



Safety Tips For Farming With Paraplegia¹

The Easter Seal Society

Paraplegia means paralysis of the lower extremities. The degree of paralysis may vary the spinal cord was injured. The following is a list of safety tips that have been shared by farmers affected by paraplegia.

1. To prevent excessive bruising, scraping, or cuts to lower extremities when mounting or dismounting from a tractor, a man lift is recommended. In addition, some tractors may require the installation of an overhead grab-bar to assist in transferring from the manlift to the tractor seat. The manlift should be used only by the person with a disability. The manlift should **never** be operated while the tractor is in motion. No one should ride on the manlift while the tractor is in motion.
2. A seat belt or restraining device should be considered when operating a manlift, especially if you have leg spasms.
3. Hand controls should be installed in farm machinery to accommodate the lost function in the lower extremities. Appropriate standards and guidelines should be used when designing and fabricating hand controls so that they do not cause further injury. Controls may need to be padded to prevent bruising and scraping if you have spasticity. In addition, a belt around your legs might be considered to prevent contact with controls when experiencing a spasm.
4. Keep an outdoor communication device with you to use in case of emergency. These devices include: FM/business band radio, cellular phone, and a push-button alarm system.
5. To prevent potential skin breakdown while operating farm machinery, various wheelchair cushions can be used. Modifications can also be made to the tractor seat to provided better upper body stability through the use of ergonomically designed or custom-made cushions. A seat belt should also be worn for safety and stability.
6. A fire extinguisher should be available within the cab of the tractor.
7. Rollover protective structures are recommended on all equipment.
8. For tractors without a cab, special care should be taken to prevent sunburn and heat stroke during the summer by wearing a cooling vest, drinking lots of fluids, installing an overhead canopy, bringing water along, or performing field work during times in which there is less exposure to heat (ie, early mornings, evenings, or nighttime).
9. During winter months, warm clothing should be worn to protect against exposure or frostbite due to decreased circulation. Quilted material wrapped around lower extremities, leg-warmers, modified "Snug Sacks", Alaskan mukluks, and other materials can be used to keep legs and feet warm. Downhill ski shops are a source for good ideas.
10. When welding, a leather welding apron that covers your legs, feet, lap, and wheelchair should be used. A custom-made apron might be needed. Caution should be taken when handling hot objects. Leather shoes should also be worn.

1. The information shared is based on data gathered by the Easter Seal Society of Iowa's Farm Family Rehabilitation Management (FaRM) Program through financial support from the Injury Prevention Research Center at the University of Iowa Grant #R49\CCR703640-02 funded by the Center for Disease Control. No scientific research has been conducted to determine if the above tips or suggestions are safe or effective. The information shared is simply ideas shared by farmers affected by disabilities of the staff at the FaRM Program. For more information or clarification contact the FaRM Program at (515) 289-1933 or submit comments or questions to P. O. Box 4002, Des Moines, Iowa, 50333.

11. Outdoor mobility aids such as all-terrain vehicles should be modified with control modifications and foot guards to prevent feet from inadvertently slipping off or getting caught under the wheels. In addition, special care should be taken to avoid leg or foot contact with the muffler. Some all-terrain vehicles have more shock absorption than others which can help reduce additional injury or degeneration of your back. Head gear should be worn when operating ATVs.
12. Try to avoid direct access with livestock. Restructure these tasks so that they can be done by another person. Use labor-saving worksite modifications including fence line feeders, automated feed systems, automatic gate openers, raised decks, and livestock holding equipment.
13. Dust, mold, dander from livestock and other respiratory irritants should be avoided, especially if your spinal cord injury results in decreased function of diaphragm or lung capacity. There is a concern that individuals with higher-level spinal cord injuries and several years of working in livestock handling facilities could be more susceptible to pneumonia.
14. Other labor-saving, technologies such as automatic hitching devices and bin level indicators should be considered as well as job restructuring of those tasks that are too difficult or hazardous to perform.
15. Any adaptations or modifications intended for use by an individual with a disability should be used by that individual only. Use of a modification or adaptation by another individual could result in an injury.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on general farm safety, contact Iowa State University's Cooperative Extension Office