

With No More Updates Coming for Windows 7, Can You Go On Using It?

This article shows you how to:

- ✓ The consequences of Windows 7's support coming to an end
- ✓ How you can switch to a more recent version of Windows
- ✓ What you should do if you choose to keep using Windows 7

If you're using Windows 7, you obviously like it. When Windows 10 was released, Microsoft offered you every opportunity to upgrade to the new version free of charge – indeed, they made it very difficult to avoid doing that! – but you didn't do it. But now, Microsoft is closing the book on Windows 7 once and for all, ending support for it in a few months' time.



So what does this mean for Windows 7 users? Can you continue using it beyond this cut-off date, and would it be wise to do so? If not, what can you do instead? In this article, I'll explain what's going to happen and examine the options available.

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The Cut-off Date: 14th January 2020

Windows versions: a bad one then a good one

There's a common perception that versions of Windows flip back and forth from a Good One to a Bad One and then another Good One. Windows Vista, released in 2007, was widely perceived as a Bad One: it was slow and unreliable, and felt as if it had been rushed out of the door before it was finished.

Windows 7 was definitely a good one!

A mere two years later in 2009, Windows 7 arrived to put all this right. It was everything Vista wasn't: fast, reliable and attractive. The computing world recognised it as the anticipated Good One and leapt on it.

Many users skipped Windows 8

We expected its successor to be another Bad One, but nothing quite prepared us for the peculiar Windows 8 that arrived in 2012. So, even when Windows 8.1 arrived a year later to sort out some of those peculiarities, most users preferred to stick with Windows 7.

Microsoft knew things hadn't gone well with Windows 8, so in 2015 they skipped a version number to add a little extra distance, brought us Windows 10 and offered it as a free upgrade for a year. In fact, they didn't just offer – they cajoled, harassed and even resorted to trickery to get Windows 7 and 8 users to move to the new Windows 10.

So far you've avoided Windows 10 too

Many gave in, but – if you're still somehow using Windows 7 – obviously not you! Congratulations, it can't have been easy. And you're in good company: even now, roughly 40% of PC users still have Windows 7.

Support for Windows 7 is ending

Sadly, though, there's bad news. The date is fast approaching when Microsoft stops support for Windows 7. It comes to an end on 14th January 2020.

What does that mean? Well, for years you received regular automatic updates for Windows via the Windows Update system. However, for the last few years, those updates have

only fixed security-related issues. You haven't received any updates designed to modernise or improve the system in any other areas, and for obvious reasons: you can almost hear Microsoft saying, 'If you want a modern, improved system, we make one. Buy it!'

Now, however, even those security updates are coming to an end. Early in the year, Windows 7 users will receive their last-ever security update and from 14th January the system will be stuck in something of a time-warp. Microsoft will no longer be looking for security flaws in the system, and they won't be issuing fixes for any that are found by someone else.

You receive no more updates

The consequences of Windows 7 support ending

If you're using Windows 7, it isn't going to stop working all of a sudden, so in theory at least you could go on using it for years to come. In practice, though, it isn't quite that straightforward:

- **There's a greater risk of infection by malicious software.** The malware makers of the world also know Microsoft won't be fixing any more security flaws in Windows 7, so they'll start poring over it with renewed enthusiasm to see what flaws still remain and how they can take advantage of them. That makes Windows 7 a riskier proposition than it used to be.
- **Hardware and software become more difficult to find.** When Microsoft drops support for an old version of Windows, other companies do the same. Developing products that work with multiple versions of Windows takes time and money, and with the number of Windows 7 users expected to dwindle rapidly now, many companies will be only too pleased to remove one version from the list.

Increased risk of malware infection

Less easy to find software and hardware

The decision you have to make

So, as a Windows 7 user, you have a decision to make. Do you continue using this version of Windows or do you stop? Neither option is straightforward, so over the next few pages I'll explore them both, starting with the one I'd recommend without hesitation.

Option 1: Switch to a Newer Version of Windows

Stop using Windows 7

If you accept that the time has come to stop using Windows 7, that means you'll have to start using something else instead, of course. Your choices are Windows 10 or Windows 8.1, and there are several possible ways to make the switch.

Buy a new PC

New PCs are cheaper nowadays

This may not be the cheapest solution, but these days it shouldn't break the bank. You can buy a new desktop PC with Windows 10 from around £300. If you take that route, you shouldn't need to pay extra for another monitor – just use the one you already have.

Alternatively, around £200 will buy you a '2-in-1' (or 'convertible') PC – a sort of cross between a tablet computer and a small notebook PC – again running Windows 10.

The easy and secure option

This is certainly the best way to make the switch since it gives you the security and future-proofing of the latest version of Windows. It's also the simplest, and you can take as long as you need to copy your files from your old PC and install the programs you want to use.

Buy a used PC

A cheap refurbished PC

I wouldn't recommend buying a used PC from a boot sale or a bloke down the pub: you don't know what you might end up with, whether its software is legal, and whether it's

free from malware. But many independent computer shops sell used PCs, often cleaned-up and refurbished, and this could be a good way to get up and running again with something more modern, probably for under £100 (especially since, as noted above, you shouldn't need another monitor).

You'll obviously want this PC to come with Windows 8.1 or Windows 10. Given the choice, Windows 10 is certainly the better bet. It's much more like your familiar Windows 7, it brings you smack up to date, and it will go on receiving automatic updates for years to come.

The many oddities of Windows 8.1 would take some learning after your years with Windows 7, and there's the added drawback that Windows 8.1 runs out of support in January 2023. If you do end up with a Windows 8.1 PC, you might consider paying an extra £80-or-so for a copy of Windows 10 to upgrade it.

Ideally one with Windows 10

Windows 8.1 could be upgraded

If you do choose one of the options above, that leaves the question of what you do with your Windows 7 PC after you're sure you've copied everything you need from it. It's probably getting on for 10 years old, so it's not worth an awful lot (although there are charities which happily accept old computers and – if nothing else – raid them for parts).

The risk when scrapping or donating an old PC is that you can't be sure there's no private information left on its hard disk, even if you think you've thoroughly erased it. My recommendation is to remove the hard drive from that PC. Either keep it and perhaps connect it to your new PC as extra storage or destroy it: undo the screws holding the drive together, wreck the circuit board you find inside it to ensure it can never be used again, and then throw it away.



Upgrade your existing PC

Keep your PC
and upgrade it

You might be more tempted to keep your existing PC and upgrade it to a more recent version of Windows. Technically, again, that means a choice between Windows 8.1 and Windows 10, but in practice there's no decision to make here. You'll struggle to find a trustworthy copy of Windows 8.1 to install, and if you succeed, you've just gained yourself the Ugly Sister of the Windows family which itself expires in three years' time!

No, what you want is Windows 10, and there's some good news: you should be able to upgrade for free.

Is it powerful
enough for
Windows 10?

First, though, is your current PC up to the job of running Windows 10? If it was bought during the Windows 7 era (post-2009), it should be, but if you bought it sometime earlier and upgraded it to Windows 7, it may not be powerful enough.

According to Microsoft, the minimum requirements for Windows 10 are a 1 GHz processor and 1 GB RAM, but those figures are ludicrously over-optimistic: for the experience to be a bearable one, you need to double both figures at least. To check how your PC matches up, right-click the Computer icon on your desktop and choose Properties, and you'll see the details in the Control Panel window that opens.

First: backup
your files!

If you'd like to upgrade to Windows 10, I recommend backing-up your personal files first. Although nothing should go wrong, it pays to play safe! Having done that, and assuming you're using a properly-licenced Windows 7, you can follow these steps to upgrade free of charge:



1. Start your web browser and visit this address:
www.microsoft.com/en-gb/software-download/windows10

2. Below the heading 'Create Windows 10 installation media', click on **Download tool now**.
3. Run the program you've just downloaded and click **Accept** to move past its licence agreement.
4. On the next page, choose **Upgrade this PC now** and click **Next**. You'll now have to wait a while as Windows 10 is downloaded. When that's finished, you'll be asked what you'd like to keep: be sure to choose **Keep personal files and apps** (in other words, everything) and then click **Install**.
5. From here it's just a matter of sitting and waiting while all the work is done automatically. Your PC will restart two or three times, but just leave it to do that until you find yourself ready to sign into Windows 10.

Double-click the shortcut to open the file

Option 2: Make Windows 7 as Safe as Possible

As you'll have gathered, I don't recommend continuing to use Windows 7. With Microsoft no longer supporting it and hackers targeting it with increased vigour, I think it's far too big a risk.

However, the alternatives all cost money, and if you're just an occasional user you may feel the cost and effort are hard to justify. In that case, I won't try to argue with you, but I'll point out a few things you really should do in order to make continued use of Windows 7 as safe as you can:

- **Keep backup copies of your personal files.** The risks I've mentioned are to your files. If your PC were to get hit by ransomware, for instance, there would always be ways to get it back to a working state again, but your files might be impossible to recover and they can never

Vital steps to keep Windows 7 safe

Safety copies of irreplaceable files

be replaced. Therefore, keep copies of your documents, pictures and other personal files on a separate disk, and unplug that disk when you're not using it.

Use a web browser that's kept updated

- **Change your web browser.** If you're still using Internet Explorer, stop! It's essential to use a browser that receives updates, and the demise of Windows 7 also brings the demise of Internet Explorer. Instead, switch to Google Chrome (google.com/chrome) or Mozilla Firefox (firefox.com).

Constant protection from viruses and malware

- **Ensure you have good anti-virus software installed.** This advice applies to absolutely any PC user, of course, but it becomes all the more important if you're using an out-of-date version of Windows – you need all the protection you can get! If you don't have anti-virus software installed already, AVG Antivirus Free still works with Windows 7 and looks set to continue doing so for some time. You can find it at www.avg.com/gb-en/free-antivirus-download.

Gradually less risky

If you follow the advice above – particularly the point about keeping backups of your files – you'll minimise the risks of using Windows 7. To cast a little ray of sunshine on the situation, as others around you start to abandon this version of Windows, it will gradually become a less-promising target for hackers and malware makers.

But, of course, the other side of that coin is that as users desert Windows 7, so will software and hardware companies, and you'll find yourself unable to take full advantage of new technology and struggling to find new software and hardware you can use.

...but more restrictive

If you don't mind putting up with this, that's fine. However, the sad but honest truth is that it really is time to bid Windows 7 a fond farewell.