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Car Break-Ins: Avoiding Car Theft Smash-and-Grab

It takes less than ten seconds for a thief to break your car window and snatch the iPod, laptop, or purse on the front seat. That's 10 . . . 9 . . . 8 . . . 7 . . . 6 . . .

Think about that the next time you dash into a store to pick up a cup of coffee or park your car for the night.

Each year, \$1.26 billion in personal items and accessories are stolen from vehicles in about 1.85 million thefts. For every theft, experts estimate there are several break-ins and attempted break-ins. Don't become a statistic. Protect yourself, here are 10 common sense habits and tips for preventing car break-ins.

Car Break-In Prevention Tips

1. Don't make it easy

First and foremost, the easiest thing you can do is to simply lock your car. Keep windows and sunroofs closed and doors **locked**. Surprisingly, almost one-fourth of thefts from vehicles are from unlocked cars.

2. Keep your car visible

Park in well-lit areas near people or in your driveway with the driveway lights on. Avoid having your car concealed by larger vehicles, fences, or foliage; thieves like to work in private.

3. Activate your vehicle's alarm

Don't have one? Factory-installed and theft systems are best, but a professionally-installed alarm can discourage a car break-in thief who likes to work in silence.

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4. Hide your valuables

Many smash-and-grab thieves act on impulse, so keep your stuff out of sight – either with you or in a locked trunk. Don't count on the glove box; thieves know to look there, and they're easy to break into. Get rid of that loose change, a thief will break into your car to steal .43 cents from your ashtray or cup holder. Also, remove that garage door opener from the car when it's parked outside your house!

5. Hide your valuables – SUV's and Trucks

If you have a SUV that leaves your cargo area visible, get a retractable fitted cover to keep shopping bags or other belongings hidden. Pick-up truck owners should utilize a lockable tailgate with a securable tonneau cover for the truck bed.

6. Don't hand a thief your keys

Take your keys with you. And if you think you have a great hiding place for a spare key, car break-in thieves know to look above the visor, in the center console, under the floor mat, in the trunk well, etc.

7. Stow your stuff before arrival

Experienced thieves often stake out parking lots to watch for people putting items in their trunk. Help prevent car break-ins by putting valuables like laptops, messenger bags, and electronic devices into your trunk before you get to the parking lot.

8. Stash the evidence, too

After you've put your stuff in the trunk, don't forget such telltale evidence as power plugs, MP3 adapters, and navigation system windshield suction-cup mounts. Thieves know what they're looking for, so hide the electronic accessories, too.

9. Trust your instincts

If you see suspicious activity, find another spot to park. If you're concerned about a suspicious person lurking around, report your suspicions to police. You may be helping keep another person from being a victim of a car break-in or worse.

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10. Take it one more step

Many vehicles are broken into with the intent of stealing the vehicle itself. Visible anti-theft devices, like steering wheel locks, steering column collars, or brake pedal locks may discourage the would-be thief from breaking in and trying.

Please help us prevent car break-ins

The aftermath of a car break-in can be expensive, both in repair costs and replacement of your valuables, as well as making you feel vulnerable. Help protect yourself by being proactive with these safety tips and with a good auto insurance policy.