What renters and landlords should check before upgrading a lock

Why lock upgrades matter for both sides of a lease

When a tenant moves into a new place, the locks on the doors are often the last thing on their mind. But those locks are the first line of defense for everything inside. For landlords, a secure building means fewer headaches, lower turnover, and peace of mind. Home lock installation is not just a technical task it is a shared responsibility that affects safety, liability, and daily convenience. This article looks at the key points both renters and property owners should consider before making changes to a door's locking hardware.

Who owns the lock

The first point to clarify is ownership. In most rental agreements, the landlord owns the doors, frames, and original locks. Tenants can ask for an upgrade or install their own temporary locks, but they usually need written permission first. Landlords, on the other hand, have the right to set a minimum security standard for the building. That standard often includes a deadbolt on every exterior door and a working strike plate anchored into the frame. Before any home lock installation begins, both parties should check the lease and local building codes. Some areas require landlords to provide certain lock types, such as a single-cylinder deadbolt on main entrances, while others leave the choice open.

Deadbolts and strike plates

A deadbolt is the most common upgrade for a rental door. It adds a solid metal bolt that slides into the frame, making it much harder to force open than a standard spring latch. The bolt should throw at least one inch into the strike plate, and the strike plate itself should be secured with screws that reach into the door frame stud, not just into the thin trim. Many rental doors come with short screws that barely hold the plate in place. A landlord can replace those screws with longer ones in minutes and improve security without changing the lock itself. For tenants who want to add a deadbolt where none exists, the landlord must approve the drilling and possible damage to the door.



Smart locks and keypad options

Smart locks and keypad locks have become popular in rentals because they remove the need for physical keys. A tenant can set a temporary access code for a guest or a service worker and revoke it later. Landlords also benefit: no more lost keys, no more rekeying between tenants, and no more lockouts at 2 a.m. But smart locks come with their own set of checks. They need a power source, usually batteries, and they must be installed correctly so the latch or deadbolt still works manually if the battery dies. Some models also connect to Wi-Fi or Bluetooth, which raises privacy questions. A tenant should ask whether the lock stores access codes on a remote server and who can see those codes. A landlord should ensure the lock meets local fire safety codes, such as allowing quick exit without a key or code from the inside.

Rekeying versus replacing

Between tenants, a responsible landlord rekeys the locks rather than replacing them. Rekeying changes the internal pins and springs so the old keys no longer work, but the lock body stays the same. It is cheaper and faster than full replacement and maintains the same level of security if the lock is in good condition. For a tenant moving in, asking the landlord to rekey the existing locks is a reasonable request. It ensures no former tenant or their guests can still enter the unit. If the lock is old or damaged, replacement may be the better choice. A new cylinder or a complete deadbolt set can provide better resistance to picking, drilling, or bumping.

Master key systems for multi-unit buildings

In apartment buildings or complexes with many units, a master key system allows the landlord to enter any unit with one key while each tenant has a unique key that only opens their own door. This system is convenient for maintenance and emergencies, but it also introduces a security trade-off. If a master key is lost or stolen, every lock in the building may need rekeying. Tenants should ask whether the building uses a master key and who has access to it. Landlords should keep a strict log of who holds a master key and change the system if a key goes missing. A well-designed master key system uses different levels of access, such as a grand master key for the building manager and a sub-master for maintenance staff, each with restricted duplication.

What tenants can do without drilling

Not every security improvement requires a permanent change. Renters who cannot modify the door can still improve security with portable devices. A door jammer, for example, wedges under the handle and prevents the door from being pushed open. A reinforced strike plate cover screws into the existing plate with longer screws, but this can be removed when moving out. Some tenants install a chain lock or a slide bolt on the inside of the door, which does not affect the exterior hardware. These options give extra protection without needing landlord approval for a full home lock installation. However, none of these should replace a properly working deadbolt or main lock. They are supplements, not substitutes.



For both renters and landlords, the goal is the same: a door that closes firmly, locks securely, and opens reliably. A quick way to research local lock standards and professional installation options is through locksmithwire.info, which covers residential security for properties in Edmonton. Their listings include locksmiths who can evaluate existing hardware and suggest upgrades that fit the building and the lease.

Key points to check before any lock work

- **Lease permission:** Never alter a lock without written approval from the landlord. Unauthorized changes can lead to fines or deductions from the security deposit.

- **Lock condition:** Check that the deadbolt extends smoothly, the cylinder turns without sticking, and the strike plate is firmly attached. A stiff lock is a sign of wear or misalignment.
- **Key control:** Know who has keys or access codes to the unit. If the landlord uses a master key, ask about their policy for tracking and replacing lost keys.
- **Fire exit safety:** Any lock on an exterior door must open from the inside without a key or special knowledge. A key-only deadbolt on the inside is a fire hazard.
- **Professional installation vs. DIY:** Some locks, especially smart locks, require precise alignment and wiring. A mistake can leave the door unsecured or damage the frame. When in doubt, hire a licensed locksmith.

The role of the cylinder and keyway

The cylinder is the part of the lock where the key goes in. It contains the pins that align when the correct key is inserted, allowing the plug to turn. Over time, cylinders wear down, and keys become harder to turn. A worn cylinder can also be easier to pick or bump open. Replacing just the cylinder, rather than the entire lock, is often enough to restore security. This is especially useful in older buildings where the door hardware is still in good shape. A locksmith can match a new cylinder to the existing keyway or upgrade to a high-security keyway that is harder to duplicate without authorization. For landlords managing multiple units, standardizing on one keyway across the building simplifies rekeying and reduces the number of spare keys needed.

When to call a professional

Some lock issues are simple. A sticky deadbolt might just need lubrication with graphite powder. A loose strike plate can be tightened with a screwdriver. But other problems, such as a misaligned door frame, a broken key stuck in the cylinder, or a smart lock that will not connect to the network, require experience and the right tools. Drilling a lock incorrectly can ruin the door or the frame. Wiring a smart lock wrong can short-circuit the electronics. For these jobs, a qualified locksmith is the safe choice. A resource like **locksmithwire.info** can help both tenants and landlords find vetted professionals in the Edmonton area who handle residential lock installation, rekeying, and emergency repairs.



Ultimately, home lock installation is not a one-size-fits-all task. A high-rise apartment has different needs than a ground-floor unit. A short-term rental has different risks than a long-term lease. By checking the points above, both renters and landlords can make informed decisions that balance security, cost, and convenience.