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June 6, 2011
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FREE AND SAFE DOWNLOADS:

If you read my articles even once in a while, you will notice that I often recommend a website that I feel is extremely helpful. Well...I have a super, colossal one for you this time. You **MUST** visit this site in the near future! FileHippo.com is a comprehensive website that will directly link you to the free software out there that not only is popular but proven safe. Here is just a sampling of what you will find: browsers chat software, Anti-Malware, Anti-Virus, audio and video players, firewalls, burning software, file transfer software, compression software and system tuning. There are hundreds of things to choose from. Do not go crazy downloading everything. Choose one from each section. Don't bloat up your computer with too much stuff. Please...only one anti-virus is allowed on your computer at a time. If you install one of the free ones you must remove whatever you have **FIRST**. Add FileHippo.com to your favorites or bookmarks for access the next time you are looking for something free and reliable.

HOW TO CLEAN YOUR KEYBOARD:

Your keyboard is one of your most important peripherals, but it's bound to get clogged with dirt and grime over time. Dust off, scrub down, and clean up your number one input device safely with these tips. There are plenty of ways to clean depending on what afflicts your workspace. We'll break it down by type, but first thing's first: unplug your keyboard! Some of these cleaning methods can theoretically do some damage to your keyboard if there's power going to it, so be sure it's unplugged and the batteries are taken out. A small hand-held vacuum cleaner or a can of compressed air will work well.

For more caked on dust, try the brush/hose attachment of a larger vacuum cleaner to help scrape off dust bunnies. Daily use can breed a whole different kind of filth on your precious keys. Be wary of disinfectant sprays; many are strong enough that you wouldn't want to keep your hands in contact with them for very long. Try to find ones that are electronics-friendly. Personally, my favorite option is to use an isopropyl alcohol solution. Be sure to use isopropyl and **NOT** ethyl, as the harsher ethyl alcohol can take the lettering off of the keys. Anything about 60% alcohol or more is fine; higher concentrations don't really help kill more germs, but it also won't hurt. Take a little alcohol solution and moisten an old rag or a paper towel with it. Do **NOT** pour it into the keyboard. Trust me, a wet napkin is enough. Scrub it over the tops of the keys, and use a wet cotton swab to go down in between them.

What's worse than accidentally turning on Sticky Keys? Spilling your soda and getting real sticky keys. First thing's first, unplug your keyboard. Dump out any excess liquid and mop up as best you can with paper towels. While it's best to clean while the keyboard is still wet to minimize the stickiness, the process is much the same whether you spilled your soda 30 seconds ago or 30 days ago. To get rid of sticky keys, we'll need to pop off the keys and clean the keyboard more thoroughly. If you have a standard keyboard, you'll be able to find references to where all the keys should go if you don't already have the layout memorized.

For custom keyboard, it might be helpful to draw a quick map or take a picture with your digital camera so you know where everything belongs when you go to put things back together. For desktop keyboards, take a butter knife or a screwdriver and try to pry up one corner of the keys. You don't need to use a lot of force; you should feel a pop and the key will come right off. For laptop keyboards, your fingernail should be enough to pull the plastic up. Start with one corner and move to an adjacent one. Be extra careful, since the mechanism is made of plastic and you don't want to break it. Once the keys are off, you can better use a paper towel and maybe some alcohol solution to clean the keyboard base. Careful with those metal bars!

For really grimy spots, try using a pencil eraser. You might be surprised as how well the rubber will peel off dirt. Just be careful that the eraser-dust doesn't fall back in the keyboard. If you've tried everything to cut the dirt and grease, then I've got one last method for you. Take a soft-bristled toothbrush that's wet with a bit of alcohol to your keyboard. You can clean the removed keys with a toothbrush and some soapy water. Your keys will be looking brand-new in no time!

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Janis Weber, B.A., owner of Ohio Computer Training, is a professional computer instructor at UT, Lourdes, and MCCC. E-mail any specific questions or comments to jwpctutor@gmail.com or contact her for assistance at 419-318-9112. Public classes are listed on her website: www.OhComputerTraining.com. **Private tutoring and repairs are a just phone call away.**