

The average life expectancy in the United States for a newborn today is 78.4 years. This includes both sexes. Men live just four years less, on average, than women, which closes the gap that was once approaching eight years. In 2004 the male life expectancy hit a record 75.2 years.

The American male population has worked hard to change these statistics and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggests that they did it by smoking less and taking other steps to reduce the risks of cancer and heart disease.

American male truck drivers, however, have a life expectancy of almost 15 years less than other industries. These statistics are related to the lifestyle of truck drivers including a lack of exercise, unhealthy diets, and smoking. The end result for many truck drivers is the development of chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and certain types of cancer, arthritis and breathing problems. Being overweight and deconditioned plays a major part in occupational injuries. Many of these injuries would not result in the costly ongoing major claims if not complicated by many of the chronic diseases listed here.

Employees are hired as a “whole person” sort of like buying a car “as is.” You hire them warts and all. You cannot discriminate in your hiring based on any of the protected classes but using just plain common sense is, well, just plain sensible.

The employees you already have working for you can make even fairly small changes that will have a big impact on their overall health and well being.

**Stop Smoking.** Many more male truck drivers smoke compared to the general male population. Smoking contributes to cardiovascular problems like stroke and heart attacks, bronchitis, emphysema (COPD) and slows the healing process of broken bones or surgery. Smokers have an increased number of illnesses as compared to the rest of the population.

**Eat Healthier.** Truck drivers are notoriously bad eaters. They are always on the go and on a tight schedule. Everyone needs to drink two quarts of liquid daily. This should be in the form of water or 100% juice drinks not coffee, sugary cocktail juices, or sodas. Take vitamins every day to make up for what could be missing in your diet. Ask your doctor about taking a baby aspirin daily to help prevent your risk of heart attack. Eat as healthy as you can by including more fruits and vegetables as snacks. Most restaurants, including those in rest stops have healthy choices on the menu so you don't have to eat the “greasy spoon” food we think of as synonymous with these places.

**Reduce Stress.** Sitting in traffic jams is not fun for any of us. Most of us are just on the way home. Truck drivers on the highways are usually on the way to a delivery and traffic jams are a particular cause of stress. Try listening to calming music for a period of time each day. Remember, the only vehicle you can control is the one you are driving. You can, however, control your reactions to stressors. When you are out on the road, keep in touch with your family and friends to stay connected. Call home often and keep your

support system strong. Remember, your reactions to anger and stress are learned behaviors and they can be changed. Remember the old adage, Count to ten? It really does work. Learn how to meditate. It not only calms your body but you begin to train your mind to relax also. Learn to deep breath, a scientifically proven breathing technique that will help train your body not to respond to the stressful events in your life. (See “count to ten” above)

Sleep, the true rest stop. Studies have shown that not getting enough restful sleep reduces your performance. Four to six hours of sleep in a bed a night versus eight hours markedly impairs safety within one week. Do you have trouble falling asleep? Try taking melatonin which is a naturally occurring substance in the brain that induces sleep. Our natural levels drop as we age so taking a supplement may give you the relief you need. Avoid alcohol which does not allow for deep sleeping. Avoid smoking as this constricts blood vessels. Chocolate and caffeine are stimulants that make it harder to fall asleep so avoid these later in the day.

Get Some Exercise. Moderate exercise is just common sense. For people who sit for extended periods of time it makes even more sense. Start with short periods of just walking and increase as you start to reap the benefits. Build up from there. If you have not had an exercise program in a long time or ever, you will get rewards from minimal efforts in the beginning which is a great incentive to continue.

You know the basics. You have been told often enough to eat right, drink plenty of fluids, get exercise, quit smoking and reduce your stress levels. There are other things that can help men to keep breaking life span records:

Go to the doctor. One reason women live longer is that they have more checkups and are more likely to seek medical attention for bothersome symptoms. Men, on the other hand, don't go to the doctor until someone has to carry them in. Get something besides the CDL certification examination that is required every couple of years. See your family doctor every year for a thorough physical examination.

Get a wife, a partner or at least a lot of friends. Married men live longer. People with close friends and relatives live longer too. (As an aside, wives die sooner than single women, but that is another story.)

Get a life. You need a reason to get up in the morning. It could be your job or a golf date but participate. Life is not a spectator sport.

While the life span for Americans is higher than it has ever been, the rising co-epidemics of obesity and diabetes threaten to erase the gains for both men and women. Small changes over time can have a big impact on your future health.

Your Health by Kim Painter 6/12/06 USA Today  
Life Expectancy Closing Between Men & Women, Mark Stibich, PhD

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