How to choose which Apple Watch to buy

It used to be easy to pick an Apple Watch. All you had to do was choose whether you wanted the larger model or the smaller one. Then Apple added optional cellular connectivity. Then, a more affordable Watch SE (now in its second generation) and, in 2022, the rugged Apple Watch Ultra (also now in its second generation). Suddenly, there are *lots* of options.

Because the Apple Watch Series 9 and Ultra 2 are here, perfectly good older versions of the Apple Watch will get discounted as retailers try to empty their inventory. If you're interested in more premium materials, like stainless steel, early fall through the holiday season is a great opportunity to get a fancier version of last year's watch. You won't be missing out on too much, either. The Series 7, 8, and 9 have been iterative updates in terms of hardware — and the bulk of new features come from software updates.

So much choice can lead to analysis paralysis. But don't worry. I've tested every single version of the Apple Watch you can buy right now — in addition to basically every other fitness watch and smartwatch on the market— and can steer you in the right direction.

a:hover]:text-black [&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a:hover]:text-gray-e9 dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-gray-63 [&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-13 dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-63″>*The Apple Watch Ultra was*

introduced last year as the new rugged kid on the block.

**:last-child>*:last-child]:mb-0″ readability=”12″>*

a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin [&>a]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-white”>Who is it for?

We’re not going to recommend an Apple Watch Ultra for a couch potato — unless you want the best battery life possible. The

idea is to guide you to the right Apple Watch for your needs.

a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin [&>a]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-white”>Feature set

Do you want to shell out

extra for LTE? Which models have what sensors, and how does that apply to you?

a:hover]:text-black [&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a:hover]:text-gray-e9 dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-gray-63 [&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-13

dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-63″>*The new Series 9 comes in a fetching blush pink.*

a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin [&>a]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-white”>Apple Watch Series, SE, or

Ultra?

$ 349
$ 349$ 39913 % off

The Apple Watch Series 9 features a brand-new S9 processor that enables offline Siri use, brighter displays, and the double tap gesture. It also has the second-

gen ultra wideband chip for Precision Finding if you have an iPhone 15. Read our review.

The main hardware update in the Series 9 and Ultra 2 compared to last year's models is that they're powered by the S9 processor. This

enables offline Siri use, brighter screens, and the **new double-tap feature.** They also have Apple's second-gen ultrawide band chip for precision finding — but keep in mind you'll also need an iPhone 15 model for that feature.

We recommend the Apple

Watch SE for younger people and first-time smartwatch buyers. If you're upgrading from an earlier Apple Watch, you want an always-on display, or you want more advanced health tracking, you should consider the Series 9. And if you want the biggest and brightest screen, the

best durability and battery life, and even more advanced fitness features, we recommend the Ultra 2.

a:hover]:text-gray-63 [&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a:hover]:text-gray-bd dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-gray

[&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-63 dark:[&>a]:text-gray-bd dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-gray”>Photo by Amelia Holowaty Krales / The Verge

The Series 9 is Apple’s flagship smartwatch. Compared to earlier models, it’s going to get you the fastest processor,

quick charging, a larger display, and all the latest sensors. Prices start at $399 for the 41mm version and $429 for the 45mm. Adding LTE connectivity will add $100 to the price, plus whatever your carrier charges for the service.

The second-gen SE has a nylon composite back, which helps shave $30 off the original's price. You can get a cellular version, and it supports many of the same advanced features as the Series 7, like fall detection, emergency calling, Fitness Plus, Apple

Pay, and Family Setup. The biggest difference is that it lacks an always-on display, the EKG sensor, the temperature sensors, and the SpO2 sensor. The display is also slightly smaller on both sizes of the SE. It starts at $249 for the 40mm and $279 for the 44mm. Adding LTE

will tack on an extra $50 in addition to your carrier's fees.

To be perfectly honest, if you're young and healthy, you're not really missing out on EKG or SpO2. This is especially true since the SE's heart rate sensor is still

capable of providing abnormal heart rate alerts. Right now, Apple's SpO2 features are limited to spot checks. There's not much you can do with that information, and unlike the EKGs, this is only cleared for general wellness purposes. It will *not* be able to replace a

fingertip pulse oximeter, and you should never use it in this way.

$ 249

The new SE for 2022 borrows a few features from the Series 8, including the same chipset and Crash

Detection feature, but it's an otherwise subtle upgrade from the last-gen SE.

The main purpose of the EKG sensor is to enable atrial fibrillation detection — and if your doctor's given you a clean bill of health, you will likely only use this

feature once or twice. According to the American Heart Association, the biggest risk factors for AFib are advanced age, underlying heart conditions, high blood pressure, family history, and sleep apnea, among other lifestyle choices. If this doesn’t apply to

you, the SE is still going to give you an excellent health tracking experience and all the same smart features. Young, first-time buyers may as well save the extra $150 – so long as the lack of an always-on display isn’t a deal-breaker.

There are some situations where opting for the Series 9 is the better choice, however, like if you want an always-on display or need to have the latest and greatest. The larger and brighter display also provides much better readability for anyone with bad

eyesight. It’s also the better choice if you have a heart condition or are at a higher risk of developing AFib.

a:hover]:text-gray-63 [&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a:hover]:text-gray-bd dark:[&>a:hover]:shado

w-underline-gray [&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-63 dark:[&>a]:text-gray-bd dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-gray”>Photo by Amelia Holowaty Krales / The Verge and Photo by Amelia Holowaty Krales / The Verge

The Ultra 2 now sits atop the lineup as

Apple's premium smartwatch. It's visually distinct from both the Series and SE — and at 49mm, it's the biggest of them all. Not only that, it has increased durability, water resistance, and a raised lip to protect the flat display. It also has an additional

water temperature and depth sensor for divers, three microphones, and two speakers, which enable the Siren. It’s also got the Action button, which can be programmed for various activities, pause workouts, and trigger the Siren. At $799, this is the most

expensive Apple Watch, but every model comes equipped with LTE capability. If you have an Ultra and are wondering if you should upgrade to the Ultra 2, the answer is no. It’s too soon, and there’s not enough of a difference. We recommend the Ultra 2 for new buyers only.

The Ultra is still a fine watch, and while inventory lasts, this is a good opportunity to find it on sale. It’s still worth getting if it’s at least $100 less than the Ultra 2.

$ 799

The last-gen Apple Watch Ultra remains one of Apple's more rugged models. It has a thicker, bigger build than the Series 8 and Series 9, precise GPS tracking, and sensors that can measure metrics for diving. It only comes in one size and configuration, and it

supports both GPS and LTE.

$ 774

$ 774$ 7993 % off

The rugged Apple Watch Ultra 2 comes in one size: 49mm. It offers the brightest display of any wearable in Apple’s lineup, along

with better battery life and improved performance. It sports Apple’s new S9 SiP, too, allowing you to take advantage of Apple’s new double-tap feature. **Read our review.**

If battery life is your highest priority, getting either Ultra

is the best choice. In testing, we got up to 60 hours without Low Power Mode enabled. However, if you use about one hour of GPS tracking a day or take calls, you're more likely to get around two days. It's also the better choice if you frequently hike, dive, or run trails.

While marketed as a hardcore watch for explorers, in our opinion, it's more of an aspirational watch for weekend warriors and intermediate athletes – or anyone who *wants* to be at that level.

You're not going to beat either Ultra on

battery life, but you can stretch out the battery life on the Series 4 or later with watchOS 9's new Low Power Mode. You can even sleep track with Low Power Mode on, though it'll turn off background health sensors.

If you have smaller

wrists, you may want to opt for the Series 9 as it has fast charging and is more comfortable to wear long-term. Faster charging comes in clutch when you're about to head to bed and you've only got 15 percent battery. Also, if you're the type that values

futureproofing, the Series 9's hardware will be able to support newer features for a longer period of time thanks to its newer processor. This is why folks who love their watch and are looking to upgrade from a Series 4 or older should also pick the Series 9. If

you’re already in the habit of wearing the watch daily, you’ll get more mileage out of it as the SE is more of a gateway device, and the Ultra is overkill for the average joe.

a:hover]:text-

black
[&>a:hover]:sh
adow-
underline-
black
dark:[&>a:hove
r]:text-gray-
e9
dark:[&>a:hove
r]:shadow-
underline-

gray-63
[&>a]:shadow-
underline-
gray-13
dark:[&>a]:sha
dow-underline-
gray-63″>*Getti*
ng a Series 8
is also a
great way to
save money or

pay less for stainless steel.

a:hover]:text-black [&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a:hover]:text-gray-

e9
dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-gray-63
[&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-13
dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-63″>The

second-gen Apple Watch SE will get you Crash Detection and the latest S8 chip.

a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin dark:[&>a:hove

r]:shadow-highlight-franklin [&>a]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-white”>The best Apple Watch for kids

$ 299

The new SE for 2022 borrows a few features from the Series 8, including the same chipset and Crash Detection feature, but it’s an otherwise subtle upgrade from the last-gen SE.

If you want your child

to have an Apple Watch, we recommend picking a cellular Apple Watch SE or, if you can find one, a refurbished Series 4, 5, or 6 with cellular. All of these watches come in smaller sizes than the Series 7, 8, or 9, which will likely better fit their wrist. Also, the

lower price will give you better peace of mind if you have a rambunctious kid.

Since you're buying for children, you'll likely want to use Family Setup, as it will give you greater parental controls. (You can read our review of the feature

here.) However, there are technical specifications that you'll need to match in order to use it. You'll need a cellular version of the device, and it must at least support watchOS 7. Again, do not get a Series 3, even if you find it floating around for less than

$100. Although it supports watchOS 8, Apple's support page states that you need a Series 4 or later or an Apple Watch SE for Family Setup.

a:hover]:text-gray-63 [&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a:hover]:text-gray-bd

dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-underline-gray [&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-63 dark:[&>a]:text-gray-bd dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-gray”>Photo by Amelia Holowaty Krales / The Verge

If you opt for the Family Setup route, not every feature will be available. While

you can get Apple Pay and certain health features, you will not get the following: health data sharing, respiratory rate, irregular heart rhythm notifications, EKG, Cycle Tracking, Sleep, Blood Oxygen, Podcasts, Remote, News, Home, and Shortcuts.

a:hover]:text-
black
[&>a:hover]:sh
adow-
underline-
black
dark:[&>a:hove
r]:text-gray-
e9
dark:[&>a:hove
r]:shadow-

underline-gray-63 [&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-13 dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-gray-63”>*The 45mm Series 8 (left) and the 41mm Series 7*

are still excellent options.