

Common Misconceptions about Pickpockets

- An experienced pickpocket is not necessarily the sleazy person lurking in dark doorways we expect to see. He (or she!) appears as an average person in both appearance and manner. Because of their chosen "line of work," they spend a great deal of time studying how to blend into a crowd, therefore eliminating the possibility of detection before they can get away.
- Pickpockets don't have a regular schedule; they operate just as well at night as they do during the day. They operate in crowds just as easily as "accidentally" bumping into an unsuspecting victim alone on a sidewalk. In fact, about the only "known" fact about pickpockets is that they generally focus on the public during times when they may be carrying more money than usual, such as during the holidays, at store sales, at fairs or carnivals, at casinos, or near bank entrances, etc.
- Many times, pickpockets work alone; however, there are also teams of two or three, which sometimes will involve a female accomplice. The first team member removes the valuables from the unsuspecting victim's pockets. He then passes them on to the next member who disappears quickly from the area. When a female member is used in this "team effort," her role is generally to engage the victim in conversation to distract his or her attention.
- Contrary to what most of us believe, experienced pickpockets do not put their hands all the way into your pocket to steal your belongings. The expert pickpocket reaches into the top of the pocket, takes up a pleat in the lining, and continually folds the lining up until the bottom of the pocket (holding your valuables) reaches the top of the pocket. This entire act only takes a second or two.

What can you do to protect yourself? The best protection is to eliminate the opportunity of becoming a victim in the first place.

Tips for Men

- The target areas are back trouser pockets, and suitcoat and sports jacket pockets, located both inside and out. A pickpocket generally avoids front trouser pockets, and especially buttoned or zippered pockets.
- If you have to carry your wallet in an unbuttoned jacket, coat or pants pocket, be sure it holds only what you can afford to lose. Keep large sums of money, credit cards, IDs, in your front pocket or any buttoned or zippered pocket. Some people even place a rubber band around their wallet, because the rubber band creates friction and rubs against the fabric of your pocket if someone is attempting to remove it without your knowledge. The best place for keys is on a chain attached to your clothing.
- Never pat your pocket to see if your wallet is there; this lets a criminal know the exact location of your valuables.
- Larger-size "pocket secretaries" are particularly inviting to pickpockets, and relatively easy to steal.

Tips for Women

- Do not carry your wallet in your purse. Conceal it in a buttoned or zippered pocket where it doesn't show a bulge.
- Use a purse that is difficult to open. A purse with a zipper or snaps is best.
- If you are carrying a shoulder bag, place the strap(s) diagonally across your body, as opposed to carrying it on one shoulder. This keeps the purse in front of you, instead of at your side or behind you, which sometimes happens with purses with long straps. If you are carrying a hand bag, then make sure to hold it close to the front of your body, instead of holding it on your wrist or loosely in your hand.
- Never leave your purse unattended on a store counter or in a grocery shopping cart.

Tips for Travelers

- Pack a photocopy of your airline tickets, passport, credit cards and any other documents that would be impossible or inconvenient to replace if stolen.
- Keep a list, separate from your wallet, of contact numbers to report lost credit cards.
- Don't wander into risky areas alone or at night, and try to avoid buses that are "standing room only."
- It's always a good idea to carry your valuables in a money belt and leave your expensive jewelry at home.

Theft from Auto

One of the most common types of theft is theft of valuables from your automobile. Theft from auto is strictly a crime of opportunity that can be prevented if you take away the opportunity. Thieves generally won't waste their time breaking into autos that don't have valuables in plain sight.

- The best way to prevent theft from your auto is to always keep valuables out of sight. Never leave cell phones, briefcases, suitcases, or small electronic devices (walkmans, palm pilots, etc.) in your car in plain view. Take these items with you, or secure them—all the time, every time.
- If your car has a trunk, use it. Put valuables in there or in a locked glove compartment. Hiding items under seats is better than leaving them in plain view, but securing them inside the glove compartment or trunk is a far better deterrent.
- During the holiday season especially, or any time you're shopping, place packages in the trunk, not on the passenger seats or floors.
- Look for car radios or other sound systems that can operate only in the vehicle it was originally installed in. This reduces the risk of theft.
- If you can unfasten your sound system and take it with you, or lock it in your trunk, do so. And don't forget to do the same with your CDs and tapes.
- Also, keep your car doors and windows locked—all the time!
- Remember: "Outta sight, outta mind."