per month but doesn't include any 'free' calls – for that you need to pay from £5 per month for Voipfone 100, which offers 100 minutes to UK numbers.

You can port your existing number to Voipfone for £20, but to connect your current phone to your router, you'll need to buy an adapter, which it sells for a rather steep £54 (from www.snipca.com/44469). Cheaper options are available, such as the Grandstream HandyTone HT801, which costs £41 from www.snipca.com/41133, pictured below – see our How To in issue 628 (page 35) for instructions on setting up this adapter.

Although Skype (www.skype.com) is most commonly used on computers and mobiles, it can also be used with a VoIP-enabled desk phone, such as the Grandstream GXP1625 (£53 from www.snipca.com/44467). Its latest plans (see www.snipca.com/44468) cost from £2.40 a month for 100 minutes of calls to UK mobiles and landlines, priced at 2.40p per minute, after a 30-day free trial.



Connect your phone to VoIP using the Grandstream HandyTone HT801 adapter

MAKE PHONE CALLS OVER WI-FI

If you want to ditch your landline without switching to a VoIP service, but the mobile signal you receive is poor quality and unreliable, you can make and receive calls over Wi-Fi instead. Provided your mobile phone is connected to your wireless network (or a nearby hotspot), and your router hasn't been taken offline by a power cut, this is easy to do and there are several methods available.

The simplest option is to make a voice (or video) call through a messaging app such as WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger – just select the person you want to speak to and tap the phone icon to ring them over Wi-Fi. The advantages to this method are that calls are completely free, and people can see when you called if they don't answer in time. The disadvantages are that you can only call other users of the messaging app, and they need to be in your contacts list – it's not possible to dial a specific number. This means that you can't call landlines or emergency services using these apps.

Skype also lets you phone other users of its mobile and desktop apps for free, and contact people who aren't in your contacts by finding them in its directory. However, if you want to call a non-Skype number, including a landline, you'll need to pay. Emergency calls are routed through your mobile network rather than over Wi-Fi, which could cause problems when reception is patchy.

Switch on Wi-Fi calling to make calls without using a mobile network or landline

Will spam calls increase on digital landlines?

You might expect that moving from an analogue to a digital landline will make it as easy for spammers and scammers to contact you as they do via email, but this won't necessarily be the case.

BT's Digital Voice system offers the same free Call Protect feature as its traditional phone service, which blocks known nuisance callers by sending them to your junk voicemail box, lets you add specific numbers to a personal blacklist and optionally blocks whitelisted, unknown and international numbers. You can also use a BT Phone app that call-blocking technology built in, though you may need to order a Digital Voice Adapter (www.snipca.com/44491).

Sky's Talk Shield call-screening service and TalkTalk's CallSafe will similarly be migrated along with your phone number, so you can continue blocking unwanted callers. Vonage (see opposite page) can block anonymous calls, though its Selective Call Block option is only available in the US.

However, because VoIP allows scammers to disguise their numbers, and pretend to be in the UK, it's already being widely used for nuisance calls. Ofcom has reportedly ordered major phone providers to automatically block suspicious international calls from VoIP services that are masked with UK numbers (www.snipca.com/44473).

Another option is to use the 'Wi-Fi calling' option, which lets you make and receive calls – and texts – when a 3G, 4G or 5G signal is unavailable. BT, EE, O2, Three and Vodafone all offer this feature to UK customers, so it's useful to know how to turn it on in your phone's settings.

On an Android phone, open the Phone app, tap the three-dot icon in the top-right corner and choose Settings. Depending on which Android version you're using, either tap Calls or 'Calling accounts' and select your mobile network, and you should see a 'Wi-Fi calling' option. Press this and activate 'Use Wi-Fi calling' (see screenshot left) to switch to Wi-Fi automatically when your mobile signal is weak or non-existent.

On an iPhone, simply go to Settings, select Phone and turn on 'Wi-Fi Calling on this iPhone'. There's also a setting to update your emergency address (see screenshot above right), so emergency services can quickly respond to your call and locate you.

Note that calls you make over Wi-Fi will count towards your monthly minutes allowances, unless you're on an unlimited plan, or you'll be charged for them if you've exceeded your limit.

If you don't see a Wi-Fi calling option, your mobile provider may not support it yet. Some of the smaller networks – which 'piggyback' on the larger ones – have recently introduced the feature, including Lebara and Smartys, so it's definitely worth checking. **Go**

Should you 'port' your phone number?

When your internet provider moves you to its own VoIP service before the Copper Switch Off, you should be able to keep your landline number without any problems. But if you decide to switch to VoIP with another company, the process might not be as straightforward. This is because your ISP may treat the request to transfer – or 'port' – your number as a request to cancel your service, which means you could lose your broadband connection as well as your landline.

For this reason, it's wise to let the VoIP

provider handle the porting process for you – it may take several weeks and you may be charged, but at least you won't be left without internet while you wait. Also remember that if you're still in contract for your phone service, you may be charged an early-termination fee.

Ofcom rules now require UK ISPs to comply with porting requests (www.snipca.com/44471), but the admin checks and costs mean you may find it quicker and cheaper to use a new phone number with the VoIP company.

NEXT ISSUE On sale Wednesday 18 January

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