



At Personal Nerd we often get asked how to keep a computer tuned-up and running effectively. We've developed the simple process below to keep you computer in tip top shape.

Don't Download Junk – Almost everywhere you go on the Internet you'll see free programs, tools, etc. Although some of this stuff is great (see spyware protection tools below), most of it isn't. In fact most of it will infest your computer with spyware. Rule # 1 – don't download stuff you won't use or programs your not absolutely sure are spyware free.

Cleanup Your Desktop – I like a nice "clean" desktop. Newly installed programs will place one or more shortcuts on your desktop. These shortcuts tend to slowly but surely take over your desktop making it nearly impossible to find the icons you really want to find. Remember, you can safely remove icons (highlight the shortcut you want to remove and drag it to the trash) from your desktop. Removing a shortcut does not remove the underlying program. All installed programs can still be accessed from the start menu.

To organize the shortcuts for my favorite programs I prefer to use the Quick Launch feature on the Windows Toolbar. You can turn on this feature by right clicking on the toolbar. Select preferences and click the checkbox on show quick launch. Simply drag any shortcuts you wish to the quick launch section of the toolbar. When you want to access one of these programs simply click once on the icon and your program will open. And you'll keep the icons off of your desktop.

Remove Unwanted Programs – Over time, people install programs on their computers that they decide they don't like or never use. It's a good idea to periodically review your installed programs and remove ones you don't want. The only way to safely remove a program from your computer is to click on "Start," select "Settings," then "Control Panel," double-click on the "Add/Remove Programs" icon, look for the program on the list, and then click "Add/Remove." Then follow the on screen directions to safely remove the program.

Check and Update Virus Protection – Although most virus protection programs will warn you if your subscription is about to expire, it's a good idea to periodically check your virus software status. Open your virus software and check the status of your subscription. Also make sure that the auto protect feature is enabled. If the software is about to expire follow the on screen directions to renew your subscription.

Cleanup the Junk - Running the "Disk Cleanup" program, found by clicking on "Start," "Programs," "Accessories," and "System Tools," will get rid of temporary files, empty your recycle bin and eliminate other junk.

Update Your Spyware Removal/Protection Tools – These are nasty snippets of code, registry entries, programs, etc. that can dramatically slow down your computer (to the point of rendering it unusable), pop up unwanted ads, and steal private information from your computer. Personal Nerd recommends two free spyware/adware removal tools. Ad-Aware ([adaware download site](#)) and Spybot ([spybot download site](#)). To be effective these programs need to be regularly updated. Both programs have a button to check and download updates for the program. Make sure you update them before you use them to check for Spyware.

Check and Remove Spyware – Go into safe mode. Close all your programs and restart the computer in "Safe Mode." After the rebooting process has begun, hit the "F8" key when you hear the beep. The process varies from computer to computer. In safe mode, the graphics look horrible, but it doesn't load programs that will interfere with what you will do next.

Run your preferred program (or programs). These programs work more effectively in "Safe Mode." For me, Ad-aware and Spybot each take about 5 - 10 minutes to run. Follow the directions to remove all the Spyware. Once completed re-boot your computer normally.

Protect Yourself From Spyware - Although Ad-Aware and Spybot are both terrific at removing spyware, Personal Nerd believes it's much better to keep spyware off your computer in the first place. Personal Nerd recommends a free program called Spyware Blaster from Javacool Software (<http://www.javacoolsoftware.com/>). When installed, this software will keep sites from downloading spyware to your system. We've found it cuts spyware by about 90%. Although the software is free, it does require you to manually update the software to keep it effective. For less than \$10 you can get the software to automatically update itself from the javacool site.

If you follow these simple steps your machine should stay in optimum shape. Personal Nerd recommends performing this checklist at least once a month. However, if you're a heavy web surfer follow it more frequently. If you find this list too difficult to follow – give us a call and set up an appointment and we'll do it for you. Remember, a little preventative maintenance can save you from a lot of problems (and cost) later.