

How to protect yourself from pickpocketing:

1. Be wary of someone yelling, "There's a pickpocket in the crowd." Gene says, "I use this ploy a lot in my show." When people find out that I can pick pockets, the men check for their wallets and the women will check for their jewelry in the order of value - most expensive first. Their actions clue me as to exactly where the wallets and valuable jewelry are located." A man in a business suit has four pants pockets and six to eight pockets in the jacket. His wallet, cash and credit cards could be in any one of ten or more pockets. Pickpockets don't usually have time to search all ten, but if they see you check your pocket when you read the sign, they now know the exact location. If you think there are pickpockets around or you see a sign, don't be obvious about checking for your wallet or valuables.

2. Don't display money or valuables in public. Flashing your money will get you more attention than you want. Pickpockets will notice where you stash the cash and one bump later, you'll be left with an empty pocket.

3. Be aware of your surroundings. Especially in crowded places, bumps, commotions, and aggressive people are the typical distractions pickpockets use. Sometimes a person will fall down, drop something or appear to be ill, and we rush in to help. That's great and I recommend it, but it may be a diversion. If you're helping a stranger, make sure someone you trust is watching your valuables. Sidewalks, malls, bus terminals, airports, train stations, in any type of crowd it is extremely important to be aware of your surroundings. Pickpockets are counting on you paying attention to everything except for your wallet or purse.

4. Don't carry valuables in a backpack or fanny pack. Anyone can reach into a backpack without you seeing or feeling. Fanny packs, if worn, should only be worn in front. Keep in mind that that won't prevent a thief from undoing it or slashing the belt and getting away with it. If you do wear a fanny pack, make sure the buckle is near the pouch in front, so a pickpocket would have a more difficult time getting to the latch without your knowledge. It is not uncommon for a pickpocket to use a razor blade to slice through a bag and reach in.

5. Thin out your wallet. Ultimately, they may still get your wallet. And when they do, you need to be prepared to respond to the fallout. The best protection is to not carry anything of value. There is no need to carry documents containing Social Security numbers, passwords, account numbers, birth certificates or anything that could lead to new account fraud. I carry a driver's license, credit card and a Costco card. Think of it this way: if your wallet were lost or stolen, would you feel like throwing up? If so, you have too much stuff in there.

6. Make copies. For those of you that have to carry lots of stuff for various reasons, please make a photocopy, front and back, of every document in your wallet. Keep those photocopies in a secure place. If your wallet goes missing, you will have everything you need to close the existing cards and get new ones. Plus, it doesn't hurt as much when you can see a copy of the missing cards.

7. Use anti-check washing pens. Wallets often contain checkbooks. Check fraud is a billion dollar problem. Check washing occurs when criminals use nail polish remover to scrub out the payee and dollar amount, and rewrite checks to themselves for increased amounts. With a uni-ball anti-check washing gel pen, you can prevent your checks from being washed.

8. Protect your identity. Invest in identity theft protection and prevention services. Even if your wallet is squeaky clean, your data may be found in your banks dumpster or be hacked. This is why you also must protect your computer by having the latest anti-virus and spyware protection.