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Your broadband download speed is essentially the same as your overall broadband speed; that's how broadband speeds are measured. Broadband speeds advertised by broadband providers can range from around 10Mb to 100Mb, depending on the type of connection you choose, and the amount you're prepared to pay. As a rule of thumb, the more you spend on your internet connection, the faster it will be. There are also two main kinds of broadband connection: ADSL connections and fibre-optic connections. Fibre-optic connections tend to be much faster.

Your 'maximum' broadband download speed will depend on a multitude of factors. If you're connected via fibre-optic cables, the distance between your house and the nearest green box will alter your top speed, while if you're connected via ADSL, it will be affected by the distance between your house and the nearest local telephone exchange. Other factors which will affect your top broadband download speed include the package you've signed up to, the quality of your line, and the number of households that share your broadband connection. Your download speed might also change depending on the time of day you're connecting; during peak times, download speeds may well be slower.

Ofcom's latest speed tests have revealed that the average broadband download speed in the UK is 7.6Mb. The truth is, a lot of the time we're not really getting the broadband speeds we're paying for. This isn't necessarily the fault of the broadband provider; it's just that it's never possible to know exactly how fast your broadband will reach you, given the various factors listed above. There are online broadband speed tests which can determine the speed at which your broadband downloads information; it's very unlikely that your broadband speed will reach the maximum that you are paying for.

The difference between your actual broadband download speed and the speed that your broadband is advertised at will also depend on whether your broadband uses fibre-optic cables or copper cables. With ADSL or ADSL2 connections, which use copper cables, your broadband is likely to be much slower than stated speeds. In contrast, fibre-optic lines still lose speed, but much less so than copper cables. This is generally because fibre-optic connections still rely on copper cables for a short portion of the route; here, they'll lose a similar amount of speed as regular connections.

If you think that your broadband download speed is slower than it should be, it's worth testing it online. Your internet service provider may be able to explain why your internet is running slow, and they may even send an engineer to your home to ascertain whether there's a technical problem. Of course, if there's nothing wrong and you still feel like your connection is too slow, you may wish to switch to a faster broadband connection. ADSL connections only reach speeds of around 19Mb, whereas superfast broadband, connected with fibre-optic cables, offers speeds of between 40Mb and 100Mb.

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