

## 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 rate<sup>1</sup>. 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,

<sup>1</sup> [Smoking and obesity among long-haul truck drivers in France \(tobaccopreventioncessation.com\)](http://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;

## Hypertension (high blood pressure)

There can be several causes of hypertension, obesity and inactivity being the key risks for drivers. The following can be done to minimise the risks. The driver should:

- regularly have blood pressure checked by medical professional (can be supplemented by self-monitoring methods e.g. smartwatch)
- exercise regularly even on a long hauling trip;
- consider reducing/stopping smoking and drinking alcohol;
- practice stress relieving exercises;
- minimise salt consumption
- reduce consumption of sugary drinks and carb-rich foods; and
- eat more fresh fruits and vegetables.

## Mental wellbeing

Driving jobs are mostly carried out with limited social contacts. For some drivers, this could affect their mental wellbeing.

Possible solutions for drivers can be:

- engaging with other drivers where possible;
- talking to friends or family members often, when safe to do so;
- engaging in non-job-related activities during stops if feasible to break the routine; and / or
- playing one's favourite music while on the trip.

There are many other factors that influence mental wellbeing which are not job related (e.g. family related, sickness, financial).

Personalities of drivers vary and therefore any solutions for their mental wellbeing are highly individualistic. The above are only examples. Managers should be aware of any changes in driver's personality or behaviour. Managers should take steps to check on driver's mental health, offer support and let drivers know of other resources available, for example confidential helplines or professional help.

## Stress

Stress is the body's reaction to a challenge or demand. In short bursts, stress can be positive, such as when it helps avoid danger or meet a deadline. But when stress lasts for a long time, it may be harmful to health or adversely affect road safety.

The stress of everyday life, work issues, lack of sleep or personal problems are often top contributors to feeling anxious while driving. Factors such as tight scheduling, driving during peak times, being stuck in traffic and feeling unfamiliar with the roads you're on can also contribute to stress.

Managers and other transport function personnel should be mindful that their actions do not contribute to these factors resulting in a more stressful working environment for drivers.

## Restlessness

Restlessness is the inability to rest or relax, potentially leading to mental discomfort. This may affect the drivers' performance and safety in general due to lack of concentration or quality rest. Causes can be anxiety or stress.

Everyone can feel restless and fidgety from time to time. However, when restlessness is experienced more frequently and is accompanied by other symptoms it can interrupt daily life and reduce a person's quality of life.

For drivers to tackle restlessness, they should:

- Take some time for themselves. Even if there are only 10 minutes to spare, they should carve out some time to relax and just breathe.
- Exercise. A lack of physical activity only makes restlessness worse.
- Find a hobby or volunteer. Doing things that you love is one of the keys to happiness.
- Consider consulting professional psychological or mental aid.

On the other hand, managers and schedulers should not put too much pressure on drivers.

### **Dehydration**

Driving continuously with limited breaks may cause drivers to ignore hydrating their bodies. Not consuming enough water during their journey may cause drivers to face dehydration. It is recommended to drink at least 1.5 litres of water per day.

Drivers should be encouraged to stay adequately hydrated by drinking regularly where safe to do so and eating juicy fruits / vegetables with high water content. The volume of water required to remain sufficiently hydrated depends on the ambient temperature and humidity.

Drivers should be aware that drinking certain drinks containing caffeine for example coffee, energy drinks or black tea that are diuretics and therefore can accelerate dehydration.

### **Nutrition deficiency**

Consuming junk and fast food most of the time limits intake of necessary nutrition. It also lowers the immunity in drivers, possibly promoting other harmful diseases.

Driver should:

- keep fruits and vegetables in the cabin that can be consumed raw; and
- take healthy natural nutrition mixture during the trip (i.e. a balanced diet of fruit, vegetables, meat, cereal and dairy products as far as there are no restrictions due to allergies or preferences).

Drivers may be provided with appropriate dietary information to help them make healthy choices.

Wider blood screening by medical experts can help to detect nutrition deficiencies.

### **Misuse of substances**

The reasons for the misuse of substances can be due to factors like stress, fatigue, and loneliness. Drivers can turn to drugs and alcohol while on the road, posing dangers to not only themselves but to all participants in traffic. These substances are often either illegal or local legislative limits are imposed, especially for drivers. While the range of drug and alcohol tests have increased in recent years, the use of these for enforcement should be carefully considered with the appropriate policies and procedures in place. Companies should consider regular briefings on safety and personal risks of misuse with support for drivers where needed. Organisations should have a drug and alcohol policy.

Drivers may consume caffeinated or high sugar content beverages such as coffee or energy drinks as a stimulant to stay awake. However, this unhealthy habit can lead to anxiety and insomnia, causing the body to deteriorate. Drivers should cut down the intake of such stimulants and consume water as a healthy alternative.

### **Effects of medication**

Many common medications and over-the-counter drugs that people, including drivers, take regularly come with warnings about driving when taking them. Some legal drugs that can cause driving impairment include but are not limited to:

- Stimulants
- Sedatives

- Antidepressant medications
- Medications to prevent seizures
- Antihistamines and decongestants
- Sleep-aid medications
- Medications to reduce anxiety
- Pain medication
- Diet pills and some natural weight loss supplements
- High-blood pressure medications
- Drugs to reduce cholesterol

A driver should consult a medical professional, if prescribed medication which may impair driving ability.

The risk of side effects that can impair driving abilities can be even worse if more than one medication is taken in combination. This can cause an allergic reaction or other complications. Side effects can include:

- Drowsiness
- Reduced cognitive capacity
- Problems with coordination
- Anxiety
- Dizziness
- Slower reaction times

All these side effects can increase the likelihood of the driver causing an incident.

## Eyesight

Having good eyesight is critical for safe driving. In many countries, there are legal minimum requirements. The vast majority of eye conditions can be easily rectified but eyesight deterioration can gradually occur.

Regular eye tests are vital to maintain good eyesight and can also have wider health benefits as an eye test can indicate other health conditions.

## Management of risks

- Integration of driver health and wellness into logistics management system, allowing for appropriate work patterns and management support in case of deficiencies.
- Training of drivers and other transport function personnel highlighting above risks and measures;
- Driver health surveillance, where permitted;
- In case of doubt, consult experts such as doctors of the relevant fields to support you in managing these risks;
- Drivers shall be encouraged to inform managers if they feel they are not fit to drive;
- Using tools such as checklists or `Fit for Duty` tests can aid managers in assessing if drivers are fit to drive.

## Conclusions

Chronic health conditions are becoming a growing concern in commercial transport. The risks to health and wellness of drivers should be considered with appropriate policies within the gas companies. Drivers may be suffering from undiagnosed conditions. It is important for management to encourage their drivers to get checked out if they have any health concerns and not to ignore minor symptoms. However, it is a driver's responsibility to ensure that they are fit for duty.

This publication lists possible risks and details recommendations that may be integrated into gas companies' transport safety management systems.

## References

[www.drivinghealthy.org](http://www.drivinghealthy.org)

[www.fleetmanagement.ae](http://www.fleetmanagement.ae)

EIGA TSI 12, *Managing Driver Fatigue*, [www.eiga.eu](http://www.eiga.eu).

## Further information

EIGA TSI 01, *Transport Safety Information, an Overview*, [www.eiga.eu](http://www.eiga.eu).

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