UK SPEED GUIDE · JUNE 2026

TROUBLESHOOTING EXPLAINER

Monday, 8 June 2026

Why Is My Broadband Slow *at night?*

Peak-time congestion, explained. Why evening speeds dip, which connections suffer most, how to tell a fault from normal busy-hour slowdown, and the fixes that actually work.

8-10pm
UK PEAK WINDOW
Slowest around 9pm, Ofcom

95%
OF TOP SPEED AT PEAK
All connections, Ofcom 2023

FTTP
LEAST AFFECTED
Full fibre dips the least

Written by **Dr Alex J. Martin-Smith**
Reviewed by **Adrian James**
Next review within 90 days

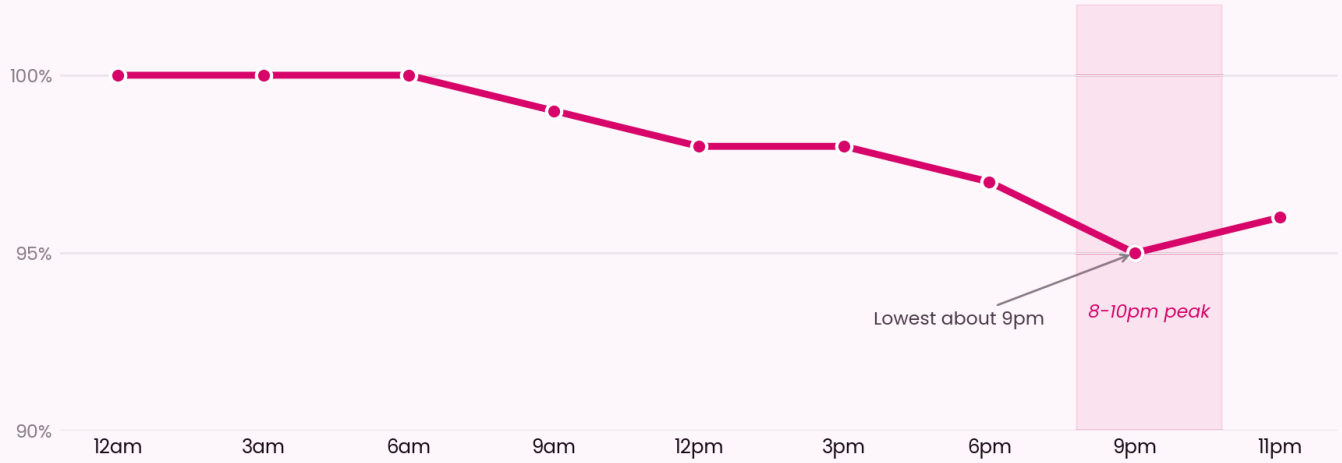
SECTION 01 · THE SHORT ANSWER

It is the evening rush

QUICK ANSWER

Most evening slowdowns are peak-time congestion, your home WiFi, or both. UK broadband is busiest between **8pm and 10pm**, when streaming, gaming and video calls all peak at once. Ofcom's last measurements found speeds were lowest around 9pm and highest overnight, but the average dip was modest, and full fibre held up best.

Broadband is a shared service. In the evening, far more people are online in your area and across the wider internet, so the busiest links slow a little. The chart below shows the typical shape of the day: steady overnight, dipping to its lowest around 9pm.



Illustrative shape of the broadband day, indexed to each line's top speed. Based on Ofcom's finding that peak (8 to 10pm) download speeds averaged about 95% of maximum across all connections.

So a small evening dip is normal and expected. The questions worth asking are how big the dip is, whether it is your line or your WiFi, and whether your connection type is one that suffers more than others. The rest of this guide answers each.

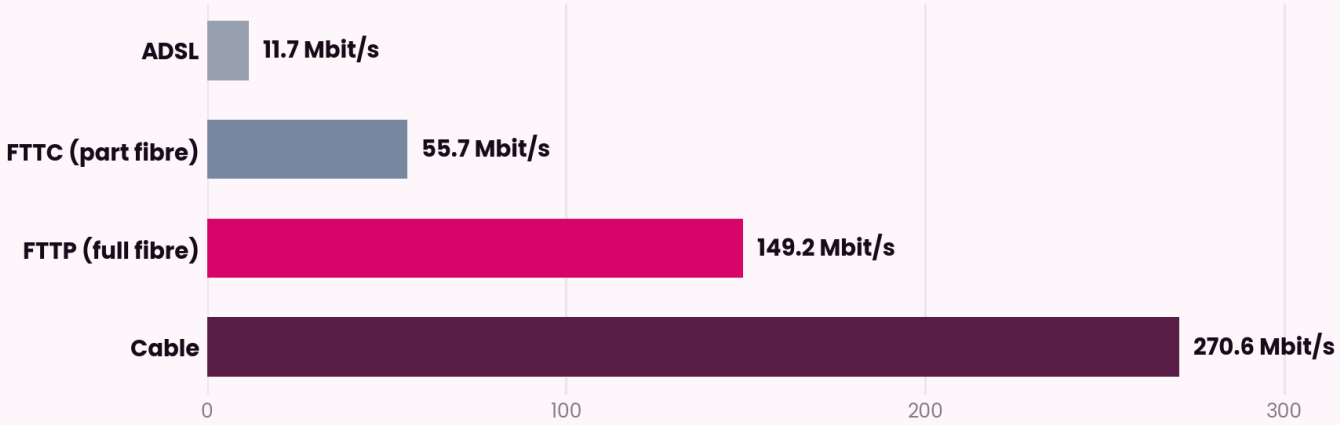
A NOTE ON THE DATA

The most detailed UK peak-time figures come from Ofcom's Home Broadband Performance report using March 2023 data. Ofcom has since paused that report, noting the variation across the day had become small, so these remain the best published figures rather than the very latest.

SECTION 02 · YOUR CONNECTION TYPE

Why your technology matters

How much your connection slows at peak depends heavily on the technology it uses, because each type shares capacity in a different way and at a different point in the network.



Median 24-hour download speed by technology, Ofcom March 2023 data. Ofcom found busy-period congestion was lowest for full-fibre lines, while older copper and cable connections showed the largest proportional dips.

How each type copes at peak

TECHNOLOGY	HOW IT SHARES	PEAK BEHAVIOUR
Full fibre (FTTP)	Fibre shared among a few dozen homes, deep in the network	Huge headroom, so dips the least
Cable (DOCSIS)	Coax shared among hundreds of nearby homes	Among the most affected at peak; node splits help
Part fibre (FTTC)	Fibre to the cabinet, copper to your door	Limited by distance and cabinet sharing
Old copper (ADSL)	Copper all the way to the exchange	Slowest overall; copper and cable dip most in proportion

What "contention" really means

Contention is simply the sharing of capacity between homes. Older networks used fixed ratios, often quoted as 50 homes to one line for residential broadband. Modern full fibre works differently: an Openreach fibre splitter typically serves up to around 30 premises, often with only a handful active at once, and faster tiers carry a minimum guaranteed speed. That headroom is why full fibre barely notices the evening rush.

SECTION 03 · FIND THE CAUSE

Is it the network, or your Wi-Fi?

Before blaming your provider, it is worth knowing that the most common cause of evening slowdowns is not the line at all, it is home WiFi. There are three places a slowdown can happen, and a simple test tells them apart.

The three places it can slow

- ✓ **Your home WiFi.** The usual culprit. In the evening, neighbouring networks and your own devices crowd the airwaves, especially on the older 2.4GHz band.
- ✓ **The access network.** The shared link back to the exchange or cable node. This is true peak-time contention, and it is what full fibre handles best.
- ✓ **The wider internet.** Occasionally the streaming or game server itself is busy, which no change at your end can fix.

The one test that tells them apart

Run a speed test **plugged directly into your router with an Ethernet cable**, then run one on WiFi in the same spot. Do both at peak (around 9pm) and again off-peak (early morning).

WHAT YOU SEE	WHAT IT MEANS
Wired is fast, WiFi is slow	A **WiFi** problem, not your line
Wired dips only at peak	Normal **peak-time contention**
Wired is slow at all hours	Possible **line fault**, contact your provider

WI-FI BANDS, QUICKLY

2.4GHz reaches furthest but is the most crowded, so use only channels 1, 6 or 11. 5GHz is faster over shorter range. 6GHz, on Wi-Fi 6E and Wi-Fi 7, is the cleanest but shortest range. For reference, Virgin Media's Hub 5 is a Wi-Fi 6 router, which uses the 2.4 and 5GHz bands, not 6GHz.

SECTION 04 · YOUR RIGHTS AND FIXES

Your rights, and the fixes

YOUR RIGHT TO A MINIMUM SPEED

Under Ofcom's voluntary **Broadband Speeds Code of Practice**, signed-up providers must give you a **minimum guaranteed download speed** when you sign up. If your speed falls below it and they cannot fix it, usually within 30 days, you have the **right to leave penalty-free**, including any phone or TV bundled with it. Most major providers have signed up, though it is voluntary and Vodafone is a notable exception, so check before you rely on it.

Fixes that actually work

1. **Move to the 5GHz or 6GHz band.**
   On a dual-band router, connecting to the 5GHz network for nearby devices avoids the crowded 2.4GHz band and usually gives an instant lift in the evening.
2. **Wire up what you can.**
   Plug TVs, consoles and desktops into the router with Ethernet. It takes them off WiFi entirely and frees the airwaves for everything else.
3. **Improve placement, or add mesh.**
   Get the router out in the open, not in a cupboard. For larger homes, a mesh system carries a strong signal to every room.
4. **If it is the line, upgrade to full fibre.**
   Where a congested cable or copper line slows every evening, full fibre is the real fix. Its headroom means peak hour barely registers.

SECTION · REFERENCES

References and sources

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Written by **Dr Alex J. Martin-Smith** (CMgr, MBA, LLM, DBA), Lead Editor. Reviewed by **Adrian James**. Published 8 June 2026, next review within 90 days. Every figure is sourced below and logged in our public corrections process.

Every figure in this guide is backed by a publicly verifiable source, listed in APA 7th edition format. Peak-time figures come from Ofcom's most recent Home Broadband Performance report (March 2023 data); that report has since been paused, which we state plainly in the guide.

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REMEMBER

A small evening dip is normal. Test wired versus WiFi at peak to find the real cause, and if a tired cable or copper line slows every night, check whether full fibre now reaches you at broadbandswitch.uk/compare.