

# Is Driving a Truck Hazardous to Your Health (Part 2)



TruckSure  
By Trevor Toohill

Last month I wrote about health and wellness programs for fleet transport operators and I needed to conclude the article with some observations and recommendations as supplied to one of my clients following a recent review and report.

## Conclusion

The research available encompassing health and welfare for commercial drivers is substantial and it has been a great eye-opening exercise compiling this report and making our observations and recommendations known.

Most Health and Wellness Programs fail! No matter how well intentioned.

They start off with a hiss and a roar and slowly fade into obscurity.

Initially the transport company's board and the drivers buy into the program with enthusiasm at varying degrees – but the problem is maintaining the momentum.

How many gym memberships have we all had in our lifetime?

Even the very successful LTSC Fit for the Road program appears now to be grinding to a halt with a lack of driver support and ACC's financial withdrawal.

We have identified the 3 main problem areas associated with commercial driving:

### 1/ Work

High and conflicting demands, low autonomy, low support, ergonomic problems, work schedules

### 2/ Stress/physical

Fatigue, tension, mental overload, musculoskeletal problems, stomach problems, elevated blood pressure, sleeping complaints, elevated adrenalin levels

### 3/ Health

Obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, sleep apnoea, hearing loss, poor eyesight, smoking, poor nutrition, alcohol and drug abuse, resultant high sickness level and absenteeism, high disability risk due to psychological, musculoskeletal and cardiovascular problems.

When you see the number of issues drivers are subjected to in this industry you have to ask why anyone would want to be a professional truck driver!

Well, plenty do and for most it is an occupation of choice. But doesn't that mean there isn't an obligation to companies to try to do something to improve the health and wellbeing of their drivers. And they should and they can!

## We have identified the solutions

There are no surprises here. Most would initially think exercise, exercise, exercise, and yes, that probably is the answer. But that in itself is a recipe for the failure of any health and wellness plan. Why? Because human motivation has proven to be a bit elusive, and anyway do you really want to jump on a treadmill for hours after knocking out a 60 hour week!?

However there are ways you can include exercise into the program without too much stress, but it should only be a small part of the overall plan encompassing:

- Exercise
- Good nutrition
- Improved work environment
- Maintain work/life balance

## Recommendations

- Provide health coaches to work with at risk drivers. Any driver displaying symptoms as outlined above should have access to a company sponsored health coach who can work with the driver, identify the problems, and offer solutions.
- Engage a nutritionist to review cafeteria offerings and train the driver trainers on nutrition – make nutrition part of the driver training program. If your company does not have a cafeteria then at least give advice on food and nutrition. Certainly chuck out the snack bar and coke fridge.
  - Engage a health 'nurse' to conduct annual check-ups for blood pressure, diabetes, and full blood test screening.
  - Smoking – ban smoking around truck proximity and in depots and yards.
  - Incentivise exercise and weight loss – encourage use of 'Fitbit' wrist activity monitors. Have a limited number of monitors available for voluntary use with appropriate incentive for weight loss and distance walked. ie \$25 Fruit World vouchers.

- Provide bottled water free of charge.
- Coach safely exiting the truck cab and deck, and loading and unloading methods as applicable to the freight you carry. Knees and backs are major contributors to driver health problems and discomfort.

There is no silver bullet fix to the raft of health issues identified. However, without any doubt, corporate investment in improving driver health and wellbeing returns capital at least 4.1 and at the same time boosts morale, reduces absenteeism, improves safety, reduces crashes and creates a caring company culture.

As always if you feel the need to discuss [www.trucksure.co.nz](http://www.trucksure.co.nz)



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