

Falls are by far the leading cause of home injury fatalities. The safest way to climb indoors and out is to use a safe and sturdy ladder. Whether you're spring cleaning, hanging decorations or painting, the same basic ladder safety rules apply:

Choose the Right Ladder

There are three basic portable ladder types:

- Type I – Industrial: heavy-duty with a load capacity not more than 250 pounds.
- Type II – Commercial: medium-duty with a load capacity not more than 225 pounds. (Suited for painting and similar tasks.)
- Type III – Household: light-duty with a load capacity of 200 pounds.

There are many types of ladders available on the market. If it is intended to be portable and used by a single person, it should fit into one of the three basic categories.

Only choose ladders with the UL seal from Underwriter's Laboratory. Ladders commonly come in three materials: aluminum, wood, or fiberglass. Aluminum is the most durable, but will conduct electricity, making it dangerous for use around electricity. Wood may rot. Fiberglass is the best combination of durability and non-conductivity, but is also the most expensive.

Using a Ladder

- Always use a sturdy ladder when climbing, it's too risky to climb on a chair.
- Before using a ladder outdoors, choose a location that is well away from all power lines. Coming in contact with live wires can be fatal.
- Place the ladder on level ground and open it completely, making sure all locks are engaged
- Use the 4-to-1 rule for extension ladders: for each 4 feet of distance between the ground and the upper point of contact (such as the wall or roof), move the base of the ladder out 1 foot.
- Always face the ladder when climbing and wear slip-resistant shoes, such as those with rubber soles.
- Keep your body centered on the ladder and gauge your safety by your belt buckle. If your buckle passes beyond the ladder rail, you are overreaching and at risk for falling.
- Make sure rungs are dry before using the ladder.

Stand at or below the highest safe standing level on a ladder. For a stepladder, the safe standing level is the second rung from the top, and for an extension ladder, it's the fourth rung from the top.