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FREE TUTORIAL

Export Contacts on iPhone Means Saving Them as a vCard File, and Here Is How to Make That File Useful

On an iPhone, "Export" bundles a whole contact list into one .vcf (vCard) file you can save, email, or AirDrop. It does not delete or move anything, but most business software wants a spreadsheet, so the useful version is exporting the vCard and then converting it to a CSV.

WHAT THIS ADDS

The iPhone's Export button gives you a vCard, a format that many business tools' import screens do not accept. The most reliable free converter is a Google account: import the .vcf into Google Contacts, then export only the 'Imported on' label it creates automatically. That gives you a clean CSV without mixing in the contacts already stored there.

What export means on an iPhone, and what you will have at the end

On an iPhone, **exporting contacts means copying them into a single file**, a .vcf or "vCard". Your contacts stay exactly where they were. Nothing is deleted, moved, or sent to anyone until you choose where the file goes.

A vCard is a decades-old standard format for contact cards. Phones, Outlook, Gmail and Macs all read it. The catch is that many CRMs, booking tools and invoicing apps want a CSV spreadsheet instead. So exporting is usually step one of two if you are moving your client list somewhere new.

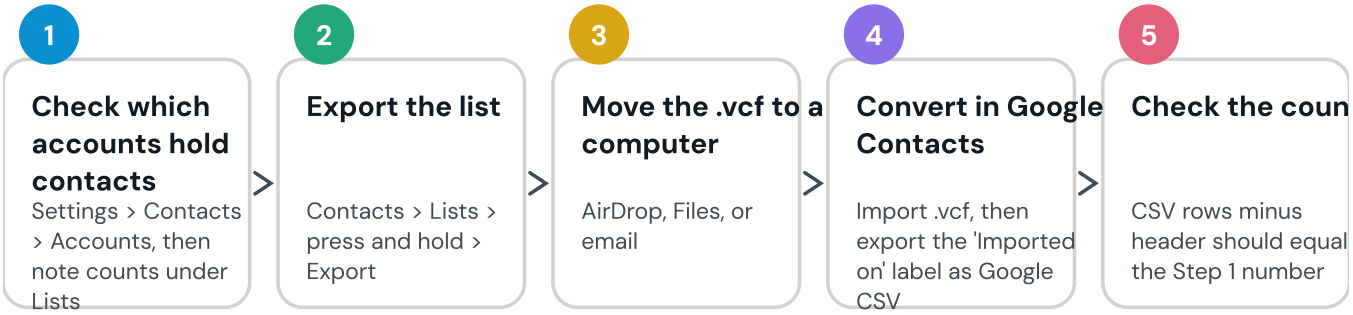
By the end of this tutorial you will have:

- One .vcf file holding every contact from the list you chose
- One .csv file of the same contacts, ready for a spreadsheet or a business tool's import screen
- A count showing that the number of contacts in equals the number out

Before you start you need:

- An iPhone on iOS 16 or later. Older versions have no Export option for whole lists; see the last section.
- A computer with a web browser
- A free Google account. A spare one is fine, and arguably better.
- About 15 minutes

If your contacts live in Outlook rather than on the phone, use our guide to exporting Outlook contacts to Excel without it rewriting your phone numbers instead.



From iPhone contact list to an importable CSV in five steps

Step 1: Find out which account your contacts actually live in

This step prevents the most common surprise: exporting 140 contacts when you know you have 600.

An iPhone can hold contacts from several places at once: the phone itself, iCloud, Gmail, and a work Exchange or Outlook account. The Contacts app blends them all into one list, so you cannot tell by looking.

1. Open **Settings**. On iOS 18 and later, tap **Apps**, then **Contacts**. On iOS 16 or 17, tap **Contacts** directly.
2. Tap **Accounts**. Note every account with Contacts switched on.
3. Open the **Contacts** app and tap **Lists** in the top-left corner. You will see something like *All Contacts*, *All iCloud*, *All Gmail*. Each list shows a count.

Write down the count for the list you plan to export. You will use it in Step 5.

Pick **All Contacts** if you want everything. Be aware that if the same person is saved in both iCloud and Gmail, they may come out twice. If your business contacts are all in one account, export only that list.

Step 2: Export the list from the Contacts app

1. Still on the **Lists** screen, **press and hold** the list you chose. Do not tap it. Hold until a menu appears.
2. Tap **Export**.
3. The share sheet opens with a file named after the list, ending in .vcf.

That file is the export. It holds names, phone numbers, emails, addresses, companies and notes. If you saved contact photos, it holds those too, which can make the file surprisingly large.

To send just one contact rather than a whole list, open that contact and tap **Share Contact**. That also produces a vCard, holding a single person. It is the same idea at a smaller size.

Step 3: Get the .vcf file onto your computer

From the share sheet you opened in Step 2, choose whichever route you trust:

- **AirDrop** to a Mac. The file lands in Downloads.
- **Save to Files**, then choose **iCloud Drive**. Open iCloud Drive on your computer and download the file from there.
- **Mail** it to yourself. This works for most lists. A list with lots of photos can exceed attachment limits, so use Files if the email bounces.

On the computer, rename the file to something you will recognize, such as *clients-2026-11-20.vcf*. Do not open it in Excel. Excel does not read vCards properly and will show you a mess.

If your contacts are in iCloud, you can skip the phone entirely. Go to icloud.com/contacts, select your contacts, and use the export option in the menu to download a vCard. This only covers iCloud contacts, not Gmail or Exchange ones.

Step 4: Turn the vCard into a CSV using Google Contacts

Plenty of paid converter sites exist. You do not need them, and uploading your whole client list to an unknown website is a poor trade. Google Contacts does the job for free.

1. Go to **contacts.google.com** and sign in.
2. Click **Import** in the left-hand menu.
3. Click **Select file**, pick your .vcf, and click **Import**.
4. Google automatically puts every imported contact under a new label called **Imported on** plus today's date. You will see it in the left-hand menu under Labels.
5. Click that label so only the imported contacts show.
6. Click **Export**. Choose the option to export contacts in that label, then choose **Google CSV**. Click **Export**.

The label is the useful part. If you use your everyday Gmail, it already holds contacts. Exporting only the label means you get exactly the iPhone contacts and nothing else mixed in. A spare Google account avoids the overlap entirely and keeps your personal contacts out of the process.

Google may offer to merge duplicates. For this job, ignore that until after you have exported, so your counts still match.

	vCard (.vcf)	CSV
What the iPhone Export button makes	**Yes**	**No**
Opens cleanly in Excel or Sheets	**No**	**Yes**
Can include contact photos	**Yes**	**No**
Easy to count and check	**Search for BEGIN:VCARD**	**Count rows**
Typical use	**Phone-to-phone, email clie**	**CRM and spreadsheet imp**

What the iPhone gives you versus what business tools usually ask for

Step 5: Check the numbers before you import anywhere

Do not skip this. A missing 40 contacts is easy to fix today and nearly impossible to notice in three months.

1. Open the .csv in Google Sheets, Numbers or Excel. If Excel turns phone numbers into scientific notation or strips leading zeros, our Outlook-to-Excel guide covers the fix, and it applies here too.
2. Look at the last row number. Subtract one for the header row. That is your contact count.
3. Compare it with the number you wrote down in Step 1. They should match, or come close if Google combined a few blank cards.
4. Scroll a few columns right. Check that phone numbers, emails and notes landed in sensible columns. Google CSV uses headings like *Phone 1 - Value* and *E-mail 1 - Value*.

To count the .vcf directly, open it in a plain text editor and search for *BEGIN:VCARD*. Each contact starts with that line once, so the number of matches is your contact count.

Now you can bring the CSV into whatever you are moving to. That might be a spreadsheet, HubSpot's free CRM, or a portal like Fynl. Most import screens ask you to match columns, so *Phone 1 - Value* maps to Phone. Contact files carry no history of calls, texts or past jobs, and our post on what the export button leaves behind covers how to keep that history.

If it does not work

There is no Export option when you press and hold

Three causes, in order of likelihood:

- **You pressed a contact, not a list.** Go back to the **Lists** screen (top-left in Contacts) and hold the list name itself.
- **Your iPhone is older than iOS 16.** Check under Settings, General, About. If you cannot update, use the icloud.com/contacts route in Step 3, provided your contacts sync to iCloud.
- **The contacts are in Gmail or Exchange.** In that case they are already in that service. Export straight from Google Contacts or Outlook and skip the phone.

The count is far lower than expected

This almost always means you exported one account's list while your contacts are spread across two or three. Go back to Step 1, compare the counts on the Lists screen, and either export **All Contacts** or export each account separately and import all the files in Step 4. Google puts each import under the same date label, so one export catches them all.

If the count is higher than expected, the same person probably exists in two accounts. Remove the duplicates in the spreadsheet or in your new tool after importing, not before, so you can still check your totals.

DO THIS

Write down the contact count on the Lists screen, then press and hold that list and tap Export. Convert the .vcf through Google Contacts using the 'Imported on' label, and only import the CSV into a new tool once the row count matches your number.

Sources

- RFC 6350: vCard Format Specification (IETF) — https://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/rfc6350

- Google Contacts Help: Import contacts — https://support.google.com/contacts/answer/1069522
- Google Contacts Help: Export Google Contacts — https://support.google.com/contacts/answer/7199294
- iCloud User Guide (Apple Support) — https://support.apple.com/guide/icloud/welcome/icloud