Your laptop questions, answered

'Have I really lost all my photos?' 11 frequently asked tech questions

Who hasn't experienced that heart-stopping moment when we've deleted a vital file or our photos have vanished? To find out what to do next, we asked a tech support specialist for help



Currys tech expert Deshan Sureshan. Photograph: Christopher L Proctor/The Guardian

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About this content

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From accidentally deleted holiday snaps to keeping an eye out for webcam hackers, modern tech can be complex and it's easy for things to go wrong.

But there are a few simple things you can do to keep everything running smoothly. To find out more, we spoke to one of Currys' tech experts, Deshan Sureshan, to shine light on some of your most common tech conundrums.

What can I do if my computer is slow?

Typically, a computer will run slow because you've got so much saved on it that the processor is no longer able to work effectively. Deleting files you don't need is a good place to start, as is making sure all software is up to date. And even simply restarting your computer regularly can help it run better.

"If your laptop is still going slow, you can come into Currys and we can do a <u>health check</u> for £45 to see what's happening with it," says Deshan, who works for Currys while studying for his degree in biomedical science. "If we can't sort things out in-store we can send it off to be diagnosed and repaired."

Should I cover my laptop webcam when I'm not using it? If so, why?

Meta founder Mark Zuckerberg famously <u>taped over his laptop camera</u> and webcams have often been a source of privacy concerns. "If you're downloading files from less reputable sources, which puts you at risk of viruses, then yes, people can hack into your webcam," says Deshan. Some hackers also try to trick people into downloading malware which gives them remote access to webcams, allowing them to spy on people in their own homes. "This is why it's so important to have proper security on a computer, and antivirus protection, so then you don't have to worry about that," says Deshan.

Is there a way to recover deleted files?

"One thing that we offer at Currys is <u>Cloud Backup</u>, which basically means that when a customer purchases a laptop, they can opt to have all their files safely backed up," says Deshan. "That way, if you ever do delete files, you can recover them via the cloud." And if files are lost due to a hardware issue, Deshan says it's not all doom and gloom. "We also have tech services at Currys that help with repairs to laptops." If you're in luck, and the files aren't corrupted, a tech expert will be able to recover them.

Is it always safe to use public wifi?

"Being on public wifi makes it easier for hackers to get into your system if they're on the same wifi. So you do it at your own risk," says Deshan. He recommends using a VPN (virtual private network), which establishes a more secure virtual space for you inside the public network by redirecting your internet connection through a private server. "You can purchase a VPN or choose a free one with more limited functions," he says. When you activate your VPN it obscures your IP address – your computer's unique identifying number – and adds other levels of encryption.

How do I keep my laptop battery in good health?

"If you keep your battery plugged in all the time it's going to start getting overwhelmed, and over time it'll lose its power so make sure you unplug it when you can," says Deshan.

"Battery health is a crucial part of looking after your laptop and should form part of a solid care routine. Other things to remember? Don't throw your laptop around! Take it for <u>health checks</u> and avoid getting corrupted files and viruses on it. That will all help keep it in good condition."



If you think you've lost your photos, 'bring your computer to us, and we'll check for you', says Deshan. Photograph: Christopher L Proctor/The Guardian

Should I install a third-party antivirus on my laptop?

"We usually recommend it, and suggest going for verified antivirus protection like McAfee and Norton. They're well-known and trusted brands and they're known to work effectively. They also have a wide range of security features."

How do I protect my privacy online?

"Things like using a VPN and antivirus protection are important because they help keep you safe from viruses and hackers," says Deshan, adding that it is wise to pay heed to the threat of identity theft. "Never give up passwords and don't give out other personal details carelessly. And if you're using names and locations for security questions, don't give that information to anyone you don't know or trust."

Should I back up my files on flash drives or the cloud, or both?

"It's always a good idea to back up important files like photos," says Deshan. "Flash drives are useful because they can't be hacked and these days you can get pretty cool ones which can be accessed with biometrics." But for Deshan, there's no convenience quite like the cloud: "It's my first choice – and it's so convenient because you can access it from any device as long as you remember your account details."

How can I tell if an email is suspicious?

It's simple. "Any email asking for bank details or personal details is suspicious," says Deshan. So don't fall for it.

How do I know if I've really lost my photos?

"First, check your album to make sure they haven't been misplaced. Then look into your recently deleted folder to see if they are there," says Deshan. Another option is to search by file extension, for example, jpeg. If you still can't find them – oh dear: "It's likely you have lost them unless you have them backed up to the cloud," he says. "But if you're still not sure, bring your computer to us, and we'll check for you."

Do I really need to eject USB sticks when I'm finished working with them? "You do, otherwise there is a risk that the files on the stick will get corrupted."

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