

Watch Your Step

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With colder weather comes the increased chance of falls due in part to bulky clothing, slippery surfaces and quickly changing weather conditions.

As we age, we are even more at risk for falls due to multiple medication use, poor vision, and chronic conditions. Hip fractures in particular can be very debilitating and recovery time can be lengthy. Preventing falls can help protect your independence and overall health. Staying active, and exercising on a regular basis strengthens muscles and bones, and prevents falls. Certainly the physical demands of farming promotes increased strength – in addition, consider adding some different activities –that help strengthen core or help with balance and flexibility, such as tai chi.

Farmers are prone to falling in part because they often work on uneven ground and around farm buildings and equipment such as grain bins and machinery. So what can you do to prevent yourself or your farm workers from falling and having a costly injury? Below are a few pointers that can help prevent falls on your farm:

- Did you know that same level falls are the most common type of fall? Keep work areas free of tripping hazards such as extension cords, or buckets. Use a slower and wider gait.
- Wear shoes that can support your ankles on uneven ground, with non-slip soles, and lace them tightly. Before stepping out of your vehicle, check for ice under your feet or slippery pavement.
- Avoid climbing up ladders or bins when they are wet or icy. If you must climb make sure you wear appropriate gloves and foot wear.
- Make sure that all your equipment is well maintained. Fix any broken ladder rungs on machines, bins and in barns. This is also a good opportunity to make sure work areas are well lit, and consider adding anti-slip stair treads and handrails, and check for trip hazards such as mats and cords.
- Be aware of the wind and how it will affect your balance on machinery; be careful when opening doors.
- Be careful to always work in well-ventilated enclosures to prevent passing out. Wear a mask when cleaning out bins.
- When mounting or dismounting machinery, keep three points of contact on the equipment at all times (i.e. two hands and one foot or two feet and one hand).
- Keep operator platforms free of any tools or debris.
- Alcohol and other substances can affect balance more than you realize – don't climb or operate machinery while using any substance that can impair you.
- Always carry a cell phone in case an accident occurs to seek immediate help.
- Be cautious and allow extra time to get things done.

If you do fall, please be sure to follow up with your doctor for immediate evaluation. In addition to helping you if you are hurt, they can help to figure out why you fell and might help you avoid falls in the future. Decreased muscle mass, balance, medications especially recent additions or change in medications can all contribute to falling. If you think a medication makes you feel dizzy, talk to your doctor, they may be able to switch you to

something different. As you age, discuss with your provider calcium and vitamin D needs to promote healthy bones.

Recent illness could also place you in a weakened state – if you haven't already, consider updating immunizations for influenza and covid-19 to protect you from illness.

We hope that these tips will help you and those working on your farm to remain grounded.

For more information, please contact the Carle Center for Rural Health and Farm Safety at 365-7961 or visit www.carle.org/farmsafety.