

WHEN YOUR COMPUTER RESTARTS ITSELF

Beginners' Kaffee Klatch
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Has your computer ever shut down and restarted itself without your help? This can be really frustrating, especially when you lose any data files that you were working on at the time. There are a number of reasons why this is happening.

HEAT. Sometimes this can be caused by an overheating situation. iTunes, RealPlayer, Windows Media player, and similar programs require a lot of processing power to decompress and decode music files, which can cause the processor or hard drive to get hot.

If your CPU is running at over 60 degrees (C) you might be at risk of burning it out. Some systems shut down automatically when the temperature reaches an unsafe level. Every three or four months, it's a good idea to open your tower and clean the fins on the heat sink that sits on top of the CPU (central processing unit). When they collect dust it restricts the airflow and prevents proper cooling. You can use a can of compressed air (look at your local office supply store) or an old toothbrush. Following this procedure can drop the temperature inside your box ten degrees!

Download the free Speedfan utility (<http://tinyurl.com/29nje6>) and it will tell you the temperature at which your CPU and hard drives are running.

MEMORY. If you determine that overheating is not the problem, the most likely suspect is bad memory. Trying to access a bad spot in your system memory (RAM) can cause the computer to freak out and restart. The best way to find the culprit is to pop open the system unit, remove (or replace) one RAM stick and see if the problem is solved. Run your system for a while and if the problem goes away, you win! If not, repeat for each RAM stick until you find the one that's misbehaving.

WINDOWS SETTING. There's a setting buried in Windows XP that tells your computer to restart when a system error occurs. If you turn off that option, you may solve your automatic reboot problem. Click Start > open Control Panel > Click Performance and Maintenance > Click System > Click on the Advanced Tab > Click Settings in the Startup and Recovery section > Uncheck Automatically Restart in the System failure section

Note that this may prevent the system from restarting, but it can also mask the true problem. As an alternative to this measure, consider what has recently changed on your system. If you have installed new hardware or software, remove it and see if the annoying restart persists. Sometimes downloading the latest driver software from the manufacturer's website will fix hardware incompatibility problems that cause restarts.