



# YOUR BRILLIANT SMARTPHONE

*UNLOCK YOUR DEVICE'S MOST  
HELPFUL TRICKS AND SECRETS  
WITH THESE 25 TIPS*

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**R**emember way back when phones could only transmit our voices? Or when they got an upgrade to send brief written messages we now cleverly refer to as “texts”? At this point, those essential functions are only a fraction of what the smartphones in our hands can do. They are really mini computers, and they're packed with more superpowers than a Marvel movie. Some are built-in features; some are apps you download. Most are free. All are worth a try, and might even change your life—or at least help you sleep better at night.

## HEALTH & WELLNESS

### SLEEP COMPANION

Do you toss and turn endlessly, or do you just wake up some mornings feeling as if you do? A sleep-tracking app can help. The product-testing company Wirecutter tried out a bunch and determined that SleepScore is the best at gauging how long it takes you to fall asleep, measuring how much and how deeply you sleep, and suggesting ways to improve your nightly recharge.

### WHITE NOISE MACHINE

Got noisy neighbors? Blocking out their ambient sounds might help you get some peace. No special machine is needed with the White Noise app, which offers white noise, of course, as well as different “shades” (some people find lower-frequency “pink” noise to be more soothing than white, for instance), along with the sounds of rain, a ticking clock, waves, or whatever else you might want for your personal background soundtrack.

### CALORIE COUNTER

We're notoriously bad at measuring what we put into our mouths, which is why MyFitnessPal comes in handy. The app has nutritional information for more than 300 million foods (general, such as applesauce, and specific, such as Mott's Unsweetened Applesauce), making it easy to keep track of your meals, snacks, and drinks. The running “ticker” shows how many calories you've consumed and how many you have left for the day based on the goals you input for yourself.

### FITNESS TRACKER

Your phone's built-in Health app can do pretty much everything a fitness tracker or smart watch can do, including counting your steps and collecting other health info. But if you specifically want to measure your heart rate, you'll need a separate app. Try Instant Heart Rate, found to be accurate in a study by heart researchers at the University of California, San Francisco. It

## SUNBURN PREVENTER

When you're spending time outdoors—whatever the weather, but especially on very sunny days—the Environmental Protection Agency has you covered. The EPA's SunWise UV Index app zeroes in on your ZIP code and lets you know the ultraviolet (UV) index, a measure of the strength of the sun's rays. Then the app will suggest how much protection you'll need over the course of the day.



PROP STYLIST: DOMINIQUE BAYNES  
GETTY IMAGES (INSET)

turns your phone's camera lens into a heart rate monitor: Just put your finger over the lens to get your reading and see whether you're in the proper range for whatever you're doing—running, resting, or something in between.

## HANDY HELPERS

### DICTATION

Tired of typing? It's easy to dictate texts and e-mails with your phone. All you have to do is tap the microphone located on your phone's keyboard, and whatever you say will magically turn into typed text. Just be sure to enunciate or the message might not say what you intended!

### DASHCAM

Odds are, you already rely on your phone for navigation. Use the CamOnRoad app, and it will simultaneously record dashcam video as you drive—which might be helpful should you have an accident and need to file an insurance claim. (Footage is stored in the cloud, so it won't eat up all your phone's memory.) The app can even tell if you've been in a collision and automatically call emergency services.

### VIRTUAL WALLET

Cash took a serious hit during the pandemic, as many people worried about the germs that might travel with their bills and coins. If you still haven't tried Apple Pay or Google Pay, it's a good time to take the plunge.

These virtual payment methods store your credit or debit card information so you can pay by simply holding your phone or smart watch over a screen at the register—no contact needed. And don't worry, your linked financial information is encrypted so it can't be stolen. You can pay this way at 67 percent of American retailers (and some places you might not expect, such as taxis and gas stations), according to a survey by research firm Forrester.

On iPhones, Apple Pay is built in to your phone's virtual wallet; just tap the Wallet icon to get started. Google Pay works on iPhones and Androids; download the app and follow the prompts to set it up.

## TURN AN OLD PHONE INTO A DIY SECURITY CAMERA OR A LIVE CAM TO WATCH YOUR PET WHILE YOU'RE AWAY.

### PERSONAL BUTLER

Maybe you like to start the day with fresh coffee and the news. Or maybe loud rock music is the only thing that gets you out of bed. You can program your phone to automate your morning routine—or any sequence of tasks. For example, your phone can turn on the coffee maker, cue up a podcast, and turn on the lights at a set time each morning, or do the reverse and turn things off before you leave the house. For Apple devices, use the



## TOOLBOX

Your phone is also a tape measure. With an iPhone, just open the built-in Measure app (if you don't see it, make sure your operating system is up to date) and click the ruler icon. You'll also see a level icon, for another handy built-in tool to help you straighten all the crooked pictures on your walls. On Android phones, search "ruler" or "spirit level" (that handy tool's official name), and digital versions should appear at the top of the results.

built-in Shortcuts app. For Androids, use the Google Assistant function.

### SECURITY CAMERA

Do you have an old smartphone you're not using anymore? You can turn it into a DIY security camera or a live cam to watch your pet while you're away with the help of an app such as Alfred. Position the phone

where it can see whatever you want to monitor, and the app will broadcast a live feed to your primary phone.

### DOCUMENT SCANNER

There are lots of apps you can use to scan and share documents from your phone; Wirecutter's favorite is Adobe Scan. Or you can do it with tools you're probably already using.

On an iPhone, open the built-in Notes app, tap the camera icon, then choose Scan Documents. Need to sign the document too? Tap the Share icon, then Markup, then Add, and choose Signature. On an Android, go to Google Documents and tap the plus sign, then the camera icon. Then take a photo of the document and send it along. To sign it first, look for the "scribble" tool under the drawing tab.

**NAVIGATOR**

If you like to hike or explore new places but worry about getting lost (or tend to forget where you parked your car!), phone map apps are useful companions. In Apple Maps, tap the blue dot that shows your current location. You will have two options: Mark My Location, which saves your spot, or Share My Location, to share where you are with others. In Google

**LANGUAGE TUTOR**

There are so many ways to learn a language besides in-person classes. With a language learning app, you can get more fluent any time you have a few free minutes. According to *PC Magazine*, the best is Duolingo, which offers instruction for more than 30 languages, customized for beginners and more advanced students.



Maps, it works the same way, only you choose Save My Parking. Then use the map app to navigate your way back to where you started.

**MAPS**

Your phone's built-in maps are great, but if you find yourself without a signal, you'll be glad you previously downloaded maps using the Maps.Me app, which you can open anytime, anywhere. It also offers dining options and directions.

**ENTERTAINMENT**

**E-BOOK READER**

If you find yourself out in the world with time to kill and wish you'd brought along a book, just download the Kindle app and you can buy a book or jump back into whatever you were reading on your Kindle device at home. Fun feature: If your chosen book also has an audio version, you can read and listen at the same time, or switch between modes by tapping on the audio or book icons located at the bottom of your screen.

**RADIO**

With so many ways to play music, sometimes you want to just listen to the radio. But you're no longer limited to what's on the air in your local area. The TuneIn radio app airs thousands of stations from around the country, with all kinds of music, as you'd expect, as well as talk, live sports, and even podcasts and TV shows.

**REMOTE CONTROL**

If you're always losing your TV's remote, you might want to download an app that can take its place. Most TV manufacturers have their own remote apps, and the news blog Android Authority says those are your best bet. The easiest way to find the one you need is to search for "TV remote app" and your TV's manufacturer.

**TV GUIDE**

It's back! And the TV Guide app does more than run down what's live on the air. You can keep track of what's playing on streaming services as well as

**SET REMINDERS FOR WHEN YOUR FAVORITE SHOWS COME ON SO YOU HAVE TIME TO GRAB A SNACK.**

what's coming soon and what's about to depart. Set reminders for when your favorite shows come on so you have time to grab a snack and settle in.

**JUST FOR FUN**

**STARGAZER**

Is that bright star actually a planet? What constellation is overhead? Launch the SkySafari app (\$2.99) and see the night sky above you replicated on your phone screen and annotated with the names of all the stars and planets. Pay another few bucks for additional content packages and you

can see a 3D view of the galaxy, get guided audio tours of the cosmos, and more. While you're in stargazing mode, download NASA's free app, which offers fun facts for space lovers plus views from space, a tracker for the International Space Station, and other features astronomy buffs (and the newly curious) will enjoy.

### SPORTS FAN ZONE

If you're a sports fan, you've probably sneaked a peek at your phone to look up game scores when you

### IF YOU HAVEN'T LOOKED FOR APPS FROM YOUR FAVORITE SPORTS TEAMS, YOU'RE MISSING OUT ON COOL FEATURES.

were supposed to be doing something else. But if you haven't looked for apps from your favorite teams, you're missing out on some cool features, including game highlights and player stats as well as basics such as schedules and where-to-watch information. For example, NBA team apps are a must-have for pro basketball fans to keep up with game scores in real time, plus post-game interviews and lots more. Just be sure to choose your teams' official apps.

### PET PHOTOGRAPHER

Your phone is probably already full of photos of your pets, but if you

want to zero in on the cuteness, try shooting in portrait mode, an option on many newer phones. When you open the camera, simply select portrait mode and the background will automatically be blurred, putting all the focus on your pet. (It works for people too.)

### CUSTOM ARTIST

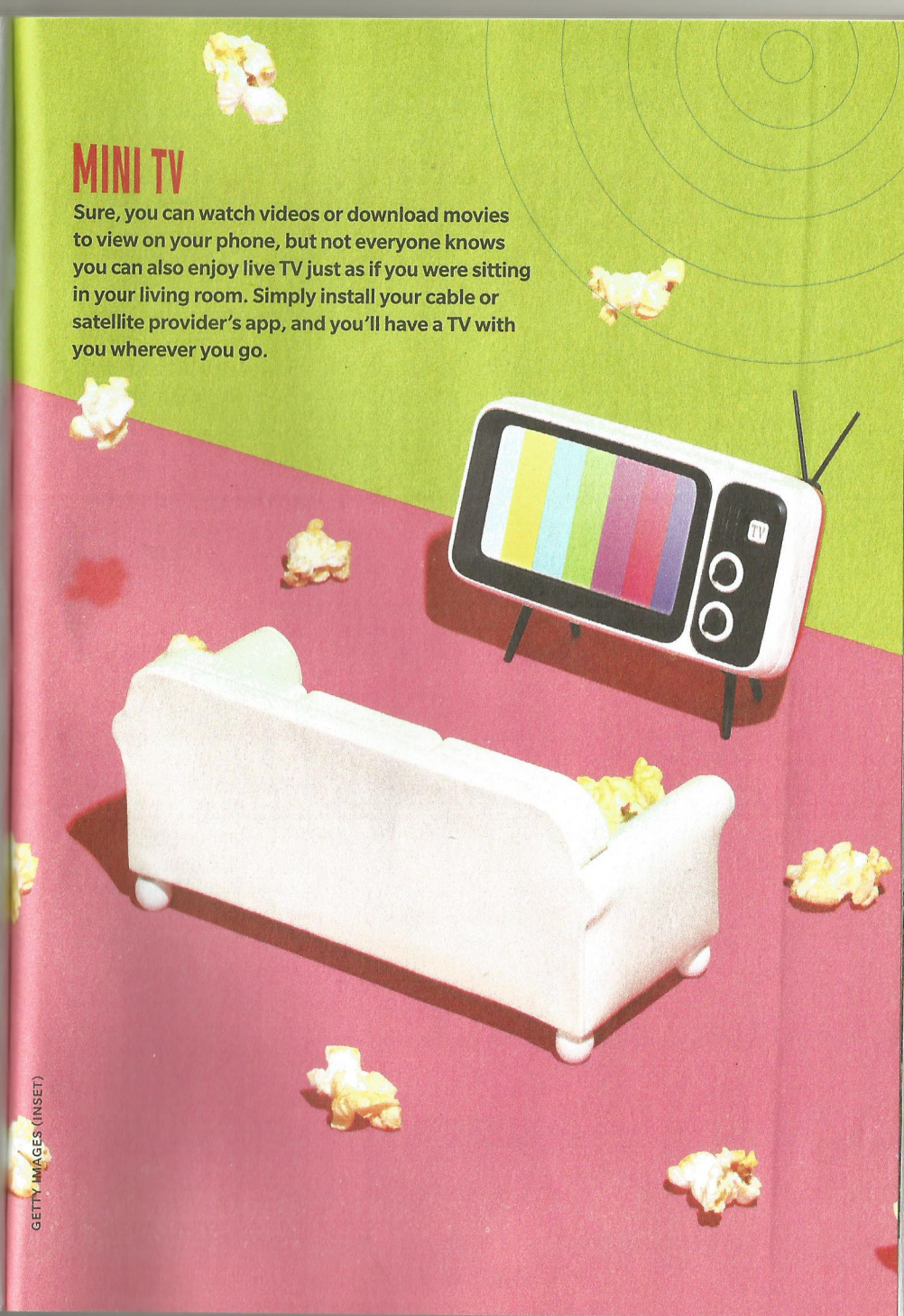
Want to get even more artsy? Try a photo-editing app such as Visionist, which can make any photograph look almost like a painting (choose your preferred style from a gallery of options).

### RECIPE BOX

How many times have you found a delicious recipe online only to search in vain the next time you want to make it? The solution: Pinterest, the virtual bulletin board where you "pin" things you find in your virtual travels and want to save. You can store all kinds of links and images: holiday gift ideas, books you aspire to read, paint colors you like. Any topic you can think of can get its own "board," but if you're a beginner, saving recipes is an easy start. Just tap the plus sign to create a board, then call it Recipes (or something more clever that says "yum" to you). When you find a recipe you want to save, look for a button with the red Pinterest *P* logo (look for it next to the blue button with the *F* for Facebook or the bird for Twitter).

## MINI TV

Sure, you can watch videos or download movies to view on your phone, but not everyone knows you can also enjoy live TV just as if you were sitting in your living room. Simply install your cable or satellite provider's app, and you'll have a TV with you wherever you go.



GETTY IMAGES (INSET)

# KEEP IT SECURE

All apps collect data as you use them. Following these four steps will help ensure you're not oversharing.


**1.** For starters, download apps only from the Apple App Store or Google Play Store, not from random websites. These apps meet the major companies' quality standards.

**2.** Before you accept an app's terms and conditions, look at what information it's planning to collect and think twice if it's asking for too many permissions. For example, why would a gaming app need access to your text messages? Also, most apps don't need to know

your location, but for those that do, you can choose to enable location services only when using the particular app, another smart privacy safeguard.

**3.** Sign up using an e-mail address you've set up just for things like app permissions and e-mail newsletters. Don't use your main e-mail address or your Facebook or another social media account. This way, if there is a security

breach, your exposure is contained to things connected to that address.

**4.** And, of course, use a secure password, which means a long one (at least ten characters) with a mixture of letters, numbers, and special characters—and, sorry, a unique password for each app. According to security experts, a good trick is to create a memorable "passphrase" by creating a series of random words, and then substitute numbers or special characters (i.e., @ for a) for some of the letters. How will you ever remember them all? Go ahead and write them down—just store your cheat sheet in a secure location (not your wallet or phone case!). Or enlist a password manager such as 1Password or LastPass. 

For many more helpful tricks and secrets, visit [rd.com/smartphones](http://rd.com/smartphones).

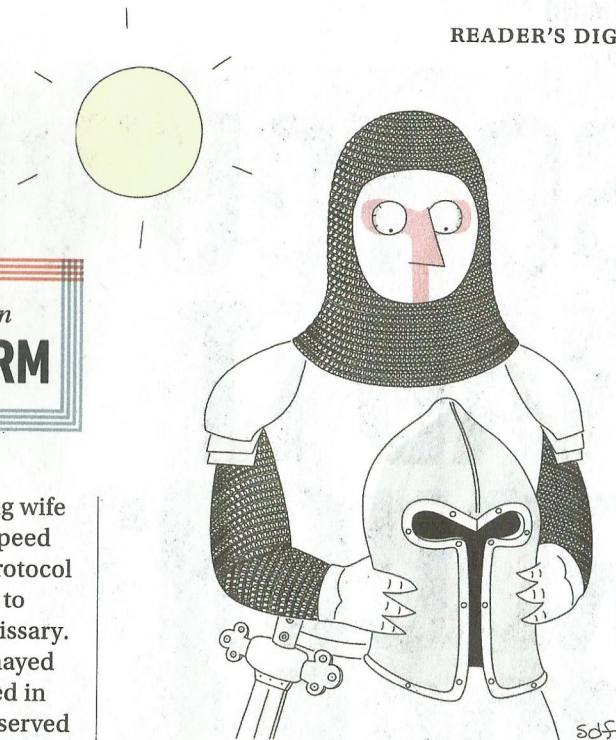


## HUMOR in UNIFORM

**I knew my young wife** was not up to speed with military protocol when we drove to the base commissary. Still, I was dismayed when she parked in the general's reserved parking space—something she mentioned she'd been doing for the past year. As a newly minted second lieutenant, I knew that was a big no-no. Even colonels couldn't park there, so I asked why she would do such a thing.

She said, "I thought that the sign meant for anyone in general."

—ALFRED LUDWIG  
Mesa, Arizona



**Stationed in Iraq** during Operation Desert Storm, I found myself in a world that had changed little since Biblical times. With so few creature comforts available, packages from home containing cookies and canned goods were received with great anticipation. When I got a box from my sister, I happily tore into it, only to discover

just how far from home I really was. She had filled it with packages of microwave popcorn.  
—ROBERT T. SIMS  
via [gcf.net](http://gcf.net)

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