Are alternatives to cable an option for you?

TIME TO CUT THE CORD?

"Cord cutting" means not having to pay for cable or satellite TV. But is it really possible to cancel the cable without feeling like you’re missing out? Here’s a chart to help you decide whether cord cutting is for you.

Do you watch TV?

NO! Perhaps we can recommended a book for you to read.

YES! You’ve come to the right place! Read on!

Is your Internet connection faster than 15 megabits per second?

NO! A connection speed of at least 5 megabits per second is Netflix’s recommendation for streaming HD-quality video. With multiple viewers and other Internet use, you’ll want to have more bandwidth. To determine your Internet speed, try an online service like http://www.speedtest.net/.

YES! Hooray! A magical new world of possibilities has just opened to you.

Can you wait to see shows online even though they already aired on TV?

NO! Several newer services, such as PlayStation Vue, Sling TV and CBS All Access, now offer live streams. An antenna also pulls in live TV. If they prove cheaper than your cable subscription, go ahead and cut.

YES! To send video wirelessly to your TV screen, use Chromecast ($35) to stream content from a Chrome browser on your computer or tablet. For $99, Apple TV can stream content from an iPhone, iPad or Mac. Many newer computers have an HDMI (high-definition multimedia interface) port for sending digital video and audio to a TV. HDMI cables usually cost less than $20 (shop online). Alternatively, you could watch your television programming on your computer screen instead of pushing it to your TV.

How long are you willing to wait for your shows to be available?

I can wait a few days

AND IT’S FREE! 

I can wait indefinitely

Some networks take up to a year to make their shows available online. If waiting isn’t a problem, go ahead and cut.

Some TV networks, such as Fox and the CW, stream the four or five most recent episodes from their websites for free for a limited time.

Paid services like Hulu offer some recent content for free and access to full seasons for under $10 per month.

Add up how much it would cost to watch all the TV shows you like, and if it’s less than the cost of cable or satellite TV, go ahead and cut.

Congratulations, you’ve chosen to cut the cord! Now what?

Many home entertainment devices – including smart TVs – feature wireless Internet connections and built-in apps for playing content from services like Netflix, Hulu and Amazon. Just make sure the services you want are supported, plug the device into your TV’s video-input port, and you’re all set!

What if I want to stream my videos from my tablet, laptop or desktop computer?

Many newer computers have an HDMI (high-definition multimedia interface) port for sending digital video and audio to a TV. HDMI cables usually cost less than $20 (shop online). Alternatively, you could watch your television programming on your computer screen instead of pushing it to your TV.

SOURCES: NETFLIX, GOOGLE, AMAZON, MICROSOFT, ROMU, APPLE, HULU, SHUTTERSTOCK

KARL TATE, ALL SCHARR / @Tomsguide.com
This is an exciting time for cord cutting — dropping cable or satellite TV service in favor of online video sources. Options are expanding, with AMC, ESPN, HBO and other hot channels going online. Plus, Internet-only channels like Netflix and Amazon Prime Instant Video offer their own shows, movies and specials. Online doesn't mean free, though. Almost every streaming service still costs money. Hulu runs $8 per month, Netflix is $9 per month and Amazon is $99 per year. The new HBO Now costs $15 per month, and Sling TV — which has an assortment of "cable" channels, including AMC and ESPN — starts at $20 per month. In addition, some shows aren't part of unlimited streaming plans, so you will have to pay for individual episodes or seasons. You might be wondering, "Is cord cutting really going to save me money?" To find out, let's consider what you like to watch, what each service offers and the price for each one.

**Step 1: Determine Your Cord-Cutting Budget**

Even if you cut cable or satellite, you still have to pay for an Internet connection — possibly a faster one, since you need a lot of bandwidth for streaming. For example, Netflix recommends 5 megabits per second for each HD stream (and 25 Mbps for Ultra HD/4K). Let's pick a baseline of at least 15 Mbps.

Here's the math:

**Calculate your maximum budget**

This is the cost of a cable/satellite plan and Internet access, minus the cost for just broadband with adequate bandwidth.

**Select services**

Pick all the streaming services for the content you like (we'll help with that), and add up the monthly costs.

**Include purchases**

Add in the prices of any favorite content you can't stream and have to buy a la carte.

**Compare costs**

If the total cost is less than what you've been paying for cable TV, go ahead and cut the cord.

We checked the cost of cable in six major U.S. cities — Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New York and Seattle. The lowest prices for adequate broadband ranged from $38 per month (Denver) to $63 per month (New York). The lowest prices for deluxe cable — about 200 channels, without premium channels like HBO — ranged from $75 (Chicago, New York) to $80 (Seattle). When you research prices for your location, be sure to include rental fees for modems and cable boxes, as well as taxes, setup fees and other add-on costs not included in the advertised prices.

**Step 2: Determine Which Services You Need**

There are lots of free video sites online — such as Crackle, YouTube and Vimeo — but for now, let's focus on the ones that cost money. Most pay services offer free trial periods that allow you to see if they have the programs you want. You can also get a good sense of what's available online by visiting the site canistream.it.

You might already subscribe to some of these services, such as Netflix, even if you have cable or satellite service. If so, don't count any of them in the cost of cord cutting.

**Amazon Prime Instant Video**

($99/year): Amazon offers shows from HBO (about three years old and older), Showtime, CBS and PBS; kids' shows from Nickelodeon and Nick Jr.; and original kids' and adult programs. Prime has other benefits, such as free two-day shipping, that might on their own justify getting it. If so, don't count Prime in your cord-cutting bill.

**CBS All Access**

($6/month): This service offers most of the current content for live streaming and, in some cases, on demand.
Hulu Plus
($8/month): Hulu Plus offers current and previous shows from ABC, Fox and NBC (not CBS), cable channels like Comedy Central, and older BBC shows.

Netflix
($9/month): Netflix includes TV content from just about everywhere (episodes are usually at least a year old), as well as original programs like House of Cards.

Sling TV
(basic, $20/month): Sling TV's basic package includes a mix of cable-TV channels, such as ESPN, ESPN2, AMC, HGTvb, Food Network, Cartoon Network and the Disney Channel. Sling TV's $5/month add-ons provide additional content like more children's channels or sports channels.

HBO
($15/month): HBO's online-only options include current shows like Game of Thrones, Girls, Silicon Valley and Veep, plus the entire back catalog. It's branded as HBO Now on Apple devices, and it's simply called "HBO" as part of Sling TV. You'll probably pay about as much to add HBO to your cable or satellite package, so it may be a wash.

Networks with antenna: ($7.50/month): ABC, CBS, NBC, PBS, plus many local channels. This option depends on whether your location receives strong signals. Check the site Antennaweb.org to get an idea. Prices range from about $25 for an unamplified antenna to about $90 for an amplified model. On the high side, that's $7.50/month for the first year.

A la carte purchases: Episodes of shows in HD generally cost about $3 each, and you may save a few dollars if you buy whole seasons. Because most streaming services charge monthly, you can save a lot by adding or dropping services each month depending on what you want to watch. Say, for example, you get two or three months of HBO for Game of Thrones and a month of Sling TV (with ESPN) for the World Cup.

Step 3: Add Up the Costs
Time to add it all up. Here's a rough tool for selecting a package of services by the type of content they are strongest in.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service/Content</th>
<th>Price/ Month</th>
<th>Especially good for</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amazon</td>
<td>$8.25</td>
<td>Sitcoms, dramas, kids programs. Some good original shows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>$6</td>
<td>Sitcoms, dramas, news, sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hulu</td>
<td>$8</td>
<td>Sitcoms, dramas. Lackluster original shows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netflix</td>
<td>$9</td>
<td>Sitcoms, dramas, movies, kids programs, original shows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sling basic</td>
<td>$20</td>
<td>Sitcoms, dramas, sports, kids programs, lifestyle (home/food)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sling add-ons</td>
<td>$5</td>
<td>$5 each for extra sports, kids, movies, lifestyle or news channels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS Vue basic</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td>Sitcoms, dramas, sports, kids, lifestyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HBO</td>
<td>$15</td>
<td>Sitcoms, dramas, movies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antenna</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sitcoms, dramas, news, sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A la carte</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Sitcoms, dramas, movies. Amount depends on whether what you like is available on other services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Step 4: Choose Your Hardware
If it turns out that cord cutting saves you money, the next step is to figure out the gadget or gadgets you need in order to tune in. You can watch most online TV on your PC/Mac, smartphone or tablet using websites or apps. It's easy to bring online content directly to your TV as well. The simplest method is to use an HDMI cable from your computer, which may require adapters. A slicker approach would be to use an Internet-connected device: a smart TV, game console, Blu-ray player, or set-top box such as Apple TV, Chromecast or Roku.