



## Computer Maintenance & Tips Keeping a Healthy Computer

This month its time to tune up your desktop and most of what I'm suggesting is free... One of the biggest gripes I get as an IT administrator is that the users' computers are too slow. Performance is a drag. It takes too long to load files, run programs, access a Web page, get e-mail, etc... You've heard or said them all yourself. (Yes you nag your PC, and although it has yet to be proven, the more you complain the slower it gets.)

But there is something you can do about some of those gripes. You can tune up your desktop or notebook machines to give the best performance possible. Of course, this is an exercise in dealing with what you have. The best way to improve performance is to get the latest, greatest, biggest and meanest computer. But budgets being what they are, it isn't likely that you'll be able to upgrade your machine to the latest and greatest very often.

Still, you can do some hardware enhancements that will help. (ok not free, but they deserve mentioning here.) First, consider your memory requirements. A memory upgrade is the simplest way to improve performance for desktop PCs. Without enough memory you will find that your system is constantly swapping programs into and out of memory as you change the focus of your work. Today, memory prices have fallen to points that it is ridiculous not to upgrade. You can get as much as 512M bytes of memory for less than \$100. That is truly an astonishing number, so if you are complaining of slow performance, then a memory upgrade should certainly be something to consider.

Next, think about the disk drive. Notebook computers generally have drives that are slower than those in desktop machines. Slow drives mean longer times loading applications and data.

But it is more than that. If you have a computer that's memory starved (today that's a computer with less than 256M bytes of memory) AND a slow drive, the swapping will take even longer. But whether you have a good memory size or not, or whether you have a fast disk or not, there are other things you can do to help increase your system performance.

Now for the Freebies!

1. Remove Your Junk Files. The easiest thing is to make sure that the drive doesn't have a lot of junk files lying around. Those files take up space that can be used for other essential functions, and they can lead to fragmentation of the drive, which slows performance. To get rid of junk files, make sure that you clear your Internet browser cache files, including saved Web pages, and set your browser options so you don't keep pages that are over a couple days old. In addition to cleaning junk files from the browser, also go to your temp files folder and delete anything that's over a couple days old. This will free up an amazing amount of space.



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2. Defrag That Drive. Now, get hold of a defrag program and defragment the disk. You'll be amazed how much this will speed up disk drive access and, hence, overall system performance. Windows 2000 and XP both come with a defrag program. Try and use it at least once a month.

3. Run the basic maintenance tools atleast once a month: Disk Cleanup, Scan Disk, Disk Defragmenter, and a good spyware removal tool: We recommend Spybot and the free version can be downloaded by clicking on the following link: <http://beam.to/spybotsd> (Note: beware which tool you use for Spyware removal. There are many that are being put out that say they remove Spyware, but are actually created by advertising companies and are themselves Spyware. One that comes to mind is Spyware Nuker. If you are running this, uninstall it and install Spybot!)

4. Remove programs that are not needed. Installed programs take up space on your hard drive, add additional files in the Windows directory and edit the Windows registry. Large registry files and excess Windows files can slow down your computer and even cause problems. So remove any programs that you don't use regularly. From the Start Menu, choose Control Panel. Select Add/Remove Programs. Scroll the list and uninstall software that you no longer use or have need for. Use caution removing programs, especially if you are not sure what they do.

5. Clean ad-ware off of your computer. Websites, computer hackers, and software may use files, programs, and/or registry items to track your personal information or computer habits. This is a privacy risk, and can also hog resources on your computer. Unfortunately, it is somewhat difficult to find these little hidden jewels once they are installed. If you have spent most of your career working with computers you will still be hard pressed to find all the hiding places. The best suggestion I have is to use a Removal tool such as [LavaSofts Ad-Aware](#). I have been using this product for over 2 years now and it has done an excellent job of keeping the spyware and pop-ups to a minimum. It would do a whole lot more if I let it run all the time as it has a built in Ad-Watcher to squash them in their tracks as you cruise the web. Ad-Aware is a free download and if you find it as helpful as I did then please register it.

6. Shutdown Background Programs If you don't need it right now, shut it down. Background programs can be memory hogs and really slow down your computer. These can be Anti-Virus programs, QuickStart programs that only slow your computer down (like RealPlayer, IntelliPoint, FindFast, and Office Startup), toolkits for your hardware (Matrox QuickDesk or Diamond InControl Tools) or needed programs that are rarely used (i.e. programs that make your Scanner work, but you may not use your scanner often). Do you need to remove these programs? Probably not, but if you're like me, you want every bit of speed and memory you can get! If you press Ctrl-Alt-Del when you don't have any foreground programs running, and you have to scroll to see all the programs that are currently running, you have too much going on and need to close down some of them. How? The quick fix that only lasts until you restart your computer is to



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press Ctrl-Alt-Del and to close any programs not currently used. **The few programs you \*want\* to keep running are explorer and systray. These two are required.**

Depending upon your computer, most of the other applications may be unnecessary. Right down the names of the programs that are running when you press Ctrl-Alt-Del. Many of these programs will show up as icons in the bottom right hand corner of your computer screen, by the clock. You can usually click, double click, or right click to access options on those programs. Often times you will find a disable option or something like that (exit usually just exits until your computer is restarted). Usually the programs that have these icons aren't very useful and can be removed to free up memory and speed up your computer. Now you can go to your Startup folder on your Start Menu by right clicking on the Start button and going to Explore. Double click on Programs, then double click on Startup. Look for any programs that are not necessary, click on them, and press the delete key (you may want to instead drag and drop them to your desktop in case it later turns out that you need them (then you can just drag them back).

As I said earlier help is available, it's free help to a degree. There are a number of Software Titles that will do most of the things outlined in the article for you and the good ones are shareware. Here are the three most popular system optimizers, all have free trial periods and are all are worth checking out. Click the link and check them out. Don't hesitate to email me with questions if you need further assistance. [MemTurbo](#) is a RAM-cleaning application. It shows you how much RAM is being used by your computer and allows you to free up more with the click of your mouse. MemTurbo is a program that increases available RAM on your system. It also defragments your physical RAM, making your CPU and motherboard more efficient without modifying your virtual memory. It recovers memory leaks from applications and flushes unused libraries and DLLs temporarily out to disk, making more room for your favorite games or applications. You define the target level of available RAM, which [MemTurbo](#) then attempts to achieve. The program can also kick in automatically when RAM level reaches a critical low, and features a "Ram Scrub" you can manually trigger to search for every bit of recoverable RAM, even beyond your target level. This new version features a smaller footprint, faster and more thorough memory recovery, and numerous other small improvements. (Shareware/Windows)

[SANDRA Standard \(System Analyzer/Diagnostic and Reporting Assistant\)](#) is a set of system diagnostic and benchmarking tools designed to help keep your computer running at peak performance. It provides diagnostic, benchmarking, and performance tune-ups for different hardware devices and subsystems, including CPUs, modems, BIOSs, drives, graphic cards, and DOS and Windows memory. The latest version includes three new benchmarks: flash/removable-storage, Internet/ISP-connection, and Internet/ISP-peerage. Also, the existing memory benchmark now supports NUMA (Non-Uniform Memory Addressing) as found on the new AMD64 machines and existing IA-64 machines. (Shareware/Windows)



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[Ashampoo WinOptimizer Suite](#) (My favorite and most recommended) is a comprehensive set of tools for speeding up your system by cleaning the cache, scouring the registry, tuning up your performance, and more. This new package delivers faster, easier, safer, and more thorough Windows cleanup performance than before. Ashampoo WinOptimizer Suite is divided into seven modules: Drive Cleaner, Registry Cleaner, Internet Cleaner, DLL Cleaner, Internet Tuner, StartUp Tuner, and File Wiper. New improvements within version 1.32.5 were made under the hood. You can switch to different languages (German, English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Swedish, Polish, Hungarian, Russian) while running the program. All the modules have the same appearance and the same intuitive controls, so as soon as you've learned how to use one of them you can use all of them. Also, all the information you need to use the program is displayed in the program screen. Free up valuable space on your hard drive. Speed up general system performance. Removing unnecessary files can significantly speed up searches on your hard drives. Avoid the need to reinstall Windows. The File Wiper module permanently deletes files and folders so they cannot ever be recovered. (Shareware/Windows) If these suggestions don't speed up your desktop it may be time to consider new hardware, but give them a try, do that tune up.. I think you will be pleasantly surprised!

7. For safety, always make sure you keep a good virus program running on your computer. Earlier, I mentioned that some virus programs slow a computer – but not all of them. For the last two years, we have been using AVG Virus Scan from [www.grisoft.com](http://www.grisoft.com). There is a free version, and we have been placing it on every computer that we repair from a virus (along with Spybot). This software has been removing virus' that Nortons and McAfee's identifies as being on the computer (sometimes), but still do not remove.

**One important thing to remember about any software that you use for security on your system: UPDATE, UPDATE, UPDATE!!! New viruses and spyware programs come out everyday. If you do not keep the software updated, it cannot work for you. It needs the updates to the definitions so it is aware of the viruses and can stop them. Just having the software on your computer is a start – but, without updates, within two weeks it becomes worthless.**

There are many ways to keep you computer running at optimum performance. If you are unsure that you need to undertake these tasks, there is a quick check that you can do:

On a fresh boot (right after you turn on the computer and before you do anything else, right click on MY COMPUTER and go to PROPERTIES. The last tab is performance. If your performance is below 90% you should follow the steps listed above to optimize your computer.

For any questions, send an email to [rstcomp@cfl.rr.com](mailto:rstcomp@cfl.rr.com) and we will do our best to assist you.