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How to Stay Healthy as a Truck Driver



As a truck driver, it isn't easy staying healthy. Compared to the general population, drivers experience higher rates of obesity, diabetes, hypertension, sleep apnea, poor nutrition, tobacco use and other health issues, studies have shown.

Not surprising for a job that demands long periods sitting in one position, irregular schedules, poor sleeping conditions and travel far from home-cooked food and exercise facilities. The good news: You can take steps to improve your health prospects.

Tips for Being a Healthy Trucker

With 40 years of experience behind the wheel of a big rig, driver Ralph Garcia of [ABF Freight System](#) is a past [America's Road Team Captain](#). He has long advocated for drivers to get healthier.

"Carriers want you to stay in that seat, so you've got to find a way to stay in shape, and you have to find time to do that. It takes a lot of discipline," he said. "What I try to do is give [drivers] ideas, and there's a lot of people starting to catch on."

Cardiovascular Exercise

Walking is good, but more intense cardiovascular exercise is better. This can include working out with inexpensive resistance bands or a few minutes of interval training. For instance, jogging in place as fast as you can for a minute, taking a short break and repeating “has a better effect than walking for a long period,” Garcia said.

Plan Time for Rest

Beyond sleeping enough at night, catching some shut-eye on long trips is crucial, said Garcia. He suggested pulling over for short power naps in your vehicle. “I feel so much more refreshed when I do that,” he noted.

Pack Your Own Meals

Truck stops have long been known as greasy spoons, but that is changing. Many now offer healthier options and post nutritional information. Still, Garcia recommended bringing your own food to control portions and food choices.

Stay Hydrated

Drivers don't always want to drink water while driving because they don't want to stop for bathroom breaks. But Garcia said hydration — specifically water and not soda or energy drinks — is crucial. Bonus: Stopping every couple of hours to use the restroom breaks up those long sitting periods.

How Trucking Companies Can Improve Drivers' Health

The onus shouldn't rest solely on drivers. Improving trucker health must also be a priority for the motor carriers that employ them, said Erin Mabry, senior research associate at the [Center for Truck and Bus Safety, Virginia Tech Transportation Institute](#).

Mabry points out that poor health is expensive both for drivers — due to higher insurance premiums, deductibles and prescription costs — and carriers, who face higher health insurance and disability costs, as well as disability claim rates. Better driver health also means improved productivity through fewer sick days and enhanced performance.

Share Educational Materials

Garcia recommended that motor carriers send their drivers regular health and fitness tips in an e-newsletter or via short, how-to videos. Consider giving them fitness trackers to encourage walking. And inform them of health monitoring apps for their smartphones.

Incentivize Healthy Habits

Offer prizes for weight loss or most steps logged on a fitness app. “Offering no-cost, incentive-based health programs to drivers is a step in the right direction,” Mabry said. “There also needs to be a cultural and environmental shift in the workplace that promotes driver health and well-being.”

Offer Support

Partner with such healthy driver initiatives as [Driving Healthy](#) and the American Trucking Associations' [Safety Management Council](#).

Whether you're a driver or a carrier company, investing time and energy into a few lifestyle improvements can payoff with more enjoyable days on the road and a longer, healthier life.

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