How to Use Time Machine on macOS

This guide will demonstrate how to enable Time Machine backups on your macOS device, setup multiple backup locations, and recover your data.

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INTRODUCTION

Time Machine, a built-in function to macOS since OS X 10.5 Leopard, is the easiest way to back up and recover your Mac from hard drive failure. Before beginning any Mac repairs, follow this guide to ensure you have protection against any data loss.

This guide includes some optional steps, such as enabling backups to multiple drives.

Step 1 — Enable Time Machine

- Select **System Preferences** from the Apple menu.

- Click the **Time Machine** icon in the bottom row.

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Step 2

(i) If you haven't already, plug in your external drive, or join to the network your NAS is connected to.

● Click the **Select Backup Disk** button.

● Select the disk you'd like to make backups to from the list.

(i) External backup drives must be HFS (Mac OS X Journaled) formatted to work with Time Machine, not APFS, NTFS, etc.

(i) Networked devices should appear automatically on this list. Consult your NAS' manual for assistance.

(i) Check the **Encrypt backups** checkbox for additional data security, especially if your backup device is portable.

Step 3

ⓘ If you chose not to encrypt your backups, you can skip this step.

● Enter an encryption password for your Time Machine backups here, or let Apple generate one for you.

⚠ Store this password in a safe place! If you lose it, you will not be able to access any of your backup data or recover your machine.

Step 4

ⓘ If you selected a network backup location, you may be asked to enter network login credentials at this point. Consult your NAS' documentation for more information.

● Check the **Back up automatically** box if it isn't checked already, and Time Machine will be enabled!

● To begin your first backup immediately, right click your backup drive and select **Back Up to "Drive Name" Now**.

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Step 5 — Multiple Backup Destinations

(i) Time Machine supports multiple backup destinations for backup redundancy, if you have a second external drive or NAS.

● Select **Select Disk** to select another drive.

● Repeat steps 2 and 3 to select another backup disk from the list, and optionally enable encryption.

Step 6

- When asked if you want to replace the current backup disk or use both, select the **Use Both** option. This will enable backups to both drives concurrently.

- *(i)* To add three or more backup destinations, select the **Add or Remove Backup Disk** option. You may need to scroll through the list of backup drives to find it.

- *(i)* With multiple drives, Time Machine will make hourly backups as normal, backing up to the drive with the oldest backup first, so all drives remain as up-to-date as possible.

- *(i)* If a second backup drive isn't connected, Time Machine will continue backing up to connected drives, and will automatically update the backup when the drive is reconnected, perfect for off-site or long-term backups!

Step 7 — Recovering Files in macOS

ⓘ Now that you have Time Machine configured, macOS has a built-in backup browser to recover accidentally deleted or modified files.

● In the folder that contained the files you want to recover, click the Time Machine icon in your menu bar, and select **Enter Time Machine**.

Step 8

● On the right side of your screen, there will be a timeline of backup dates you can scroll through. Select the date you want to recover from.

● Click the file you want to restore, and select **Restore**.

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Step 9 — Recovering macOS in Recovery Mode

- (i) Time Machine also has full system restore functionality, in case of hard drive failure. You can also use this method to setup a new machine from a previously created backup.

- Boot to macOS recovery by holding Command+R.

- Select **Restore from Time Machine Backup** from the list of available options.

Step 10

- **Continue** to the Restore Your System page.

- Select your Time Machine backup from the list, and **Continue**.

- Select the most recent backup of your drive, or the backup you need to restore, and **Continue**.

- (i) Your Mac will now restore the system from the backup you selected, and will restart upon completion.

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Step 11 — Restoring via Migration Assistant

(i) Time Machine backups can also be used as a data source in the built-in Migration Assistant app.

● Open the **Migration Assistant** app if you've already setup macOS.

● Select the **From a Mac, Time Machine backup, or startup disk** option in the list of transfer choices, and click **Continue**.

● Select the backup drive icon in the list of choices, and click **Continue**.

   (i) If you backed up to a NAS and don't see it in the list, ensure you're connected to the same network.

   ● You may be asked to enter a decryption password. Enter the one you chose previously, when configuring your backup.

Step 12

- Choose the backup you want to use, likely the latest backup, and click **Continue**.

- Select the information you want to transfer.

- (i) If you have a lot of content backed up, it may take several hours to restore entirely.

That's it! Now you should know how to keep your data backed up using Time Machine, understand its more advanced features, and know how to restore a backup in the event of a failure.

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