



SAFETY ALERT

Cumulative Strain Awareness

Name:

Date Read:

WHAT HAPPENED

During the peak of calf-rearing season, a calf rearer had a demanding daily routine: shifting heavy bags of feed, lifting calves, and carrying bucket after bucket of milk and water.

They began to feel ongoing aches and strains in their shoulders, hips and lower back. Like many farmers, they decided to “tough it out”, expecting the aches to pass once the busy season was over.

Instead, the pain kept increasing, eventually resulting in serious injuries that took a full year to recover from.

There was no single accident – the injuries built up quietly over time through repeated lifting and carrying.

WHY DID IT HAPPEN

The natural instinct to push through and get the job done meant the early warning signs were ignored. Rest and early treatment at that stage would have made the biggest difference.

On farms, health and safety often focuses on serious incidents involving machinery or vehicles. Gradual strain injuries are easier to overlook until they start affecting your work and daily life.

Repeated lifting, awkward postures and heavy loads all take a toll. Over time, muscles, tendons and ligaments weaken and become more likely to give out or cause long-term pain. Thinking “just one more bucket won't hurt” gives a false sense of security – your body needs rest and recovery time to repair.

KEY LESSONS

- **Look after your body.** Machinery can be repaired or replaced – your body can't. A long-term injury can end a farming career and affect your quality of life for years.
- **Act on early warning signs.** Discomfort, stiffness, tingling, and minor aches are signals that tissue is working too hard – do not wait for a full tear or worse before taking action.
- **Reduce heavy lifting where you can.** Look for ways to avoid carrying loads by hand. A pivot milk bucket trolley lets you wheel and tip milk buckets without carrying them. Mobile milk carts, feed hoppers, piped water and other mechanical aids also help.
- **Use safe lifting technique.** When you do need to lift, stop and think first, get a firm grip, bend your knees, keep your back straight and the load close, and don't jerk or twist. As a guide, anything over 25 kg is a two-person job.
- **Don't just “tough it out”.** Pushing through pain during busy periods won't help it heal. It makes the damage worse and can turn minor aches into long-term injuries.
- **Get advice early.** See a physiotherapist or GP at the first sign of persistent strain before a niggle gets worse and forces you off the farm.



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