Tip Sheet

How to use less data on your smartphone

Smartphones can chew through your data allowance without you realising it. This can be because data-hungry apps are left open or simply due to default settings on your phone.

It can be very expensive if you go over your monthly data allowance. Our blog post on excess mobile data charges outlines what some of the telcos charge for going over your mobile data allowance.

No matter what type of smartphone you use, you should track your data usage in your provider's smartphone app or your account on your provider's website. Your provider has to send you notifications when you have used 50, 85 and 100 per cent of your mobile data allowance. Do not ignore these notifications as they can help you track your usage. When checking your data usage, remember that this information may be up to 48 hours old. If you are close to going over your limit, you may have already actually gone over it and incurred extra charges.

Android and Apple smartphones have internal features that track data usage. These can be useful to identify which apps are using the most data. However, you should not rely solely on this internal data to track your usage as some people have noticed differences when comparing internal counters to data usage measured by providers.

Whenever possible, you should conserve mobile data by connecting your smartphone to your home or work Wi-Fi.

iOS (Apple)

Turn off "push notifications" for emails, social media and GPS apps
Go to Settings > Notifications > Select the app, for example Facebook > Switch Allow Notifications off.

Turn off video autoplay
Change the settings in apps like Facebook and Instagram so videos do not automatically start playing.

Restrict mobile data
Make sure certain apps run only over Wi-Fi.

Go to Settings > Mobile > Scroll down to Mobile Data > Switch off mobile data for apps that you do not want to run over the mobile network.

You can also turn off mobile data to conserve data.

Go to Settings > Mobile > Switch Mobile Data off.

Turn off iMessage

iMessage uses data to send text messages. If Wi-Fi is unavailable and your plan includes unlimited SMS, turn off iMessage.

Go to Settings > Messages > Switch iMessage off.

If you are not connected to Wi-Fi try not to use messaging apps like WhatsApp or Viber as they also use data to send text messages.

Beware of "free" apps

Free apps can often use up more data than paid versions as they generally have more advertisements.

Manually close certain apps

Pressing the Home button to exit apps does not fully close the app and they may still use data in the background.

Close apps by tapping the home button twice > Open apps will appear on the screen > To close an app place your finger on the app and swipe up > Once finished press the home button to return to the home screen.

Android

Turn off "push notifications" for emails, social media and GPS apps

Go to Settings > Notifications > Switch off notifications for selected apps.

Turn off video autoplay

Change your settings in apps like Facebook and Instagram so videos do not automatically start playing.

Restrict mobile data for certain apps

You can restrict certain apps from using mobile data in the background.

Go to Settings > Apps > Select an app > Switch off 'Allow background data usage.'

You can also turn on Data Saver mode to conserve data.

Go to Settings > Connections > Data Usage > Turn on Data Saver mode or restrict data usage for certain apps.

Data-based text services

If you are not connected to Wi-Fi try not to use apps like WhatsApp or Viber as they use data to send text messages.

Beware of "free" apps

Free apps are increasing in popularity, but they can often use up more data than the premium (paid) version as they generally have more advertisements.

Manually close certain apps

Pressing the Back or Home button to exit apps does not fully close the app and they may still use data in the background.

To properly close apps press the Overview button (the square button) > A list of open apps will appear > Close any open apps by pressing the "X" or swiping left or right on the app.

Note: due to differences in Android software and manufacturers, instructions for Android devices may vary.