Understanding Cookies

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Cookie Basics

What are they?

Cookies are small text files that are stored a web browser (e.g. Firefox or Safari) on your computer or other device. They permit websites to store your preferences. The website can then reference these settings when needed.

Login

When you register with a site, cookies are created that indicate if you are signed in.
This enables sites to offer additional facilities to visitors such as being able to post comments or view members only pages.

Advertising

These cookies indicate whether or not you've seen an advert and how long it is since you've seen it. Advertisers may use cookies to more accurately target you, to show items which may be of interest. These cookies are anonymous, they store information about the content you are browsing, but not about who you are. Typically these cookies are by the advertisers not the site publishers.

Analytics

When a user visits a website, software generates an anonymous analytics cookie. These cookies enable a site to tell if you have visited before. If you don't have one, one may be created. This allows sites to know how many users they have, and how often they visit. Unless you are signed in to a site, these cookies cannot be used to identify you. They are used for statistical purposes. If you are logged in, it is possible the details you supplied for this, such as user name and email address will correlated. Cookies which track your behaviour in the above ways can be restricted by using features in your browser.

Duration

Session cookies are deleted when you close your browser or shut down your computer.
Some of the remainder are short lived. However some are set to expire several years into the future.

Your Privacy

Browsers can enable you to reduce the effect that cookies can have. Different browsers can have different controls. Tracking occurs when a cookie is placed in your browser and when you visit other sites this noted by them to build up a picture of your habits. One of the typical consequences of this you tend to see the same advertising repeated when you go from site to site. This is used by advertisers quite often, and many people consider to be a bit creepy.

3rd Party

Most advertising on websites is placed by companies such as Google. The owners of the site don't have direct control over the advertising. The advertising can place cookies independently from the site you are visiting. These cookies are known as '3rd party'. Most browsers have facilities for rejecting these cookies.

Private Browsing/Incognito

Most browsers have the ability to remove any traces of a web viewing session. The easiest way to implement this is to use the private browsing feature. This will remove all cookies when you are finished. It will also remove the history of the sites you have visited.

Protect Yourself

The above shows that there are different ways that the influece of cookies can be restricted. This should enable you to start devising a strategy that suits you. Private browsing is probably the solution that is most restrictive to those that would seek to harm you. Restricting Third Party cookies would negate the effects of pushy advertisers. It should also be borne in mind that tracking contols rely on a voluntary code of practice by major companies. The browsers themselves cannot stop this. The following pages illustrate some of the features relating to cookies that can be found in common browsers.
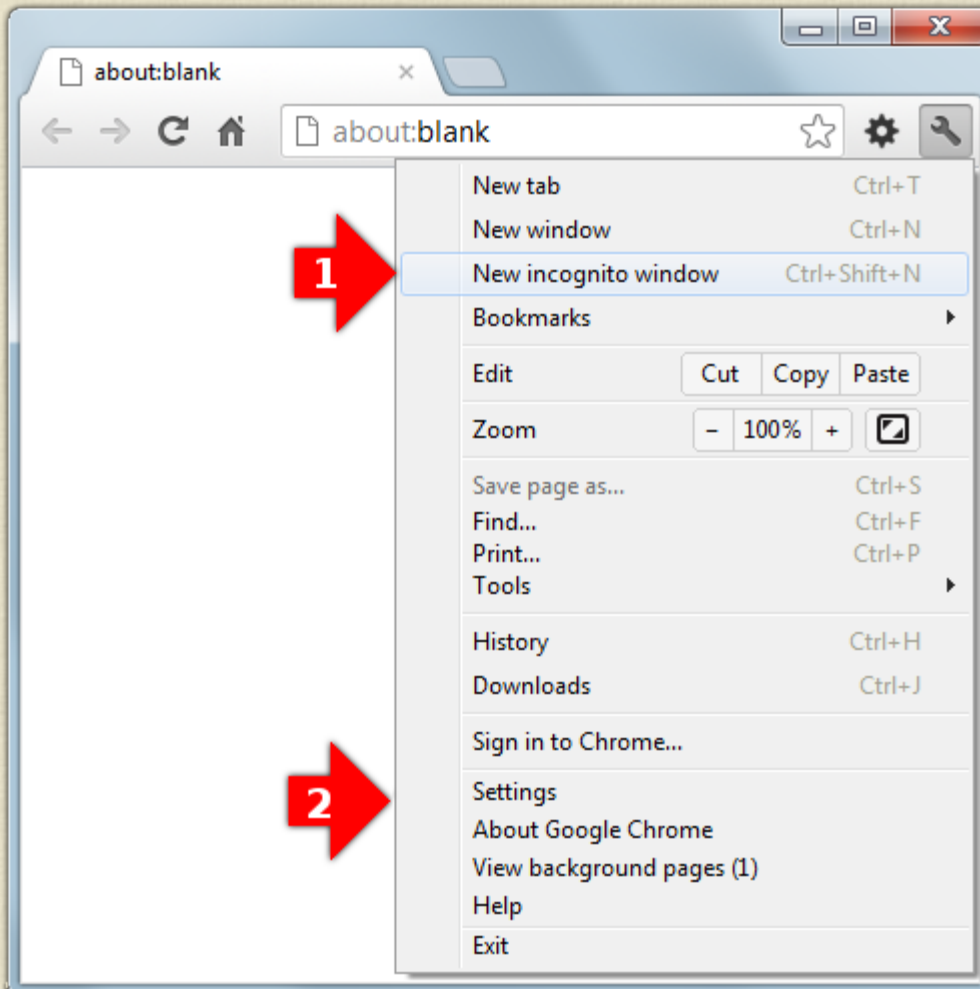
Microsoft: Internet Explorer
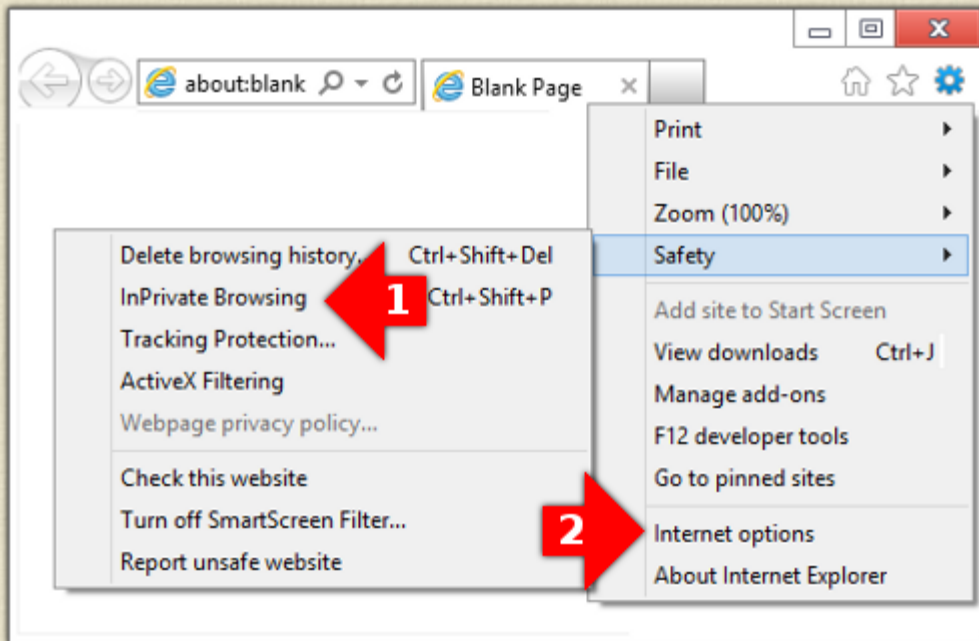
1. Internet Explorer InPrivate mode removes records of the sites you have visited when you close the browser.
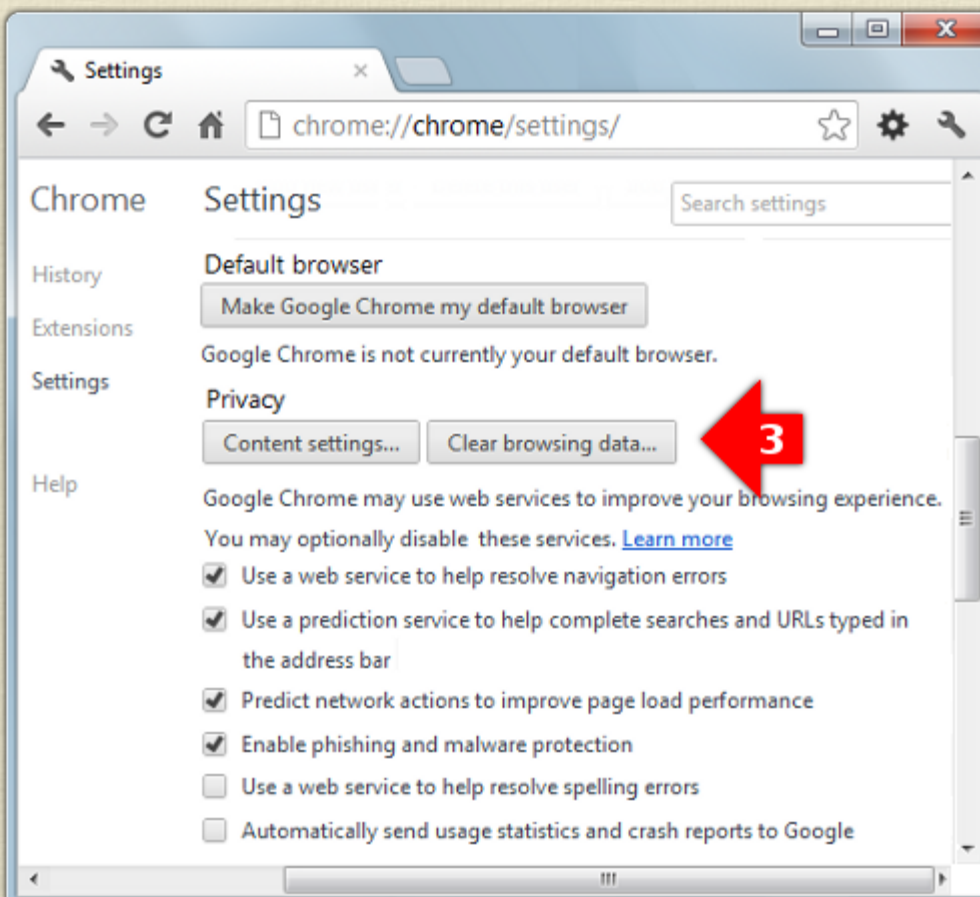
2. Click on settings to reveal further controls
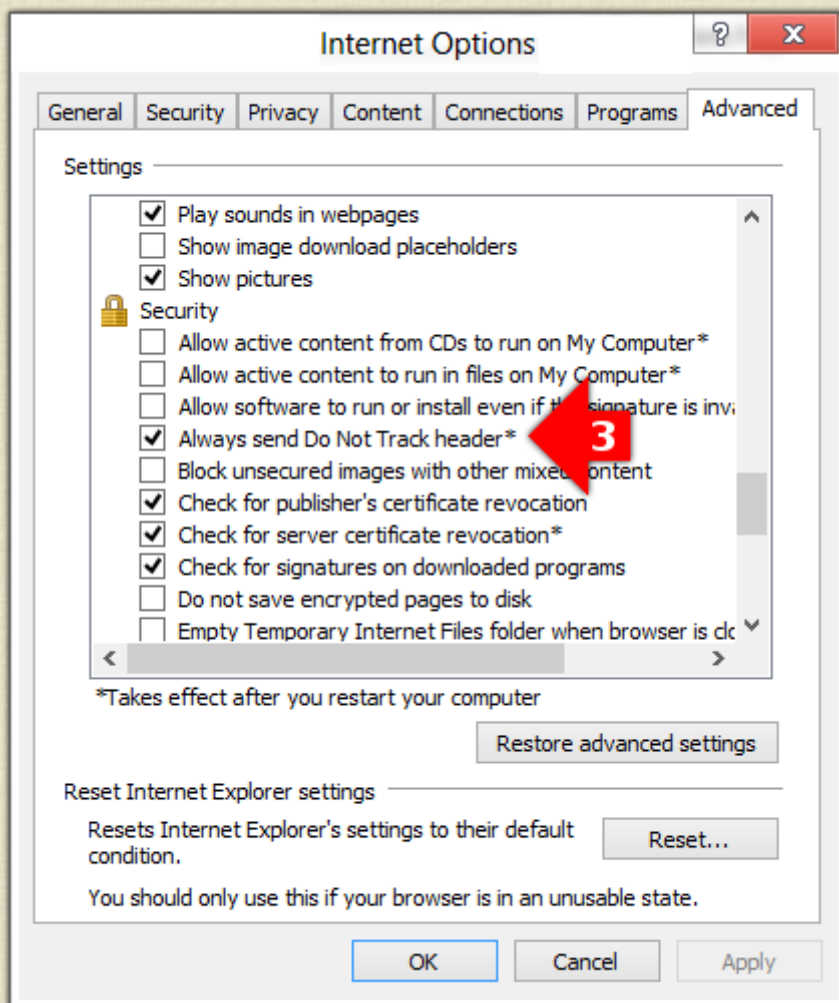
3. The privacy options enable more ways of decreasing your exposure. For example reducing tracking
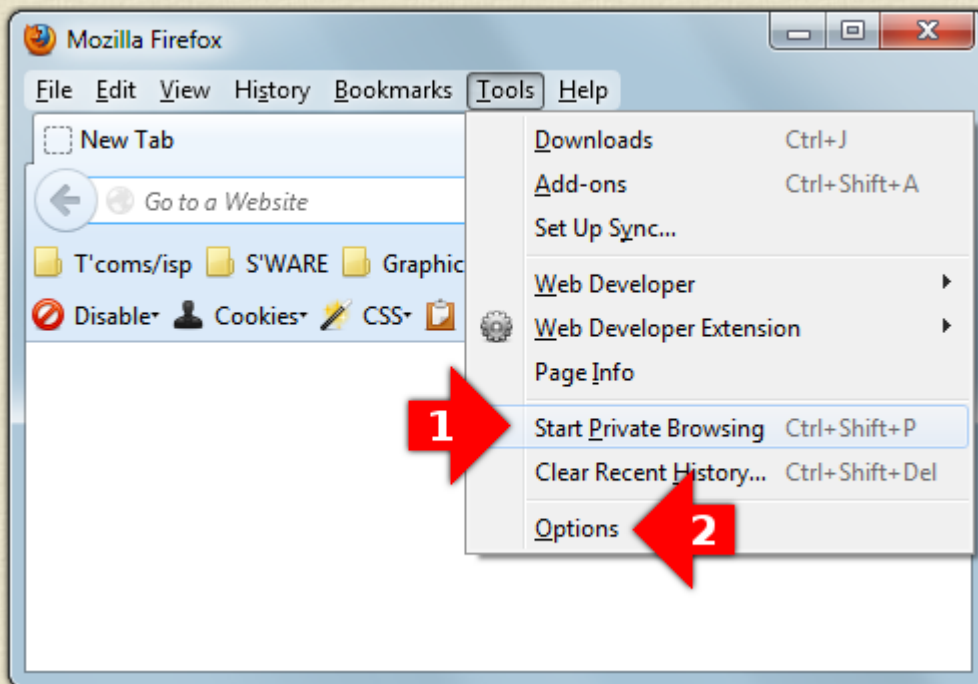
Google: Chrome

1. Googles Incognito mode removes records of the sites you have visited when you close the browser.
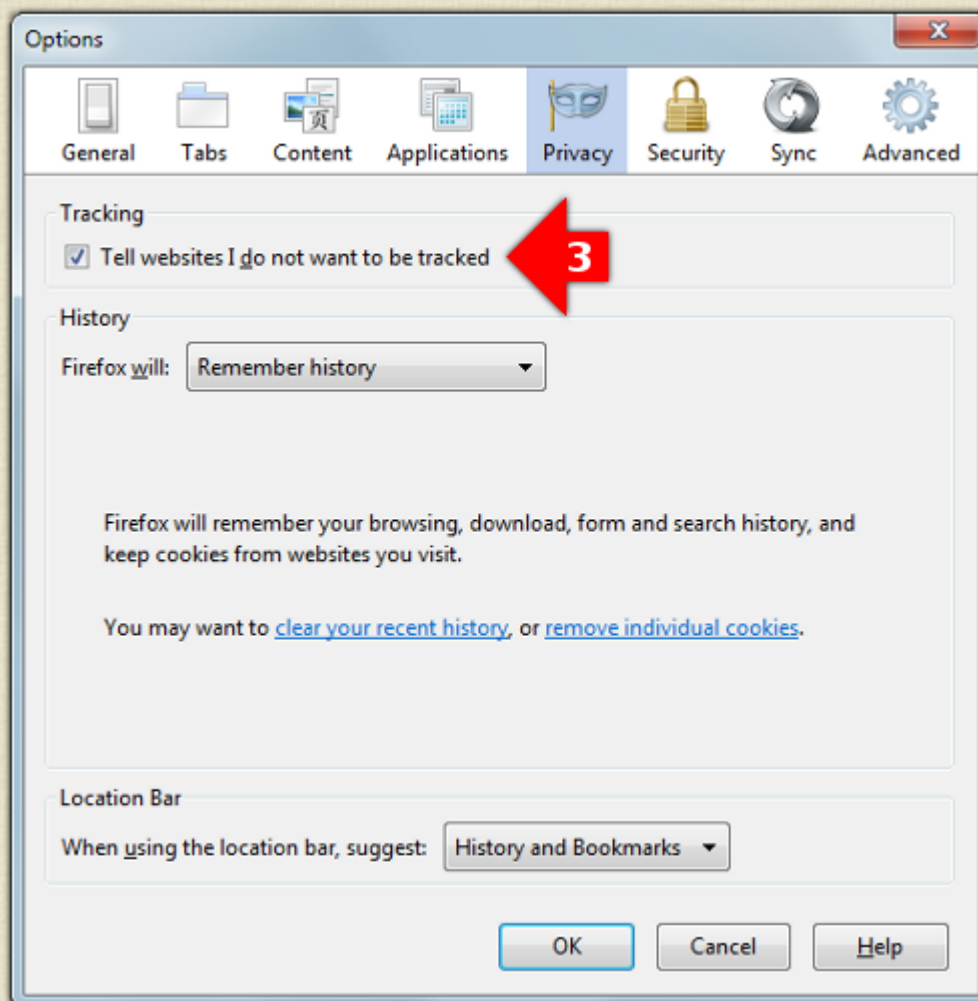
2. Click on settings to reveal further controls

3. The privacy options enable more ways of decreasing your exposure.
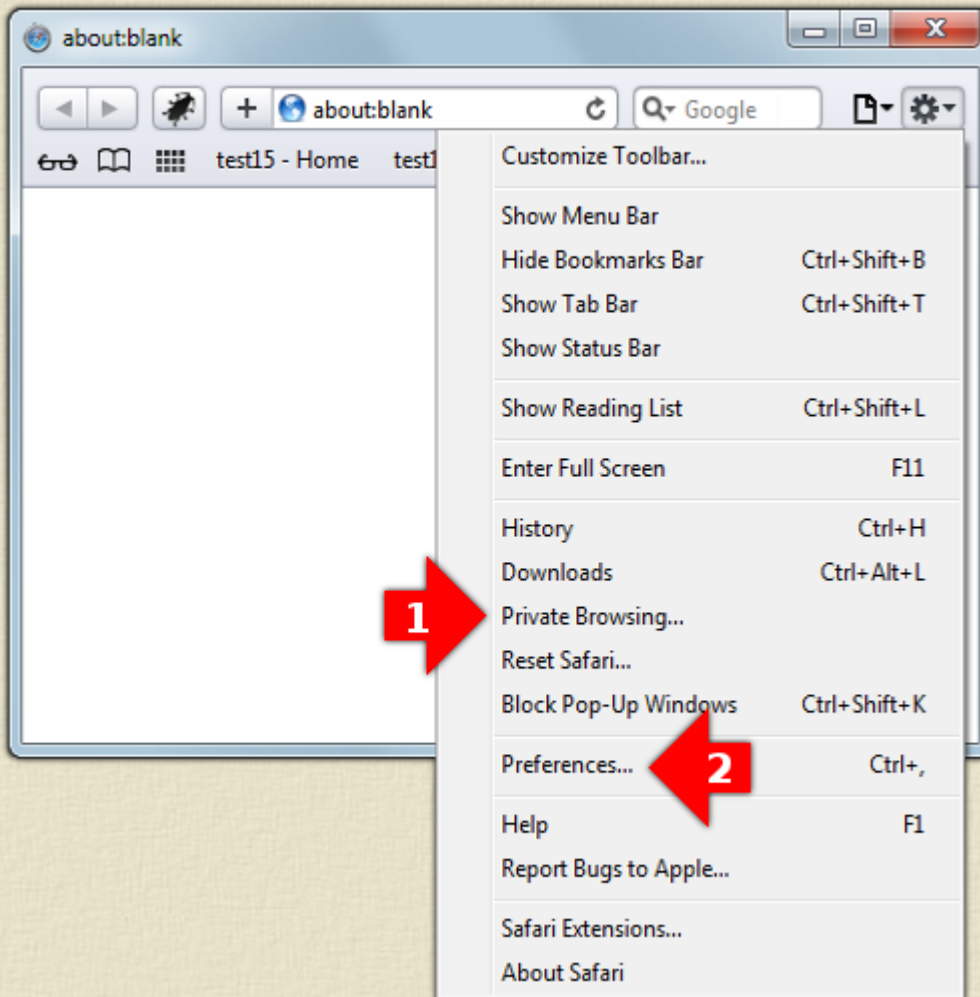
Mozilla Firefox

1. Firefox has a simple to use Private Browsing mode which removes records of the sites you have visited when you close the browser.

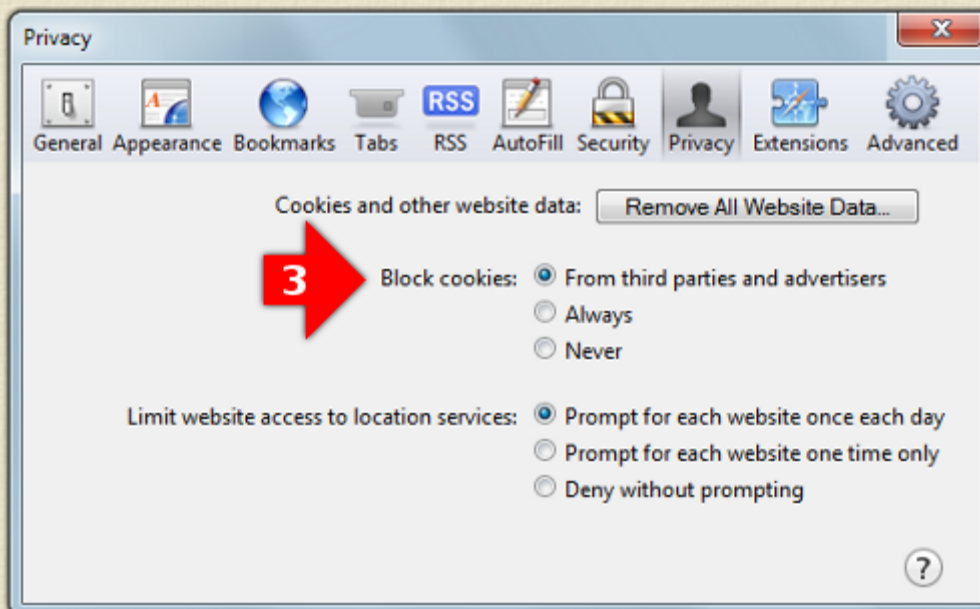2. Click on options to reveal further controls

3. Other options include the instruction to advertisers etc to not use tracking.
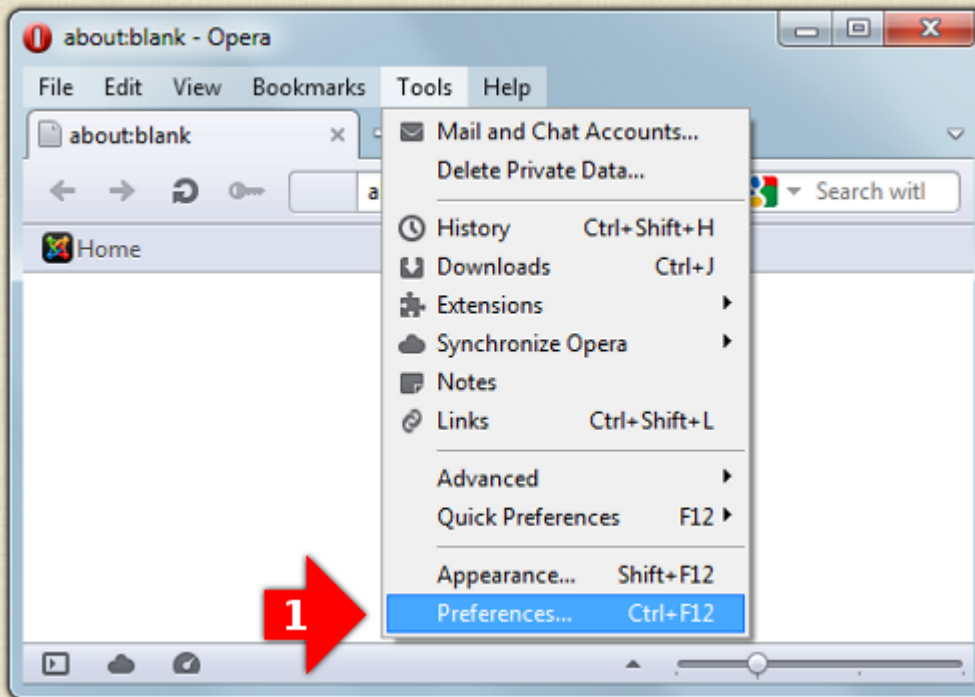
Apple: Safari

1. Safari has a simple to use Private Browsing mode which removes records of the sites you have visited when you close the browser.

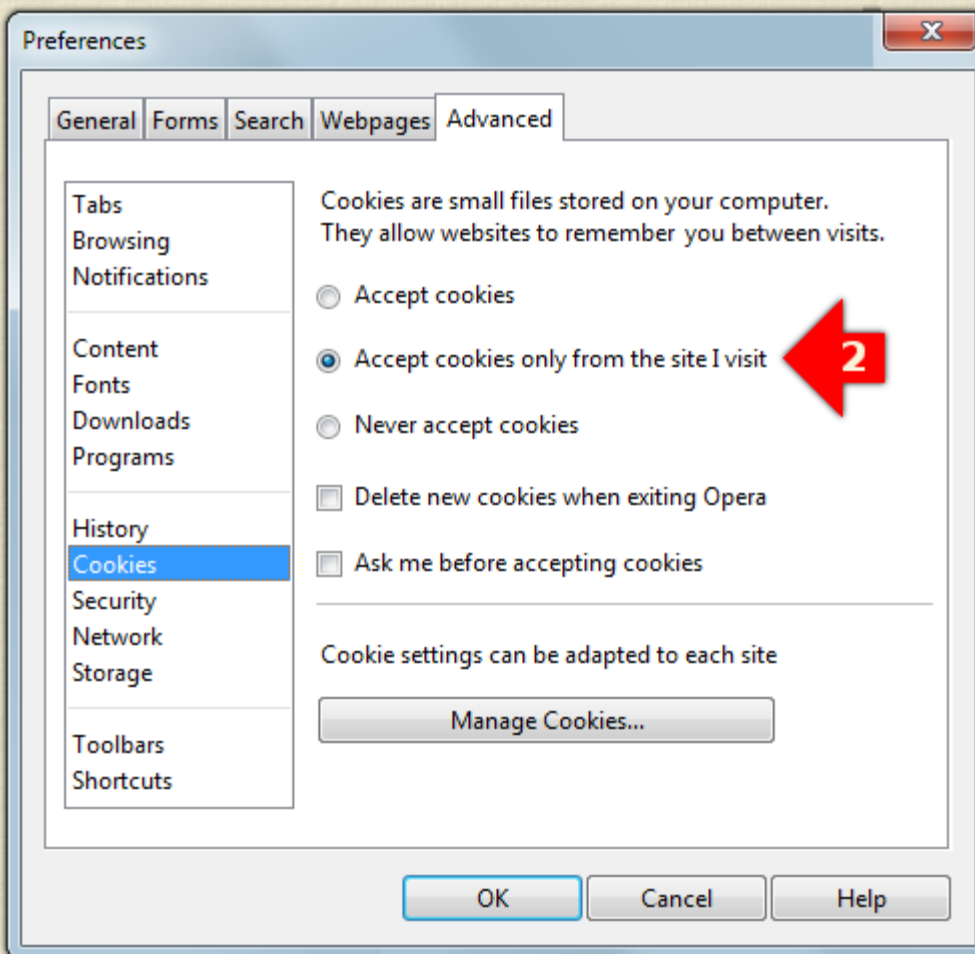2. Click on Preferences to reveal further controls.

3. Other options include blocking third party and advertising cookies .

Opera

1. In Opera you can click on the tools menu to find Preferences

2. Click on Preferences and then the Cookies submenu to reveal further controls. If you only accept coookies from the site you visit other third party cookies from advertisers will be blocked

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