FREE HOMEOWNER GUIDE

Why does my GFCI keep tripping?

What a GFCI outlet does

If your GFCI outlet keeps tripping, it is doing its job. GFCI (Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter) outlets shut off power when they detect even a small electrical imbalance, and they are most commonly found in bathrooms, kitchens, garages, laundry rooms, and outdoor areas.

A GFCI monitors electricity flowing out and returning. If even a tiny amount leaks, often through water or a faulty appliance, it shuts off power instantly to prevent shock. That is why they are required by code in wet or damp areas. If it keeps tripping, something is causing an imbalance.

Common causes of GFCI tripping

A faulty appliance is the most common cause. If your GFCI trips when you plug something in, that device may be the problem. To test it, unplug everything, reset the GFCI, then plug items back in one at a time; if it trips when one device is connected, that appliance likely has an internal fault.

Moisture is also common in the Portland area, and rain, condensation, or humidity can cause exterior, garage, or crawlspace outlets to trip; our outdoor outlet and garage outlet pages cover those locations. A downstream wiring issue is another cause: one GFCI can control multiple outlets, so a loose neutral or damaged insulation downstream will keep it tripping. Finally, GFCIs wear out; if yours is more than 10 to 15 years old, replacement is often the simplest solution.

- [ ] A faulty appliance such as a coffee maker, toaster, hair dryer, space heater, or garage refrigerator
- [ ] Moisture or outdoor exposure on exterior, garage, or crawlspace outlets
- [ ] A downstream wiring issue with a loose neutral or damaged insulation
- [ ] A worn-out GFCI that trips randomly, refuses to reset, or has become overly sensitive

When to call an electrician

A GFCI trips because it detects something abnormal; it is protecting you from shock. A faulty appliance is usually minor, but a moisture or wiring issue needs attention, and a burning smell or warm outlet means you should turn off power and call immediately. Call a licensed electrician if any of these apply.

- [ ] The GFCI won't reset
- [ ] It trips immediately with nothing plugged in
- [ ] Multiple outlets lost power
- [ ] You see burn marks or smell burning
- [ ] It keeps happening repeatedly

Frequently asked questions

Why does my GFCI trip when it rains?

Moisture may be entering an exterior outlet or the downstream wiring. Rain, condensation, and humidity are common triggers for GFCI trips on outdoor, garage, and crawlspace circuits in the Portland area. If it happens repeatedly, the outlet box or wiring may need to be sealed or repaired.

Can I replace a GFCI myself?

It's possible, but incorrect wiring can cause nuisance tripping or safety hazards. GFCIs are line- and load-sensitive, so a reversed connection will keep the outlet from protecting you correctly. If you're unsure, or the GFCI keeps tripping after replacement, have a licensed electrician handle it.

Why does my garage fridge keep tripping the GFCI?

Refrigerators and freezers can sometimes cause nuisance trips because their motors create small electrical fluctuations a sensitive GFCI reads as a fault. A dedicated circuit may be recommended so the appliance isn't sharing protection with other loads.

Sources

1. Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters, Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI). https://www.esfi.org/program/ground-fault-circuit-interrupters/
2. Electrical Safety: Checklist, National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). https://content.nfpa.org/-/media/project/storefront/catalog/files/home-fire-safety/electrical/electrical_safety_checklist.pdf

> **Need a licensed electrician in the Portland area?**
> Call Smiley Electric at (503) 484-7556 (Mon–Sat, 7am–5pm) or visit smileyelectric.net/contact. For sparks, smoke, a burning smell or a hot panel, turn off the power if it is safe and call right away.

Reviewed by Joshua Smiley, owner & master electrician, Smiley Electric. Last reviewed November 13, 2026. Online version: smileyelectric.net/help/gfci-keeps-tripping/. General information, not a substitute for an on-site inspection.

Cite this page: Smiley Electric. “Why does my GFCI keep tripping?” smileyelectric.net/help/gfci-keeps-tripping/. Last reviewed November 13, 2026. You are welcome to quote, print or share this page with credit to Smiley Electric and a link to smileyelectric.net/help/gfci-keeps-tripping/.