

Healthy Habits for Truckers

Your Guide to Healthy Living on the Road



The livelihood of a truck driver depends on passing the DOT physical, yet truckers have unique challenges when it comes to living a healthy lifestyle. The good news is that health improvement and maintenance is achievable with a bit of knowledge, planning and creativity.



Truck drivers know how important it is to prevent high blood pressure and sleep apnea, or successfully treat them if already diagnosed. Good nutrition is vital in managing these issues which is crucial to maintaining your CDL. Along with weight and blood pressure management, making better food choices can also help alleviate other problems that many drivers suffer with, including constipation, indigestion, low energy, trouble sleeping and the body aches associated with carrying extra weight.

Truck drivers spend a lot of time sitting. It's best to avoid heavy, high calorie meals as you'll most likely take in more calories than you're expending. It can also be hard on digestion. This is especially true when driving at night, as our normal circadian rhythms are not set to digest heavy meals during normal sleeping hours. Consider eating smaller, lighter meals or snacks every 4-6 hours. The staples of your diet should be fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low fat dairy and lean protein sources. The two most important steps you can take to prevent or treat high blood pressure is to lose weight if needed and reduce your sodium intake. Restaurant and fast food meals can be very high in calories and sodium, but are not your only options. If you have a small refrigerator or cooler in the cab, consider stocking up with food before you leave home. You can also find groceries at larger truck stop convenience stores and some grocery chains with large lots will allow parking. Some healthy options to consider:

- Make a sandwich with 100% whole wheat bread; mustard or low fat mayo; and chicken, tuna, turkey, or lean roast beef. You could also use a whole wheat tortilla and make a wrap.
- Many grocery stores have premade chef salads. Buy a low fat dressing you like to keep on hand, and just limit the high calorie/ sodium toppings like cheese and bacon. Better yet, buy a bag of prewashed salad mix and add your own pre-cut or shredded veggies and lean protein.
- Precooked hard boiled eggs are a great protein source that many stores are now carrying.
- Whole grain crackers with chicken, tuna or egg salad made with low fat mayo.
- Light yogurt or low fat cottage cheese and fruit (note that cottage cheese is high in sodium).
- Hummus with pre-cut veggies like carrots, broccoli, celery, cauliflower or cherry tomatoes.
- High fiber cereal with low fat milk.
- Low fat, low sodium cheese and whole grain crackers.

If you don't have a cooler or refrigerator in the cab, there are still healthy foods you can keep on hand, including:

- Nuts and dried fruit (just watch portion sizes— very easy to overeat and consume too many calories).
- Peanut butter on whole wheat bread or crackers.
- Protein bars with at least 7 grams of protein.
- Fresh fruit or canned fruit in it's own juice (not heavy syrup). Try apple slices with peanut butter.
- Canned tuna or salmon on whole wheat bread or crackers.
- Plain instant oatmeal packets. Use hot water from a truck stop to make the oatmeal and consider adding your own fruit or nuts and sugar substitute.

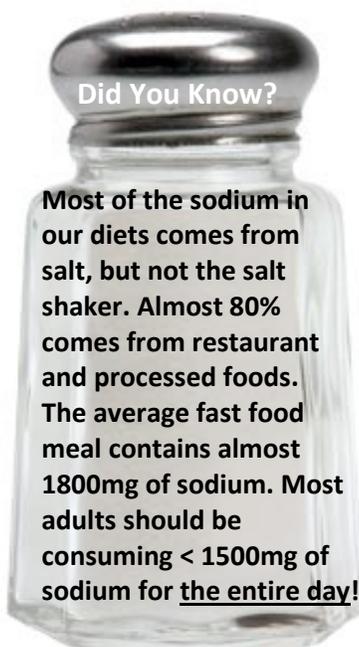
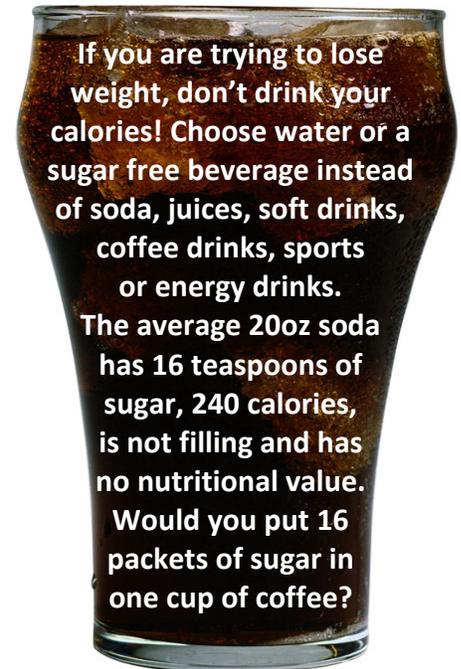


Sometimes there is no choice but to stop at a restaurant for food. If it's a fast food joint, here are some healthier options:

- A single patty hamburger or grilled chicken sandwich without cheese or mayo/ special sauce. Choose whole wheat bread, buns or wraps if available.
- A garden salad with grilled chicken and low-fat dressing.
- A slice of thin crust veggie pizza.
- The fresco menu at Taco Bell.
- A small roast beef sandwich without cheese.
- A six inch Subway sub with veggies, chicken, turkey, or roast beef; no cheese; apple slices instead of chips.
- A plain baked potato at Wendy's, add your own low-fat toppings (like low-fat plain yogurt and salsa).
- Wendy's chili without cheese.

Tips for eating healthier at a sit down restaurant:

- Take advantage of having the chance to eat fish and vegetables— two super healthy foods that can be challenging to eat much of when on the road. Choose fish that is baked and not breaded. Consider ordering extra vegetables in place of the starchy potato or rice side.
- Watch for words associated with higher fat/ calorie choices, including: breaded, battered, fried, smothered, alfredo, au gratin, creamy/ creamed, and crispy. Choose instead menu items with preparation methods that include: grilled, steamed, boiled, broiled, baked and roasted.
- Often much of the sodium, fat and calories with dishes come from the sauces, gravies and dressings. Consider asking for the sauces to be held or at least served on the side, so you can control the portion.
- Restaurant serving sizes are often twice as much food as we really need. This is where a cooler in your car can come in very handy. Ask for a to-go container AT THE START OF YOUR MEAL, immediately put half the food in it, and then save it for another meal.



Tips to help prevent indigestion and/ or constipation:

- Drink plenty of fluids throughout the day. Fluid needs vary depending on many factors, including weight, activity level, climate and sweat rate. However, most people should be drinking 64—80oz of fluid a day.
- Get plenty of fiber in your diet. Good sources include: fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, and high fiber cereals
- Avoid eating large amounts of food at any one time.
- Chew your food thoroughly.
- Avoid laying down immediately after eating. If you are able to, go for a short walk after eating.
- Food tolerances vary among people who suffer with chronic indigestion or heart burn. However, some common intolerances include: high fat foods, spicy foods, chocolate, peppermint, coffee, alcohol, citrus fruits, carbonated beverages and artificial sweeteners.



The benefits of regular physical activity to a truck driver are numerous and can include: managing weight, blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar; improving back and joint pain, enhancing mood, reducing stress, preventing constipation and improving sleep. However, when your paycheck is dependent on putting miles in, it can seem like there is no time for fitness. The following are some ideas to help exercise become a manageable part of your workday.

Cardio

Cardiorespiratory exercise, also known as “aerobic” or “cardio”, is exercise that elevates your heart rate and gets you breathing faster. It burns calories and improves the ability of your heart to pump oxygen through your blood to your muscles. This helps everyday tasks be easier, from what you do on the job, to walking up stairs and doing yard work. The current recommendations for cardio is an accumulation of at least 150 minutes a week. The Intensity should be high enough that you can talk, but would have trouble singing. Types of cardio include: brisk walking, jogging, biking, spinning, stepping, swimming, exercise DVD’s, and circuit training with weights, Many people choose to do 30 minutes, five times a week. However, 10 minute chunks of consecutive exercise can be effective and may be more manageable for a trucker. For example, you may be able to get in 3, 10 minute power walks at truck stops during the course of a day. Don’t forget to pack a pair of sneakers and consider wearing a pedometer to help you track your progress.

Strength Training



Increasing your muscle mass can increase your metabolic rate, which should help with weight loss. Being strong can also help decrease risk of injury and can make your job easier to do. Strong abdominals are particularly important in supporting your back. Strength training should be done on at least 2 (non consecutive) days a week. Resistance can come from your own body weight, dumbbells, resistance bands, or gallon jugs of motor oil or antifreeze. Within the week, target the muscles of the hips, legs, shoulders, arms, back, chest, and abdominals. Do 8—12 reps of each exercise. Resistance should be heavy enough that the last few reps are difficult to do and still maintain good form.



The FIT System (Freightliner In-cab Training system) is a workout solution for professional drivers looking to workout in the convenience of their own truck. FIT allows the user to interchange 1, 2 or 3 cables at the same time. The simple design allows you to easily go from light to very heavy resistance by just adding or removing a couple bands. The user has 5 different attachment points inside the truck and it can be taken out of the truck to be used at home or in a hotel room. Visit rollingstrong.com to purchase.

Stretching

Stretching is very important for truck drivers who often stay in a seated position for long periods of time. Stretching helps improve flexibility which may improve your performance in physical activities and help decrease risk of injuries. At least 3 times a week (but everyday if possible) stretch the muscles of the shoulder girdle, chest, neck, trunk, lower back, hips, legs, and ankles. It’s also important that truck drivers stretch their fingers, as the constant gripping of the steering wheel can cause fingers to contract and tighten. Hold each stretch for at least 20 seconds and repeat if you have time.



Since your paycheck depends on putting miles in, truck drivers often skimp on sleep to increase productivity. However, lack of sleep can impair more than just your driving skills. Inadequate sleep is associated with weight gain, irritability, impaired glucose control, high blood pressure, and immune system suppression. Sleep deprived truckers are more likely to suffer from sleep apnea, obesity, depression, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and hypertension. They tend to get sick more often and take longer to recover from illnesses.

Untreated sleep apnea is a medical condition that can not only cost you your job, but can greatly increase your risk for hypertension, stroke, heart attack, death during sleep, and falling asleep at the wheel. If your sleep apnea is associated with being overweight, as it often is, then losing even a moderate amount of weight may be the cure. Whatever the cause, it's extremely important to follow the treatment plan your doctor has prescribed for you, which may include wearing a CPAP machine while sleeping.

Truck drivers often drive during night hours, upsetting the normal circadian rhythm which prefers sleep when the sun is down. Try to get at least 7 hours of sleep during a 24 hour period. The longer your sleep sessions are, the better. However, if you can't get it all in one shot, try to get at least one continuous 4 hour session augmented by naps until you reach the 7 hour mark.

Tips to help you fall asleep faster and stay asleep longer:

- Whenever possible, sleep during night hours and keep a consistent sleep schedule.
- If you must sleep during the day, consider a sleep mask to completely block out all light.
- Trick out your sleeper berth! Invest in whatever will help you sleep more comfortably. This may include a higher quality mattress and pillow, and a portable fan or heater.
- Use earplugs or a white noise machine to help block out noise.
- Avoid heavy meals right before sleeping. If possible, avoid caffeine for 8 hours before sleeping.
- If you think you might be on a medication that is keeping you awake, review this with your doctor.

