



# BACK PAIN

## COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 2008 Health Report states that over 27% of the United States population age 18 and older have active back pain. As many as 80 - 90% of Americans will experience an episode of back pain at some point during their lifetime. Here are some commonly asked questions about back pain.

## WHAT CAUSES BACK PAIN?

There are many possible causes of low back pain, including stretched (strained) muscles, torn or stretched (sprained) ligaments, ruptured discs, osteoarthritis, and tension or emotional stress. Sometimes the cause is unknown. Common risk factors for back pain include being overweight, poor physical conditioning, smoking, whole body vibration, and improper lifting technique and body mechanics, including poor posture. Repeated activities (lifting, carrying, bending, twisting, pushing, pulling, reaching) cause more back pain than slips and falls.

## ARE FARMERS MORE SUSCEPTIBLE TO BACK PAIN?

Farmers appear to be at an increased risk for low back pain in comparison to the general population (estimates range from 25 - 43%). Farmers are involved in a wide variety of tasks that put strain on the lower back. Such tasks include operating heavy equipment (often for long periods without a break), lifting heavy objects, and daily exposure to the same repetitive motions.

## WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP PREVENT BACK PAIN?

Some general tips include:

- Maintain good posture – step forward with the entire body instead of reaching, and keep your feet shoulder width apart when standing.
- Use assistive devices whenever possible to simplify tasks (see below).
- Observe good lifting technique (see below).
- Change positions frequently, stretching before and during a task.
- Avoid unnecessary lifts; don't lift something that needs to be lowered later or put an object on the floor that needs to be lifted in the near future.
- Stay in shape with regular exercise and a healthy diet.
- Maintain core body strength (back and abdominal muscles).
- Decrease vibrations by installing air cushions or upgrade seat to damper vibrations.
- Stay positive! – Depression makes pain worse.

## HOW DOES ONE LIFT PROPERLY?

Follow these recommendations:

- Plan ahead – think about the best way to lift an object before you start.
- Test whether you can lift the item alone or whether you will need assistance, taking both weight and bulkiness into consideration.
- Clear a path between you and your destination.
- Get close to object, use a wide balanced stance, get a firm grasp, and bend at the knees while contracting the abdominal muscles.
- Keep head up and shoulders and back straight.
- Lift with the knees and leg muscles bending at the hips, with slow smooth movements.
- Keep the object close to your body.
- Pivot with your feet instead of twisting your back, and set the object down using the same techniques.

## WHAT CAN I DO AROUND HOME, THE FARM, OR PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT TO REDUCE MY RISK OF BACK INJURY?

Automate as many tasks as possible. Automatic hitching systems, rope-controlled wagon disconnects, self-unloading gravity boxes, augers, and skid steer loaders are examples of devices that make certain tasks easier and reduce the amount of lifting and bending that is required.

Appropriate use of carts, wheelbarrows, stools, tools, ladders, etc. can help prevent back injury. Using a cart or table to keep things at waist level minimizes the amount of bending necessary and makes lifting easier. Use a ladder or stool instead of reaching. A wheelbarrow, wagon, or hand truck can make it easier to handle heavy or bulky items.

Work with tools (forks, shovels, brooms, etc.) close to the body.

Rotate tasks in order to reduce repetitive movements and minimize fatigue and boredom.

