When your keys stop feeling right: signs it is time to change your lock cylinders

Locks wear down over time. It happens slowly, so you might not notice until one morning when the key sticks, or the deadbolt feels stiff, or a neighbour mentions they found a key that looks like yours on the sidewalk. A lock that no longer works smoothly is not just an annoyance. It can be a security risk. The question is: when should you rekey rather than replace, and what tells you the lock cylinder itself needs attention?

Rekeying means changing the internal pins inside the lock cylinder so the old key no longer works and a new key does. It costs less than installing a whole new lock, and it keeps the same hardware. For homes and small businesses, rekeying is often the smart move when the lock body is still in good shape. But knowing when to call for it requires a bit of observation. Below are the common signs that your door locks should be rekeyed, along with the reason each one matters.

You have lost a key or had one stolen

This is the most obvious reason, and it applies whether you lost a single key or the whole set. If a key falls into the wrong hands, anyone who finds it can walk straight through your door. Even if you think the key is just buried in a drawer somewhere, you cannot be sure. Rekeying eliminates that risk because the old key no longer fits. It is a straightforward fix that takes a locksmith only a few minutes per cylinder, and it gives you back full control over who can enter.



You moved into a new home or office

Previous owners, tenants, contractors, and even the real estate agent may have copies of the keys. Most people do not think about it, but a lock that has been used by multiple people over the years is a lock whose key history is unknown. Rekeying after a move is a standard precaution. It does not require replacing the entire lock set, just the internal pins, so you keep the same handles and deadbolts while making sure only your new key works.

The key is getting harder to turn

When a lock starts to feel gritty or requires a bit of jiggling to open, the internal pins may be worn or misaligned. Over time, the constant friction between key and pins can flatten or round

the edges of the pins, especially if the lock sees heavy daily use. A worn pin no longer lifts to the correct height, so the key does not align with the shear line, and the lock sticks. Rekeying replaces those worn pins with fresh ones, restoring smooth operation without swapping out the entire lock body. If the lock itself is old or the cylinder is corroded, replacement might be the better choice, but a locksmith can advise on that.

You shared keys with someone who no longer needs access

Maybe a roommate moved out, a contractor finished a job, or a former employee had a key to the office. Keeping the same locks after that person leaves means they still have access, even if they promised to return the key. Copies can be made without your knowledge. Rekeying is the cleanest way to remove that access. It is also a good practice after a relationship ends or after a service worker like a cleaner or dog walker stops coming by. The cost is low compared to the peace of mind.

The lock is old or shows visible wear

Look at the face of the lock and the keyhole. If the metal around the keyway is scratched, if the key wobbles when inserted, or if the finish is flaking off, the internal components are likely worn too. Locks have a service life, and after many years the pins and springs lose their tension. A lock that is past its prime may not hold the pins securely, making it easier to pick or bump open. Rekeying can extend the life of a good-quality lock, but if the cylinder itself is damaged, a locksmith may recommend installing a new lock instead. Either way, a professional can inspect the lock and tell you what is safe.



You want to upgrade to a master key system

For a small business or a landlord with multiple units, a master key system lets one key open several locks while each tenant still has their own unique key. That setup requires a precise arrangement of pins inside each cylinder. Converting existing locks to work with a master key involves rekeying each one to accept both the master key and the individual key. A locksmith can do this on most standard cylinders, and it avoids the expense of buying all new hardware. It is a practical way to improve access control without a full retrofit.

You are moving to high security locks

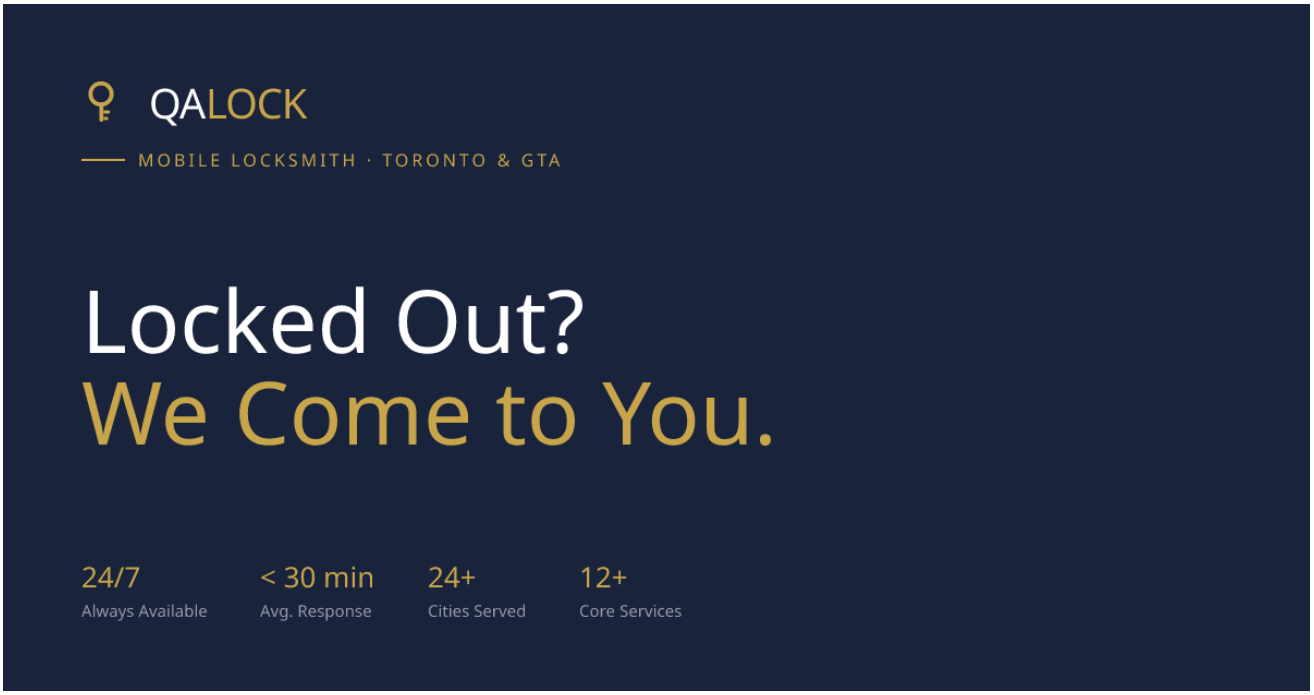
If you are ready to upgrade your security, rekeying might be part of the process. High security locks use restricted keyways and patented pin designs that resist picking, bumping, and drilling. Some of these systems allow you to rekey the lock yourself by using a special tool to change the pins, but most require a locksmith who is authorised for that brand. Moving to a high security lock often means replacing the cylinder entirely, but for some brands, rekeying the existing hardware to a restricted keyway is an option. A locksmith can explain which approach fits your door and your budget. In the Toronto area, services like those offered by QA Locksmith include rekeying for both standard and high security locks, so you can get a system that matches your needs.

You want to match all locks to one key

Having a different key for the front door, back door, garage, and shed is inconvenient. It also increases the chance of losing a key or grabbing the wrong one. Rekeying all the cylinders to accept the same key simplifies your life and reduces the number of keys you carry. A locksmith can rekey each lock so that one key works them all, as long as the locks are compatible. This is a common request from homeowners who have added new doors or changed locks over the years.

What to do when you spot the signs

If any of these situations sound familiar, the first step is to have a locksmith inspect your locks. They will check the condition of the cylinder, the pins, and the springs. If the lock is in good shape, rekeying is fast and affordable. If the lock is damaged or too old, they will recommend a replacement. Either way, you end up with a lock that works properly and that only your key can open. For residents and business owners in the GTA, QA Locksmith handles both rekeying and new installations, so you can get a clear answer without having to call around.



Rekeying is one of those maintenance tasks that is easy to put off until something goes wrong. But a lock that is worn, compromised, or shared with too many people is a weak point in your security. Paying attention to how your keys feel and who has them can save you from a bigger problem later. When in doubt, have a professional look at it. A few minutes of inspection can tell you whether a simple rekey will do the job or if it is time to upgrade to a more secure system.