

PREVENTING FALLS

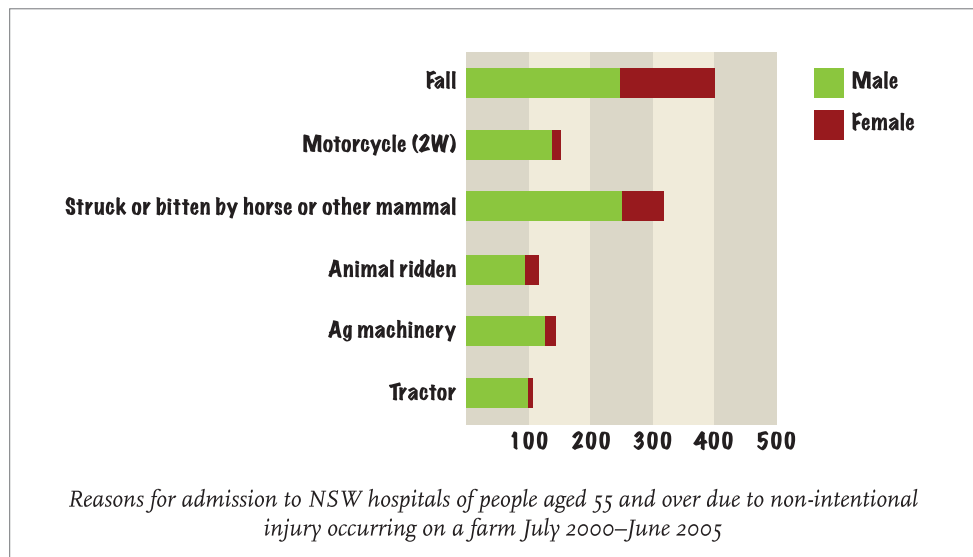
FOR OLDER FARMERS



Why is falling a problem for farmers over 55?

The risk of falling and being injured from a fall increases as people age. Preventing falls in older people is important because falls often result in serious injury, including admission to hospital. A fall is also the most common reason for admission to residential aged care so avoiding falls can help you to remain active and independent on the farm.

In NSW alone, over a 5 year period, 6768 people had to be admitted to hospital as a result of an injury on a farm. People aged over 55 made up over a third of these injuries. This graph shows the main causes of injury highlighting the importance of falls (ACAHS, 2007).



How can this guide help me to prevent falling?

This guide has been developed with the help of farmers aged over 55 years to help you identify your own risk of falling and to take steps to prevent falling on the farm. Risks can include individual risks as well as risks in the farm workplace. Individual risks are specific to you and may be increased by health problems, your medications, and poor balance, limited flexibility and reduced muscle strength. Risks in the farm workplace will vary according to the type of farm and type of work being undertaken.

Section 1 provides a falls risk checklist to help you identify your individual risk for falls, as well as a test of balance and strength to assess your falls risk.

Section 2 helps you plan a way to prevent falling on the farm including practical exercises you can do to build strength and balance, simple things you can do on the farm to reduce the risk of falls and also provides a personal action plan to help you reduce your risk of falls.

Section 3 adds ideas to the “Great Idea Bank” of older farmers for making farm work easier and safer.

1. Falls Risk Checklist — Identifying your personal falls risk

Filling out this section will help you identify any individual factors that may increase your risk of falls. This information can then be used to take action to reduce those risks.

- Part A you can do sitting at a table - simply tick the boxes that apply to you
- Part B shows you how to do 3 simple tests of balance and strength to assess your balance and strength

Once you have done these you add up your score to work out your falls risk score.

Part A: Tick Questions

	YES	NO
Have you had a fall in the last year? (if YES, How many times.....)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have a fear of falling?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<hr/>		
Are you taking four or more prescription medicines?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you taking any of the following — sleeping tablets, tranquilizers, antidepressants, fluid tablets or blood pressures pills?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has your GP reviewed your medicines in the last 12 months?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<hr/>		
Do you have blurred/double vision or have difficulty seeing steps, walking in dim or glary light?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you had your eyes tested or your glasses checked in the last 12 months?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<hr/>		
Do you experience dizziness, light headedness, unsteadiness, drowsiness or have difficulty thinking clearly?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<hr/>		
Do you have diabetes, arthritis, Parkinson's disease or Osteoporosis?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Part B: Test of balance and strength for falls risk

Tandem stand test

- a) Stand with your back to a corner of a room with a hard floor, with each of your shoulders about 15cm (6 inches) from the wall with your head up.
- b) Place one foot in front of the other with your toes of one foot behind the heel of your other foot in line with one another.
- c) Close your eyes and try to stand in this position without moving for 10 seconds.

Can you stand without losing your balance for more than 10 seconds? ☐ YES ☐ NO

Alternate step test

- a) Stand in front of a step of about 18cm (7 inches) in height
- b) Keeping one foot on the ground, touch the other foot flat on the top of the ground of the step, keeping your weight on the foot on the ground, then return your foot to the ground. Repeat with the other foot on the ground. Do this 8 times.

Can you do this in less than 10 seconds? ☐ YES ☐ NO

Sit to stand test

- a) Sit in a chair that is about 15cm (6 inches) away from a wall.
- b) Fully stand up with your arms folded.
- c) Time how long it takes to sit up and down 5 times with finishing sitting down.

Can you do this in less than 12 seconds? ☐ YES ☐ NO

Work out your score

Count all the **circles** that you ticked (don't count the squares): (____ x Circles)

Your risk rating. *If your score is:*

- 0 to 2** You have a **NORMAL** risk of falling
- 3** You have **DOUBLE** the risk of falling
- 4** You have **FIVE TIMES** the risk of falling
- 5-7** You have **NINE TIMES** the risk of falling

Making sense of your personal risk score

After looking at your falls score there are two more important things to think about.

1. If you work at heights you will be at increased risk of having a fall that results in severe injury or death.

Farm Hazards	Falls Risk Rating 0-2	Falls Risk Rating > 2
On your farm do you work in areas that are 1-5 m off the ground – eg trucks, headers, tractors, loading docks ramps?	Normal risk of falls – attention to falls prevention required	High Risk of falls: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• improve personal falls risk• engineer to reduce risk
On your farm do you work in areas that are more than 5m from the ground – eg silo's windmills?	Falls hazards high risk to all persons	HIGH RISK: Work should not be undertaken. All effort to avoid this work should be taken.

2. If your score was 3 or above, take this sheet with you to your General Practitioner and discuss your risk of falls and ways to prevent falls.

2. My Plan to Prevent Falling

Part A: Daily exercises that can help to prevent falls

Physical activity, particularly strength and balance training can help prevent falls. These are examples of key exercises that you can do every day to help prevent falls and reduce your risk of being injured if you do fall.

Sit-to stand



Seated in a chair stand up slowly and hold for 5 seconds

- This helps with your leg strength
- You could do this at the kitchen table
- Do at least 10 times

Tandem walk



With one foot in front of the other walk along in a straight line

- This exercise helps with your balance
- You could do this down the hallway or along the verandah
- Look for opportunities to do this every day (eg. every time you walk down the hallway or along the verandah)

Leg extension



While sitting in a chair straighten one leg at a time and hold for 5 seconds

- This exercise helps with leg and ankle strength
- You can add resistance to this exercise by adding weight such as a bag of rice
- Do at least 10 times each leg

Extra Walking: On a smooth surface use a pedometer to count your steps. Try to walk at least 10,000 steps a day. Look for ways to increase your steps each day. For example, you could leave the bike at the shed and walk back up to the house, or walk to the front gate instead of riding or driving.

Part B: Making changes on the farm to reduce risk of falls

There are many things in the farm workplace as well as around the house that can increase your risk of falls and taking action to eliminate or control these factors can prevent falls. These are a few ideas that farmers around North West NSW came up with to reduce falls risk on their farms that may apply to you as well.

Grab Rails

- Look where you can put additional grab rails on trucks, tractors and headers, walkways etc

Steps

- Look where you can put additional steps – ie safe tractor access platform on machinery
- Apply non-slip tape/matting to make surfaces less slippery
- Apply marking paint or tape to highlight falls risk areas – eg steps, platform edges

Working at Heights

- Choose ladders that are appropriate to weight
- If you must work at heights, have a safety harness available for your use and use by others.

Light up places to improve Visibility

- Make sure lighting is good, for example around buildings where visibility may be poor in the early morning or in the evenings.

Personal Protective Features

- Have available aids such as walking sticks, staffs, and sticks for walking on uneven or steep ground
- Wear appropriate footwear that fits well and has grip soles

Awareness/Education

- Minimise clutter in workshop and keep pathways clear
- Livestock handling areas pose special risk and need special attention. (See the *Great Idea Bank* for ideas)
- Be aware of moss, ice, and other slippery substances on the ground or floor surfaces
- Be aware of your own limitations
- Think and plan to prevent falls

Part C: My falls prevention plan

1. Score on Falls Risk Checklist _____

2. My exercises to help protect me from falling

- Sit-to-stand: _____ times a day
- Tandem walk: _____ times a day
- Leg extension: _____ times a day
- Extra Walking _____ steps a day

3. I will discuss falls risks and falls prevention with my GP
(asking for a long consultation) _____

4. Our action to reduce falls in the farm workplace

References

Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety: *Safety of Older Farmers Chartbook*
www.aghealth.org.au

Acknowledgements

This resource has been made available through funding from the Department of Health and Ageing as part of the North West Farmsafe Falls Injury Prevention Project. The work of the steering committee and members of the North West Farming Community who participated in the project workshops is greatly appreciated in the development of this resource.



The Great Idea Bank

Good advice from
older farmers to reduce
risk of falling

This section of the Great Idea Bank will be expanded as more ideas are added to those provided by farmers in NSW.

Send in your ideas to share with others and add to the collection.



Some Good General Principles

Good advice from older farmers around Australia

Make your changes sooner rather than later!

The sooner you make the job easier, the better your quality of life. Furthermore, you'll get the most from your early investment in time or resources.

Steps and rails make life much easier

Putting better and lower steps on trucks, machines and buildings, with strong hand rails to grab, and help take the weight work like magic. You need to look for where you might make these changes.

Most changes are not that expensive

Many of the changes need not cost the earth – and its not self-indulgent to spend a bit on yourself – you've earned it!

Contents

1. Grab Rails

- For cattle yards and steps

2. Steps

- Non-slip surfaces
- Marking to highlight edges

3. Personal Protective Equipment & Clothing

- Footwear
- Walking staffs and sticks

4. Lighting

- Lighting up poorly-lit areas

Ideas for GRAB RAILS to reduce risk of falling

Older farmers, like most people as they get older, have reported feeling more unsteady on their feet, and also that they more often “miss a step” when climbing up, down or over objects.

1. Ideas for GRAB RAILS on steps at cattle yards

Idea 1:

Grab rails can be fitted to most steps on the farm
- not just at the sale yards!



Idea 2:

Where have you used grab rails?

Send a
photo to:

Great Idea Bank, Australian Centre
for Agricultural Health and Safety
PO Box 256, Moree NSW 2400

Email:

dpayne@health.usyd.edu.au

Phone:

02 6752 8210

Ideas for STEPS to reduce risk of falling

Older farmers have reported loosing their footing more often, and many have slipped and fallen from steps and ladders. They don't have to be very high to cause trouble.

1. Ideas for NON-SLIP SURFACES on steps

Idea 1:

Use mesh, or other non-slip material for the treads on any new steps



Idea 2:

You can buy non-slip 'grip tape' that adheres to step surfaces



Ideas for STEPS to reduce risk of falling

2. Ideas for NON-SLIP SURFACES on ladders

Idea 1:

You can buy anti-slip adhering grips for use on ladder rungs.



Idea 2:

How have you made steps and ladder surfaces safer?

Send a photo to:

Great Idea Bank, Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety
PO Box 256, Moree NSW 2400

Email:

dpayne@health.usyd.edu.au

Phone:

02 6752 8210

3. Ideas for marking to HIGHLIGHT EDGES on steps

Idea 1:

You can paint the edges of steps with bright or contrasting colour



Idea 2:

How have you made surfaces more visible?

Send a photo to:

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Ideas for PERSONAL AIDS to reduce risk of falling

Older farmers have reported losing their footing, stumbling and falling on uneven ground more often as they get older.

1. Ideas for NON-SLIP FOOTWEAR

Idea 1:

Keep wearing those boots that have good grip – even though you'll need the bootjack to get them off as you get older!



2. Ideas for staying upright while walking around the farm – WALKING STAFFS and STICKS

Idea 1:

Sheep producers have reported using the old crook to help get around – this one is very lightweight and useful. Others are trying the staffs used by recreational walkers – also light-weight. But there's generally a sturdy stick to be found!



Idea 2:

How have you kept yourself more stable on your feet?

Send a
photo to:

Email:

Phone:

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dpayne@health.usyd.edu.au
02 6752 8210

Ideas to IMPROVE LIGHTING to increase visibility and reduce risk of falling

Older farmers have reported that poor visibility and uneven surfaces are not a good mix! Falls have occurred at the back door or around sheds in poor light.

1. Ideas for **IMPROVING VISIBILITY** in low light

Idea 1:

Simple solar-powered lights with sensors can be installed so that the light turns on when movement is sensed (and you don't need an electrician to install one).



Idea 2:

What ideas have you used to improve visibility?

Send a photo to:

Email:

Phone:

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dpayne@health.usyd.edu.au

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**The Falls Project is funded by the
Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing**



The Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety is a joint initiative of
Hunter New England Health and the University of Sydney

PO Box 256, Moree NSW 2400
Phone: 61 2 6752 8210
Fax: 61 2 6752 6639
Email: dpayne@health.usyd.edu.au
Website: www.aghealth.org.au