

Safety Bulletin

Heart Smart Strategies for Drivers

Driver health is a major issue for the trucking industry, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle can seem challenging for those on the road. There are some small but important steps you can take each day to help prevent heart disease. Here are eight ways to improve heart health.

Get moving. The American Heart Association recommends 150 minutes of moderate physical activity each week. That breaks down to just over 20 minutes a day - which can be divided into two 10-minute sessions. Even something as simple as walking three times around the trailer when their load is being delivered or when they have to stop and fuel can be helpful. To be more creative, Rolling Strong has released an in-cab exercise and flexibility system for drivers.



Get good sleep. Driver fatigue can be a serious issue for drivers, and a lack of quality sleep can increase the risk of heart disease. Sleep apnea, a breathing-related sleep disorder that causes brief interruptions of breathing during sleep due to the airway collapsing at night, can be treated with a mask that keeps airways open. Symptoms include loud snoring, morning headaches and nausea and excessive daytime sleepiness. Undergoing a sleep study can diagnose the disorder.

Prevent and control high blood pressure. High blood pressure has a direct effect on heart health. Eating healthy foods low in salt and high in potassium can lower blood pressure. Your doctor can determine what your blood pressure should be and discuss ways to lower it if it is high.

Avoid smoking and secondhand smoke. Cigarette smoking increases the risk of heart disease. Even light smoking or occasional smoking damages the heart and blood vessels; so it is best to either never start smoking or to quit. There are a number of programs and medicines that can help you quit smoking. Also, try to avoid secondhand smoke by avoiding places where smoking is allowed or asking friends and family members who smoke not to do it in the house and car.

Limit alcohol use. Drinking alcohol can lead to high blood pressure and heart failure. For those who do drink, it is important to do so in moderation. The American Heart Association suggests no more than an average of one to two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women.

Maintain a healthy weight. Calculating your Body Mass Index - BMI - can help you gauge your risk for diseases that can occur with more body fat, such as heart disease. There are several free BMI calculators online. A BMI index between 18.5 and 24.9 is considered normal.

Eat healthy foods. Drivers pressed for time often grab quick and unhealthy food for energy. Fortunately, more and more restaurants have healthier options on the menu. Also consider packing your lunches from home and storing them in your truck's refrigerator, as well as stocking up on healthier snacks (such as fruits or whole grain fiber-rich crackers) for the cab.

Reduce sodium intake. Too much salt can raise blood pressure. To lower blood pressure, eat no more than 2,400 mg of sodium per day. Limiting daily intake to 1,500 mg can lower it even further. Eating fresh fruits and vegetables and buying low-sodium products can reduce it further.

