

# Step Ladder Safety

The longer days and good weather we have experienced is a signal for many of us to carry out the outdoor 'spring clean' with maintenance and tidying up, not only around the worksite but at home. At a glance, a step ladder doesn't look very dangerous. There are no sharp blades, or fast-moving parts, however it is potentially one of the most lethal pieces of equipment you may ever use.

Stepladder safety has become a major concern over recent years because of the number of serious injuries people experience in falls from them. Some have even been fatal. Each year, according to ACC, it is estimated more kiwis are injured in falls from stepladders than accidents involving any other type of tool or equipment. ACC General Manager, Injury Prevention, Katie Sadleir says "We willingly don protective gloves, goggles, leggings etc. when using tools more obviously threatening, such as chainsaws. But we barely give safety considerations a second thought before scaling a ladder."

The statistics are sobering with regard to the dangers of stepladders. Fall from a stepladder and you risk sustaining severe fractures, head and spinal injuries. One of the reasons ladder falls can be so dangerous is that generally, there is little time to adjust your body before you hit the ground. In other words, you land the way you fall. Most injuries are sustained in falls from 2-3 metres, with a fatality even recorded in a fall from just 1.5 metres.

## Ladder Safety Guidelines

Here are some simple guidelines to help maintain the safety of your employees while using a ladder.

### 1. Assess the job

Before you get out the ladder, stop and ask yourself 'Is a ladder the best tool for the job?' The purpose of a ladder is to provide access – **it's not a work platform**. Standing on a ladder for too long can also be fatiguing- your concentration may wander. Be careful not to take too many tools with you. So, consider whether some sort of work platform, such as scaffolding or trestles,

would be better. Using a work platform may also save time, as you won't need to reposition it as often as you would a ladder.

### 2. Check the ladder

Always check the ladder you are using to make sure it's in good condition. Look for cracks, bends and loose or missing parts. If anything's amiss, get it fixed or get a new ladder. When buying a new ladder, make sure it complies with the Australian or New Zealand Safety Standards (AS/ NZS 1892.1.1996 Portable Ladders-Metal) and always read the safety instructions that come with the ladder, before you use it.

### 3. Position the ladder correctly

It's important to position the ladder correctly before it is used. You should:

- Position straight ladders at a 1:4 angle, which means one measure out at the base, for every four measures of height. Stepladders should be fully opened, with both stay bars locked when in use. If both stay bars won't lock - **do not use the ladder**.
- Place the ladder on a firm, level surface. Putting it on soft or uneven ground could cause it to lean and topple under your weight. If the ground is soft, place something firm underneath the ladder, such as a sheet of plywood.
- Prevent the ladder from slipping by:
  - ⇒ Examining the site for slippery surfaces e.g. oil or ice. Clean it up before placing the ladder.
  - ⇒ Making sure it has slip-resistant feet – these feet can become brittle and lose their ability to grip a surface after a while and need replacing.
  - ⇒ Placing blocks behind the feet.
  - ⇒ Having someone hold the ladder while you are on it. This person should secure the base of the ladder with their feet, and hold onto the ladder with both hands **and not walk away**.
- Ensure straight ladders project 1m above the landing place, e.g. the roofline.

(cont.)

## WELCOME TO OUR AUTUMN NEWSLETTER



Dr Simon Ryder-Lewis

Welcome to our Autumn newsletter! We always aim to keep you up to date with the latest developments in Occupational Health and Safety. If you have any questions about the articles here, or if we can help with any issues you have at work, please give us a call.

### Our Services

Individual Work Site Assessment

- Walk through surveys
- Hazard identification and management
- Noise, lighting and air quality (dust) monitoring
- OOS hazard identification and management
- Health and Safety Compliance

Pre-employment Medical exams

- UKOOA / OGUK exams

Training for Staff and Management

- Use of personal protective equipment
- Stress and fatigue
- Understanding the HSE Act
- Influenza pandemic planning
- Manual handling

Health Monitoring

- Work site clinics
- Absenteeism management
- Accident investigation
- Hearing and respiratory testing
- Injury management and rehabilitation
- Gradual return to work programmes
- Influenza vaccinations
- Drug and alcohol testing
- Occupational vaccinations
- Travel medicine

Healthy Workforce Programme

- Independent Medical Opinions

# Epilepsy - What is it?

Epilepsy is a common neurological disorder affecting 1-2% of New Zealand's population. It is characterised by recurring seizures. Seizures are a result of bursts of electrical activity within the brain caused by an imbalance in the chemicals responsible for the transmission of impulses. A person's behaviour will usually be different during a seizure.

## Stepladder Safety cont.

- Always tie a straight ladder to something stable, as close as possible to the point of support, to prevent movement. It's a good idea to keep some synthetic cord permanently looped around an upper rung to use for this purpose. Cord of 4-8mm is ideal.

### 4. Use the ladder correctly

Once the ladder is positioned appropriately, make sure it is used safely.

- **Always** keep three points of contact with the ladder at all times – two hands and one foot, or two feet and one hand.
- **Always** face the ladder – never come down with your back facing the rungs.
- **Never** descend or ascend a ladder until the other person has exited the ladder.
- **Never** carry tools up the ladder in your hands – keep your hands free for climbing. Put tools in a tool-belt, builder's pouch or backpack. Heavy items should be pulled up to the worksite on a rope.
- **Never** over-reach sideways. As a rule, your belt buckle should stay between the ladder uprights. If this puts you out of reach of what you're working on, climb down and move the ladder along.
- **Never** climb higher than the third rung from the top of a straight ladder, or the second step from the top of a stepladder.
- **Never** place a stepladder on boxes or scaffolds to gain extra height.
- **Never** use a step ladder as a support for a working platform - they are too unstable.
- **Always** take care when positioning a stepladder in corridors or driveways where it could be hit by a person or vehicle.
- **Set up** suitable barriers around stepladders where necessary.

Even if your workplace does not use stepladders, it is useful to educate and remind staff of these safety guidelines for around the home to help prevent injuries and time off work.

Many people may experience a single seizure during their lives, this does not however, mean they have epilepsy.

For many people the cause of epilepsy is not known. If it is known it may be a result of:

- Birth injuries
- Severe head trauma
- Tumours
- Infections e.g. meningitis
- Stroke
- Hormonal changes
- Genetically inherited conditions

Factors such as fever, changes in blood chemistry, anxiety, sleep deprivation or alcohol may also influence the onset of a seizure.

### Seizure Patterns

For most people the frequency of seizures is unpredictable. Some people may have seizures in a regular pattern, such as always during sleep or on waking. Whilst others may experience an aura or a strange feeling which is a signal of seizure activity. This warning may allow people to move to a safe place before the onset of convulsions.

Behaviour during a seizure can vary between individuals. It may present as a convulsion, unusual body movement, a change in awareness, or simply a blank stare. The person may be unconscious or completely aware of what is happening. Some people with epilepsy may also be sensitive to environmental factors that may trigger a seizure. These include:

- Temperature extremes
- Excessive noise
- Stress
- Fatigue, and
- In some people flashing lights.

### What to do if an employee has a seizure at work:

We would recommend at least one trained first-aider is at work at all times.

The only first aid necessary for seizures involving blank staring / day dreaming is to ensure the person's safety and offer reassurance.

#### Do...

1. Ensure the employee is safe and not likely to injure themselves.
2. Give the person some privacy by not allowing the whole workplace to stop & stare - but stay with them.
3. If necessary place them on the ground or away from desks, chairs or machinery, move away sharp objects that may injure.
4. Protect their head from injury with a cushion, pillow, or jersey (do not force their head up to place something underneath if the neck is rigid).

5. As soon as the seizure has ceased, turn the staff member into the 'recovery position' to keep their airway clear.

6. Reassure and stay until they have regained consciousness. Seizures can be distressing to individuals and they may become incontinent during a seizure.

#### Do Not . . .

1. Put anything in the staff member's mouth or force anything between their teeth.
2. Restrain the individual.
3. Give them anything to drink until they are fully conscious - preferably not hot beverages.
4. Leave them alone during or after a seizure until they are fully awake.

#### Call an ambulance (Dial 111) if:

- This is an unexpected seizure, is prolonged or lasting longer than 5 mins.
- Injuries have occurred which require medical attention.
- If a second seizure occurs without the employee regaining consciousness.
- The person vomits during the seizure.
- Post-seizure confusion lasts for longer than 15 minutes.

#### Interview

If a job applicant volunteers he/she has epilepsy, the following questions may be useful for the work medical advisor to ask if they relate to safety at work.

1. How often do you have seizures?
2. When are the seizures most likely to occur?
3. Do you have any warning of a seizure?
4. What happens when you have a seizure?
5. What would you expect colleagues to do if you have a seizure at work?

Many jobs are suitable for people with epilepsy. Blanket prohibitions can be discriminatory and should be avoided. However work roles that are safety critical require evaluation in order to reduce the risks to the employee. We would recommend any potential employee with epilepsy be assessed by an Occupational Doctor to ensure their safety is able to be maintained as well as that of the workplace. Every situation and person is unique so please contact us for advice.

The general health information in this publication has been researched using reliable sources and is believed to be correct. However individual situations differ and no liability of any kind is undertaken to any person in respect of the information produced. Decisions on your own or others personal health and medical care must be made in consultation with your doctor. These materials are not intended to be legal advice. Therefore, readers should not rely on anything stated, and the author is not liable for any errors or omissions, in the materials in respect of a particular issue or circumstance. The reader must seek his or her own legal advice.