

CHOOSING A SEARCH ENGINE

A search engine finds websites for you when you type in what you're looking for. Google handles around nine in every ten searches in the UK, but it isn't the only choice, and the alternatives differ in how much they show you adverts, record what you search for, and fill the page with AI-written summaries.

Search engine or web browser?

They're easily confused. Your **web browser**, such as Edge, Chrome, Safari or Brave, is the program you use to visit websites. Your **search engine**, such as Google or Bing, is the website it uses to find things. You can usually choose any search engine in any browser. Our [Guide to Choosing a Browser](#) covers browsers.

THE MAIN SEARCH ENGINES

G
MOST
POPULAR

Google

Benefits: The most thorough results, especially for local businesses, maps and opening times.

Drawbacks: Adverts fill the top of many searches, and your searches are linked to your Google account. Its AI summaries can't be switched off in its settings, though there are simple workarounds.

B
BUILT INTO
WINDOWS

Microsoft Bing

Benefits: Built into Windows and Microsoft Edge, with results that are generally good.

Drawbacks: Microsoft's Copilot AI assistant features heavily, and adverts appear at the top of results.

D
PRIVACY
FOCUSED

DuckDuckGo

Benefits: Doesn't track you or keep a record of your searches, shows fewer adverts, and offers a version with the AI features removed.

Drawbacks: Results for local businesses and very specific searches are sometimes less thorough than Google's.

GOOGLE'S RESULTS, PRIVATELY

If you like Google's results but not the adverts, the tracking or the AI summaries, **Startpage** is worth a look. It passes your search to Google on your behalf, without revealing who you are, and shows you Google's results in a simple, uncluttered page.

S

GOOGLE
RESULTS

Startpage

Benefits: Google's results without AI summaries or tracking, and with fewer adverts. It works the same on a computer, phone or tablet, with nothing to set up beyond choosing it.

Drawbacks: Some Google extras, such as maps and panels for local businesses, are more limited. On an iPhone or iPad it isn't one of Safari's built-in choices, but its free app works well.

Who owns it? Since 2019, Startpage has been part-owned by System1, an advertising company. That raised some concern at the time about whether its privacy promises would last. So far they have held up, and it's still widely recommended by privacy experts, but it's worth knowing.

CHANGING YOUR SEARCH ENGINE

- **On a computer:** open your browser's **Settings**, type **search engine** into its search box, and choose a different one from the list.
- **On an iPhone or iPad:** open **Settings**, tap **Apps**, then **Safari**, then **Search Engine**.
- **On an Android phone:** open Chrome, tap the three dots, then **Settings**, then **Search engine**.

BEWARE OF ADVERTS AT THE TOP

The first few results on a search page are often adverts, paid for by whoever is willing to pay most. Scammers use this to their advantage. They pay for adverts that pretend to be the helpline of a well-known company, so that when you search for its phone number, theirs appears first.

In December 2025, Which? found fake adverts for the mobile network Three at the top of Google's results. People who rang the number were asked for their account password by fraudsters posing as customer services. Similar scams have copied banks, airlines, energy suppliers and broadband providers.

STAYING SAFE

- Look for the word **Sponsored** or **Ad** next to a result. It's often small and easy to miss.
- Never ring a phone number from a search advert. Use the number on your bill, statement or bank card, or on the company's own app or website.
- For your bank, and anywhere else you sign in, type the web address yourself or use a bookmark, rather than searching for it each time.
- Check the web address before entering a password or card details. Fake websites often use names very like the real thing.

AI SUMMARIES CAN BE WRONG

Most search engines now show a summary written by artificial intelligence (AI) above the results. These are often helpful, but they can be confidently wrong, and have even repeated scammers' phone numbers. For anything important, such as health, money or a phone number to ring, check the original website. If you'd rather not see them, our [Guide to AI in Search Results](#) explains how to reduce or remove them.

WHICH IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

If you're happy with Google

Stay with it. It gives the most thorough results. Just remember to skip past the adverts at the top, and never ring a number from one.

If you like Google's results but not the AI

Startpage. You get Google's results without the AI summaries, the tracking or most of the adverts, on your computer, phone and tablet alike.

If you'd like more privacy and fewer distractions

DuckDuckGo. It doesn't keep a record of your searches, shows fewer adverts, and its no-AI version, at **noai.duckduckgo.com**, gives you a plain list of results.

If you use Microsoft Edge

Switch it to Google or DuckDuckGo. Edge uses Microsoft's Bing unless you change it. Bing works well enough, but Microsoft gives a lot of the page to its Copilot AI assistant, news and shopping, and scam adverts have appeared there too. Edge may ask if you're sure, or later suggest switching back, but you can simply say no.

If you use the Brave browser

Brave Search is already set up and is fine for most searches. If you often look up local shops, services and opening times, switch Brave to Google for better local results.

WE CAN HELP

We can set up the search engine that suits you on your computer, phone and tablet, and show you how to tell a genuine result from an advert.