

Apple Watch Series 6: Is it worth it to upgrade?

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It's been just over a week since Apple unveiled its latest fitness device: the Apple Watch Series 6.

The latest Apple Watch features a lot of you'd expect from the iPhone giant five years into the smartwatch game: more usable screen space, a brighter always-on display and more customization options.

At the core of the model upgrade is a [blood](#) oxygen sensor, which Apple stresses isn't a medical tool. But it can key you in to what's happening to your body beneath the surface.

"It is meant for fitness and wellness purposes," said Apple's vice president of health Sumbul Desai. "We're doing research to learn more."

Aside from the blood oxygen tool, Series 6, priced from \$399 and up, represents a modest step up from the previous generation with more color options and sleep tracking capabilities. Apple sent over a unit to test out, and here are my first impressions.

Blood oxygen levels

The blood oxygen app is straight forward and easy to use. Just tap Start, wait 15 seconds, and it'll display your results. You have to be completely still while it generates your results, otherwise, you'll get a few unsuccessful measurements like I did.

Ultimately, my blood oxygen saturation was 96%, according to the Apple Watch.

That information wasn't really actionable, or inherently useful though.

Oxygen saturation shows what percentage of oxygen is being carried by red blood cells from the lungs to the rest of the body. When you're in a healthy blood oxygen saturation range, around 95% or higher, Apple's latest watch feature doesn't really do you any good.

But health experts say the watch's ability to passively check for drops in your blood oxygen saturation can be a useful way of nudging you to see a licensed doctor if you drop into an unhealthy range.

"It's not useful day-to-day. It's really only helpful if it's low," said Dennis Deruelle, a physician and executive director at American Physician Partners. Certain illnesses, including COVID-19, could cause your [blood oxygen saturation](#) to go down, he added. But a doctor would have to diagnose what's truly happening.

Working out with Series 6

Since the Series 6 isn't scientifically approved to be a [medical device](#), its best described as a fitness device for those keen on tracking their calories burned, workout intensity and overall wellness.

I've spent the past several days comparing the latest edition to the iOS family to my old Series 4, which lacks the coveted always-on display but still has a similar design feel to the Series 6.

The differences during workouts were minuscule, at best. They both have the same fitness animations and display the same metrics as you work toward closing your rings or reaching your goals.

Maybe there will be more striking differences once Apple unlocks Fitness+, the company's upcoming fitness experience that'll give you streamable content from fitness trainers on your iPhone or iPad. The \$9.99-per-month service integrates real-time workout metrics from your

Apple Watch.

Until then, the differences between the new Apple Watches and the 2-year-old Series 4 are better reflected elsewhere.

So what's new?

One of the most striking differences was the color. Apple sent over a navy blue one to test out, though the Series 6 also comes in a new PRODUCT(RED) and graphite.

The Series 6 is also the first Apple Watch I've worn to bed at night, in part because 18-hours of battery life isn't enough to sustain two days of wear, and partially because there wasn't a native sleep tracker until now.

The latest WatchOS 7 software update introduced sleep tracking, Sleep Mode and Wind Down, so I decided to give those a shot. The native Sleep app feature tracks your slumber in the background, without any interaction from you.

I set my bedtime and the watch sent me a reminder when that time was approaching. I mostly ignored it, much like Apple's reminders to breathe, but I can see how it can come in handy for people who want to make sure they get their recommended eight hours every night.

Before going to bed, I ticked on the watch's Sleep Mode, which simplifies your watch face and puts the device in do not disturb mode so notifications don't wake you up. Also, the backlight was lowered, so it didn't keep me awake.

The next morning, the sleep app on the watch will display how many hours you slept, and any gaps in your slumber. I found out that I actually sleep fewer hours than initially thought.

And I'd likely continue to use the feature if the watch didn't die early the next morning.

Do you need the new Series 6?

While the Series 6 is solid, it's hard to recommend the smartwatch over previous versions. Blood [oxygen](#) isn't something you're likely to check every day, if ever, and that feature is the most notable new addition to Apple's family of devices.

Also, Fitbit's latest device monitors sleep but has a longer battery life and can check for fever symptoms, so that's a strong contender, too.

If you're locked into the world of iOS, want something new to toy with, or need a new workout tracker, the Series 6 could be well suited for you. If you're excited about Apple unlocking Fitness+ soon, the latest watch with the most updated bells and whistles might also be worth checking out.

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