

Is Your TV Spying on You?

How to stop your set from tracking what you watch

IT'S SAFE to assume that most of us would rather watch the TV than have the TV watch us.

But unlike the televisions we grew up with—simple, one-way devices—modern sets are “smart” TVs, connected to the internet. And TV manufacturers and their partners want to know what you’re watching, what streaming apps you use the most, where you’re watching from and more, because it makes them money. “Advertising is the real profit generator, hence the push for data collection and selling, sharing,” says James K. Willcox, senior electronics editor at *Consumer Reports*.

TVs use something called automatic content recognition to track your viewing habits. The more a snooping TV can learn, the more businesses can profit by building a detailed profile of you. They may guess your income, education level or even health status based on your choices.



What you can do

“The TV manufacturers have a lot of little checkboxes hidden in the settings menus under System and Privacy, and you really have to dig for them,” says Dan Ackerman, editor in chief at tech retailer Micro Center. “You want to turn off anything that says it’s going to serve you live advertising content or monitor what you’re watching.” In addition, turn off settings that say “automatic content recognition” or “ACR.”

And if you use a streaming box for your viewing, you can turn off Wi-Fi on the TV itself. But remember, that box is also tracking you—as are Netflix, Peacock, Disney+ and other streaming platforms—so check the settings in all those places too. —Edward C. Baig



ASK THE TECH GURU

I accidentally dial people from time to time, which surprises me because I lock my phone. Why does this happen, and what can I do to prevent it?

AARP personal tech columnist Edward C. Baig responds:

Even if they’re locked, many phones “wake up” when they detect movement. To disable this feature, iPhone users should go to Settings, then Display & Brightness,



then Raise to Wake. For Samsung Galaxy phones, it’s Settings, then Advanced features, then Motion and gestures, then Lift to wake. Another tip? Turn off certain gestures that activate the phone. On an iPhone, go to Settings, then Accessibility, then Touch, then Tap or Swipe to Wake. Unlocking will then require pressing the power button and swiping up. On a Samsung, go to Settings, then Advanced features, then Motions and gestures, then Double tap to turn on screen.

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AARP SMART PICKS

BLOOD PRESSURE MONITORS

Our lab team worked with older adult testers to determine which home devices performed best

BEST OVERALL

A&D Medical Premium Multi User
(\$54)



• **Easy to use.** This monitor is easy to put on without assistance, has a well-organized display and is feature-packed for the price. Our home testers found it intuitive to use. “The numbers are large, clear and easy to read,” said Donna, 60. The display also uses color-coding to indicate whether a reading is normal (green), elevated (yellow) or high (red).

BEST FOR DATA TRACKING

Homedics 5-Day Trend-at-a-Glance
(\$70)



• **Straightforward.** Our home testers appreciated that this monitor connects to an app using Bluetooth, automatically defines readings (noting whether they are in the normal range or elevated) and stores those readings for reference. It also allows users to share results with their doctor over the internet.

MOST COMPREHENSIVE DATA

Connq Pulse
(\$289)



• **Additional monitoring.** The Connq Pulse costs more than some other blood pressure monitors, but it can track extra metrics related to your cardiovascular health, such as indicators of arterial stiffness. “The readability, navigation and display are comprehensive and simple,” said Ken, a 57-year-old tester. —Taylor Leamey

AARP Smart Picks provide unbiased, thoroughly researched, rigorously tested reviews. Go to aarp.org/smartpicks to read more about blood pressure monitors and other products. AARP may earn a commission through affiliate links on aarp.org. This does not influence our objective reviews.

