IT Computer Technical Support Newsletter

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How do I keep my computer clean?

Computers are expensive, and with all major purchases you probably want to protect your investment**. Luckily, it is not difficult to** keep your computer clean, healthy **and in good working order.**

When dealing with computers, dust isn't just unattractive—it can potentially destroy parts of your computer. By cleaning your computer regularly, you can help to keep it working properly and avoid expensive repairs**.**

Cleaning the keyboard

A dirty keyboard doesn't look nice and can cause your keyboard to not work properly. Dust, food, liquid, and other particles can get stuck underneath the keys, which can prevent them from working properly. Check your owner's manual to see if the manufacturer has provided you with instructions for your specific keyboard. If so, follow them. If not, the following steps are basic cleaning tips that can help keep your keyboard clean.

1. Unplug the keyboard from the USB or PS/2 port. If the keyboard is plugged into the PS/2 port, you will need to shut down the computer before unplugging it.
2. Turn the keyboard upside down, and gently shake it to remove dirt and dust.
3. Use a can of compressed air to clean between the keys.
4. Moisten a cotton cloth or paper towel with rubbing alcohol, and use it to clean the tops of the keys. Do not pour alcohol or any other liquid directly onto the keys.
5. Reconnect the keyboard to the computer once it is dry. If you are connecting it to a PS/2 port, you will need to connect it before turning on the computer.

Dealing with liquids

If you spill liquid on the keyboard, quickly shut down the computer and disconnect the keyboard and turn it upside down to allow the liquid to drain.

If the liquid is sticky, you will need to hold the keyboard on its side under running water to rinse the sticky liquid away. Then turn the keyboard upside down to drain for two days before reconnecting it. The keyboard may not be repairable at this point, but rinsing the sticky liquid off of it is the only chance for it to be usable again. The best way to avoid this situation is to keep drinks away from the computer area.

Cleaning the mouse

There are two main types of mice: optical and mechanical. Each is cleaned in basically the same way, although the mechanical mouse requires a bit more work.

- Optical mice require no internal cleaning because there aren't any rotating parts; however, they can get sticky over time as dust collects near the light emitter. This can cause erratic cursor movement or prevent the mouse from working properly.

Mechanical mice are especially susceptible to dust and particles that can accumulate inside the mouse, which can make it difficult to track—or move—properly. If the mouse pointer does not move smoothly, the mouse may need to be cleaned.

Before you clean your mouse, check the owner's manual to see if the manufacturer has provided you with instructions for your specific mouse. If so, follow those instructions. If not, the following steps are basic cleaning tips that will help keep your mouse clean.

1. Unplug the mouse from the USB or PS/2 port. If the mouse is plugged into the PS/2 port, you will need to shut down the computer before unplugging it.
2. Moisten a cotton cloth with rubbing alcohol, and use it to clean the top and bottom of the mouse.
3. If you have a mechanical mouse, remove the tracking ball by turning the ball-cover ring counterclockwise. Then clean the tracking ball and the inside of the mouse with a cotton cloth moistened with rubbing alcohol.
4. Let all of the parts dry before reassembling and reconnecting the mouse. If you are connecting it to a PS/2 port, you will need to connect it before turning on the computer.

If you want to give the mouse a quick cleaning, place it on a clean white sheet of paper and move the mouse back and forth. Some of the dust and particles should rub off onto the paper.

Cleaning the monitor

Dirt, fingerprints, and dust can make your computer screen difficult to read; however, it's easy to clean your screen when needed. Although there are monitor-cleaning kits you can buy, they may damage your monitor if they are designed for a different type of monitor. For example, a monitor cleaner that is designed for glass screens may not work with some no glass LCD screens. The safest method is simply to use a soft clean cloth moistened with water.

Do not use glass cleaner to clean a monitor. Many screens have anti-glare coatings that can be damaged by glass cleaner.

1. Turn off the computer.

2. Unplug the monitor from the power. If you are using a laptop, unplug the laptop.

3. Use a soft clean cloth moistened with water to wipe the screen clean

Do not spray any liquids directly onto the screen. The liquid could leak into the monitor and damage the internal components.

Tips for cleaning other computer surfaces

From time to time, you should clean your computer case and the sides and back of the monitor to avoid buildup of dust and dirt. Here are a few tips you can use when cleaning these surfaces.

- Dust is your computer's main enemy. Use an antistatic wipe to lightly dust your computer casing. Don't use furniture cleaners or strong solvents.

- Use a can of compressed air with a narrow nozzle to blow out debris from the air intake slots.

- Spray cleaning solution—like diluted ammonia cleaner or glass cleaner—on a paper towel or antistatic wipe. Clean the monitor housing and case—not the monitor screen— by wiping in a downward motion.

- A safe cleaning solution for computer surfaces—not computer screens—is ammonia diluted with water or glass cleaner comprised mostly of ammonia and water (check the label). The milder the solution, the better.

Keep it cool

Don't restrict airflow around your computer. A computer can generate a lot of heat, so the casing has fans that keep it from overheating. Avoid stacking papers, books, and other items around your computer.

Many computer desks have an enclosed compartment for the computer case. If you have this type of desk, you may want to position the case so it is not against the back side of the desk. If the compartment has a door, you may want to leave it open to improve airflow.