

Health and Wellness

A healthy driver is a safe driver

A healthy driver is a safe and alert driver. Achieving a healthy lifestyle can be challenging when done on the road, but it can be done.

To achieve a healthy lifestyle, it is important to incorporate good habits including a healthy diet, plenty of rest, and an exercise routine.

Diet

Whether you are at home or on the road, it is important to maintain a healthy diet. A healthy diet includes eating a variety of foods on a daily basis that are rich in nutrients and low in calories. This includes vegetables and fruits, whole grains, low-fat dairy, and lean protein.

Vegetables and fruits. Vegetables and fruits are full of nutrients that help in promoting good health. Select vegetables and fruits of various colors and varieties. Choose red, orange, and dark green vegetables such as tomatoes, sweet potatoes, and broccoli with meals. Also select a variety of fruits and vegetables as snacks such as apples, pears, berries, and carrots.

Whole grains. When selecting bread, rice, or pasta, try to select whole grains. Whole grains provide more nutrients than refined grains. Examples of whole grains include oatmeal, brown rice, and whole wheat pasta.

Low-fat dairy. Milk, cheese, and yogurt are included in the dairy group. Select fat-free (skim) or low-fat (one percent) milk, cheese, and yogurt.

Lean protein. Meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, nuts, and seeds are considered part of the protein group. Select lean cuts of meat or low-fat meat and poultry.

Limit fat, oil, added sugar, salt. Limiting fats, oils, and added sugars is also important when it comes to a healthy diet as these foods provide calories, but little in nutritional value. Too much salt (sodium) can increase blood pressure.

Drink water. Water is a key ingredient to health and wellness. You need water to process the nutrients you eat, cleanse your body of toxins and impurities, and replenish you after exercise or physical exertion, especially in extreme heat. Normally, you should drink at least eight-8 ounce glasses of water every. If you are working in extreme heat, you will need to drink at least 8 ounces of cool water every 15 to 20 minutes.

Healthy choices

Being on the road can present additional challenges when it comes to a healthy diet. Your options can be limited when it comes to the menu at a truck stop or fast food outlet. Planning ahead and packing healthy foods before starting a trip is one way to combat this problem.

There are lots of healthy choices that can be purchased from the grocery store and carried in a small cooler on your vehicle. These choices include fresh fruit and cut up vegetables, and string cheese. Ready to eat cereals and unsalted nuts are other healthy foods that can be taken on the road.

Making healthy food choices can be a challenge when stopping at a restaurant or truck stop. Being an informed diner is half the battle. Many restaurant and fast food chains are starting to post calories on their menus. Also, many post nutritional information on their websites. If possible, this information should be checked out before ordering. If this isn't possible, look for key words such as grilled, whole grain, and low fat to help in making informed mealtime decisions.

Beverages are another issue to consider. Sodas and sweetened coffees are full of sugar and calories. Low-fat milk, water, unsweetened tea, and fruit and vegetable juices without added sugars are better choices.



Fatigue

Fatigue is a generic term used to describe anything from being sleepy to exhausted. Two major causes of fatigue are sleep loss and changes to the body's internal clock.

Sleep loss. Sleep, like food and water, is necessary for human survival. Depriving your body of sleep is like starving yourself.

In general, most adults need 7 to 8 hours of uninterrupted sleep to feel well-rested. Sleep loss of as little as 2 hours can affect alertness and performance. This can include reduced judgment, slowed reaction time, and lack of coordination.

Circadian rhythm. Put simply, circadian rhythm is your body's internal or biological clock. For most people, their clock runs on a 24-hour basis with some highpoints and low points in that 24-hour span of time.

Time cues, such as sunlight and darkness and your work/rest schedule keep your body clock set to a certain schedule.

Most everyone's clock is set for two low points. One is between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m. The other is between 1 p.m. and 5 p.m. The more dangerous of the two is between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m. as most people are programmed to sleep when it is dark and fighting fatigue is difficult.

Exercise

Regular physical activity is important to overall health and fitness. Being physically active can help with losing weight or maintaining a healthy weight (when combined with proper diet), well-being, sleep, and strengthening muscles and bones.

Beneficial physical activity includes:

- Aerobic activities including brisk walking, jogging, bicycling, and swimming,
- Resistance, strength building, and weight-bearing activities such as lifting weights and push-ups, and
- Balance and stretching activities including gentle stretching, dancing, and martial arts.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) recommends that adults do at least two and a half hours of moderate physical activity each week.

Being on the road can present challenges when it comes to getting in some physical activity on a regular basis. Having a "game plan" can help in getting in some form of physical activity.

The "game plan" may include making time during a stop to take a 30 minute walk or planning to stop at a facility that includes exercise equipment.

Some drivers carry exercise equipment such as hand weights or a bicycle or do simple stretching exercises in their vehicle.



Signs of fatigue

There are several signs that can tell you that you are about to fall asleep including:

- Lack of alertness,
- Drowsiness,
- Yawning,
- Trouble focusing eyes/trying to keep them open,
- Head drooping,
- Reduced reaction time,
- Erratic shifting, intermittent braking, following vehicles too closely,
- Lane deviations, and
- Bad driving decisions.

There are several things that can be done to fight fatigue:

- Get a solid 8 hours of sleep,
- Try to establish a regular sleep and waking schedule, and
- Avoiding driving during "down" times.

Consult with a medical professional

Make sure you consult with a medical professional before starting any diet or exercise program. A medical professional can make recommendations based on your health and lifestyle.



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