Preventing Crime in Your Home

Senior Wellness Series
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Older adults in their homes are less likely to be victimized by crimes of violence than they are to be defrauded over the telephone or at the door. Older people have been found to be more susceptible to crimes that can devastate them economically--fraud, medical quackery, and con games, as well as commercial fraud by telemarketers.

The following are some simple steps you can take to prevent being defrauded and to make your home more secure.

**Put your home "off limits" to Burglars**

If you live alone:

♦ Use a buddy system with a friend or neighbor. Check on each other once a day; often when an isolated person is a victim of crime, no one knows about it for days.

♦ Put only your last name and initials on your mailbox.

**Theft and Fraud**

A thief doesn't have to break into your home. They can take your money if you welcome them either at the door or over the telephone.

**At the Door**

♦ Always look to see who is at your door before you answer it. Use a peephole or a safe window. If you don't have a peephole, consider getting one; they are inexpensive and easy to install.

♦ You never have to open your door. If the person is a stranger, you do not have to open the door. Keep it closed and locked. Don't make the mistake of opening the door to a stranger with just a chain guard on the door for protection--these are easily broken.

♦ Ask any stranger to tell you his or her name as well as to show an official company picture ID. If you have not scheduled an appointment, ask him or her to wait outside while you call the company. Do not open the door unless you are positive this person is who s/he says s/he is.
One home burglary approach involves people saying they are from the telephone company and that they need to check your line. They come in, start coughing, and ask for a glass of water. While you get them the water, they steal your valuables. They often also ask if there are other phone jacks in the house in order to get to valuables in other rooms.

**On the Phone**

- You lock doors and windows against burglars, so why allow any potential thief into your home via the telephone?

- Never purchase anything over the phone from someone who called you.

- Never get involved in personal conversations with telephone solicitors. They are not your friend. They want your money.

- Never give important information such as your credit card, social security, or bank account numbers to anyone who calls you.

- If you have a difficult time hanging up on phone solicitors use, an answering machine or caller ID to filter calls.

**Doors and Windows in your home**

- Always keep doors and windows locked when at home or away.

- Make sure that locks, windows, and doors are strong and cannot easily be broken. The best locks are double cylinder deadbolt locks. Next best are securely mounted deadbolts with a one-inch throw or rimlocks. On the other hand, spring locks or any type with a button are easy for a burglar to force.

- All outside doors should have a solid core or be metal reinforced. Hollow doors are easily kicked in.

- Doors with outside hinges should be replaced with non-removable hinges.

- Sliding Doors: Panels should be prevented from being lifted out of their tracks.

- The top track should have small screws protruding down so the door barely clears them. The sliding door should also be wedged with a swinging metal rod, or "Charlie Bar," to prevent opening it even if the lock is penetrated. Another option, though not as effective, is to wedge a wooden rod into the bottom track.

**Windows**

- Double-hung window are the most common type and are easy to jimmy open. To prevent entry, drill a hole in downward sloping direction through top of bottom sash and into (not through) bottom of top sash. Insert a pin or nail through hole to prevent opening of either sash.

- When securing windows, keep in mind that you need to have easy exit from all points of entry into your home in case you have to get out quickly, such as in a fire.

- The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department suggests you secure windows using a lock, a wooden dowel, and the nail or screw method to extend the time and trouble a burglar has to go through to get into the window.

**Lighting**

- If you leave and expect to come home after dark, turn on the porch light. Have your keys ready before you get to the door.

- Keep outside lights on when you are at home at night. This discourages prowlers.
♦ At night, shades and curtains should be closed.

♦ Lights on in more than one room indicate that someone is home, which discourages burglars.

♦ Keeping lights on at home is not an extravagant expense when you consider the deterrent that lights are to criminals. As an added bonus, lights are a safety technique to help you avoid tripping.

Home Burglaries

♦ If you are home in bed at night and hear someone breaking in, Metro advises that you grab a cell or cordless phone that you keep charged in your room by your bed, take it with you to the bathroom, lock yourself in the bathroom, and dial 911. If you attempt to use a weapon, it could be grabbed from you and used on you.

♦ To assist you in recovering stolen items, mark valuable property by engraving an identification number on it. Make a list of expensive items like jewelry and silver. Take pictures of these items and store them in a safe place such as a bank safe deposit box.

Home Exterior

♦ Look at trees, bushes, and shrubs. Could a person conceal himself behind or within them? If so, they may need to be trimmed.

♦ Do outside lights illuminate areas around doors and windows? If not, some may need to be installed.

♦ Motion sensor lights provide an excellent passive alarm system. They are an inexpensive way to alert you and scare potential burglars at night. You know when someone is at the front door before they ring the bell. In the back yard a motion sensor light alerts you that someone is in the yard or near the house. Burglars hate lights.

♦ When the floodlights go on the thief has lost the element of surprise and anonymity.

Vacations

♦ Before leaving home for an extended time, ask a friend or neighbor to watch your home and collect mail and newspapers, or have the post office hold mail and the newspaper hold delivery while you are gone. Cut the lawn prior to leaving and perhaps have the lawn mowed by someone you trust while you are gone.

References:


