

# The Anxious Person's Guide to Being Home Alone at Night

*By Paige Towers • October 7, 2016 at 12:50pm*

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A night alone at home should be a time to kick back in your ugliest pajamas, turn on some very shallow television programming and relax. But for those of us who turn into sack of paranoia after the sun goes down, ask yourself this: What are you doing crouched behind that ottoman? Do you really think zombies won't find you there? And more importantly, is this the best use of your time and energy?

Considering that — no — maintaining a state of high alertness generally reserved for knife fights and gun battles is not a reasonable way to approach a normal Tuesday evening, it may be time to quell your irrational nighttime fears. This means stop

kicking open your closets just to “check real quick if any strange men are hiding behind my sweaters,” and take some deep breaths. Because if you've ever experienced heart palpitations in response to that little thump of the dishwasher, or bellycrawled to your front window to investigate who's ringing your doorbell (the pizza deliveryman delivering the

pizza you

ordered), then this guide is for you, my jittery, irrational, likeminded friend.

1) To begin with, I'd like to address the three questions that all truly anxious people ask themselves when they're alone at night. They go like this:

Question #1: Did I lock the door? Question #2: Am I sure I locked the door?

Question #3:

Even if I did lock the door, is the door still locked? (Because, technology and iron deadbolts be damned, you can never really be sure.)

The answer to all of these questions is, yes, you locked the door. So stop squirming, put your feet up and watch the rest of that "Golden Girls" episode like god intended you to.

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2) Speaking of TV, a good way to avoid the fear of your body being found two weeks from now by your apartment building's super is to stream Netflix at all times. And not just, like, when you're actively watching it. So long as you avoid horror films,

any and all violent scenes, so-called dark humor, so-called mysteries, “The Fall,” or that weirdly terrifying season eight episode of “M.A.S.H.” called Dreams,

you’ll be great. In fact, having Netflix on while you eat dinner, use the toilet and even sleep (if you’re able to), is probably the only doctor-approved means of feeling secure you can afford.

3) Try picking up a book! Becoming absorbed in a great story can serve as a distraction from the never-ending task of listening for the creak of your basement door knob turning. So long as you leave anything by Cormac McCarthy, Stephen King or Paula Hawkins on the bookshelf, reading might help you forget that you know tonight is the night you’re going to die. Or at the very least be kidnapped. By a goblin.

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4) Learn to identify sounds. All the sounds. Even if, at some point, you train yourself to pause and recognize the irrationality underlying your body’s DEFCON 5 level response to the tinkle of your neighbor's wind chime, your brain is an anxious brain. Anxious brains classify perfectly normal, easily explainable noises as whatever they’re least likely to be. And

11/10/2016 Nighttime Anxiety: I'm Afraid of The Dark | Van Winkle's with that, allow me to clarify for you what those things that go bump in the night actually are:

Common misconception #1:

A ghost (probably murderous) is currently occupying my bedroom, despite

the fact that I don't believe in ghosts during the day, when I'm a rational person. Reality:

You have an old, shitty radiator that makes noise. Call your landlord tomorrow.

Common misconception#2:

A serial killer — perhaps dressed up as a clown, or maybe just wearing overalls (it's a tossup) — is crouched behind my dresser, waiting to attack me with a weed cutter. Reality:

Nope. That's your shadow. YOUR OWN SHADOW.

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My Common misconception #3:

house is trying to kill me. Reality:

Your house has mice. Again, call your landlord tomorrow.

5) Showering. I get it. Psycho

ruined it for us all. Furthermore, you also don't want to be one of those supporting (blonde) characters in Bmovies who's like, "Gee, what was that loud

thump? It sounded like a man breaking in through my bedroom window, but, I'll just get into this shower where I'm naked and vulnerable and blinded by steam.”

And yet.

Considering the other option is not showering, perhaps for days at a time, do this instead: Crank up an episode of something totally innocuous (like “Jeopardy,” perhaps), wash your face with your eyes open — stinging be damned — and lock your dog in the bathroom with you even though he'll stare at your naked body and make you really uncomfortable. You'll get used to it.

6) Leave a light on at all times. Obviously. But see if you can't slowly decrease the wattage. Start by switching off those uber bright, industrialized flood lights you bought last year after reading about that string of murders thousands of miles away from you. Then see if you can stand in a slightly dimmed hallway. It'll be good for you, your electricity bill and the environment. (Also, if you have a cat, please learn from my mistakes: Those devilish, glowing orbs of death are the cat's eyes. The cat's eyes.)

7) I know you hate the basement, but stop avoiding the lowest level in your house like Fox News avoids facts. Tonight, try one stair. Next time, try two. Repeat — except this time don't cry as much. Good job!

## 8) Sleeping .

It might be the hardest part of spending a night alone. I say:  
Benadryl. Or Ambien. Or both, plus vodka.

## 9) In the very

offhand chance that you genuinely, rationally, objectively, absolutely must go investigate a sound, be prepared to defend yourself against whatever might try to choke the life out of you. Makeshift weapons include baseball bats, empty beer bottles (for whacking, shanking and what haveyou), glue guns (they eject molten liquid — enough said), shovels (good for investigating backyard sheds), unplugged lamps, heavy pots and irons. Arm yourself with a few of these, and you'll gain enough confidence to check for nighttime dwellers underneath your own covers.

10) And always remember: It's probably just racoons. Probably. Or at least maybe.

But maybe not. Actually, probably not.

No, it's not. It's not just racoons.