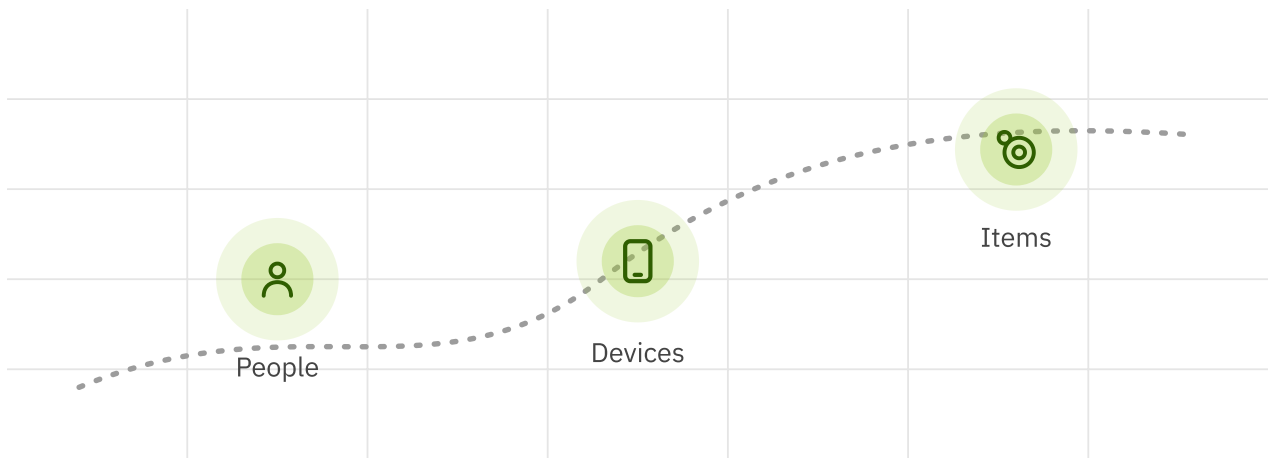


Find My, Explained

How Apple finds your people, your phone and your things, including the AirTag in your suitcase, and what you should turn on before your next trip.



The short answer

You, your phone, an AirTag in your purse, the AirTag tied to your keys. Find My keeps track of all of them. It's one app that finds three kinds of things, and it works on your iPhone, iPad, Mac and Apple Watch.

People

Friends and family who choose to share where they are. Nobody is shared without saying yes.

Devices

Your Apple gear. It can be found even with no signal, and a newer iPhone even when it's switched off for a while.

Items

AirTags and similar tags. Made for things, not people or pets. They have no GPS. Other people's iPhones find them for you.

The one idea behind all of it

An AirTag can't tell anyone where it is. It only sends out a little Bluetooth chirp that says "I'm here." An iPhone that passes by hears it and reports its *own* location. That report is sealed so only you can read it.

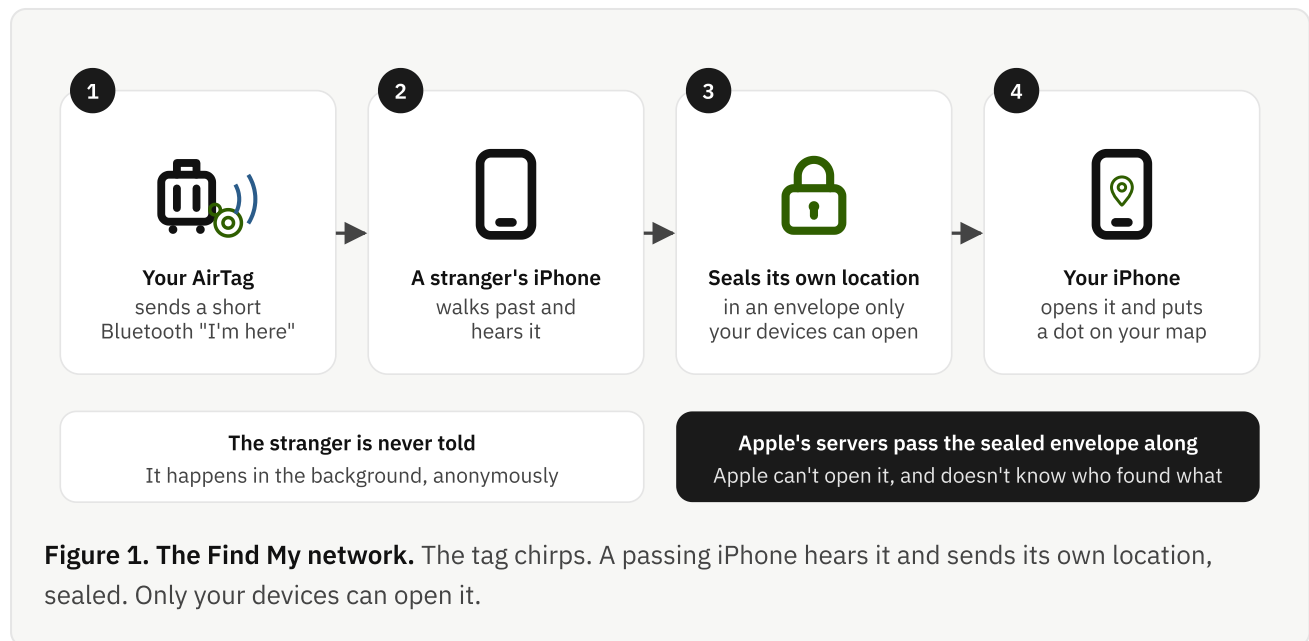
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HOW IT WORKS

How a stranger's phone finds your bag

Your suitcase is on a baggage cart. An AirTag is inside. Nobody has to do anything for what happens next.



Someone else's iPhone, a stranger's, walks by, drives by, or just happens to be in the neighborhood. It hears your tag's chirp, works out where it is itself, and sends that spot to Apple inside a sealed envelope. Your phone opens the envelope and shows a dot on the map.

It sounds a little scary that a stranger is involved. It isn't. It all happens in the background, anonymously. The stranger never knows, and even Apple can't open the envelope. Only you can.

Why it stays private

The tag's ID changes about every 15 minutes

7F3A...	C019...	5B8E...	E24D...
9:00	9:15	9:30	9:45

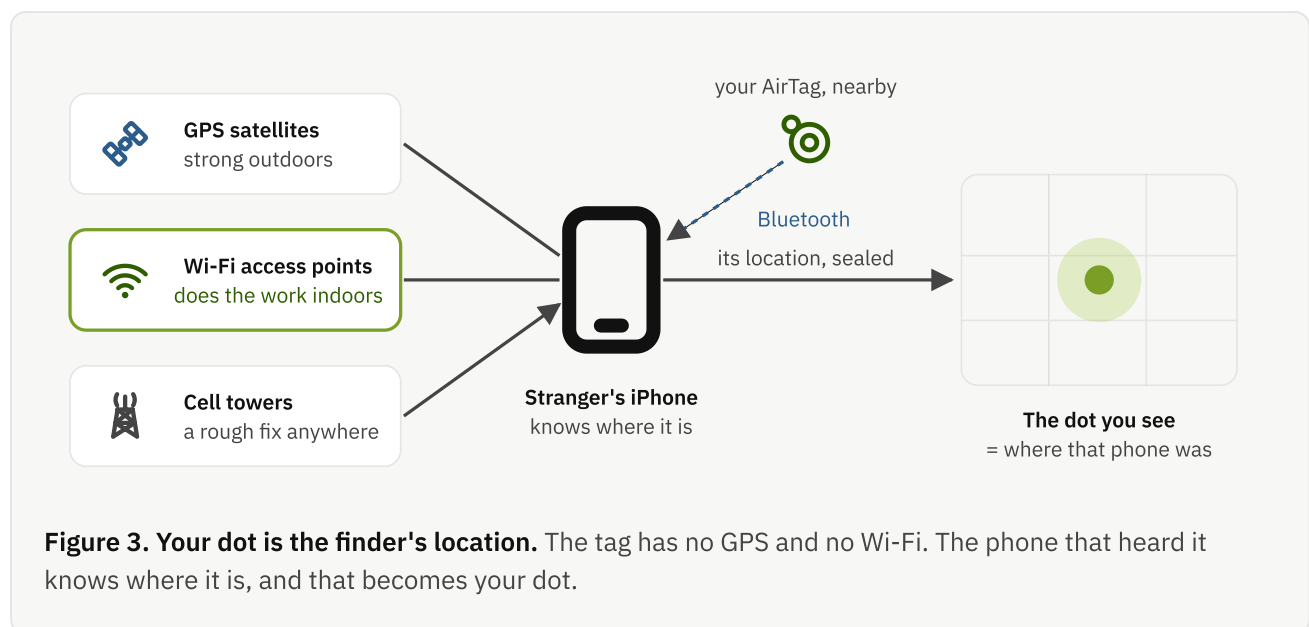
An eavesdropper sees four unrelated codes.

Only your devices know they are the same tag.

Figure 2. The tag keeps changing its name. Its radio ID changes about every 15 minutes, so nobody can follow it by listening.

- 1 The key stays with you.** Only your own devices can open the reports.
- 2 The finder stays anonymous.** Apple doesn't know who found the tag, or whose it is.
- 3 The tag keeps no history.** It doesn't store where it has been.

Where the dot comes from



So the dot moves only when someone walks by. At a soccer game or in a busy airport, phones are everywhere and the dot updates often. In the same plaza at three in the morning, it may not move for hours.

Three radios, three jobs

Far away, you see a dot on a map. In the same room, you play a sound. Up close, some iPhones show an arrow.

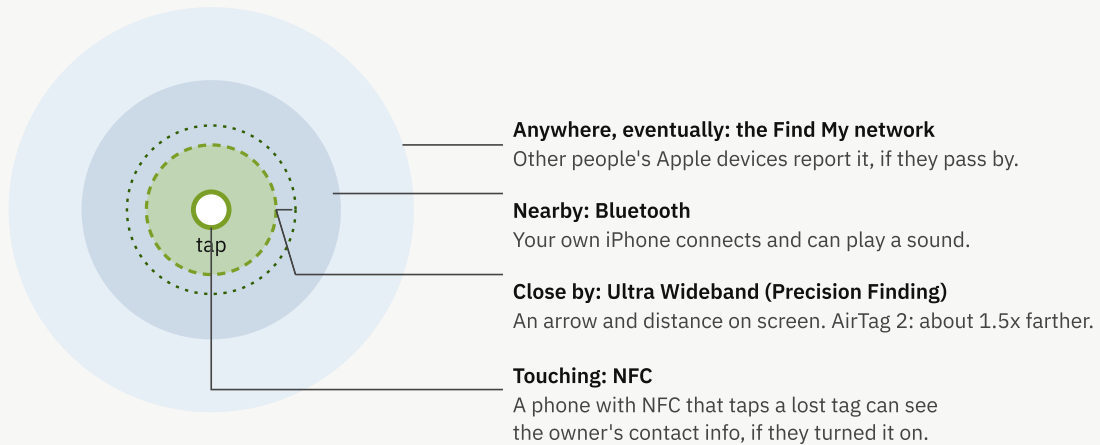


Figure 4. Three radios, three jobs. The farther away the tag is, the rougher the answer. Not to scale.

The arrow is called Precision Finding. It's what tells you your keys are on the couch, two meters away. It needs a special radio called Ultra Wideband in both the phone and the tag. Some iPhone models leave it out. They can still see the map and play a sound.

A word on the words

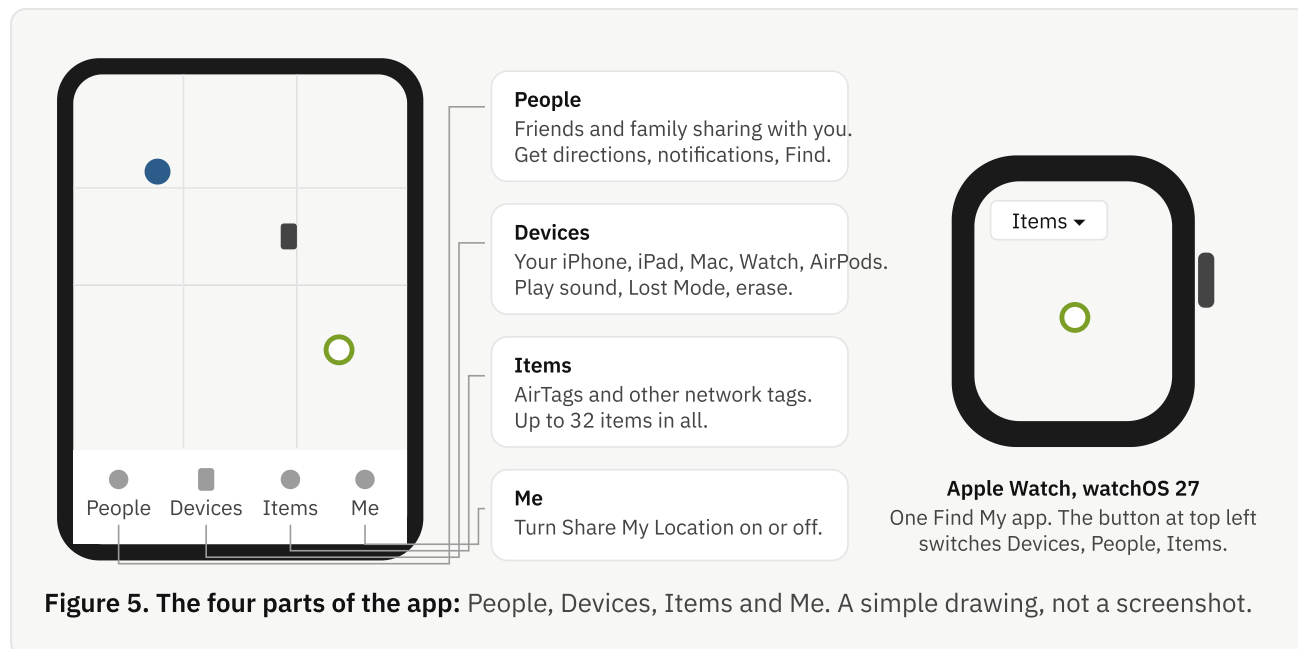
Bluetooth is the short-range radio your earbuds use. **Ultra Wideband** is a newer short-range radio that can tell distance and direction. It powers the arrow. **NFC** works only when you're close enough to touch, the same radio you use to tap to pay.

The arrow isn't available in every country. There, you still get the map and the sound.

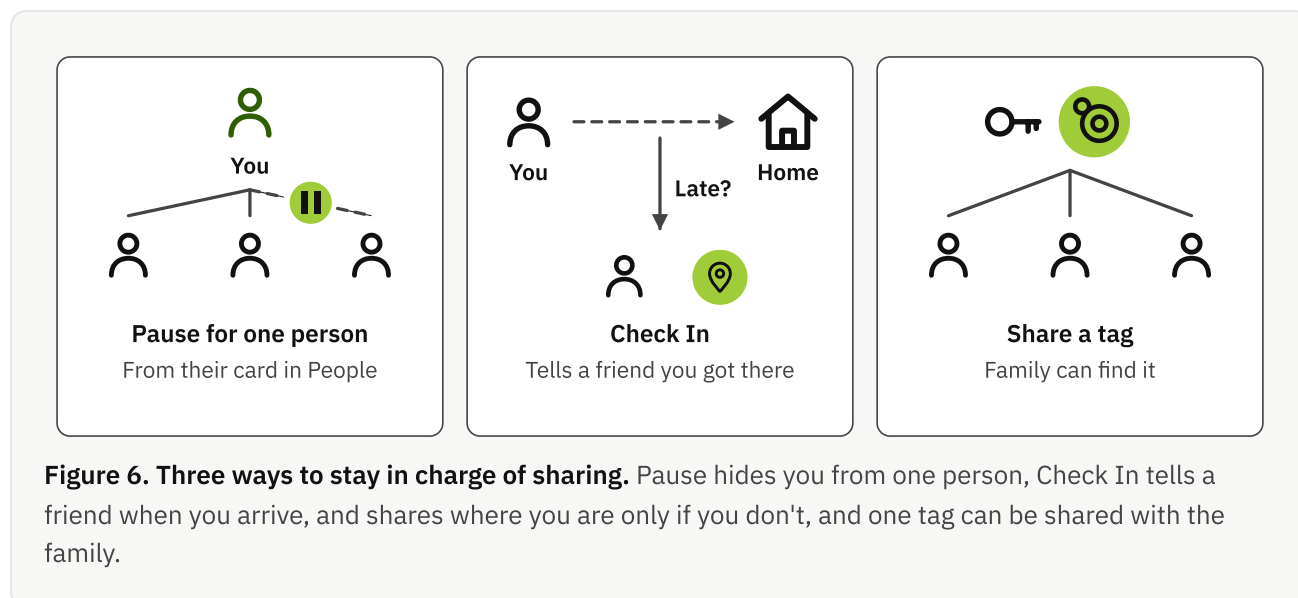
From my own travels

On a trip to Italy, my family spread out in the busy plaza outside the Pantheon, and we got separated from my wife in the crowd. She shares her location with me, and both our iPhones support the arrow. I opened Find My and tapped her name. After a few seconds I got an arrow on my screen and how many feet away she was. We walked that direction and walked right into her.

The app, and sharing with people



Sharing your location is always your choice. You pick who sees it, when, and for how long, person by person and tag by tag, and you can stop any time. When my family travels together, we share our luggage tags, so any of us can see where the bags are.



Your phone, even when it dies

Left your phone somewhere and think the battery is dead? A newer iPhone keeps a little power in reserve, so it can still be found for a while. So can one that's switched off.

**On, with signal**

Reports itself directly, GPS, Wi-Fi and cell.

**Battery dead**

Power reserve: findable for up to 5 hours.

**Switched off**

Findable for up to 24 hours through the Find My network.

Figure 7. Still findable. With a signal, your phone reports itself. With a dead battery or switched off, it can still be found for a while through the Find My network.

Turn on **Send Last Location**. When the battery is almost gone, your phone sends its spot to Apple first. Step 1 at the back shows where.

 STOP**If a device is lost or stolen**

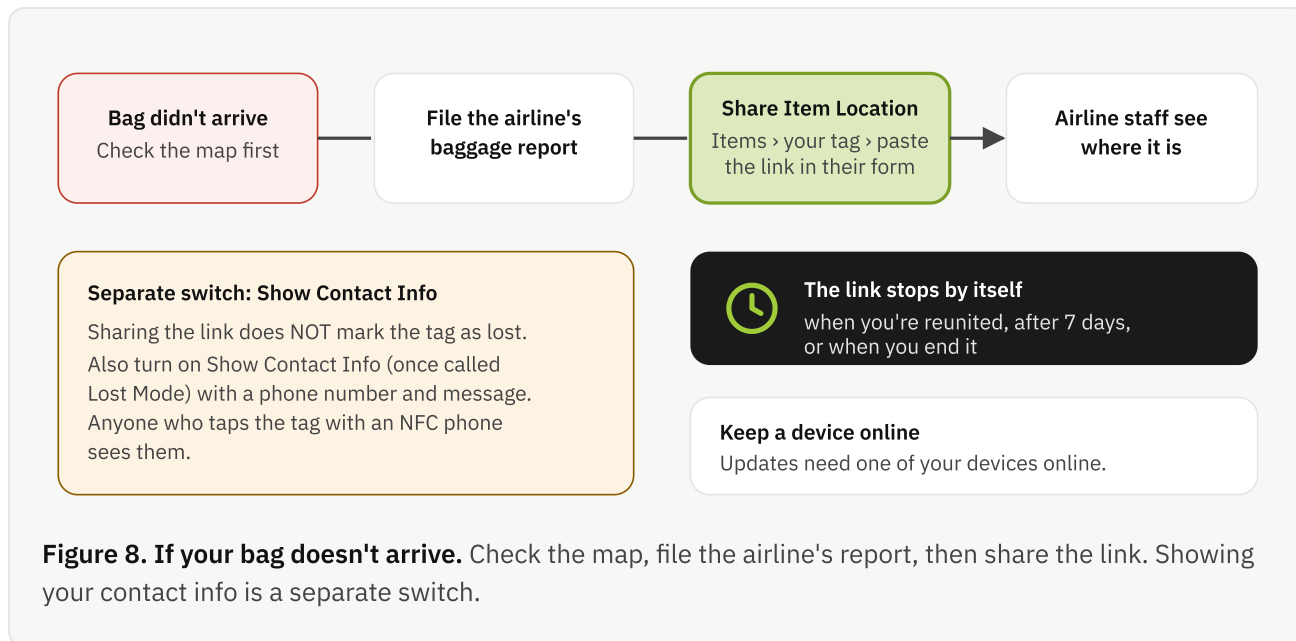
Mark it as lost in Find My, from another device or at icloud.com/find. That locks it. Erasing it is the last step. **Apple will never contact you to say your device was found.** Never share your passcode or any code with someone who says they have it.

It used to be harder

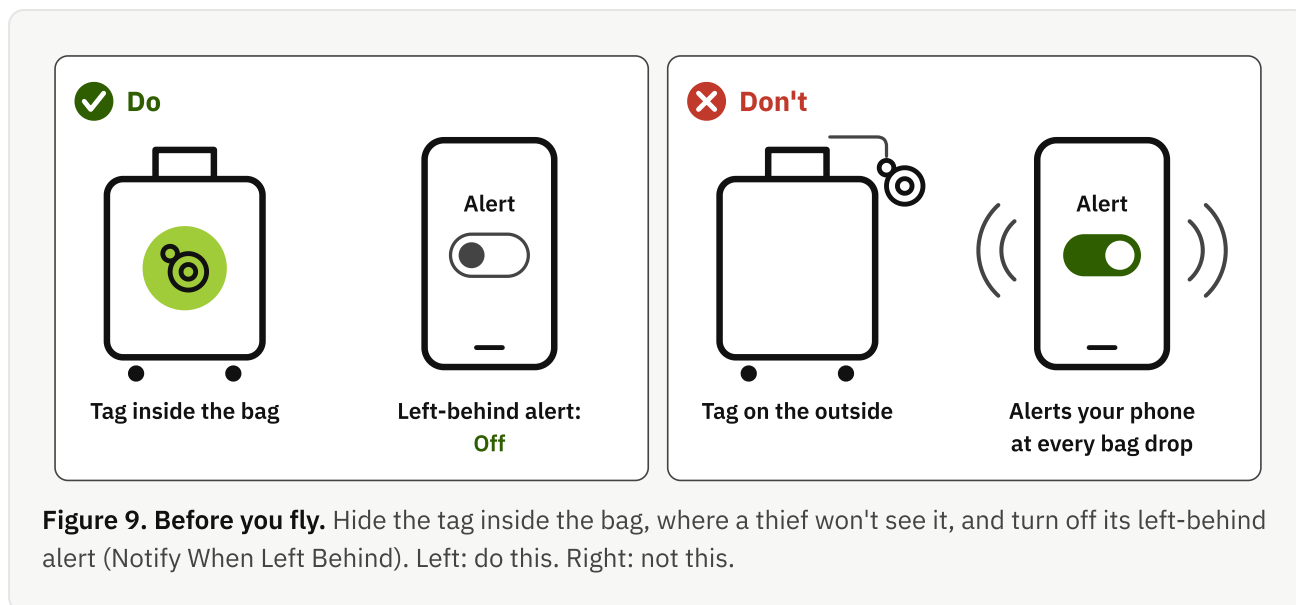
Years ago I lost an iPad on a flight. Find My showed it right behind the airline's counter, and they still wouldn't let me back there to get it. Today, if there's an AirTag in your bag, many airlines let you share its location right from their lost-baggage page.

Lost luggage

You can send an airline a live link to your bag's location. Many airlines now accept it.



Before you fly



- **Check the battery:** in Find My, look for a Low Battery note under the tag's name. They're cheap coin batteries. Buy a multi-pack, and keep spares away from children.
- **Name each tag clearly,** like "Blue suitcase".

A tracker that isn't yours

If someone else's tag travels with you, your phone can warn you, as long as Bluetooth and Location Services are on and Airplane Mode is off. iPhones do this, and so do most Android phones.

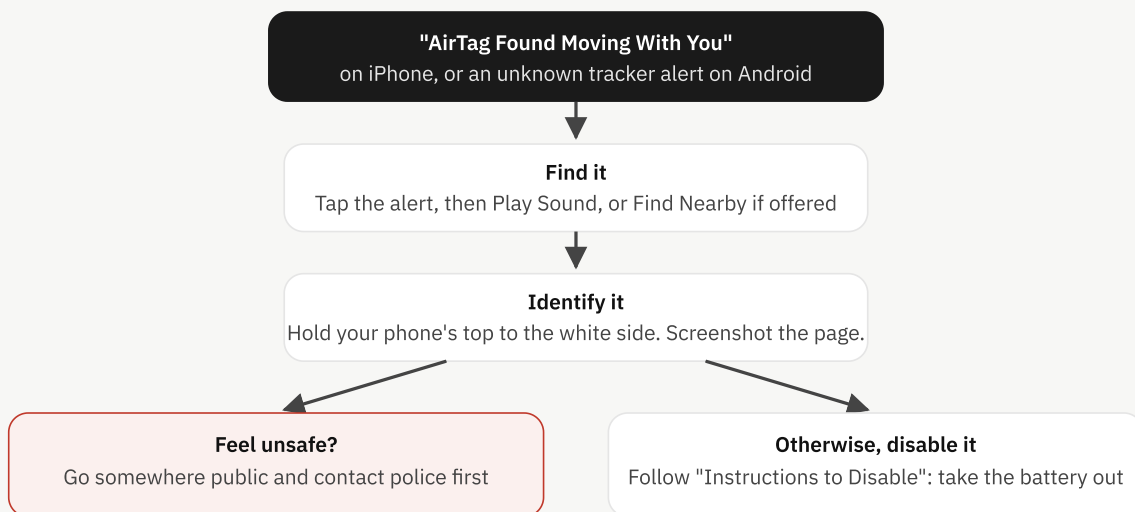


Figure 10. What to do if you get an alert. Find it, identify it, and if you feel unsafe, go somewhere public and call the police first.

⚠ STOP

Why "police first" matters

When you pull the battery, the owner stops getting updates and may notice. If you think someone is following you on purpose, keep the tag, go somewhere public, and get help before you disable it. That's our advice, not an Apple rule.

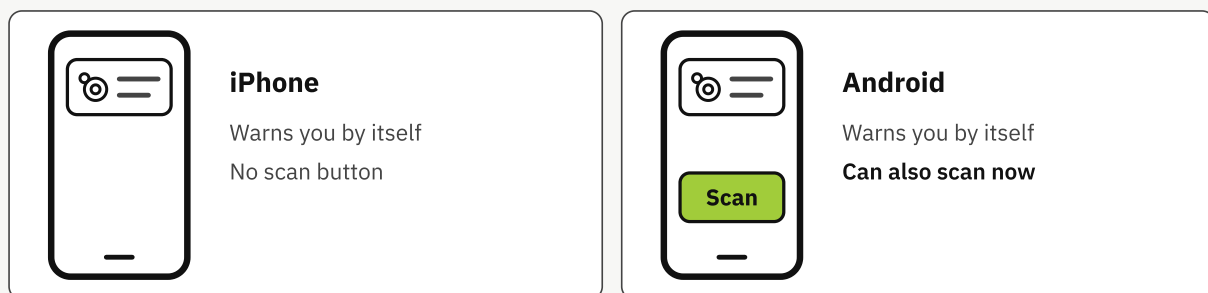


Figure 11. Both phones warn you. Only Android can also scan. An iPhone warns you on its own, but has no button to search the room on demand.

Five things people get wrong

Each myth is followed by what's true.

MYTH An AirTag is a GPS tracker.

FACT It has no GPS, no Wi-Fi and no cell radio. Its location comes from iPhones that pass by.

MYTH Apple can see where my AirTag is.

FACT The reports are locked with a key only your devices hold.

MYTH The map updates every few seconds.

FACT It updates when an iPhone passes by. That can be often in an airport and never in a field.

MYTH My iPhone can scan the room for hidden trackers.

FACT It warns you on its own, but has no scan button. Android phones do.

MYTH Every iPhone can point an arrow at my AirTag.

FACT The arrow needs Ultra Wideband. iPhones without it can still see the map and play a sound.

Step-by-step settings

The › symbol means "then tap". Button names can change a little between updates.

Get your devices ready

1. Turn on Find My for your iPhone

Do this first. Without it, nothing else in this guide works for your phone.

- 1 Open **Settings** › **[your name]** › **Find My**.
- 2 Tap **Find My iPhone** and turn it on.
- 3 Turn on **Find My network**, so the phone can be found while it's offline or switched off.
- 4 Turn on **Send Last Location**.
- 5 Check **Settings** › **Privacy & Security** › **Location Services** is on.

2. Set up an AirTag

Turn on Bluetooth first. An AirTag 2 needs iOS 26.2.1 or later.

- 1 Pull the plastic tab out of the AirTag. It chimes.
- 2 Hold it next to your unlocked iPhone and tap **Connect**.
- 3 Pick a name, or **Custom Name** and an emoji, then **Continue**.
- 4 Agree to link it to your Apple Account, then **Done**.

If the prompt doesn't appear: **Find My** › **+** › **AirTag**.

3. Change an AirTag's name or emoji

- 1 **Find My** › **Items** › tap the tag.
- 2 Scroll down to **Settings** and tap **Change Name and Emoji**, choose **Custom Name**, type the name and pick an emoji.

4. Share an AirTag with up to five people

Handy for family keys or a shared car.

- 1 **Find My** > **Items** > tap the tag.
- 2 Under **Share AirTag**, tap **Add Person**, choose the person and their Apple Account, and send.
- 3 To stop: tap the person's name > **Remove**.

Travel and lost items

5. Get an alert if you leave something behind

Leave this off for the tag in your checked bag.

- 1 **Find My** > **Items** > tap the tag (or **Devices** > a device).
- 2 Under **Notify Me**, tap **When Left Behind** and turn it on.
- 3 Add places where it's fine to leave it, like home: pick a suggestion or tap **New Location**, then **Done**.

6. Share a lost item's location with an airline

- 1 File the airline's lost-baggage report first.
- 2 **Find My** > **Items** > tap the tag. Under **Lost AirTag**, tap **Share Item Location**.
- 3 If your iPhone says **Item Is With You**, the bag is too close. This only works once the bag is away from you.
- 4 Paste the link into the airline's form, or send it to the agent.
- 5 You can see who opened the link, and stop sharing from the same screen.
- 6 Keep at least one of your Apple devices online, or the link stops updating.
- 7 The people you send it to can see the tag's serial number and your Apple Account email or phone number.

7. Mark an AirTag as lost (Show Contact Info)

- 1 **Find My** > **Items** > tap the tag.
- 2 Under **Lost AirTag**, tap **Show Contact Info**.
- 3 Follow the prompts to enter a phone number and a short message.
- 4 Turn it off in the same place once you have the item back.

8. Use the on-screen arrow (Precision Finding)

Needs a newer iPhone. Some iPhone models don't have it.

- 1 **Find My** > **Items** > tap the tag > **Find**.
- 2 Move slowly and follow the arrow and distance. Tap the speaker button if you're close.
- 3 A newer Apple Watch can do this too, from the Find My app.

People

9. Share your location with someone

- 1 **Find My** > **Me** > turn on **Share My Location**.
- 2 **People** > **+** > **Share My Location** > choose the person.
- 3 Choose how long: **For One Hour**, **For Today**, **Always**, or **Custom** (anywhere from 15 minutes to 30 days).
- 4 For a family group: **Settings** > **Family** > **Location Sharing**.

10. Use Check In when you head home

- 1 In Messages, open the conversation with the person > **+** > **Check In**.
- 2 Tap **Edit** and choose **When I arrive** (pick the destination) or **After a timer**.
- 3 Tap Send. It ends by itself when you arrive.

11. Pause your location for one person (iOS 27)

- 1 **Find My** > **People** > tap the person's name.
- 2 Under **My Location**, tap **Hide Location**. To stop sharing with them for good, scroll down to **Stop Sharing My Location**.

Safety and upkeep

12. If you get "AirTag Found Moving With You"

- 1 Tap the alert > **Continue**.
- 2 Tap **Play Sound**, or **Find Nearby** if your iPhone offers it.
- 3 Hold the top of your iPhone to the white side of the tag and screenshot what appears.
- 4 If you feel unsafe, go somewhere public and contact police. Otherwise tap **Instructions to Disable** and remove the battery.

13. Change an AirTag's battery

Keep new and used coin batteries away from children. A swallowed one can cause serious injury or death within hours.

- 1 Press the steel cover and turn it counterclockwise until it stops, then lift it off.
- 2 Put in a new coin battery (CR2032), + side up. Look for packs marked "Compatible with Apple AirTag".
- 3 Line up the three tabs, press and turn clockwise until it stops.

SOURCES

Where these facts come from

Checked against Apple's pages in September 2026.

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- Apple 109512, Precision Finding and Ultra Wideband availability by device and country
- Apple 120373, Find My on Apple Watch (watchOS 27)
- Apple 105104, share your location; Apple 105107, Family Sharing location
- Apple 104978, if your device or item is lost
- Apple 102414, Notify When Left Behind
- Apple 119874, unwanted tracking alerts
- Apple 101602, set up AirTag (32-item limit, iOS 26.2.1 for AirTag 2)
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- Apple Newsroom, 2026-01-26: AirTag (2nd generation)
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- Apple Personal Safety User Guide: Check In, Find My and location sharing
- Google Android Help 13658562: unknown tracker alerts and Scan now

About this guide

Written for people who aren't technical and want to know what Find My does before they need it. Apple, AirTag, iPhone, Apple Watch and Find My are trademarks of Apple Inc. This guide is independent and isn't affiliated with or endorsed by Apple.