



Tips for ranching and farming with back pain and injury

Back injuries can be chronic or short-term, but everyone will experience some form at some point. Back pain is the sixth most expensive health care condition in the US with the Center on an Aging Society stating that "back pain is the leading cause of work limitations ages 18 to 64".

While prevention of back injury is important, it is not always an option. Factors including family history cannot be changed but many lifestyle factors that contribute to back pain and injury can be changed.

Repetition and long-term poor posture are major contributors to back pain and injury. Back pain can often lead to other (secondary) limitations or challenges by leading to difficulty standing, sitting, reaching, lifting, carrying, pushing, pulling, climbing, bending, crawling, kneeling, etc. (National Ag Safety Database).

The three natural back curves to be maintained are: the upper curve (cervical), the middle curve (Thoracic) and the lower curve (lumbar). When properly aligned, these curves form an "S" shape; ears, shoulders and hips are in a straight line. These can be maintained by maintaining strong and flexible muscles.

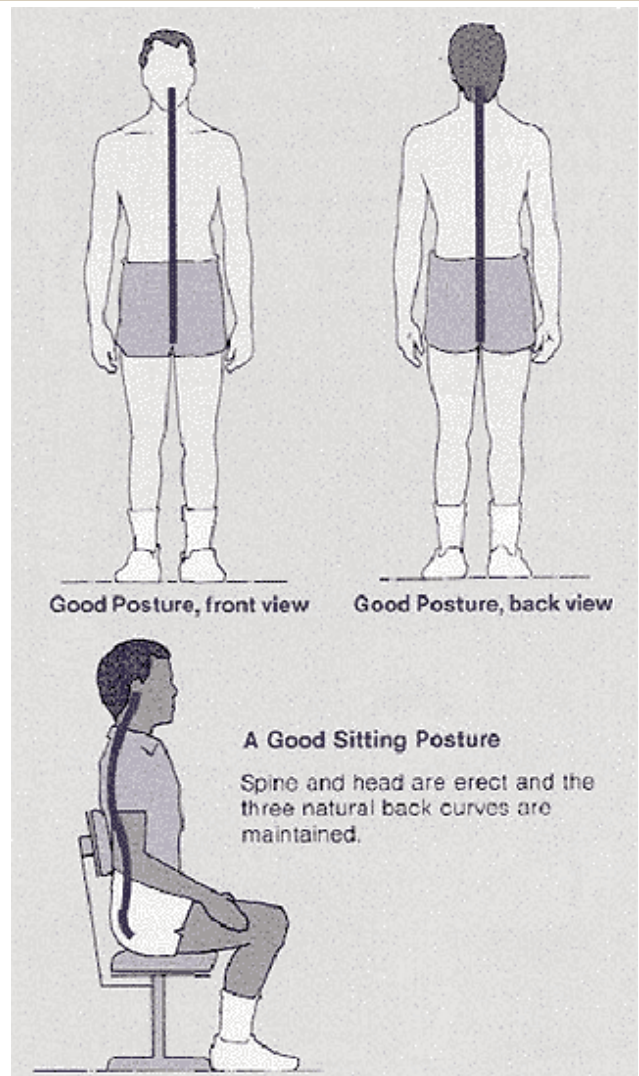


Fig. 1 Proper Posture
(Photo from: American Physical Therapy Association)

Prevention

Several lifestyle changes can have a positive impact on the risks for back injury. Regular exercise is one of the most important steps to maintain a strong, healthy back. Movements should be

deliberate to reduce or eliminate unnecessary bending, twisting and reaching. Minimize or eliminate stumbling and falling hazards such as loose thresholds, or objects. Reduce stress as much as possible. Lower stress levels allow your body to stay relaxed, tense muscles are more likely to sustain injury.

Add steps which are made with non-slip materials to equipment. Apply non-slip tape to existing steps to assist with safe mounts and dismounts and reduce slipping. Automatic hitches, gate openers and cattle guards also reduce the number of equipment mounts and dismounts necessary.

Equipment cushions can be modified or replaced to accommodate existing back conditions. Newer seat cushions often have adjustable lumbar support and arm rests as well as adjustable thigh support to help with weight distribution. Swivel seats, mirrors and cameras allow the operator to turn comfortably and potentially reduce the need to turn as frequently.

Utilize carts or wheelbarrows when feeding animals or hauling heavy feed. Many types of back supports are available "over the counter"; check with your doctor for suggestions and recommendations. Use handle extenders and long-handled tools to increase leverage and reduce bending.

Use proper body mechanics and lifting techniques. Lift and lower with your legs while slowly straightening the leg only after the load is positioned close to the body (see figure 1).

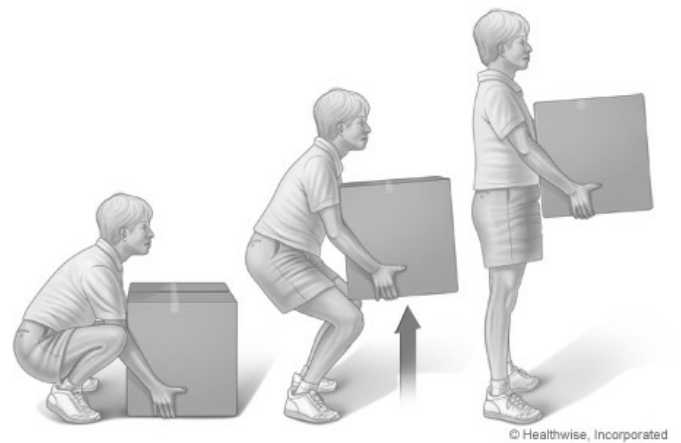


Fig. 2 Proper lifting technique
(Photo from: Revolution Health)

Turn your entire body rather than twisting from the core. If you must maneuver a heavy load, seek assistance. If there is none, try to take more frequent, lighter trips.

For more information pertaining to the images in this fact sheet, please see:

The American Physical Therapy Association website: www.apta.org and Revolution Health at: www.revolutionhealth.com.

For more information

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