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My external hard drive is clicking or beeping

An external hard drive that clicks, grinds or beeps is warning you of a problem. The most important advice is to stop using it straight away.

What the sounds can mean

A hard drive with spinning parts normally makes a soft whirring or occasional gentle sounds. These are not normal:

- Repeated clicking or ticking
- Grinding or scraping
- Loud beeping
- The drive spinning up and down again and again

These often mean a part inside is failing or damaged. Drives with no moving parts, called solid state drives, are silent, so this guide applies to the older spinning type.

What to do right now

1. Stop using the drive. Do not try to copy more files.
2. Safely eject it if the computer will let you. If not, switch off the computer and unplug the drive.
3. Do not shake it, tap it or put it in a freezer. Freezing is an old myth and can make things worse.
4. Do not keep plugging it in to see if it works. Each try can cause more damage.

What not to do

- Do not open the drive. The inside is very delicate and dust ruins it.
- Do not run repair or format programs.
- Do not drop or knock it while it is running.

If you have a backup

If your files are safely stored somewhere else, you can replace the drive. Make sure that you really do have a recent copy and can open it.

If you do not have a backup

Do not panic. A specialist can often recover data from a failing drive, but the sooner you stop using it, the better the chance. It can cost money and does not always work, so we can talk you through the options.

Prevent it happening again

Keep at least two copies of anything important. See our guide on backing up your files.

When to get more help

Please contact us before trying anything else. Tell us the make of the drive, what you hear, and what is on it. Leave it unplugged until we speak.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.