

Apple Watch 6 rumors: Sleep tracking, blood oxygen levels and an Apple Watch for kids

The next Apple Watch (likely a Series 6) is still months away from making its grand debut alongside the rumored iPhone 12, 12 Pro and 12 Pro Max.

But there's still plenty of speculation surrounding a Series 6 smartwatch to hold us over in the meantime. We've compiled a roundup of plausible and compelling new features for the Apple Watch Series 6 based on the latest leaks, rumors and Apple patents.



Design: A round Apple Watch, but not this year

Save for a few minor changes such as larger screens, different materials and various watch band designs, the look of the watch hasn't changed much since Apple introduced the first Apple Watch in 2014. And this year will be no different.

Rumors of a circular watch face on the Apple Watch have been making the rounds for a few years now. Some of its Android counterparts like the Samsung Galaxy Watch have circular designs, so it wouldn't be too much of a stretch to think Apple would follow suit. To add fuel to the fire, the company has also issued a couple Apple Watch patents that show a round display. But so far, it's just a possibility; the existence of a patent doesn't guarantee Apple will use it in a product. Even if one of these patents does become a reality, it would likely take years. A change this big would require Apple to rework the hardware and software of the watch, and so far we

haven't heard anything that would indicate it's happening in 2020.

New watch face options, but no store

The Apple Watch has tons of customizable watch faces (known as "complications") ranging from animated Disney characters to weather-centric interfaces. But Apple still hasn't loosened the reins for third-party watch faces, and we don't see that changing anytime soon.

Instead Apple might allow users to *share* watch faces. According to a 9to5Mac, each watch face configuration will be shared as a unique file via AirDrop. The report, which cites leaked iOS 14 code as the source of its information, also says WatchOS 7, the next version of Apple's smartwatch software, will add an analog-style tachymeter to its design options that would measure speed and distance.

You may also be able to use shared albums from your photos app to create a customized watch face that cycles through the photos in that album. That means family members could add individual photos to the shared album for everyone in the group to see on their wrists.

Lastly, for patriotic users, WatchOS 7 may add an "international" option that lets you choose a country's flag as your watch face.

A new fitness app

Fitness has been at the core of the Apple Watch since its launch, and this year Apple may take it even further. According to MacRumors, the company is working on a standalone fitness app. Unlike the existing Activity app that tracks your progress and is already on the Apple Watch (and iPhone), this one would give you guided workouts for an assortment of different activities such as running, cycling, rowing, strength training, dance and yoga.

There's no shortage of third-party fitness apps like this for the Apple Watch, but a native fitness app could put a lot of those out of business. The app would be available on the iPhone and Apple TV as well as the Apple Watch. And it might be free. The MacRumors report says there's no evidence of in-app purchases, but that doesn't necessarily rule out a subscription based approach like Apple Music.

Native sleep tracking may finally arrive

This could finally be the year when Apple Watch gets native sleep tracking. Since acquiring the sleep sensor Beddit back in 2017, a tracker that sits under the mattress, there have been rumors about Apple integrating a similar feature in the Apple Watch. A "Sleep app" was also accidentally mentioned in a screenshot of Apple's preinstalled Alarm app in the App Store. The image was spotted by a reader of MacRumos back in October, and has since been removed.

Currently, sleep tracking is available on the Apple Watch through third-party apps and one of the biggest hurdles for Apple to offer it natively has been battery life. The current Apple Watch models last about a day and a half of normal use, but a feature like this would require overnight monitoring. This would likely drain the battery much faster. It's in the company's best interest to solve this issue soon though; many Apple Watch competitors like Fitbit and Samsung have had it on their devices for years.

Blood oxygen levels and other health features

Even if the Series 6 doesn't have native sleep tracking, Apple will likely continue expanding health and wellness features for the next Apple Watch.

This year's big health feature could be what's known as SPO2 tracking. This would allow the watch to measure your blood oxygen levels and alert you if it dips below a certain threshold, according to 9to5Mac. The Apple Watch already does something similar with heart rate, and alerts you if it detects an abnormally high, low or irregular heart rhythm indicative of atrial fibrillation (afib).

For this to be possible, the Series 6 could require a new type of sensor, likely a pulse oximeter. Or it might be able to pull with a software update and use the existing hardware. The Apple Watch already tracks VO2 max (or maximum oxygen consumption) inside the Activity app using the GPS and heart rate sensor during exercise.

Other health rumors include glucose and blood-pressure monitoring on the next Apple Watch, but these could be further off.

A kid-friendly Apple Watch

The leaked iOS 14 code reportedly also references new tools for parents. Rather than give their kids an iPhone, parents looking to stay connected with their kids, could set up a second Apple Watch (completely separate from theirs) using their iPhone and Apple ID as the host. This would also give parents the final say on what kind of content their kids can access on the watch like emergency contacts and music.

With a feature called SchoolTime in WatchOS 7, parents could even determine what apps can be used at what times to limit distractions in the classroom.

This would also mean adapting some of the health features for younger users. According to 9 to 5 Mac, the ring system (used for activity tracking) would be based on different metrics. The red move ring, for example, would track active minutes instead of active calories as it does with adults. The Watch will also incentivise kids to keep moving by offering virtual rewards when they take part in sports or outdoor activities.

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