

MSI and Professional Drivers

Truck Vibrations and Physical Activity Related to the Trucking Industry Can Have a Big Impact on a Driver's Health

People who experience vibrations from the operation of heavy equipment, such as a commercial truck, may be at risk of developing a musculoskeletal injury (MSI). Those aches and pains that you feel after holding the steering wheel for a long time, or that twinge you get when cranking the dolly legs? Those might be musculoskeletal injuries.

What is a Musculoskeletal Injury (MSI)?

As the name suggests, a musculoskeletal injury refers to damage involving the muscles and other soft tissues (including tendons, ligaments, and nerves) and skeletal system. These injuries are a result of repetitive motions and actions over a period of time. Due to the repetitive nature of their work, professional drivers are prime candidates for MSI.

What are the risk factors for MSI?

MSIs arise from work activities which are frequent and repetitive, such as driving. MSIs are associated with work patterns that include

- fixed or constrained body positions, or awkward postures (such as sitting on your wallet),
- continual repetition of movements (for example, shifting gears),
- force concentrated on small parts of the body, such as the hand or wrist (consider the amount of time spent holding onto a steering wheel for extended periods),
- a pace of work that does not allow sufficient recovery between movements.

Generally, none of these factors acts separately to cause MSIs. MSIs commonly occur as a result of a combination and interaction among them.

Almost all work requires the use of the arms, hands, and back. Therefore, the most common MSIs affect the hands, wrists, elbows, neck, shoulders, and lumbar regions (think carpal tunnel syndrome or upper back tension). Common arm and hand movements, such as bending, straightening, gripping, holding, twisting, clenching and reaching, are all movements drivers would undertake throughout the course of any work shift. However, work using the legs can lead to MSI of the legs, hips, ankles, and feet, such as sore knees or tight hips (from too much sitting).

Finally, some back problems also result from repetitive activities.

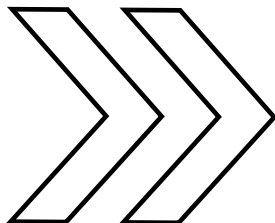
These common movements are not particularly harmful in the ordinary activities of daily life. What makes them hazardous in work situations is the continual repetition, often in a forceful manner, and most of all, the speed of the movements and the lack of time for recovery between them.

What are some symptoms?

Signs that you may be experiencing a musculoskeletal injury include mild to severe aches, low back pain, numbness, tingling, decreased muscle mass, and weakness/loss of strength.

What can be done to prevent this type of injury?

- Taking frequent breaks
 - As a driver, this may be harder to do due to the number of rest places, restaurants, or truck stops available
 - If you can get out of the truck, do so. Move your body, stretch your muscles, go for a short stroll, change your scenery. Not only is the movement good for your body, but the fresh air and new view are good for your mental health.
- Making a priority for rest as soon as it is possible will help to alleviate the pressure on the joints and body.
 - If you can, spend some time stretching while on your break. These stretches could include shoulder rolls and neck stretches to relieve upper back/shoulder tension. Some good resources that can easily be adapted for in-cab can be found on CCOHS' website. While these exercises were designed to be completed at a desk, they can be adapted to the cab or passenger seat of the truck.
- Diet/Nutrition
 - Drink plenty of water and liquids (try to avoid sugary drinks),
 - Carry a smaller cooler (that can fit in the cab) where you can carry fruit and vegetables (when possible), protein bars, and other nutritious snacks,
 - Try to have a nutritious meal once you have stopped for the day, and once again before you start your work shift.



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- Assuming the appropriate posture
 - Be mindful of posture while you're driving, and avoid slouching or over-reaching.
 - Use the adjustment settings on your seat to find a comfortable, ergonomically appropriate fit to your body.
- Strengthening exercises
 - Invest in a small set of weights or resistance bands to keep in the truck. You don't need a full set of weights with a bench to give yourself a workout; even 10-30 pound weights with enough repetitions will increase your strength. Just don't overdo it and injure yourself!
 - You can also do strengthening activities using your own body weight while on a break from driving. Some examples include:
 - » *Strengthen Your Shoulders* (sit up straight with both hands on their respective sides of the steering wheel. Ideally, your elbows should be tucked by your sides and your arms should form a 90-degree angle. This is dependent upon how far you sit from the wheel. Focus on using your shoulders instead of your arms to power the movement. Relax your shoulders, then press your hands as hard as possible against the wheel. You should feel tension in your shoulders when you do this. Hold for 10 seconds, then release. Repeat three to 10 times.)

» *Challenge Your Neck* (strengthen the sides of your neck with isometric exercises. Place your right palm on your right ear. Relax your left shoulder. Simultaneously push your hand and head against each other. Hold for 10 seconds, release and repeat three to 10 times. Place your left palm on your left ear, relax your right shoulders and do the same.)

Do you need more information? RPM can help!

Our Advisory and Training team can help with tips and templates to design a safety and health program. We can also facilitate training to identify hazards and incorporate controls to prevent injuries.

Please note RPM courses are offered to RPM registered companies only. Your company must be registered with RPM and be in the process of working towards certification or must have achieved the SAFE Work Manitoba Trucking Certificate of Recognition. Not yet registered in the RPM program? Today is a great day to get started!

Please contact RPM by emailing info@rpmsafety.ca or calling 204-632-6600, or by visiting our website www.rpmsafety.ca.

