

A Brief How-To On Housekeeping For Your Windows® PC

Every computer's performance will degrade over time and, because you're reading this, you probably know that firsthand! The good news is that you can avoid or remedy this problem by periodically spending a little time keeping your machine tuned up. That's what this How-To is about, cleaning out the junk and putting in place a few programs that will help keep your system safe and organized. All the programs mentioned here are available on links provided directly to the developer's download page. Another excellent and safe source for downloadable software is CNet's [Download.com](#).

NOTE: *You should read this How-To thoroughly before you attempt this project. If you don't feel comfortable with any of the steps, take some time to research them on the Web before going forward. If your machine is already so compromised that you don't have Web access, you probably may want to get some experienced help.*

Before you do anything else, take the time to collect all the documentation and disks for any of the hardware or software associated with your PC. It's a good practice to keep all these together in a safe place anyway. Hopefully you won't need to go so far as to reinstall software or drivers, but it's better to be safe than sorry.

With software and documentation in hand, you should also make sure to have a safe backup of all your user documents and files. I won't digress into a tutorial on backup procedures at this point, so if you're not already knowledgeable on this subject, now would be a good time to hit the Internet and educate yourself. Be aware that some ISPs (Internet Service Providers), such as Comcast®, offer free programs and storage for routine and automatic backups. If you're not backing up to online storage, be sure to use an external drive or some type of removable media so that your backups are truly safe from system failures. A good choice for backup software is FBackup® (available for download at [FBackup](#)).

The next step is to unclutter your system. Over time, we all load programs we think we want then just seem to forget that they're sitting around, cluttering up your system. Go to <Start>, <Control Panel>, <Add or Remove Programs> and you'll see a list of currently installed programs. Read down the list and note any you don't recognize with the goal of uninstalling the things you don't want or need on your system. *Caution!* Take your time and be conservative with this step. Don't delete anything until you're sure you know what it is and truly don't need it. Many valid and necessary programs have names that are hard to connect to their actual function. Research unfamiliar names on the Internet to be sure what you're dealing with before you choose to install. When in doubt, leave it in place until you're sure. A good resource at this point is WinPatrol® (available for download at [BillP Studios](#)). WinPatrol® maintains a huge file of programs to help you weed out the bad ones.

Once you've gotten rid of the junk, it's time to reclaim some space on your drive and get things better organized. Windows offers a built-in tools to clean up and defragment your hard drive. Defragmentation reorganizes the files to make it easier and faster to access data. It also reduces wear and tear on the drive as it searches for information. You can find these built-in tools in <Start>, <All Programs>, <Accessories>, <System Tools>. Microsoft® has unimaginatively named these utilities "Disk Cleanup" and "Disk Defragmentator". If you want to try something more powerful, try CCleaner® and Smart Defrag® (available for download at [Piriform](#) and [IObit](#),

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respectively). CCleaner® in particular, has the added advantage of a Registry cleaner. This feature will analyze the Registry file of your PC and offer to remove the clutter often left behind by inefficient uninstall routines.

Now that your disk is cleaner and more organized, its time to look for pest control. Particularly now that almost everyone is connecting to the Internet, we're all subject to the occasional infestation. The list is long and includes its viruses, worms, spyware, adware, and malware so you need to address it in several ways. Start with a program called Malware Bytes Anti-malware® (available for download at [Malwarebytes](#)). The freeware version of this program does a manual scan of your disk(s) and is remarkably good at dealing with a wide range of bugs.

Assuming that your system is as pest-free as possible, keep it that way by installing an anti-virus program that will monitor your system in live time to help protect you from future trouble. An excellent choice for this is, surprisingly, a free program from Microsoft® called Microsoft Security Essentials® (available for download at [Microsoft](#)).

Another important aspect of keeping your system healthy is keeping all your programs updated to their most recent and secure versions. That can become a huge headache and for that reason is often neglected, creating both an operational and security problem. An effective answer to this problem is a program from Secunia® called Secunia PSI®, which stands for Personal Security Inspector (available for download at [Secunia](#)). This program will scan your disk and alert you if any of your software has an available update and then keep everything current as time goes on.

In summary, here's our recipe for a healthy PC:

- WinPatrol®, Microsoft Security Essentials®, and Secunia PSI®, running quietly in the background to keep your system running more smoothly and securely,
- A monthly cleanup with CCleaner®, defragmentation with Smart Defrag®, and a security scan with Malwarebytes Antimalware® to keep your system clean, efficient, and pest-resistant, and
- Scheduled backups of your data to protect you from the inevitable hardware crisis.

Of course, no plan is perfect and the best software in the world can't protect your system from your own bad habits. If you apply safe web-surfing and email practices, are aware and cautious of what you're downloading and using, and apply a healthy dose of common sense, your computer will thank you for it.

Good Luck!

Harry Braithwaite

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