

# Turning Your PC On And Off Many Times A Day Not A Good Idea

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*Cox News Service*

ATLANTA -- My Great Uncle Bill ruined his mind struggling with deeply philosophical questions like why most socks end up single over time and whether cornbread should be salty or sweet. The question of whether a toilet seat should be left up or down nearly ruined his marriage.

So it is with great fear and some loathing that I tackle a question that seems - based on the e-mail that I get - to be much on the mind of my readers:

Is it better to leave a computer on all the time, or should a person turn it off at night?

Unlike with many of the other important questions in life, I have a definite opinion. Before I tell you what I think, let's talk about some of the factors to consider.

Turning a computer on and off creates a small surge of electricity that - over a period of time - can cause damage to components. And since the surge is internal, the voltage surge protector that you should be using doesn't buffer that shock.

The damage isn't great, in fact it is so small that there is a good chance that most people will replace the computer well before any problems would crop up. Still, common sense says turning the machine on and off many times a day isn't a good idea since it ages the components prematurely.

Leaving a computer on all the time is not a perfect answer either.

For one thing, some computers tend to run hot. That shouldn't be. The ventilation system should allow the machine to stay on all the time. But for reasons that can include a ventilation system clogged with dirt or just poor design, it can happen. And heat also damages components.

There's also the increased danger of hacker break-ins when a computer is both turned on and connected to a cable modem or a DSL line. There are several reasons for the increased risk. But basically, it's no different than when you go fishing. The chances of catching a fish increase with the amount of time your bait is in the water. The chances of a hacker attack increase with the amount of time your computer is online.

And, if you leave your computer on all the time - even when you're not around - a big thunderstorm can crop up, send 182 zillion amps of electricity down your power line and into your computer and leave you with a large computer-shaped paperweight.

Even if you have a top-of-the-line surge protector, unplugging the computer (and any other electronic gadgets) is the only sure way of preventing damage if lightning hits a power line directly connected to your house.

All that said, here's what I do with my own computer at home.

I turn it on when I first need the computer during the day. Then, if I plan to be away from home for more than an hour or so, I turn it off. I also turn it off when I go to sleep at night.

I'm comfortable with that compromise because I know I'll be able to unplug it (a much better way to protect it from lightning strikes) if a storm brews, or if it is one of those days when power outages are likely.

I don't turn it off if I'm home and likely to use it again in a few hours. To prevent hacker break-ins I use a good firewall program like the commercial one available from Symantec or the free version of Zone Alarm available at [www.zonelabs.com](http://www.zonelabs.com).

No matter whether you choose to leave your computer on all the time, or turn it off every- time you finish using it, the odds are that nothing dreadful will happen to it. The chances of wearing it out before you replace it from turning it on and off are small. The chances of lightning hitting your house are a little greater but it's still not anywhere near likely.

In other words, you're much more likely to have problems based on how you handle the toilet seat question.

Reprinted from The Morning Call newspaper, Allentown, PA on April 3, 2001.