How to Boot into Safe Mode When Windows Starts to Black Screen (and You Cannot Press F8)

Windows starts to a black screen and spinning cursor? Find out below how to repair Windows, return to the previous version after an update gone wrong, boot into Safe Mode, and more— even if pressing F8 does nothing for you during startup.

First, One Red Can of Cocoa and One Red Can of Cocoa and One Red…

…can of cocoa and so on: more than 100 years ago, a Dutch company started selling cocoa powder in boxes that showed a nurse serving a cup of hot chocolate together with the box that showed the nurse serving the box etc.

Since then, cocoa boxes are red—and the **picture-in-picture recursion** known as the *Droste effect* after the chocolate company **Droste**.

Now, if you try to boot Windows in Safe Mode starting from the desktop, you may experience a kind of boot-in-boot effect; if your Windows boots to failures, spinning cursors and black screens, do serve yourself a **cup of hot chocolate** in any event. It will be a boon to your spirits while we get Windows repaired:

How to Get Boot Options When Windows Starts to a Black Screen and Spinning Cursor

To make **Windows** offer you boot options so you can attempt to repair it, launch into Safe Mode, return to a previous version and more:

1. Press the `F8` key as soon as Windows starts to load.
2. Choose from the Advanced Boot Options screen.
   It will offer entries including the following:

   - *Repair Your Computer*: lets you return the computer to a previously saved restore point—before you installed a Windows update, for instance—or choose from other repair options.

   - *Safe Mode* and *Safe Mode with Networking*: starts a very basic version of Windows that lets you perform recovery tasks (such as removing or installing drivers and applications) or at least know it is something about the configuration that prevents normal boot. This is often your best bet for getting Windows running again.

   - *Safe Mode with Command Prompt*: launches an even more basic version of Windows that lets you troubleshoot from a command prompt.

   - *Enable Boot Logging*: Windows protocols all drivers it loads during startup to a file called *Ntbtlog.txt* in the Windows install folder—typically C:\\Windows.

   - *Last Known Good Configuration*: Restores the Windows registry to the state it was when Windows last shut down. If the problem is purely with Windows settings, this might be able to fix it. Note that you cannot undo this step.

   - *Debugging Mode*: boots Windows into a mode that lets special software—a "debugger"—read diagnostic information from the

core of the operating system for troubleshooting. Usually, this will not be directly helpful repairing a Windows installation.

- *Start Windows Normally*: restart Windows without any special actions.

Often, Windows is just too eager to boot into its failed state, though. You can press F8 before, during and after turning on the PC as much as you want—it will do you no good. You are not locked out of Windows and not out of options, though:

How to Get Windows Boot and Recovery Options When You Cannot Press F8

To get options for repairing Windows 10 or to start in Safe Mode when Windows boot gets stuck at a black screen and spinning cursor even when pressing F8 at boot does not work:

1. Hold down the *Power* button of the computer or device until it shuts off.

   - If you use a virtual machine, use the host's shut-down or power-off command for the client installation.

2. Press *Power* to turn the machine back on.

3. Immediately after the black screen appears (with the cursor spinning), hold down the *Power* button again until the device shuts down.

4. Repeat the steps 1–3 until Windows 10 boots to a *Recovery* screen.

   - Typically, you will need to **cut the computer's power 3 times**.

5. Click *See advanced repair options*.

6. Now click *Troubleshoot*.

7. Choose Advanced options.

   - *Reset this PC* is often not necessary; it does, however, provide a way to get the computer back to working state unless the problem is with its hardware.

8. Select *Startup Settings* for Safe Mode and other boot options. You can also try to repair Windows from here, of course:

- *System Restore*: lets you return to a restore point.

- *Startup Repair*: lets Windows attempt a number of automated fixes for common Windows boot problems.

- *Go back to the previous version*: after a Windows update (e.g., to the Windows 10 Fall Creators Update) gone wrong, this handy option will restore Windows as it was before the update. You can then try to re-apply the new version.

9. Click *Restart*.

10. Use the boot options menu as above (under *How to Get Boot Options When Windows Starts to a Black Screen and Spinning Cursor*).

How to Get Windows Boot and Recovery Options from the Windows Desktop

To get to the Windows recovery options (including booting into Safe Mode) from Windows itself:

1. Click the power button either on the Windows log-in screen or in your *Start* menu.

2. Hold down the `Shift` key while you click *Restart*.

3. Use the Windows troubleshooting options as above (under *How to Get Windows Boot and Recovery Options When You Cannot Press F8*).

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(How to boot into Safe Mode when Windows starts to black screen and spinning cursor tested with Windows 10; updated October 2017; title image: StockUnlimited)