

Apple announces new \$249 AirPods Pro with noise cancellation (Update)

28 October 2019, by Edward C. Baig, Usa Today



Credit: Apple

For nearly three years now, everywhere you go there are the pod people—folks with those ubiquitous white wireless AirPod earbuds perched in their ears. Still, despite their popularity, AirPods have lacked one major feature for listeners who want to block out external sounds while fully immersing themselves in the music.

That's "Active Noise Cancellation," the key ingredient driving the long-rumored new AirPods Pro that finally hit Apple Stores on Wednesday. The \$249 buds—yes, they're expensive—go on sale just as rival Amazon's new EchoBuds arrive, also with their own version of noise cancellation, but for \$120 less.

According to Apple, the noise cancellation inside AirPods Pro is accomplished through a pair of microphones—one outward-facing, the other inward—that are combined with advanced software. Apple says noise cancellation continuously adapts the sound signal 200 times per second.

But the new AirPods also have a feature called

"Transparency Mode," similar to the Ambient Mode feature on Samsung's \$130 Galaxy Buds, which, for example, will let you hear the captain's greeting or some other announcement on an airplane at the same time you're listening to a song.

You can switch modes by apparently squeezing a force sensor along the stem that hangs down from your ear lobe. You can also use that sensor, Apple says, to skip tracks or answer and end phone calls. Siri can also handle such tasks, via a "Hey, Siri" voice command.

Apple is claiming about five hours of listening time between charges, same as on existing models, or about a half-hour less if active noise cancellation is activated. The new models support wireless charging. And by charging them in their wireless charging case, Apple says you'll get more than 24 hours of listening time or over 18 hours of talk time.

The earbuds come with three different sizes of soft, flexible silicone ear tips to help provide a comfortable fit. We'll be putting a pair in our own ears to determine just how comfy that is, while also judging the most important consideration for would-be buyers, sound quality.

For those people who don't want to spend quite so much, Apple will still be selling AirPods with a conventional charging case for \$159, and models with a wireless charging case for \$199.

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APA citation: Apple announces new \$249 AirPods Pro with noise cancellation (Update) (2019, October 28) retrieved 22 September 2020 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2019-10-apple-debuts-airpods-pro-noise.html>

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