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utsw vpn user guide

Published: September 3, 2026 | Index ID: #-

Utsw VPN User Guide: Secure, Reliable, and Easy Connectivity

Whether you're a faculty member, researcher, or administrative staff member at the University of Texas Southwestern (UTSW), you'll quickly discover that a reliable virtual private network (VPN) is essential for accessing campus resources from off premises locations. The UTSW VPN not only safeguards sensitive data but also grants you seamless access to internal applications, email servers, research databases, and more. This user guide walks you through every step of installing, configuring, and troubleshooting the UTSW VPN, ensuring you stay connected, secure, and productive wherever you work.

Why UTSW VPN Matters for Your Daily Workflow

UTSW's research community relies on a vast array of proprietary tools and datasets. When working remotely—whether in a coffee shop, a hotel, or a colleague's lab—your connection must be encrypted and authenticated. The VPN accomplishes this by:

- Encrypting traffic so that eavesdroppers cannot intercept your data.
- Providing authentication through UTSW credentials, ensuring only authorized users can connect.
- Offering consistent network topology so that internal URLs and file shares remain accessible.
- Enabling secure file transfers via SCP, SFTP, and VPN tunneled FTP.

By following this guide, you'll eliminate the frustration of intermittent connections, reduce security risks, and comply with UTSW's IT policies.

Prerequisites Before You Start

Before you dive into the installation process, double check that you meet these requirements:

1. Active UTSW network account with a valid username and password.
2. Administrator or superuser privileges on your local machine (if installing system wide).
3. An up to date operating system: Windows 10/11, macOS 12+, or a recent Linux distribution.
4. Internet access to download the VPN client and necessary certificates.
5. Optional: A USB security token or smart card if you use two factor authentication.

Step by Step Installation Guide

1. Download the UTSW VPN Client

UTSW uses the **OpenVPN Connect** client for most users, but certain departments may use **Cisco AnyConnect** or **FortiClient**. Check the IT portal or your department's IT liaison to confirm the preferred client.

- OpenVPN Connect: Download here.
- Cisco AnyConnect: Download here.
- FortiClient: Download here.

2. Install the Client

Run the installer and follow the on screen prompts. For most users, the default settings are sufficient. If you're on a

corporate network that requires a proxy, configure the proxy settings during installation.

1. Locate the downloaded installer file (e.g., openvpn-connect-2.5.0.exe).
2. Double click to launch the installer.
3. Accept the license agreement.
4. Select the installation directory (default is usually fine).
5. Complete the installation and launch the client.

3. Obtain the UTSW VPN Profile

UTSW distributes VPN configuration files (.ovpn for OpenVPN, .xml for Cisco, .conf for FortiClient) via the **UTSW IT Portal**. Log in with your UTSW credentials and navigate to “VPN Downloads.” Download the profile that matches your operating system and VPN client.

4. Import the Profile into the Client

Open the VPN client and look for an option like “Import” or “Add Profile.” Browse to the downloaded configuration file and import it. The client may prompt you to install a root certificate; follow the prompts to trust the certificate authority.

1. Launch the VPN client.
2. Select “Import” or “Add Profile.”
3. Navigate to the downloaded .ovpn/.xml/.conf file.
4. Confirm the import and wait for the client to validate the profile.

5. Connect to the VPN

With the profile imported, you’re ready to connect. Click the “Connect” button, enter your UTSW username and password, and, if required, provide your second factor (e.g., a token code or a push notification).

- Windows & macOS: The client will display a status bar indicating a successful connection.
- Linux: Use the command line or a system tray icon depending on your distribution.

Once connected, you should see the UTSW internal network address range in your routing table. Test by pinging an internal server (e.g., *ping research.utwshost.edu*) or opening the UTSW intranet portal.

Common Connection Issues and How to Resolve Them

1. “Unable to Connect” Error

Typical causes include:

- Incorrect username/password.
- Expired or invalid VPN profile.
- Network firewall blocking VPN traffic.
- Outdated VPN client.

Solutions:

1. Verify credentials by logging into the UTSW portal.
2. Download the latest profile from the IT portal.
3. Check your local firewall settings and add an exception for the VPN client.
4. Update the VPN client to the latest version.

2. “Authentication Failure” Despite Correct Credentials

UTSW may enforce two factor authentication (2FA). If you’re prompted for a token and it fails, ensure:

- Your token device is synchronized.
- You’re entering the correct time based code.
- You’re using the correct authentication method (e.g., OTP vs. push).

If 2FA remains problematic, contact the UTSW help desk to reset your token or re enroll.

3. Slow or Intermittent Connection

Possible reasons:

- High latency due to distant server location.
- ISP throttling VPN traffic.
- Local network congestion.

Fixes:

1. Choose a VPN server closer to your physical location if the client offers multiple endpoints.
2. Use a wired Ethernet connection instead of Wi Fi.
3. Enable TCP mode in the client settings for more stable connections over lossy links.

4. “Certificate Error” or “Untrusted Root”

UTSW’s VPN relies on a corporate root certificate. If the client flags it as untrusted:

- Ensure the certificate is imported correctly.
- Check that your system clock is accurate; SSL certificates rely on correct timestamps.
- Re download the certificate bundle from the IT portal.

Optimizing Your VPN Experience

1. Use Split Tunneling When Appropriate

Split tunneling allows you to route only specific traffic through the VPN while letting other traffic use your regular internet connection. This reduces bandwidth usage and improves speed for non UTSW sites. Configure this in the client settings under “Split Tunneling” or “Traffic Rules.”

2. Keep Your VPN Client Updated

Security patches and performance improvements are released regularly. Set the client to auto update or check manually at least once a month.

3. Secure Your End Point Device

A VPN protects data in transit, but a compromised device can still expose data. Ensure:

- Anti virus software is installed and up to date.
- The operating system receives security patches.
- You use a strong, unique password or biometric lock.

4. Use a Dedicated VPN Connection for Research Projects

Some research groups require a dedicated VPN subnet to isolate sensitive data. Coordinate with your department’s IT lead to request a separate profile and subnet allocation.

Advanced Configuration Options

1. Custom DNS Settings

UTSW’s internal DNS servers (e.g., *dns1.utwshost.edu*, *dns2.utwshost.edu*) should resolve all internal resources. If

you encounter name resolution issues, manually set these DNS servers in the VPN client's advanced settings.

2. Using a Smart Card or USB Token

For higher security, UTSW offers smart card authentication. Insert the card, launch the VPN client, and follow prompts to select the card as the authentication method. Ensure the card's driver is installed.

3. Configuring VPN on Mobile Devices

UTSW provides mobile VPN support for iOS and Android. Download the official UTSW VPN app from the App Store or Google Play, import the mobile profile, and follow the in app instructions to connect. Mobile VPNs often support **Always On** mode for continuous protection.

Security Best Practices for VPN Users

Maintaining a secure environment is a shared responsibility. Follow these guidelines:

- Never share your VPN credentials with colleagues or external partners.
- Use a strong, unique password and change it regularly.
- Enable two factor authentication whenever possible.
- Disconnect from the VPN when you're finished working to avoid unintended exposure.
- Report any suspicious activity or connection anomalies to the UTSW help desk immediately.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. Can I use the UTSW VPN on a laptop that's shared with other users?

Yes, but ensure that each user has their own UTSW account and installs the VPN client individually. Shared credentials compromise security.

2. Is the UTSW VPN compatible with all browsers?

All major browsers (Chrome, Firefox, Safari, Edge) work seamlessly once connected. Some internal web applications may require specific browser extensions, which are available through the IT portal.

3. How do I reset my VPN password if I forget it?

Use the UTSW password reset portal. If you can't log in due to VPN issues, reset your password via the campus portal first, then re authenticate the VPN client.

4. Can I use the VPN to access UTSW Wi Fi hotspots?

No. The VPN is for secure data transmission, not for Wi Fi authentication. Use the campus Wi Fi credentials separately.

5. What should I do if my VPN keeps disconnecting automatically?

Check for:

- Intermittent internet connectivity.
- VPN client updates pending.
- Firewall rules that may terminate idle sessions.
- Consult the UTSW help desk for logs and diagnostics.

Resources and Further Reading

- UTSW VPN Help Center – Detailed troubleshooting guides and FAQ.

- UTSW Security Policies – Overview of acceptable use and data protection standards.

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