

5 hidden iOS 27 upgrades that make a big difference – and why I love them

Not wowed by Siri AI? These other iOS 27 features and upgrades may finally convince you to update.

Jada Jones

Editor

Jada Jones is a journalist based outside of Atlanta, Georgia..

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Kerry Wan/ZDNET

ZDNET's key takeaways

- iOS 27 is more than just Siri AI and big, flashy features.
- New tricks for Fitness, CarPlay, and Messages are worth trying, too.
- Don't have Siri AI? No worries. You can try most of these upgrades.

I've been living with iOS 27 for a few weeks now, and as I continue using my phone, little nuggets of new, useful features keep popping up. Some are powered by Siri AI, while most are much smaller nice-to-haves.

Also: My 5 favorite Siri AI 'onscreen awareness' tricks – and why

If all you've seen is how Siri AI can make the iPhone experience more intuitive and seamless, but you aren't moved by conversational AI-powered upgrades, these little nice-to-haves may convince you to update your phone.

1. Safari Notify Me

If you're an avid online shopper like me, you like to keep an eye on that one thing you really want to buy but want to wait for it to go on sale. With Safari's Notify Me feature,

you can ask Safari to scan for specific changes on a webpage and notify you when they happen.

Also: Apple Wallet can split the bill for you in iOS 27 – plus 4 more cool upgrades

For example, I've had my eye on a specific Coach bag, but I always miss when it's discounted. I can tell Safari to notify me when the Coach listing has a price reduction and to check for it every day at 10:30 am. You're not limited to price drops of products; you can access this feature on any page in Safari, and you have the liberty to get creative about what you'd like it to notify you about.

2. Voice note playback speed

Between my long-distance friendships, my friends becoming first-time parents, my friends pursuing graduate degrees, and full-time jobs plaguing all of us, catching up over voice notes is far more convenient than scheduling phone calls. However, absentmindedly recording a voice note means lots of “ums” and “uhs,” and sometimes I wish I could speed up the playback instead of skipping around and missing something important.

Also: iOS 27 draining your iPhone battery? 7 ways to extend battery life

Now, iOS 27 allows faster voice note playback at 1x, 1.25x, 1.5x, and 2x speeds. When you open the message thread with the person who sent you the audio message, you can begin playing their voice note, and the playback speed bubble will appear on the voice note's message bubble.

3. CarPlay audio scrubber

If you listen to music, podcasts, or YouTube videos while driving, you sometimes want to go back and re-listen to a part without starting the audio from the beginning. In my car, I had to hold down the track rewind button on my steering wheel to go back in 15-second increments. Though this method worked, it was clunky.

Also: I'm an Android Auto ride or die – but Apple CarPlay beats it on these 3 features

An iOS 27 update to CarPlay introduces an audio scrubber that you can toggle on your car's infotainment screen, and it's available while you're driving (though I advise against using it then). To use the scrubber, open your media player, whether it's Spotify, Apple Music, or

YouTube. The scrubber is not available when your media player is in widget form.

4. More GymKit integration

As someone who ditched their Apple Watch, I always welcome more ways to track my fitness metrics with just my iPhone and AirPods Pro 3. Last year's iOS update introduced Fitness compatibility without an Apple Watch, and iOS 27 builds on it. Now, you can tap your iPhone to cardio machines with the NFC logo (it usually is labeled with "Connect to Apple Watch"), and the machine's metrics will be recorded in your iPhone's Fitness app.

Previously, when tracking a workout in Fitness, I had to perfectly sync my app's workout start time with the treadmill. Often, I was a few seconds off, or I forgot to do it entirely and missed my tracking. Now, I can tap my iPhone to the cardio machine, and it will automatically begin the corresponding workout.

Also: My favorite 5 watchOS 27 upgrades – and how to try them yourself

With my iPhone and AirPods Pro 3 for heart rate tracking, this feature records workout time, elapsed time, distance, active calories, total calories, elevation gain, average cadence, average pace, and average heart rate, with all

metrics taken from the machine and recorded in the Fitness app. This feature works with supported treadmills, ellipticals, cycling machines, and stair steppers.

The only drawback is that while your workouts are recorded accurately in Fitness, they do not close Activity rings; you still need an Apple Watch to do that.

5. Smoother network transitions

Faster network transitions are one of the less glamorous but incredibly useful iOS 27 features that I've been eagerly waiting for since Apple announced them at WWDC. One pain point for me previously was being on a voice call connected via my Wi-Fi network, getting in my car, pulling out of my garage, and my call dropping because my phone didn't transition from Wi-Fi to 5G quickly enough.

Also: Your iPhone just got a hidden anti-scram upgrade in iOS 27: How to enable it

Since updating my phone to iOS 27, I don't have this problem anymore, and it's wonderful. It's one of those features that runs in the background and better helps your phone blend into your life.

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