

Can you imagine losing some or all of your photos forever? It happens every day. People start deleting photos from their phones without realizing that the photos are being deleted from everywhere. And they could be gone forever. I'm explaining how this happens and what to do before deleting any photo from your phone.

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0-8 Jamey Tucker/whatthetech.tv

ON-CAMERA TEASE

Can you imagine losing every photo you've taken over the past 2, 5, or even 10 years? It happens almost every day. I'm Jamey Tucker. I'll show you how and why it happens, and how to keep from making the same easy mistake.

ANCHOR INTRO

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF EVERY PHOTO AND VIDEO ON YOUR SMARTPHONE SUDDENLY DISAPPEARED? IT HAPPENS MORE OFTEN THAN YOU MIGHT THINK ALL BECAUSE SOMEONE MAKES A MISTAKE.

IF YOU HAVE AN IPHONE, DELETING PHOTOS IS BOTH SIMPLE AND CONFUSING AND OFTEN COSTS FAMILIES YEARS OF MEMORIES. OUR CONSUMER TECHNOLOGY REPORTER JAMEY TUCKER EXPLAINS.

PACKAGE SCRIPT

This mistake usually happens when your phone runs out of storage. You open the Photos app and start deleting, thinking everything is safely stored in the cloud. Then, later, you realize those photos are gone. Everywhere.

On an iPhone, all photos are synced to iCloud. But synced is not the same as 'backed up.' If iCloud Photos is turned on and you delete a photo from your phone, you're also deleting it from iCloud. And from your Mac. Your iPad. And, if other people are on your iCloud account, their devices are too.

If you turn off 'Sync this iPhone', Apple will ask if you want to remove the photos from this device or download a full copy first. If you choose "Remove from Phone", it won't delete them from iCloud. But you do get this scary notification that you're deleting all of the photos from your phone.

You might think, well, I'll download them first. But you won't have enough free space.

Removing all of them from the phone does not delete the photos from iCloud. They'll still be there, and you can still see them from the Photos app. The full-resolution originals are still in the iCloud. And you can download them again at any time to your phone.

If those photos truly matter, the safest move is to plug the phone into a computer and copy them to a hard drive.

It's less confusing for Android devices. Photos are actually "backed up" to Google Photos. If you delete them from your device, they're still in Google Photos until you delete them from there.

If your iPhone family is all connected to the same iCloud account, make sure they know that deleting photos from their device without making the change will delete them from everyone's device. Forever.

That's What the Tech? I'm Jamey Tucker

ANCHOR TAG

(IF YOU WANT TO PUSH PEOPLE TO YOUR WEBSITE, I HAVE STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS IN THE WEB STORY)

WEB STORY

Running out of storage on your iPhone can make anyone a little nervous. You open the Photos app, start deleting pictures and videos, and assume everything is safely stored in the cloud.

Sometimes that assumption costs people years of memories.

Here's what's really happening, and why you don't need to panic if you understand the settings.

Synced Is Not the Same as Backed Up

When iCloud Photos is turned on, your pictures are synced across all your Apple devices. That means your iPhone, iPad, and Mac are all showing the same photo library stored in iCloud.

If you delete a photo while syncing is on, you are deleting it from that entire library. It disappears from your phone, iCloud, and every connected device.

Deleted photos sit in the Recently Deleted folder for 30 days. After that, they are permanently gone.

That's where many people get tripped up.

What Happens If You Turn Off Syncing?

Some people think the solution is to turn off iCloud Photos before deleting anything. That can work, but it helps to understand what Apple does next.

When you go to Settings, tap your name, tap iCloud, then Photos, and turn off “Sync this iPhone.” Your phone will ask you to choose:

- Remove from iPhone
- Download Photos & Videos

This is the part that makes people nervous.

If you choose “Remove from iPhone,” it does not delete your photos from iCloud. It only removes them from that one device to free up space. The full resolution originals remain safely stored in iCloud. You can still view them at iCloud.com or on another Apple device.

If you choose “Download Photos & Videos,” your iPhone will download full-resolution copies to the device before turning off syncing. This requires enough available storage to hold those files.

Either way, nothing is permanently deleted unless you actually delete photos from your main library or empty the Recently Deleted folder.

Are Photos in iCloud Full Resolution?

Yes. When iCloud Photos is enabled, Apple stores the original, full-quality versions of your photos and videos in iCloud.

If you remove photos from your iPhone after turning off sync, you are not losing quality. You are simply removing the local copy from that device.

The Safest Move

Cloud storage is convenient. But convenience is not the same as having a true backup.

If your photos truly matter, connect your iPhone to a computer and copy them to an external hard drive. That creates a second independent copy that is not tied to syncing.

That extra step may feel old school, but it is the best way to protect years of memories.

Before you start deleting photos to free up space, take a minute to understand how syncing works. A small misunderstanding can lead to a very big regret.