

## What is a cookie?

Cookies are pieces of data stored on your computer by a website you visited. This data identifies you to the website when you move from page to page within the site and when you return for another visit. This data ranges from information about your computer and internet connection; information about what products or services you viewed or purchased; to demographic information like your age, gender, location, etc. Websites use cookies to help track who visits their site and what their browsing patterns look like. This includes site usernames and passwords.

Advertisers track you as you move from site to site and target you with advertisements and pop-up ads. Cookies help sites verify the effectiveness of their advertising efforts.

Cookies are not programs! They are tiny bits of data saved to your computer by your web browser program. It would take more than 2 million cookies to overflow a very small hard drive.

Are cookies a threat to you in any way? Yes! They can reveal personal information. Doubleclick.com ([www.doubleclick.com](http://www.doubleclick.com)) sells the information it gathers from cookies. Is this bad? Is this the way you want companies to gather information about you and your internet habits?

Read our column next week to find out what a virus is and what to do if you get one!