



Helping your drivers stay healthy on the road

Truck driving can be a demanding job, both physically and mentally. At Sentry, we want to help you understand some of the risks your drivers face, and help you learn how you can help them avoid future health concerns.

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) has proposed rules that would require employers to provide drivers with information on maintaining healthy cholesterol levels, blood pressure, and weight, along with the importance of periodic health monitoring, proper diet, and exercise.¹ We'll help you develop a wellness plan that not only meets those requirements, but also makes it easy for you to get this information to your drivers.

Besides the obvious benefits to your drivers' health, a wellness plan can help you avoid:

- Higher health care costs, including health care premiums, workers' compensation premiums, and driver out-of-pocket expenses.
- Excessive absences, which reduce driver and carrier productivity.
- Increased driver turnover, which is costly to both employee morale and driver replacement costs.

THE RISKS YOUR DRIVERS FACE

Your drivers may be at risk for a range of health issues, including elevated blood pressure, obesity, musculoskeletal disorders, cardiovascular disease, some cancers, and other problems. Additionally, evidence suggests that poor driver health—combined with sleepiness, fatigue, and inattention—can affect performance and increase their odds of being involved in a fatal accident.²

Here are some common health risk factors your drivers may face:

- **Smoking:** Smoking substantially increases the risk of cardiovascular disease. It's also among the leading causes of cancer-related deaths. In fact, according to the Centers for Disease Control, one in three cancer-related deaths in the US would be avoided if smoking were eliminated.³
- **Obesity:** Obesity is a risk factor for many diseases, including stroke, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, and diabetes. It also exacerbates problems with conditions such as arthritis and back pain.

- **Hypertension (high blood pressure):** High blood pressure increases an individual's risk of heart disease, renal failure, and stroke. Excess body weight correlates closely with increased blood pressure. The FMCSA has set guidelines for CDL holders based on the blood pressure guidelines from the Joint National Committee on Prevention, Detection, Evaluation, and Treatment of High Blood Pressure:
 - Drivers need a blood pressure reading of 140/90 mm Hg or below in order to maintain a CDL license
 - If a driver is being medicated, they need to be recertified more frequently
 - Drivers have three months to get their blood pressure under control
 - If it's lowered to 140/90 or below, they can drive for one year on their federal medical card
- **Alcohol or drug abuse:** Alcohol and other drugs can contribute to unintentional injuries, such as motor vehicle accidents, suicide, and other violent deaths. Alcohol is also a factor in a high percentage of chronic diseases.
- **Stress:** Stress can cause numerous mental and physical problems for your drivers, including immune system dysfunction, which can lead to types of arthritis, cancer, and other diseases. Home life and social contacts are excellent support sources for those experiencing stress. A lack of support, on the other hand, can make problems worse, leaving drivers more likely to experience stress-related health issues.
- **Fatigue:** Driver fatigue is a particularly important safety issue. High mileage, stressful driving conditions, and other factors make fatigue a far greater concern for commercial drivers than non-commercial drivers.



- **Sleep apnea:** Sleep apnea is a condition that restricts upper airway breathing, potentially causing sleep disorders and affecting driver performance. The main cause of sleep disorders like sleep apnea is increased body mass index (BMI) combined with aging. Sleep apnea can cause drivers to experience daytime drowsiness, affecting their reaction times and judgment—similar to being drunk. If one of your drivers is diagnosed with sleep apnea, you should temporarily take him or her off the road until the condition is treated consistently.
- **Poor eating habits:** A good diet is one of the most important influences on an individual's health, but it's also among the most difficult things to change—particularly for drivers who are forced to eat most of their meals on the road. A diet high in fats and carbohydrates and low in fresh fruits, vegetables, and fiber can create or amplify health problems.
- **Physical inactivity:** A lack of activity—common for many drivers—can increase the risk of health issues like heart disease, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, diabetes, and breast and colon cancer. Depression, anxiety, and stress are also concerns related to physical inactivity.
- **Musculoskeletal disorders:** Overexertion injuries are the leading cause of lost-time injuries for truck drivers, which in turn lead to high workers' compensation costs for motor carriers like you. Injuries to the back, neck, and shoulders are frequently associated with lifting and material-handling tasks, along with:
 - Pulling the fifth wheel pin
 - Lowering and raising heavy truck hoods
 - Slipping while exiting the truck
 - Sleeping on one's side in a bouncing vehicle
 - Lowering the landing gear
 - Unloading the truck
 - Driving with one elbow resting on the window frame
 - Frequently resting one hand on a vibrating gearshift lever
 - Tarping over a trailer load

CHOOSING A WELLNESS PROGRAM

There are many things you can do to help your drivers avoid certain health issues. By incorporating driver wellness programs, you can increase awareness and provide company support of healthy lifestyle choices.

Establishing a program isn't difficult, and doesn't have to be expensive. Your health care providers and other organizations—such as the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association, and the Wellness Councils of America—can provide you with information, most of it inexpensive or free.

If you'd like a more comprehensive wellness program, you can hire a vendor that specializes in health education and training programs. Many firms offer health assessments and disease management assistance on an individual basis, which allows wellness counselors and occupational health nurses to work with individuals to address their specific needs. In the case of truck drivers, counselors can focus on recommending healthy food choices on truck-stop menus, strategies for quitting smoking, and incorporating exercise into their daily routines.

Another way you can improve your drivers' health and reduce your health care costs is through disease management. Certain diseases like diabetes, asthma, and hypertension can lead to expensive complications if they're not actively monitored and treated. If they're properly managed, the related costs typically remain relatively low. A good assessment program can identify these problems early on, and a counselor or nurse can provide ongoing assistance.



Keep in mind that health assessments need to be confidential. Instead of reports on individual employees, you should receive reports showing the general health of your workforce so you can identify any negative overall trends.

REWARDING HEALTHY PEOPLE

We get it—changing lifestyle habits is hard. But we also know that financial incentives can be an excellent motivation. High-deductible health plans can be designed to encourage early intervention and health maintenance, by covering regular checkups and other preventative measures at 100 percent.

Your health plans can also be structured to reward your employees for their healthy lifestyles by reducing co-pays or premiums. For instance, your company could choose to pay more toward health insurance premiums for non-smokers than for smokers. Many companies arrange for discounts on health club memberships, diets, and stop-smoking programs—or even pay part of the cost. In most cases, the benefits are extended to families of employees, since success depends largely on family participation and support.

HOW TO DEVELOP A WELLNESS PLAN

As you develop your wellness program, remember that it needs the support of top management to be successful, since any meaningful change will be driven from the top. Here's what managerial support could look like:

- Involvement in the planning process
- Distribution of announcements and support materials
- Making allowances with a budget and program time
- Participation in wellness events
- Flexibility in employee schedules to accommodate wellness activities

OBTAIN INPUT FROM YOUR EMPLOYEES

Asking your employees about their needs and interests increases the likelihood that they'll participate in wellness activities. You can find out what they'd like through informal conversations or formal needs assessments throughout the company. Here are some key questions you can ask:

- What wellness topics and activities interest you?
- What types of activities would you like to see?
- What's preventing you from starting a physical activity and healthy nutrition program right now?

An individual or team can oversee the effort—whatever works best for your company. In a small trucking company, it could be a single individual such as the owner. You should collect some form of baseline data to know where your employees are, and where they can improve as a whole. If excess weight is identified as a concern, for example, the wellness team could set a goal for the company of losing a total of 500 pounds over 12 weeks. Consider what you can afford, and set a budget to make the most of your resources. From there, determine which resources you'll include. Some possibilities include:

- **Health assessments:** Create personal health awareness through surveys or employee health screenings.
- **Facilities:** Find space for a gym, equipment, or a training room. Have trained staff assist in developing workout routines for your employees, and consider offering corporate discounted memberships.
- **Involving families:** Include your employees' families in order to promote a healthy lifestyle in the home.
- **Education:** Have instructors hold regular meetings and classes to promote ongoing fitness.
- **Health fairs:** Introduce your employees to the health resources you've made available, both within and outside the company.
- **Health educators and counselors:** Focus on employee needs through classes and workshops on various topics. Individual counseling can also be a benefit.

Carefully evaluate your health program's outcomes. If you're not seeing the desired results, you may need to change the program or make the environment more supportive. Beyond an organized health program, you can help your drivers improve their wellness in other ways, including emphasizing these simple steps:

- **Get enough sleep:** Most adults need 7–9 hours to maintain proper alertness. Adequate rest keeps your mind alert, and your immune system strong.
- **Reduce stress:** Find ways to relax or reduce stress. Basic deep breathing techniques can go a long way toward relieving stress.
- **Stay fit:** Get regular exercise, such as walking. Even three 15-minute walks per day can help you shed pounds and make you healthier.
- **Eat properly:** Cut back on the junk food. It may be easy—and tempting—to grab a donut or high-fat burger on the run, but leaner and greener foods give you the nutrients you need to maintain vital energy and strong muscles.
- **Use proper lifting technique:** Bend with your knees and lift with your legs, rather than bending at the waist. Get help if you need it, and use mechanical aids to lift heavy loads.
- **Take breaks:** Awkward, repetitive motions can result in sore hands, arms, neck, and back. Take breaks to rest and use good body mechanics to avoid long-term injuries.
- **Take time away:** Make vacations and other time off a mandatory part of your personal health plan.
- **Quit smoking:** Give up tobacco to live longer and reduce your chance of developing heart disease, lung disease, stroke, and cancer.
- **Avoid alcohol and drug abuse:** If you're looking to get help breaking an addiction, help is readily available from a number of sources.
- **See a doctor:** Talk to your doctor if you have high blood pressure, diabetes, or high cholesterol. Tell them you're a professional driver, and that these conditions can affect your CDL. Find out about health conditions and treatment plans.

HEALTH PROMOTION WEBSITES

There are hundreds of health promotion websites out there that can help both employers and employees learn about healthy lifestyles. You can start by visiting any of the following official governmental agencies and nationally known organizations:

- **National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion:** Physical activity suggestions and health-related electronic or printed publications. Visit www.cdc.gov/pcd.
- **Federal Trade Commission (FTC) Consumer Information:** Several publications that contain information on proven weight loss strategies and programs. Visit www.consumer.ftc.gov/topics/health-fitness.
- **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Healthfinder:** A free guide to reliable health information provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, with links to many health-related websites. Visit www.healthfinder.gov.
- **MedlinePlus:** Health care information from the U.S. National Library of Medicine at the National Institutes of Health—the world's largest medical library. Visit www.medlineplus.gov.
- **National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI):** Publications for patients and the public on a variety of health topics, including asthma, cholesterol, heart disease, blood pressure, obesity, smoking, and women's health issues. Visit www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health.
- **National High Blood Pressure Education Program (NHBPEP):** Resources to help consumers control their blood pressure, including interactive quizzes, healthy eating tips, and information on other behaviors that contribute to high blood pressure. Visit www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-pro.
- **National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK):** Health education programs related to diabetes and weight control. Visit www.niddk.nih.gov.
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—Smoking & Tobacco Use:** Information and educational programs on how to quit smoking. Visit www.cdc.gov/tobacco/index.htm.
- **Office on Women's Health (OWH):** Fact sheets, resource papers, and articles on a variety of issues concerning women's health from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Visit www.womenshealth.gov.
- **U.S. Department of Agriculture – Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion:** Information and educational programs on nutrition and healthy eating. Visit www.usda.gov/cnpp.

In addition to these government services, there are also a number of non-profit voluntary health organizations.

- **American Cancer Society:** Prevention and awareness materials available to the general public on early detection, tobacco, and other topics. Visit www.cancer.org.
- **American Diabetes Association:** Nutrition fact sheets and other publications. Visit www.diabetes.org.
- **American Heart Association (AHA):** Information and educational programs on heart disease and stroke. Visit www.americanheart.org.
- **American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR):** Educational service program with reliable, accurate, and current information on a variety of subjects related to diet, nutrition, and the prevention and treatment of cancer. Visit www.aicr.org/aicr.htm.



- **American Lung Association (ALA):** Information for employers, including fact sheets on workplace smoking policies and resources to help employees quit smoking. Visit www.lungusa.org.
- **National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD):** Education and information on prevention, intervention, and treatment. Visit www.ncadd.org.

These are just some of the ways you can improve your employees' wellness and promote a healthy, safe, and successful workplace.

For more information on wellness programs or any other safety issues, contact your Sentry agent or your safety consultant at 800-443-9655. You can also learn more on our customer website, Sentry Connect®. Visit www.sentry.com/sentryconnect.

1: Federal Register Vol. 68, No. 158, Minimum Training Requirements for Entry Level Commercial Motor Vehicle Operators

2: Bunn, T.L., S. Slavova, Struttman, T.W., and S.R. Browning (2005) Sleepiness/fatigue and distraction/inattention as factors for fatal versus nonfatal commercial motor vehicle driver injuries. *Accident Analysis and Prevention* 37 862-869

3: <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips/diseases/cancer.html>

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