



Women in Trucking

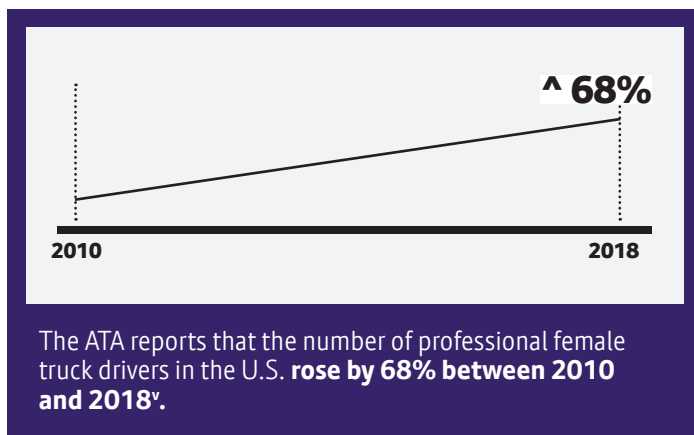
How Fleets Can Help the Growing Number of Women in Trucking Get or Stay Healthy

With over 3.5 million professionals, truck drivers in the commercial transportation industry constitute one of the largest occupational groups in the U.S. However, the American Transportation Research Institute (ATRI) listed shortages of professional drivers as the #1 concern facing the trucking industry for the last five consecutive years¹.

According to the American Trucking Associations (ATA), an aging workforce is one of the main reasons this labor pool is constrained; the average age of a truck driver is 55 years oldⁱⁱ. Many drivers chose early retirement or to pursue a different career as a result of the COVID-19 pandemicⁱⁱⁱ. At the same time, increased e-commerce activity during the pandemic also caused a spike in demand for trucking services^{iv}.

The shortage of professional truck drivers has wide-ranging impacts, from fuel shortages to higher prices at the grocery store. The good news is that notable progress is being made to diversify the workforce and attract new talent to the industry.

While still a male-dominated occupation – defined as having a workforce comprised of fewer than 25% women – professional truck driving has experienced a significant demographic shift over the past decade.



The most recent Women in Trucking Association (WIT) survey finds that women represent more than 10% of U.S. truck drivers^{vi}.

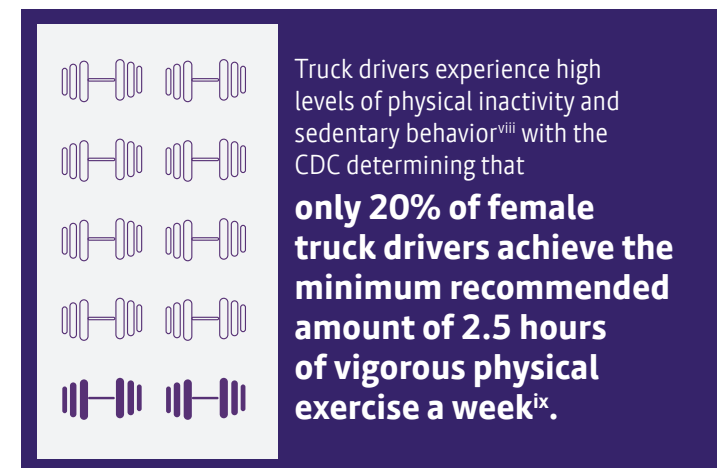
As the U.S. takes a closer look at the vital role of truck drivers in the larger supply chain, it is critical to understand the distinctive elements of the trucking lifestyle and challenges encountered by female drivers pursuing careers in trucking. While many of the industry-specific challenges facing professional truck drivers transcend gender – all drivers work in an environment that offers minimal opportunities for physical activity, exacerbates poor eating habits, and increases the likelihood of stress, fatigue, and loneliness that can trigger substance use – women face a unique set of challenges in the industry.

Lifestyle and Health Challenges

The long hours on the road and time spent away from home and family, a hallmark of the truck driving lifestyle, presents difficulties for female drivers. Beyond gender-specific care and personal hygiene needs, women traditionally have more domestic responsibilities that affect the valuation of the job attributes, such as childcare and ease of returning home if there is a family emergency. These work-homelife constraints contribute to additional stress and anxiety for female drivers.

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The work of a professional truck driver takes place in a range of non-office settings – the truck cab, highway rest areas, warehouses – each of which features a shortage of healthy food options and opportunities for physical exercise. For truckers, the very nature of their jobs directly contributes to rates of obesity at nearly twice the national level^{vii}.



These factors may contribute to elevated rates of hypertension, high cholesterol, and high blood glucose seen in the truck driver population^x.



The occupational stress resulting from persistent delivery-related time pressures and the limited social support felt by truck drivers working in isolation contribute to significant levels of anxiety, depression, fatigue, and sleep deprivation^{xi}. According to the CDC, elevated rates of smoking in the truck driving population may result from an attempt to combat fatigue^{xii}. Studies have found that women are more likely to have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) than men^{xiii}. Female truck drivers are at increased risk for this condition since cigarette smoking is three times higher among female drivers than other women in the U.S. workforce^{xiv}.

In addition to the baseline stress and anxiety experienced by truck drivers of both genders, female drivers must grapple with bias, harassment, discrimination, and physical safety issues in the workplace. One academic study found that over 60% of female truck driver respondents reported feeling like they were treated with less dignity and respect because they were women^{xv}. In a survey commissioned by WIT, women gave an average score of 4.4 when asked to use a 1-10 scale for ranking how safe they felt on the job^{xvi}. In another survey focused on female driver satisfaction, 67% reported having feared for their personal safety during the previous year^{xvii}.

Related Costs

By themselves, these adverse lifestyle behaviors and health conditions pose serious health risks and expenses, but they also represent risk factors for developing chronic diseases, such as type 2 diabetes and its precursor, prediabetes. The cost of diabetes care is enormous: the average annual medical expense for a diabetic is over \$16,750 – more than twice the amount for an individual without diabetes^{xviii}.

Like other chronic diseases, these conditions impact a driver's health and Commercial Driver's License (CDL), which requires an examination and clearance from a Certified Medical Examiner (CME). If a driver is healthy, they are awarded the CME certificate and cleared to drive for 24 months. If not, they are flagged and typically have 90 days to improve their health. Together with the other stressors facing drivers, these factors may contribute to the ongoing turnover rates that hinder fleets.

The turnover-associated expenses facing fleets are considerable. The average cost of driver turnover is about \$8,200 per driver, including recruitment advertising expenses, idle equipment costs, lost profit, drug testing, background checks, and new hire orientation^{xix}. The Department of Labor has estimated that the combination of labor turnover and absenteeism represents approximately 25 percent of a trucking company's total budget for the year^{xx}.

Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Intervention Through Lifestyle Change

Within the trucking industry, several organizations are leading the charge to make improved health more attainable, with trade organizations like the American Trucking Associations and Women in Trucking shining a spotlight on the importance of driver safety and health with resources dedicated to improving it. Health and wellbeing resources have demonstrated the potential to positively impact driver physical and mental health, directly benefiting employers with increased employee retention, reduced healthcare costs, improved safety, and job desirability.

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More broadly, the advent of the National Diabetes Prevention Program (National DPP) established by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) can have the biggest impact in improving health and reducing the risk of type 2 diabetes. Several studies demonstrate that a 5-7% reduction in bodyweight can help lower the risk of developing type 2 diabetes by 58% in adults with prediabetes^{xxi}. However, traditional employer benefit strategies for disease prevention and standard off-the-shelf point solutions historically cater to office-based employees. They often fail to generate results for a largely disparate labor force of lone drivers working on the road. Achieving meaningful health changes becomes even more of a challenge for hard-to-reach, medically underserved employee populations like professional truck drivers, whose lives on the road may lack the support structures and scheduling consistency that other occupations have.



How WellSpark Designed a Custom-Tailored Solution to Work with Drivers

WellSpark's Occupational Digital Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP) is one-of-a-kind in its approach to engaging participants. Using its CDC-certified digital DPP as a foundation, WellSpark's customized program accounts for the lifestyle, demands, needs, and personal experiences of the transportation industry workforce – from truck drivers and diesel technicians to warehouse personnel, office staff, safety managers, and more.

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WellSpark's comprehensive disease prevention solution is a 12-month live and on-demand lifestyle change program that combines behavioral science with personalized support to help participants build healthy habits that can last a lifetime.

A range of digital media – including on-demand video and podcasts – enables participants to learn strategies tailored to the needs of professional truck drivers and allows them to take part in knowledge checks, challenges, and quizzes that reinforce what they've learned. Participants gain true-to-life, practical tools, including guidance on eating, activity, sleep, and stress, which can be put into practice on the road and at home.

What further sets WellSpark's Digital DPP apart is personalization and individual engagement. WellSpark has Certified Health Coach Educators on staff who take the time to get to know each participant and develop customized strategies that reflect the drivers' lifestyles and unique environments. These Health Coach Educators are Certified in the National Diabetes Prevention Lifestyle Change Program/Diabetes Training and Technical Assistance Center at Emory University and Cognitive Behavior Life Coach (CBT).

This level of training advances genuine relationship building, one driver at a time, to generate camaraderie and foster a sense of accountability among the driver population. This differentiator provides individuals the emotional support

necessary to stay on the right path to better health, which is particularly important given drivers' common experiences of social isolation while on the job. Conversely, this human connection is lacking in similar-sounding offerings that rely solely on digital interactions to generate trust and commitment on the part of the participant.

WellSpark's DPP has been recognized as exceeding national averages of traditional CDC Programs for hard-to-reach professions across a range of important metrics, including increased physical activity, average weight loss, and reduced A1c levels. Participants also experienced a decline in both blood pressure and cholesterol levels^{xxii}, ^{xxiii}.

What's Needed from Fleet Owners

Recognizing the importance of women pursuing careers in trucking, lawmakers recently passed the bipartisan infrastructure bill to identify and eliminate barriers and industry trends that discourage women from entering the industry.

If the trucking industry hopes to continue the trend of increased female representation, they need to mirror the top-down efforts proposed in the bipartisan infrastructure bill. This effort needs to be paired with a shift in culture by employers with dedicated champions of diversity and inclusion and a sincere commitment to creating a culture of wellbeing that accounts for the total health, both physical and mental, of their female drivers.

Working with WellSpark, fleets can position themselves as standout companies for women to work for in the transportation industry, address the challenges that female drivers face as part of a larger strategy to promote driver wellbeing, and provide actionable solutions to the overall unique health challenges and related costs facing the transportation industry. WellSpark is dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of the transportation industry – one fleet and one driver at a time – for the long haul.





End Notes:

- i. <https://truckingresearch.org/2021/10/24/trucking-workforce-issues-top-the-list-of-industry-concerns/>
- ii. <https://www.bulktransporter.com/whats-in-print/article/21162337/keep-it-moving-how-the-trucking-industry-can-address-its-driver-shortage-dilemma>
- iii. <https://www.bulktransporter.com/whats-in-print/article/21162337/keep-it-moving-how-the-trucking-industry-can-address-its-driver-shortage-dilemma>
- iv. <https://www.natso.com/topics/covid-19-increases-e-commerce-demand-trucking-needs>
- v. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/drawn-by-the-salary-women-flock-to-trucking-11571045406>
- vi. <https://f.hubspotusercontent20.net/hubfs/6069071/PDFs/2019%20FreightWaves%20and%20Women%20in%20Trucking%20Association%20Survey%20.pdf>
- vii. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24390804/>
- viii. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7590350/>
- ix. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/truck/health.html>
- x. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33099498/>
- xi. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6164547/>
- xii. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/truck/health.html>
- xiii. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4511423/>
- xiv. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/truck/health.html>
- xv. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/216507990305100305>
- xvi. <https://www.freightwaves.com/news/steering-more-women-to-the-trucking-industry-taking-the-hire-road>
- xvii. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263326262_Workplace_Violence_against_Female_Long-haul_Truckers
- xviii. <https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/prevention/about-prediabetes.html>
- xix. <https://www.thetruckersreport.com/shortage/>
- xx. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25053606/>
- xxi. <https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/prevention/about.htm>
- xxii. @2018/2019 WellSpark DPP results
- xxiii. @2018 American Diabetes Association: A National Effort to Prevent Type 2 Diabetes: Participant-Level Evaluation of CDC's National Diabetes Prevention Program