

How to Make Your Smartphone Last Longer

by Natasha Stokes on August 03, 2020

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Looking to save money by holding onto that phone you've already paid off? You're not alone. In recent years, [Americans have been bucking the trend of switching to a new phone every couple of years](#), in part due to the rising costs and minor improvements in flagship phones. People are holding onto their phones for around 2.8 years, according to data from trade-in site HYL A Mobile, with iPhones being traded in slightly later, after about 2.9 years.

Even so, powerful smartphones could last more than three years. After all, the top-end phones have the power capability – and price tag – of a good laptop, yet laptops are perceived to last five years or more.

1. Your smartphone can be fixed

One reason – besides network providers offering incentives for people to upgrade smartphones on contract – is that many who would [maintain their laptops](#) might not view smartphones as equally repairable. A sluggish smartphone, for instance, may be assumed to be obsolete, rather than requiring servicing.

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Manufacturers such as Apple have historically warned that repairs from non-authorized service centers void their warranties – even though [this is illegal](#) – while many don't supply original parts to

independent repair shops or make repair manuals widely available, dissuading users from fixing devices themselves or taking the devices into a local repair shop. And for some who want to repair their devices at a manufacturer store or authorized service center, the nearest branch can be hundreds of miles away.

Then there's the fact that manufacturers tend to build devices in a way that makes repairing less accessible, all in the name of creating slimmer phones.

For example, iPhones, which [according to the site iFixit](#) are some of the more repairable phones available, are constructed using proprietary screws, with screens glued down and batteries held by adhesive strips. Samsung phones are glued shut and internal components are soldered down so that replacing the screen or the battery requires substantial disassembly.

Where standard phones of yore – such as Nokias, Ericssons and those Motorola flip phones – had removable back covers and batteries that could easily be exchanged for fully charged spares, the impression of today's smartphones is that batteries are simply not replaceable.

At least until 2018, when Apple was [forced to offer battery replacement](#) for thousands of iPhone 6ses that were consistently shutting down due to battery issues.

“That was the first time consumers realized smartphone batteries are replaceable,” says Kay-Kay Clapp, director of communications and advocacy at iFixit, which tears down devices and rates their ease of repair. “We saw a huge uptick in [clicks on] iPhone battery replacement.” Since then, iFixit's iPhone 6S battery guide alone has been viewed over 675,000 times, with around 10 million visitors hitting the site monthly for its tens of thousands of consumer tech repair guides.

2. Replace the battery

In fact, a new battery is the most effective way to breathe new life into an older smartphone. Batteries come with a certain number of charge cycles – one cycle going from fully charged to fully discharged – and as it runs through more of these cycles, a battery becomes less efficient at delivering charge.

“Every time a first-time fixer replaces their phone battery, they're amazed at how much better the phone performance becomes,” says Clapp. What's more, rather than seeing a battery replacement as a one-off fix, view it as routine maintenance, says Clapp. “Swapping out your battery every two years really helps with the longevity of the device.”

If prying open your smartphone and disassembling its battery fixings doesn't appeal – though Clapp assures us it's “very doable” – getting the battery replaced at a repair shop is a straightforward task that usually costs under \$100.

3. Protect your screen

Along with the battery, a smartphone screen is the component most likely to fail – and one of the pricier ones to repair. Expect to shell out upwards of \$250 for iPhone or Galaxy screens at authorized repair centers – though if you feel up to the challenge, iFixit offers screen replacement guides for most popular devices.

For a cheap, easy fix, invest in a good shock-absorbing [case for your phone](#) and a screen protector instead.

4. Repair damage immediately

If you end up cracking the screen, be sure to get it repaired as soon as possible, even if you can make out enough of the display to go about your daily business. “Many people are quick to dismiss a shattered screen as a cosmetic issue,” says Josh Sutton, Training Department Manager at uBreakiFix, a national chain of over 540 repair shops. “However, the longer you wait to repair, the more dirt, oil, and debris can work their way into the cracks and compromise your phone’s internal components.”

Speediness applies to other damage too, such as dropping your phone into water. “You can temporarily ‘save’ your phone by drying it in a bowl of uncooked rice; however, the rice is unable to absorb all of the water vapor, which lingers inside your phone and will eventually cause corrosion of the internal components,” says Sutton, who recommends immediately taking the phone to a repair technician who would take the phone apart and clean and dry each individual part with dedicated equipment.

5. Clean your charging port

Keeping your smartphone clean can go a long way towards recreating that like-new feeling. One common area that attracts dirt which could compromise device operation is the charging port. “People almost always get lint in the charging port that can block the charge to the battery sensor,” says Clapp. “Get a toothpick and clean out the lint.”

The same goes for dirt or sand getting under your smartphone case – remove your phone from its case every so often and give it a wipe. You can use a microfiber cloth like the MagicFiber Microfiber Cleaning Cloths (\$5.50 for 2, check price on [Amazon](#)), lightly dampened with a 50/50 mix of water and distilled white vinegar to remove grease and smudges.

Also available at [eBay](#) (\$5.99).

6. Pay attention to storage

General maintenance matters - if your smartphone has started slowing down, the first thing to troubleshoot is the amount of storage you have available.

“With smartphones more akin to computers, the available storage is also used by the operation system to perform tasks. You will see a substantial drop in device performance as you approach 80% of storage used,” says Sutton. “That’s because when storage starts running out, it creates a bottleneck that limits how many commands the operating system can execute a time, decreasing performance seeds.”

If you find your storage is filled nearly to the brim, check which apps, photos, videos and other media you can delete, backing up important files to a cloud storage. You can also free up space on your phone by expunging other virtual debris such as fragments from various app processes. Then restart your device to flush out any performance-draining processes that may still be running.

7. Reset your device

Should clearing out your smartphone fail to restore its performance, its software may be corrupted, perhaps through downloaded apps. Again, “this does not necessitate replacing the smartphone,” says Sutton. Instead, a total reset that erases all content – including passwords and accounts – can help by allowing you to reinstall the operating system afresh, giving it an (nearly) out-of-the-box speed and slickness.

For iPhones, you can find the total reset option under Settings > General > Reset > Erase All Content and Settings.

For Androids, head to Settings > System > Advanced > Reset options> Erase all data (factory reset)

When it's time to pass on your old phone

However, it is often new software that make older smartphones feel their age. Although iOS and Android OS updates technically support devices for four or more years, certain apps – and OS updates themselves – can prove too power-hungry for previous years’ specs.

“Hardware could operate for five to ten years,” says Clapp. “But will these older devices be provided with software that they need to keep running?”

If your motivation for upgrading your smartphone is that it no longer runs the apps you want to use – or if you simply must own a shiny new device – then consider whether it can enjoy new life in the hands of a kid or grandkid who would be using more basic apps.

Or, if you’ve kept it in good condition, you might want to [sell your old phone on eBay](#); even if it’s not in good condition, you may be able to score a deal selling it for parts.

The rise of repair culture?

According to the U.S. Public Interest Research Group, Americans toss out 416,000 cell phones a day, and just 15-20% of old electronics are recycled. In an effort to battle this waste, the group has

been advocating for “[right to repair](#)” legislation that would force tech companies to make their products easier to repair. As Clapp says, “The easier it is to repair something, the more people will do it.” With [electronic waste predicted to double by 2050](#), the benefit isn’t only in saving the cost of a new device, but in reducing the health and environmental impacts of e-waste.

So far, 20 states have filed right-to-repair legislation and some manufacturers are responding. [Apple's authorized repair program](#) enables independent shops to access official tools, parts, manuals and diagnostics, and [Samsung has partnered with uBreakiFix](#) so that its certified repair service is available in more locations.

Flagship iPhones, Pixels and Galaxy’s may once have launched to fanfare and overnight queues, but these days, improvements tend to be incremental updates on already impressive cameras or CPUs. The next big smartphone feature might have nothing to do with megapixels or gigahertz, but everything to do with how easily the phone can be fixed.

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