

# Preventing Fatigue for Farmers and Ranchers with Arthritis

Arthritis, a condition that can reduce strength and mobility for completing routine chores, is a pain to farmers, ranchers, and farmworkers. Arthritis is one of the most common disabling conditions, and it especially affects farmers, ranchers, and farmworkers due to the physical nature of their work, which may include climbing steps, driving a tractor, baling hay, moving livestock, or bending down frequently when milking dairy cows.

The term arthritis refers to more than 100 different ailments known as rheumatic diseases. The most common types are osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, bursitis, and tendonitis.

Osteoarthritis causes the breakdown of the smooth, gliding surface of a joint, known as cartilage. When cartilage is destroyed, raw bone surfaces rub together and the bone ends may thicken and form boney overgrowth called spurs.

For farmers, ranchers, and farmworkers frequent lifting of heavy objects, repeated use of vibrating machinery or constant bending to perform certain tasks can add to the stress on joints and set the stage for osteoarthritis, particularly of weight-bearing joints.

Many everyday tasks that were once simple are now painful and tiring. Working in agriculture is different from other occupations because certain tasks cannot wait to be completed. Asking and getting help from others is often limited; and changing careers is not possible nor, is it a realistic and practical solution.

By slightly altering the way you do tasks, you can save energy, allowing you to get more done without becoming fatigued. The following are some suggestions for simplifying tasks and conserving energy.

## **Decrease the amount of work done**

- eliminate unnecessary tasks
- combine or eliminate steps of a task
- delegate tasks to other family members
- use professional services for heavy tasks

## **Organize work areas**

- store frequently used items within easy reach
- gather all items at work station before beginning a task

## **Pace yourself**

- work at a steady, moderate pace
- plan frequent, short rest breaks rather than one long break
- rest before becoming fatigued

## **Plan ahead**

- distribute heavy tasks over several days
- alternate light and heavy tasks
- alternate active and quiet tasks (e.g. paying bills)

## **Decrease the amount of stress on your body**

- sit to perform tasks whenever possible
- keep Your back straight, bending at the hips and knees rather than the waist
- avoid stretching, straining, bending, reaching, stooping, and twisting
- use proper work heights
- use a cart, wagon, or basket to gather work items
- slide or push objects rather than carrying them
- if you must carry an object, use both hands and carry it close to your body

## **Use correct equipment**

- use tools that fit the job
- use lightweight equipment (e.g. cookware, vacuum, iron, etc)
- use electrically powered equipment (e.g. mixer, electric can opener, battery-powered screwdriver, etc.)