

When to Choose a Lock Rekeying Service Over a Full Lock Replacement

I have been working with locks and keys for over a decade, and one of the most common questions I hear from homeowners and business owners in Toronto is whether they really need to replace a lock or if they can just rekey it. It is a fair question. A full lock replacement costs more and takes longer, while a lock rekeying service can restore security at a fraction of the price. But the choice is not always obvious. It depends on the condition of the lock, the level of risk, and what you are trying to protect.

Let me walk through the practical differences between these two options, when each makes sense, and why a professional lock rekeying service is often the smarter move for residential and commercial security alike. I will share some real examples from my own experience working across the Greater Toronto Area, from old Victorian houses in the Annex to new condo towers in North York.

What Does Rekeying Actually Do?

Rekeying changes the internal pin configuration of a lock so that the old key no longer works and a new key does. It does not remove the lock cylinder from the door. A locksmith opens the lock, rearranges the pins and springs inside the cylinder, and cuts a new key to match. The lock body, the strike plate, and the hardware stay exactly where they are. That is important because it means you keep the same look and finish, and you avoid drilling new holes or patching old ones.

Most residential locks from brands like Schlage, Kwikset, and Baldwin can be rekeyed. Even some higher-security commercial cylinders from Medeco and Mul-T-Lock can be rekeyed, though the process is more involved because of the restricted keyway and patented pin designs. The key point is that rekeying works on locks that are still in good mechanical shape. If the lock is worn out, rusted, or damaged, rekeying will not fix those problems. In that case, replacement is the better option.

When a Lock Rekeying Service Makes Sense

I have done countless rekeying jobs for clients who moved into a new home or office. You never know how many copies of the key are floating around. The previous owner might have given keys to a neighbour, a cleaning person, a dog walker, or a contractor. Rekeying resets the security without changing the lockset. It is fast, usually under thirty minutes per cylinder, and costs much less than buying and installing new hardware.

Another common scenario is after a breakup or a change in tenants. Landlords in Toronto often call a 24/7 locksmith to rekey a unit between leases. It is a simple way to ensure the new tenant has exclusive access without the expense of replacing every lock in the building. I have rekeyed entire apartment buildings with brands like Yale and Stanley, and the tenants barely noticed because the hardware stayed the same. Only the keys changed.

Rekeying also works well when you want to keep a historic or decorative lock. Some older homes have beautiful brass or bronze locksets that cannot be easily replaced. A [lock rekeying service](#) preserves the original look while providing modern security. I once worked on a house in the Beaches district that had original Baldwin locks from the 1920s. The homeowner wanted to keep the vintage feel but needed to know that no one else had keys. Rekeying solved the problem perfectly.

When Replacement Is the Better Choice

Not every situation calls for rekeying. If the lock is physically worn out, if the cylinder is seized, or if the lock has been compromised in a break-in, replacement is the safer route. I have seen cylinders so corroded that the pins would not move, and rekeying would just be throwing good money after bad. In those cases, I recommend a new lock from a trusted brand like Schlage, Kwikset, or Medeco, depending on the security level needed.

Another reason to replace is if you want to upgrade to a smart lock. Many of my clients in Toronto are moving toward keyless entry for convenience and control. Smart locks from Yale, Schlage, and Baldwin offer features like temporary codes, remote access, and integration with home automation systems. Rekeying cannot add those functions. If you want a smart lock, you need to replace the whole thing. But I always remind people that a smart lock still has a mechanical override, usually a key cylinder, and that cylinder can be rekeyed if needed.

For commercial security, replacement is sometimes required by insurance or building codes. High-security cylinders from Mul-T-Lock and Medeco have patented keyways that cannot be rekeyed by just any locksmith. The manufacturer controls the key blanks and the pinning system. If a key is lost or stolen, the cylinder may need to be replaced entirely. That is a more expensive process, but it maintains the integrity of the restricted key system.

How a Professional Rekeying Service Works

When a client calls me for a lock rekeying service, I start by assessing the lock. I bring a set of tools and a kit of pins and springs. For most residential locks, I can rekey them on site. I remove the cylinder, take it apart, and replace the pins to match a new key. Then I cut a few copies of the new key and hand them over. The whole job takes about fifteen to twenty minutes per lock if the cylinder comes out easily.



For commercial cylinders, especially those from Medeco or Mul-T-Lock, the process is different. I often need to order a new cylinder from the manufacturer because the pinning is proprietary. That takes a few days and costs more, but the result is a true restricted key system that cannot be duplicated at a hardware store. Some clients ask if they can just buy a rekeying kit online and do it themselves. The answer is yes, you can, but it is not as simple as it looks. A rekeying kit from Master Lock or Abus might work for a basic lock, but it is easy to mess up the pin order or damage the cylinder. I have fixed more than a few botched DIY rekeying jobs, and the labour cost ends up higher than if the client had hired a professional in the first place.

The Cost and Time Trade-Offs

Rekeying is almost always cheaper than replacement. A typical residential rekeying runs between fifteen and thirty dollars per cylinder, plus the cost of new keys. A new lock from a brand like Kwikset or Schlage can cost forty to one hundred dollars per lock, plus installation time. For a house with three exterior doors, rekeying saves a significant amount. For a commercial building with twenty doors, the savings add up fast.

But price is not the only factor. If the lock is in good shape, rekeying is also faster. I can rekey three doors in an hour. Replacing three locks takes longer because I have to remove the old hardware, possibly patch the door, and install the new lock. That extra time matters when you are running a business or need to get back into your home quickly. An emergency lockout

situation is a different story. If you are locked out at two in the morning, you need a 24/7 locksmith who can get you inside first, then discuss rekeying or replacement later.

Security Considerations

Rekeying does not change the lock's resistance to picking, bumping, or drilling. If you have a low-security lock, rekeying will not make it more secure. It only changes the key. For better security, you might want to upgrade the cylinder to a high-security model from Medeco, Mul-T-Lock, or Abus. Those cylinders have anti-pick pins, hardened steel inserts, and restricted keyways. A lock rekeying service on that kind of cylinder still changes the key, but the underlying security features remain the same.

I often advise clients to think about the overall security of the door. A strong lock on a weak door is not much of a barrier. A deadbolt from Baldwin or Schlage is only as good as the door frame and the strike plate. If the frame is rotted or the strike is held by short screws, the door can be kicked in regardless of the lock. Rekeying is one part of a larger security picture. It is not a cure-all.

Key Duplication and Rekeying

Key duplication is different from rekeying. Duplication copies an existing key. If you lose a key or want a spare, duplication is the answer. But if you want to invalidate all existing keys, you need rekeying. I have had clients who thought that just duplicating a key would solve a security problem, but it does not. Anyone with the original key still has access. Rekeying is the only way to reset the lock's keying system.

Some brands offer rekeying kits for their own locks, such as Schlage and Kwikset. These kits let you rekey the lock to match an existing key, so you can have multiple locks on the same key. That is convenient for houses with multiple doors. But the kit only works for that brand and model. A professional locksmith carries pins and springs for most brands, including Yale, Baldwin, Master Lock, and Stanley, so we can rekey a wider range of locks.

Final Thoughts on the Decision

I have seen too many people replace perfectly good locks because they did not know that rekeying was an option. It is a waste of money and effort. If your lock is in good condition and you just need to control who has keys, a lock rekeying service is the right call. If the lock is worn, damaged, or outdated, go ahead and replace it. And if you are unsure, a good locksmith can inspect the lock and give you an honest opinion. That is what I do every day in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area, whether it is a residential security job, a commercial security upgrade, or an automotive locksmith call for a car key replacement.

Rekeying is a practical, cost-effective tool in any locksmith's kit. It is not flashy, but it works. And sometimes the simplest solution is the best one.