

How to delete everything Google knows about you



Last Updated: Feb 14, 2017 @ 9:34 am

It knows you better than you know yourself. It knows every smartphone you've thought about buying, every coworker you've tried to find dirt on, every embarrassing ailment you've suffered...

It's your **Google Activity** (formerly known as Google Web & App History), and it knows everything you've searched for... [dating back to 2005](#). Yikes!

This post will teach you **how to permanently delete your Google history** to [enhance your internet privacy](#) and prevent your search and browsing data from following you around forever.

Note: Clearing your browser history is NOT the same as clearing your Google Web & App Activity history. When you clear your browser history, you're only deleting the history that's locally stored on your computer. Clearing your browser history doesn't do anything to the data stored on Google's servers.

Warning: If you use G Suite (formerly Google Apps for Work), it is vital that you find out your company's acceptable use and data retention policies before you delete anything!

What you do online is YOUR business—and yours alone

ExpressVPN believes what you do on the internet is private. Nobody should be keeping tabs on what you do online—not without your knowledge and permission, anyway.

Unless you've disabled it, Google Activity has been keeping a record of your search and browsing activity for the last decade. It knows every link you've followed, every image you've clicked on, and the URLs you've entered in the address bar.

Google uses all this data to **construct a profile about you**, including your age, gender, languages, and interests, and filters search results and ads for you based on your profile. Pretty clever, right? But this is also an incredible invasion of your privacy.

Don't let your Google search history haunt you forever.

Back up your Google Activity before you delete everything

In April 2015, Google quietly released a feature enabling you to download all of your Google data. If you're feeling sentimental (sniff), you might want to consider downloading your search data before you delete and disable it forever.

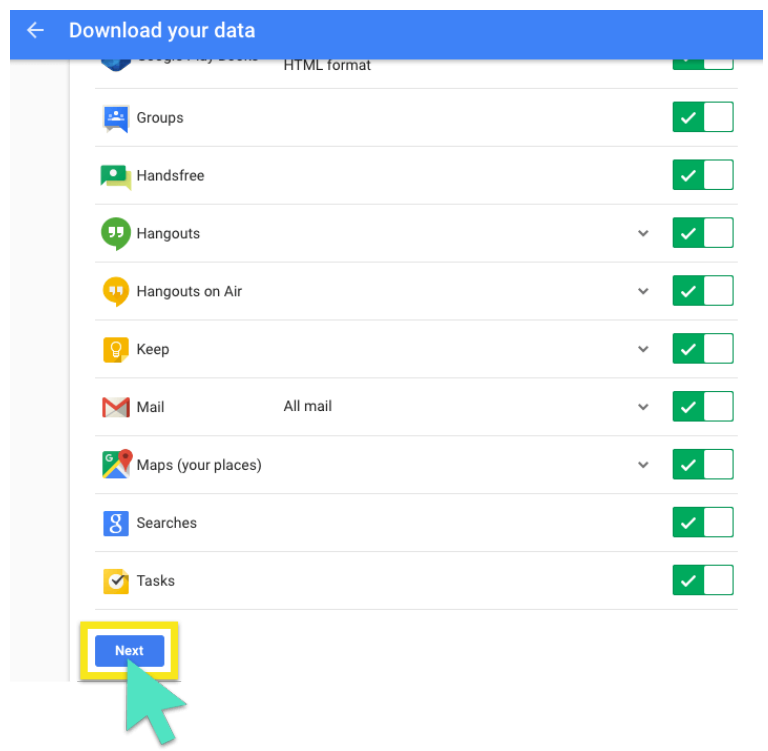
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How to download and delete your Google search history and stop Google from saving your activity

How to download all your Google data

Google's **Takeout** feature lets you download data from all of the Google products you use, including your Google Search history, Gmail, Calendar, Chrome, Google Photos, Maps, and more. Here's how to use Takeout to download all your Google data.

Step 1: From your Google Takeout "Download your data" page, **select the data you'd like to download**. By default, all of the boxes are selected. Select **Next**.



Step 2: Select your archive format and delivery method, then select **Create archive**. (We stuck with the default settings.)

Customize archive format

Choose your archive's file type and whether you want to download it or save it in the cloud.

File type

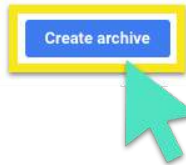
Zip files can be opened on almost any computer.

Archive size (max)

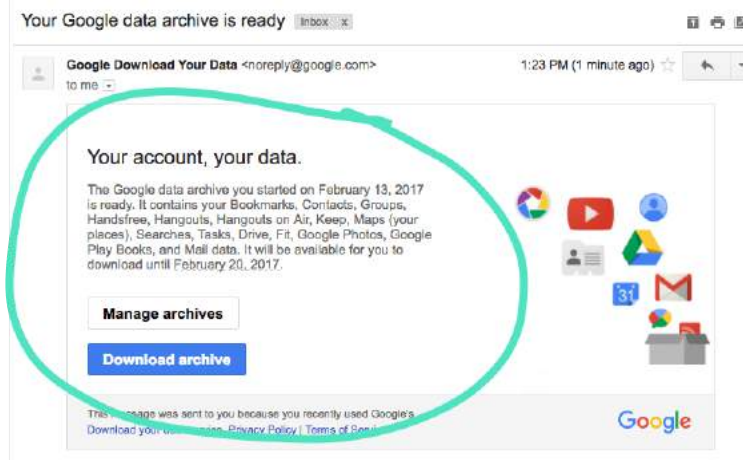
Archives larger than this size will be split into multiple files.

Delivery method

After we finish creating your archive, we'll email a link so you can download it to your personal device. You will have one week to retrieve your archive.



Step 3: You'll receive a notification when the archiving process is complete. In this example, we received an email with a link to download our archive.



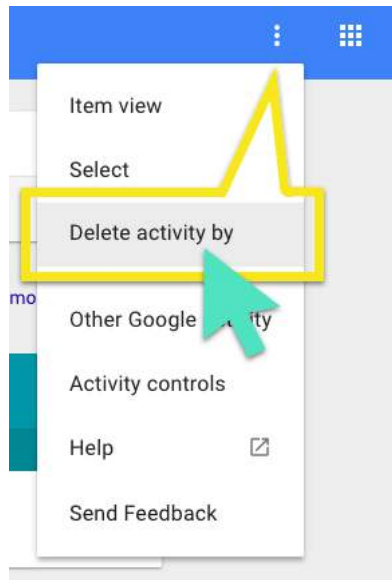
Now that you've downloaded an archive of your data, you're ready to delete your history.

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How to delete all your Google activity

Use these steps to delete data about **all** your Google activity, including your searches, video searches, and any ads you've clicked on.

Step 1: From your [My Activity page](#), select the vertical ellipsis (:), then select **Delete activity by**.



Step 2: Change the date from **Today** to **All time**. Select **All products** from the product drop-down menu, then select **DELETE**.

Delete by topic or product

Search by keyword or filter by product, then select Delete results from the more options menu, to delete all matching activity



[TRY IT](#)

Delete by date

All time

After

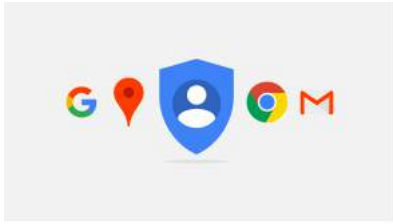
Before

All products

DELETE



Step 3: Google will tell you how it uses your data to make its services more useful for you. Select **OK**.



Before you delete

Your activity can make Google services more useful to you, like better commute options in Maps and quicker results in Search.

[Learn more](#)

Don't show again



Step 4: Google will ask you if you want to delete your activity. Select **DELETE**.

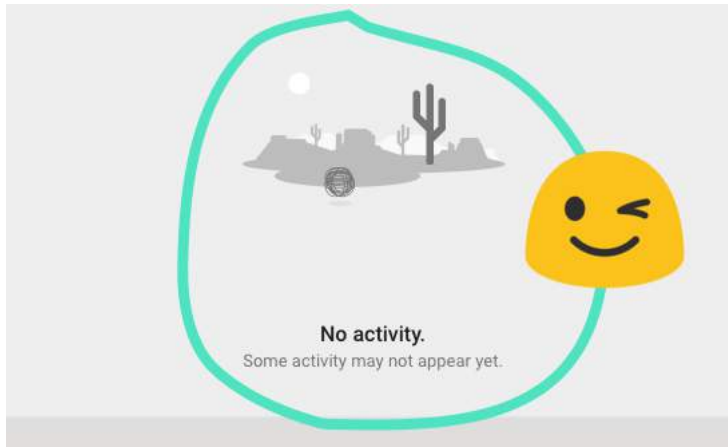


Delete your activity from all time?

These items will be permanently deleted from your Google Account.
[Learn more](#)



Step 5: Your screen should now say **"No activity."**



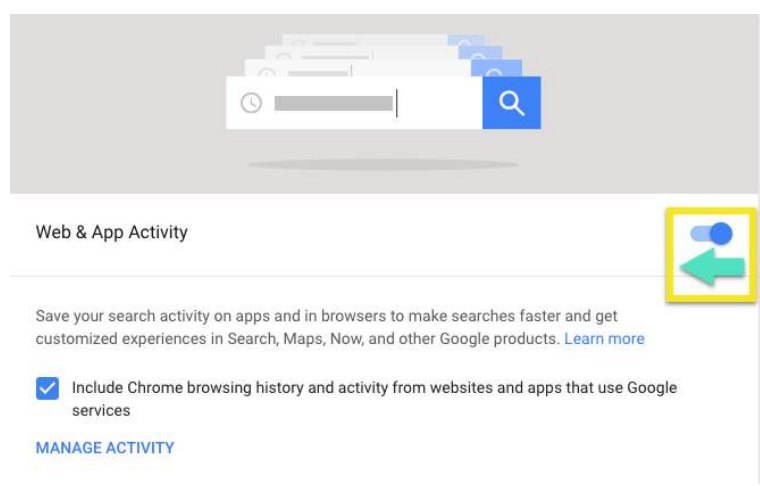
Congratulations. You've now deleted your Google search history. Here's to blank slates! Next up: Get Google to stop saving your activity.

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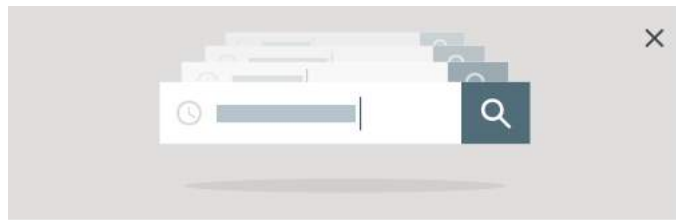
How to stop (or “pause”) Google from saving your activity

Google doesn't provide a way to permanently disable it from saving your activity, but you can hit **pause**. Use these steps to hit pause on Google saving your activity.

Step 1: From your [Activity controls](#) page, you'll see a section for “Web & App Activity.” **Slide the switch to the left.**



Step 2: Google will ask if you'd like to pause your Web & App Activity. Select **PAUSE**.



Pause Web & App Activity?

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Many of our products, like Google Now and Google+, use your Web & App Activity to improve their suggestions and updates. Pausing this setting will limit their ability to offer you this kind of personalized content.

Please note that even when this setting is paused, Google may temporarily store searches in order to improve the quality of the active search session.

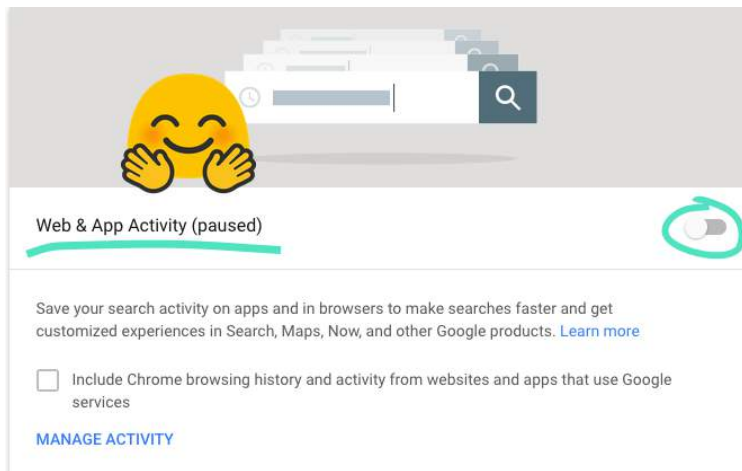
Remember, you can search or browse in [incognito mode](#) whenever you want to be more anonymous.

Pausing your Web & App Activity doesn't delete any of your previous activity, but you can view, edit and delete your [Web & App Activity data](#) whenever you like.

CANCEL

PAUSE

Step 3: Check to see if your activity is paused. The screen should say “Web & App Activity (paused)” and the sliding toggle should be grey.



Step 4: If you want to hit “pause” on Google logging your activity on ALL the Google apps and services you use, **slide all the switches on this page to the left.**

Read the important information for each item and select **PAUSE** to complete each step.

The image shows a vertical scroll of Google My Activity settings. A yellow vertical bar highlights the right side of the page, and green arrows point to the toggle switches for each activity type. The settings are as follows:

- Web & App Activity (paused)**: Save your search activity on apps and in browsers to make searches faster and get customized experiences in Search, Maps, Now, and other Google products. [Learn more](#)
 Include Chrome browsing history and activity from websites and apps that use Google services
[MANAGE ACTIVITY](#)
- Location History (paused)**: Creates a private map of where you go with your signed-in devices in order to provide improved map searches, commute routes, and more. [Learn more](#)
[MANAGE ACTIVITY](#)
- Device Information (paused)**: Store your contacts, calendars, apps, and other device data to improve your experience across Google. [Learn more](#)
[MANAGE ACTIVITY](#)
- Voice & Audio Activity (paused)**: Help recognize your voice and improve speech recognition by storing your voice and audio inputs to your account (for example, when you say "Ok Google" to do a voice search). [Learn more](#)
[MANAGE ACTIVITY](#)
- YouTube Search History (paused)**: Store your YouTube searches to make your future searches faster and improve your recommendations. [Learn more](#)
[MANAGE ACTIVITY](#)
- YouTube Watch History (paused)**: Make it easier to find your recently watched videos on YouTube and improve your recommendations. [Learn more](#)
[MANAGE ACTIVITY](#)



Mission accomplished! Google won't be saving your search data any more.

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Know the consequences of deleting & disabling your Google search history

It's important to understand the consequences of deleting your Google search history.

By default, **Google personalizes your search results** based on your search activity. So if you search for recipes and click on links from allrecipes.com more frequently than all other websites, then Google will rank allrecipes.com higher up on the search results page every time you look up a recipe.

If you delete and disable your history, then your returning search results will be **broader and less specific to you**. So allrecipes.com won't show up at the top of the results, even though it's your favorite site.

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Deleting and disabling your history does NOT make you invisible to Google

If you delete and disable your history, you are **not** invisible to Google—especially if you maintain a Google account for using various Google apps and services, such as Gmail and YouTube.

The reality is that it's pretty much impossible to be invisible to Google. But you can be prudent. Start by eliminating all Google apps and services from your daily web use. And use [search engines that don't track your search activity](#), such as [DuckDuckGo](#), [Ixquick](#), and [Startpage](#).

But if your heart is set on being as invisible to Google as you can possibly be, then don't use the internet. Ever. (Even then you'll need to jump into the bushes if the Google Street View vehicle is nearby.)



Caught on Google Street View: No bushes in sight for this guy to dive into!

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Do more to protect your internet privacy



Now if you REALLY want to step up your internet privacy game, here are more steps you can take.

1. **Use ExpressVPN.** While “pausing” Google Web & App History prevents Google from collecting data about you, it doesn’t prevent your ISP from tracking what you’re doing online and potentially sharing it with corporations and governments. To hide your online activity from your ISP, use a VPN like [ExpressVPN](#).
2. **Use Tor Browser.** Tor hides your location and online activities from anybody doing network surveillance or traffic analysis, so your internet activity is difficult to trace back to you. It’s one of your best bets for maintaining anonymity online. To maximize the effectiveness of Tor, be sure to read these tips: [Want Tor to really work?](#)

Safe browsing, everyone!

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Featured image: [Thomas Lefebvre / Unsplash](#) (image has been modified)