



iOS 26.5.2 is unable to download because there is not enough free space on my iPhone SE. System data takes up 15.82 GB of the 64 GB storage. Is there some simple way to reduce this ?

You can't directly "shrink" System Data with a single switch, but there are a few simple, fairly safe steps that usually reclaim several GB and then make the update possible. On a 64 GB iPhone SE, 15–16 GB of System Data is high but not unheard of, and you may be able to get it down a bit and/or work around it. ^[1] ^[2] ^[3]

First check: do you actually need to shrink System Data?

1. Go to **Settings** → **General** → **iPhone Storage**.
2. Note:
 - **How much free space** is shown at the top.
 - Whether there is an existing iOS 26.5.2 update file listed (often just called "iOS" near the top).

If there's a partially-downloaded update, tap it and **Delete Update**, then try again after freeing a bit more space. ^[4] ^[1]

Apple's own guidance is that you **don't need to act specifically on "System Data"**; instead you free space in other areas, and iOS will trim caches and temporary system data automatically as needed for the update. ^[1]

Simple things that often reduce System Data

None of these should affect your important content, but I'd still make sure iCloud/other backups are up to date before you start.

1. **Restart the iPhone**
 - Fully power off, wait 30 seconds, then turn it back on.
 - This alone often clears a chunk of cached logs and temporary files counted under System Data. ^[5] ^[3]
2. **Clear Safari data**
 - Go to **Settings** → **Safari** → **Clear History and Website Data** and confirm. ^[6] ^[3] ^[7]
 - This can free a surprising amount if you have a lot of browsing history and cached websites.

3. Trim Messages attachments and history

- Go to **Settings** → **General** → **iPhone Storage** → **Messages** and look at **Photos / Videos / GIFs & Stickers / Other**. Delete large, old items you don't need. ^[3] ^[5]
- Optionally, go to **Settings** → **Messages** → **Keep Messages** and set to **1 Year** or **30 Days** so it doesn't bloat again. ^[7] ^[5] ^[3]

4. Clear heavy app caches (streaming, social, email)

Some apps put a lot of cached content into System Data. ^[2] ^[3]

- Open apps such as **Spotify**, **Apple Music**, **Netflix**, **YouTube**, **BBC iPlayer**, **podcast apps** and look in their settings for **Clear cache / Downloads / Offline content**, and delete anything you don't need. ^[3]
- For email: if you use the built-in Mail app with "Forever" sync, you can remove the account and re-add it with a shorter sync window (e.g. 30 days) to reduce local mail storage that counts toward System Data. ^[7] ^[3]

5. Offload unused apps (rather than delete outright)

- Go to **Settings** → **General** → **iPhone Storage**.
- Tap large but rarely used apps and choose **Offload App**. This keeps your documents/settings but clears the app binary, which may free enough space for the update. ^[5] ^[1]

These steps won't remove System Data entirely (iOS always reserves a chunk for itself), but they commonly bring the number down and, more importantly, free enough total space for an over-the-air update. ^[6] ^[2] ^[3]

If you still can't free enough space

If space still looks tight after the easy clean-up:

1. Let a computer do the update for you

This bypasses the need to download the full installer onto the phone.

- On a Mac: connect the iPhone via USB, open **Finder**, select the iPhone in the sidebar, and click "**Check for Update**" → **Update**. ^[4] ^[1]
- On Windows: install the **Apple Devices app** (or **iTunes** on older systems), connect the iPhone, select it, and use **Check for Update**. ^[4] ^[1]
The Mac/PC downloads the update and pushes it to the phone, so your iPhone can get by with less free space.

2. As a last resort: full backup and reset

If System Data is extremely bloated and nothing else works, the nuclear option is:

- Make sure you have a **current iCloud backup** (**Settings** → [your name] → **iCloud** → **iCloud Backup** → **Back Up Now**) or an encrypted backup to a computer.
- Then go to **Settings** → **General** → **Transfer or Reset iPhone** → **Erase All Content and Settings**. ^[7]
- After it wipes and reinstalls iOS, you restore from your backup.
This often dramatically shrinks System Data, but it's more involved and you should

only do it if you're comfortable and fully backed up.^[2] ^[7]

About “tricks” that promise to slash System Data

You'll see suggestions online to change the date several years into the future, toggle Airplane Mode, or use obscure sequences to make iOS purge caches. These can sometimes work, but they're unofficial and can cause side-effects (e.g. iCloud, notifications, and certificates relying on correct date/time can misbehave), so I'd treat them as experimental rather than “simple”. For most people, Apple's supported methods above plus updating via a computer are safer.^[8] ^[9] ^[10]
^[1] ^[2]

To tailor this better: roughly how much free space does your iPhone SE show at the top of **Settings → General → iPhone Storage** right now, and do you have easy access to a Mac or Windows PC to run the update from there?

✱

1. <https://support.apple.com/en-us/108327>
2. <https://appleinsider.com/articles/22/05/29/how-to-fix-system-data-filling-your-iphones-storage>
3. <https://www.avast.com/c-clear-system-data-iphone>
4. <https://www.idownloadblog.com/2025/08/20/unable-to-update-iphone-despite-free-space-fix/>
5. <https://medium.com/@olha.novitska/how-i-finally-delete-system-storage-on-iphone-75b69238e511>
6. <https://www.macworld.com/article/232651/iphone-other-storage-what-is-it-and-how-do-you-delete-it.html>
7. <https://nordvpn.com/blog/what-is-system-data-on-iphone/>
8. <https://manuals.plus/apple/how-to-fix-system-data-storage-bloat-on-ios-18-ios-26-2025>
9. https://www.reddit.com/r/ios/comments/1pvkdfy/updated_psa_the_proper_way_to_remove_or_reduce/
10. <https://discussions.apple.com/thread/254876478>
11. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLkBNT-p1dM>
12. https://www.reddit.com/r/ios/comments/194ic1k/iphone_storage_full_from_system_data_heres_a_fix/
13. <https://setapp.com/how-to/clear-system-data-on-iphone>
14. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PHJ12AK0PD0>
15. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mflsc07z7WY>