

How to make sure Google automatically deletes your data on a regular basis

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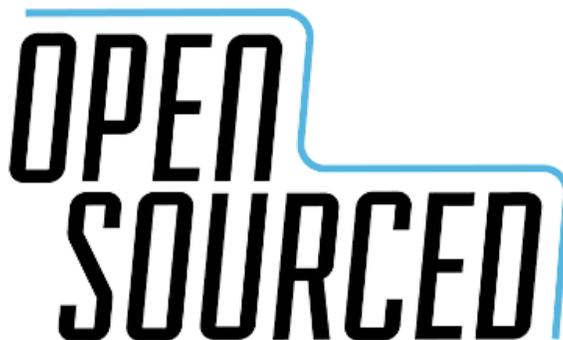
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Google is making it easier for users to auto-delete data like their search histories.

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Google is making it easier to delete the data it collects about you — though you might still have to do a little work to enable the feature.

The company announced on Wednesday that auto-delete will be the default setting for user account activity settings. That said, this “default” setting only applies to new accounts or existing accounts that now turn on data retention after having it disabled. And the default auto-delete time still gives Google as much as three years of your data, as opposed to manual auto-delete settings that keep as little as three months’ worth.

Google also announced that its account privacy and security settings will soon be accessible through its search page. You’ll also be able to switch over to Chrome’s Incognito mode in its apps more easily — simply press down on your profile photo for a second or two. Incognito mode lets you browse the internet “privately,” which means Google Chrome won’t save your history or cookies on your computer. It does not, however, mean that the websites you visit or the server you use can’t see what you’re doing.

The Google announcement comes just a couple days after rival Apple announced some new privacy features for its software. More on that in a second.

If you have a Google account and use Google products like Gmail, YouTube, or Chrome, you’re probably logged in all the time. In this case, your activity while using those apps and services can be tracked by Google, which will then use that data to target ads to you, among

other things. Over the years, Google has introduced privacy controls over the data you send the company and has made efforts to make those features more obvious to users.

You can find most of these privacy controls in [your account](#) settings by clicking on “[Manage your data & personalization](#).” From there, you can click on “[Manage your activity controls](#).” This is the section where you can save your web and app activity, location history, and YouTube history if you want Google to use that data to give you what it calls a “more personalized experience.” Or you can just ask Google not to save anything and have an impersonal, but more private, experience.

If you decide that you do, in fact, want the personalized experience, you can still manually delete that data whenever you want or set it to auto-delete after a certain amount of time. With the newly announced changes, Google is trying to make it easier to enjoy the best of both worlds, both private and personalized, by making auto-delete the default setting for web and app activity, location history, and YouTube history.

And now, the other caveats. If you have an existing account that has these things turned on — and, except for location history, they are on by default — then you’ll still have to turn on auto-delete yourself. This default setting only applies to new accounts or existing accounts that turn data collection back on. Which means millions of users won’t have this feature enabled by default after all.

How to set your Google data to auto-delete.

Google

It appears that Google is also making more of an effort to notify existing users that they have the option to turn on auto-delete. The [Google search page](#), for instance, now has a little notice and link to the setting beneath the main search field. Also, that default auto-delete time still gives Google a big chunk of your history: 18 months for web and app activity and location history, and 36 months — three years! — for YouTube histories.

The timing of this announcement is interesting, given that Apple [announced two days ago](#) that, in the upcoming releases of iOS 14 and macOS Big Sur, apps will be required to get user permission to track them. Apple’s operating system updates will also require app developers to post a clear notice telling them what is being tracked. Apple’s move toward greater transparency and control could represent a huge boost for user privacy, one that Google does not yet offer in its Google Play store.

The data Google collects about its users is a big part of its business model. Google and its parent company, Alphabet, pull in [billions of dollars](#) in revenue from ads, which are worth more when they’re targeted to the people most likely to buy the product they sell. So while Google has [made some improvements](#) in user privacy and control, it’s had a tough time convincing the general public that it truly cares about keeping their data private. And in

this regard, Google has lagged behind some of its peers, like Apple, whose business model relies far more on goods and services than data and ads.

Given how relatively few accounts will have this default auto-delete feature and the large amount of data that is retained even with it, it's hard to say how much of a difference Google's updates will really make in user privacy. But it does show that the company is trying to improve it — or at least make us think it is.

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