Security In Your Home

A Help the Aged advice leaflet

Endorsed by

CRIME concern

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Sadly, thousands of people every year suffer a burglary or a break-in. Often the crime could have been avoided by simple preventive action. However, no one need be a prisoner in their own home or be afraid to go out because of the fear of crime. The fact is that an elderly person is less likely to be attacked or robbed than any other age group. Crime against senior citizens is rare.

This leaflet explains some simple steps that you can take to make you feel more safe and secure in your home.

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Locking up

Most break-ins are not the work of professional burglars. Many are carried out by petty thieves who see an open or insecure door or window and take the opportunity to get into your home.

When you go out, be sure to lock all the outside doors and check that all the windows are closed - even if you are just popping out for a few minutes.

The first places that a burglar will look for your door key are under the mat, in a flower pot or on a piece of string through the letter-box.

If you are going away on holiday remember to cancel milk and other deliveries. To the burglar a dozen milk bottles on the doorstep is an invitation to break in. Don’t close curtains or blinds as they are a give-away, especially during the day.

You may have neighbours who will keep an eye on your home for you even if you are only away for the day. If you have a garden it is also advisable to mow your lawn and lock away your ladder and garden tools - very useful for the opportunist burglar. Also, don’t forget to lock garage windows and doors, particularly if your garage is attached to your house with a door leading to the inside.

When travelling, remember not to display your home address on the outside of your luggage.

If you’re out for the evening, draw the curtains and leave a front room light on (not the hall) and perhaps put on the radio too. The amateur thief will think there is someone in the house.
Making your doors safe

What makes a secure front door? Ideally it should be made of solid wood, have a strong frame, two good locks, a door viewer and a security chain. A letter-box holder can also be a useful deterrent to tampering with locks through the letter-box.

Door locks
The best arrangement for door locks is to have one mortice deadlock with at least five levers and one rim mounted deadlock. The mortice lock should have a Kite Mark stating that it conforms to British Standard BS 3621. The gap between the two locks should be one-third of the door’s length. It is also a good idea to have hinge bolts fitted, especially on doors that open outwards. Don’t forget back and side doors as these are vulnerable too.

For a mortice lock to be fitted, the door must be at least 1 3/4 inches thick. If your door is thinner than this, a mortice lock will weaken it. If this is the case, then a rim mounted deadlock should be fitted. A rim mounted night latch does not provide adequate security, especially when used alone. In a rim mounted deadlock, the night latch is replaced by a deadlock bolt which prevents it being opened from the outside by slipping the latch. Ideally, the rim mounted deadlock should also have a handle which can be locked with the door key from the inside or outside. This would stop the deadlock being released if a burglar broke any adjoining glass and reached through to try to open the door.

Mortice security bolts will provide extra protection for back or side doors which are easier targets for a burglar as they are often located out of sight. These can only be operated by a key, usually with a serrated edge, and from the inside of the door. They are far stronger than the sliding type of bolt which could be opened from the outside, particularly if the door is glass or part-glass.
Mortice security bolts should be fitted about nine inches from the top and bottom of the door but if this is inconvenient, have them put at a height you can easily reach. It is advisable not to have mortice security bolts on your front door or main exit as they could slow down your escape in the event of a fire or other emergency.

Patio doors and French windows should also be secured with good quality locks. Some patio doors can easily be lifted off their runners; if yours can, it is important to fit anti-lift locks or other anti-lift devices.

If you’re thinking of buying UPVC or metal framed windows or doors, make sure they come with good built-in locks as it may not be possible to add better locks once they’re installed. Also, make sure that the UPVC is the reinforced type which is much stronger.

Never leave keys in locks - keep them in a safe place.

Making your windows safe

Windows left open are an invitation to the burglar but closed windows fitted with window locks are an effective deterrent. It is rare for a burglar to break a window in order to climb through the broken glass, more likely he will reach through and open it or a nearby window by releasing the catch.

Remember to remove keys from locked windows and keep them in a safe place out of sight and reach.
Fitting locks

It is advisable to get locks fitted by a qualified locksmith. Look for membership of the Master Locksmiths Association (see page 10).

Extra security

In addition to locks, there are other more sophisticated security devices available such as special exterior lighting and intruder alarms. Ask your local Crime Prevention Officer if you require further information on these (see page 9).

Insurance

It is sensible to have good insurance cover. At least it will relieve you of the financial worry of replacing stolen items. Many insurance companies will offer reduced premiums for people with good home security. Help the Aged operates an insurance scheme especially for senior citizens. For further information, contact Help the Aged Insurance Services on 0800 41 31 80.

Marking your possessions

Your valuables are more likely to be found by the police if you keep a record of serial numbers and mark your property with your postcode. This can be done by etching, die-stamping or using a security marker which can only be read under an ultra-violet light. Your local Crime Prevention Officer or Neighbourhood Watch group can give you details of suppliers (see page 9). They will also advise you where to get a window sticker to warn thieves that your property is marked. In addition, a full list of items you value with descriptions and colour photographs can assist greatly in returning stolen property to its owner if it is recovered.
Doorstep callers

Often, and quite unnecessarily, people feel embarrassed about refusing to let someone in at the door. Most people who are likely to come knocking at your door will be genuine but it is sensible to take precautions.

Have a security chain and door viewer fitted to your door. This way you can see who is at the door in safety. When there is a knock at the door, use your door viewer to see who it is. If you don’t know them, put the door chain on before you open it. Ask to see their identification and look at it carefully. If the caller is genuine, they will not mind this at all. Look at their clothing: most official callers wear a uniform with their organisation’s logo.

If you are still unsure, telephone the organisation they claim to represent (look in the telephone directory or at a recent bill received from the organisation). Shut the door whilst telephoning. If you don’t have a telephone or if after telephoning you are still not sure that the caller is genuine, send them away. You can always ask them to come back when someone will be with you. Do this particularly if there is more than one person on your doorstep - it might be difficult to keep an eye on both of them if you let them in. Burglars come in all shapes and sizes (including children) and often work in pairs, one will keep you talking while the other one robs you. When they have gone and you have closed the door, take the door chain off again. This is important for your own safety, should anyone need to open the door to get to you in an emergency.

If you are still suspicious, dial 999 and ask for the police.

Many organisations will make an appointment with you before they visit. Ask your gas, electricity and water companies if they run a password scheme. If they do, a password can be arranged between you and the company. When one of their workers calls they will say the password so that you know they are genuine. This is very useful if you’re partially sighted and can’t check identification cards.