Data protection: keep a copy of what matters

The four big cloud backups, compared

iCloud — Apple · iPhone, iPad, and Mac

- What it is: Turn it on once and it copies your photos, contacts, and settings by itself.
- What it costs: A small amount of space is free.
- Good to know: It only covers Apple devices.

Google Drive — Google · Android phones and any computer

- What it is: On Android phones it backs up photos and settings automatically, and on any computer you can drag files straight into it.
- What it costs: 15GB free — the biggest free slice here.

OneDrive — Microsoft · Windows computers

- What it is: Your Documents folder can sync to it without you lifting a finger.
- What it costs: A little space is free. The Microsoft 365 plan costs about ten dollars a month and includes Word, Excel, and a full terabyte of backup space.
- Good to know: If you already pay for Microsoft 365, you already have the backup — most people never turn it on.

Dropbox — Dropbox · works on any device

- What it is: A folder on your computer that magically exists on all your other devices too.
- What it costs: Paid plans run about ten dollars a month for a big chunk of space.
- Good to know: Sharing is its superpower — send a link and anyone can view or download, no account needed.

The backup you keep at home

External hard drive — Home backup · one-time purchase · no monthly fee

- What it is: A small box, about the size of your phone, that plugs into your computer with a cable.
- How you use it: Plug it in, copy your photos and documents over (or let the computer do it on a schedule), then unplug it and put it somewhere safe.
- Why unplug it: A backup only protects you if a virus or power surge can't reach it. Unplugged on a shelf, it is safe from both.

The simple rule: two copies, two places

- One copy in the cloud (iCloud, Google Drive, OneDrive, or Dropbox) — protects against theft, fire, and a dead device.
- One copy on an external drive at home — protects against internet problems and monthly fees, and it is fast to restore from.
- Check once in a while. A backup you never look at might have stopped working months ago. Open it twice a year and make sure your newest photos are there.