



Do I Really Need a Sleep Apnea Test?

Sleep Apnea Tests for Commercial Truck Drivers

Concentra® understands why some truck drivers question whether a sleep apnea test is necessary during a DOT physical. We wanted to shed light on obstructive sleep apnea (OSA), the most common type of sleep apnea, and explain why Concentra medical examiners may refer a driver for an OSA test.

What is sleep apnea?

Sleep apnea is a common disorder in which you have erratic breathing pauses while you sleep. These breathing pauses – known as apnea events – can last anywhere from a few seconds to several minutes and can lead to excessive daytime sleepiness and performance problems (e.g., drowsy driving).

Obstructive Sleep Apnea

Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) occurs when the soft tissue in the back of the throat relaxes during sleep and blocks the airway, causing snoring and apnea events that can occur several times in one hour. During the course of sleep, normal breathing typically restarts, but it can be accompanied by loud choking sounds or snorts.

Three Types of Obstructive Sleep Apnea

	This level of sleep apnea disqualifies a driver if untreated.	
Mild	Moderate	Severe
Involuntary sleepiness during activities that require little attention (e.g., watching TV, reading)	Involuntary sleepiness during activities that require some attention (e.g., meetings, presentations)	Involuntary sleepiness during activities that require more active attention (e.g., talking, driving)
5-14 apnea events per hour	15-30 apnea events per hour	30+ apnea events per hour

The Importance of OSA Testing

- Truck transportation is rated as the most dangerous industry due to the number of work-related deaths.
- Sleep apnea is a major contributor to daytime drowsiness, which could prove deadly for commercial truck drivers and other drivers and passengers on the road.
- Truck drivers with undiagnosed sleep apnea or those who fail to adhere to sleep apnea treatment have higher crash rates.
- Drivers with undiagnosed or untreated sleep apnea have higher rates of high blood pressure, heart attack, and stroke, as well as higher health care costs.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Is a sleep apnea test required for CDL certification?

The short answer is no. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) does not specify that sleep apnea testing is a required procedure for CDL certification; **however, FMCSA does require that a medical examiner applies the Pulmonary Standard when evaluating the health of a commercial truck driver.**

Physical Qualifications for Drivers: Pulmonary Standard [49 CFR 391.41 (b) (5)]

(b) A person is physically qualified to drive a motor vehicle if that person:

(5) Has no established medical history or clinical diagnosis of a respiratory dysfunction likely to interfere with his/her ability to control and drive a commercial motor vehicle safely;

OSA falls under the category of a **respiratory dysfunction that may interfere with safe vehicle operation**; therefore, if you are a driver with some of the risk factors associated with OSA, a Concentra medical examiner may refer you to a sleep specialist.

Concentra is providing this information as a courtesy. Concentra does not endorse, sponsor, or affiliate with any specific sleep medicine specialist, clinic, diagnostic center, or program. Concentra does not require the individual to be seen by any specific sleep health provider. This information does not guarantee insurance coverage of any or all services, testing, and/or treatment. Individuals are encouraged to verify insurance coverage with their carrier prior to seeking care at any specific vendor, clinic, physician, or specialist.

Sleep Apnea Self-check

There are many signs, symptoms, and risk factors for sleep apnea. Take a self-check to see if you're at risk.

Statement	Yes	No
I can be heard snoring heavily through the walls.		
I've been told that I stop breathing while asleep.		
I've been told that I choke or gasp for air while asleep.		
I wake up with a dry mouth and/or sore throat.		
I suffer from morning headaches.		
I experience daytime drowsiness.		
I am age 40 or older.		
I have been diagnosed with high blood pressure and/or diabetes.		
I have a BMI of 25 or greater.		
My neck size is at least 17 inches (male). My neck size is at least 16 inches (female).		

Source: National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI)

If you answered "yes" more than twice, you may be at risk. You should talk to your primary care physician about seeing a sleep medicine specialist.

What to Do If Diagnosed with OSA

You and/or your doctor should contact the Concentra medical examiner to determine your fitness to operate a commercial motor vehicle and to discuss treatment options and next steps.

DOT Certification and Sleep Apnea Testing - Talking Points

When asked why a driver has to take a sleep test as part of the DOT physical

- Driver presents certain risk factors associated with sleep apnea, such as:
 - BMI \geq 33
 - Neck size (\geq 17 inches for males; \geq 15.5 inches for females)
 - Presence of diabetes or high blood pressure (treated with two or more medications)
 - Overweight/obese (i.e., BMI > 40)
- Other factors include:
 - Smoking habits
 - Age (> 40 yrs)
 - Sex (males or postmenopausal females)
 - Race/ethnicity

When asked why Concentra would require a sleep test (when FMCSA doesn't require it)

- FMCSA Pulmonary Standard is a discretionary standard, and thus it is up to the medical examiner to decide whether the driver needs additional testing to rule out a condition (e.g., OSA) that may impair the driver's ability to safely operate a CMV.

Where to direct a driver or employer who wants to verify the Pulmonary Standard

- Physical Qualifications for Drivers [49 CFR 391.41 (b) (5)]:
 - (b) A person is physically qualified to drive a motor vehicle if that person:
 - (5) Has no established medical history or clinical diagnosis of a respiratory dysfunction likely to interfere with his/her ability to control and drive a commercial motor vehicle safely;

Findings that can disqualify a driver pending OSA evaluation and documented successful treatment

- Driver experiences excessive daytime sleepiness
- Involvement in a motor vehicle crash or near crash caused by sleepiness or falling asleep at the wheel
- Driver diagnosed with OSA is not compliant with treatment recommendations

If a driver or employer wants to know what sleep test options are normally recommended

- Polysomnography may be ordered to detect obstructive sleep apnea (OSA)
- Two types typically used in the driver certification process are the in-lab study and home study.
- Overnight sleep study in a certified sleep lab is the "gold standard" for diagnosing OSA
- Home Sleep Apnea Test (HSAT) can also be used but should record at least five hours of sleep time and include oxygen saturation, chest/abdomen plethysmography, nasal pressure, and sleep/wake time.
- The validity of an in-home sleep study is determined by the sleep specialist reading the test.

When asked what happens after a driver is recommended for a sleep study

- Driver or driver's PCP selects a sleep specialist; Concentra can provide a list of non-affiliated sleep vendors.
- Driver undergoes a sleep study.
- PCP receives sleep study results and prescribes treatment.
- If CPAP machine is required, the driver must use more than 70% of time. Machine has a chip inserted to record data.
- Driver prints off sleep study compliance report and brings to next DOT physical.

- If a DOT card was issued on the first DOT recertification, the driver returns to Concentra for a new DOT physical prior to DOT card expiration date (based on drivers' compliance report and current health).
- If the driver was placed on determination pending and not issued a DOT card, the driver must return before the determination pending expiration date with a sleep specialist's report; pending date won't exceed 45 days.
- When driver returns for recertification, Concentra requests one year of data if available.

When asked about the Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) machine

- Most popular treatment option
- Typically recommended for moderate or severe cases of OSA
- Consists of a mask and nose piece that deliver constant, steady air pressure while sleeping

How to maintain DOT compliance using a CPAP machine

- Drivers must use a CPAP machine at least four hours per night, for at least 70% of the time.
- Drivers beginning CPAP treatment may be certified if they have been successfully treated for a minimum of one week.
- Drivers previously established on a CPAP machine may be recertified annually provided they can present at least one year of compliance data.

Other acceptable treatment (besides a CPAP machine) options for a driver with moderate-to-severe OSA diagnosis

- Ear, Nose, and Throat (ENT) surgical procedure
 - Driver should wait at least one full month post-surgery before attempting to get certified.
 - Concern with ENT procedure is sleep apnea signs and symptoms may recur, and the need for additional treatment would be required.
- Bariatric surgery
 - Driver may be certified if treated with CPAP until adequate weight loss is achieved and no symptoms or objective findings of OSA are present.
 - A driver may continue to drive following bariatric surgery as long as he/she is compliant with CPAP treatment.
 - A driver must have a post-op sleep study to be certified without CPAP treatment.
 - If sleep study demonstrates moderate to severe OSA, driver may still be certified if he/she complies with CPAP treatment and has no excessive daytime sleepiness.

For all drivers:

Bring a complete list of ALL of your medications including the doses and your doctors' names/addresses
You may want to complete page one of the exam (driver's portion) to save time at the center

For drivers who require eyeglasses, contact lenses or hearing aids

- Be sure to bring your glasses, contacts, or hearing aids with you
- You will be required to pass both a vision and hearing test

For drivers with high blood pressure

- Your blood pressure **MUST** be below 140/90 on the day of your exam, or you may not qualify for a DOT card

Diabetic drivers should ensure their blood sugar is controlled

- Your blood sugar should be controlled
- It is recommended that you bring the most recent results of a lab test called a Hemoglobin A1C (HgA1C) and your blood sugar logs or other records related to your diabetes

Drivers who have nighttime sleep disturbance (sleep apnea) and use a CPAP machine

- Please provide a reading from your machine documenting your proper use of the machine. A letter from your sleep specialist may also be required.
- You must bring at least 90 days of data, but the past year is best.

Drivers who have heart-related issues, (including the use of stent, valve replacement, pacemaker, open heart surgery, cardiac bypass surgery, or heart attack)

- At the minimum you will need to bring a letter from your Cardiologist (heart specialist), outlining your medical history and current medications, and indicating you are safe to drive a DOT vehicle.
- It is likely you may also need to bring the results of a recent stress test, ECHO cardiogram, or other testing completed within the past 1-2 years.

Drivers who have suffered a stroke, a brain tumor, seizure disorder or bleeding in the brain

- You will need to bring a letter from your Neurologist (brain and nerve specialist), outlining your medical history, current medications, and your current neurologic and psychiatric state.

For drivers who have experienced the permanent loss of use in an arm or a leg

- Please have your physician provide an overview of the injury and if you have any work restrictions due to the injury
- You may need a Skilled Performance Examination in order to qualify for your DOT card.

Drivers who are taking any medications that may cause sedation or sleepiness or if you take controlled substances (narcotics, sleeping pills, anxiety medication, ADHD medication are included)

- You will most likely need a note and medical records from your treating physician regarding the safety of driving a DOT vehicle while using these medications.

For drivers who are taking the blood thinner Coumadin (Warfarin)

You will need to bring a recent INR (blood level and clearance) letter from your doctor.

If you are uncertain if you will qualify for a DOT card, you may want to schedule a visit with your primary or specialty physician BEFORE your re-certification date. Each physical examination, just like each DOT applicant, is unique. The above are guidelines only, and not meant to be all inclusive or as a guarantee of passing the exam. Additional testing or information may be required by your DOT examiner.

