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# TECHNOLOGY

CNN **HeadlineNews** **HOT WIRED** HEADLINE NEWS

## Plug obsession

By Christine Boese  
 CNN Headline News  
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**(CNN) -- The father of Harry Potter's best friend, Ron Weasley, has a goofy obsession with "Muggle artifacts," especially plugs. Wizards use magic, so they don't know why ordinary people, "Muggles" to the wizarding world, would be plugging electrical devices into wall outlets.**

I can relate to Weasley's obsession with plugs. My dad is an electrician. When I was little, I helped him wire parts of our house. Most of my Christmas stocking gifts came from Radio Shack.

My parents are toying with the idea of a "smart home," a house that aspires to be some kind of a big walk-in computer. I feel a bit left out. As a terminal renter, I'm left obsessing over my plugs.

There is not a wall outlet in my house that isn't altered in some way. I recently had to move, and it was a day's job just changing the outlets back to their original two-plug state.

I used to think my problem stemmed from living in older apartments with very few, mostly ungrounded, outlets. I often install ground fault circuit interrupters, or GFCI adaptors, as well. Those are the things found in most bathroom outlets and on the end of hair dryer cords.

GFCI adaptors basically add an additional breaker at the outlet to keep you from electrocuting yourself by dropping the blow dryer into a sink full of water.

Some hardware stores sell portable GFCI outlet adaptors, but in most cases you have to replace the entire outlet. If your dad isn't an electrician, get professional help before you try this at home.

My problem is worse than simply not having enough outlets. Last month I moved into a newer apartment. I thought I'd get over my plug problem, but it's worse than ever.

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I plugged two top quality surge protectors into some outlets. Then I plugged extension cords into the surge protectors, and there are still not enough outlets.

I asked my dad: "How do I know if I'm overloading a single outlet?" He couldn't give me an easy answer.

First look inside your breaker box. Each item listed is called a "home run," meaning each grouping of outlets and lights on the same circuit are controlled by a single breaker, often one "home run" per room.

By turning breakers off, you can figure out which outlets are on each circuit.

Dad said to try distributing my biggest load surge protectors over different breaker circuits.

That advice doesn't help me very much. I've still got loaded surge protectors on every outlet.

He did say I'll know it's overloaded if the breaker trips. But fuses can get dangerously hot over time and still not hit the trip point.

It is also a bad idea to turn your breakers on and off repeatedly. The wear and tear shortens the life of the breaker.

Meanwhile, until I get some kind of smarter rental home, I'll continue giving my dad electrical fire nightmares.

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