

Road to Better Health

Health & Wellness
Newsletter Brought to you by
**UrgentCare
Travel**
Medical Clinics For Truckers
Located at **Pilot**

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Ask the Nurse Practitioner



Smoking Effects

Q: What are some of the effects of smoking?

A: Smoking is directly linked to cancer, lung disease, heart attacks, strokes, diabetes, and COPD.

Q: What is nicotine and how does it affect the body?

A: It is the addicting substance in tobacco products and is stimulatory in nature.

Q: How does smoking affect a driver's DOT physical?

A: Since nicotine acts as a stimulant, it increases blood pressure and heart rate. These can be red flags during a DOT physical. Pulmonary Function Tests (PFTs) are recommended in smokers greater than 35 years old, or with a known diagnosis of chronic lung disease/antibiotics.

Smoking and Considerations for the Driver

By Fantasia Harris, FNP – Dallas, TX

Truckers and Smoking: There have been several studies researching the effects of smoking and the increased prevalence among truck drivers. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) published a recent study conducted by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) that surveyed 3,759 drivers at truck stops across the U.S., 1,670 of which qualified as long-haul drivers. With the focus of the study being on long-haul drivers, 54% were identified as smokers and 88% reported having one or more risk factors for chronic disease. That's a ~47% difference between the general U.S. population versus long-haul drivers, which is an alarming representation of smoking and how it affects driver health.

The Effects of Smoking

Smoking is harmful to almost every organ in the human body. It has been linked to cancer and is a known cause of lung disease, heart attacks, strokes, diabetes, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Smoking causes cancer by

introducing carcinogens (cancer causing substances) directly into the lungs. The risk for cardiovascular events increases with smoking due to thickening of the blood which decreases blood flow to the heart. Secondly, it damages vessels and arteries that are responsible for carrying oxygen throughout the body, thereby causing the heart to experience an increased work load. Diabetes as a result of smoking causes an interference with the body's ability to utilize insulin (insulin resistance) which increases blood sugar. COPD (emphysema and chronic bronchitis) is a result of constant inflammation in the lungs. Eventually, this leads to reduced lung capacity, shortness of breath, and difficulty breathing. The consequences of all of the conditions can ultimately increase the driver's medical costs and sick days.



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**ATA Management Conference
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October 17-20, 2015

Kicking the Habit

It is well known that nicotine is the addicting chemical in cigarette smoke. Nicotine causes addiction by altering substances in the brain which influences mood and behavior. This is the means by which nicotine is able to make one feel less stressed and even alter appetite.

With that being said, it's no wonder why it is so difficult to quit. "Smoking cessation", which refers to discontinuation of tobacco smoking, can be very frustrating and can often seem impossible for most individuals. According to a Gallup poll, 85% of smokers have tried to quit at least once. In fact, 45% made at least 3 serious attempts to stop smoking. Most just tried the "cold turkey" method, which means to withdraw abruptly. Another method, "cutting down", is usually reducing the amount of cigarettes smoked over a period of time until there is complete cessation. There are also other options frequently utilized for smoking cessation such as nicotine replacement (NRT), prescription medication and/or social support. NRT is usually in the form of a skin patch, oral spray, chewing gum, or lozenge. An individual will use NRT as a means of getting nicotine without exposing one to carcinogens and smoke. Prescription medications that are most often used are Chantix and Zyban. Both are FDA approved and have been shown to be effective in smoking cessation. Social support can range from online support groups, counseling, smart phone apps or avoidance of social situations involving smoking. The website, Smokefree.gov, indicates that the most effective way to quit is using a combination of medication and counseling. The basic principles to consider are one's readiness to quit and choosing what best suits the individual.

Considerations for the Trucker

The guidelines set forth by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) recommend spirometry/Pulmonary Function Tests (PFT's) for individuals who are symptomatic, smokers greater than 35 years old, or with a known diagnosis of chronic lung disease. Spirometry is one of the more commonly performed PFT's that specifically measures the amount (volume) and/or speed (flow) of air that can be inhaled and exhaled. A driver will likely be disqualified for poor PFT results, inadequate oxygen at rest and/or chronic respiratory failure. It is important to remember that nicotine has effects on the body that can cause issues for a driver. Nicotine, when it first enters the body, is stimulatory in nature so it can increase your blood pressure and heart rate which can be "red flags" on you DOT physical exam. Drivers should try to avoid smoking the day of your physical to lessen the appearance of these side effects during your exam. Many times lung function will improve with smoking cessation, inhaled medications, and/or pulmonary rehabilitation. If you are experiencing breathing problems consider scheduling an appointment with your primary care provider (PCP) to discuss a treatment plan. Finally, if you are a smoker and would like to quit, consult with your PCP to discuss the best options for you.

About UrgentCareTravel

UrgentCareTravel, a network of medical clinics for truckers, is an organization dedicated to improving the health and quality of life of truck drivers and families. In partnership with Pilot Flying J, UrgentCareTravel addresses one of the trucking industry's biggest challenges of offering easily accessible and affordable healthcare services for truck drivers. Located at Pilot Flying J Travel Centers, UrgentCareTravel clinics offer occupational medical services (DOT/non-DOT physicals, workers comp, sleep apnea testing, urine/hair drug screens, etc.) and primary care services (chronic disease screening and management (e.g. diabetes, cholesterol, hypertension), blood pressure checks, Men's & Women's wellness exams, wound care, cold/cough/flu, upper respiratory infections, sinus infections, ear infections, muscle pain/strain, etc.).

UrgentCareTravel's **GOLD Healthcare Membership program** provides members with DOT Physicals and unlimited no deductible / no co-pay visits (in-clinic services) at UrgentCareTravel locations for a low monthly fee. With health insurance plans costing more, providing less medical coverage and requiring higher deductible payments, UrgentCareTravel's **GOLD Healthcare Membership program** is an affordable option to address the healthcare needs of drivers, local businesses and communities. To enroll or request additional information about the **Gold Healthcare Membership Program**, please contact an UrgentCareTravel clinic or send an e-mail to services@urgentcaretravel.com.

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