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Keeping Latches and Locks Working

Metal Locks & Latches

What on this planet holds less moisture than solid metal? Not much, so when you have two metal parts (say a key and a lock) wrestling with one another day in and day out, they'll eventually get sticky and cranky until, finally, they freeze up entirely. There are many different kinds of Locks and latches. If the information you are looking for is not on this page, please have a look at our section on [cylinder style locksets](#) and [replacing a deadbolt lock](#)

Prevention

As with all home repairs, the best cure for this problem is prevention. Make it part of your annual or semi-annual maintenance program to go through you house and lube up your locksets and latches.

Tip: There are lots of lubricants you can use for these projects, but we have to admit that none we've tried works better or is easier to apply than WD-40.

For a sticky lock or latch:

1. The quickest solution is to spray WD-40 directly into the keyhole, insert the key and turn it in the lock a few times. You can try coating the key with a thin layer of graphite (run a pencil over the entire key surface before inserting it into the lock). If you have a deadbolt, lightly coat it with lubricant or graphite too.
2. If the lock is old, you may need to disassemble it first. Loosen the screws on one knob to release both sides from the shaft and pull them from the door. If you have a deadbolt, first unscrew the lock faceplates, and then the knobs or handles. Keep the anchors to the different parts separate for easier reassembly. If your deadbolt has a tumbler assembly inside your door, look to see if it has a tiny hex-shaped set screw. If so, you may need to loosen it with an Allen (hex) wrench.
3. Remove the latch screws and faceplates for the latch mechanism along the inside door edge.
4. Lubricate all moving parts of your lockset and latch, moving them as you lightly coat them with WD-40, liquid graphite, motor oil, silicone or other lubricant. Also lubricate the key and move it back and forth in the lock a few times.
5. Reinstall and enjoy.

For a faulty latch:

1. If your latch won't close properly or stay closed, you can fix it one of three ways, depending on what's wrong. If the latch is too big for the striker plate (the piece with the hole in it, or the "female" part of the latch), simply remove the plate, stabilize it using a vise or some other method, and enlarge the opening with a metal file. Choose the inside edges that appear chewed by the latch hitting it repeatedly.
2. If the striker plate is misaligned, you may need to move the striker plate up or down to have the latch hit it correctly. To move the striker plate, you'll have to extend the mortise (the recessed block behind the striker plate). Remove the plate and lengthen the top or bottom of the mortise as needed using a sharp wood chisel. To fill in the gap on the opposite end, use wood putty or glue in a wood shim.
3. If your latch hits the striker plate but refuses to stay closed, your striker plate may be set in too deep. Remove the plate and shim with either another strike plate or with strips of sheet metal cut to fit along the two sides that don't have screws. You can also cut shims to fit using dense, smooth cardboard (like the kind used for cereal boxes and file folders) and stack 3 or more layers together to fit behind the strike plate until it holds the latch. Make sure the screws install through the cardboard shim to add stability.



Share tips on latch and lock maintenance with other do-it-yourselfers on our [Doors and Windows forum!](#)

