



## When back pain becomes a pain in the neck

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Aches and pains are common afflictions of everyday life. Stiff knees, sore feet and back pain are all too common. Back injuries can be chronic (long-term) or short-term and can affect everyone at some point in their life. Back pain, especially lower back pain, is a common work-related issue that affects many farmers from farms both small and large.

Back pain can be caused by many factors and can affect anyone, young or old. Farmers are especially at risk because work done on the farm can include activities that are factors for developing back pain. Some risk factors for developing back pain include:

- Lifting objects heavier than 25 pounds or repeatedly lifting lighter objects,
- Awkward body posture while working,
- Driving farm equipment for long periods of time that cause your whole body to vibrate,
- Slips and falls.

Most lower back pain caused by overexertion is short-lived and usually resolves on its own. However, having back pain for any amount of time can be a real problem. If severe enough, back pain can lead to a hard time walking or sitting, let alone doing any farm work!

What can be done to help reduce the risk of having back pain? There are some easy steps to remember to help reduce the likelihood of spending the next few days in pain.

Start by identifying high-risk activities. Are you spending an extraordinary amount of time in equipment? Are you lifting awkward or heavy loads? Is there a tripping hazard that could lead to a fall? Once you realize that there could be a potential for creating back pain, take some steps to help yourself.

- Avoid prolonged, repetitive tasks. (Ask somebody to help out! Take turns.)
- Practice safe lifting techniques. (Use your legs!)
- Alternate between heavy and light work tasks.
- Take frequent rest breaks.
- Before starting a task, consider how it could be done differently.
- Address tripping hazards.





There are also things that you can do to strengthen your body against the suffering of back pain. Don't wait until you are in severe pain to start! Exercising, strengthening your core, stretching and eating well can not only safeguard against back injury, it can also lead to optimal health.

If your back pain doesn't resolve itself or is unbearable, seek the advice of a doctor or other medical professional. Don't ignore the pain and hope it goes away. Medical treatment and rehabilitation may enable you to continue working and functioning. By addressing the issue, you could prevent further pain.

This safety advice article is a part of Canadian Agricultural Safety Week. Canadian Agricultural Safety Week (CASW) is an annual campaign held the third week of March of each year. In 2020, Grow an AgSafe Canada, takes place March 15 to 21. CASW is presented by Farm Credit Canada. For more information visit [agsafetyweek.ca](http://agsafetyweek.ca)

