Data Privacy Cheat Sheet

Cheat Sheet · Who's Tracking You, How They Do It, And What Actually Helps.

Privacy isn't an all-or-nothing switch. Five practical defences cut the bulk of the data collection without breaking your favourite sites.

Who's Collecting Your Data

Actor	What They Collect	Why
Your ISP	Every domain you visit, when, for how long	Targeted advertising, government compliance, network ana
Google / Meta	Search history, location, contacts, watch history, ad-click behaviour	Personalised ads, product improvement, profiling
Data brokers	Name, address, age, family, income, purchase history	Sold to advertisers, employers, landlords, insurers
Third-party trackers	Which sites you visit and what you do on them	Cross-site advertising, analytics, fraud detection
Your apps	Location, contacts, photos, microphone, ad ID	App functionality + monetisation via ad networks

Tracking Mechanisms

- **Cookies (1st party)** — set by the site you're on. Useful, generally OK to keep.
- **Cookies (3rd party)** — set by ad networks across many sites. The main vehicle for cross-site tracking.
- **Tracking pixels** — invisible 1×1 images that ping a tracker when an email is opened or page is loaded.
- **Browser fingerprinting** — uniquely identifying your browser by its config (fonts, plugins, screen size). Cookieless tracking.
- **Mobile ad ID (IDFA / GAID)** — unique-per-phone ID that apps and ad networks use to track across apps.
- **Login profiles** — when you sign into Google, Facebook, etc., your activity is tied to your real identity, not just a cookie.

The 5 Defences That Actually Help

1. **Use a privacy-respecting browser.** Firefox, Brave, or Safari with Privacy Protection enabled. Disable third-party cookies.
2. **Install an ad blocker.** uBlock Origin (Firefox/Chrome) or built-in (Brave). Blocks 90% of trackers automatically.
3. **Use email aliases.** Hide My Email (Apple), SimpleLogin, Firefox Relay, DuckDuckGo Email Protection. Stops cross-site tracking via email.
4. **Limit app permissions.** Phone settings → Privacy → review each permission and deny anything you didn't actively need.

5 **Opt out of data brokers.** Manually (free, slow) or via DeleteMe / Incogni / Optery (paid, automatic). 50+ brokers covered.

Quick Setting Wins

- iOS: Settings → Privacy & Security → Tracking → toggle off 'Allow apps to request to track.'
- Android: Settings → Privacy → Ads → 'Delete advertising ID.'
- Google: myactivity.google.com → turn off Web & App Activity, Location History, YouTube History.
- Facebook/Meta: Settings → Privacy Centre → Off-Facebook Activity → Disconnect.
- Browser: Privacy settings → 'Strict' tracking protection.