

## TRUCK DRIVER APPRECIATION

Good Day! My name is Jimmy Fields, a sophomore in high school, from Orland Park, Illinois. I wanted to write this essay to show my appreciation for my dad, Jim, who has been a CDL truck driver for over 8 years. My uncle and grandfather were also truck drivers. I'm just learning how to drive and not a bad driver myself so maybe it's a "family calling".

An important aspect to a truckers' life is health and wellness. I have read that truck driving is one of the most unhealthiest jobs. Our drivers need to be healthy, well rested and sharp but how is that done while sitting behind an 18 wheeler for over 10+ hours a day? That's the question I want to help answer. Driver health and wellness should be just as important as DOT regulation and it needs to be discussed by drivers and employers. It needs to be taken seriously.

Step 1 - Diet - Families and employers' should help stress the importance of eating healthy and drinking plenty of water. I'm happy to say my dad starting a low-carb diet about 4 months' ago. He no longer lives on caffeine. He increased his water intake. He's lost over 30 pounds to date. He all around feels better, moves easier and has less aches and pains. There needs to be more healthy food options available at truck stops and not at a higher cost. Teaching our drivers about food prep and planning would help them avoid the quick and cheap food options truck stops offer.

Step 2 - Fitness - It is definitely hard to find any time for exercise while driving a big rig. The more miles you drove, the more money you made so that was the name of the game. Finding time to stop and exercise was tricky. Luckily, we live in the age of technology and can put it to good use. I showed my dad several fitness apps he could download to his phone. The apps showed several exercises he could do in short spurts of 8-10 minutes. He would do these exercises 3 times per day and he noticed a huge change in focus and flexibility. It was quick, easy and got his blood pumping between stops. He overall just felt better.

Step 3 - Sleep/Rest - This being the most important in my opinion. It's so awesome to have my dad home daily now but I do see him struggling with a solid sleep schedule. His start time changes consistently. He could work a 1st shift or 3rd shift with only a few hours notice. Managers/employers' should be more mindful of this and try to keep shift changes to a minimum. It's super important for drivers to have a solid 6-8 hours of straight sleep. Along with that, I have noticed that vacation time is at a minimum for drivers. Most companies only offer 2 weeks vacation time max, while some do offer more...they're few and far between. There should be more discussion on offering loyal employees more vacation time for their years of service. My mom works for an insurance and has awesome vacation time benefits, why not do the same for our dedicated drivers?

We need to thank and care for our drivers because without them we could not function. They deliver our daily goods and are the core of our daily lives. They are not just mindless drivers. They are our fathers, mothers, aunts, uncles, brothers and sisters. We should all be made aware of the struggles they face not while just driving but in living. It's important to take care of them just as they take care of us. Educating the driver, families and employers on their health and well being can only positively impact the industry for our future drivers. Who knows...maybe my future in the industry as well.