



# Washing Machine Door Is Locked



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## Causes

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## First Steps

We are starting with you looking at your locked washing machine. First of all, there are a few questions to answer.

- Is your machine a top loader? If not, go to the next question.
  - Most top-load machines don't have a latch device that is released by pulling a handle. They use the weight of the lid to hold it closed.
  - Your best bets for releasing the door:
    - Unplug and wait 5 minutes
    - Gently bang on the door near the latch location.
    - Try to alternately lift and push in gently on the door near the latch location. Do this for a minute or so.
    - Try to remove the top of the machine to gain access to the latch. This is often complicated on a top-load machine and usually involves removing the control console and then releasing the top. You may find that it's better to have a

service person do this.

- If you get in you should be able to manually release the latch.
- Is your machine still full of water? Some machines will not unlock the door if they aren't pumped out first. If it's emptied of water, but stuck, go to the next question.
  - You will need to drain your machine first to see if it will unlock.
  - Many front-load machines have filters that are located down low on the front of the machine, these can be opened carefully to allow the machine to drain.
  - Some machines will have a drain tube in the same spot, which can simplify the process.
  - You may be able to use a wet-dry vac at the filter opening (or the drain tube) to rapidly remove the water. Be careful doing that at the filter opening, because the seals or other parts of your washer might be damaged if you apply the vacuum and seal off the opening.
  - If you just drained it from the filter or drain tube on the front of the machine, plugged it in again, waited and it opened, then you know the problem is not the latch, it's likely the pump. You should replace it.
- Does your washer have a handle on the door that moves a latch hook on the door to allow it to open? If not, go to the next question.
  - It may also have a mechanism that locks the door when the cycle is started too and may cause a delay, so give it 5 minutes before trying to open the door
  - If that handle mechanism is broken (it will likely be kind of floppy when you operate it) you will have to use some tricks to get the door open. We'll walk through those below at [Releasing the Latch](#).
- Does your washing machine have a lock mechanism that locks the door while a cycle is running, but releases it once the machine is turned off?
  - Your machine may have a delay feature that doesn't allow the door to be opened for a short time (like a minute or two).
    - This is normal behavior and you can just wait 5 minutes to try again; it may be slow or sticky.
    - Try giving the door a sharp rap where the latch is located to release it.
    - If it opens; you're set, but be prepared to replace the latch as the sticking will only get worse.

- Your machine may have a solenoid that is failing or the mechanism is worn.
- If you are still locked out, go to [Releasing the Latch](#).

## Releasing the Latch

There are several methods for releasing the latch on your machine. **Some should not be used on certain machines as they can cause damage.**

- If the hook or catch is a **fixed part** on the door and doesn't move to operate, **you will have to open the top (or some other part) of the machine to get at the latching mechanism. Do Not Try** any of the other methods below; you can damage your washer. Go to [Remove the Top](#) and start there.
- If the hook or catch **moves** to open the door (there's a movable handle on the dryer door that normally operates it) here are two ways to release the door, the String Method and the Card Method.
- If you don't know, it is best to open the latch by removing the top and accessing the latch.

### The String Method

This method involves threading a string or cord around the door to form a loop and allows you to move the hook by pulling the loop.

- The string should be *strong*, as the pull you must exert needs to be substantial.
  - The best strings will combine flexibility with strength and resistance to breakage.
  - Strings made from nylon or other plastic will usually prove the most useful, and less likely to damage anything; some examples: Line for a weed trimmer, strong fishing line, a nylon guitar string, or small diameter insulated wire will work.
  - Braided cords can work, but may be difficult to thread in the tight space around the door, as they may tend to hang up on obstructions more easily.
  - You may break the cord while pulling, so having a backup is almost a necessity.
- You need to know which direction the handle moves the hook to know which way to put in the string. The string will be formed as a loop when it is in place.
  - If the handle pulls away from the hinges of the door, you will pull on the string loop from the hinge side, as the catch will be moving in the direction of the hinges.
  - If the handle pulls toward the hinges of the door, you will pull from the edge of the door away from the hinges. You will be at the hook side of the door.

- If the handle pulls in another direction (like downward) you will just have to remember which way the catch moves (sorry).
- Thread the string around the door so the string will move the catch in the right direction to release the door. Connect the ends so it forms a loop that will be easier to pull.
- Pull the string very firmly. It may help the catch to release if you apply gentle inward pressure on the door.
- If this doesn't work, you can always try to access the catch by opening the machine and manually releasing it.

## The Card Method

You can release catches that move toward the hinges by using a [stiff plastic card](#) (like an old credit card or gift card) and slipping it into the space between the door and the front of the machine by the latch.

- It may be helpful to sort of "thread" the card down from above the latch location and slide it downward until it is opposite the catch.
  - You may have an easier time of getting past any parts which stick out on the front of the machine and keep you from getting the card to where the catch is.
- When the card is in place push the card toward the hinges.
- If the machine opens, you may be able to make a temporary release arrangement.

## Remove the Top

If there is no movable hook catch on your washing machine, or you have tried the previous steps without getting in, you will need to access the latch mechanism from inside the machine.

To do so you will need to remove the top panel of your machine. **Make sure it is unplugged before you do this.** You might be able to remove a kick panel on some machines (Kenmore HE3 for example) to get at the latch.

There are usually two or occasionally three screws located at the rear of the machine, that you will remove, and then slide the top of the machine toward the rear and lift it off.

You should then be able to see the latch assembly. You can release the catch from the latch manually either by pushing a release button or inserting an Allen wrench into a hole on the latch, or pulling a release ring (this last might be best accessed from below by removing a kick panel)

## Temporary Workarounds

- With washing machines, the show must go on. Maybe you can go for a few days, but unless you like going to a laundromat, or borrowing a friend's machine (really machines), unless you want to tote wet, heavy laundry back to your home to dry it, it is nice to use your machine.
- You can make a temporary release for your door if it is just a latch problem.
  - Install a loop of more flexible cord around the catch hook and lead it outside the door.
  - This may be through a hole where the handle belongs if the hook moves toward the hinges.
  - On machines that have the hook move away from the hinges of the door, you will just leave it hanging on the outside edge.
  - You can attach a ring or other device to allow you to pull more easily.

Now that your door is open and your clothes are freed from their wet prison, we need to figure out how to keep them free. Now we move toward fixing the problem.

## The Causes:

The reasons your washer would lock you out are varied and involve several different parts. One set involves the door latching mechanism itself (catch and latch), the next involves systems that control the door latch (water level), and the last set involves the main control board. Top loaders should go to

## Causes

### 1 Faulty Handle (Movable Catch)

If your machine doesn't have a handle that moves a catch on the door, go to the next step.

If your machine has a handle that is supposed to move the catch and doesn't do so anymore, these next steps are for you.

- If the handle still moves the catch, it may be that it isn't quite moving it far enough.
- Since this is generally not an adjustable part, nor is the latch, your best move is to replace the handle and catch assembly, as it is more likely to have worn.
- This failure is a common one, especially since it involves a mechanical item subject to wear and fatigue.
- Since the problem is likely not going to cause more damage right away you can use

- Since the problem is likely not going to cause more damage right away you can use a [temporary workaround](#) so you can keep using your machine while you get the parts.

If replacing the handle mechanism didn't fix the problem, you will need to go to the next step.

## 2 Faulty Catch (fixed or movable catch)

Is the catch piece bent? You can snag the catch with laundry and inadvertently bend it so it won't be able to release properly from the latch.

- This is more likely to happen with a non-movable catch. Most movable catches are mounted with a spring and it gives them more flexibility.
- If the catch is bent, replace it and make sure the door has not been bent as well. Test it, if it works, you're done. If not, next question.

## 3 Faulty Door Hinges

Sometimes the door hinges may have been damaged or gone out of alignment. This is a frequent cause of problems with top-loading machines,

- Check to see if the hinges are loose, or corroded (especially top loaders)
- Check to see if they have been bent. This will be apparent because the catch won't be aligned well with the latch mechanism hole.

## 4 Faulty Latch Mechanism

Now that your machine is opened, we have to consider what caused the problem. You have either checked or don't have a handle that moves the door catch. There are several failures that can occur. The latch mechanism is the most common culprit after the handle mechanism and catch.

- Is the latch faulty? Some of the signs might include:
  - The machine refuses to lock properly.
  - The machine shows DL codes.
  - The machine takes longer than usual to unlock, and may on occasion fail to do so.

- The mechanism may hum or buzz and fail to release.
- Has the latch been damaged?
  - Trying to open the door before the latch has released can damage the latch and make it jam.
  - Slamming the door very hard can damage the latch mechanism as well.

Replacing the latch mechanism is relatively simple and straightforward, usually involving two or three screws and a couple of wire connectors. It is usually the failed part at this point, so it is worth replacing.

If this does not solve the problem, go to the next step.

## 5 Faulty Water Level Sensor

If the water level sensor is faulty, the machine may think it is still filled with water, and since the door is supposed to remain locked when that is the case, it won't open.

- Sometimes the sensor itself may have failed.
- More commonly it is the tube that runs from the washing machine drum to the sensor that has become plugged, possibly with lint, minerals, or other foreign materials. This tube fills with water which compresses the air trapped inside it and causes a diaphragm to operate a device to indicate the water level is correct. Some just directly read pressure and indicate the reading to the control board.
- You can disconnect the tube from the water level switch to test it.
  - Try running water through it with a small funnel. if it flows quickly through the tube, it's clear.
  - Alternatively try **blowing** through the tube. **Be sure not to suck on it**, if there is trapped water in the tube (a common problem) you will get a mouthful.
- Many washers use a simple switch, possibly with multiple positions. Check the switch for continuity and or operation.
- Note: on some newer models (LG for example) the switch may show variable frequency rather than continuity. This is best tested in test mode on your washer, and this switch is generally very reliable.



## 6 Faulty Control Board

Some machines have failures associated with their control boards that result in a clothing prison. Some relays stick and refuse to trigger the latch release. This failure is both less common and more costly to fix. If you have reached this point, the control board is likely the sole remaining culprit.



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