

Displaying Only the Date with Excel's NOW Function: A Step-by-Step Guide

Authored by
Mohammed looti

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The Dual Nature of the NOW Function in Excel

The [NOW function](#) within [Excel](#) is a powerful, dynamic utility that serves to capture the exact, precise moment of calculation. Unlike static data entry, this function automatically updates, providing both the current date and the current time whenever the workbook is opened or recalculated. This comprehensive output, while highly valuable for detailed auditing, timestamping operations, or precise duration calculations, often proves to be excessive when the user's requirement is merely to display the calendar date for reporting or logging purposes. The challenge lies in isolating the necessary date component while discarding the superfluous time fraction.

To effectively manipulate time and date values in Excel, one must first grasp how the software manages them internally. Excel stores dates and times not as text, but as sequential [serial date system](#) numbers. In this system, the date is represented by the integer portion of the serial number, while the time is represented by the decimal fraction. For example, if the current serial number is 45678.75, the integer 45678 signifies a specific calendar date, and the decimal .75 signifies three-quarters of the way through the day, or 6:00 PM. Understanding this fundamental structure is the key to successfully separating the date from the time generated by the [NOW function](#).

When the simple formula **=NOW()** is entered into a cell, the software returns the full serial number, which it typically displays using a default [date and time format](#), such as 12/31/2023 10:30 AM. Because the function is **volatile**, this value changes constantly, ensuring accuracy. However, if the intent is solely to maintain a current date marker--such as labeling a daily report or calculating an item's age in full days--the inclusion of the time component introduces unnecessary complexity and requires explicit truncation. This realization leads us to two primary methodological approaches for achieving date isolation: employing a mathematical function to discard the fractional component, or utilizing a specialized date function designed to ignore time inherently.

The Mathematical Approach: Using INT() to Extract the Date from NOW()

One highly reliable and instructive method for stripping the time component from the comprehensive output of **NOW()** involves integrating the [INT function](#). The **INT** function, short for Integer, is mathematically designed to round any given number down to the nearest whole number. Because Excel's date serial number structure defines the date as the integer part and the time as the decimal fraction, applying **INT()** directly to the output of **NOW()** performs a perfect mathematical truncation, effectively eliminating the time value entirely and retaining only the pure date serial number.

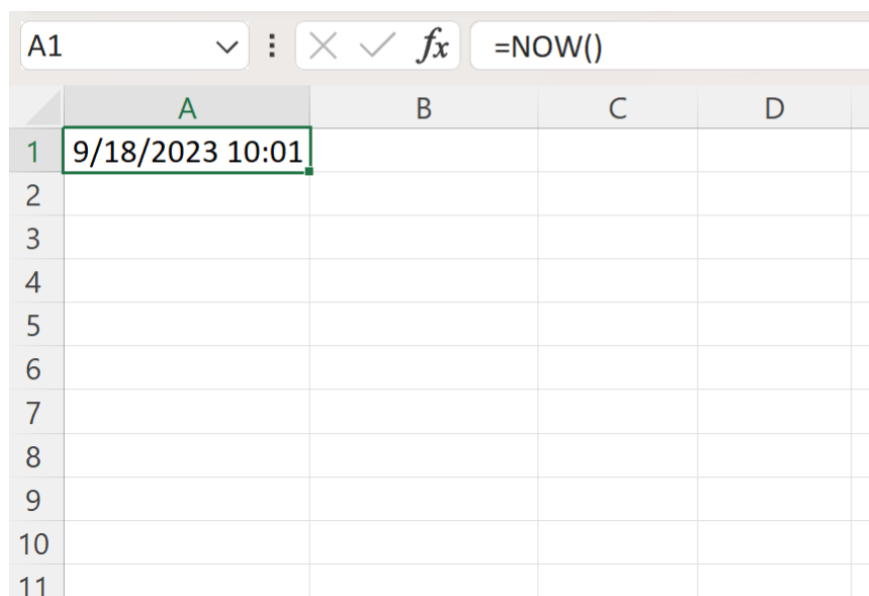
The implementation of this powerful combination is concise and elegant. The formula **=INT(NOW())** first executes the **NOW()** function, which generates the dynamic, comprehensive serial number (e.g., 45678.75). This result is then immediately passed as the argument to the **INT()** function. The

INT() function processes this input, disregarding the decimal remainder (.75, representing the time) and returning only the integer portion (45678). While this raw result is technically a number, it represents the exact current date in Excel's internal system. This method is crucial for users who need to explicitly demonstrate or leverage the separation of the date and time components within the spreadsheet logic.

To fully appreciate the need for this mathematical manipulation, consider the default behavior. If we input the basic formula into cell **A1** to display the current date and time without any modification, the outcome will include both components:

=NOW()

The following screenshot demonstrates the full, comprehensive date and time value that Excel initially displays when using the unmodified **NOW** function:



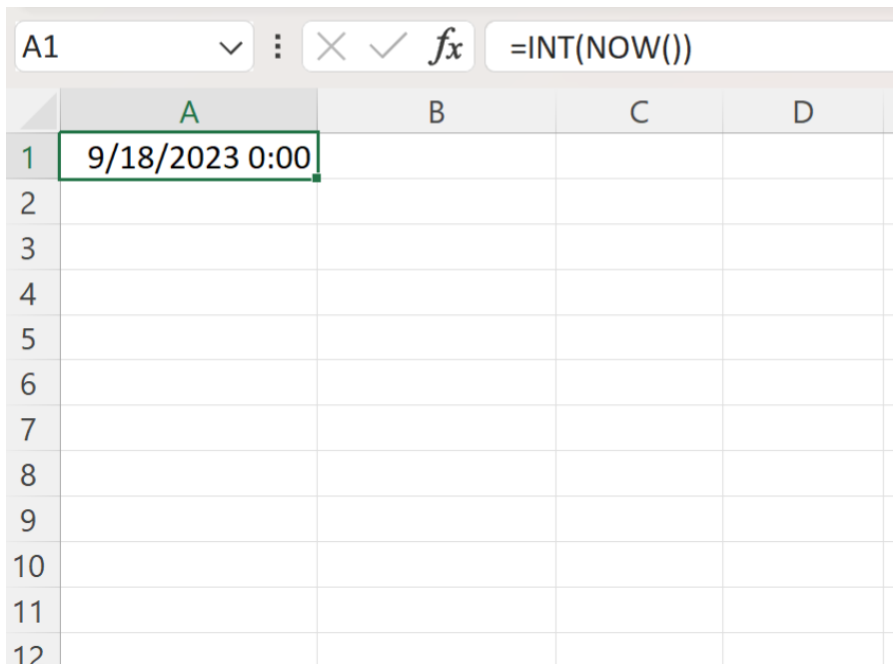
The screenshot shows an Excel spreadsheet with the formula bar at the top displaying "=NOW()". The active cell is A1, which contains the text "9/18/2023 10:01". The spreadsheet grid shows columns A, B, C, and D, and rows 1 through 11. Cell A1 is highlighted with a green border.

	A	B	C	D
1	9/18/2023 10:01			
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				

To isolate the date using the **INT** method, which performs the necessary truncation, we would refine the formula in cell **A1** to explicitly return only the date component, discarding the time fraction:

=INT(NOW())

The subsequent screenshot illustrates the immediate result of applying this mathematical truncation. Crucially, without any accompanying formatting changes, the output often reverts to Excel's underlying generic number format, displaying the raw date serial number:



The screenshot shows an Excel spreadsheet with a single cell, A1, containing the formula `=INT(NOW())`. The formula bar at the top displays the formula. The cell A1 shows the date and time "9/18/2023 0:00". The spreadsheet grid shows columns A, B, C, and D, and rows 1 through 12.

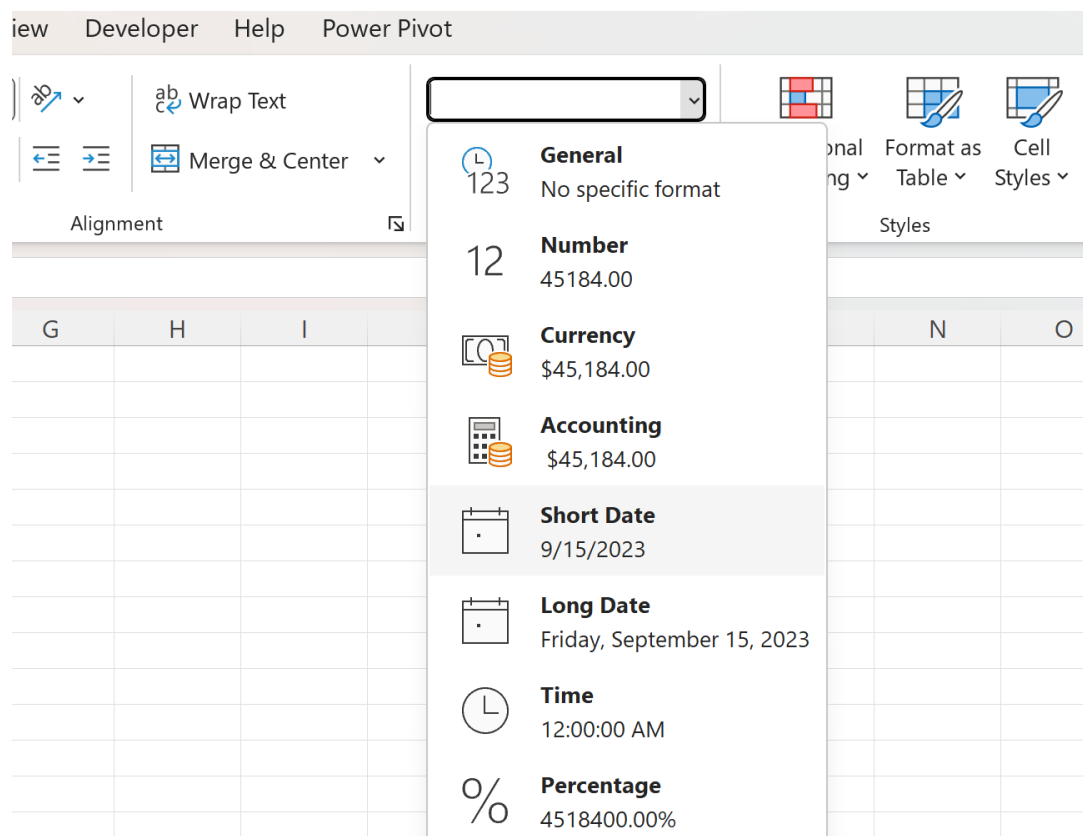
	A	B	C	D
1	9/18/2023 0:00			
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				

Formatting the Output for Readability

Achieving a time-free date requires two distinct steps: calculation and presentation. While the formula `=INT(NOW())` successfully completes the calculation by removing the time component, the resulting cell value often defaults to a generic number format, displaying a large serial number (e.g., 45287) that is unintuitive for standard reporting. This raw integer output, while mathematically correct, must be converted into a universally legible date format for practical use. Therefore, the final, crucial step in this methodology is applying the correct [date and time format](#) to ensure the underlying serial number is presented as a recognizable calendar date.

The process of formatting the cell is straightforward and essential for user comprehension. With the cell containing the formula `=INT(NOW())` selected, users must navigate to the **Number Format** settings, which are conveniently located within the **Number** group on the **Home** tab of the Excel ribbon. Within the dropdown menu, selecting the **Short Date** option instructs Excel to interpret the stored integer serial number not as a generic numerical value, but as a date. This action triggers the display of the date according to the standard regional short date convention, typically appearing as MM/DD/YYYY or DD/MM/YYYY depending on the user's localization settings.

The visual guidance for applying this formatting change is detailed in the illustration below. By ensuring that the correct format is selected after the calculation is complete, the user transforms the meaningless raw number into a clear, concise, and professional date display. This step bridges the gap between the technical calculation of the [NOW function](#) and the required end-user readability.



After successfully applying both the mathematical truncation and the explicit formatting, the designated cell will now display the accurate, time-free current date. This two-part solution--combining the dynamic nature of **NOW()** with the precision of the [INT function](#) and proper formatting--provides a complete and robust method for displaying only the date, ensuring that the result updates automatically without showing extraneous time data:

A1 ✕ ✓ <i>fx</i> =INT(NOW())				
	A	B	C	D
1	9/18/2023			
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				

The Simplest Solution: Leveraging the TODAY Function

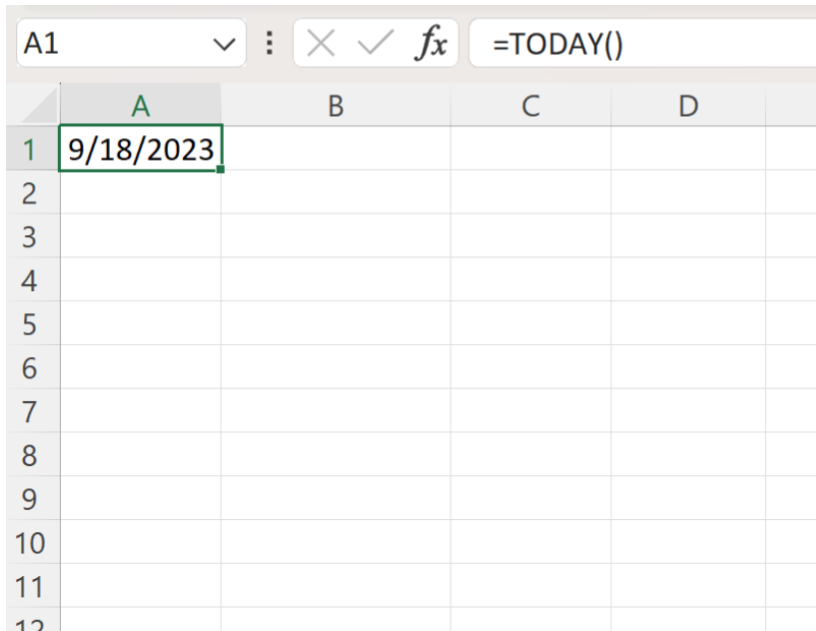
While the **=INT(NOW())** method is an outstanding technical demonstration of how to accurately manipulate Excel's [serial date system](#), Excel provides a dedicated, streamlined function specifically designed to achieve the exact same result with far greater simplicity: the [TODAY function](#). This function is inherently built to return only the current date, thereby eliminating the necessity for combining functions or performing manual truncation. For users whose sole requirement is a dynamically updating calendar date, **TODAY()** is overwhelmingly the most efficient and readable choice.

The fundamental difference between **TODAY()** and **NOW()** lies in the structure of the serial number they return. Like **NOW()**, **TODAY()** is a **volatile function** that updates whenever the workbook recalculates, ensuring the displayed date is perpetually current. However, the serial number generated by the [TODAY function](#) is always a pure integer (e.g., 45678). Because it contains no fractional component, it inherently carries no time data. This means that **TODAY()** automatically performs the date isolation that **INT(NOW())** achieves through mathematical intervention, resulting in a cleaner implementation that often requires less manual cell formatting.

To implement this simplified solution, which is generally recommended for displaying the current date without time, the user needs only to input the following formula into the desired cell:

=TODAY()

The resulting output is visually clean and directly reflects the current date, as illustrated in the following screenshot. This demonstrates how a dedicated function can bypass the complexities associated with managing and formatting the full date-time serial number:



The screenshot shows an Excel spreadsheet with the formula bar at the top displaying `=TODAY()`. The spreadsheet has columns labeled A, B, C, and D, and rows numbered 1 through 12. Cell A1 contains the date `9/18/2023`, which is highlighted with a green border. The rest of the cells are empty.

	A	B	C	D
1	9/18/2023			
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				

It is important to note that, irrespective of the method chosen, the date returned by `=TODAY()` will always be numerically equivalent to the date returned by the more complex `=INT(NOW())` formula. This equivalency confirms that both techniques successfully isolate the integer component of the current date's serial number, providing flexibility based on the user's specific needs and level of technical understanding.

Practical Comparison and Use Cases

The choice between the `INT(NOW())` construct and the simple `TODAY()` function hinges critically on whether the user has any potential need for the time component in auxiliary calculations or logging activities. Both functions are equally volatile and ensure automatic updating, but their intended purposes within a larger spreadsheet model are subtly distinct, necessitating a clear decision based on application.

The [TODAY function](#) is the definitive choice for general operational tasks where simplicity and clarity are paramount. This includes creating dynamic report headers, performing date comparisons (e.g., calculating the number of days until a deadline), or simple logging where time precision is irrelevant. It offers the highest degree of readability and the lowest overhead in terms of formula complexity and required formatting adjustments. When the goal is simply to tell the user "what day is it today," `TODAY()` is the superior method.

Conversely, the **INT(NOW())** structure serves a specific analytical or instructional purpose. It is highly valuable when demonstrating the mechanics of Excel's [serial date system](#), or, more practically, when the **NOW()** value is already utilized elsewhere in the sheet and you need a derived cell that explicitly references only the date part of that specific timestamp. Furthermore, if a complex calculation requires you to isolate the fractional time component--for instance, calculating the exact duration from the current moment to midnight--you would use **NOW() - INT(NOW())**. In such scenarios, using **INT(NOW())** as a component of a larger calculation is necessary to separate the integer (date) from the fraction (time).

In conclusion, the selection process should prioritize efficiency and purpose. For dedicated current date display and maximum simplicity, **TODAY()** is the recommended function. For advanced users who require explicit manipulation of the date-time serial number components or need to derive a date from an existing **NOW()** timestamp, the **INT(NOW())** structure provides the necessary mathematical control and separation.

Additional Resources

For further exploration of date, time, and advanced computational operations in Excel, we recommend consulting the following authoritative documentation and tutorials:

[Official Documentation for the NOW function](#)

[Official Documentation for the TODAY function](#)

[Understanding Date and Time Formats in Computing](#)

These resources explain how to perform other common operations in Excel: