



Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety

# **FARMING WITH BACK PAIN**

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**Title:** Farming with Back Pain

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## INTRODUCTION

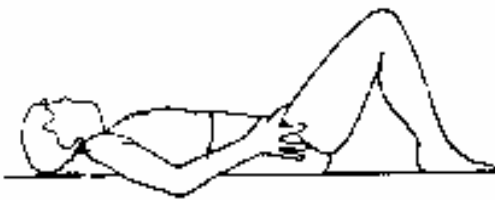
According to the National Health Survey 2001 Report, the most commonly reported long term condition, as a result of an injury at work, was back pain/problems with disc disorder and joint injury following closely behind<sup>1</sup>. Back pain has been reported to be one of the most debilitating conditions and can impact on every facet of ones life. While these statistics represent chronic conditions there are many more acute back injuries not represented in these statistics. It can therefore be loosely said that back pain in the work place is a common condition.

This information pamphlet is designed to assist farmers and farm workers with the management of back pain, in order that they can continue to be actively involved in farm work.

A number of sources have been used in the development of this information pamphlet we would like to acknowledge the Workcover Authority and the Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety.

## TIPS FOR BACK PAIN RELIEF<sup>2</sup>.

- Lie on your back with your knees supported by a pillow or a chair for 15-20 minutes.
- Gentle heat can often help, especially if the pain is muscular. Try a warm bath or shower, a hot water bottle or an electric blanket.
- A massage can often relieve pain.



### Pelvic Rocking

- Tighten your stomach and buttocks (bottom) muscles and press your lower back onto the floor.
- Repeat and relax.

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### Elbow Press

- Lie face down on the floor.
- Put your elbows under your shoulders and lean on your forearms
- Push yourself up on your forearms but don't lift your hips.
- Repeat very slowly but don't push into pain.



### Lower Back Stretch

*This exercise gently stretches the shortened muscles of your lower back and strengthens your abdominal muscles.*

- Bring both knees slowly up to your chest.
- Tighten your abdominal muscles and press your back flat against the floor.
- Hold your knees to your chest for 20 seconds, then lower them slowly.
- Relax and repeat 5 times.
- You can hold your knees onto your chest and gently rock back and forwards.

## STRETCHES<sup>2</sup>

*Before commencing the following exercises gently swing your arms by your side and from side to side across your body.*

### Shoulder Rolls

- Relax your arms by the sides of your body.
- Slowly and gently roll your shoulders in a circular movement backwards, starting with very small circles.
- Repeat several times.



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### Chin Tuck

- Hold your head in a neutral position. (ie without any forward or sideways tilt).
- Gently tuck your chin in to make a double chin. Do not bend your head forwards.
- Hold for 5 to 30 seconds.
- Gently release hold and return to the starting position.



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### Shoulder/Arm Stretch – Backwards.

- Hold your arms in a relaxed position by your side.
- Turn your hands away from your body until your palms are facing forwards.
- Gently stretch arms backwards (keeping palms facing forwards).
- Hold for 5 to 30 seconds.
- Gently release hold and return to the starting position.



***Make sure you are not arching your back.***

### Upper Trunk Stretch

- Straighten your arms out in front of your body.
- Gently raise hands until fingers are pointing to the ceiling.
- Stretch arms and upper body up towards the ceiling.
- Hold for 5 to 30 seconds.
- Gently release hold and return to the starting position.



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### Lower Back Stretch

- Stand with your feet slightly apart.
- Lift one leg towards your chest.
- If you are free from knee pain or injury, clasp hands gently over your knee and slowly pull leg tight to your chest.
- Hold for 5 to 30 seconds.
- Gently release hold and return to the starting position.



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### Lower Back Reliever

- Stand with your feet slightly apart.
- Place your palms over the small of your lower back/upper buttocks region.
- Gently lean your trunk backwards, keeping your knees straight and your head facing forward.
- Hold for 5 to 30 seconds.
- Gently release hold and return to the starting position.



## CORRECT LIFTING TECHNIQUES TO REDUCE THE RISK OF BACK INJURY<sup>3</sup>

### Lifting heavy and awkward objects.

- Always hold the object close to the body.
- Keep a slight bend in the knees this brings you closer to the object, as well as making your body use the thigh and buttocks muscles to lift.
- Where possible always have the object elevated off the ground and as close as possible to where it needs to be.



### Carrying heavy and awkward objects.

- Keep the load close to the body.
- Lean slightly backwards this allows the force of the load to be carried through the hips, knees and feet evenly.



- Starting in the squat position means the, load can be lifted directly up and the larger muscle groups will be used during the lift. Place the feet as close as possible to the load.
- Never twist while carrying the load. Move your feet to where the load needs to go. In this case the stock feed needs to be dumped into the bins behind.



### Split the load.

- Rather than carrying the 20kg bag, open it and take smaller loads of a more manageable weight.
- This may be more time consuming, however it may save you from back pain at the end of the day.



**Never** lift with the back, the muscles holding the spine in place do not and can not lift directly up.





## ASSISTIVE EQUIPMENT TO REDUCE THE RISK OF BACK INJURY

### ***Looking at tasks with fresh eyes<sup>3</sup>***

Pain can be reduced by rearranging the way everyday tasks are performed and in some cases pain can be eliminated. One technique to do this is to use trigger words. These are a series of words that may help to look at things differently. For example if the job is to move something heavy, rather than *'lift and carry'* other words can be used:- sling, glide, push, pull, slide, roll, drag and slip<sup>4</sup>.

### **Auxiliary Handle**

- The body works best, and has more strength in an upright position.
- The auxiliary handle can be attached anyway along the handle of hand and garden tools. Making it easier for short and tall people to use.
- Pulling the handle up for each strike is less stressful on the back.



There are lots of pieces of assistive equipment found commonly in workshops or around the farm. Step ladders, bag trolleys and trailers or wheel barrows can be used to dramatically reduce the risk of back injury.



### **Hoist, winches and cranes.**

This man is able to lift a tonne of steel onto the back of his ute without lifting more than his finger.



## SOURCES

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4. Identifying, Selecting and Implementing Assistive Technology in the Agricultural Workplace - a resource guide for rehabilitation professionals and other service providers designed to assist them in identifying, selecting and implementing assistive technology that is appropriate for the agricultural workplace. Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety. Modified Edition 2008.

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