Clean your PC

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NOTE that underlined highlighted words are links to programmes I use. There are other suitable programmes. You should make yourself familiar with the process of downloading of files. A map of the cleaning process is added below

Before any major cleaning of your PC, adding a new programme or updating, it is wise to develop a habit of creating a new System Restore Point (SRP). This allows you to revert to an earlier SRP if anything goes wrong. To create a SRP go to *Search* and type *System Restore*, click *Create* and follow the instructions. If anything goes wrong, repeat the above procedure but instead click *Restore* my computer to an earlier time.

Backup (My) Documents and any other folders or files containing information you wish to retain e.g. (My) Pictures and emails. Web mail does not need to be backed up as it is held in the *Cloud*. For other email programmes look in the *Help* folder

Ensure your protection programmes (antivirus, anti-spyware and software firewall) are in place and completely up-to-date. Note that if you have a wireless router it has an inbuilt hardware firewall. Don't have any other firewall in such a case or you could face conflicts.

Next, clean out superfluous files. e.g. games, images and unused programmes. Good free programmes for this are *Geek uninstaller* at geekuninstaller.com (which does not load to your machine and also removes 64 bit programmes) and *Revo Uninstaller* at revouninstaller.com (which will not completely remove 64 bit programmes unless you buy the *Pro* version).

At this point run your (updated) antivirus, like the free built in Microsoft Security Essentials (supported in XP until July 2015 – see goo.gl/IKmmZS), or its later replacement Windows Defender, and antispyware programmes such as the free *Malwarebytes* at malwarebytes.org or *Superantispyware* at superantispyware.com.

NOTE – you should only run a single antivirus programme, but can run more than one antispyware programme.

Now use programmes that clean out other issues on your PC. The first of these is a disk check to ensure the integrity of your hard drive. This is done by clicking the PC icon, and then right clicking on your hard drive icon, usually C:/, and selecting Properties. Then click the Tools tab and the Error Checking button/Check Now. Check both boxes in the dialogue screen that appears and click Start. At this stage you will be advised that the check will be done the next time the computer is restarted.

Restart the machine at this stage. The disk check can take some time to complete when the machine is restarted.

Doing a Disk Clean-up (Search/Disk Clean-up) is the next step. The box that appears will invite you to select a drive. Then press OK. An analysis of the selected drive will be carried out. The box that appears has a selection of boxes. Tick all these boxes and click OK and the process will proceed to clean your disk. Repeat this process and select the system files to clean out residual Windows update files.

The next step requires the use of a free programme like *CCleaner* at filehippo.com/download_ccleaner. This is a system optimisation and privacy tool. It removes unused files from your system, including extraneous registry settings and files, allowing Windows to run faster and freeing up valuable hard disk space. It also cleans traces of your online activities such as your Internet history. Taking the tour on the site will give a good understanding of this programme. Another useful free programme is *AdwCleaner* at goo.gl/7kulE. It is a program that searches for and deletes Adware, Toolbars, Potentially Unwanted Programs (PUP), and browser Hijackers from your computer. The types of programmes that AdwCleaner targets are typically bundled with free programs that you download from the web. In many cases when you download and install a program, the install will state that these programs will be installed along with the program you downloaded. Unless you perform a Custom install, these unwanted programs will automatically be installed on your computer leaving you with extra browser toolbars, adware, and other unwanted programs. AdwCleaner is designed to search for and remove these types of programs.

Defragmenting your hard drive is the final step in the process. This can be done by going to *Search/Disk Defragmenter*. This process puts files that have been scattered around the drive back in an order that makes them accessible more quickly. With the larger hard drives this is not so important.

Downloading and the Internet

Downloading files and programmes from the Internet can be a simple process and limited only by the speed of your connection. The problem is with the potential to have nasties e.g. viruses or malware, included along with the downloaded material. Following a few simple rules, such as in the sequence below, can reduce such risks.

Before downloading what appear to be a useful programme it is wise to look at a few reviews of the programme. You can do this by using *Google* ([google.com)](google.com) with the search word review xxx – where xxx is the name of the programme. Look for reviews other than those of the programme developer to limit bias.

When downloading a programme go to the site which is owned by the developer of the programme. Often, when the programme is downloaded from a 'mirror' the software has an added 'payload' which may be a virus, advertising or malware. It is also not unknown for the 'mirror' to charge for the download of what is normally a freeware or open source programme.

Before downloading a programme have a good look at the file size. Large files may choke your internet connection and cause the download to abort (it' called the rural problem!).If you know the file size you can find the download time by using this online calculator at tinyurl.com/2woya8, which I do if sending files to rural destinations.

Set a system restore point. This ensures that if anything goes wrong during, or as a result of a download, you can set your machine back to the state it was in before the download. A friendly description and explanation of the process is found at tinyurl.com/2p9unw.

To speed your download, there are a number of programmes that you can use. One that I recommend is *FDM* (which surprisingly means Free Download Manager!). It can be sourced at freedownloadmanager.org (which is the developer's site). Just click the Download button at the head of the page.

As noted, be careful of the downloaded programme carrying features you did not expect (like viruses and other nasties). If you have an efficient and effective antivirus programme and an anti-spyware programme they should capture such material on download.

When downloading, **don't be tempted to click on other boxes on a page**. They are generally a recipe for disaster in that often they ask you to purchase unwanted things or take you to sites that (may) make you blush!

Beware friends bearing a gift of software as it may also contain nasties. If you are going to use it, check the disc in the same manner as above and run your spyware programme over the disc. Many antivirus and anti-spyware programmes will automatically recognise and check an external disc or drive. Have a look at the help file for your programme to see what it checks.

When installing a new programme you may find that a series of boxes appear appealing to you to tick or untick them. Look at such boxes carefully as they may be requesting you to add other features that you may not need.

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- Optimisation
  - CCleaner
  - AdwCleaner
  - defragmentation
- Other issues
  - disk check
  - disk clean-up
- Clean out
  - games
  - images
  - unused programmes
    - geek
    - revo
- Run
  - antivirus
  - antispyware
- Downloading link
- System Restore
- Backup
  - documents
  - emails (not webmail)
  - Images
- Update
  - antivirus
  - antispyware
  - firewall