

Cookies: what they are and how to remove them

Most web sites you visit will use cookies to improve your user experience by enabling that website to 'remember' you, either for the duration of your visit (using a 'session cookie') or for repeat visits (using a 'persistent cookie'). All very confusing we know. But cookies have been around for years and are part of what makes web sites work.

Cookies do lots of different jobs, like letting you navigate between pages efficiently, storing your preferences, and generally improving your experience of a website. Cookies make the interaction between you and the website faster and easier. If a website doesn't use cookies, it will think you are a new visitor every time you move to a new page on the site - for example, when you enter your login details and move to another page, it won't recognise you and it won't be able to keep you logged in. Cookies may be set by the website you are visiting ('first party cookies') or they may be set by other websites who run content on the page you are viewing ('third party cookies').

What is in a cookie?

A cookie is a simple text file that is stored on your computer or mobile device by a website's server and only that server will be able to retrieve or read the contents of that cookie. Each cookie is unique to your web browser. It will contain some anonymous information such as a unique identifier and the site name and some digits and numbers. It allows a website to remember things like your preferences or what's in your shopping basket. It doesn't store your name, address or inside leg measurement.

What to do if you don't want cookies to be set

Some people find the idea of a web site storing information on their computer or mobile device a bit intrusive, particularly when this information is stored and used by a third party without them knowing. Although this is generally quite harmless you may not, for example, want to see advertising that has been targeted to your interests. If you prefer, it is possible to block some or all cookies, or even to delete cookies that have already been set; but you need to be aware that you might lose some functions of that website.

If you don't want to receive cookies, you can modify your browser so that it notifies you when cookies are sent to it or you can refuse cookies altogether. You can also delete cookies that have already been set.

If you wish to restrict or block web browser cookies which are set on your device then you can do this through your browser settings; the Help function within your browser should tell you how. Alternatively, you may wish to visit www.aboutcookies.org, which contains comprehensive information on how to do this on a wide variety of desktop browsers.

The sort of cookies we use may include:

Session cookies

Without these little cookies most sites won't work at all. They allow you to add things to a shopping basket, remember where you are on a web site and other necessary things. Without them you may find most web sites are useless.

Google Analytics

This allows us to keep track of how people use our web site. It has no personal information stored and certainly cannot be used to contact you.

AddThis

AddThis is a helpful tool which allows you to forward a web page onto your LinkedIn account, Blogger or up to 300 other social services.

Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus and others

Occasionally we may give you the ability to post a page to one of the above services. In order to do this a cookie may be set.