

Computers Confuse Me

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Basic Spyware Guide

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What is spyware?

As the name implies, spyware (used interchangeably with adware and malware) is computer software that spies on you and is installed without appropriately obtaining your consent. It collects personal data on you through keystroke logging, tracking your web browsing habits or recording data from documents on your computer.

Spyware is commonly used for targeted advertising based off of your browsing habits but can also be used to steal your identity by stealing passwords and other personal data.

Do I need to worry?

Yes.

Everyone computer is vulnerable to Spyware. You may become affected without ever knowing. Learning the common signs of spyware with some good practices will help keep you safe, this article is a great place to start.

How do I know if I have spyware on my computer?

Below are a few common characteristics found on computers infected with spyware.

- Pop-up advertisements occur even when your not on the Web
- Certain tasks take longer than usual to complete
- The initial page (home page) that appears when you open your Web browser has changed unknowingly (hijacked)
- Your Web browsers search settings have changed without your knowledge
- A new toolbar appears in your browser and is difficult to get rid of
- Computer crashes appear to occur more frequently

How did spyware get on my computer?

Spyware is most commonly installed through freeware (free programs) and peer-to-peer (P2P) file sharing programs such as Kazaa, Imesh and Grokster. The developers of these applications

are paid by the spyware manufacturers to bundle the spyware with their application, the profit is used to cover development costs.

Spyware can also be installed by simply visiting a website with malicious programming scripts built in, also know as drive-by spyware. This is typically achieved by exploiting Web browser flaws when you visit malicious websites, or by tricking unsuspecting users into clicking a button that installs spyware.

Finding and eliminating spyware?

Luckily there are plenty of great freeware (free) applications available to help you find and eliminate spyware. But be careful when you search for spyware removal tools because some spyware applications are created with similar names to trick you. And as I said above, some freeware applications have spyware bundled it, this can also be true for spyware removal tools.

Before Downloading and / or running a spyware removal tool you should double check to make sure it is not on the list of [Rogue/Suspect Anti-Spyware Products & Web Sites](#)

Since no single spyware removal tool will catch every single threat, I recommend downloading and installing the following two free spyware removal tools, both have great track records for finding and removing spyware. I also recommend updating and running them each at least twice a month.

- [Spybot Search & Destroy](#) - detect and remove spyware for free. Here's a [tutorial](#) to assist with installing and running Spybot Search & Destroy
- [Lavasoftware's Ad-Aware SE Personal](#) - detect and remove spyware for free. Here [are three tutorials](#) to assist with installing and running Ad-Aware SE Personal.

Below are a few free online spyware removal tools that don't require software downloads.

- Trend Micro [Anti-Spyware for the web](#): Detects and removes spyware, Internet Explorer required
- Spyware Guide [Free Scanner](#): Detects and removes spyware, Internet Explorer required
- ewido anti-spyware, now AVG [anti-spyware](#): Detects and removes spyware, Internet Explorer required

How can I protect myself from spyware?

There are a number of things you can do to protect yourself from spyware, below is list of a few of the most important.

Microsoft Windows Update

If you use Microsoft Windows you should visit <http://update.microsoft.com> at least once a month to receive all critical updates at a minimum. Or, if you don't think you will remember to visit the Windows Update website, you should turn on Microsoft's [Automatic Updates](#) feature. You can set

it to notify you when updates are available or even install them automatically.

Keep your Web browser up to date

Keep your Web browser up to date with the latest version and also with the latest security patches. If you use Internet Explorer the [Microsoft Windows Update](#) website will take care of this for you. If you use [Firefox](#), [Opera](#) or another Web browser you should visit the manufactures website to get the latest version. You should also read their security section to find out what other features are available to you.

Install anti-spyware software

You need to Install an anti-spyware application that blocks spyware. I recommend Microsoft's free [Windows Defender](#) with automatic updates. Here are some [tutorials](#) to get you started.

I also recommend installing JavaCool's [SpywareBlaster](#) alongside Windows Defender. SpywareBlaster protects against a huge list of spyware and other harmful software by blocking installation of their ActiveX objects in Internet Explorer. It also blocks spyware/tracking cookies in Firefox and Internet Explorer. Here's a [tutorial](#) to assist with installing and using SpywareBlaster

You can also purchase one of the following well known and trusted anti-spyware programs listed below. You should not run more than one of the below anti-spyware applications simultaneously, they may conflict with one another and cause problems of their own.

- Webroot [Spy Sweeper](#): Detects and removes spyware, automatic updates, free customer support. Also have a version with a virus scanner
- PC Tools [Spyware Doctor](#): Detects and removes spyware, free customer support, automatic updates
- Trend Micro [AntiSpyware](#): Detects and removes spyware, automatic updates
- Sunbelt [CounterSpy](#): Detects and removes spyware, automatic updates

Remain cautious

You should now be well on your way to becoming spyware free, just remember to be cautious about what you download by only download from sites you trust. Be sure to research websites before visiting and software before downloading if you have any question on their real intentions.

Related links for further reading

- Computers Confuse Me: [Basic Virus Guide](#)
- [Spyware Warrior](#)
- Wikipedia: [Spyware](#)
- Microsoft: [What is Spyware?](#)
- [Related Blogs](#)

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