

Alyssa Den Dulk

Touch More Than the Screen

What is the back tap? The little-known feature streamlining the iPhone experience beyond the screen since iOS 14.

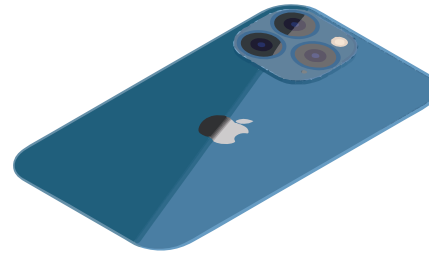


Touch More Than the Screen

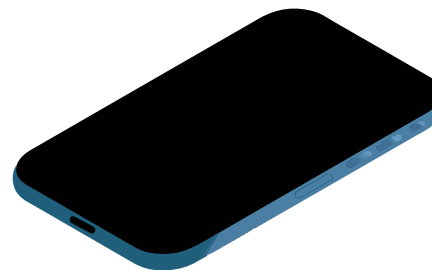
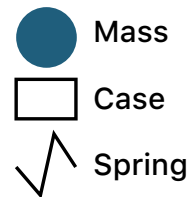
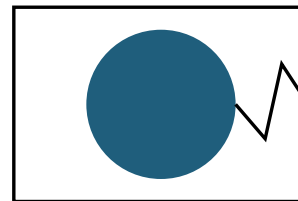
Alyssa Den Dulk

Back tap on iPhone, a feature not known by many users. Between being only briefly mentioned at the end of the iOS 14 new features list no one reads and being under a few layers of accessibility settings that people who don't need them don't really use, it's no wonder so few people have gotten the chance to incorporate this feature into their regular phone use. To set it up, you go into settings – accessibility – touch, and then at the very bottom of the page, it can be turned on. Once activated, back tap can be used to quickly access up to two features with two or three taps on the back of your phone. These range from turning on the flashlight, turning on the camera, screenshotting, or mute. Is it worth the trouble?

The technology in an iPhone that lets it have back tap to begin with is an accelerometer. This is what allows the phone to sense vibration and acceleration, giving it the necessary information to perform a range of tasks. For example, the accelerometer is also why a phone can tell that it has been turned



Accelerometer



sideways and can turn the screen to match. Accelerometers measure force applied to it, such as gravity or tapping against it, and applies it to functions on the phone. The way it measures these forces is usually by having a mass on a spring in a case. As it gets moved around the mass lags behind, like when a car accelerates and the passenger gets jerked backwards, and the amount the spring stretches or compresses is measured. The best part of all, this means that back tap works through almost any phone case imaginable.

As it sits in the accessibility settings, it's easy to guess that the back tap feature can help those with accessibility issues. The average user can take for granted the number of fine motor skills, visual cues, and memory necessary to consistently swipe and tap the screen in increasingly complex patterns. As much as it can be an annoyance, many people with mental and physical disabilities and divergencies often find these actions difficult or even detrimental to the regular use

of features on their iPhones. The back tap allows users who are struggling to take two of their most used, or most difficult, features and simplify them to a double or triple tap on the back of their phone, no matter what is happening on the screen.

Although the accessibility features are put in place to help those who need them, they aren't exclusive. Fully abled users can use them too, and it can be extremely beneficial. Everyone has something on their phone that they use all the time, but it's always annoying or difficult to get to quickly. It may be something as simple as turning on the flashlight without having to open multiple menus first or activating a complex shortcut that's been set up through the shortcuts app. The back tap feature can become an essential part of anyone's regular daily use of their phone, simplifying processes and speeding up access to their favourite functions.

When it comes down to it, every iPhone user has different needs from their phone,

the back tap feature is versatile enough to be able to fulfil a wide range of them. Once a user knows where to find it, it takes only seconds to set up something that will save them time, effort, and frustrations down the line, streamlining the experience on iPhone. It is always worthwhile to make day-to-day activities easier where possible, and the simple shortcut of tapping the back of a phone to access someone's favourite features is an incredible way to use the iPhone more effectively. Not only can the everyday user benefit, but accessibility for those who struggle is significantly easier from such a simple addition to the iPhone.



References:

Ajaay. (2022). *Back Tap Shortcut on iPhone: Everything You Need to Know*. Nerds Chalk. Retrieved from <https://nerdschalk.com/back-tap-shortcut-on-iphone-everything-you-need-to-know/>
Apple. (2020). *About iOS 14 Updates*. Retrieved from <https://support.apple.com/en-us/HT211808>
Roudaut, A., Baglioni, M., Lecolinet, E. (2009). *TimeTilt: Using Sensor-Based Gestures to Travel through Multiple Applications on a Mobile Device*. In: , et al. *Human-Computer Interaction - INTERACT 2009*. INTERACT 2009. Lecture Notes in Computer Science, vol 5726. Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg.

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-03655-2_90
Woodford. C. (2022). *Accelerometers*. EXPLAINTHATSTUFF! Retrieved from <https://www.explainthatstuff.com/accelerometers.html#how-work>