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# Don't Lose It!

Tools and tricks for **keeping track of everything**  
from toys to keys to just-washed socks

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**THIS MORNING YOU SPENT 20** frenzied minutes searching for your keys. Finding Fluffy after she slipped out of her collar (again) took up another half hour. Now you're late for an appointment, and—to top it off—you can't find your cell phone.

We all know how stressful and time-consuming the hunt for lost things can be. But, by taking a few simple precautions, you can drastically reduce your chances of losing them in the first place. *Real Simple* consulted the experts to find out how to hold on to what's yours—from your credit card to your garden tools—and how to get it back as soon as possible should it go missing. Choose a system that works for you, and make the headache (and heartache) of lost things vanish for good.

“Losing one glove is certainly painful  
But nothing compared to the pain  
Of losing one glove  
Throwing away the other  
And finding the first one again.”

*Piet Hein, Grooks*







## Don't Lose Your... Things

A missing wallet can send even the coolest customer into a tailspin. For some, the loss of the TV remote is no less distressing. Here, commonsense and high-tech solutions for tracking your treasures.

### Wallet

- Choose a wallet in a vivid color, so it stands out inside your dark purse. Keep it in a zippered pocket, and always return it there.
- Try not to change bags too often. "Transferring between purses creates more opportunities for losing stuff," says Lisa Zaslow, owner of Gotham Organizers, in New York City.

### TV Remote

- Use Velcro to attach the remote to the side of the TV when it's not in use.
- Use an electronic finder system, such as Brookstone's the Smart Find Remote Control Key Locator (see Keys, following page).

### Glasses

- If you primarily use your sunglasses for driving, "leave them in the car," says James O'Connor, president of Clutter Control, a home-organization

service in Lake Forest, Illinois. "Or designate a place for them near the front or back door. Don't bring them any further into your home, where they may be misplaced."

- Designate a fabric-lined tray for your reading glasses next to your chair or nightstand. Don't set them down anywhere else.
- Use an eyeglass chain to keep your specs securely on your neck (\$18, [www.snootyjewelry.com](http://www.snootyjewelry.com)).
- Get eyeglass cases in bright colors to make locating them easier (\$3 to \$20 for various models, [www.debspecs.com](http://www.debspecs.com)).

### Credit Cards

- Keep all your credit cards in the same wallet.
- When making a purchase, keep your card in view at all times, and ask for it back as soon as the cashier has completed the transaction.

- Photocopy your credit cards, front and back, making sure the customer-service phone numbers are legible. Put the copies in your filing cabinet under C. If you lose a card and need to cancel it, you'll have all the necessary numbers ready.

### Cell Phone

- Always store your phone in the same pocket of your purse.
- Keep your phone in a case and "use the clip on the case to attach it to the pocket," says Nokia's Keith Nowak. "If the purse tips over, the phone won't go flying out."
- If your phone has a strap, make a habit of wearing it on your wrist. Or wear it like a necklace on a chain or a lanyard around your neck.
- Always keep your charger plugged into the same outlet, preferably one in plain view.

## If You've Lost Something...

Ask yourself if you've truly lost the thing or just the memory of where you put it. Experts on memory recommend a few surprisingly simple methods to help your brain remember.

**1. Breathe slowly.** This will help you calm down. "Stress is a big destroyer of memory," says Barry Gordon, a neuroscience professor at Johns Hopkins University, in Baltimore, and the author of *Intelligent Memory* (MKing, \$25).

**2. To avoid panicking, repeat a simple phrase over and over.** "If you do that, your cognitive processes will take over from the emotional centers of the brain, and you will remember," says Sheenab Harlin, a New York City psychotherapist and the author of *Complete Confidence* (HarperCollins, \$25).

**3. Backup.** "Do a mental walk-through of where you might have left the item," says Gordon. If that doesn't work, "physically retrace your steps."

**4. Hit the sack.** "Lack of sleep affects cognitive functioning," says New York City psychotherapist Lloyd Glauberman, author of the audio program *Resilience: The Power to Bounce Back* (four CDs, Nightingale-Conant, \$80, [www.nightingale.com](http://www.nightingale.com)). "If you're chronically tired, your brain won't be able to store information, and you'll lose stuff."



### Bills

■ Create one convenient spot for all of them, ideally a separate basket alongside your other mail, and keep all your bill-paying needs—checkbook, calculator, stamps, return-address labels—nearby.

### Keys

■ Always keep keys in the exact same place: Hang them on a hook on your doorjamb (be sure it's out of reach of kids or pets), or put them in a designated basket near the door.

"Being organized is really not rocket science," says Barry Izsak, president of the National Association of Professional Organizers. "It's about doing something in a systematic way and sticking to it."

■ Make not one but two backup sets of your keys, says real estate broker Tom Polley of the Corcoran Group, in Brooklyn, whose job requires handling dozens of sets of keys at a time. "Keep one set in your desk drawer," he says, "and give a set to a friend who lives nearby."

■ The Smart Find Remote Control Key Locator (\$60, [www.brookstone.com](http://www.brookstone.com)) comes with two color-coded key rings, two slim receivers you can stick to a TV remote or cell phone, and a wireless transmitter. Press the button on the transmitter that corresponds to the missing object and follow the loud (85 decibel) alarm to its hiding place.

■ The Sound Activated Key Finder with Microlight (shown above, right; \$15, [www.gadgetbargains.com](http://www.gadgetbargains.com)) attaches to your keys; it beeps and flashes when you clap, whistle, or shout.

■ Instead of attaching your phone number or address to your key ring—a bad idea, for obvious reasons—try Codetag (individual labels, \$2 to \$3; variety packs, \$15 to \$45; [www.codetag.com](http://www.codetag.com)). This service provides labels or metal tags bearing an anonymous code number and the company's toll-free number or e-mail address. Anyone who finds your keys can contact the company with the anonymous code, and the operator will then contact you with the finder's

name and number. You can also use Codetags on your cell phone, PDA, or camera. (The service is included in the price of the tag.)

### Tools

■ Tote your garden tools in a caddy (\$29 for a hand-carry version, [www.smithandhawken.com](http://www.smithandhawken.com)), and keep them there when not in use. Individual tools are easier to overlook under the daisies. To improvise a less expensive version, Arlene Kastner, president of the Herb Society of America, suggests using a plastic cleaning-supply container with wells on each side. Keep frequently used household tools (hammer, screwdrivers, wrenches) in a toolbox or mounted on pegboard, and put them back as soon as you're finished with the task at hand.

■ Avoid buying garden equipment in any shade of green. It's too easy to lose amid the foliage.

■ Kastner suggests painting garden tools with fluorescent orange spray paint. Or wrap the handles with Super Bright Reflective Tape (\$18, [www.northerntool.com](http://www.northerntool.com)). Doing the same with your other tools will make them easier to spot in a dark basement or garage.

■ "My mother attaches two-foot-long fluorescent orange-and-yellow plastic ribbons to each tool," says organizer Lisa Zaslou. Not only does this increase their visibility but "you can make a loop in the end of the ribbon to hang the tools on hooks or nails in your garage," says Zaslou.

**tip** If you have credit cards, don't bother carrying around a checkbook, too. Stores are more likely to take plastic anyway. Just keep a couple of loose checks tucked away in your pocketbook for emergency use.



...Things (continued)



**Socks**

- When doing the laundry, put all the socks into a lingerie bag to keep them neatly contained, says Kathy Webb, a mother of three from Sterling, Virginia.
- You could also try Sock Locks (\$3 for a pack of 20, [www.sock-locks.com](http://www.sock-locks.com)), plastic disks that firmly grip the tops or toes of a pair of socks.
- Keep a bag in your drawer for singletons, so if a missing sock resurfaces, you know right where to find its mate.
- When kids remove their socks, always have them stuff them into their shoes, where they'll stay put.

**Gloves and Hats**

- Purchase an Over-Door Shoe Organizer (\$54, [www.holdeverything.com](http://www.holdeverything.com)) for your closet, and designate a few pockets for hats, scarves, and gloves. For a no-cost alternative, put a clear plastic bag on a hanger for your head and hand accessories.
- When you take winter wear off while you're out and about, stuff it securely in the interior pockets of your jacket, says Ashley Miller, who has seen more than her share of missing mittens on the job at the Rockefeller Center ice-skating rink, in New York City.



**Don't Lose Your...Loved Ones**

Keep the whole family—kids, pets, and even little stuffed rabbits—together with these loss-proofing tips.

**Kids**

- If you're going to be in a crowd, dress your tot in bright colors or a distinctive hat so she'll be easy to spot.
- Safety-pin a card with your phone number into your child's pocket, and "practice with your children what they'll say or do if they get lost," says Dallas teacher Sara Long.
- Investigate a high-tech tracking system. IonKids allows parents to monitor the locations of up to four kids via water- and tamper-resistant wrist tags that transmit their whereabouts to a base unit up to 500 feet away outdoors, or 350 feet indoors (\$200 for one handheld base unit and one handheld Wrist Tag, [www.ionkids.com](http://www.ionkids.com)).

**Toys**

- "When you realize a particular toy is important, buy another one of them," says child psychologist Lawrence Shapiro, author of *The Secret Language of Children* (Sourcebooks, \$15).

- Never let a treasured toy out of your home, he also suggests.
- Buy or make a collar and a dog tag for beloved stuffed animals.

**Pets**

- Make sure your pet is properly tagged and licensed. And consider an ID microchip, suggests Ruth Goldstein of the ASPCA. This tiny metal chip is injected between your pet's shoulder blades. Animal-control authorities routinely scan lost animals for chips.
- "Use a standard leash, not a retractable one," says Seth Edelstein, owner of New York City dog-walking service Walkee Doggie. The small plastic handle of a retractable leash is harder to hold on to if your dog bolts.
- Clip the leash to your dog's collar or harness and to a nylon safety choke collar (\$3 to \$6, [www.bowwowshop.com](http://www.bowwowshop.com)). If the regular collar breaks, the safety collar will save the day.

**tip** In a sea of autos, set yours apart by tying a brightly colored ribbon to the antenna. This is especially helpful in the winter, when a heavy coat of snow can turn every car the same shade of white.



## Don't Lose Your... Vital Information

You don't want important personal data falling into the wrong hands, nor do you want to see weeks or years of hard work zapped into digital oblivion. Take these steps to protect yourself.

### Computer Files and CDs

- At least twice a week, copy all the important documents on your computer onto another medium, such as a CD (\$9 and up for 10, Staples, [www.staples.com](http://www.staples.com)) or a key chain-size USB flash drive (\$20 to \$400, depending on storage capacity, Staples). "I say it 50 times a day," says Karen Simon of PT Tech Associates, in Santa Monica, California. "I had a client who was working on a million-dollar sales deal, and his hard drive took a dive. He had no backup." And, alas, no deal.
- If you're not good about putting your backup CDs into their jewel cases, keep a small basket or tray near the computer to act as an interim holding bin. Line the basket with cloth to protect the CDs. Do the same thing near your stereo for your music CDs.
- Another option for your music: "Throw out the jewel cases immedi-

ately and get a big CD storage book," urges international DJ Lady Bunny, who prefers the convenience of three-ring-style binders to hold her many discs (\$5.50 to \$55, [www.caselogic.com](http://www.caselogic.com)). The largest book can hold up to 264 CDs—with room for liner notes. Best of all? "It's too big to lose," says Bunny.

### Laptop

- Simple, foolproof rule: When you're away from home, always keep your laptop in view—even if you think it's in a secure room.
- If that's not possible, use a cable lock to secure your laptop to a table leg or a heavy chair (\$30 to \$80, [www.kryptonite.com](http://www.kryptonite.com) for store locations). "If someone just picks up your laptop and walks down the hall with confidence, no one's going to look twice," says Broadway stage manager

Patty Lyon, whose untraditional work space—a theater—makes laptop locks a necessity. "It's the equivalent of the Club for your car," she says.

- Use a coded return-service tag (see Keys, page 158).

### PDA and Filofax

- Write your name and phone number in indelible ink on a heavy-duty label and stick it in a conspicuous place on the item. For safety's sake, use your office phone number—you don't want to disclose any more personal info to strangers than your Filofax or Palm already has.
- Clearly write that you're offering a reward for the item's return.
- If you use a pen-and-paper Filofax, photocopy its contents at least once a year. If you use a PDA, make sure that you do regular backups onto your computer.

### Traveling Smart

- **Before your trip** Make three copies of the following: (1) the photo page of your passport, with your passport number and the issuing office; (2) your paper airline ticket, if you have one—or use electronic tickets, which you can't lose; (3) traveler's checks—make sure the serial numbers are readable, or record them separately; and (4) your driver's license. Keep one set of copies for yourself (apart from the originals), leave one set with a family member or friend, and stow the last set in the hotel safe when you get to your destination.

- **While you're away** "Treat your travel documents like you would treat your cash," says Denise Reilly, president of Reilly Group Travel, in Milford, Connecticut. Don't leave them lying around, and keep them locked up, if possible, even in your hotel room. (Leave them at the front desk if there's no safe in your room.) When you're on the move, keep the originals in a pouch with a Velcro closure so nothing can slip out.