FREE HOMEOWNER GUIDE

Why are my lights flickering?

What flickering lights are telling you

Occasional flicker when a large appliance kicks on can be normal, but lights that flicker often, dim across the whole house, or pulse for no reason are worth taking seriously. The cause can be as simple as a loose bulb or as serious as a failing breaker, a loose neutral connection, or an overloaded circuit, and the serious causes can lead to overheating.

If flickering is limited to one fixture, try a different bulb and check that the fixture connections are tight. If multiple lights flicker, dim when appliances run, or you notice flickering along with warm switch plates or a burning smell, stop using the circuit and call a licensed electrician. Those are signs of a connection problem that can become a fire hazard. If the bulbs are failing instead of flickering, see why light bulbs keep burning out.

- [ ] Loose light bulbs or fixture connections
- [ ] Overloaded circuits
- [ ] Loose wiring connections
- [ ] Voltage fluctuations
- [ ] Outdated or failing electrical panels

When should you be concerned?

While some flickering issues are simple, others may indicate a deeper electrical concern. Flickering combined with burning smells or warm outlets requires immediate attention. Call a licensed electrician if any of these apply.

- [ ] Lights flicker throughout the entire home
- [ ] Lights dim when large appliances turn on
- [ ] You hear buzzing from switches or panels
- [ ] Flickering is frequent or worsening
- [ ] You have an older home with outdated wiring

Our troubleshooting process

We focus on diagnosis first, so you get answers before committing to repairs. We trace flickering to its real source, whether panel, wiring, or connections, and fix it correctly the first time.

- [ ] Thorough inspection of lighting circuits
- [ ] Voltage testing and load analysis

- [ ] Panel and breaker evaluation
- [ ] Clear explanation of findings
- [ ] Upfront pricing before any repairs

Frequently asked questions

Is occasional flickering normal?

Occasional flicker when a large appliance kicks on can be normal. Lights that flicker often, dim across the whole house, or pulse for no reason are worth taking seriously, since they can point to a loose connection, overloaded circuit, or failing panel.

Can flickering lights be a fire hazard?

They can. Flickering along with warm switch plates or a burning smell is a sign of a connection problem that can become a fire hazard. Stop using the circuit and call a licensed electrician.

What should I check if only one light flickers?

If flickering is limited to one fixture, try a different bulb and check that the fixture connections are tight. If multiple lights are affected, or the flicker persists, have it diagnosed by a licensed electrician.

Sources

1. Electrical Safety (safety tip sheet), National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). https://www.nfpa.org/-/media/project/storefront/catalog/files/safety-tip-sheets/electricalsafetytips.pdf
2. Home Electrical Fires, Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI). https://www.esfi.org/home-electrical-fires/

> **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/lights-flickering/. General information, not a substitute for an on-site inspection.

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