

Keeping Your PC Happy

Hardware

Power

- Keep your PC plugged into a good quality surge suppressor. Small, portable suppressors are available for use with notebook PCs.
- If you use your computer infrequently, be sure to turn it on and connect to the Internet for a few hours every week or two to ensure that it can download and install updates and run scheduled jobs (e.g., virus scans).
- Use standby/suspend/sleep mode to reduce power use and return to work quickly.
- Use hibernate mode to preserve a notebook PC's battery between uses and to return to work relatively quickly.
- Power off the computer for extended periods of non-use or if you are having difficulty with standby or hibernate mode.

Always save your work before entering standby or hibernate modes or powering off your PC!

Environment

- Avoid exposing your PC to temperature or humidity extremes.
- Keep your PC, especially air intake and fan vents, free of dust.
- Keep magnets and liquids away from the computer, keyboard, and other peripherals.

Cleaning

- Clean the exterior of the PC with a soft cloth. Using a mild cleaning spray or water on the cloth is okay, but be sure to avoid spraying directly onto the PC or allowing drips to enter the computer.
- Clean the keyboard (after shutting down the PC and unplugging the keyboard) as you would the PC. Remove crumbs and other small particles using a cotton swab moistened with rubbing alcohol, a small vacuum, or a can of compressed air.
- Clean the exterior surfaces of the mouse (after shutting down the PC and unplugging the mouse) as you would the PC. For mechanical mice (those with a rolling ball, instead of a LED or laser light, on the bottom), turn and remove the ring, remove the ball, and clean the rollers with a tweezers or a cotton swab moistened with rubbing alcohol.
- Clean the monitor screen with a soft cloth moistened with a little water or a specialized cleaning spray designed for PC screens. Be sure to avoid moisture dripping into the gap between the screen and the bezel.
- Once or twice a year, power off your desktop/tower PC, unplug the power cord, and remove the main access panel (typically the left side of the case). Typically there are one or two screws on the back that hold this panel in place. Clean out dust carefully using a cloth, cotton swabs, a small vacuum, and/or a can of compressed air.

Maxim Weinstein, PC Consultant
max@virtualmax.com • (781) 391-6985

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Software

Windows updates

Keep Windows's automatic update feature turned on:

Windows XP: Start→Control Panel→Automatic Updates→Automatic (set to weekly on Wednesday for best results)→OK

Windows Vista: Start→Control Panel→Security→Turn automatic updating on or off (under Windows Update)→Install updates automatically (set to weekly on Wednesday for best results)

Note: If you keep your PC turned on and connected to a high-speed Internet connection regularly, you can set this to update every day.

Note 2: It is possible from the Windows Update web site (Start→All Programs→Windows Update) to upgrade to an enhanced version of this feature called Microsoft Update that works the same way but provides updates not just for Windows and Internet Explorer, but also for other Microsoft products (Word, Messenger, etc.).

Other application updates

Keep other software on your PC, especially software that you use online or to open files that you receive online, current by using the built-in update feature (often found in the Help menu) or by downloading new versions from the software maker's website. Beware of attempts to get you to download additional software that you don't need (e.g., QuickTime tries to get you to download iTunes).

Security software

It is essential that your PC have:

- Anti-virus software (such as AVG, BitDefender, NOD32, etc.)
- Anti-spyware software (such as Lavasoft Ad-Aware, Spybot Search & Destroy, etc.)
- Firewall software (built into Windows Vista and XP if you have all updates installed)
- Products advertised as Internet security suites often include all three (including a firewall with more features/protectations than the built-in one). Avoid "rogue" products by purchasing boxed items in a store or downloading/purchasing only from the websites of vendors listed here or recommended by reliable sources.

It is critical that you keep your security software updated with fixes and "definitions" updates. Some products charge for these, others provide them for free. In some cases, it may be necessary to upgrade to a new version of the software to keep getting updates.

Malware

Limit your exposure to viruses, trojans, worms, unwanted adware, and other unfriendly software:

- Read pop-ups and warning messages carefully before clicking on them.
- Watch for web browser pop-ups that look like real warning/information messages (often identified by seeing the browser name—Internet Explorer or Mozilla Firefox—in the title bar at the top of the window).

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- Heed warnings provided by reliable sources, such as Google search results, McAfee SiteAdvisor, Internet Explorer or Firefox phishing warnings, etc.
- Do not open e-mails, and especially do not click on attachments or links in e-mails, unless you are very confident that they are legitimate. When in doubt about a link, visit the website by typing its URL (web address) into the browser yourself instead of clicking the link.
- Protect your passwords by keeping them to yourself and using them only on reputable sites. Do not write them down someplace where they can easily fall into someone else's hands (e.g., on a desk or in a drawer at work).

Unnecessary software

If you have programs on your PC that you do not use, uninstall them:

Windows XP: Start→Control Panel→Add/Remove Programs

Windows Vista: Start→Control Panel→Uninstall a program

Note: If you're not sure what a program does, it's best to look it up online or ask someone before removing it, just in case it's something useful but obscure.

Startup applications

If you have programs on your PC that you wish to keep, but you do not want them to start automatically every time you boot up, you may be able to disable them in one of the following ways:

- Check the applications options menu and/or right-click on the system tray icon (bottom-right of the computer screen) for an option that lets you disable running the program at startup.
- Look in the Start menu under All Programs→Startup for the program's icon. If you find it, right-click and choose delete. This can be reversed by finding the item in your Recycle Bin, right-clicking, and choosing Restore.
- Use the msconfig tool (XP: Start→Run→type **msconfig**→OK, Vista: Start→type **msconfig**→OK). Click the Startup tab, uncheck the item you want to stop from running automatically, and click OK. This can be undone by repeating the process and re-checking the box.

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