

Is your circuit breaker overloaded?



Do you have problems with a circuit breaker shutting off? You might have a fire hazard, or at the very least an overloaded circuit breaker box. You can follow these steps to do a safety check.

First After the circuit breaker “trips,” unplug all appliances that stopped, turn off all lights that went out, and unplug all table lamps that went out. While doing that, inspect all electrical cords for discoloration or fraying and inspect your electrical outlets for discoloration. If you find anything discolored or frayed, don’t use it. Have it replaced or repaired. If everything looks good, go to the next step.

Second Go to your main electrical service panel to find the tripped breaker switch. All but one of the circuit breakers should have the switch in the “on” or “off” position. When you find the one that’s in between, turn it to the “off” position, wait a few seconds, then turn it to “on.” That should restore power.

Third Plug in and turn on each appliance and table lamp, and flip the light switches back on. If one of them trips the circuit breaker, inspect it again closely. If everything still looks fine but your breaker continues to trip, you might have an overloaded breaker box. High-wattage appliances like microwave ovens, vacuum cleaners, hair dryers, and toasters are often the culprit. If you suspect an overload, call an electrician who can inspect your electrical system and upgrade/repair your breaker box, if needed.

Fourth If everything stays on, but you want to know if you’re close to overloading your breaker box, try these tips.

- Check your circuit breaker box to read the rating of each switch. It probably has a number on it ranging from 15 to 50. That’s your amperage rating.
- Look at the wattage rating found on the serial plate attached to each appliance. If you can’t find it, check the appliance instruction book.
- Determine which appliances run off of each switch, then identify which of those appliances you might use at the same time. Add up their total watts.
- Divide the total number of watts by 120 (volts); that gives you the amps.
- Total amps should be less than the number of amps the circuit is rated for.
- If it’s operating properly, a circuit breaker will trip when you exceed its capacity.

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