

Stress and Fatigue

With such a wet spring and planting being delayed, it's evident the stress is mounting. Once the skies clear, farmers will likely be spending more time in their tractor than in their homes. Agriculture has to be one of the most stressful occupations. There are financial worries, endless paperwork, long hours and on top of all of that, something we have no control over-Mother Nature. What does this mean for farm safety?

Effects of Stress and Fatigue

The average reaction time for a person is $\frac{3}{4}$ of a second. In that amount of time, you can be fully entrapped in a PTO, have sustained numerous cuts by a blade and much worse. When you work long hours, that time increases and you respond much slower. You may also experience a diminished capacity to recognize and avoid risky behavior.

Most farmers do not take time off when they are ill and this can also increase the chance of an accident and heat and poor nutrition can also cause problems.

Identifying Stress and Fatigue

Listen to your body. It may respond physically, emotionally or both. Everyone experiences stress differently. Headaches, stomach aches and restlessness are all common signs of stress. A change in your behavior or angry outbursts and depression are also indicators that the stress may need to be addressed by a professional or even just sharing your concerns with a family member or friend.

Who is most susceptible?

Studies show these differences in the way various groups tend to experience stress:¹

- Younger farmers, especially those younger than 50, report more stress than older farmers.
- Farmers in dairy or mixed (grain and livestock) operations report higher stress levels than farmers in grain operations.
- Farmers employed in off-farm jobs report more stress than full-time farm operators.
- Farm women may experience additional stressors. Besides working as a full partner in the farm business, many farm women have full responsibility for home and family matters. A farm woman with an off-farm job faces very difficult demands in addition to being the traditional nurturer for the rest of the family.

What can you do?

- Recognize your symptoms
- Eat healthy. Don't skip breakfast. Take along health snacks with natural carbohydrates like fruit and breads.
- Take a break every couple of hours. Get off the equipment and do an inspection if resting is not for you. The vibrations in the tractor and make you tired and you need to get off the equipment.
- Accidents are more likely to late morning from 10 to 11 a.m. and later afternoon from 4 to 5 p.m., just before meals, so be extremely cautious at this time.
- Be ready to have a safe day and dress appropriately for the weather.
- Make sure you have a current tetanus booster.
- Avoid alcohol and drugs that cause slow reflexes.

Bottom line, always use good judgment. You do not need to be super farmer and lost time and the financial burden of an injury or death are never worth it.

This message is brought to you by the Center for Rural Health and Farm Safety at Carle Foundation Hospital, (217) 383-4606.

¹ SAFE FARM - Promoting Agricultural Health & Safety: Manage Stress to Increase Farm Safety. National Ag Safety Database. <http://www.cdc.gov/nasd/docs/d000601-d000700/d000695/d000695.html>