



Senior's Guide to TikTok



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@msgrandmasgarden

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@lilihayes

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If you have teenage children or grandchildren, there's a good chance they use TikTok. But so do tens of millions of adults. Only about a third of TikTok users are under 20, according to a June 2020 Statistica Report. Just under 14% are between 40 and 49, and over 7% are over 50. There's no data on older TikTok users, but — from looking around — it is definitely used by people well past Social Security age.

What is TikTok?

TikTok is a global short-form video platform that hundreds of millions of people use to enjoy entertaining content, engage with a diverse community, express themselves creatively and share their talent.

Why do seniors like it?

Seniors like TikTok for some of the same reasons as teens. It's fun and entertaining and — if they choose to post videos — it's an easy way to express themselves and build a community. Seniors also like TikTok because it allows them to connect with friends and family, including children and grandchildren, where they are. For younger social media users, that's often TikTok. There are TikTok users in their 60s, 70s and above with teenage followers and plenty of older TikTok users who enjoy watching videos posted by young people.

How does TikTok work?

You download the app on your phone and sign up with a phone number or email. If you already have a Facebook or Instagram account, you can save some time by signing in through these services. Once you're signed in, you'll be on the "For You" feed where you'll see videos from your friends and others across the TikTok community.



You can find people to follow on TikTok using your phone or social media contacts.

Tap **Discover** to search popular videos, or use the search bar to browse content by topic. You can find people to follow using your phone or social media contacts. Tap on **Me** in the lower right corner, then **Followers**. Select the **profile+** button (looks like a person with a + next to them) in the upper right corner. Many celebrities and public figures are on TikTok, so it's a great way to see their videos in your "For You" feed.

What does it mean to follow and be followed on TikTok?

When you follow a person on TikTok, their content shows up in the "For You" feed, which means you can see anything they post. Likewise, when someone follows you, they can see everything you post. You may also see posts from people who you don't follow, including celebrities and people who are posting particularly popular content. Unless you have a private account (see below), anyone, including people you don't follow, can see what you post.

What do seniors post and watch on TikTok?

Seniors, like any group, have a wide variety of interests. They are sharing dance moves, sports activities and hobbies of all sorts. They're making jokes and telling short stories sometimes aimed at other seniors but also at family members, including adult children and grandchildren. Seniors are also posting cooking demonstrations, gardening tips and health issues, as well as their favorite exercise routines. Some seniors use TikTok to share their vast knowledge and experience, while others ask questions and engage directly with the community and their followers.

A lot of people only use TikTok to watch videos, and that's great. There are plenty of fun videos on the platform that may amuse and entertain you – regardless of your age. There are also educational videos on health, fitness, nutrition, travel, hobbies and so much more.



@mandypatinktok

Popular Account

How can I control my privacy on TikTok?

By default, everything you post is public, but TikTok gives you the option to make your account private so that only users you approve can follow you. You can turn this on or off at any time without affecting who already follows you, and you can remove followers at any time. You can control your privacy from the "Settings and privacy" menu that you access by tapping on the **Me** icon in the lower right corner followed by the three dots and then selecting **Privacy**.

You can also decide whether to have TikTok suggest your account to others, Facebook friends, users with mutual connections, and users who open TikTok to view links that you've sent. TikTok also gives you the option of syncing your phone contacts so that they can easily find you.

There are also options when it comes to advertising, including whether you want to allow TikTok to target ads based on information that other app developers share with TikTok about your activity on those apps.

TikTok's rules of the road

TikTok's Community Guidelines define a set of norms on the app and provide guidance on what is and is not allowed. TikTok prohibits violent extremism, hateful behavior, illegal activities, violent and graphic content, harassment, bullying, nudity and sexual activity. The platform also takes down content that displays suicide, suicidal ideation, or content that might encourage participation in other self-injurious behavior and has policies to protect minors. You have to be at least 13 to post on TikTok, and there are age-specific policies and controls for teens 13-18 years old. Happily, there is no upper age limit! You'll find all the guidelines at tiktok.com/community-guidelines.



By default, everything you post is public, but TikTok gives you the option to make your account private.



@grandadjoe1933

Popular Account

Moderation, blocking and abuse reporting

The vast majority of interactions on TikTok are positive but – like any community – there are people who abuse the service. One way to avoid these situations is to have a private profile where only people you authorize can follow you. Another is to block anyone who is mean or abusive and, if you feel someone may have violated TikTok’s Community Guidelines, you can and should report them so that TikTok staff can review and potentially take further action.

To enforce its Community Guidelines, TikTok uses a combination of policies and human- and machine-based moderation practices to handle content that may violate its guidelines. To report a comment: Tap on the comment and then **Report**. To report an inappropriate video, tap the arrow at the bottom right corner of the video, select **Report** and choose the reason. You can report a profile by going to that profile, selecting the three dots and then **Report**.

To report and/or block someone:

- Go to the user's profile
- Tap the three dots at the top right corner
- Tap **Block** or **Report** and follow the steps in the app.

Blocking will prevent someone from seeing what you post. Reporting will alert TikTok to a potential violation of its community standards. The person will not be informed that they have been blocked or reported.

Mobile app vs. web access

TikTok is available on mobile apps and the web. The mobile interface lets you view and post videos, while the web only allows you to view videos. You can download the TikTok app from the Apple (iOS) App Store or the Google (Android) Play store for use on phones or tablets. Access TikTok on the web at [TikTok.com](https://www.tiktok.com).



Blocking prevents someone from seeing what you post.



For additional resources, visit ConnectSafely.org/tiktok.



I've heard that TikTok is a Chinese company. Is that true, and how does it affect me?

TikTok is owned by the Chinese company ByteDance, which was founded in 2012. ByteDance owns and operates numerous products in China, including the popular news platform Toutiao, and Douyin, which is similar to TikTok but a completely separate app available only in China. ByteDance entered the U.S. market in 2017, when it purchased Musical.ly, a popular youth-oriented lip-syncing short-form video platform. TikTok is not available in China and, according to a company blog post, stores all TikTok U.S. user data in the United States, with backup redundancy in Singapore. TikTok data centers are located entirely outside of China.

What are the risks of using TikTok?

With all social media, there are risks and rewards and ways to manage those risks. As mentioned earlier, you can block and report anyone who is being mean and abusive, and you can limit who can comment on your videos. There is also the risk of oversharing or spending too much time online, but you can control that. As with any online service, there is the risk of someone getting access to your account, typically via your password but there are ways to minimize that risk. If someone does log into your account, they can post as if they were you, which could lead to an embarrassing situation. As with any social media service, there is also the risk of misinformation.

Here is some general safety advice to reduce risks.

Privacy. Consider whether to make your account private. Some people want to share their videos with everyone, while others choose to have a private account. The default is public, which means that anyone can see what you post. With a private account, only users you approve



With all social media, there are risks and rewards and ways to manage those risks.



@its_j_dog



Popular Account

can follow you, view your videos, live videos, bio, likes as well as your following and followers lists. With a private account, other users won't be able to Duet (which allows users to share a video alongside another person's video) with you or download your videos.

Protect personal information. Be very careful about your personal information — never share information from your credit cards, driver's license, Social Security or Medicare.

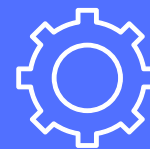
Use a strong and unique password. Also, consider using two-step authentication, which sends a unique code to your smartphone only if someone tries to log in on a machine, app or browser that hasn't previously been used to access your TikTok account. This makes it much harder for someone to hack into your account. To turn on two-step authentication, tap **Me** in the lower right corner and then the three dots in the top right corner. Select **Security and login**.

Never post anything that you wouldn't want to see on the front page of a newspaper, and always treat others with respect.

Always get permission before posting videos that include other people.

Be aware of what's in the background of your videos (home addresses, car license plates, personal photos or belongings you might not want others to see) or anything that could embarrass you or get you into trouble.

Misinformation. Don't believe everything you see on TikTok or any other social media platform. People may post videos that contain false information. It could be in jest (parody), because they mistakenly believe it or want to convince you of something that isn't true. This could be to get you to buy something, support a political cause or candidate or influence your behavior. Be especially careful about any form of medical or public health advice, including information about vaccines or cures.



Don't believe everything you see on TikTok or any other social media platform.



@jayprehistoricpets

Popular Account

Mean comments. If you post to TikTok, there is the risk that someone could post mean comments. You can filter comments so that everyone, no one or only friends can comment on your videos. Go to Settings (tap on **Me** in the lower right corner and then the three dots in the upper right corner). Select **Privacy** and then **Comments**.

Time management and life balance. Whether it's TikTok or any other app, it's important to put down our devices and interact with others in person. No app should ever keep you from getting exercise, doing chores, work or anything else that keeps us healthy, happy and productive. If you need a nudge, use the time management features in the TikTok app or Apple and Android phones. For TikTok's controls, go to Settings (tap on **Me** in the lower right corner and then the three dots in the top right corner). Tap **Digital Wellbeing**.



Be careful when connecting online with people you don't know in real life.



For more about online safety for seniors, [ConnectSafely.org/seniors](https://connectsafely.org/seniors).

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About ConnectSafely

ConnectSafely is a Silicon Valley, California-based nonprofit organization dedicated to educating users of connected technology about safety, privacy and security. We publish research-based safety tips, parents' guidebooks, advice, news and commentary on all aspects of tech use and policy.