THIRTEEN THINGS

... Your Computer Person Won't Tell You

Turn it off, turn it back on.
"Nine times out of ten, rebooting your computer—and any equipment that connects to it—will solve the problem," says Aaron Schildkraut, who owns a home tech-support service in the New York tristate area.
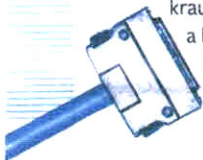
Just because we're "buddies" at work, **don't expect me to come running** every time you've got a problem. I've got a slew of IT problems to fix.

We're like Santa: We know if you've been bad or good. Fessing up to what really happened right before the system crashed is going to save time—and I'm going to figure it out anyway.

Use "strong" passwords.
Geek Squad agent Derek Meister suggests combining letters and numbers—but not your birth date—to create a "base" password, and adding a unique suffix for each site you use. If your base password is your spouse's initials and your anniversary date (say, SPo61789), your Amazon password might be "SPo61789AM."

Make sure you have **current antivirus and anti-spyware** protection, and set it to update at least once a day and run a full-system scan at least once a week.

There's no free lunch.
Downloading free music, movies, and games from file-sharing sites can open holes in your system for others to exploit. Play it safe and use established services like Rhapsody, iTunes, and Netflix.

Remember: **Public Wi-Fi is public.** If you don't have a compelling reason to check your e-mail or bank account while sipping a latte at the mall, don't do it. While you're on a public network, even one that's encrypted, a nearby hacker can capture your passwords.

Give it a rest. Turning off your computer when it's not in use saves energy and clears out the RAM, or temporary memory, which would otherwise slow your machine over time.

If you can't get online, call your **Internet service provider** first. Connection problems can often be checked and fixed—free.

If you want to see less of me, **get a Mac.** That's what we use. "Macs are actually a little bad for my business," says Schildkraut.

No, **you can't use your cell phone** to pop popcorn. Next time an Internet rumor drops into your inbox, don't just pass it on—check it out at snopes.com first.

Sometimes **we talk about you**—in code. If you hear "HKI error" (for human-keyboard interface) or "PEBCAK" (problem exists between chair and keyboard), we're insulting you.

If you don't understand me, I'm not doing my job. Confusing tech jargon is a sign of insecurity, not intelligence.   Interviews by Adam Bluestein

More things your computer person won't tell you are at
readersdigest.com/computer