

What should I be doing to monitor my hard drive?

This question was answered on August 24, 2023.

Of all the components that make up your computer, the hard drive should be considered the most important to maintain and monitor because it stores your valuable data.

Recognizing signs that it may be faltering can help you avoid a catastrophic event that could result in the complete loss of your critical data.

Depending upon the age and type of hard drive, the potential failures can be mechanical or electronic so the first thing to do is pay attention!

Free Space

One item that you should regularly monitor is the amount of free space on your drive. Your computer constantly uses empty hard drive space for temporary memory, so it's not just about having space to save your data.

Windows users can follow these steps <https://bit.ly/44syG1N> and Mac users can follow these steps <https://apple.co/44l44Py>.

As your drive approaches 80-85% capacity, purge programs and files (especially video files) or consider replacing it with a much larger drive.

Strange Noises

Computers with older magnetic hard drives may start to generate strange noises, which clearly indicates a major issue.

If you start hearing a strange noise coming from your computer, don't ignore it! Mechanical components, such as your hard drive and power supply wear out over time and it's important to quickly determine the source of the sound.

If the noises seem to mirror the flashing of your hard drive's LED indicator, it's most likely a failing drive.

If you're not sure where the noise is coming from, get help before it becomes a major problem.

Blue Screen or Spinning Beach Balls

Another indication of a faltering hard drive can be performance-based symptoms.

Windows users who start to see lots of Blue Screen errors should consider this a serious sign and start by having the hard drive evaluated.

Mac users who start to see the 'spinning beach ball' on a constant basis should also take the time to have the hard drive tested.

Both scenarios can be caused by a variety of other things, but testing the hard drive is always a good first step.

Got S.M.A.R.T.?

Most hard drives incorporate a monitoring technology known as S.M.A.R.T. (Self-Monitoring, Analysis, and Reporting Technology).

This is one of the easiest ways to know if your drive is beginning to exhibit signs of an impending failure.

While the technology is designed to automatically warn you, you can manually check your drive by following these instructions: <https://bit.ly/45IR3jN>

Third-Party Tools

If you're interested in more extensive hard drive testing programs, a variety of companies offer utilities that you can install for ongoing monitoring and testing: <https://bit.ly/3KUyJfy>

Backup, Backup, Backup

The three rules of computing are backup, backup, backup! I've always contended that there are only two types of hard drives; those that have failed and those that are going to fail.

There's a common misconception that newer SSDs (Solid State Drives) aren't prone to failure because they don't have moving parts.

SSDs can fail from a number of causes, so make sure you have a solid 3-2-1 backup system in place as your ultimate safety net: <https://bit.ly/3ORuh2r>

About the author



[Ken Colburn](#) of Data Doctors on August 24, 2023