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Safety Features for Your Home and Apartment: A Guide for Older Americans

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How much security can you afford in your home? There seems to be a very large number of home security gadgets and devices on the market nowadays. Some are very hard to understand unless you are a skilled carpenter. Some are also very expensive.

However, there are many things you can do yourself. Some do involve installation, such as putting in a few door locks or a window latch. If you can't do it yourself, find a friend who can. Ask around, be pushy. After all, it's your safety you are talking about.

This brochure will introduce you to some basic home security devices. Some do cost a little bit of money, and some do involve a little bit of installation. But it's worth the effort, isn't it? Be good to yourself, and make the effort and get it done today! Don't put off making where you live more secure.

Where Do Burglars Enter?
Did you know that, according to police statistics, two out of every five times a burglar gains entry into a home, it is by forcing inadequate front door locks? Another 7 percent of the time the burglar breaks the glass in the front door and then reaches in to unlock the lock. One out of five times, the burglar goes around to the back of where you live and gets in by breaking the glass in the back door and then reaching in to unlock it. Ten percent of the time the burglar forces an inadequate back door lock. Fourteen percent of the time the burglar breaks a window to get in. Amazingly, in 8 percent of all break-ins, the burglar gets inside through an open door or window, or with the key to the front or back door.

How Well Did You Score on the Crime Prevention Quiz?
Remember the crime prevention quiz. The first 15 questions were about "Do you have these safety features?" To how many of these questions did you answer no? Let's go over each of the questions about safety features and talk about why you might have a security problem if you answered no.
1. Deadbolt locks—did you say that your outside doors do not have deadbolt locks? Deadbolt locks are far more difficult for the would-be burglar to open. Shop around for prices. You will find that they are not so expensive, and they are well worth the cost for your security and your peace of mind. Key-in-the-knob locks, the most common and generally the cheapest lock you can buy, are easy to open, even for the "unskilled" burglar.

2. Doors with glass or light wood panels—did you say you have doors with windows or a panel of wood that is easy to break? If so, even a good deadbolt lock is useless. You can buy a double-cylinder deadbolt with a key on both sides of the door. If it is locked, a key is needed to open the door even from the inside. Another alternative is to replace the old door with one that is solid and sturdy. If you use a double-cylinder deadbolt lock, make sure you put the key in a place you can readily get to in an emergency, such as a fire, and make sure other members of your family also know where this key is located.

3. Door hinges—did you say you have outside doors with hinges facing the outside? Do something about this, because it would be quite easy for the would-be burglar to take the hinges off the door, and it wouldn’t make any difference what type of lock is on that door. If you need a friend or relative to do this for you, let them know in no uncertain terms that you want it done as soon as possible. Be pushy, it’s your security.

A simple deadbolt lock looks like this and can be installed as an extra lock above the key-in-the-knob type. A deadbolt of this kind is a simple solid bar that goes across the gap between the door and the frame. Two locks may be a little less convenient but may be worth the security. Installation instructions should come with the lock when you buy it at the store.

There are many types of deadbolt locks. However, when you talk to your hardware dealer or locksmith, there are three safety features you should insist upon: (1) there should be at least a 1-inch throw on the bolt; (2) the cylinder guards should revolve or rotate; (3) the lock should be a steel-to-steel vice-type lock with carriage bolts instead of posts.

If you are afraid someone will try to sell you a lock which costs more than you want or can afford to spend, take a trusted friend with you.

4. Chain locks—If you do not have a chain lock on your outside doors, you should. If a caller is at your door, it gives you a chance to see who it is without taking the risk that the door will be forced open on you. However, don’t count on a chain lock for anything more than a delaying device. A chain lock can be easily forced open. A doorviewer is a more secure device for looking over callers at your door.
5. Outside basement doors—If you have outside basement doors that are not properly secured, then there is no sense in buying good deadbolt locks or chain locks for your first-floor outside doors. Remember, the security of your home or apartment is only as good as the weakest point of entry.

6. Inside basement doors—did you say that your inside basement door does not have a bolt or a lock? If it does not, then you have allowed easy access into your dwelling place from the basement. The rim lock pictured is one type of lock you can easily install for your inside basement doors.

8. Window locks—Window locks and fasteners are important devices because windows usually provide easy access to the burglar. A nail in the window casement is of some help, but only when you are at home. A window lock is better because even if the burglar gains entry into your home or apartment while you are away, a window lock prevents him from opening the window all the way and carrying out large items, such as a television. A double lock deadbolt and deadlatch for your doors will serve the same purpose there because a key is needed to open the door, even from the inside. Hardware stores and lock shops can give you more information about these.

9. Second-floor windows—It is equally important to have at least a nail or window locks and fasteners on your second floor and basement windows. Too often, it is easy to neglect details like this. Remember, a burglar will not.

10. Automatic timer—did you say you do not own an automatic timer? Whenever you are away from your home at night, an automatic timer device, which turns your lights on and off, makes it look like someone is at home. Burglars are on the prowl for vacant homes because they are easier to rob. Your home should never look unoccupied.

11. Garage window—If you have valuable items in your garage, such as a lawn mower or garden tools, remember to make them as secure as possible.
12. Garage doors—remember, your garage should be as secure as your own home. If you do not have a good lock on it, you are inviting the criminal onto your property. It is dangerous to you because you are often in and out of your garage, especially if you park your car there and often pull in at night. Remember to lock your garage doors, especially at night.

13. Ladders—did you say you don’t lock up your ladder? If so, then you are inviting the criminal into your house. It makes no sense to secure the first floor while making entry through the second floor of your home simple and easy.

14. Aids for climbing—The same applies here. Trellises, patio tables and chairs provide aids for climbing. How many of us use these items to clean out our gutters? It is only one small step more to climb onto the roof and gain entry through the second floor. If you plan to be away from your home for more than a couple of hours, lock your patio furniture in the garage.

15. For women living alone—Do not give away your single status by putting the designation “Mrs.” on your mailbox. Don’t give away your single status by using the designation “Mrs.” or your first name (given name) in the telephone book. The would-be criminal might think you are an easy target.

REMEMBER, most break-ins are crimes of opportunity. Most criminals are looking for the “easy target.” They don’t want a challenge. Good security can be fairly inexpensive, yet still effective.

If you want more information, there is a third brochure titled “Things You Can Do For Free: A Guide for Better Home and Apartment Security for Older Americans.” This brochure will talk about things that don’t cost you one penny, but can still help you provide better security for where you live.