

Hey Google, do you really record everything I say? Yes.

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Google says it only records interactions with connected devices like the Google Home speaker when we use the "wake word," of "Hey, Google," or "OK, Google."

But when using many of the Google smartphone apps with a microphone for [voice search](#), or even Google on the desktop with [voice commands](#), it can actually record every word you say to it—whether you use the wake word or not.

The fine print is that you have to click on the microphone in the apps to communicate with Google. (For queries like "Hey, Google, find Italian restaurants near me.") Once you do that, Google will start transcribing you, word for word, and storing your commands, in text and audio, as U.S. TODAY discovered in tests this week.

This is similar to Google's monitoring of our keystrokes. The search giant takes note of every letter and word typed into the Google Chrome browser, and every website visited, unless you use "Incognito Mode" instead. (Remember, though, incognito doesn't mean invisible.)

How does the audio tracking get accepted? When you set up your Google account, it asks you to "opt-in" to let Google track your video and audio recordings.

In one of a series of e-mails to U.S. TODAY, Google said it does this to improve the accuracy of the Google Assistant.

Google is so all-encompassing on tracking us that when we started dictating a dummy phrase aloud into the Google Assistant app on an iPhone, Google transcribed every word.

The phrase: "We are told that Google only records you if you first use the wake word. Then how to explain this, huh?"

It recorded and transcribed every other query as well.

We tried again on a Google Pixel Android phone and on the web version of Google.com using the microphone from the built-in webcam on an Apple MacBook Pro and the results were strikingly similar. We were recorded every time.

In response, Google says it only records when you click on the

microphone. It adds that users have to "opt-in" to have [audio recordings](#) stored to your account.

But you're probably wondering when did I opt-in for this?

To get you to agree to this, Google asks you to opt-in, by making certain features available.

For instance, Google Maps has a service called "Match," which suggests restaurants based on your past dining experiences and tastes. If you click on it, Google sends you to Settings to allow Location History tracking.

Google also routes people to turn on Location History in exchange for "real-time traffic updates based on your current location" or with Google Photos to "help improve auto-organization and search."

Opt-in for those, and you'll be forever tracked.

Google says recording us can be used to improve speech systems. "You can let Google save a recording of your voice and other audio to give you more personalized experiences across Google services and to improve speech technologies for you and everyone."

In its lengthy pitch to get users to opt-in for audio tracking, it tells users they will get only a "limited" experience with the app if we don't accept audio tracking, as opposed to "full" which requires web, app, voice and audio activity for tracking calendar reminders, flights and more.

Say no, and the Assistant experience will be "limited to things like web results, jokes and local info."

To opt-out of Google's [audio](#) tracking, go to your Google account settings, by clicking the icon of you at the top right of the webpage or

app.

Click "Manage your Google account."

Select Data and Personalization.

Then Activity Controls, Web and App Activity.

De-select "Include Voice and Audio recordings."

Google will show you a pop-up window asking you to reconsider, saying that doing so "may limit" your personal experiences.

Once you did hit pause, Google reminds that all the records it's already made on you have been stored. You'll need to go in and manually delete them if you want them wiped off their servers.

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