



Safety Tips for Farming With Lower Extremity (Leg or Foot) Limitations¹

Leg and foot problems include: limitations that have resulted in decreased strength or function due to toe or foot amputations; below-knee or above-knee amputations; or tendon, muscle, nerve, or joint damage.

The following is a list of safety tips that have been provided by farmers with lower extremity impairments:

1. To prevent falls, increased fatigue or further degeneration, outdoor mobility aids should be considered when maneuvering around rough rural terrain. These aids include: manual, electric, electric/gasoline-powered wheelchairs, all-terrain vehicles, golf carts, and riding lawn mowers. Foot guards and modifications to controls for all-terrain vehicles and lawn mowers should be considered if you lack sensation and/or control in your legs or feet. Head gear should be worn when operating ATVs.

2. Special cane tips for snow, ice, and loose gravel should be considered.

3. When mounting and dismounting from a tractor, you should start out with your stronger leg.

4. To accommodate lost abilities in mounting and dismounting, farm machinery can be adapted by adding a manlift, non-slip steps, wider steps, additional steps, and hand-holds.

5. To accommodate for lost strength or function of your leg or foot when operating foot controls on a tractor, you can adapt controls by constructing hand controls.

6. Direct access to livestock should be avoided if possible (or approached with extreme caution) due to the unpredictable nature of livestock. Worksite accommodations to eliminate direct access include: fence line feeders; automated feed systems; using round bales; raised decks for hogs; or having another person perform the potentially dangerous tasks.

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.

7. If you use a prosthetic device, jumping off a tractor is not recommended. You might break the prosthesis, re-injure yourself or suffer an additional injury to your legs or feet.

8. Labor-saving devices such as automatic gate openers and automatic hitching devices will help in reducing further degeneration of impaired extremity.

9. Modifications to tractor seats such as better cushions or installation of an independent suspension seat might be considered for an above-knee amputation or hip replacement to help provide more protection and shock absorption for the stump or hip joint.

10. If you have a hip replacement, tasks that require bending 90 degrees or more from the hip should be avoided. An all-terrain vehicle with a bench seat may be more appropriate than one that requires you to swing your leg over the top of the engine when mounting or dismounting.

11. Walking through fields with weeds and knee-high vegetation can lead to potential falls or entanglements that could cause twisting of a joint. When walking out to the field to check on crops, it is recommended to follow the wheel tread marks that have been made by farm equipment or create a smoother path for safer ambulation.

12. For climbing over fences or walking on very unstable ground, it is sometimes recommended to lock the knee on a prosthesis to provide better stability.

13. Several improvements have been made to lower-extremity prosthetic devices to enhance comfort, reduce skin breakdown, save energy, and improve safety. These improvements include a “NSNA” (Normal Shape, Normal Alignment) socket for above-knee amputees; Flex-foot (an energy storing prosthesis); and a hydraulic knee. Consult a prosthetist to determine if any of these technologies would be appropriate.

14. To reduce fatigue or further degeneration of an affected extremity when performing tasks that require standing for long periods of time, a sit-stand chair or stool might be useful to relieve pressure without interfering with completing a task.

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 Kansas State University Research and Extension Agricultural Safety and Health Program at 785-532-5813. To contact Kansas AgrAbility call 1-800-526-3648 (1-800-KAN DO IT)