

Anti-Spyware

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What is spyware?

Spyware is a general term used for software that performs certain behaviors such as advertising, collecting personal information, or changing the configuration of your computer, generally without appropriately obtaining your consent. Here are some signs of spyware.

Spyware is often associated with software that displays advertisements (called adware) or software that tracks personal or sensitive information.

That does not mean all software which provides ads or tracks your online activities is bad. For example, you might sign up for a free music service, but "pay" for the service by agreeing to receive targeted ads.

If you understand the terms and agree to them, you may have decided that it is a fair tradeoff. You might also agree to let the company track your online activities to determine which ads to show you.

Other kinds of spyware make changes to your computer that can be annoying and can cause your computer slow down or crash.

These programs can change your Web browser's home page or search page, or add additional components to your browser you don't need or want. These programs also make it very difficult for you to change your settings back to the way you originally had them.

The key in all cases is whether or not you (or someone who uses your computer) understand what the software will do and have agreed to install the software on your computer.

There are a number of ways spyware or other unwanted software can get on your system. A common trick is to covertly install the software during the installation of other software you want such as a music or video file sharing program.

Whenever you are installing something on your computer, make sure you carefully read all disclosures, including the license agreement and privacy statement. Sometimes the inclusion of unwanted software in a given software installation is documented, but it may appear at the end of a license agreement or privacy statement.

Attention: Surf and download more safely !

Spyware can be installed by Web sites, downloaded programs, or a program you might install from a CD-ROM or floppy disk. Spyware is most commonly installed through free software, such as file sharing programs, screen savers, or search toolbars.

The best defense against spyware and other unwanted software is not to download it in the first place. When you visit Web sites, do not automatically agree to download anything the site offers. If you download free software, such as file-sharing programs or screen savers, read the license agreement carefully. Look for clauses in which you must accept advertising and pop-ups from the company, or that the software will send certain information back to the software publisher.

Here are a few helpful tips that can protect you from downloading software you don't want:

- Only download programs from Web sites you trust. If you're not sure whether to trust a program you are considering downloading, ask a knowledgeable friend or enter the name of the program into your favorite search engine to see if anyone else has reported that it contains spyware.

- Read all security warnings, license agreements, and privacy statements associated with any software you download.

- Never click "agree" or "OK" to close a window. Instead, click the red "x" in the corner of the window or press the Alt + F4 buttons on your keyboard to close a window.

- Be wary of popular "free" music and movie file-sharing programs, and be sure you clearly understand all of the software packaged with those programs.