MacOS Tahoe 26 Feels Slow? Try These 6 Performance Tips

Summary

Some Mac users report that macOS Tahoe 26 runs slower than previous versions, experiencing sluggishness, lagging performance, and increased heat. This slowdown is likely due to background tasks like Spotlight indexing and system optimization after the upgrade. To improve performance, users can disable transparency effects, free up drive storage, update apps, and restart their Mac.

Table of Contents

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Some Mac users who have updated to macOS Tahoe 26 feel like the new operating system runs slower than their prior MacOS installation did. Reports online suggest there can be general sluggishness and lagging performance, sometimes with frame rate drops and stuttering animations on the screen, or even when typing. Other users in various forums have voiced complaints that app launching is slower or that app performance and interactions within MacOS, Finder, Photos, Safari, Chrome, and other apps may feel slower. Some MacBook users report their laptop battery drains faster, or that the MacBook feels hot to the touch as well. While every new MacOS release tends to find user reports like this, some complaints regarding sluggish or slow macOS Tahoe performance, unusual heat, and other weirdness may be easily resolved.

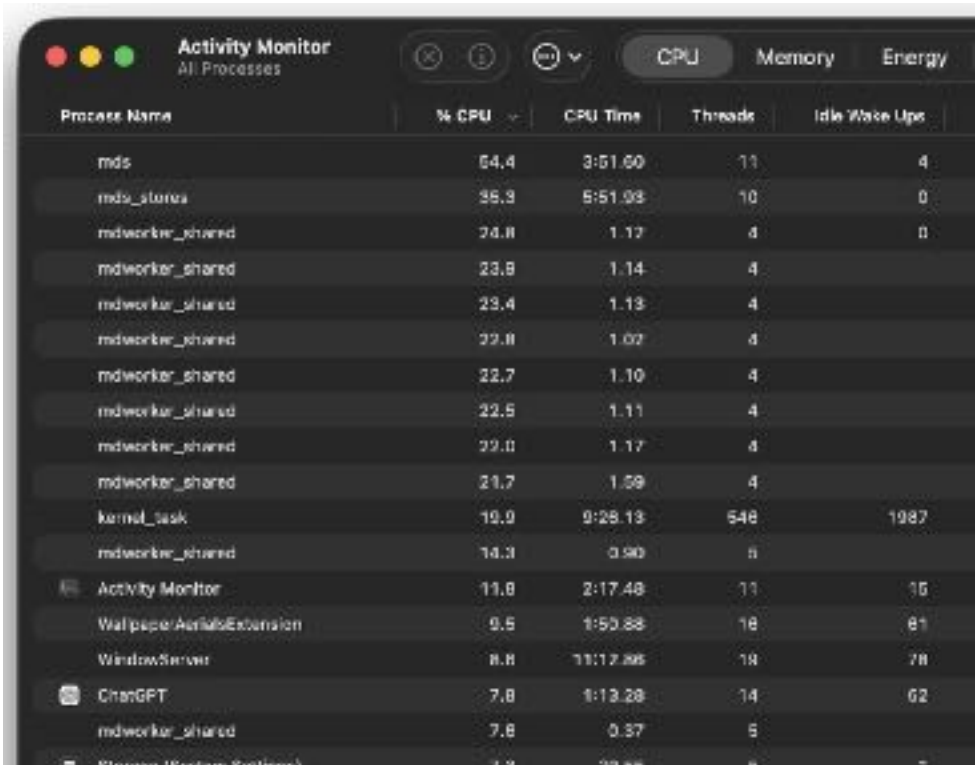
If your Mac feels slower after installing macOS Tahoe 26, read along and we'll discuss some of the reasons that may be, along with some tricks to help improve performance.

6 Tips for Helping macOS Tahoe 26 Performance Problems

A notable amount of Mac users have described various issues with slow performance in macOS Tahoe 26, ranging from Finder slowly loading icons, to choppy animations and reduced frame rates, to slow choppy menu drop-downs, to hiccups with drawing transparency, apps slow to load or respond, and an overall sluggishness to the new operating system. This can all be very frustrating to experience, so if you're in this group of impacted users then try the tips below to help speed things up again.

1: Background Activity & Indexing After Upgrading to macOS Tahoe

It is normal for MacOS to perform many system tasks in the background after a major system software upgrade, and that's certainly the case with macOS Tahoe 26 as well. After you install macOS Tahoe, your Mac will kick off a whole bunch of behind the scenes tasks that do things like rebuild the Spotlight search index of your files and data, rebuild photo libraries, refresh and rebuild caches, optimize system files and storage, and many other standard functionalities that macOS engages in, but that all tend to happen at once after a major system upgrade like from a prior MacOS version to macOS Tahoe. All of these tasks take up a lot of CPU usage and memory, and can really slow down performance while they're running in the background. These high CPU tasks can also generate more heat than usual, as any high processor activity can, which can make a MacBook laptop feel warmer than usual. And, more CPU usage means more energy usage, which translates to reduced battery life, temporarily at least. A look at Activity Monitor usually reveals mds, mdworker, mds_stores, mdworker_shared, and more, hard at work in the background.

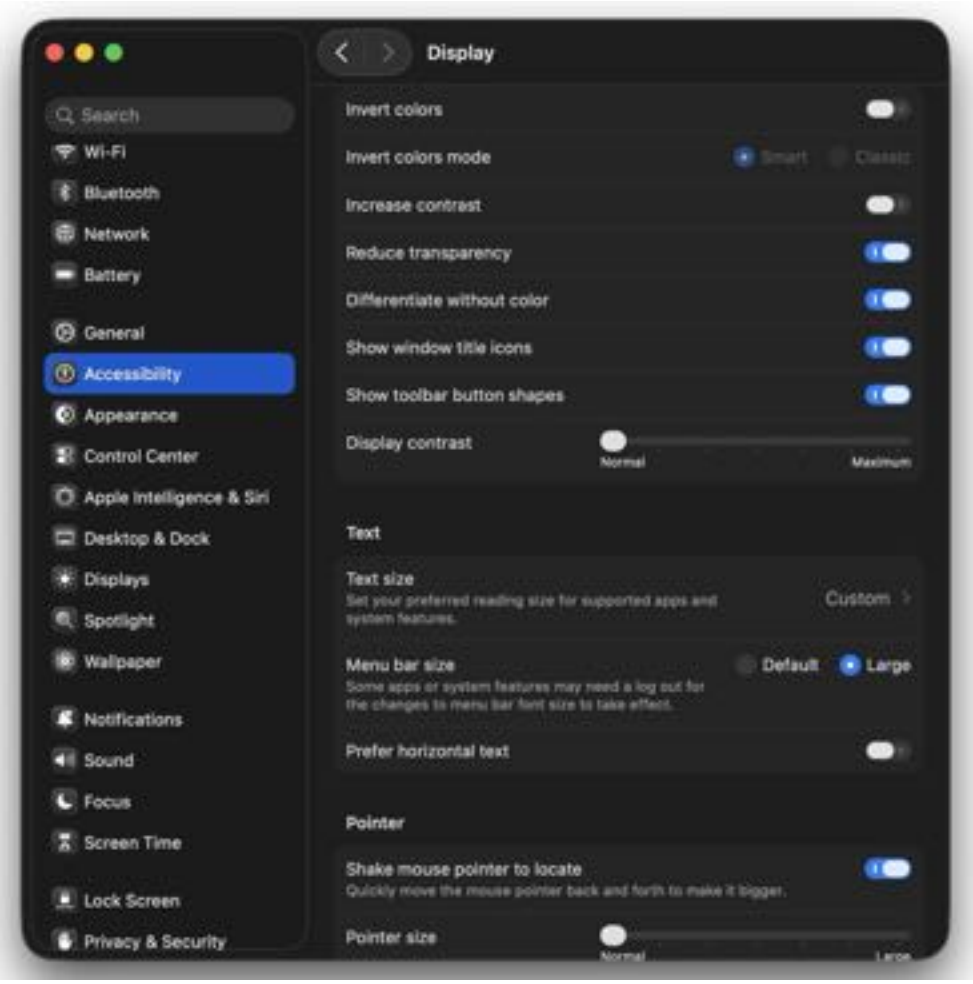


The solution to this temporary slowdown is simply patience. Keep your Mac plugged in and turned on overnight, and just let all of the indexing, analysis, and rebuilding, run its course.

This is normal expected behavior, and usually resolves itself within a day or few. It's almost certain that your Mac performance will notably

improve after a day or two of letting these tasks run.

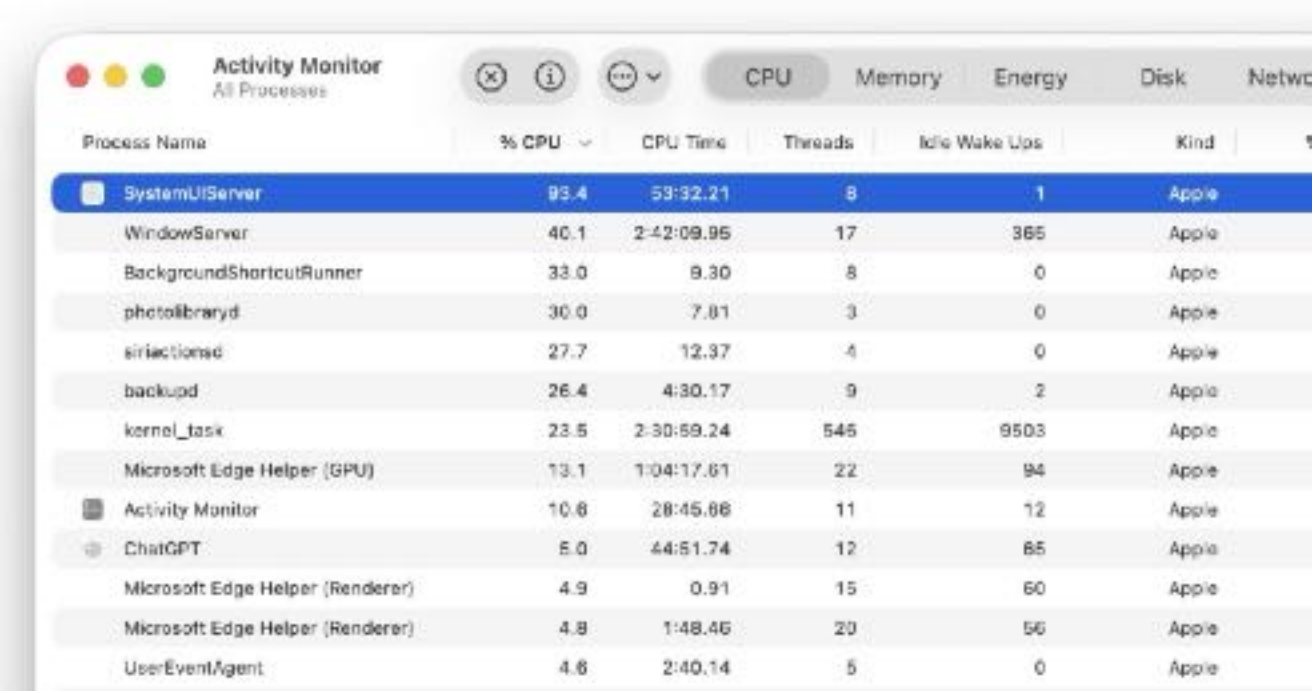
2: Liquid Glass Interface Uses More System Resources



Liquid Glass is what Apple calls the new look for the entire OS 26 suite, and it makes very heavy use of transparency and translucency in interface elements of macOS Tahoe. Those fancy effects look interesting, but they also require system resources, and some users feel they are slower or delayed. I've noticed that both SystemUIServer and WindowServer use more CPU than they did in prior MacOS releases, perhaps coincidental or not. One way to reduce this type of system resource usage and potentially speed things up is to tune down the graphical glitz and disable the translucent effects.

- Apple menu > System Settings > Accessibility > Display > Reduce Transparency to ON

This is usually a fairly obvious one to see and feel the results of, but if you're not sure if it makes a difference you can keep an eye on SystemUIServer and WindowServer processes while you interact with the Tahoe Liquid Glass interface, and don't be surprised to see enormous spikes in their CPU usage.

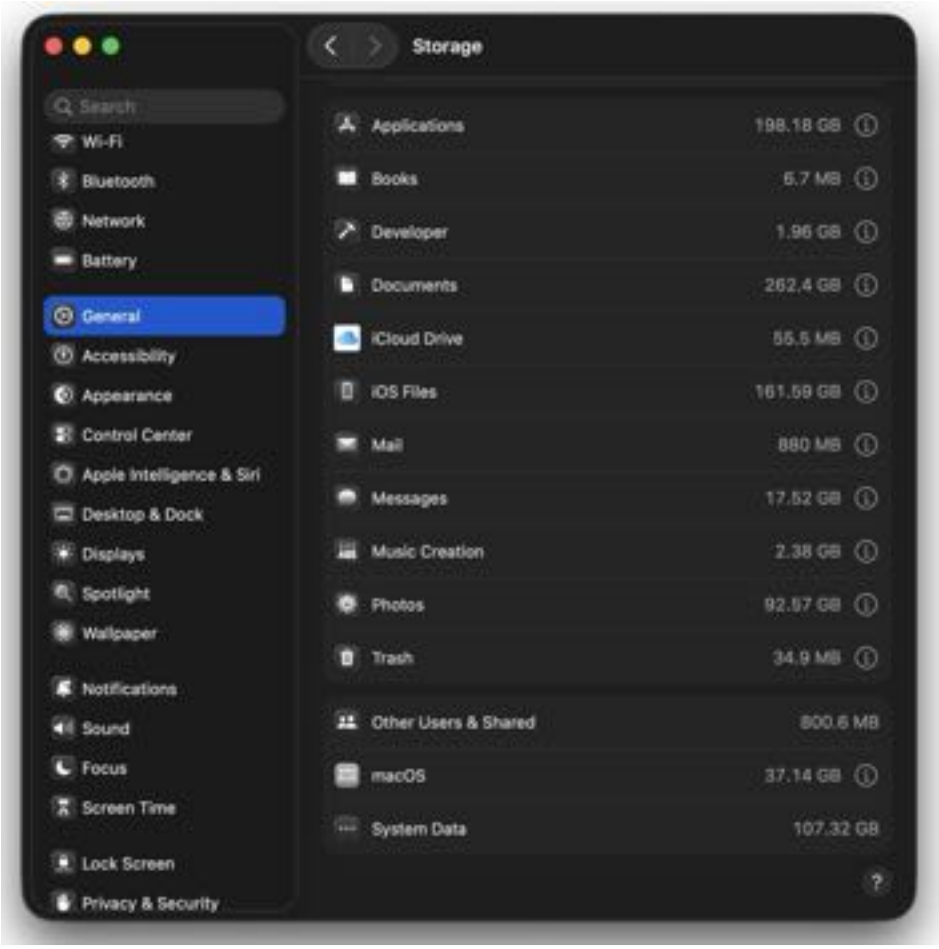


3: Animation Sluggishness

Disabling transparency should have an improvement on animations and draw speed as well. But if that's not enough, and if you feel the new animations are sluggish or slowing you down, you can use the Reduce Motion toggle which aims to use transitions instead of animations whenever possible, and this can help things feel speedier too, as well as potentially reduce system resource use.

•Apple menu > System Settings > Accessibility > Motion > Reduce Motion to ON

4: Free Up Drive Storage



MacOS performs best with plenty of free disk storage available, and you should always aim to have 10-15% of your drive capacity free, giving plenty of room for caches, swap and virtual memory, logs, tmp files, and more.

Investigate what is taking up storage capacity on your Mac (System Settings > General > Storage is a good place to start) and aim to free up a considerable amount. If the Mac has less than 5% of free disk space available, performance tends to suffer, getting dramatically worse the closer it gets to 0% free space before things just outright start breaking and stop functioning at all.

One of the widespread complaints about macOS Tahoe 26 (and in fairness, prior MacOS versions) is the enormously oversized mysterious “System Data”, which often takes up 100Gb+ of capacity that can be challenging if not impossible to recover, and if your Mac is low on disk storage this can be particularly frustrating. Rebooting and clearing out junk caches can help that issue a bit, but it’s a well documented problem.

5: Update Your Apps

If you haven’t updated your apps in a while, it’s a good idea to do that too. App developers will optimize their applications for various features of new operating systems, and sometimes performance issues that are app-specific can be directly linked to an old app that needs updating. This is easy low hanging fruit, and it’s good practice anyway.

Many apps can be updated through the App Store, while some must update directly through the app itself, like Chrome, Microsoft Edge, and similar.

6: Good Old Restart

If macOS Tahoe is still feeling slow to you, consider just rebooting the Mac. It's surprisingly effective! Yes yes, the same troubleshooting and performance trick that every Windows 95 user learned way back in the day, turns out to still be pretty effective in modern operating systems too. There's not any particularly crazy reason for this either, it's that restarting a computer will quit apps and background processes, and clear caches and memory, giving you a fresh start to work with.

What has been your macOS Tahoe performance experience?

Have you noticed that macOS Tahoe performs any different from MacOS Sequoia or Sonoma? Has it been better or worse for you? Did you find any particular tips or tricks to resolve the performance problems, sluggishness, overheating, or battery drain? Are you avoiding MacOS Tahoe for now as you wait for things to shake out and a first or second point release update?

Anecdotally, when I first installed macOS Tahoe, it was significantly slower than than MacOS Sequoia, and I quickly noticed a huge number of indexing tasks were kicked off in the background, while animations, opening windows and apps, resizing windows, and things like pulling down menus was significantly slower and choppier. Due to all the new transparency of the Liquid Glass interface, I turned off that feature right away, which immediately helped sped up the slow menus and redrawing of windows. I then let my Mac stay idle while plugged in for 48 hours, and nearly all performance issues have resolved since then. With that said, if I toggle back on transparency, things are slower and choppy again, and this is with an Apple Silicon M2 with 24GB RAM, a highly capable computer. It's reasonable to expect that refinements, improvements, bug fixes, and maybe even performance improvements, are to arrive in future updates to macOS Tahoe, so stay tuned and remember to update MacOS as new versions arrive.

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