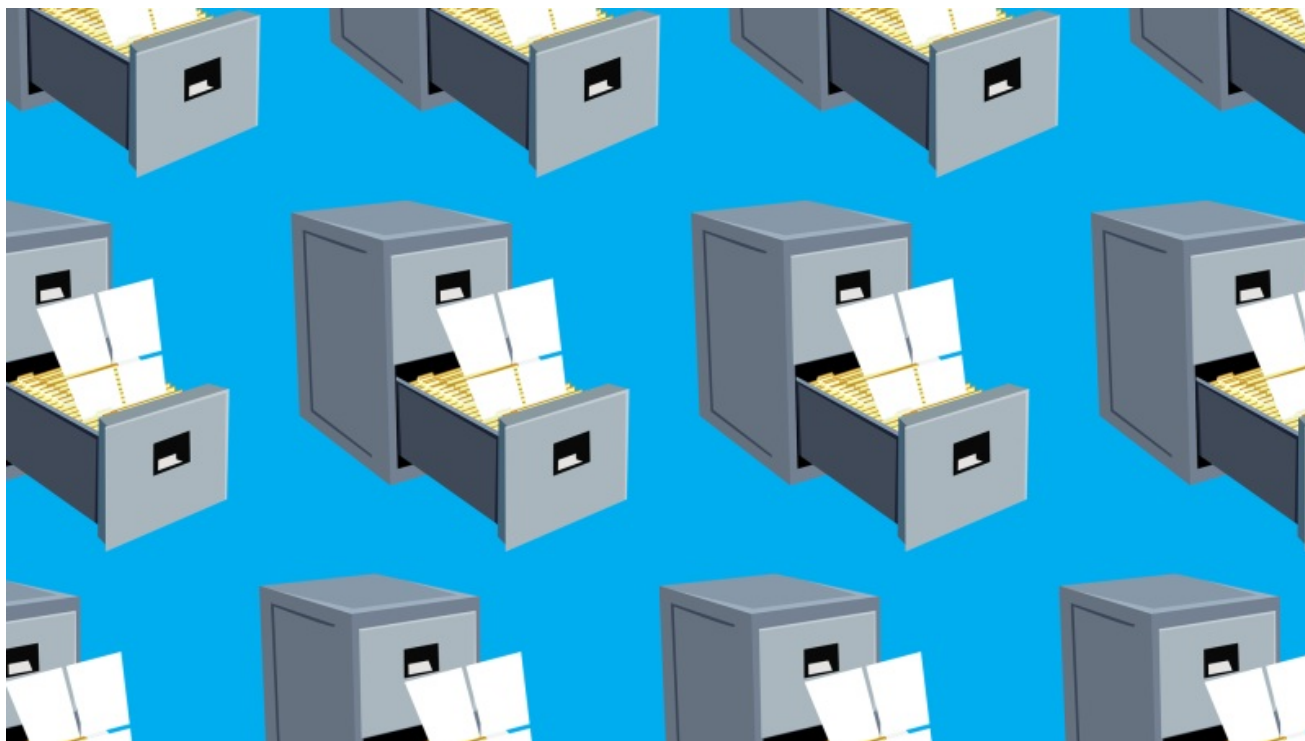


How to Back Up Your Computer Automatically with Windows 10's Built-in Tools



If you don't have a backup system in place already, today's the day you build one. In about 15 minutes, we'll finally get your computer and all of its precious data backed up on a regular schedule. It's mostly painless in Windows 10, and it's easier than ever. [There's really no excuse not to.](#)

Windows 10 includes two different backup programs: **File History** and **Windows Backup and Restore**. The File History tool automatically saves multiple versions of a given file, so you can "go back in time" and restore a file before it was changed or deleted. That's useful for files that change frequently, like Word documents or PowerPoint presentations. The Backup and Restore tool, on the other hand, creates a single backup of the latest version of your files on a schedule. It can also create a "system image," which is a snapshot of your entire system—operating system, programs, documents, and all—which makes it easy to restore everything if something terrible happens.

You could use one or the other, but for a more comprehensive backup strategy, use both. These backups will be your first line of defense in case something catastrophic happens to your computer, like a hard drive failure, a malware infection, or someone accidentally deleting something important. Of course, [you still need offsite backup](#). [We recommend CrashPlan](#), which can be configured for online backups or remote backups to another computer. However, recovering your files from a local backup will be much quicker—and, with the system image, you can get your entire computer back almost immediately to exactly the way it was before a system crash.

Without further ado, let's get started. You'll need an external hard drive, a NAS (network attached storage), or another computer on your local network to serve as your backup location.

Use File History to Back Up Specific Files and Folders That Change Often

We [looked at File History](#) when it came out with Windows 8, but Windows 10 adds a new interface and some important improvements, such as being able to choose specific folders to back up. By default, File History backs up all the folders in your user account folder (C:/Users/[accountname]). These include your desktop, documents, downloads, music, pictures, and a few other folders. It will also back up your OneDrive folders. Most importantly, File History monitors these folders for changes, and automatically backs up any files that have been added or modified, similar to OS X's Time Machine.

How to Set Up and Enable File History

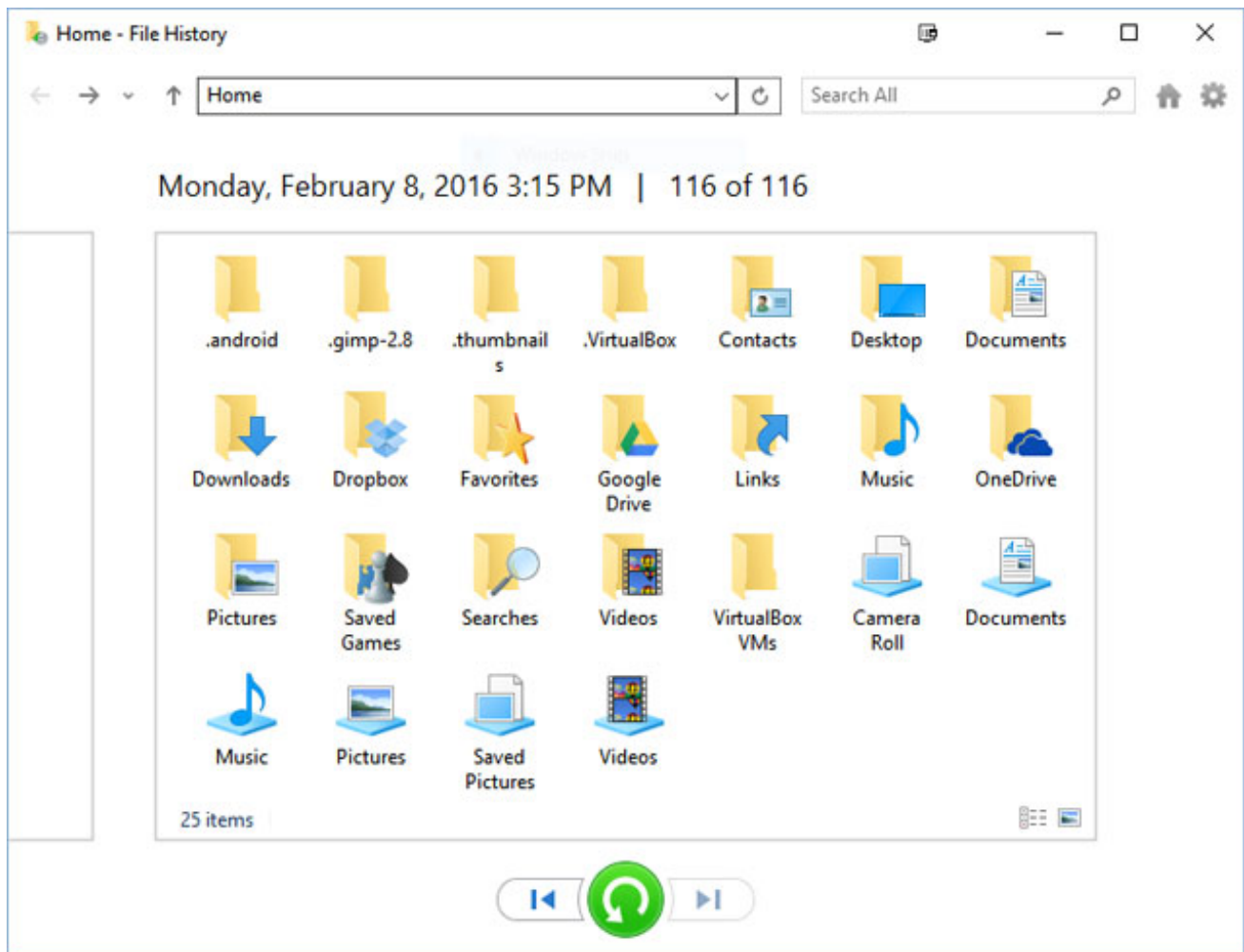
One option you might want to change in the settings, depending on your preferences, is how long File History's backups are kept:

- The default is “**Forever**,” which means File History will keep making and saving backups until your drive is full. At that point, you'd have to either use a different drive or manually start a cleanup from the Control Panel (under System and Security > File History > Advanced Settings) to make space.
- If you switch to “**Until space is needed**,” File History will automatically remove the oldest versions of the files it backs up when space gets low on your backup drive.
- If you switch to one of the other timeframes, like **1 month or 2 years**, File History will delete the oldest versions when files reach that time setting.

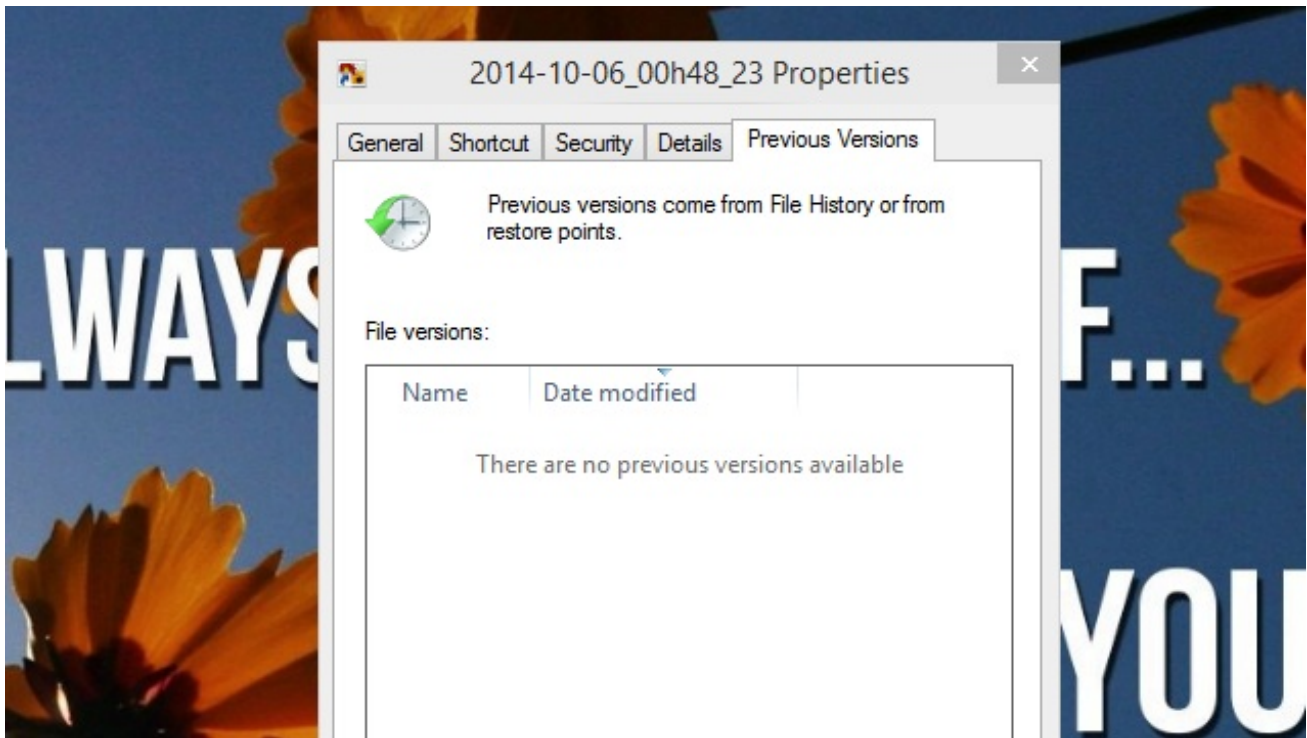
That's all there is to it. File History will work quietly in the background going forward.

How to Restore from File History Backups

To restore individual files or folders or to get an old version of a file back, go to Control Panel > File History and click the “Restore personal files” link in the left menu. You'll be able to browse by backup date and even preview files before you hit the big green button to restore the file to its previous location.



You can also restore previous versions of a file [without having to open the File History restore tool](#). Right-click on the file, select Properties, and go to the Previous Versions tab.



Handy! *But, again, you have to have this feature turned on for it to be useful.*

Use Backup and Restore to Make Complete System Images

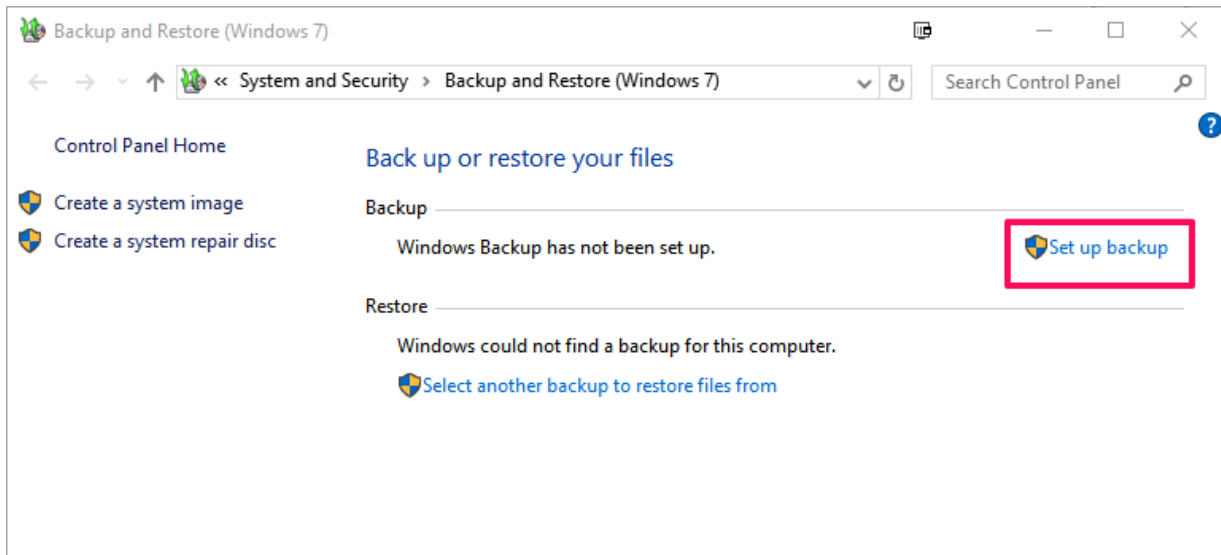
You may remember Backup and Restore from earlier versions of Windows. In Windows 10, the feature is actually called “Backup and Restore (Windows 7)” so you’ll know it’s the older tool. Even if you have File History turned on, it’s a good idea to also use Backup and Restore to create a system image periodically on a different drive. Besides getting you quickly back up and running if something happens like a boot drive failure, you could use a system image to upgrade to a new drive and get back to work without reinstalling everything and losing your settings.

Use a different drive than the one you use for File History to add redundancy to your backup system. Remember: When it comes to backups, redundancy is king.

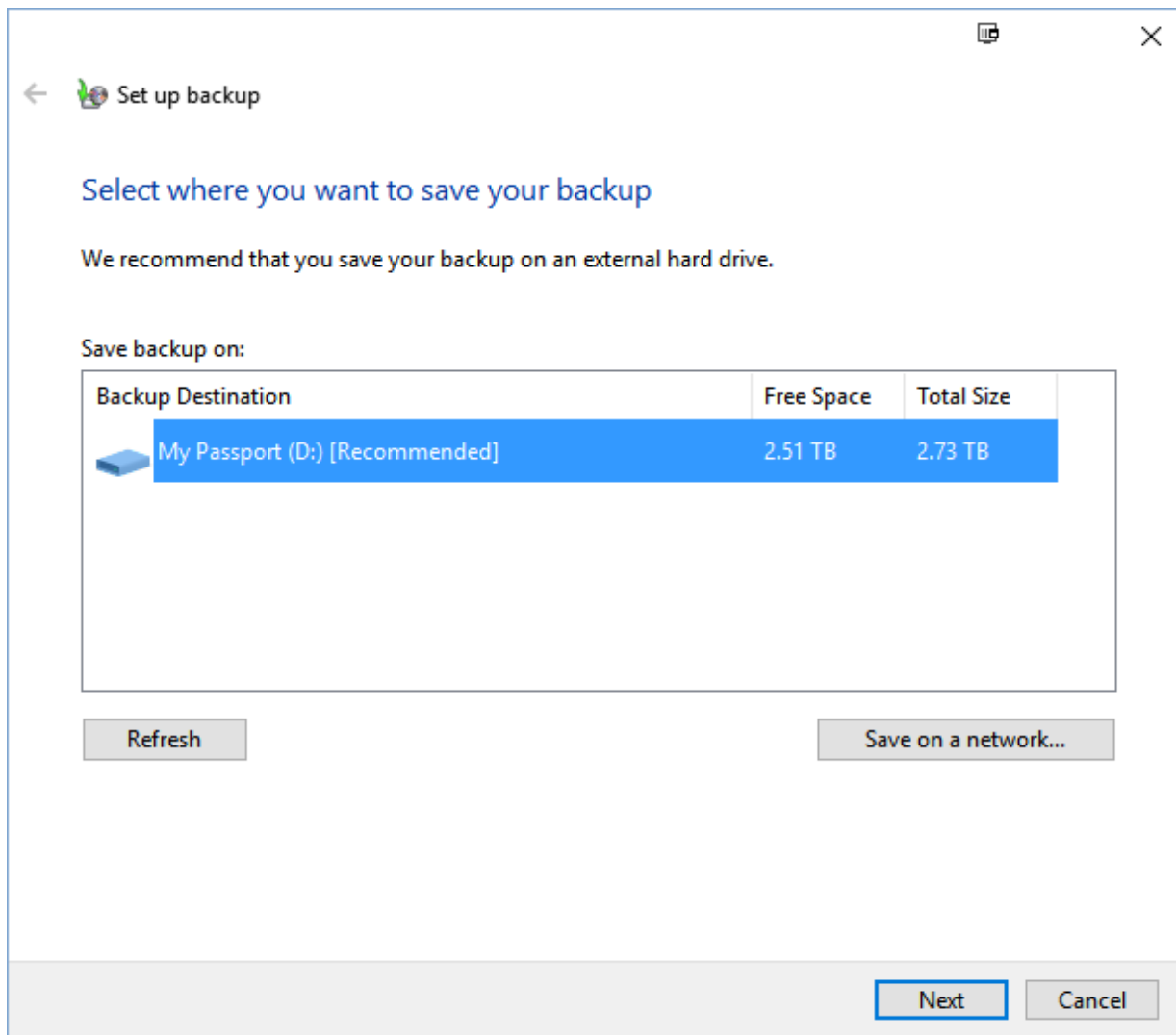
How to Set Up and Enable Backup and Restore

4. Open Backup and Restore. It’s in the Control Panel rather than Windows 10’s Settings, but again, you can click the Windows button and then type in “backup and restore” to find the tool.

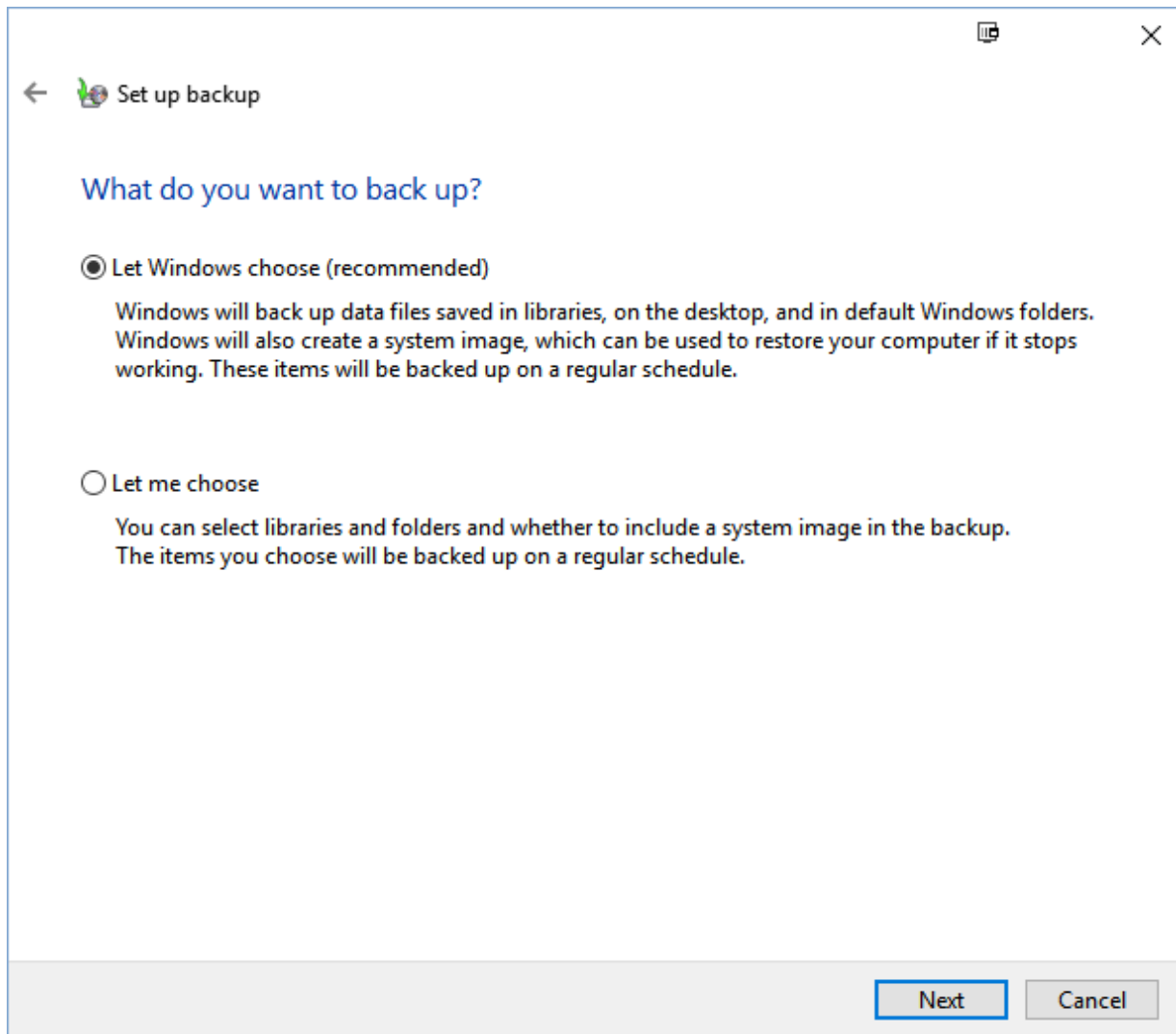
5. Click “Set up backup”



6. Select your backup drive. Or, alternatively, click on the “Save on a network” button to choose a network share.

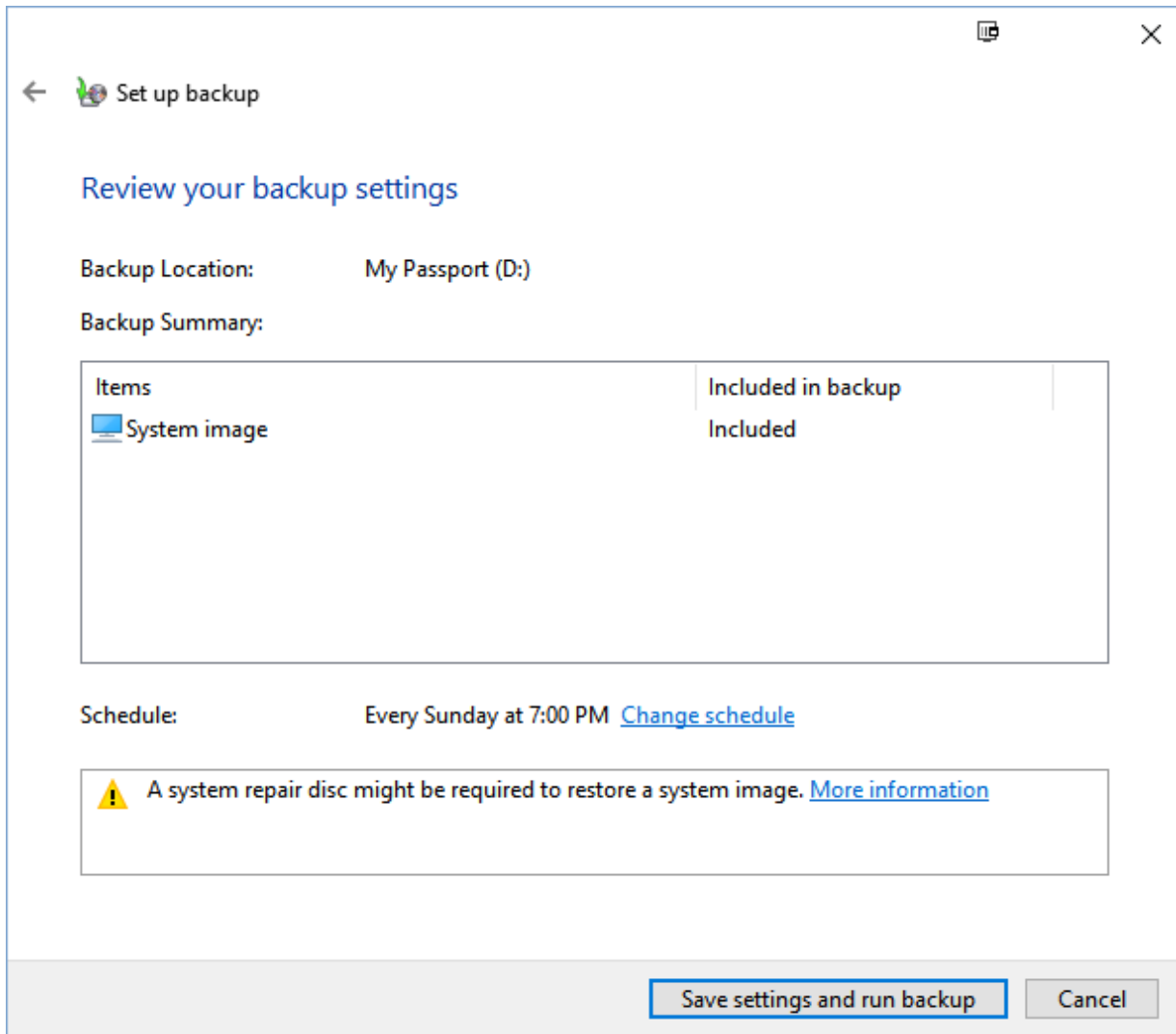


7. Next, choose whether you want Windows to select what to back up or if you want to select the folders yourself. If you let Windows choose, it will save the files on your desktop, in your user folder, and in your libraries as well as create a system image.



The easiest solution is to let Windows choose. However, if you're concerned about space or want to tweak which folders are included, select "Let me choose." Then you can deselect the Libraries, which would already be backed up with File History, and have the tool only create system images on the drive.

8. Click the “Save settings and run backup” button to run your first backup.



The best part? After your first backup, this will be done automatically on a schedule (Sunday at 7pm, by default).

How to Restore a System Image

To restore Windows from a system image, head to Settings > Update & Security > Recovery and restart your computer in the advanced startup mode. From there, you should be able to navigate to and select the system image you want to restore from.

If you just want to restore certain folders or files from your backup, head back to the Control Panel > System and Security > Backup and Restore (Windows 7) screen and click the “Restore my files” button.

If your computer isn't working and you can't get to either the Control Panel or Settings, you can start your computer using a [Windows installation disc or USB drive](#), a [system repair disc](#), or a bootable USB recovery drive, and use the restore tools on that disc to recover from a Windows system image. [This WinHelp article](#) describes the difference between a recovery drive (which is new in Windows 10) and a repair disk, as well as how to create one.

File History and Backup and Restore aren't the most robust backup and recovery tools you can use, but they're simple, free, and built into Windows already. Supplement them with an online backup service like Crashplan or

Backblaze, and you have your [3-2-1 backup needs](#) covered.

Illustration by Sam Woolley.
