FREE HOMEOWNER GUIDE

Power out but the breaker isn't tripped? Where to look next

The answer, first

When part of the house is dead and every breaker looks on, something other than a visibly tripped breaker is stopping the power. There are four usual causes: a tripped GFCI somewhere else in the house, a breaker that did trip but does not look like it, a failed connection at one outlet that cut off everything after it, or a problem with the power coming into the house.

Work through them in that order, easiest first. You can fix the first two yourself in five minutes. The last two need an electrician or the utility.

Step 1: reset every GFCI in the house

One GFCI outlet protects the outlets wired after it, and those are often in other rooms. The dead outlets have no buttons of their own, so nothing about them tells you a GFCI is involved. Press Reset on every one you can find.

- ☐ Every bathroom, not just the nearest one
- ☐ Kitchen counters, including behind appliances
- ☐ The garage, behind whatever is stored against the walls
- ☐ Outdoor outlets, under their covers
- ☐ The laundry, basement, and crawlspace
- ☐ The panel: any breaker with a Test button

Step 2: reset the breakers properly

A tripped breaker does not always flip to OFF. Most stop in the middle, and some barely move, so a row of handles can look fine. Run a finger down each row and feel for one that is loose or out of line with its neighbors. To reset it, push it firmly to OFF first, then back to ON. Breakers with a Test button trip the same way.

If you cannot tell which one it is, PGE's own troubleshooting advice is that you may need to reset all of the breakers, turning them off for about 15 seconds and then back on. If a breaker trips again as soon as you reset it, stop there. Our page on a breaker that won't reset explains what that means.

Step 3: map what is dead

Walk the house with a lamp or a phone charger and note every dead outlet and light. The pattern tells you, and us, where the problem is.

- [ ] One outlet only: a failed outlet, or half of an outlet that is run by a wall switch
- [ ] A few outlets in a row, or one room and part of the next: a failed connection in the chain
- [ ] Bathrooms, garage, kitchen counter, or outdoors: a GFCI you have not found yet
- [ ] About half the house, with the range, dryer, or water heater acting up: a lost leg of the service
- [ ] Everything: the main breaker or a utility outage

The failed connection in the chain

Outlets on a circuit are wired one to the next, like links in a chain. In many houses the wires are pushed into spring clips on the back of each outlet, and the current for everything farther down the line passes through that outlet. When one of those connections loosens and burns open, every outlet after it goes dead. The breaker never trips, because nothing is drawing too much current. There is simply a gap.

The break is usually at the last outlet that works or the first one that does not. This is not a do-it-yourself repair. The gap is a burned connection in a box that has been heating up, and one side of it is often still live. The warning signs come before the power quits: an outlet in that area that was warm or loose, a lamp that flickered, or a crackle. See our pages on a warm outlet or switch and an outlet or switch that buzzes or crackles.

When it is the power coming in

A home's service arrives as two 120-volt legs. Lose one, and roughly half the circuits go dead with no breaker tripped, while 240-volt appliances stop or run weakly. Our page on half the house losing power covers that case. If lights anywhere are much brighter or dimmer than normal, turn off what you can and call right away, because a loose neutral damages electronics and appliances quickly.

Check with a neighbor. If they are out too, it is a utility outage, and PGE or Pacific Power is the call to make. If they have power and you have done steps 1 through 3, the problem is at your address. Call us.

What an electrician does to find and fix it

We start at the panel and confirm that each breaker is actually delivering power, because a breaker can fail inside with its handle still on. Then we follow the dead circuit from the last live point to the first dead one, open that box, and repair the connection: new terminations under the screws, a new device, and a check of the rest of the chain.

If the fault is at the service or the meter, we tell you and coordinate with the utility. Either way it starts as an electrical repair visit. If the panel turns out to be the weak point, our guide on how to tell if a panel is outdated explains what we look at.

Frequently asked questions

Why do some outlets have no power when the breaker isn't tripped?

The three common reasons are a tripped GFCI outlet somewhere else in the house, a breaker that tripped without moving all the way to OFF, and a failed wire connection at one outlet that cut power to the outlets after it. Reset every GFCI, then reset the breakers by pushing each one fully OFF and back ON. If the outlets are still dead, it needs an electrician.

Can a breaker be tripped without looking tripped?

Yes. Many breakers stop in a middle position that is hard to see, and some move very little. Feel for a handle that is loose or out of line with the others. A tripped breaker has to be pushed firmly to OFF before it will reset to ON.

Can a breaker go bad without tripping?

Yes. A breaker can fail inside so that the handle stays on but no power gets through, or it passes power only some of the time. This is more common in older panels. It takes a meter at the panel to confirm, which is a job for a licensed electrician.

Can one bad outlet make other outlets stop working?

Yes. Outlets are wired in a chain, and the current for the ones farther along passes through each outlet before them. If a connection on one outlet burns open, every outlet after it goes dead, even though that first outlet may still work and no breaker trips.

Should I call the power company or an electrician?

If your neighbors are out too, call the utility. If they have power and only part of your home is dead, the problem is almost certainly on your side, so call an electrician. If lights are unusually bright or dim, turn off major appliances and call right away.

What does it cost to find out why the power is out?

Troubleshooting is booked as a $295 Electrical Service Appointment. It includes the service visit and up to the first hour of labor for troubleshooting and minor repairs, so smaller problems are often fixed on the spot. Materials are additional, and anything bigger gets an upfront price before we proceed.

Sources

1. Why is My Power Out?, Portland General Electric. https://portlandgeneral.com/outages-safety/why-is-my-power-out
2. GFCI Fact Sheet (Publication 099), U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. https://www.cpsc.gov/s3fs-public/099_0.pdf
3. Troubleshooting Home Power Problems, Portland General Electric. https://portlandgeneral.com/outages-safety/why-is-my-power-out/home-faqs

> **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/power-out-breaker-not-tripped/. General information, not a substitute for an on-site inspection.
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