Clogged Vent vs Broken Element: A Quick Diagnostic Guide

How to tell them apart before anyone books a repair

How to tell them apart

1. **Check if it's hot to the touch**

   Unplug the dryer first, then feel the outside cabinet after a cycle. A cabinet that feels warm all over often points to restricted airflow rather than the heating element itself.

2. **Time how long a full cycle takes**

   A load that regularly needs a second cycle to finish is worth noting, especially if it did not always take that long.

3. **Listen and smell for changes**

   A faint burning-dust smell or a laundry room that feels warmer than usual are both airflow clues worth mentioning to a technician.

Before you call anyone

1. **Check the breaker or fuse box first**

   A tripped breaker can look identical to a heating failure and takes a minute to rule out.

2. **Look at the outside vent hood**

   See whether the flap opens freely while the dryer runs. A flap that barely moves suggests a blockage somewhere in the line.

3. **Note when the pattern started**

   A gradual change points one direction, a sudden change points another, and either detail helps a technician diagnose faster.

Questions to ask your technician

1. **Is this the vent, the element, or both**

   Ask them to explain what they found, not just what they plan to replace.

2. **How is the vent run configured**

   Length, number of bends, and material all affect how often a line needs clearing.

3. **What upkeep keeps this from recurring**

   A quick answer here tells you whether the fix addresses the cause or just the symptom.

Match the symptom to the likely cause, then get a written diagnosis before any part gets replaced.

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