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[Next Page](#)

Is it better to turn my computer off when I am not using it or leave it on all the time?

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Inside this Article

1. Is it better to turn my computer off when I am not using it or leave it on all the time?
2. [Lots More Information](#)
3. [See all Hardware Basics articles](#)

This is one of those questions where there is no single right answer. In other words, it depends on how you use your [computer](#).

There are at least three situations that force you to leave your computer on 24 hours a day:

- You are on a **network**, and the network administrators back up files and/or upgrade software over the network at night. If that is the case, and you want your machine backed up or upgraded, then you need to leave it on all the time.
- You are using your machine as some sort of **server**. For example, HowStuffWorks has a machine that creates the images for the [How Webcams Work](#) article. It needs to be on 24 hours a day. If your machine acts as a file server, print server, [Web server](#), etc., on a [LAN](#) (local area network) or the Internet, then you need to leave it on all the time.
- If you are running something like [SETI@home](#) and you want to produce as many result sets as possible, you need to leave your machine on all the time.

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In some cases, leaving your computer on is the better option. See more [laptop pictures](#).

If you do not fall into any of these categories, then you have a choice about whether or not to leave your machine on.

One reason why you might want to turn it off is **economic**. A typical PC consumes something like 300 watts. Let's assume that you use your PC for four hours every day, so the other 20 hours it is on would be wasted energy. If electricity costs 10 cents per kilowatt-hour in your area, then that 20 hours represents 60 cents a day. Sixty cents a day adds up to \$219 per year.

It's possible to use the energy-saving features build into modern machines and cut that figure in half. For example, you can have the [monitor](#) and [hard disk](#) power down automatically when not in use. You'll still be wasting \$100 per year.

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The argument for leaving your computer on all the time is that turning it on and off somehow **stresses the computer's components**. For example, when the [CPU](#) chip is running, it can get quite hot, and when you turn the machine off it cools back down. The expansion and contraction from the heat probably has some effect on the solder joints holding the chip in place, and on the micro-fine details on the chip itself. But here are three ways to look at that:

- If it were a significant problem, then machines would be failing all the time. In fact, hardware is very reliable (software is a whole different story, and there is a lot to be said for rebooting every day).
- I don't know a single person who leaves the [TV](#) on 24 hours a day. TVs contain many of the same components that computers do. TVs certainly have no problems being cycled

on and off.

- Most vendors will sell you a three-year full-replacement warranty for about \$150. If you are worried about it, spend some of the money you are saving by turning your machine off and buy a service contract. Over three years, you come out way ahead!

See the next page for more information on computer hardware and ways to save energy at home.



Home Energy Savings

Watch this Medialink video to learn more about how to save money at home by switching to compact fluorescent light bulbs, planting shrubbery and using air conditioning wisely. (August, 2008)



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[Next Page](#)

Inside this Article


1. [Is it better to turn my computer off when I am not using it or leave it on all the time?](#)
2. [Lots More Information](#)
3. [See all Hardware Basics articles](#)

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