

# Avoid holiday decorating hazards

December 10 2013, by Dr. Roger Humphries

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Holiday decorating is supposed to be a joyous time. But without the proper precautions, it can be dangerous—even deadly. So before you pull those light strings out of the basement and set your ladder up against the side of the house, consider the following: according to the Centers for Disease Control, almost 18,000 people have been treated in Emergency Rooms during the holidays for fall-related injuries during the past four years.

Ladders, heights, slippery surfaces and hurried schedules are a combination for potential disaster, and some of those injuries can be devastating. Broken bones are the most common fall injury, but there is also a fair number of head and spinal [trauma injuries](#). In these cases, there can be long-term, serious consequences, such as paralysis. A few patients have actually died from their injuries after falling from a ladder.

Just a little more planning and attention to detail could be the difference between a near miss and a devastating injury. To reduce your risk, remember:

- Dress appropriately: Wear shoes with dry, non-slip soles. Make sure your shoelaces are securely tied, and make sure that your pants are short enough that they cannot slide under your shoes.
- Use the ladder safely: Face the ladder while climbing, and stay in the center of the rails. Never sit or stand on the top rung, pail shelf, or spreaders of any ladder, and never use a ladder in high winds. Be alert to nearby power lines and make sure your ladder or anything you are holding never comes in contact with a power

source.

- **Know your limits: Resist the temptation to overreach.** A good rule of thumb is to keep your navel within the ladder's width and move the ladder more frequently. Do not allow more than one person on the ladder at a time, and never climb a ladder without someone nearby who is able to spot you.
- **NEVER drink and decorate:** Just one alcoholic beverage can impair your judgment and equilibrium. You might think you can reach that extra 6 inches (poor judgment), but you tip over instead (poor equilibrium).

And, once the holidays are over, don't forget that taking decorations down is just as dangerous as putting them up.

## **What if you see someone fall?**

Keep them lying down and quiet. Don't move them unless it is absolutely necessary, and avoid moving the person's neck.

Stop any bleeding. Apply firm pressure to the wound with sterile gauze or a clean cloth.

Watch for changes in breathing and alertness. If the person shows no signs of breathing or movement, call 911 and begin CPR.

Seek immediate medical attention, especially if the victim loses consciousness, is confused, dizzy, vomiting, or cannot be roused from sleep.

Provided by University of Kentucky

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