

Summary

The article describes the best Apple Watch to buy based on individual needs. The Apple Watch Ultra 3 is recommended for athletes and adventurers who need features like depth gauge, water temperature sensor, and emergency SOS via satellite. The Apple Watch Series 11 is a good choice for most users who prioritize features like heart rate monitoring, fall detection, and emergency SOS.

At a Glance

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Our in-depth Apple Watch buying guide compares the Apple Watch Ultra 3, Series 11, and SE 3 to help you choose the best Apple Watch for you.

By [Karen Haslam](#) Managing Editor, Macworld NOV 28, 2025 9:48 am PST



Image: Foundry

There are three [new Apple Watches](#): the Apple Watch Series 11, Apple Watch Ultra 3 and Apple Watch SE 3. The newest Apple Watch models feature upgrades in processing power, connectivity, and health monitoring capabilities, alongside design refinements. Notable enhancements include the S10 chip, 5G connectivity, battery life improvements for the Series 11 and Ultra 3, and an always-on display for the Apple Watch SE.

In this guide, we will help you decide which Apple Watch is best for you. We'll compare the features, specs and price as well as offer advice on choosing cases, colors, and straps in our Apple Watch comparison chart so you can be confident you are choosing the right Apple Watch.

Best Apple Watch

Right now, Apple sells three different Apple Watches, although there are different combinations of case and wristband that can make it seem like a bit of a minefield. The newest Apple Watches are the Apple Watch Series 11, the Apple Watch Ultra 3, and the Apple Watch SE 2, so we are primarily focused on those here, although you may still be able to buy one of the older watches at a discount if you shop around (take a look at the [Best Apple Watch Deals](#) for the best prices.)

Choosing the best Apple Watch for you depends on your needs. The three Apple Watches have a lot of things in common, but they also have some significant differences. The Apple Watch Ultra 3, is best for those who are into extreme sports, the Apple Watch SE 3 is for anyone who wants a budget-friendly Apple Watch, and the Series 11 is for the rest of us.

For help understanding what the differences between the Apple Watches are and whether you really need to spend the extra money to get them, read on.

Apple Watch Series 11 – Best Apple Watch for everyone



Pros

- More scratch-resistant
- 24 hour battery
- 15 minute charge fir 8 hours if battery life

Cons

- Same S10 chip as the Series 10

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2024's Series 10 brought a larger display and thinner design, and at a quick glance, 2025's Apple Watch Series 11 is much the same. But there are differences: the new display is more scratch-resistant than 2024's model thanks to the upgraded Ion-X glass that comes with the aluminium case which Apple says is 2x more scratch-resistant than the Series 10. The even tougher titanium version of the Apple Watch 11 offers the same tough sapphire crystal display used for the Ultra 3.

The Series 11 is available in Jet Black, Silver, Rose Gold, Space Gray in the standard aluminium body, or Natural, Gold, and Slate titanium versions. The Space Gray option is new for 2025.

The big news of the 2025 models is the inclusion of blood pressure monitoring. The hypertension detection feature will be available for the Apple Watch Series 11 and Ultra 3. But it's not only those models: you can also record the data on the Apple Watch Series 9 and 10 and the Ultra 2.

Also available on the Apple Watch Series 11, and all Apple Watches from Series 9 onwards is Live Listen transcription and Live Translation which will automatically transcribe phone calls and messages on your Apple Watch screen in real time. Sleep Score is another new feature that isn't unique to the 2025 models: it runs on Series 6 and newer models running watchOS 26.

New features that the older Apple Watches don't get include 5G cellular on the cellular models. There is improved battery life of 24 hours, up from 18 hours, and fast charging is faster: charge up to 80% in 30 minutes and a 15 minute charge will get you up to 8 hours battery life.

The main disappointment is that the Apple Watch 11 uses the same S10 processor in the Series 10.

Prices start at \$399/£369 for the smaller model – that's a reduction in the U.K. price compared to the Apple Watch Series 10.

Apple Watch Series 11 starts at \$399/£369 for 42mm model. The Apple Watch Series 10 was from \$399/£399 for 42mm model, so that's a price drop in the U.K.

Who should buy the Apple Watch 11?

While it shares the S10 processor with the Series 10, the enhanced durability and improved battery life are beneficial – and, if battery life is important to you, crucial. For those upgrading from an older Apple Watch, the Series 11 is a good option. If you own a Series 10, or even a Series 9, it's probably not worth upgrading because you can already take advantage of most of the new features.

Apple Watch 11 further considerations:

If you can find an offer on an Apple Watch Series 10 then you can save money knowing you are getting a practically identical Apple Watch. We would tend to advise against spending more to get the cellular model as we don't think it's necessary – but it may be something you would benefit from.

Read our full [Apple Watch Series 11 \(42mm\) review](#)

Apple Watch Ultra 3 – Best Apple Watch for sports enthusiasts



Pros

- Screen visibility improvements
- 42 hour battery
- Charge up to 80% in 45 minutes

Cons

- Big and bulky

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Apple's Ultra series are Apple Watches designed for adventurers and power users. The Apple Watch Ultra 3 comes two years after the Ultra 2 launched. There's a slightly larger display due to thinner bezels, and the case is slightly thinner too (12mm compared to the Ultra 2's 14.4mm), but it doesn't look massively different to the Apple Watch Ultra 2. It comes in the same natural and black titanium options.

There are some differences though. The tough sapphire crystal display means improved durability. The screen is better thanks to a LTPO3 wide-angle OLED – so you'll be able to see notifications from any angle in bright sunlight.

Other changes include the S10 chip (up from the S9 in the Ultra 2), 5G cellular and satellite connectivity.

The 42 hours of battery life, compared to 36 on the Ultra 2, and 24 for the Series 11, is particularly impressive. Fast charging is faster – you can charge up to 80% in 45 minutes, rather than an hour. A 15 minute charge will get you up to 12 hours.

The high blood pressure detection feature may be enticing, but it is also available on the Apple Watch 11, Apple Watch 10 and even the 9. As are the other features like Live Listen transcription, Live Translation, and Sleep Score.

The Apple Watch Ultra 3 starts from \$799/£749, that's a discount for U.K. shoppers compared to the Apple Watch Ultra 2 which started from \$799/£799.

Who should buy the Apple Watch Ultra 3?

If you are the adventurous type, taking part in activities like camping, hiking, diving, and anything else classed as extreme sports, the Apple Watch Ultra is the watch for you. With its satellite feature, the Ultra 3 will be a particular benefit for anyone who goes off the grid and outside of cellular coverage. It's bigger and bulkier, and it costs

more than the Series 11, but if you need a smart watch with a rugged design suited to extreme environments, the Ultra is the one to get.

Apple Watch Ultra 3 further considerations:

Features offered by the Ultra models that are missing from the Series 11 include Emergency SOS via satellite, a Siren (to use in emergencies), water resistance to 100m (rather than 50m), and a 40m depth gauge (up from 6m) suitability for scuba, high-speed water sports, a 3,000 nits display (compared to 2,000) and an expanded operating range for the Always-on altimeter from -500m to 9,000m. If you need any of those features then the Ultra is for you.

Read our full [Apple Watch Ultra 3 review](#)

Apple Watch SE 3 – Best value Apple Watch



Pros

- Always-on display
- Temperature sensing
- Wrist flick and double tap gestures
- Media playback
- 64GB storage

Cons

- Silver option no longer available

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Apple's budget watch was last updated in 2022, now, three years later the Apple Watch SE 3 is here. The longer gaps do mean the improvements are a bit more pertinent than the yearly Apple Watch Series upgrades: a jump from S8 to S10 chip is significant – even more so as that's the same S10 processor as the Apple Watch 11 (and 10) and Apple Watch Ultra use.

Visibly it's not changed, it's still available in Starlight and Moonlight. If you are a fan of Silver that color option is no longer available, which seems an odd choice for anyone wanting to match a metal bracelet.

The biggest news is probably the fact that it gains an Always-on display for the first time, with 2 nits minimum brightness. That display also uses 4x more crack-resistant Ion-X glass than the previous generation.

Other features finally on the SE include: Temperature sensing, the wrist flick and double tap gestures, on-device Siri, the ability to play back media via its own speaker, and 64GB storage (up from 32GB). It also gets sleep apnoea notifications. The SE 3

still lacks the sensors for the ECG and Blood Oxygen features of the other watches. Plus battery life is 18 hour, which while decent is behind the Series 11 (24 hours) and the Ultra 3 (42 hours.)

Who should buy the Apple Watch SE 3?

The Apple Watch SE 3 is the Apple Watch for the budget-conscious, with a starting price of \$249/£219. If you don't require the advanced, extra sensors found in more expensive Apple Watches it could suit you.

Apple Watch SE 3 further considerations:

Apple has also marketed the SE 3 specifically for children. The cellular version of the Apple Watch SE allows parents to locate them using Find My, and enables them to send or receive texts and calls, while also providing parental control over app access and notifications. It's also a good choice for the elderly thanks to features like Fall Detection and it can monitor heart rate, though it can't take an ECG.

Read our full [Apple Watch SE 3 \(40mm\) review](#)

Apple Watch comparison chart: Apple Watches specs compared

	Apple Watch SE 3	Apple Watch Series 11	Apple Watch Ultra 3
Price from	\$249/£219	\$399/£369	\$799/£749
Screen size	44mm or 40mm	46mm or 42mm	49mm
Display	1,000 nits	2,000 nits	3,000 nits
Weight from	40mm from 26.3g / 44mm from 32.9g	42mm from 29.7g / 46mm from 36.9g	61.6 g
Materials	Aluminium	Aluminium or Titanium	Titanium
Colors	Midnight, Starlight	Aluminium: Silver, Rose Gold, Jet Black, Space Gray Titanium: Slate, Natural, Gold	Natural or Black
Processor	S10	S10	S10
Battery life	Up to 18 hours	Up to 24 hours, Faster charging 0-80% in 30 mins	Up to 42 hours, Fast charging 0-80% in 45 minutes
Extra features	Always-on display, double tap gesture, Faster on-device Siri,	Always-on display, double tap gesture, Faster on-device Siri, Precision Finding for iPhone, Depth gauge to 6m and water temperature sensor, speakers and media playback, microphone	Always-on display, double tap gesture, Faster on-device Siri, Precision Finding for iPhone, Customisable Action button, Depth gauge to 40m and water temperature sensor, scuba to 40m, Dual speakers, media playback and three-mic
Health features	Heart rate, Heart rhythm, sensing, Cycle Tracking with ovulation estimates, Sleep stages, Sleep Score, Sleep	Blood Oxygen, ECG, Heart rate, Heart rhythm, Hypertension notifications, Temperature sensing, Cycle Tracking with ovulation estimates, Sleep stages, Sleep Score, Sleep	Blood Oxygen, ECG, Heart rate, Heart rhythm, Hypertension notifications, Temperature sensing, Cycle Tracking with ovulation estimates, Sleep stages, Sleep Score, Sleep apnoea notifications
Safety features	Emergency SOS, Fall Detection and Crash Detection	Emergency SOS, Fall Detection and Crash Detection	Emergency SOS, Emergency SOS via Satellite, Fall Detection and Crash Detection, Siren
Water features	50 meter water resistance. Suitable for swimming and snorking.	50 meter water resistance, depth gauge to 6 meters, water temperature sensor. Suitable for swimming and snorking.	100 meter water resistance, depth gauge to 6 meters, dive to 40m, water temperature sensor. Suitable for swimming and snorking, scuba, high-speed water
Connectivity	L1 GPS, 5G cellular option	L1 GPS, 5G cellular option, Second-generation Ultra Wideband chip	Precision dual-frequency 5G GPS (L1 and L5 GPS), cellular only, Second-generation Ultra Wideband chip, Satellite connectivity

Should I buy one of the older Apple Watches?

Apple stops selling the previous generation of Apple Watch models as soon as new models are launched, but that doesn't mean you won't be able to buy them. Apple itself sells older Apple Watches in its refurbished store, and you can often get a good deal with the added bonus that Apple will guarantee the Apple Watch. It's not only

Apple that still sells older Apple Watch models: you can often get a cut price deal on older Apple Watch. See our round up of the [Best Apple Watch deals](#).

Here's our views on whether you should buy one of the older Apple Watches if you find a good deal:

The Series 10 was a modest set of improvements over the Apple Watch Series 9. It was a tiny bit thinner and larger, just enough to make the display fractionally bigger (42mm up from 41mm or 46mm up from 45mm) and slightly easier to read (with wider viewing angles, too). Also new for the Series 10 was a water temperature sensor and the ability to sense depth up to 6 meters.

The Series 10 has the same processor as the Series 11, so if you see a deal you may think it's worth a look. The main thing you will be missing out on is the longer battery life: Battery life for the Series 10 was rated at 18 hours, like the Series 9. The Series 10 has a 24 hour battery life – which is a massive upgrade.

The second generation of Apple Watch Ultra launched in 2023, there was a minor update in 2024. The processor in the 2023 Ultra 2 was the S9. The new Ultra 3 model gets the S10. Other changes include much better battery life: 42 hours compared to 36 hours. Faster charging, and a (very) slightly larger display. It's also a little slimmer, which helps with some of the bulk of this Apple Watch category.

With those updates, should you buy the Apple Watch Ultra 2? Any generation of the Apple Watch Ultra goes beyond the standard Apple Watch, with features for divers (depth gauge, water temperature sensor, water resistance to 100 meters) and features for hikers such as precision dual-frequency GPS. If you see a good deal, and you are an athlete or adventurer in need of those kinds of features, it would be a good purchase.

This version of the Apple Watch SE arrived in 2022 and was the second generation SE, with the first being introduced in 2020. There's a heart sensor,

Compared to the Apple Watch SE 3, this version of the SE lacks body temperature sensor for cycle monitoring, Temperature sensing, the wrist flick and double tap gestures, on-device Siri, the ability to play back media via its own speaker, and only has 32GB storage, rather than 64GB.

As with the SE 3, you don't get Blood Oxygen monitoring or the ability to perform an ECG. Battery life is the same 18 hours as the Apple Watch SE 3, but the Low Power Mode in the new Watch means you can get up to 32 hours.

What can an Apple Watch do?

Practically every Apple Watch ever made has offered the same set of basic functions. Apple Watch can be used in conjunction with an iPhone (or separately if the user has a cellular contract) to:

- Make or take phone calls
- Read and send text messages
- Read and send emails
- Listen to music or podcasts
- Receive notifications relating to iPhone and Apple Watch apps
- Use apps, such as Maps for navigation, a calculator or a compass
- Track fitness, including steps and calories burned
- Monitor your health, including heart rate
- Track temperature for ovulation estimates
- Enable an Emergency SOS alert
- Display hypertension notifications (Series 9, 10, 11, Ultra 2 & 3)
- Detect a fall or car crash
- Tell the time on an always-on display (older Apple Watches don't do this)
- Act as a flashlight (or torch)
- Pay via Apple Pay
- Track your sleep, notify of sleep apnoea, and provide a Sleep score

The Apple Watch doesn't need an iPhone to work, but it helps, and it is needed for initial setup. See: [Does an Apple Watch work without an iPhone?](#)

Should I buy a cellular Apple Watch?

There's another choice to be made. Do you need an Apple Watch with cellular connectivity or not? We examine GPS versus cellular in a separate article, read: [Should I buy a cellular Apple Watch](#). Also read: [You probably don't need an LTE Apple Watch](#).

If you choose a cellular version of the Apple Watch you'll be able to leave your iPhone at home and use your Watch for making calls, receiving texts, and streaming music. Apple Watch can also support Family Setup if you are looking for a Watch for someone who doesn't have an iPhone.

Which Apple Watch to buy

As you can see from the above, it's not a simple case of being able to say a particular Apple Watch is the winner. The Apple Watch Ultra 3 clearly has the best features if you are off up a mountain, diving in the ocean, or heading out for a marathon. If that

sounds like you, the Ultra is the way to go. But it's big, perhaps too big, and it has a big price attached to it.

The Apple Watch Series 11 is the best choice for most users that don't have specific need of the rugged outdoor qualities of the Ultra. This generation improves durability and improves battery life – both good reasons to buy one.

The Apple Watch SE 3 is Apple's cheapest Apple Watch, starting at \$249/£219, which will be a big point in its favor. Along with a lower price, the SE also offers features such heart rate monitoring, fall detection, Car Crash detection, emergency SEOs, and some other features that may give you peace of mind. But it lacks some of the health-related features that people are looking for, such as the ability to take an ECG, check blood oxygen readings and give hypertension notifications.

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Karen has worked on both sides of the Apple divide, clocking up a number of years at Apple's PR agency prior to joining Macworld more than two decades ago. Karen's career highlights include interviewing Apple's Steve Wozniak and discussing Steve Jobs' legacy on the BBC. Having edited the U.K. print and online editions of Macworld for many years, more recently her focus has been on SEO and evergreen content as well as product recommendations and buying advice.