

Testing and resetting a GFCI outlet

Easy · 5 min a month · Free

A GFCI is the outlet with TEST and RESET buttons. It cuts power in a fraction of a second when electricity leaks somewhere it shouldn't, like through you. Test each one monthly and after a power outage: plug in a lamp, press TEST (the light should go off), press RESET (it should come back). If a kitchen or bathroom outlet is dead, find the GFCI upstream and press RESET.

YOU'LL NEED

- ☐ A lamp or nightlight to plug in
- ☐ Your phone, to note which outlets each GFCI controls
- ☐ A list of where your GFCIs are: kitchen, bathrooms, garage, outdoors, basement, laundry area

WHAT TO KNOW

- 1 **Know what you're looking at.** A ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI, sometimes GFI) protects you from severe shocks. It can be built into an outlet, a circuit breaker or a power cord.
- 2 **Find them.** The electrical code now requires GFCIs in kitchens, bathrooms, garages and outdoors. Older homes may not have them everywhere, because the code mostly applies to new construction and major renovations.
- 3 **Test it.** Plug a lamp into the outlet and turn the lamp on. Press TEST. The light should go out.
- 4 **Reset it.** Press RESET. The light should come back on.
- 5 **Test every GFCI at least once a month, after a power failure, and as the manufacturer's instructions say.** They can fail without any sign, so regular testing may save your life. ESFI also says to test them once a month.
- 6 **Have a GFCI breaker in your panel?** Push its test button. The handle should move to the middle or off position. To reset it, move the handle all the way to off, then back to on.
- 7 **Map what each one controls.** One GFCI outlet also protects the outlets "downstream" on the same circuit. After you press TEST, check which other outlets went dead, and write it down.

Watch out Light stayed on after you pressed TEST? The GFCI isn't working or wasn't installed correctly. Don't count on it. Call a qualified electrician, or your landlord if you rent. If the light won't come back after RESET, the GFCI needs replacing.

DAD NOTE *Push the button once a month. It's the cheapest life insurance in the house.*

Full lesson: aptkeys.com/tools/hand-tools-and-quick-fixes/testing-and-resetting-a-gfci-outlet/

Checked October 2, 2026. Sources: U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission; Electrical Safety Foundation International.