

Manual Lifting and Strain Injuries

Manual handling or strain injuries can keep farm workers away from work for weeks at a time. They can happen from lifting, pushing, pulling, carrying, lowering, holding or restraining.

Injuries occur through:

- increased wear and tear or damage, e.g. from intense or strenuous manual activity;
- gradual wear and tear, e.g. from frequent or prolonged periods of activity (continuous handling of hay bales); heavy or awkward lifts (lifting heavy machinery);
- sudden damage, e.g. from unexpected movement (carrying a heavy object over uneven ground, stumbling, tripping or falling).

Spot the hazard

Conduct safety audits of all farm jobs involving manual handling. Take note of heavy, stressful, awkward or repetitive activities. Check injury records to see which activities have caused most strain injuries. Look for difficult handling jobs that could be made easier.

Assess the risk

Assess the likelihood of each identified hazard resulting in injury or harm. Use injury records to assess the potential risk of various tasks. If you consider there is a significant risk of serious injury, look for the best way to minimize the risk.

Make the changes

Here are some suggestions to help you make the changes:

- Plan ahead. Consider the safest possible ways of lifting, carrying, holding, lowering, pushing, and pulling.
- Eliminate unnecessary tasks.
- Avoid double handling.
- Use mechanical aids.
- Carry out a safety check first.

Lighten the load

- Where possible, choose light-weight materials.
- Divide heavy loads into smaller loads.
- Purchase in smaller bags.
- Half fill containers.
- Get help to share the load.

Reduce bending, twisting, reaching

- Point your feet in the direction of the load you are carrying.
- Keep tools and equipment within easy reach.
- Build benches to waist height.
- Keep frequently used items at waist height.

Follow a safe procedure

- Plan the handling.
- Clear the way.
- Wear appropriate protective clothing.

Correct body techniques

- When lifting a load from ground level, bend knees, keep back straight, keep load close to your body, lift with leg muscles, support forearms with knees, and support the load with your body.
- When lowering a load, use leg muscles and lower the load by bending your knees, not your back. Where possible, support forearms on knees.

Avoid muscle fatigue

- Warm up first.
- Take frequent breaks.
- Change jobs to use different muscles.
- Gradually get used to the job.
- Ensure the tractor seat is well sprung.
- Adopt good posture when standing or sitting at a job.
- Instead of crouching or squatting for low jobs, use a small stool.

Mechanical aids

Consider using:

- trolleys for heavy bags, drums or other weighty, awkward items;
- special trolleys to move and tilt 200 liter drums;
- picket drivers for fencing;
- small mobile hoists or forklifts;
- a fixed hoist on the utility or truck;
- mobile ramps or skids for loading and unloading trucks or uses;
- crow bars, barrows, pulleys, hooks and jacks.

Fence injuries

Steel fence pickets can inflict nasty injuries on workers using metal pipe drivers.

Unless the pipe section is long enough, the picket can dislodge at the top of the upstroke, and the down stroke can bring the worker's arm down on the picket.

Make sure the pipe section is long enough to minimize these risks. Minimum pipe length should be 600 mm. Take into consideration the size and strength of the worker.

Safe procedure should include instruction and training to ensure the worker's upswing does not exceed the length of the pipe.