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Walking away from chronic low back pain: managing back pain as a farmer



SASKATOON - Harvest season can be a tough time for back pain.

Farmers are a group already known to have higher rates of back pain than other occupations, but harvest presents a particular challenge. Long hours operating farm machinery exposes farmers to both prolonged sitting and vibration, which are known to be risk factors for low back pain. Recent research from the University of Saskatchewan shows that Saskatchewan farmers who operate a tractor for more than 400 hours per year had 34% higher risk of low back pain. “One of the tricky things about back pain on the farm is that folks are a long way from hands-on care... the time and gas it takes to get to the nearest physio can make appointments hard to get to. That’s why it’s important to find innovative treatments that work with real people’s lifestyles.” Says Dr. Catherine Trask, director of the U of S Ergonomics Laboratory.

Dr. Stephen Milosavljevic is very familiar with the challenges of treating back pain in rural farmers. As a physiotherapist in NZ, he saw farmers all the time. “I was seeing farmers regularly who were sitting all day and complaining of back pain, and they’re looking for more than temporary relief.”

That’s why he teamed up with an international group to test a highly-accessible and self-directed way of dealing with back pain: walking. The study compares education-only with education plus a physiotherapist-directed walking program using a pedometer. The research team is currently looking to recruit farmers who are over the age of 18 and have experience back pain for at least 3 months. Participation involves two appointments with a physiotherapist, where participants will receive an evaluation of their lower back, as well as

education and advice about their back pain and exercise. Participants will be randomly assigned into either the self-monitored education group or the 12-week walking group.

To find out more, email us at back.research@usask.ca, call or text 639-480-5595, or visit our website: <http://research-groups.usask.ca/ergolab/our-research/walking-away-from-back-pain.php>.

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