

# Review: Apple Watch improves with new software

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In this March 9, 2015 file photo, attendees get a look at varieties of the new Apple Watch on display in the demo room after an Apple event in San Francisco. The watchOS 2 update for Apple Watch arrives Monday, Sept. 21, 2015, delayed by nearly a week as Apple fixed an unspecified bug. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg, File)

Apple Watch's new software brings useful enhancements, though it's not

the same as getting a new watch.

That same watch can now do more. For the first time, non-Apple apps are able to display video and use the watch's sensors and controls. In addition, the watch now works with Wi-Fi, extending how far you can go without a phone with you. These enhancements address many of my initial frustrations with the watch.

But the hardware itself isn't changing, apart for some new color and band choices. Promised battery life remains at 18 hours, something Apple will need to address in upcoming generations given that rival smartwatches are promising more. For now, you might need to buy a spare charger to give the watch a power boost while you're sitting at work. Even 15 minutes will help.

The watchOS 2 update for Apple Watch arrived Monday, delayed by nearly a week as Apple fixed an unspecified bug.

The update comes as Apple Inc. pulled several Chinese apps, including the popular WeChat, from its app store after third-party developers were tricked into inserting malicious code into their apps. The malicious software isn't believed to affect the watch's functionality, though it could collect data on the tethered iPhone and send them to remote servers, according to security experts. Users should delete any Chinese apps they got or updated recently from their iPhones and iPads and get new versions from the [app store](#) once they are available.

As for the watch update, first make sure your phone has the latest software, iOS 9. Then go to the Apple Watch app on the phone, choose "General" and then "Software Update."

Apple's own fitness apps are smarter with Monday's update:

— Before, the watch displayed only current pace during your runs. I've found that to swing wildly on all sorts of fitness trackers, including Apple Watch. During my most recent marathon, my usually reliable Garmin GPS had me going faster than two minutes a mile at one point—more than three times as fast as the winners. Average pace is more useful, as it factors in the occasional errant readings. The watch finally lets you choose that instead, though you need to dig in the settings on the phone to change that.

— The watch also tracks mile-by-mile splits for the first time, matching what many [phone apps](#), the Fitbit Surge and the Microsoft Band offer. It's not the same as choosing your own splits manually, such as after each lap on a track. But it's progress. The splits aren't displayed on the watch, though, but in the Activity app on the phone after you sync your workout.

— The nagging reminders that you need to stand up if you've been sitting at your desk for too long can be paused if you happen to be on a flight or a road trip. And it's clearer whether you've already earned credit for standing during a given hour. A blinking blue bar appears in the Activity app on the watch if you haven't yet.

You also have more choices for watch faces: Choose photos of your kids or friends to appear on the main watch screen. Or choose time-lapse video from one of six cities. At 10 p.m. your time, you see what Paris or Shanghai looks like at 10 p.m. local time. It's cheaper than a flight. When charging, the watch functions like an alarm clock on a nightstand.

Beyond that, the watch update lets you reply to email and set more than 12 friends as favorites.

Many improvements are still pending, however. Apple apps have had the ability to run natively on the watch, meaning they can access sensors and

controls directly and aren't merely extensions of phone apps. Now, non-Apple apps have that capability. But those apps are just starting to appear. For instance, GoPro will let you use the watch as a viewfinder for its camera, but not for a few more months.

Even with the update, the Apple Watch still isn't a must-have gadget for everyone, the way smartphones have become. But Apple is headed in the right direction, and the update should improve the experience for those who do get the [watch](#) now.

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