

Proper Body Mechanics for Farmers with Arthritis

Body mechanics is the way one's body is held and moves during daily activities. One of the most important components of body mechanics is posture, which refers to the position of the spine, arms, and legs.

Improving your body mechanics through proper posture, positioning, and exercise can help to prevent back pain, neck pain, headaches, pressure sores and further injury or deformity to the spine. When you apply proper body mechanics during everyday activities, you will promote a more "neutral" alignment of your spine and help reduce the risk of injury.

Please consult with your physician and/or therapist for specific recommendations on body mechanics that take your body into consideration.

Proper Sitting Position

- Always sit with your shoulders and hips facing in the same direction.
- Rest your back against the back of the chair and **DO NOT SLOUCH**. Slouching places extra stress on the lower back which can cause muscle fatigue, weakness, discomfort and unnecessary pressure to a sensitive area of the spine.
- Place both feet flat on the floor (or foot rests if you are in a wheelchair) approximately shoulder width apart.
- You may place a small pillow or rolled towel in the low back area (lumbar region) to promote the natural curve of the spine.
- If you sit in an office chair, choose one with a high supportive back, armrests and no wheels.
- If you use a wheelchair, consult an occupational therapist for recommendations on the appropriate back support, arm and foot rest height and seat cushion for your wheelchair. This creates the best position for activities and to prevent pressure areas.
- If you sit on a couch, you may place pillows on the seating area to provide more support and stability. If you use a wheelchair, you can place your wheelchair cushion on the couch for comfort, pressure relief and positioning.

Sitting Exercises

1. Pull your chin down and back like a turtle pulling his neck into his shell. Repeat ten times.
2. Squeeze your shoulder blades together and hold for five seconds. Repeat ten times. Do both exercises daily.

Proper Standing Position

- Wear comfortable rubber soled shoes that support the arches of your feet.
- Do not wear high heeled shoes or platform shoes for long periods of time.
- Do not “lock your knees.”
- Stand with your feet shoulder width apart with shoulders relaxed and rolled back
- Align your head with your spine, not tilted forward.
- If balance is good, while doing standing activities, relieve pressure on the lower back by placing one foot on a low step stool. Alternate feet often.
- Try to work at the appropriate table height to prevent slouching over your work space.

Sitting Exercise

Tuck your buttocks in, tighten your stomach, and using both arms pretend you are rowing a boat. Reach both arms straight out in front of your body and then pull both arms back toward your body with your elbows out to the side. Then squeeze your shoulder blades together.

Proper Positioning for Sleep

- Use a firm mattress.
- Use a pillow that allows your head to rest evenly with the rest of your body to promote straight spinal alignment.
- Do not sleep on your stomach because it can over-extend your lower spine.
- To relieve low back pressure, place a pillow under your knees (not recommended after a total knee replacement) while lying on your back,
- While lying on your side, place a pillow between your knees to promote a neutral alignment of the spine. Neutral spine can be demonstrated by your therapist.
- To prevent twisting while you sleep, place a body pillow down your backside while lying on your side.
- Don't forget to protect your small joints too! Try to keep your wrists and fingers straight to prevent stiffness (especially with arthritis).

Lying Down Exercise

Inhale while inflating your stomach. Exhale as you attempt to tighten and pull your navel toward your spine.

Proper Lifting Techniques

- Keep in mind any medical precautions from your physician before you lift.
- Assess the weight of the load before you attempt to lift anything. If it is too heavy, ask for help!
- Position your feet shoulder width apart to ensure a broad, comfortable base of support.
- Do not hold onto unsteady furniture for support.
- Do not bend from the waist. Squat while you bend your knees and keep your back straight.
- If you must turn while lifting, turn with your feet. DO NOT TWIST.
- Keep the weight of the object as close to your body as possible.
- Try to avoid lifting heavy objects above shoulder height.
- Utilize long handled reachers, long handled shovels, mops, and dust pans to protect your back.
- Consider pushing heavy items on wheeled carts instead of carrying them.
- When carrying groceries and laundry, make several trips of smaller loads.

References

<http://www.mu.edu> Marquette University College of Health Sciences
www.spineuniverse.com Posture for a Healthy Back: What is Good Posture?
Body Mechanics 101
Maintain a Healthy Spine Using Good Body Mechanics