

# Secure your wireless network

## WPA2 Security

### Keyword

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*By Julie Byrd*

The biggest challenge to home wireless network users is keeping their network secure so others can't access it. If your network is not secure, anyone within range can access files and data on your home computers. It may just be a nosy neighbor looking around for open networks for fun, but it could also be a professional hacker looking for personal or financial information. Even if you only use your computers to surf the net or send email, you still want to make sure your home network is locked down and not accessible to anyone else. Besides, if neighbors are using your Internet connection (whether intentional or not), it'll result in more network traffic and slower surfing for you.

One of the easiest ways to secure a wireless network is by using your router's Wi-Fi Protected Access (WPA) or Wired Equivalent Privacy (WEP) security features. **Most new routers sold today have WPA or WEP security features, but it's up to you to actually use them.** The preferred method is WPA because it's more secure than WEP. WEP is typically used with older network devices, so if your home network doesn't have older computers or devices on it, use WPA. This article describes how to set up basic WPA security.

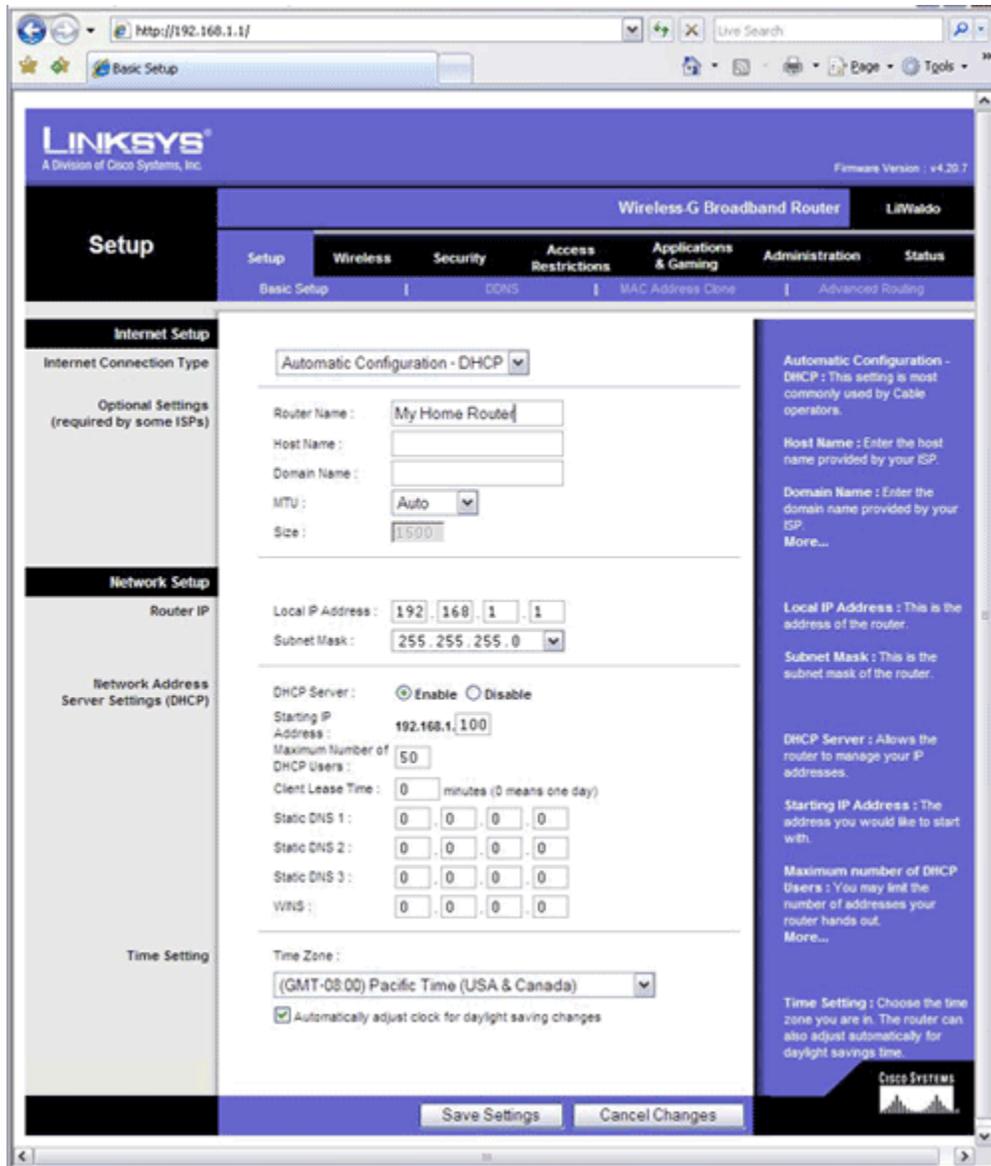
WPA encrypts (scrambles) data as it is sent wirelessly from your computer to the router so others can't access it. If you don't set up WPA security, anyone in range of your wireless network with the right hacker tools could see your data. For example, someone could see what websites you're visiting, and potentially intercept passwords to places like your online banking account. Also, without security, anyone within range can join your network. Once they are part of your network, they can see the contents of any shared folders or files.

### **Setting up a secure network is easy**

To enable your router's security features, you log in to your router's administrative Web page (big name for an easy-to-use Web page.) This is a website created by your router's manufacturer where you can enter security settings. If possible, it's best to log in to the router Web page from a computer that's physically connected to the router with a cable, for example, your desktop computer rather than a wireless laptop.

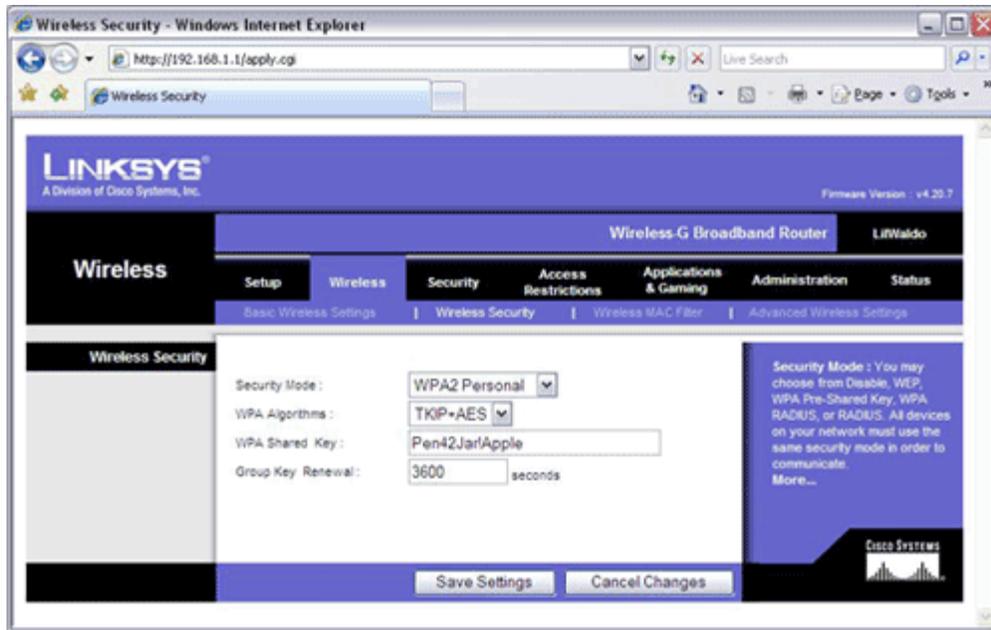
Network Magic makes it easy to get to your router's administrative Web page by simply right-clicking the router image on the Network Map, and then selecting **Setup or Manage Device**. To find the username and password required to log on to the site, refer to your router's documentation. The username and password are also sometimes printed on the bottom of the router itself, so if you can't find the router manual, flip the router over and take a look. Or, go [here](#) and see a list of default usernames and passwords for many types of routers.

Shown below is a Linksys router's administrative page. Depending on the type of router you have, its administrative page will look different.



Once in the router's Web page, look for the wireless security settings. Here is where you set up WPA security. In the Linksys administrative page above, you'd click the Wireless tab along the top of the window.

Shown below is the Wireless Settings page for a Linksys router.



To set up WPA security, select WPA or WPA2 security mode and then create a security key, or password. When creating your security key, create one that's hard to guess, and don't share it with anyone outside of your network. Include upper- and lower-case letters and numbers. Ideally, it should not be a word found in the dictionary, but a mix of random letters and numbers, for example: 492QorPN82?wclbPWbJABaMb417. Also, **be sure to write this key down and keep it in a safe place.** You'll need it to re-connect your computers to your router, and in the future if you add new computers to your network.

When you're finished setting security settings, save your settings and log out of the router's Web page.

### Securing each computer

After you set your security settings, all previously-connected computers and devices need to be re-connected to your router using the security key and password. You only have to do this once after you set up security. The method for re-connecting computers to the router depends on which version of Microsoft Windows you're using. If you're not sure how to do this, from the Windows Start menu, open the online Help and search for wireless networks and look for a topic about connecting to available wireless networks.

It takes only a few minutes to set up security features for your wireless network. By doing so, you can ensure that your data and personal information is safe from intruders.

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