

How to Remove Date Formatting in Excel

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Managing data within **Microsoft Excel** often requires a deep understanding of how the software interprets and displays various data types. One common challenge users encounter is the automatic application of date formats to numerical values. While this feature is generally helpful for readability, there are many instances where a user might need to **remove the date format** to reveal the underlying raw data. This process is essential for specific types of **data analysis**, where the numerical value of the date is more useful than its calendar representation.

The process of removing the date format in Excel involves changing the **cell format** to remove the date function and displaying the cell content as plain text or its raw numerical equivalent. This can be done by selecting the cells with the date format, navigating to the "Number" tab in the home menu, and selecting "Text" or "General" as the cell format. This action effectively strips away the visual mask of the date, revealing the integer that Excel uses for its internal calculations. Alternatively, the user can utilize the "Clear Formats" option under the "Clear" menu to remove all styling and formatting from the selected cells, including the date format. This results in the cells displaying the raw numerical value of the date without any **formatting rules** applied.

Understanding these techniques is vital for users who deal with large **datasets** where dates might be imported incorrectly or where mathematical operations require the raw serial number. Often, users may find themselves in a situation where they want to remove a date format from specific cells to facilitate better data integration or to prepare the sheet for a different type of **spreadsheet** function. By mastering these methods, you ensure that your data remains flexible and accurate across different analytical contexts.

	A	B	C	D	E
1	Date				
2	1/1/2023			44927	
3	5/14/2023			45060	
4	6/17/2023			45094	
5	7/1/2023	Remove date format		45108	
6	8/15/2023			45153	
7	9/27/2023			45196	
8	10/3/2023			45202	
9	12/20/2023			45280	
10	12/24/2023			45284	
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					

Fortunately, there are two primary and highly efficient ways to accomplish this task. Each method serves a slightly different purpose depending on whether you want to remove all formatting or simply change the data type display. These methods are designed to be accessible even for those who are new to the **ribbon interface** of modern office software. In the following sections, we will explore these techniques in great detail, providing a comprehensive guide to cleaning your data effectively.

The two most common approaches are:

Method 1: Use the "Clear Formats" Feature - This is the most comprehensive method, as it resets the cell to its default state.

Method 2: Use the "General Format" Feature - This is a more targeted approach that specifically changes how the number is displayed without affecting other stylistic choices like borders or fonts.

The following detailed examples illustrate how to apply each method in a practical scenario, using a standard column of dates in an Excel workbook. By following these steps, you will gain a deeper insight into the **Excel date system** and how to manipulate it to suit your specific project needs.

	A	B	C	D	E
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2	1/1/2023				
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4	6/17/2023				
5	7/1/2023				
6	8/15/2023				
7	9/27/2023				
8	10/3/2023				
9	12/20/2023				
10	12/24/2023				
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					
16					

The Logic Behind Excel's Date Storage System

Before diving into the methods for removal, it is beneficial to understand exactly what you are

seeing when a date format is removed. In **Microsoft Excel**, dates are not stored as text strings like "January 1, 2023." Instead, they are stored as sequential **serial numbers**. This system allows Excel to perform calculations on dates as if they were standard integers. For instance, if you subtract one date from another, Excel is simply subtracting two integers to find the difference in days.

The 1900 date system is the default for Excel on Windows. In this system, the **epoch** or starting point is January 1, 1900, which is assigned the value of 1. Every day after that is one unit larger. Therefore, when you "remove" a date format, you aren't deleting the data; you are merely revealing the underlying number that represents that specific point in time. This is a critical concept for anyone performing **data science** tasks within a spreadsheet environment.

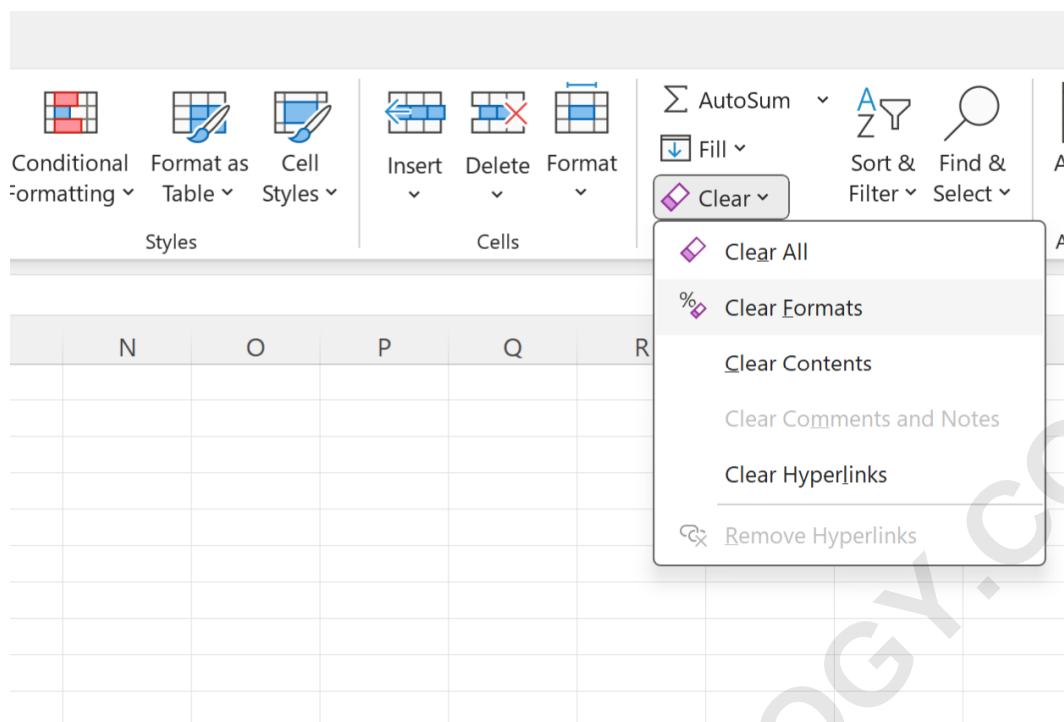
When you encounter a cell that looks like a date but behaves unexpectedly in formulas, it is often because of the formatting layer applied to it. By stripping this layer away, you can verify the integrity of your **information system** and ensure that your calculations are based on the correct numerical values. This transparency is key to building robust and error-free financial or statistical models.

Example 1: Using "Clear Formats" for a Complete Reset

One highly effective way to remove the date format from cells in Excel is to utilize the **Clear Formats** feature. This tool is particularly useful when the cells in question have multiple layers of formatting, such as specific fonts, background colors, or borders, and you wish to return the cells to their "factory default" state. Using this feature ensures that no hidden **metadata** or stylistic rules interfere with your data processing.

To begin this process, you must first identify the range of data you wish to modify. In our example, we will highlight the cell range **A2:A10**. Once the selection is active, you should direct your attention to the **ribbon** at the top of the Excel window. Under the **Home** tab, look toward the right side for the **Editing** group. Within this group, you will find a **Clear** icon, which often looks like an eraser.

Clicking the **Clear** icon will present a dropdown menu with several options, including "Clear All," "Clear Formats," and "Clear Contents." You should specifically select **Clear Formats**. This action will immediately strip away the date display, as well as any other visual modifications, leaving behind the raw data. This is a powerful way to sanitize data imported from external **databases** or web scrapers that may bring along unwanted styling.



Once you have executed this command, you will notice an immediate change in the appearance of your spreadsheet. The date format will be removed from each of the selected cells, and in its place, you will see a series of five-digit numbers. This transformation confirms that the **cell format** has been successfully reset to "General," allowing the underlying **serial number** to be visible to the user.

	A	B	C	D	E
1	Date				
2	44927				
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The dates are now displayed as integers, which **Microsoft Excel** uses to represent the number of elapsed days since the start of the 20th century. This raw numerical format is the "true" state of the data within the software's memory. For example, consider the following conversions that occur when the format is removed:

The date 1/1/2023 is represented as **44,927**, meaning it is 44,927 days since 1/1/1900.

The date 5/14/2023 is converted to **45,060**, representing its chronological distance from the epoch.

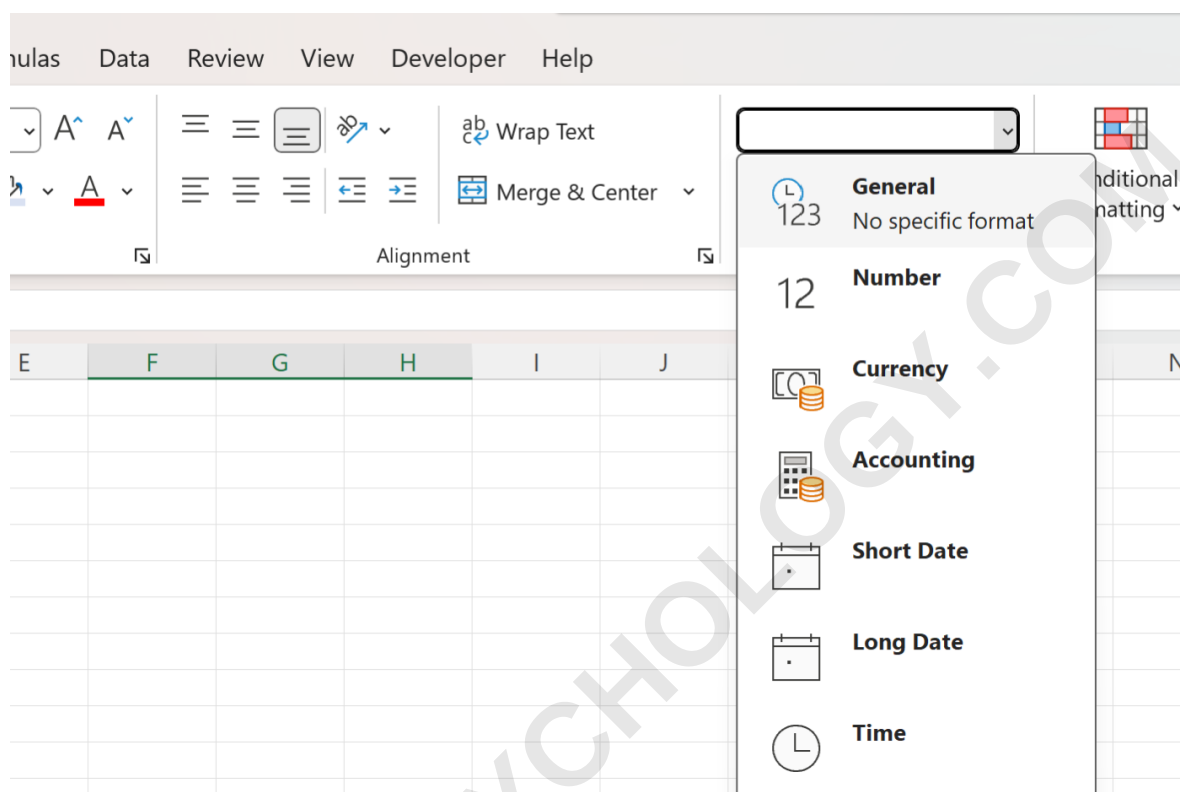
The date 6/17/2023 is displayed as **45,094**, reflecting the integer value used in back-end calculations.

Example 2: Using "General Format" for Targeted Changes

Another common and perhaps more precise way to remove the date format from cells in Excel is to use the **General Format** feature. Unlike the "Clear Formats" method, which removes all styling (including bolding, colors, and borders), changing the format to "General" specifically targets the **data type**. This is ideal when you want to keep your cell's aesthetic appearance but need to change how the number is interpreted.

To use this feature, begin by highlighting the cell range **A2:A10**. Navigate once again to the **Home** tab along the top **ribbon**. In the center of this tab, you will find the **Number** group, which contains a dropdown menu that typically displays the current format of the selected cells (in this case, it likely says "Date"). Click this **Number Format** dropdown to view the variety of available display options.

From the resulting list, select **General**, which is usually the first option. The "General" format is the default setting for any new cell in **Microsoft Excel**; it has no specific number format. When you apply this to a date, Excel reverts to showing the **serial number** while maintaining any other formatting choices you might have made, such as cell alignment or font size.



After clicking **General**, the date format will be removed from each of the selected cells. The visual result in terms of the numbers displayed will be identical to the previous method, as shown in the following image. This process effectively tells Excel to stop treating the number as a coordinate on a calendar and start treating it as a simple **integer** value.

	A	B	C	D	E
1	Date				
2	44927				
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4	45094				
5	45108				
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7	45196				
8	45202				
9	45280				
10	45284				
11					
12					
13					
14					
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As observed, the dates are once again displayed as the number of days since January 1, 1900. It is important to notice that this produces the same numerical result as the previous example, but the "General Format" approach is often preferred in **professional reporting** environments because it is less destructive to the overall design of the **spreadsheet**.

Advanced Scenarios: Removing Date Formatting via Formulas

While the manual methods described above are sufficient for most tasks, advanced users may occasionally need to remove date formatting dynamically using formulas. This is particularly useful when creating **dashboards** or automated reports where the input data is constantly changing. By using functions, you can ensure that the "unformatted" version of a date is always available for other calculations without manual intervention.

One common function used for this purpose is the **VALUE** function. If a date is stored as text, the VALUE function converts the text string into a **serial number** that Excel can recognize. For example, if cell A2 contains a date, entering `=VALUE(A2)` in another cell will return the raw numerical value. Another approach involves using the **TEXT** function, though this is usually used to convert numbers into a specific text format rather than removing formatting.

Furthermore, if you are dealing with a large **dataset** where dates are stuck in a text format that refuses to change via the standard ribbon options, the "Text to Columns" wizard is an invaluable tool. By selecting the data and running the wizard without changing any delimiters, you can force

Excel to re-evaluate the data type of the cells, effectively stripping away persistent and stubborn date formatting that might have been inherited from a **CSV file** or a web-based export.

Troubleshooting Persistent Date Formats

Occasionally, you might find that clicking "General" or "Clear Formats" does not seem to change the appearance of your data. This often happens when the data is not actually a date but a text string that *looks* like a date. In such cases, Excel's **cell format** rules do not apply because the software treats the entry as literal text rather than a numerical value. Identifying these "pseudo-dates" is a crucial step in **data cleansing**.

To fix this, you can use the "Paste Special" trick. Type the number 1 into an empty cell and copy it. Highlight the range of dates that won't change, select "Paste Special," choose "Multiply," and click OK. This operation forces Excel to perform a mathematical calculation on the cell contents, which usually triggers the conversion of text-based dates into their underlying **serial numbers**. Once converted, you can then easily apply the "General" format to remove any remaining date-like appearance.

Another troubleshooting tip involves checking for leading apostrophes. Sometimes, data imported from other **SaaS platforms** includes a hidden apostrophe at the beginning of the cell (e.g., '1/1/2023). This apostrophe forces Excel to treat the cell as text regardless of the formatting selected in the **ribbon**. Removing these apostrophes, either manually or via a "Find and Replace" operation, is necessary to successfully remove the date format and restore the numerical integrity of your data.

Conclusion and Best Practices for Data Management

Mastering the ability to remove date formatting is a fundamental skill for anyone looking to perform advanced **data analysis** in Excel. Whether you choose the "Clear Formats" method for a total reset or the "General Format" method for a targeted display change, understanding the underlying **serial number** system is key to ensuring your **spreadsheet** functions correctly. These techniques allow you to look past the visual representation of your data and interact with its true numerical form.

As a best practice, always keep a backup of your original data before performing bulk formatting changes. While removing a date format is reversible (you can simply re-apply a date format later), it can be confusing to look at a screen full of five-digit integers if you lose track of which column represents which data point. Using clear headers and maintaining consistent **documentation** within your workbook will help you and your colleagues navigate these changes effectively.

The following tutorials explain how to perform other common operations in Excel, helping you to

further expand your technical proficiency and streamline your workflow. By continuing to explore the depths of Excel's capabilities, you will be better equipped to handle complex data challenges and produce high-quality, accurate results in your professional projects.

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