

# How to Remove Apple Watch from iPhone the Right Way

## TechRounder PDF Edition

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## Quick answer

To correctly remove an Apple Watch from an iPhone, you should unpair it via the Watch app on the paired iPhone, which simultaneously backs up your data, erases the device, and disables the Activation Lock. Simply erasing the watch from its own settings menu is insufficient for selling or gifting, as the device will remain locked to the original owner's Apple account.

## Key points

- Best Method: Unpairing through the Apple Watch app on the paired iPhone is the most effective method because it removes the Activation Lock and creates a backup.
- Activation Lock Warning: Erasing the watch directly from its own settings wipes the data but does not remove the account lock, making it unusable for a new owner.
- Alternative for Lost iPhones: If the paired iPhone is unavailable, you must erase the watch on the device and then manually remove it from your account using iCloud or the Find My app.
- Cellular Plans: For GPS + Cellular models, users should ensure the mobile plan is removed or canceled with the carrier when selling or trading in the device.
- Crucial Sequence: Always unpair the watch before resetting or erasing the paired iPhone to avoid a more complex account-recovery process.

Here's what catches most people off guard. They wipe the watch, reset the old iPhone, pass the watch along to someone else, and then realize it's still locked to their Apple account. The watch looks clean, but it's not actually free to use.

The fix isn't hard, but sequence matters. If you've still got the iPhone the watch was originally paired with, unpairing through that iPhone is your cleanest option. That single step takes care of the backup, the reset, and the account disconnect that trips people up later.

## What "remove" actually means in this context

When someone says they want to remove an Apple Watch from an iPhone, they're typically talking about one of three situations: disconnecting it for a sale, moving it to a different iPhone, or resetting it because something's gone wrong. Those aren't the same task.

What really matters is whether Activation Lock gets removed. Apple's Apple Watch guide spells this out: unpairing from the paired iPhone removes Activation Lock, but erasing the watch directly from the watch itself doesn't.

That's why a watch can appear factory-fresh and still prompt for the previous owner's Apple account when someone tries pairing it. If you're selling, gifting, trading in, or switching to another iPhone, a simple erase from the watch won't cut it.

## The right approach at a glance

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Scenario: You still have the paired iPhone | Best method: Unpair from the Apple Watch app on iPhone | Creates backup: Yes | Removes Activation Lock: Yes | Best for: Selling, giving away, switching iPhones, clean reset

Scenario: You no longer have the paired iPhone | Best method: Erase on the watch, then remove from iCloud/Find My | Creates backup: No automatic local backup during unpair | Removes Activation Lock: Only after account-side removal | Best for: Old phone lost, broken, erased, or sold

Scenario: You only want to troubleshoot the watch | Best method: Erase from watch or reset through iPhone, depending on the issue | Creates backup: Varies | Removes Activation Lock: Not always | Best for: Software issues, pairing failures, stuck setup

## How to remove it correctly when you still have the paired iPhone

This is your cleanest path and what Apple recommends for most normal situations. Keep the iPhone and watch near each other, open the Watch app on the iPhone, go to My Watch > All Watches, tap the info button next to the watch, then tap Unpair Apple Watch.

If you've got a GPS + Cellular model, the iPhone will ask whether you want to keep or remove the mobile plan. If you're keeping the watch and pairing it again yourself, keeping the plan makes sense. If the watch is leaving your account, remove the plan, and sometimes you'll need to finish the cancellation with your carrier using Apple's sell or trade-in instructions.

You'll also need to enter your Apple account password. That's not just a confirmation screen. It's what disables Activation Lock so the watch can be paired again without being tied to your account.

Once the process wraps up, the watch is erased, removed from your account, and backed up to the iPhone. That backup matters if you're about to switch to another phone or restore the watch down the line. If you need a separate reset walkthrough, TechRounder already has a full reset guide that works alongside this process.

## What happens when you erase the watch from the watch itself

You can erase the watch directly by going to Settings > General > Reset > Erase All Content and Settings on the watch. That does wipe the watch. The catch is that it doesn't fully finish the job for transfer or resale.

Apple says this clearly in its unpair and erase support article: erasing from the watch restores factory settings, but it doesn't remove Activation Lock. In real terms, that means the next setup can still stop and ask for the original Apple account.

This is where most confusion happens online. People assume "factory reset" and "ready for a new owner" are the same thing. With Apple Watch, they're not.

## If you already lost, sold, or reset the old iPhone

This is the messier scenario, but it's still fixable. First, erase the Apple Watch from the watch itself if it hasn't already been erased. After that, remove the watch from your account through iCloud or Find My so Activation Lock gets cleared.

Apple's Activation Lock page and iCloud device-removal guide explain the account-side part: sign in to iCloud, open Find My, select the Apple Watch, erase it if needed, then remove that device from your account.

If the watch is offline, removal can still work through the web workflow, but the timing can depend on when the watch next comes online. That's why this route is more frustrating than unpairing from the original iPhone in the first place.

## **Moving your Apple Watch to a new iPhone**

If you still have the old iPhone, the smoothest route is to update both devices, back up the old iPhone, restore that backup to the new iPhone, and then let the watch move across as part of the normal process. Apple's new iPhone steps still treat proper unpairing as the fallback if the transfer doesn't complete cleanly.

If you already set up the new iPhone and the watch doesn't attach properly, the reliable recovery path is usually to unpair the watch and pair it again. That sounds frustrating, but it's cleaner than forcing partial pairing data to behave.

This is also where people panic because the watch asks to start pairing again. That prompt usually means the old link needs to be removed cleanly before the new one can be created.

## **Common mistakes that create extra work**

### **Resetting the iPhone before unpairing the watch**

Once the old iPhone is wiped, you lose the easiest path. You can still recover by erasing the watch and removing it from iCloud, but you've turned a two-minute job into an account-recovery job.

### **Assuming a watch-side erase is enough before selling**

This is the biggest mistake. The watch may boot like a fresh device, but it can still be locked to the original Apple account. If the buyer sees an Activation Lock screen, the sale is basically on hold until the original owner fixes it.

### **Forgetting the cellular plan**

On cellular models, unpairing doesn't always end the billing relationship by itself. If the watch is being sold, traded, or permanently removed, check that the plan was removed and that the carrier side is closed out as well.

### **Confusing Wrist Detection or passcode lock with Activation Lock**

A watch locking when it comes off your wrist is normal behavior, not the same thing as account lock. If that part has been confusing, TechRounder's explanation of automatic wrist locking helps separate the normal security behavior from an actual pairing problem.

## **When removal fails or the watch won't cooperate**

If the watch is frozen, stuck during restart, or not behaving normally, fix that first. A watch that's hanging on startup or looping can interrupt the removal process and make it look like account removal failed when the watch simply never completed the reset properly.

In that case, go through the normal troubleshooting path, then try the unpair again. TechRounder's article on an Apple Watch stuck on the logo is a practical starting point if the device refuses to boot cleanly.

## **What to do next**

If the watch is staying with you, unpair it from the old iPhone and pair it again only when the new iPhone is ready. If the watch is leaving your hands, don't stop until it's erased, removed from your Apple account, and no longer carrying a cellular plan that still bills you.

## References

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