

Finding your water shutoff and breaker panel

Easy · 15 min to do · Free

On day one, find and photograph three things: the main water shutoff (usually in the basement, garage or crawl space, or by the foundation), the small valves behind each toilet and under each sink, and the breaker panel. A wheel valve closes clockwise until snug. A lever valve is off when it's crosswise to the pipe. To reset a tripped breaker, unplug things on that circuit, push the switch fully off, then on. If it trips again, call an electrician.

YOU'LL NEED

- ☐ A flashlight
- ☐ A nightlight or phone charger, to test outlets
- ☐ Your phone, to photograph what you find

DO IT LIKE THIS

- 1 Find the main water shutoff.** It's usually in the basement, garage or crawl space, under the home, or outside by the foundation. In an apartment, ask your landlord or building manager where yours is, and whether it's in your unit at all.
- 2 Learn which kind of valve it is.** A wheel (gate) valve looks like an outdoor spigot. Turn it clockwise until it's snug, which may take several turns. A lever (ball) valve is off when the handle is perpendicular to the pipe, a quarter or half turn. Don't test a stiff valve by forcing it.
- 3 Find the small shutoffs.** There's usually one on the wall behind each toilet and under each sink, for the hot and cold lines. They close clockwise. These let you stop one leak without shutting off the whole home.
- 4 Find the breaker panel.** It's the box of switches that controls power to each circuit, usually near where power enters the building. Check for a garage, basement, utility closet or hallway. Look for a label on each breaker, and write labels in yourself if they're missing.
- 5 Find the GFCI outlets.** These are the outlets with TEST and RESET buttons, required in kitchens, bathrooms, garages and outdoors. If a bathroom or kitchen outlet goes dead, look for a GFCI nearby and press RESET before you check the panel. The full monthly test is in Testing and resetting a GFCI outlet.
- 6 Photograph everything.** Take a photo of each shutoff and of the panel with its labels. Save them to a phone album named "House" so you can find them in a panic. Show everyone you live with.

Watch out Never touch electrical equipment if it's wet or you're standing in water. Never replace a fuse with one that has a higher amperage rating. It's a serious fire hazard.

DAD NOTE Find it today, so you're not hunting for it with water on the floor.

Full lesson: apkeys.com/your-place/basic-home-repairs/finding-your-water-shutoff-and-breaker-panel/

Checked October 2, 2026. Sources: Regional Water Providers Consortium; Electrical Safety Foundation International; American Red Cross; Ready.gov (FEMA); U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.