

SAFETY GUIDELINES WHEN USING A LADDER

You don't have to fall far off a ladder to be seriously injured: 1–2 metres can be enough. Fractured limbs, spinal cord damage, severe brain injury or even death can result. The numbers of deaths and serious injuries among older Australians, mainly men, after falling from ladders is increasing. Falls most commonly occur while doing home maintenance, followed by gardening, with overreaching, ladder placement and ladder instability implicated in many falls. Men at or near retirement age are in the highest risk category for this type of accident. Stay alert when using a ladder and stay safe.

Check the ladder before use

- Check the ladder is in good condition, without signs of warping, rust, corrosion or missing rivets.
- Check that non-slip safety feet are fitted and are in good condition.
- Check that the ladder's height is right for the job – if using an extension ladder to access a roof or work area, the top of the ladder should extend at least one metre over the top of the surface on which it is resting.

Set-up

- Place the ladder on dry, firm, level ground – if the soil is too soft, place a hard board under the ladder's feet to stop it sinking.
- Engage all locks and braces – stepladders should be fully opened.
- Keep the ladder clear of powerlines and exposed electrical wiring.
- The foot of an extension ladder should be placed at a distance from the wall equal to one-quarter of the length of the ladder.

Climb safely

- Wear good-fitting, enclosed, slip-resistant footwear – not sandals or thongs.
- Have someone hold the ladder at the base while you are using it.
- Hold the ladder with both hands as you climb, and carry tools in a tool belt.
- Stay in the centre of the ladder as you climb.
- Only climb to the second rung from the top of a stepladder, or the third rung from the top of an extension ladder.
- Secure the top of an extension ladder into position before starting work.

Work safely

- Work within arm's reach of the ladder – if you cannot easily reach, climb down and re-position the ladder.
- Always hold the ladder with at least one hand.
- Be careful when pulling items from shelves, gutters or roofs, as this may cause you to lose your balance.
- When you are finished, store the ladder in a dry place to prevent warping and corrosion.

Caution

- Don't take a risk by taking short cuts.
- Never lean a ladder on an unstable or slippery surface.
- Do not walk the ladder while still on it. Climb down and re-position the ladder closer to the work.
- Do not push or pull against other objects when up the ladder, unless the ladder is properly secured – these forces can destabilise the ladder.
- Do not use a ladder if you are working in wind or rain.
- Do not use a ladder if you are affected by medication or if you have a medical condition that can cause you to lose your balance.
- Never have more than one person on the ladder at a time.