Wat to Do if my Lap Is Plugged In but Not Charging

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When you plug in your laptop, you usually find yourself greeted with a cheerful chirp from your PC, a new glowing LED indicator light, and a display that perks up and beams a bit more brightly. At least that's what it's supposed to do. Sometimes, though, what happens instead is that you connect the AC adapter—usually because the battery is nearly drained—and you get nothing. No glowing lights. No brightened display. And no battery charging. What went wrong? Why won't it work, and what is to be done about it?

It may seem simple enough to recharge a laptop. You plug it in, it works; easy, right? Well, not necessarily. Between the wall outlet and your battery are several steps and parts that can all fail. Some are easy to fix yourself with a software tweak or a new battery, but some problems may require a visit to a repair shop or even a full-blown system replacement. Knowing which is which can save you hours of frustration and hundreds of dollars in repairs. By taking an inside-out approach, you can quickly narrow down where the problem originates and find the most economical solution.

Get ready, boys and girls, it's time to go troubleshooting.

1. Are You Plugged In?

It sounds silly, but you need to make sure that the laptop is actually plugged in. No software tweak or hardware repair can make a disconnected laptop magically power on. Before checking anything else, then, you need to ensure that both the AC outlet and laptop plugs are firmly seated. Check the AC adapter brick and verify that any removable cords are fully inserted. Next, make sure that the battery is properly seated in its compartment, and that there is nothing wrong with either the battery or laptop contact points. Finally, find out whether the problem doesn't lie with the laptop at all: Try plugging the power cord into a different outlet to see if you've got a short or a blown fuse.

At this point, we've determined that it's not just user error causing the problem. There is a real issue with powering the laptop; now it's simply a matter of figuring out where the problem may be. That begins with eliminating where it isn't. We'll start with the most common and easy-to-address issues.

2. Lose the Battery

A simple way to check the integrity of the battery is to remove it entirely and try plugging in the laptop. If the laptop powers on properly, the problem was likely a bum battery.

3. Breaks, Burnout, and Shorts

Feel along the length of the power cord, bending and flexing as you go, to check for any kinks or breaks.

Check the ends for any broken connections, such as plugs pulling loose or spots that may have gotten chewed by a pet or caught in a vacuum cleaner. Inspect the AC brick. Is it discolored? Are any parts warped or expanded? Give it a sniff—if it smells like burnt plastic, that's likely where the trouble lies.

4. Check the Connector

When you plug in the laptop's power connector, the connection should be fairly solid. If it's suddenly wobbly or loose, or if the receiving socket gives when it should stay firm, the power jack may have broken inside the chassis. Are there discolorations or any sort of burning smell? If there seems to be any damage to the power connector, repairs will be in order.

5. Beat the Heat

A non-charging battery can sometimes be caused by an overheating laptop. This problem is two-fold; with the system shutting down to prevent overheating a battery and causing a fire. Also, as the temperature rises, the battery sensor may misfire, telling the system that the battery is either fully charged or missing completely, causing the charging problems. These problems become far more likely when dealing with older laptops which don't have the quality of cooling technology used today, or when using the laptop on the couch or in bed, with a blanket or pillow covering the cooling vents. Let the system cool down and take the time to make sure that the air vents are clean and unobstructed.

6. Swap Out the Cord and the Battery

These are the cheapest and easiest-to-swap parts on the laptop. A replacement power cable can often be had for under $10 on Amazon.com, and replacement batteries can be picked up for under $100. Replacement cables are most easily found by searching under the model name of the laptop, while batteries often have their own model numbers. Look for a replacement that matches the voltage specifications of the equipment your laptop came with, and be aware that cheap replacement parts from third-party manufacturers may not have the quality of the originals.

At this point, we've eliminated the problems caused by kinked cords or environmental causes. If you still find yourself powerless, the problem lies within the computer itself, caused by either a software issue or faulty hardware. Let's start by looking at the settings and software.

7. Check Your Settings

For Windows Laptops: In the Control Panel, open up the Power Options. Open the plan settings and visually check that all are properly set. Be on the lookout for incorrect settings for the battery, display, and sleep options. For example, your battery settings may cause trouble if you have set the computer to shut down when the battery level drops too low and set the low battery level at too high a percentage. You can also assign actions like sleep and shut down when your lid is closed or the power button is pressed. If these settings have been changed, it's easy to suspect a power malfunction even though there's no physical problem with the battery or charging cable. The easiest way to make sure that your settings aren't causing problems is to restore the power profile to default settings.

For Mac Laptops: In System Preferences, select the Energy Saver pane and review your preferences. Mac settings are adjusted with a slider, letting you select the amount of time the computer can sit idle until it goes to sleep. If the interval is too short, you might suspect battery issues when settings are the true culprit. And don't forget to check these settings for both battery power and wall power.You may want to revert back to the default settings to see if a change in settings is causing the problem.

8. Update Your Drivers

For Windows Laptops: In the Control Panel, open the Device Manager. Under "Batteries" you should see three items, one for the battery, another for the charger, and a third listed as "Microsoft ACPI Compliant Control Method Battery". Open each item, which will bring up a Properties window. Under the "Driver" tab, you'll see a button labeled "Update Driver." Go through the driver update process for all three. Once the drivers are all up to date, reboot the laptop and plug it in again. If this doesn't resolve the problem, uninstall "Microsoft ACPI Compliant Control Method Battery" completely and reboot.

For Mac Laptops: On a Mac you'll need to try resetting the System Management Controller (SMC). For laptops with removable batteries this is as simple as shutting down power, removing the battery, disconnecting power, and pressing the power button for 5 seconds. Reinsert the battery, connect power, and fire up the laptop.

For newer Macs with batteries sealed into the chassis, shut down the computer, but leave the power adapter connected. With the power off, press and hold the power button while pressing the Shift-Control-Option keys on the left-hand side of the keyboard. Release the keys and power button simultaneously, then attempt to power on the laptop.

9. Call in Outside Assistance

If you haven't already, this is probably a good time to contact tech support. Your particular make and model of laptop will likely have its own unique issues, and a seasoned tech support operator will have seen all of them. He or she will likely walk you through many of the steps outlined above, but will also be aware of software and hardware issues specific to your configuration, such as what bits of hardware commonly fail.

10. Problems Inside

When all of your options are exhausted—you've tried other power cables and batteries, you've checked and rechecked your settings, you've fixed any potential software problems—the problem is likely found inside the machine.call up a local laptop repair shop.

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