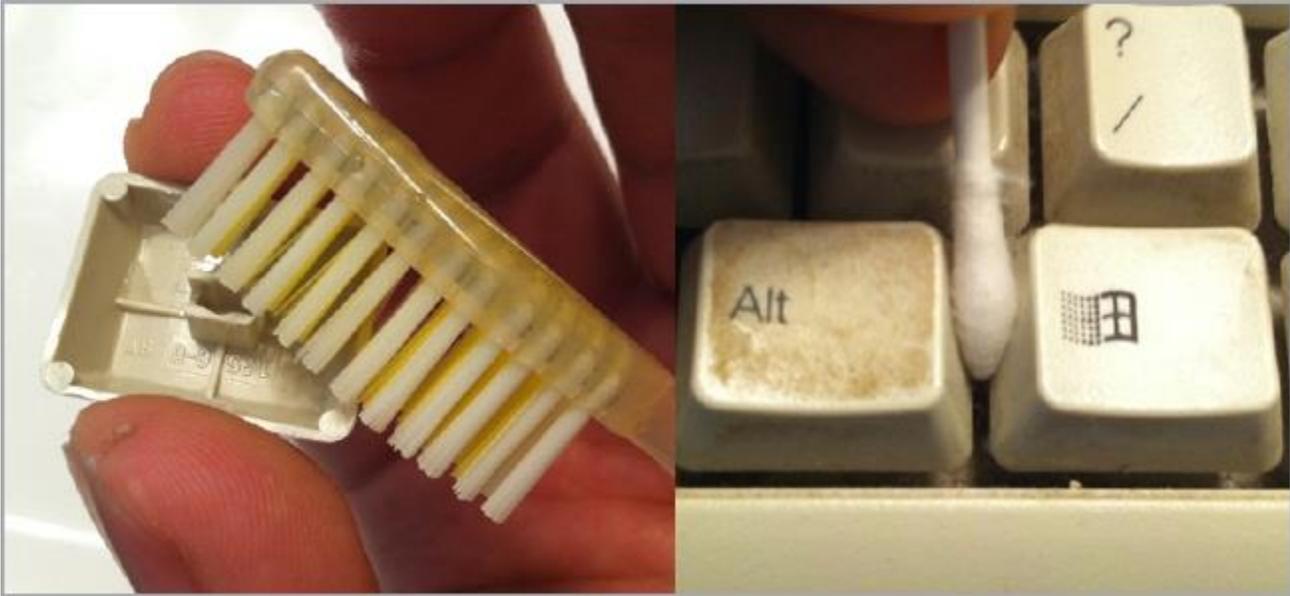


How to Thoroughly Clean Your Keyboard (Without Breaking Anything)



Your keyboard is one of your most important peripherals, but it's bound to get clogged with dirt and grime over time. Dust off, scrub down, and clean up your number one input device safely with these tips.

There are plenty of ways to clean depending on what afflicts your workspace. We'll break it down by type, but first thing's first: **unplug your keyboard!** Some of these cleaning methods can theoretically do some damage to your keyboard if there's power going to it, so be sure it's unplugged and the batteries are taken out.

Dust

A common problem in offices, dust can really make typing unpleasant. It's an easy fix, however. For daily maintenance, you can use a small soft-bristled dusting brush, like the one below.



A small hand-held vacuum cleaner or a can of compressed air will work well.



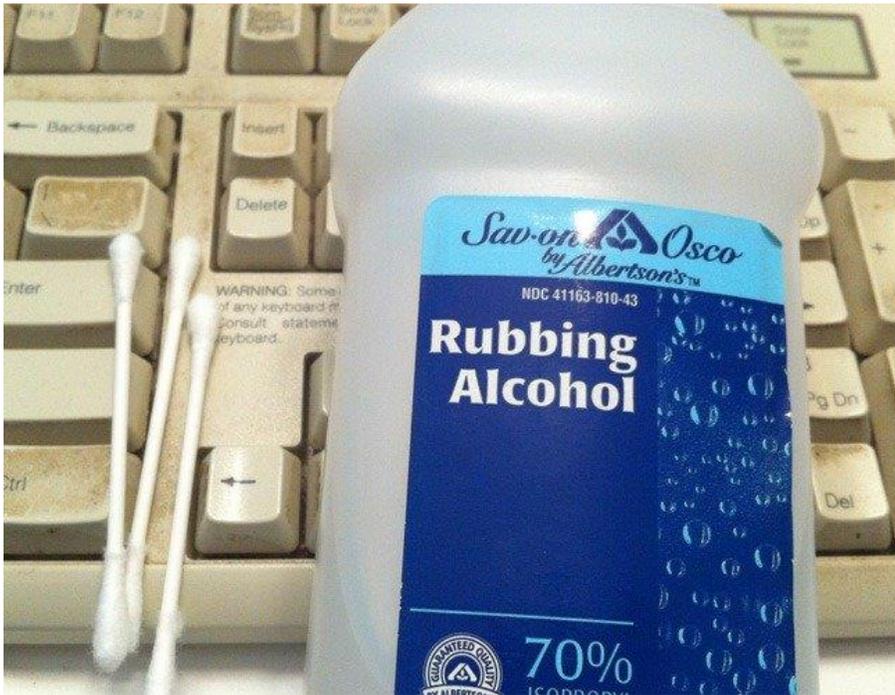
For more caked on dust, try the brush/hose attachment of a larger vacuum cleaner to help scrape off dust bunnies.



Germs

Daily use can breed a whole different kind of filth on your precious keys. Be wary of disinfectant sprays; many are strong enough that you wouldn't want to keep your hands in contact with them for very long. Try to find ones that are electronics-friendly. Personally, my favorite option is to use an isopropyl alcohol solution.

Be sure to use isopropyl and NOT ethyl, as the harsher ethyl alcohol can take the lettering off of the keys. Anything about 60% alcohol or more is fine; higher concentrations don't really help kill more germs, but it also won't hurt.



Take a little alcohol solution and moisten an old rag or a paper towel with it. Do NOT pour it into the keyboard. Trust me, a wet napkin is enough. Scrub it over the tops of the keys, and use a wet cotton swab to go down in between them.





Spills

What's worse than accidentally turning on Sticky Keys? Spilling your soda and getting real sticky keys. First thing's first, unplug your keyboard. Dump out any excess liquid and mop up as best you can with paper towels. While it's best to clean while the keyboard is still wet to minimize the stickiness, the process is much the same whether you spilled your soda 30 seconds ago or 30 days ago.

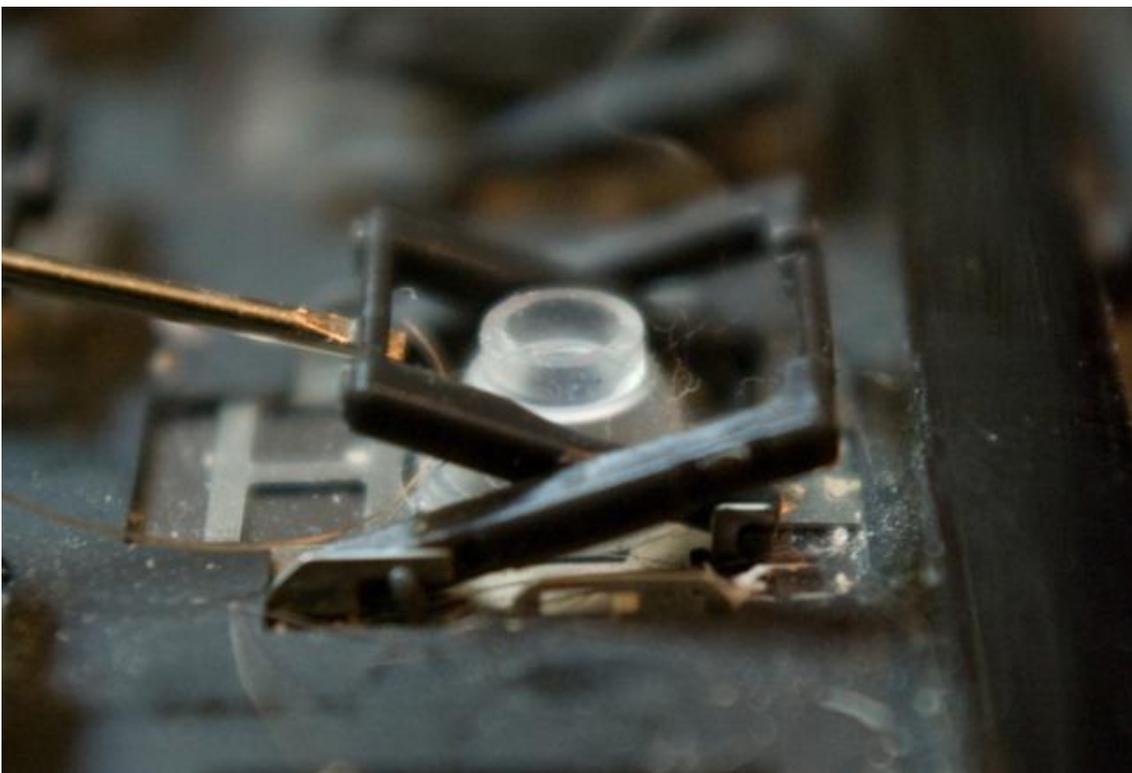
To get rid of sticky keys, we'll need to pop off the keys and clean the keyboard more thoroughly. If you have a standard keyboard, you'll be able to find references to where all the keys should go if you don't already have the layout memorized. For custom keyboard, it might be helpful to draw a quick map or take a picture with your digital camera so you know where everything belongs when you go to put things back together.

For desktop keyboards, take a butter knife or a screwdriver and try to pry up one corner of the keys. You don't need to use a lot of force; you should feel a pop and the key will come right off.





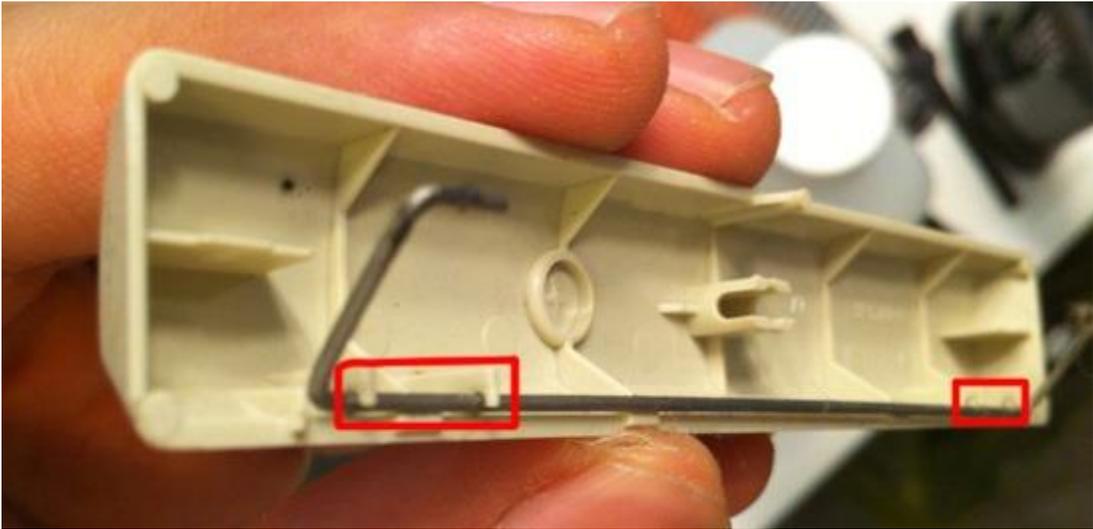
For laptop keyboards, your fingernail should be enough to pull the plastic up. Start with one corner and move to an adjacent one. Be extra careful, since the mechanism is made of plastic and you don't want to break it.



Once the keys are off, you can better use a paper towel and maybe some alcohol solution to clean the keyboard base. Careful with those metal bars!



To clean the keys, you can wash them in warm water and/or use some cotton swabs. To put the keys back on, just place them over their correct position and press them until you hear a snap. They shouldn't feel mushy or sticky anymore, and if they do it's probably because they either didn't set properly in the base or it's in the wrong place. With keys that have metal bars, make sure the bars are properly attached to the keys and that the ends line up in the slots on the keyboard (compare the above and below images).



Chiclet-style keyboards are great because they prevent a lot of dirt from getting underneath, but unfortunately I've still not found a good way to clean them of sticky spills.

Food Particles and Grime

Geeks' diets aren't always the best. Aside from spilled soda, you may find potato chip grease, Cheeto crumbs, or popcorn pieces stuck under the keys, making them feel mushy while typing. As with liquid cleanup, pop off the keys as best you can. Take a vacuum, then a can of compressed air to really flush out everything underneath.



For really grimy spots, try using a pencil eraser. You might be surprised as how well the rubber will peel off dirt. Just be careful that the eraser-dust doesn't fall back in the keyboard.



If you've tried everything to cut the dirt and grease, then I've got one last method for you. Take a soft-bristled toothbrush that's wet with a bit of alcohol to your keyboard. You can clean the removed keys with a toothbrush and some soapy water. Your keys will be looking brand-new in no time!



A dirty keyboard hinders typing, is riddled with disease-inducing germs, and just doesn't go well with the decor. Show your keyboard some love by cleaning it. These methods also work well with all different kinds of mice, especially he alcohol and cotton swabs.