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**Fit to drive?**

Driver welfare goes beyond the pastoral care good organisations offer to employees – it has a direct effect on road safety.

Driver welfare is a broad term covering both the pastoral duties employers may undertake to support their workforce, and the very specific issues which organisations must manage as part of their health and safety responsibilities.

Most employers like to believe they are supportive of employees’ health and well-being. However, for those who drive professionally there are several physical and mental factors which have a direct impact upon their road safety. These issues tend to intersect, eg drivers who are chronically tired will tend towards carbs-based foods, lower mood, and other potential health problems.

Marcus de Guingand, Managing Director of Third Pillar of Health, says: “Organisations who go beyond basic controls for fatigue, such as drivers’ hours regulations, and proactively address the topic are likely to see significant benefits. Those regulations have some merit but they are a very poor control against the myriad of issues that could be causing driver fatigue.”

Drivers and managers must understand the following issues:

* **Fatigue** and sleepiness are jointly linked to 20% of serious road collisions. Drivers must be educated about the need for quality sleep, and how to remain alert. Non-vocational drivers should also be made aware of the legal limits on driving time. [Read more about fatigue and sleepiness here.](https://www.shponline.co.uk/advertorial/driver-fatigue-a-hidden-challenge/)
* **Diet.** Having a healthy diet is essential for proper focus and cognitive performance. Carbohydrate snacks and sugary drinks [lower hypocretin](https://www.cell.com/neuron/fulltext/S0896-6273%2811%2900782-3), the neurotransmitter which keeps us awake. A poor diet and sedentary job can also contribute to diabetes.
* **Hydration.** Just 1% dehydration can lower cognitive performance significantly. Like fatigue, it is thought to be as [dangerous as drink-driving](https://www.lboro.ac.uk/media-centre/press-releases/2015/april/54-dehydrated-drivers.html). Many drivers tend to skimp on hydrating drinks so they do not need to stop at facilities. This can impair performance significantly.
* **Medical conditions.** Many conditions are [notifiable to DVLA](https://www.gov.uk/health-conditions-and-driving/find-condition-a-to-z) and employers must always be aware if a driver has a notifiable condition. Prescription and over the counter drugs can also have an impact on driving safety, particularly if they can cause drowsiness or affect judgement.
* **Mental health.** Male HGV drivers are 20% more likely to commit suicide than other men their age. Driving can be a lonely and pressured job, and anxiety, stress and depression can all affect a driver’s judgement and safety, as well as have devastating impacts on their quality of life. Be proactive about establishing ways in which drivers can discuss mental health issues in confidence. Use [our CALM driver resources](https://www.drivingforbetterbusiness.com/calmdriver/).
* [**Eyesight.**](https://www.gov.uk/driving-eyesight-rules) Poor eyesight is thought to contribute to 3,000 serious or fatal collisions every year. Ensure that driver’s eyesight is checked regularly and that they always wear prescriptive lenses if necessary.

You can find free, [high-quality toolbox talks](https://vandrivertoolkit.co.uk/), videos and resources to help educate drivers about these essential safety conditions at Driving for Better Business.