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At some point, we have all been in the unfortunate position of being unable to use our mobile phones as the result of an apparent lack of signal. There are a great number of different causes for this problem, although some are more common than others.

First and foremost, it is worth checking whether or not your network provider actually offers comprehensive coverage in the area where you are trying to use your phone. Even within larger areas that experience excellent coverage from a network provider, there may be small areas where a quality signal is not widely available. There are a few different ways to perform a mobile coverage check - network operators are required to host a coverage map on their web sites, although these are not always easy to find. A quicker option might be either to use a mobile phone comparison web site, which may host links directly to the coverage maps of different network operators, or to phone your network operator and ask them about coverage in the specific post code where you are experiencing difficulties.

Although many no-signal problems will be the result of poor network coverage, there are plenty of exceptions. Another factor that can have a major effect on mobile phone signal reception is the local geography, both natural and man-made. Some landscape features that can drastically affect mobile signal in a small area are: mountains, hills, dense trees and tall buildings - although this is by no means a comprehensive list. Unfortunately, if any of these are the reason for your mobile phone's poor signal reception, there is little you can do except try to angle your phone in such a way that your nearest phone tower will find it easier to reach your handset.

Whilst electromagnetic interference is not the most common reason for poor mobile phone reception, it is a possibility worth bearing in mind. Interference disrupts the reception of radio waves, prohibiting mobile phone towers from communicating correctly with phones. Most electrical or battery-operated devices are capable of causing electromagnetic interference, and in turn, disrupting your mobile phone reception. The best way to avoid this problem is to stand clear of such items when attempting to use your phone.

One of the greatest factors that can influence mobile phone reception is standing inside of a building. Although 3G networks can provide excellent reception when the handset user is standing outside, the spectrum frequencies most commonly used on these networks are not the most suitable for penetrating buildings. Signals with lower frequencies are better than those with higher frequencies at penetrating dense objects such as buildings. This is the basis of the current debate over the 4G spectrum auction - there is both high-frequency bandwidth and low-frequency bandwidth available to prospective 4G network operators, but none is prepared to forego a sizeable chunk of the more valuable, building-penetrating low-frequency spectrum. In cases where reception is poor inside a building, it may be better to revert to 2G signal if this option is offered by your network provider.

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