

# Tips N' Techniques

## Computer Maintenance Tips

You may not realize it, but your computer and your car have something in common: they both need regular maintenance. No, you don't need to change your computer's oil. But you should be updating your software, keeping your antivirus subscription up to date, and checking for spyware. Read on to learn what you can do to help improve your computer's security.

### Getting started

Here are some basics maintenance tasks you can do today to start improving your computer's security. Be sure you make these part of your ongoing maintenance as well.

- **Sign up for software update e-mail notices.** Many software companies will send you e-mail whenever a software update is available. This is particularly important for your operating system (e.g., Microsoft Windows® or Macintosh), your antivirus program, and your firewall.
- **Register your software.** If you still have registration forms for existing software, send them in. And be sure to register new software in the future. This is another way for the software manufacturer to alert you when new updates are available.
- **Install software updates immediately.** When you get an update notice, download the update immediately and install it. (Remember, downloading and installing are two separate tasks.)

### Developing ongoing maintenance practices

Now that you've done some ground work, it's time to start moving into longer term maintenance tasks. These are all tasks that you should do today (or as soon as possible) to get started. But for best results, make these a part of a regular maintenance schedule. We recommend setting aside time each week to help keep your computer secure.

- **Back up your files.** Backing up your files simply means creating a copy of your computer files that you can use in the event the originals are lost. (Accidents can happen.)
- **Scan your files with up to date antivirus software.** Use your antivirus scan tool regularly to search for potential computer viruses and worms. Also, check your antivirus program's user manual to see if you can schedule an automatic scan of your computer.
- **Change your passwords.** Using the same password increases the odds that someone else will discover it. Change all of your passwords regularly (we recommend monthly) to reduce your risk. Also, choose your passwords carefully.

### Making a schedule

One of the best ways to help protect your computer is to perform maintenance regularly. To help you keep track, we suggest making a regular "appointment" with your computer. Treat it like you would any other appointment. Record it in your datebook or online calendar, and if you cannot make it, reschedule. Remember, you are not only helping to improve your computer, you are also helping to protect your personal information.

### A few simple steps will help you keep your files safe and clean.

- Step 1: Update your software
- Step 2: Backup your files
- Step 3: Use antivirus software and keep it updated
- Step 4: Change your passwords

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