

Driver Health and Wellness

Introduction

Transporting dangerous goods by road is a high-risk potential activity largely due to the risks associated with the act of driving itself. A driver's health and wellness play an important role in their capability to drive and transport dangerous goods safely. Therefore, this topic should be part of a transport safety management systems.

Truck driving as a profession may promote an unhealthy lifestyle which can lead to chronic health conditions.

Gas companies should encourage their own and contracted drivers to lead a healthy life and support them in the pursuit of this goal.

Scope

This publication highlights possible risks to drivers' health and wellness and gives guidance on how to mitigate these risks. This publication is not produced by medical professionals. If drivers are suffering from any of the conditions described, they should be encouraged to consult with a medical expert.

While sleep apnoea and fatigue are also risks associated with driver health and wellness, these topics are covered in EIGA TSI 12, *Managing Driver Fatigue* and are not focused on in this publication.

Definition

Wellness – the state of being healthy, especially when it is something that is actively achieved.

Wellbeing – the state of feeling healthy and happy.

Body mass index – a measurement of a person's weight in relation to their height, used to find out if they are overweight.

Learning more about the risks associated with driver health and wellness

1. Do you know the risks concerning drivers' health?
2. Do you know the risks concerning drivers' wellness?
3. Are your drivers aware of the risks?
4. Are you aware of how to mitigate these risks?
5. Are your drivers made aware and encouraged to mitigate these risks?
6. Is the topic "driver health and wellness" part of your transport safety management system?

If the answer to any of the above questions is 'no', then you should consider taking action!

THIS TRANSPORT SAFETY INFORMATION GIVES AN OVERVIEW OVER RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH DRIVER HEALTH AND WELLNESS AND GIVES GUIDANCE ON HOW TO MITIGATE THESE RISKS.

Risks associated with drivers' health and wellness

Overweight and Obesity

Overweight and obesity are defined as abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that may impair health. The fundamental cause of obesity and overweight is an energy imbalance between calories consumed and calories expended. The fast-food culture and sedentary lifestyle affect the overall bodily metabolisms and raise severe health risks. Consuming processed convenience and fast foods is not a healthy diet. Especially without physical exercise, it causes the body to gain weight over time and can lead to obesity. Common health consequences of overweight and obesity are cardiovascular diseases (heart disease and stroke), diabetes, musculoskeletal disorders, and some cancers (including prostate, liver, gallbladder, kidney, and colon). Body mass index (BMI) is a simple index of weight-for-height that is commonly used to classify overweight and obesity in adults. Overweight is a BMI greater than or equal to 25 and obesity is a BMI greater than or equal to 30.

To avoid or reduce overweight and obesity, drivers can limit energy intake from total fats and sugars, increase consumption of fruit and vegetables, as well as legumes, whole grains and nuts and engage in regular physical activity (30 minutes/day average). Getting enough sleep is also beneficial.

Frequent and effective information campaigns may support drivers to actively consider health risks and how overweight and obesity can be avoided or reduced. Multiple studies have shown that drivers are many more times likely to be classified as obese in comparison to the general population and can have up to 69% obesity rate¹. Most have eating habits limited to roadside restaurants, where the food is typically not as healthy as home-cooked meals. Obesity may lead to health conditions including coronary diseases, insomnia, and diabetes. For drivers, it is undoubtedly essential to take care of ones' health. But, for that to happen, drivers should consciously take care of their eating habits to have a balanced diet plan with enough food varieties with appropriate calories, which includes:

- being aware of eating the right quantity of the right food at the right time.
- eating fresh fruits and vegetables regularly.
- staying hydrated by drinking water and avoiding sugared drinks.
- avoiding foods with high saturated fat content.

Physical exercise is important, especially for drivers. Drivers should be encouraged to do simple activities such as stretching and going for a walk. It will:

- make drivers sharper, both physically and mentally;
- improve their flexibility, making them less likely to suffer falls and injuries;
- offset the effects of diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol;
- reduce the risk of illness;
- help lose weight and may improve self-esteem which is important for mental health;
- help improve quality of sleep; and
- improve their mood.

Exercising at home can be done in many fashions and should be encouraged.

Exercise on the road is often more difficult. This makes it even more important to encourage exercise when opportunities arise, for example something as simple as taking a walk for at least 10 minutes during a rest period.

Smoking

Study shows that over 50 percent of truck drivers smoke. Though smoking may help drivers feel stress-free, it increases their chances of acquiring lung cancer. Nicotine contained in tobacco is highly addictive and tobacco use is a major risk factor for cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, over 20 different types or subtypes of cancer,

¹ [Smoking and obesity among long-haul truck drivers in France \(tobaccopreventioncessation.com\)](https://tobaccopreventioncessation.com)

and many other debilitating health conditions. Worldwide and every year, more than 8 million people die from tobacco use.

Smoking in trucks is prohibited in many countries and by many employers.

For health reasons in general, drivers should also be motivated to:

- try to reduce the amount of smoking (outside the cab) on a daily basis and aim to quit;
- practice other stress-relief methods while driving instead of smoking.

Professional “Stop Smoking” information in conjunction with customized step-out offers for smokers, also offering good motivation and alternatives to the habit, may motivate drivers to quit smoking.

Obstructive sleep apnoea

Sleep apnoea is common especially amongst smokers and obese people. The affected person may have breathing problems when they sleep. Their tongue folds back and blocks the airflow.

As a result, it can lead to improper rest, causing the body to tire easily. Sleep apnoea has also been known to cause the body to slow down its reaction time.

Sleep apnoea is said to be linked to smoking, obesity, and can be hereditary.

For further information, see EIGA TSI 12, *Managing Driver Fatigue*.

Irregular sleep routine

Driving routines are not always fixed. Drivers may work for many hours without a fixed pattern. This can cause the body to develop fatigue due to improper sleeping routine.

A traffic jam or poor weather conditions can disrupt the schedule of drivers and force them to extend their shifts to late hours (within the regulations). This can impact the resting hours and can lead to excessive workloads.

Drivers should:

- try to stick with daily schedules (with the support of their managers) allowing for enough rest periods and contact their schedulers in case of risk of extension of their journey;
- get familiar with the route and roadside rest areas;
- adhere to regulated resting hours; and
- be aware that irregular shift patterns may increase the risk of fatigue.

Only following the minimum regulated rest hours may not be sufficient for an individual driver to be adequately rested and alert. Managers shall ensure that drivers are able to get enough rest. This may require managers to amend schedules. Drivers shall understand the importance of getting good quality rest and should advise managers if they are not getting enough rest.

Musculoskeletal issues

Limited mobility in the cabin can lead to musculoskeletal issues.

Drivers should:

- adjust the seat and steering column where possible, in order to ensure the correct ergonomic position;
- safely practice body stretching and other exercises during rest periods;
- avoid excessive tension on the body and be in a relaxed posture;