

# What is USB-C, the charging socket that replaced Apple's Lightning cable?

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A USB-C cable is pictured in San Jose, Calif. Tuesday, March 10, 2015. Apple is ditching its in-house iPhone charging plug and falling in line with the rest of the tech industry by adopting USB-C, a more widely used connection standard. Credit: AP Photo/Jeff Chiu, File

Bye, Lightning cable. Hello, USB-C.

Apple is [ditching its in-house iPhone charging plug](#) and falling in line with the rest of the tech industry by adopting a more widely used connection standard. A big part of the reason is a European Union common charging rule that's coming soon for the 27-nation bloc.

Here's a look at the USB-C plug and what it means for consumers:

## **WHAT IS USB-C AND HOW CAN I TELL IT APART FROM OTHER PLUGS?**

The first part of the acronym stands for Universal Serial Bus, and it replaces earlier versions of the USB cables used on everything from printers and hard drives to computer mice and Kindle readers.

The USB-C plug comes in a different shape than its predecessors—an elongated oval. It's also symmetrical and reversible, which eliminates one of the common gripes about previous versions like the rectangular USB-A connectors because there's no wrong way to [plug](#) it in.

## **WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT USB-C?**

USB-C cables can carry more power so laptops can be charged faster, and they enable faster data transfer speeds, allowing a big trove of files to be copied from a computer to an external hard drive. At the same time, they can pump out a video signal to a monitor and supply power to connected accessories.

The USB-C connector also is designed to be future-proof. Its shape won't change but newer versions—and the devices they connect to—will come with upgraded capabilities. That means users will have to beware because older devices might not be able to support the latest specs.

It's also slimmer than boxy USB-A plugs, making them a better fit for newer devices that keep getting smaller.



A customer holds a Lightning to 3.5mm headphone jack adapter cable at the Apple Store on Michigan Avenue, Friday, Sept. 16, 2016, in Chicago. Apple is ditching its in-house iPhone charging plug and falling in line with the rest of the tech industry by adopting USB-C, a more widely used connection standard.

Credit: AP Photo/Kiichiro Sato, File

## **WHY IS APPLE USING IT?**

Apple has long championed its proprietary Lightning connector for iPhones even though pretty much no one else used it. It resisted the EU's common charging push, citing worries that it would limit innovation and end up hurting consumers.

Apple held out even as others started adding USB-C connectors into their devices. But after the EU proposal won a key approval last year, the U.S. tech giant gave in and didn't look back.

A company executive unveiling the latest iPhone on Tuesday didn't even mention the Lightning cable as she introduced its replacement.

"USB-C has become a universally accepted standard so we're bringing USB-C to iPhone 15," said Kaiann Drance, vice president of iPhone product marketing.

She said USB-C has "been built into Apple products for years" and can now be used on MacBooks, iPads, iPhones and AirPods.

## **WHAT ROLE DID EUROPE PLAY?**

Apple's shift is an example of how European Union regulations often end up rippling around the world—what's known as the "Brussels effect"—as companies decide it's easier to comply than make different products for different regions.

The EU spent more than a decade cajoling the tech industry into adopting a common charging standard. The push to impose rules for a uniform cable are part of the bloc's wider effort to make products sold in the EU more sustainable and cut down on electronic waste.

The EU's common charging rule won't actually take effect until fall 2024. It covers phones, tablets, e-readers, earbuds, digital cameras,

headphones and headsets, handheld video game consoles, keyboards and mice, portable speakers and navigation devices.

It also standardizes fast-charging technology and gives consumers the right to choose whether to buy new devices with or without a charger.

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