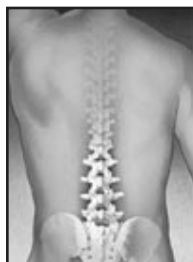


Overcoming Lower Back Pain in a Farming Environment



Farmers and people who work in farming environments are highly susceptible to lower back pain. Their work activities often are risk factors for developing this condition.



Are You At Risk?

You may be at risk if—

- Your job requires frequent bending and lifting
- You must lift and carry in a hurry
- You do not exercise regularly
- You are overweight
- You smoke

What Can You Do To Prevent Lower Back Pain?

When lifting (sacks of feed, small animals, etc.)—

- Get your body as close to the object as possible; bend your knees and lift with your legs. Lift gradually and smoothly without jerking.
- Plan ahead so your path is free of obstructions and you have a place to set the object when you reach the desired destination.
- When changing directions, turn with your feet, not your waist.
- Get help when lifting heavy or bulky items.
- Use proper equipment such as hand trucks, rolling carts, overhead hoists, forklifts and front end loaders, and wheelbarrows for heavier loads.
- Use the same techniques when you set the object down—bend your knees while you slowly lower the object.



When stooping (planting, pulling weeds, etc.)—

- Get down on one or both knees; never stoop or bend from the waist.
- Wear pads to protect your knees; the cushioning is also good for your back.
- Stand up and stretch your back muscles occasionally.

When standing for long periods of time (packing houses, canneries, etc.)—

- Wear comfortable shoes. Do not wear tight, high-heeled, or platform shoes.
- Stand with one foot resting higher than the other. Change the position of your feet occasionally.
- Stand on a comfortable surface such as a piece of carpet, a rug, or some other cushioned material.

When driving a tractor or combine or sitting for long periods of time—

- Adjust the seat so your knees are level with your hips and you can reach the controls comfortably.
- Sit up straight. Do not slump or slouch over.
- Support your lower back with a small cushion or rolled-up towel.
- When stepping down from a tractor or combine, step down backward, not forward.¹

Suggestions for a Back Exercise Program

As a general rule, people who are active and well-conditioned are much less likely to suffer from lower back pain due to muscle strain. Regular exercise stretches the muscles so they are less likely to strain, tear, or spasm. This allows the muscles to work in harmony, providing improved alignment of the back and pelvis.

Follow these guidelines:

- Exercise regularly. Sporadic exercising may actually be harmful to your back. Reserve a set time each day, preferably 15 minutes in the morning and 15 minutes at night.
- If you are recovering from a back problem, follow only the exercises your doctor has recommended to avoid possible further injury.
- If you are experiencing pain, don't exercise. See your doctor if you experience pain while exercising.
- Begin your exercises in the starting position with a warm-up period lasting 2 to 3 minutes. Loosen up by moving your arms and legs and alternately tightening and relaxing your muscles. Don't overexert initially.
- Remember, if you have a history of back problems, consult your doctor before beginning an exercise program.²



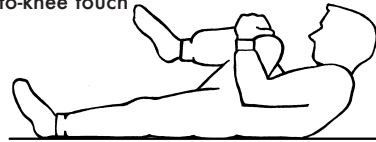
MISSISSIPPI STATE
UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION SERVICE

Knee-to-chest lift



To help loosen up the back: 1) Assume starting position. 2) Raise right knee to chest. 3) Hold; count to five. 4) Repeat five times. 5) Repeat with left leg. 6) Repeat with both legs. NOTE: Don't lift legs with arms or hands.

Nose-to-knee touch



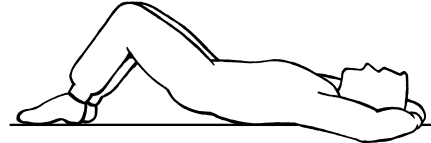
To stretch hip muscles and strengthen abdominal muscles: 1) Assume starting position. 2) Raise left knee slowly to chest. 3) Pull left knee to chest with both hands. 4) Raise head; touch nose to knee. 5) Hold; count to five. 6) Repeat five times. 7) Repeat with right knee. NOTE: Keep lower back flat on floor.

Partial sit-ups



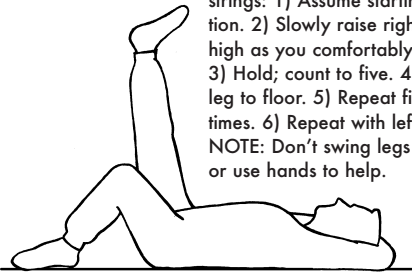
To strengthen stomach and back muscles: 1) Start on back with knees bent. 2) Slowly raise head and neck to top of chest. 3) Reach hands forward; place on knees. 4) Hold; count to five. 5) Slowly return to starting position. 6) Repeat five times. NOTE: Keep lower back flat on floor.

Pelvic tilt



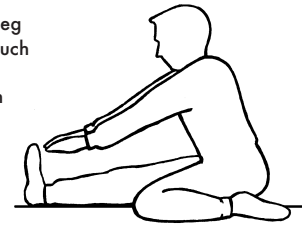
To strengthen back muscles and reduce posture problems: 1) Assume starting position. 2) Tighten buttock muscles. 3) Hold several counts. 4) Relax buttocks. 5) Repeat five times. NOTE: Keep lower spine flat against floor.

Leg raise



To help limber up, stretch hamstrings: 1) Assume starting position. 2) Slowly raise right leg as high as you comfortably can. 3) Hold; count to five. 4) Return leg to floor. 5) Repeat five times. 6) Repeat with left leg. NOTE: Don't swing legs up fast or use hands to help.

Leg stretch



To limber up tight hamstring muscles: 1) Sit down. 2) Tuck right leg back. 3) Reach to touch toe. 4) Repeat five times. 5) Repeat with left leg tucked back.

References

¹Dedeaux, C. "How to Keep Farming from Becoming a Real Pain in the Back." AgrAbility Summer 2004 Newsletter.

²Department of the Army Pamphlet 385-8: Safety Back Injury Prevention.

Visit us online at www.msucares.com/safety/agrability.
For more information, call (601) 736-8251.

The Mississippi AgrAbility Project is a partnership of the Mississippi State University Extension Service, the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services' Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Methodist Rehabilitation Center's Orthotics and Prosthetics Lab, the T. K. Martin Center for Technology and Disability, and the Alcorn State University Extension Program.

This USDA-funded project provides assistance to agricultural workers with disabilities through information on assistive technology, equipment and workplace modifications, and safe practices regarding physical and mental limitations.

This material is supported by the Cooperative States Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES), United States Department of Agriculture, under special project number 2005-41590-03165.

Copyright 2009 by Mississippi State University. All rights reserved. This publication may be copied and distributed without alteration for nonprofit educational purposes provided that credit is given to the Mississippi State University Extension Service.



MISSISSIPPI STATE
UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION SERVICE
msucares.com

By **Emily Knight**, Extension Associate II, Agricultural and Biological Engineering; Dan Allison and Wes Perry, T.K. Martin Center for Technology and Disability; and Luly Johnson and Chris Wallace, Methodist Orthotics and Prosthetics

Discrimination based upon race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, or veteran's status is a violation of federal and state law and MSU policy and will not be tolerated. Discrimination based upon sexual orientation or group affiliation is a violation of MSU policy and will not be tolerated.

Information Sheet 1843

Extension Service of Mississippi State University, cooperating with U.S. Department of Agriculture. Published in furtherance of Acts of Congress, May 8 and June 30, 1914. MELISSA J. MIXON, Interim Director (POD-02-09)