

Transport Workshop

Health and fatigue management: Key takeaways



Health and injury

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Truck Drivers have high rates of chronic disease and having multiple chronic diseases can impact a driver's ability to work safely. Some characteristics of the truck driving role contribute to these high rates of chronic disease, such as:

- Prolonged sitting
- Shift work and long working hours
- Difficulty accessing healthy food options
- Lack of access to hygienic facilities
- Social isolation

Truck drivers have high rates of work-related injury. Between 2005 – 2015, the industry lost around 22,000 years of productive working time to work related injury. Most lost time was due to musculoskeletal disorders. Older drivers are particularly at risk and have longer claim durations than younger drivers. Many factors combine to result in these high rates of injury including:

- Laws and regulations
- Ageing workforce
- Job demands
- Geography
- Workplace systems and policies
- Worker health

Physical Activity

Contact Dr Steph Chapple s.chapple@cqu.edu.au or visit [Physical activity and sedentary work | Healthy Workplaces](#) for more information

Research shows that Australian truck drivers are highly sedentary on both work and non-workdays (roughly 11-12 hours of sitting time). Promoting healthy physical activity during leisure time is important, but it is also important to promote healthy physical activity levels at work. This can be difficult due to the nature & demands of truck driving. Workplace interventions for increasing physical activity among truck drivers during their breaks or 'down-time' tend to have mixed, short-term effects. These interventions often:

- Rely on individual motivation to be active
- Do not significantly reduce the amount of inherent sedentary time

The **Goldilocks Work Paradigm** is a new job design approach that looks at ways to find the 'just right' balance between being physically active and having sufficient recovery time (sitting) during work activities.

- The goal is to redesign the way productive work tasks are completed to integrate physical activity into the work itself.
- It should consider the entire workplace system – especially worker participation
- It requires creative re-thinking about how jobs are done

Key messages:

- Encourage the message that 'any movement/physical activity is better than none'
- Explore the idea of redesigning work tasks to promote physical activity/movement
- Talk to your drivers about their ideas on how you can help them be more physically active and achieve the 'just right' balance

Nutrition

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Transport workers doing night shifts will typically redistribute food intake from the daytime to nighttime. This is problematic as the body is primed for sleep at night rather than digestion.

Food intake at night is a challenge to the body and over time is a major contributor to chronic health issues in shift workers.

Food intake at night can also impact alertness and safety at work – eating a large meal during the night shift led to drivers feeling sleepier, less alert, and crashing more often in a driving simulator compared to those who ate a smaller snack or did not eat at night.

Key takeaways:

- Share the risks of eating large meals at night with workers
- If eating at night, opt for smaller snacks and not a large meal
- Aim to provide workers with healthier snack options during the nightshift or ways to eat healthier options (e.g. food storage in truck cabs)

Sleep and fatigue

Contact Dr Maddy Spracjer m.spracjer@cqu.edu.au or visit [Sleep and fatigue | Healthy Workplaces](#) for more information

The challenges that workers in the transport industry face regarding sleep and fatigue include:

- Nighttime and early starts – the risk to fatigue-related safety increases here
- Challenging sleep environments (e.g. exposure to light / noise), which can lead to insufficient sleep
- Long shifts and long work weeks – higher risk from hour 10 onwards of each shift, and the more consecutive nights on shift, the higher the risk.
- Extended time on task (e.g. driving time, sustained concentration)
- Time pressures

The impacts of sleep deprivation on driver safety:

- 17 hours awake = equivalent impairment as .05%BAC
- <5 hours of sleep = double the risk of a vehicle crash
- Driving hour limits and break duration do not always ensure adequate sleep

What countermeasures can drivers use to reduce fatigue-related risk?

- Sleep/nap (most effective, though can have some drowsiness on waking)
- Caffeine
- Taking regular breaks
- Increased communication (report fatigue, check-in with drivers)
- Change tasks (where possible)

The **Shared Responsibility Model** would ideally underpin fatigue management systems and drivers would ideally hold the absolute authority to stop

- The absolute authority to stop means that drivers can stop driving if they ever feel that they are not safe to do so.
- There are important barriers to consider such as, fear of reprimand for stopping, not wanting to let people down, deadlines to meet, impact on logbook, bravado, or no suitable place to stop.

Fatigue detection technology is increasingly common in Australia, and organisations should consider a range of factors before choosing to invest:

- Does the technology have the features you need and how well does it work?
- What resources does your company need to manage the tech?
- Have you consulted with your drivers?
- What will your drivers do when they get an alert?
- Legal considerations and data privacy