



Taking Steps to Prevent Slips, Trips, and Falls

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“In theory the prevention of falls is simple. Nearly all falls result from conditions or practices whose hazard is obvious or readily discoverable. In practice, however, prevention is difficult because the detail involved is very great and it is necessary to improve the performance of practically everyone.” – From “Safety Subjects”, US Division of Labor Standards, 1944.

Falls are a serious concern for all seniors, including senior farmers. According to a report published by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) on Seniors’ Falls in Canada, “falls remain the leading cause of injury-related hospitalizations among Canadian seniors.” These falls and their consequences affect physical and mental health and even financial wellbeing.

The Seniors’ Falls in Canada report says that there are complex risk factors that lead to falls and they can be categorized as biological, behavioural, environmental and social. “Each older person may face a unique combination of risk factors according to his or her life circumstances...” Preventing falls isn’t as simple as telling someone to be careful, preventing falls requires attention to detail and changes to the environment and behaviours.

A Canadian Agricultural Injury Surveillance Program report says that between 1990 and 2000, falls made up the majority of hospitalized farm-related injuries among seniors aged 60+. These falls were from machines, from heights and on the same level. Many factors that lead to falls are very complex – like how machine vibrations affect balance. However, there are steps that people can take to help prevent slips, trips, and falls on the farm.

With the scope of the problem clear, there are some solutions that can be implemented on farms to prevent these very serious slips, trips, and falls. First, address the environment. Environmental hazards can be everything from poor stair design to inadequate lighting to uneven surfaces. It can also be hazards like power cords, spills, or even a family pet that gets underfoot. Take a look around the farm and identify those



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environmental hazards and then address the hazard. Addressing the hazard could be as simple as changing a lightbulb. However, there are hazards that might be costly, time consuming or even impossible to address, this is where changing behaviour becomes more important.

Behaviours like wearing the appropriate footwear can help reduce the likelihood of a fall. Eating well and drinking enough water are also behaviours that can help prevent falls. (Being hungry and thirsty make you feel weaker.) Some medications can interfere with your ability to keep your balance. (Talk to your doctor, explain your activities and develop a plan to reduce the impact of medications on your daily activities.) And very importantly, watch your risk-taking. The PHAC report says “For an older person, behaviours such as climbing ladders... paying little attention to the surrounding environment... are all risk-taking behaviours that lead to falls and injuries.”

Sometimes seniors take risks that they know could lead to injuries. “But I used to do this all the time!” or “I’ve done this before!” are comments that seniors make when asked why they take such risks. Biological changes are a part of the natural aging process. As we age, risk factors for falls like balance changes, chronic conditions and vision changes occur. Sometimes these risk factors can be managed, but sometimes, they cannot. A part of healthy aging is creating conditions so that people can make choices and behave in a way that prevents falls - this includes not taking risks that could lead to a fall, or injury, or even worse, death.

A slip, trip or fall can be prevented. It takes attention to detail and the commitment of everyone on the farm to prevent slips, trips, and falls. Environmental factors can be addressed through managing hazards. Biological factors can be addressed by adjusting behaviours and the environment. Remember, this isn’t a “one size fits all” solution. Each farm, each senior, and each scenario is unique. Protect yourself, your farm and your legacy by taking steps to prevent slips, trips and falls.

Canadian Agricultural Safety Week (CASW) is a public awareness campaign focusing on the importance of farm safety. CASW takes place every year during the third week of March. In 2018, CASW takes place March 11 to 17. CASW is presented by Farm Credit Canada. For more information visit agsafetyweek.ca.



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