

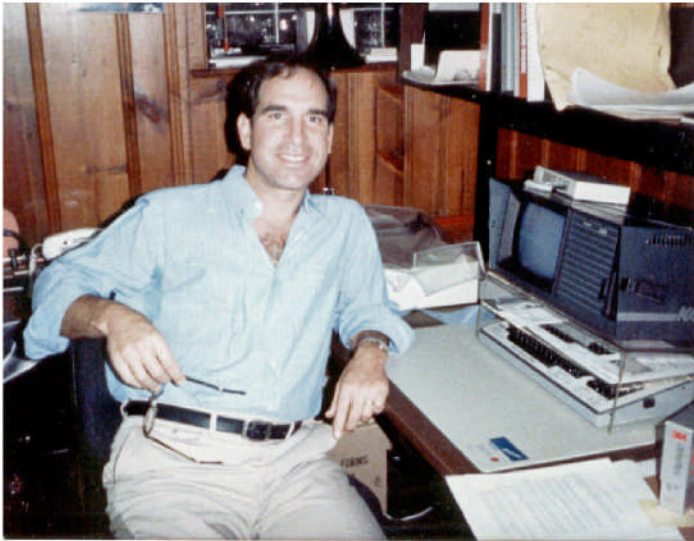
# American Academy of Pediatrics

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## Computer Savvy for Seniors (An Introduction)

Do you remember your first computer? I do! The year is 1983 and I am sitting at my desk in front of a Kaypro 10. Many former AAP Board members have fond memories of their Kaypro PC's. This 26 lb. steel "luggable" was one of the first personal computers along with the Apple 2E, Commodore 64, and the venerable IBM 286 PC. In fact, my Kaypro still sits in my closet. I can't bear to part with it via E-Bay.



Today, in 2005, older US adults are flocking to the web and represent the fastest-growing segment of the Internet community according to AARP. The perceived techno-phobia of senior adults is crumbling as more and more of us become PC users. In 2002 38% of AARP members owned a PC and 17% were online. Online use provides access to E-mail, and information about health, finance, and travel as well as up-to-date information from the American Academy of Pediatrics and access to the AAP Members Only Channel.

This column is for you and me; the non-techie that wants to use a PC to improve the quality of our lives; rather than the computer "techie wanna-bee" from MIT that wants to build their own PC. We will explore simple problems (purchase, use, enjoyment) that require simple solutions – no more, no less. That's my objective. While I own a Windows PC, I will try to objectively inform about Apple issues, as well. Over the next few issues, we will look at:

- x Why you should purchase and use a PC.
- x How to use your PC safely and protect your identity and privacy. x

Should I upgrade my existing PC or purchase a new PC?

- x PC use to improve the quality of your life, financial health, leisure and AAP relationships.
- x Navigating the World Wide Web
- x And other topics that you recommend. That's right, I said "you". Please contact me with comments/questions/topic suggestions at my AAP e-mail address [jmaronson@aap.net](mailto:jmaronson@aap.net). Any Apple user interested/willing to collaborate with me on this column, please contact me, as well.

Let's start with some principles for purchase and ownership:

- x Decide what you want to do with a PC.
- x Get educated about your choices.
- x Take a test drive - visit "big box" stores to compare brands and models and explore features to match your preferences
- x Make some basic decisions about computer hardware and software. x Take the plunge!

**What might you use a PC for?** A recent AARP survey found the following computer uses in decreasing frequency:

- personal correspondence (e-mail) with family, and friends. (72%)
- research a particular issue (legal, financial, travel, etc) subject. (59%)
- access news. (53%)
- try the latest adventure games and CD-ROM puzzles. (52%)
- research or purchase air travel/hotels/vacation or consumer items (47%)
- obtain weather information. (43%)
- perform volunteer work for various organizations. (25%)
- Others including producing memoirs, editing and archiving photos and videos, monitoring investments, tracking geneology, start a post-retirement businesses, make greeting cards to send to friends and relatives, write letters to legislators, government agencies, make friends and combat loneliness via communication, or whatever your imagination encourages you to do

**Get educated:** Investment in learning pays off for years. Learn the basics: -- take a class (local library, school district adult evening programs), buy a book, attend local computer user group meetings, talk with friends/neighbors and grandchildren, consult Web sites, or read some technology magazines at the local library. Evaluate brand name products through Consumer Reports or computer magazines. Two books of note are:

"It's Never Too Late to Love a Computer" (a friendly first guide) by Abby Stokes  
"Easy Computing for Seniors" by Frank K. Wood.

Both titles (approximately \$12 each) and myriad others are available at your local

bookstore or online.

Good websites, to bookmark and refer to often are:

AARP – Computers and Technology (<http://www.aarp.org/learntech/computers/>), a wonderful reference library, advisor on buying and upgrading computers, and a fun place to visit for recreational reading about technology,  
 SeniorNet (<http://www.seniornet.org> or 1-800-747-6848)), a volunteer run non-profit organization of senior citizen PC users. Their free website provides information on SeniorNet community learning centers, courses, and online tutorials.

**Take a “test drive” and make some basic decisions:**

Here are some points to consider when you take your “big box store” (Staples, Circuit City, Best Buy, WalMart, MicroCenter, etc.) test drive to get acquainted before your first or next computer purchase.

What brand/type of computer and operating system do I want?

<b>Apple</b>	<b>PC (Windows)</b>
Advantages: Limited choices but enthusiastic users report high reliability and good technical support; easy-to-use software especially with digital audio, photography, and video; limited virus/spyware threats	Advantages: A commodity available in many flavors at very competitive prices; large amount of software and peripheral hardware available; very expandable as needs change/grow; lots of tools easing use/accessibility -- enlarging type, making keyboarding easier, providing special audible and visual cues, etc.
Disadvantages: More expensive, limited software and hardware available; limited expandability	Disadvantages: Reliability and technical support vary with manufacturer; some software incompatibilities exist, especially with older (non Windows XP) operating systems; frequent virus/spyware target

What components do I want/need in my PC?

- x Desktop vs. laptop (lower cost, more features/\$ vs. convenience and mobility re: travel)
- x Processor and RAM memory (the more RAM memory, the better)
- x Storage capacity: size of hard drive (your filing cabinet; more if high photo/music storage)
- x Archiving and backup devices – e.g. CD ROM (routine transfer/storage of software and files), or DVD
- x Keyboard and pointing devices (mouse and others– ergonomics and accessibility are the keys)
- x Printer and/or Scanner (how often will you use the printer to print digital pictures, e.g. photo-quality printer vs. basic color ink-jet printing)
- x Multimedia Features

- x Monitor (CRT monitors - low cost/high quality/bulky on the desk vs. thinner, lighter LCD panel displays of higher cost that take up less desk space)
- x DVD reader and writer to view and write for high capacity/high quality archiving of data, including pictures/music, etc.
- x Audio Quality/speakers (concert hall at home?)
- x Digital camera (pays for itself in film developing cost savings over time if willing to share photos by e-mail or web)
- x Web connectivity:
  - o Dial-up modem (usually built-in)
  - o Broad band connection (Centrino processor option for laptop to save battery, plus built in wireless connection vs. Ethernet connector)
- x Software
  - o Business/Productivity (Word Processing, Spreadsheets, Presentation Software, etc.)
  - o Financial (Quicken or Money – manage personal finance for taxes, bill payment, online banking, brokerage/investing)
  - o Photo/Video – there’s a little bit of Cecil B. DeMille in all of us!
  - o Computer protection against invasion of privacy (firewall), “bad software applications (antivirus, antispam, antispys)
- x Other useful gadgets, e.g. Flash Drive to easily transfer data from one PC to another!

How much computer do I really need? What will I pay for it?

Computer Type	Speed (Ghz)	RAM MB	Storage GB	Disc Writers	Monitor	Cost
Budget (fills basic needs including e-mail, photo editing, word-processing, and web browsing)	Celeron / AMD	256-512 MB	40-80 GB	CD-RW	CRT/LCD 15-17"	\$400 to \$800
Workhorse (basic + games, graphic intensive applications, e.g. PowerPoint with pictures, video editing/video cam)	AMD / Pentium 4	>512 MB	>80 GB	CD-RW / DVD-RW combo drives	CRT/LCD 19" or>	\$1000 and>

Note – RAM = computer memory; CD = compact disc storage device; DVD = digital video device, RW = read/write capability for disc writer. (adapted from Consumer Reports, June 2005)

The bottom line, almost any current PC with a printer and Internet connectivity will handle most mainstream requirements. The good news is that means that a generic, budget Windows PC is usually adequate to begin. PC's last a long time; however, plan to upgrade/replace every 3-5 years of so to be able to take advantage of new advances in technology. Old PC's have lot's of uses, including

young grandchildren.

**Are you ready to take the plunge?** See you next time!!