

# How to Easily Add and Subtract Days in Google Sheets

Authored by  
**stats writer**

December 3, 2025

## RECOMMENDED CITATION

stats writer (2025). *How to Easily Add and Subtract Days in Google Sheets*.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SCALES. Retrieved from <https://scales.arabpsychology.com/?p=104051>

Welcome to this comprehensive guide on manipulating Google Sheets dates. Calculating future deadlines, scheduling project milestones, or determining past events are common tasks that rely heavily on accurate date arithmetic. While it might seem complex, Google Sheets provides exceptionally straightforward methods--both simple mathematical operations and specialized functions--to handle the addition and subtraction of days, workdays, and even months.

Understanding how to correctly utilize these functions is fundamental for anyone managing financial schedules, project timelines, or sequential data within a spreadsheet environment. We will explore the core techniques, from basic addition to the use of powerful functions like `WORKDAY`, ensuring you can quickly calculate any resulting date with precision and ease. We strongly recommend using the specialized functions when dealing with business logic to maintain accuracy.

## Understanding Date Arithmetic in Google Sheets

Before diving into the formulas, it is crucial to understand how Google Sheets interprets dates. Unlike plain text, dates are stored internally as serial numbers. This convention means that every date corresponds to a sequential integer count, typically beginning from December 30, 1899 (Day 1). This underlying structure is what allows for simple mathematical operations on dates.

When you input a date, such as `01/01/2024`, Sheets converts it into its corresponding serial number. Adding the number `10` to this serial number is mathematically equivalent to advancing the date by ten days. This mechanism forms the basis of the simplest and most commonly used method for adding or subtracting days in your spreadsheet applications. If the resulting calculation appears as a number instead of a date, simply reformat the cell using the "Format" menu to ensure it displays the correct date format.

While direct addition is effective for standard calendar days, it fails when the requirement is to calculate only working days (excluding weekends or holidays). For business and project management contexts, relying solely on simple arithmetic can lead to significant errors in scheduling. Therefore, Google Sheets offers dedicated functions that handle these more complex logistical requirements automatically.

## The Simple Method: Adding or Subtracting Days Directly

The most basic way to adjust a date in Google Sheets is through direct arithmetic manipulation. This approach treats the date as a serial number, allowing you to simply add or subtract integers to shift the date forward or backward, respectively. This method is ideal when you need to calculate a future or past date based on calendar days, without regard for weekends or public holidays.

To implement this, you reference the cell containing the starting date and apply a simple mathematical formula. For instance, if your starting date resides in cell A2, adding 10 days requires

the formula `=A2 + 10`. Conversely, subtracting 10 days would use `=A2 - 10`. This operation is quick, efficient, and requires no specialized function names, making it the preferred choice for general-purpose date shifting.

Below we illustrate the fundamental syntax for performing standard date addition and subtraction. Note that the output format will automatically adjust to a date if the cell containing the formula is properly formatted.

We can use the following simple formulas to **add or subtract days** to a date in Google Sheets:

**#add 10 days to the date in cell A2**

`=A2+10`

**#subtract 10 days from the date in cell A2**

`=A2-10`

## Utilizing the WORKDAY Function for Business Calculations

When project planning, calculating payroll, or setting official deadlines, it is often necessary to exclude weekends (Saturday and Sunday) from the total day count. The standard addition method fails in this scenario. To solve this, Google Sheets offers the powerful `WORKDAY` function, which automatically skips non-working days when calculating a future or past date.

The `WORKDAY` function takes two mandatory arguments: the starting date and the number of working days to move forward or backward. A positive number adds workdays (moving the date forward), while a negative number subtracts workdays (moving the date backward). This function is invaluable for business contexts where operations cease during the weekend, ensuring that calculated deadlines fall on an actual workday.

Furthermore, the `WORKDAY` function allows for an optional third argument: a range containing a list of specific holiday dates. By supplying this list, the function will not only skip Saturdays and Sundays but also any custom holidays defined in your spreadsheet, providing highly accurate and realistic deadline calculations tailored to your specific organizational calendar. If you require more flexibility, such as excluding Tuesday and Wednesday instead of the standard weekend, you would need to utilize the `WORKDAY.INTL` function, which allows for custom weekend definitions.

And we can use the following formulas to **add or subtract workdays** (Monday through Friday) to a date:

**#add 10 workdays to the date in cell A2**

`=workday(A2, 10)`

```
#subtract 10 workdays from the date in cell A2  
=workday(A2, -10)
```

The following examples show how to use each of these formulas in practice.

## Advanced Date Manipulation: Adding Months with EDATE

While adding days is straightforward, manipulating dates based on months can be tricky due to the inconsistent length of months (28, 29, 30, or 31 days). If you simply multiply 30 days by 3 (for three months), you risk landing on an incorrect date, especially when crossing over the end of February or months with 31 days. To ensure mathematical integrity when dealing with monthly increments, Google Sheets provides the specialized EDATE function.

The EDATE function calculates the date that is a specified number of months before or after a starting date. It maintains the day of the month. For example, if you start on January 15 and add 2 months, EDATE will return March 15, regardless of whether January has 31 days and February has 28. This functionality is essential for calculating maturity dates, billing cycles, or renewal periods that must fall on the same calendar day in the future.

The syntax for EDATE is simple: `=EDATE(start_date, months)`. Using a positive number for the `months` argument moves the date forward, while a negative number moves it backward. This function eliminates the need for complex nested logic to handle varying month lengths, simplifying financial and contractual date calculations immensely. It is highly recommended over attempting to approximate months using simple day multiplication.

### Example 1: Calculating Future and Past Dates (Standard Days)

This example demonstrates the application of simple arithmetic addition and subtraction to a list of existing dates. We will use a column of dates and calculate the resulting dates 10 days in the future and 10 days in the past, respectively. This method assumes that weekends and holidays are included in the count, as is standard for most personal scheduling needs.

We begin with a simple dataset containing several starting dates in column A. Our goal is to calculate the adjusted dates in columns B and C. This step is crucial for establishing baseline data before applying any transformations.

Suppose we have the following list of dates in Google Sheets:

	A	B	C	D
1	<b>Date</b>			
2	1/15/2021			
3	1/20/2021			
4	1/25/2021			
5	1/30/2021			
6	2/5/2021			
7	2/10/2021			
8	2/15/2021			
9	2/20/2021			
10	2/25/2021			
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				
16				
17				
18				
19				
20				
21				

To calculate the date 10 days later, we apply the formula `=A2 + 10` in the first row and drag it down. The resulting dates will show the exact calendar date after the 10-day increment, demonstrating the efficiency of Google Sheets' date serial number handling.

We can use the following formula to add 10 days to each date:

B2  $\nabla$  *fx* =A2 + 10

	A	B	C	D
1	<b>Date</b>	<b>Date + 10 days</b>		
2	1/15/2021	1/25/2021		
3	1/20/2021	1/30/2021		
4	1/25/2021	2/4/2021		
5	1/30/2021	2/9/2021		
6	2/5/2021	2/15/2021		
7	2/10/2021	2/20/2021		
8	2/15/2021	2/25/2021		
9	2/20/2021	3/2/2021		
10	2/25/2021	3/7/2021		
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				
16				
17				
18				
19				

Conversely, to calculate the date 10 days prior, we use the subtraction operator: `=A2 - 10`. This effectively reverses the process, calculating the date that preceded the start date by exactly ten calendar days. This versatility ensures that date calculations can flow both forward and backward in time using the same basic mathematical operations.

And we can use the following formula to subtract 10 days from each date:

	A	B	C	D
1	<b>Date</b>	<b>Date + 10 days</b>	<b>Date - 10 days</b>	
2	1/15/2021	1/25/2021	1/5/2021	
3	1/20/2021	1/30/2021	1/10/2021	
4	1/25/2021	2/4/2021	1/15/2021	
5	1/30/2021	2/9/2021	1/20/2021	
6	2/5/2021	2/15/2021	1/26/2021	
7	2/10/2021	2/20/2021	1/31/2021	
8	2/15/2021	2/25/2021	2/5/2021	
9	2/20/2021	3/2/2021	2/10/2021	
10	2/25/2021	3/7/2021	2/15/2021	
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				
16				
17				
18				
19				

## Example 2: Calculating Project Deadlines (Workdays Only)

In scenarios requiring precise adherence to a business week, such as estimating project completion dates or calculating SLA windows, we must ensure that weekends are not counted. This example shows how to use the `WORKDAY` function to accurately calculate these dates.

In some scenarios, we may only want to add or subtract workdays to dates in Google Sheets. Fortunately we can use the **WORKDAY()** function to do so, automatically excluding Saturdays and Sundays from the calculation, which is vital for professional scheduling.

To calculate a deadline 10 working days after the starting date, we use `=WORKDAY(A2, 10)`. It is important to observe how this resulting date differs significantly from the one calculated using simple addition, especially if the starting date falls near a weekend. The `WORKDAY` function ensures the resulting date is a Monday through Friday, making it a reliable tool for operational planning.

The following formula shows how to add 10 workdays to each date:

B2    fx    =workday(A2, 10)

	A	B	C	D
1	<b>Date</b>	<b>Date + 10 workdays</b>		
2	1/15/2021	1/29/2021		
3	1/20/2021	2/3/2021		
4	1/25/2021	2/8/2021		
5	1/30/2021	2/12/2021		
6	2/5/2021	2/19/2021		
7	2/10/2021	2/24/2021		
8	2/15/2021	3/1/2021		
9	2/20/2021	3/5/2021		
10	2/25/2021	3/11/2021		
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				
16				
17				
18				
19				

Similarly, we can determine the date 10 working days prior by using a negative value within the `WORKDAY` function: `=WORKDAY(A2, -10)`. This application is useful for looking backward to determine when a 10-day task would have needed to start to meet a specific deadline, maintaining the integrity of the business week throughout the calculation.

And the following formula shows how to subtract 10 workdays from each date:

C2    fx    =workday(A2, -10)

	A	B	C	D
1	<b>Date</b>	<b>Date + 10 workdays</b>	<b>Date - 10 work days</b>	
2	1/15/2021	1/29/2021	1/1/2021	
3	1/20/2021	2/3/2021	1/6/2021	
4	1/25/2021	2/8/2021	1/11/2021	
5	1/30/2021	2/12/2021	1/18/2021	
6	2/5/2021	2/19/2021	1/22/2021	
7	2/10/2021	2/24/2021	1/27/2021	
8	2/15/2021	3/1/2021	2/1/2021	
9	2/20/2021	3/5/2021	2/8/2021	
10	2/25/2021	3/11/2021	2/11/2021	
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				
16				
17				
18				
19				

## Addressing Common Errors in Date Calculations

Even with the correct formulas, users frequently encounter issues when performing date arithmetic. One of the most common problems is the display of a serial number instead of a recognizable date (e.g., displaying 45289 instead of 12/25/2023). This usually occurs because the cell formatting was not automatically updated upon calculation. The solution is straightforward: select the cell, navigate to "Format" > "Number," and choose the desired date format (e.g., "Date," "Custom date and time").

Another error arises when the input date is not recognized by Google Sheets. If the starting date is entered as text (e.g., 'January 1, 2024), simple arithmetic or date functions will return an error, often #VALUE!. Always ensure that the starting date cell is correctly interpreted by Sheets; using the DATEVALUE function can help convert ambiguous text strings into recognizable serial dates if necessary, though it is best practice to enter dates using the standard slashes or hyphens (e.g., 1/1/2024).

Finally, when using the WORKDAY function, be mindful of holiday exclusions. If your organization

observes specific public holidays, failing to include a named range of these dates as the third argument in the `WORKDAY` function will result in an inaccurate calculation, potentially overestimating project timeframes. For international use, remember that `WORKDAY` assumes a Saturday/Sunday weekend; if your locale uses different weekend days (e.g., Friday/Saturday), you must switch to the `WORKDAY.INTL` function to define the custom weekend structure.

## Summary of Key Date Functions

Mastering date manipulation in Google Sheets involves knowing when to use simple arithmetic versus when to employ specialized functions. Simple addition and subtraction are perfect for counting all calendar days, providing a fast and efficient calculation when weekends and holidays are irrelevant.

For professional and business applications, however, the `WORKDAY` and `WORKDAY.INTL` functions are indispensable tools. They ensure that your calculated deadlines respect organizational working hours by automatically excluding standard or customized non-working days. This precision is essential for reliable scheduling and reporting.

Furthermore, when dealing with monthly increments, always rely on the `EDATE` function. This function handles the inherent mathematical inconsistencies of varying month lengths, guaranteeing that monthly recurring dates remain synchronized. By employing these techniques, you can transform complex scheduling challenges into simple, repeatable, and accurate Google Sheets formulas, significantly enhancing your spreadsheet efficiency.