



Home Tips®



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Q & A

Home Security?

What are some suggestions to make our home as safe as possible against being burglarized without spending a large amount of money?

Most burglars seek easy targets, homes they can get into quickly and quietly. They will try to enter a window or door only for a minute or two before moving on to an easier home.

These 10 basic security mistakes are easy for a burglar to spot, but also easy for you to correct. By fixing them, you can beef up your home's security without spending a lot of time and money.

① UNLOCKED DOORS & WINDOWS

This may sound too obvious to mention, but in almost 50% of burglaries, thieves get in without picking, prying or breaking anything. And most burglaries occur between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. So even if you're just making a quick afternoon trip to the corner hardware store, lock up your house when you leave. Many insurance companies will not cover your losses unless there's evidence of forced entry.

② INSECURE STRIKE PLATES

Every exterior door should have a good-quality name-brand deadbolt (\$20 to \$30). But a deadbolt is only as tough as its strike plate. And too often, strike plates are secured with short screws that will pull out with a couple of swift kicks to the door. Strike plate screws should be 3 inches long, so they go through the jamb and deep into the framing behind it.

Some security experts favor double-cylinder deadbolts (the kind that requires keys from the outside and the inside). That way, a thief who comes in through a window can't just unlock the door to carry out all your worldly goods. But those concerned with fire safety say double-cylinder deadbolts should only be used where a crook could easily break a window and reach the lock. If you choose a double-cylinder model, keep the key hidden near the door and make sure everyone in the house knows where it is so they can escape in case of fire.

③ RELYING ON DOOR CHAINS

Door chains-meant to allow you to open the door a few inches to see who's on the outside-can be yanked out with one good shove. So install a peephole instead. Drilling a hole is

all that is required. **Warning:** if you hear a knock, but can't see anyone through the peephole, do not open the door. Some crooks knock and then duck, waiting for you to open up.

④ UNCHANGED GARAGE DOOR OPENER CODES

Many newer door openers come with an individualized frequency code. But older openers (and some new ones) have a standard factory set code that's supposed to be changed by the homeowner after installation. But since so many people don't bother, crooks can drive around with a few common brands of transmitters, clicking them until they find a garage door that responds. In some areas burglars have been using electronic "code grabbers" to record opener codes. Major manufacturers have developed systems that resist this, but you have to install a new receiver and buy new transmitters (about \$80 for a receiver and two transmitters).

Be sure to remove your transmitter from your car when you drop it off for servicing or repair. A crook could open it, copy down the codes and replace it without your knowledge.

⑤ COMPLETE DARKNESS

Burglars of the nocturnal variety consider darkness a tool of the trade. So they hate motion-activated lighting. If you already have exterior light fixtures, replacing them with motion detecting lights is a simple matter of turning off the power at the main panel and connecting three wires. **Tip:** Security lights are best kept out of reach, where crooks can't tamper with them.

⑥ WIMPY WINDOWS

Casement windows (the kind that crank open) are generally hard to break into, unless, of course, a crook is willing to make a lot of noise by breaking the glass. Double hung windows offer less security. Their latches are usually inadequate-but they can be beefed up easily. You can cut a dowel to fit in the track. Another solution is to screw or pin the sashes together.

⑦ VULNERABLE SLIDING GLASS DOORS

Burglars love sliding glass doors because many have flimsy locks or can be lifted off their tracks. To prevent lift-out, install a couple of screws into the top trap (over the area where the door is closed) leaving the heads protruding so the door can not be removed unless the screws are removed first. You can supplement your existing lock by simply laying a cut-to-fit dowel or broom handle in the lower track.

⑧ HIDDEN DOORS AND WINDOWS

Burglars don't want an audience, so they like doors or windows that can't be seen from the street or from

