

Body Mechanics for Farmers and Ranchers with Arthritis

For many farmers and ranches with arthritis performing daily activities or doing chores can be painful and tiring. The good news is there are many ways to meet these challenges. Here are some helpful tips and techniques to help decrease the stress to your body.

- Organize your work and storage areas. Keep all equipment and tools within easy reach and at a comfortable level. Use a lazy Susan or plastic bins to keep things close by.
- Wear good walking shoes that fit and provide good support. Elastic shoelaces or velcro closures make putting on shoes easier.
- Use adapted devices or assistive technologies to help make chores easier and more efficient. But always try to use your own range of motion and strength first.
- Distribute the work load over stronger joint(s) and/or larger surface area:
 - To reduce joint stress and prevent joint pain by spreading the weight of objects you are carrying, pushing, or pulling.
 - To eliminate tight grasping and pinching, since these actions may stress your knuckles or cause hand stiffness.
 - Hold objects close to your body. This reduces the load and in turn reduces fatigue and joint stress.

Simple Solution: Instead of using your arms, use your whole body.
Instead of your back, use your legs.

- Avoid maintaining the same joint position for prolonged periods:
 - To reduce joint stiffness.
 - Hips and knees: Alternate between sitting and standing positions; stretch frequently.
 - Knees: when sitting, change the position of your legs so that your knees are periodically stretched out. This can reduce stiffness and pain when you return to standing.

Posture:

- Use proper body mechanics to reduce pain.
- Use good posture to protect the neck, back, hips, and knees.
- If standing for long periods is painful, lean against a wall or put one foot up on a stool.
- Use proper body alignment when standing, sitting, lifting, and changing positions uses your muscles and joints more efficiently.

NIDRR Funded MARRTC Farming with Arthritis Project
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- Check your posture: ears directly over shoulders, shoulders in line with the hips, stomach muscles lightly contracted, knees straight but unlocked, feet shoulder-width apart, and even weight on both feet.

Lifting:

- When lifting objects from the ground or low shelves, bend your legs and lift by straightening your legs, not your back.
- When picking up an object, hold it as close to your body as possible, and rise, letting your leg muscles do the work.

Prevention is crucial. Using the right techniques and tools will allow you to farm longer and enjoy it more, with less risk of strain and injury. However, if you are a farmer with arthritis, please contact AgrAbility for information and assistance to help you in your everyday farm tasks. Our staff can come to your farm, assess the problems presented by the disability, and suggest adaptations that can make farming easier and more enjoyable.