

What is smart home technology?

A smart home can be simpler than you probably think. Let's look at some smart home technology and what can it do for you.

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Smart home technology may seem complicated, but it's all about making your life easier and more convenient:

- A **smart home** uses the internet and your Wi-Fi network to make all kinds of compatible devices talk to each other.
- Instead of complicated control panels, you control your smart devices by talking to a **smart speaker**.
- The smart speaker has a built-in **voice assistant** which understands what you're saying and can speak back to you.
- A smart home can be simple, with just a device or two, or very sophisticated, controlling air-conditioning, home security, lighting and more.



A simple smart home uses the internet, Wi-Fi and a smart speaker

Benefits of smart home technology

Here are some of the things that smart home technology can do for you:

- You can simply tell a compatible **smart TV** to change channels or play a movie, without the need to touch the remote control.
- A **smart speaker** can connect to the internet and play just about any kind of music from a **music streaming service**, either using that speaker or other speakers across the whole house.
- Compatible light bulbs can be controlled by voice or set to operate at specific times. Some can even change colour.
- **Smart switches** connect to your Wi-Fi and can switch appliances on and off to a schedule, or just when you tell them to.

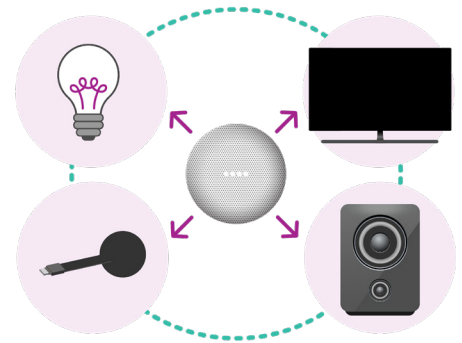
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- Inexpensive **smart speakers** are the heart of a smart home. Not only can they control your smart devices, they can give you information such as the weather or information from the web.

What you need for a smart home

Of course, you'll need a few things to get your smart home started:

- **Home internet with Wi-Fi** so that your smart devices can be connected. You should have plenty of data available on your home internet plan for streaming music and video.
- A **mobile device** such as a phone or tablet, because you set up and control your smart home using an app, in addition to your voice. Sometimes the smart system will need to send information to your device.
- A **smart speaker**, since that's the easiest way to tell your smart home what to do.
- A **smart home account** with one of the providers, such as Google, Apple or Amazon. There's a good chance you already have one of them. Those accounts are free.



A smart speaker can control other devices over Wi-Fi

Voice control

Perhaps the most amazing thing about smart home technology is the ability to control it with your spoken words. Let's learn more:

- These systems are built around a **voice assistant**. You can use plain English to ask the voice assistant questions, and it will provide a spoken response. Often some other languages are available, such as French, German, Italian, Japanese and Spanish.
- So that the voice assistant isn't always butting in on your conversations, you have to say an **activation phrase** – sometimes called **hot words** or **wake words** – to let it know that you're talking to it.
- The voice assistant is always listening with its built-in **microphone** but won't record anything until you say the activation phrase. When you do, your words are sent over the internet to be analysed for meaning, and a response is sent back to the device. This only takes a second or two.

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- Many smart speakers have a physical switch to cut off the microphone so that it isn't listening at all.
- A typical voice command will be like, "OK Google, play ABC radio Sydney". **OK Google** is the activation phrase for Google Assistant. It will acknowledge your request and a few seconds later you'll start hearing ABC radio streaming over the speaker.
- There are all manner of things you can do with voice, such as increase the volume of music, ask about the weather, check on your day's schedule and control other devices.

How to choose a smart speaker that's right for you

Smart speakers come in different brands, work with different voice assistants, and some even have screens. Here's how you can choose:

- The three major brands are **Google with Google Assistant**, **Apple with Siri** and **Amazon with Alexa**.
- Those companies make their own smart speakers, but other brands also made compatible smart speakers. If you want to use Google Assistant, you should look for a smart speaker that is labelled **Works with Google Assistant**.
- Your smart speaker should be compatible with your mobile device. **Google Assistant** and **Alexa** both work on Android devices, iPhones and iPads. **Siri** only works on iPhones and iPads.
- Consider what you want from your smart speaker. Larger ones may provide better sound for music. Some include a screen and camera so that you can use them for video calls.
- For normal smart home use, they all operate similarly. Even the smallest speaker, such as the **Google Nest Mini** or the **Amazon Echo Dot**, provide full voice control.
- It's important that you choose the right speaker for your **voice assistant**. An Echo Dot will not work with Google Assistant, nor the other way around. Any future speakers you add should work with the same voice assistant.
- For peace of mind, choose a speaker with a physical microphone switch. When you can switch the microphone off, you can be certain your voice assistant isn't listening.



Some smart speakers include colour screens for displaying information