

### **Cumulative stress**

Transport drivers work in a stressful industry and many drivers have developed ways of coping with the normal day-to-day stresses of the job but when a driver is affected directly or indirectly by road trauma their normal coping mechanisms can be quickly overwhelmed and ineffective. This can be worse if you have been involved in multiple accidents over your driving career. The most recent incident, whilst perceived as minor incident, can have major impact because the impact of the prior incidents are suddenly brought to the forefront exploding the current issue to the extreme.

### **Transport work, road trauma and the stress cycle**

The stress of driving is ongoing and in most instances drivers are able to cope with the stress. However when drivers are affected by stress associated with road trauma, these reactions can cause more problems leading to more stress. A stress cycle quickly becomes an established lifestyle, which when left untreated can lead to long-term health problems.

### **Dealing with stress in the workplace**

Unlike other workplaces, the transport driver's workplace is their rig and so drivers often don't recognise when they are experiencing 'work-related' stress. More often than not it is close family, friends and workmates who will be the first to recognize changes in your behavior following exposure to road trauma.

### **Looking after yourself**

There are plenty of things you can do to help break the stress cycle.

Step 1. Recognize your reactions to work related stress and reactions when exposed to unusually stressful situations.

Step 2. Learn how to manage stress reactions.

Step 3. Make changes on the job to reduce work related stress and break the stress cycle.

### **Physical**

- Try to engage in some form of physical activity during breaks when driving and on breaks at home.
- Try and reduce or at least not to increase the amount of alcohol and tobacco.
- Try and eat 6 small regular balanced meals –

### **Relaxation**

- Try and take more frequent, even if short, breaks from driving. More frequent short breaks will keep you more alert and when combined with deep breathing or physical exercise will keep your blood-oxygen levels higher – keeping your mind more alert.

### **Attitudes**

- Try to reorganise the way you do your job as a way of reducing stress – being more efficient will give you more time to yourself. This may not always be possible but even a small change can give you a greater sense of control over your life and your job.
- When you are stressed concentration and judgment can be impaired and accidents more likely to happen.
- Recognise and accept that it will take time to break the stress cycle. You may also need to enlist the help of your family – partner and children – to help break the stress cycle at home as well as on the job.

### **Relationships**

- When you are on a break between runs try and make time for your family or friends.
- Try and set up a network of support amongst your workmates, close family and friends. Try and keep in contact with people you like to be with.
- Talk to people you trust about yourself and your problems to help keep things in perspective.
- Learn how to ask for help when you need it.

Or call Trans-Help



**Help Line**

**1300 78 79 96**

Trans-Help Foundation  
P.O. Box 141

Tarcutta, NSW 2652 or email to  
[admin@transhelpfoundation.com](mailto:admin@transhelpfoundation.com)

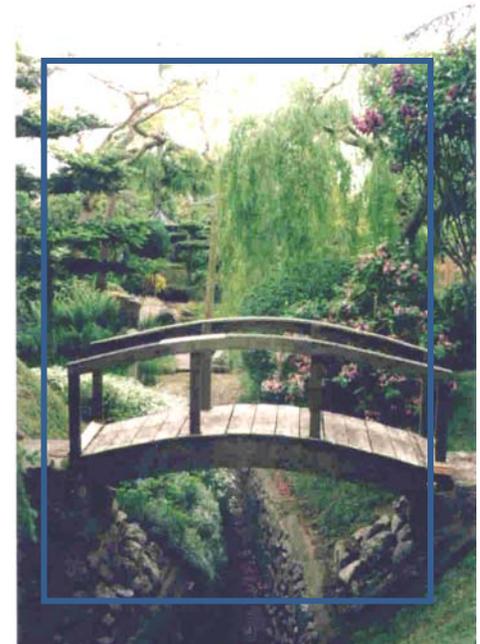
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*Road Trauma*



*Unknowingly affecting you*

**1300 787 996**

Transport drivers are at a greater risk for experiencing the effects of road trauma than other road users simply because of their higher rate of road usage and the high levels of stress associated with working in the transport industry.

## *Understanding road trauma*

Transport drivers may be directly or indirectly affected; directly through involvement in a collision with another vehicle or indirectly through witnessing or assisting at the scene of a crash involving other vehicles.

Road trauma is recognised as the most common form of trauma experienced in the community but its victims receive the least understanding, consideration or support from those close to them, friends, workmates or the wider community.

The effects of road trauma can be wide ranging, affecting all areas of a person's life. You may experience many, a few, or no symptoms at all. Not everyone has the same reaction. For some people there may be a delay in reaction.

Having a reaction is not an indication of weakness or going crazy. It is normal and expected that there will be some kind of reaction after involvement in a highly emotional and potentially life-threatening event.

## *Normal Stress Symptoms*

### *Thinking*

- Trouble thinking clearly, or making decisions, forgetful, feeling confused and disoriented.
- Unable to concentrate, difficulty remembering details or short span of attention.
- Difficulty talking clearly, difficulty finding words to describe events or experience.
- Can't stop thinking about the crash.
- Recurring images of the crash.

### *Physical*

- Feeling physically tired, tightness in muscles, tense and unable to relax, feeling weak.
- Headaches, nausea, sweating, aches and pains, trembling, feeling shaky.
- Changes in appetite, eating more or less, drinking more coffee or alcohol.

- Changes in sleep patterns, tired but unable to sleep, disturbed sleep.
- Low energy levels, feeling heavy, difficulty moving about.
- Palpitations, dizziness, chest pain, diarrhoea
- Easily startled, anxious.

### *Feelings*

- Easily upset or overly sensitive to what others may do or say.
- Impatient, irritable, restless, lashing out for no reason, low level of tolerance, frustrated.
- Feeling overwhelmed, even by everyday activities.
- Feeling insecure and need familiar routines – familiar driving routes.
- Needing frequent contact with family or friends.
- Feeling detached, distant, removed from general activities, loss of interest, don't care anymore.

### *Behaviors*

- Finding it difficult to continue driving.
- Withdrawing from close family and friends.
- Relying on alcohol, tobacco, sedatives or other over-the-counter medications to numb painful thought or feelings.
- Avoiding the scene of the crash.
- Lashing out physically.

### *Relationships*

- Misunderstand or misinterpret what other say.
- Tendency to get things out of proportion.
- Moody, gloomy, feeling sad and hopeless.
- Change in relationships with those close to you.
- Keep talking about the crash all the time.
- Feel others don't understand or care.
- Avoiding friends and work mates.
- Lost interest in life in general and feel there is no future.
- Loss of interest in family activities, can't feel happiness or enjoyment or affection for close family.

### *Reducing the effect*

Remember your reactions are normal. You may not be able to avoid experiencing strong reactions, but there are things that you can do to reduce their effect.

- Try to keep your life as normal as possible.
- Structure your time – keep busy.

- Try to include periods of physical activity/exercise with relaxation.
- Talk to people. Try to express your emotions and needs carefully and honestly with family, friends and others.
- Don't overuse drugs and alcohol. You may be able to numb the pain for a short period, but you may be starting a new set of problems.
- Don't make any big life changes. Your judgment, at the moment may be impaired.
- Spend time with others but also allow yourself some time to rest, sleep and think.
- Don't expect memories to go away – the feelings will stay with you for a long time to come.
- Make as many decisions as possible – this will give you a feeling of control over your life.
- Remember that you are normal and having normal reactions – don't label yourself crazy.
- Ask for help – reach out – people do care.

## *When to seek help*

If you feel unable to change the level of stress you are feeling or you are having distressing symptoms you may need someone to help you work out what to do to improve things. Help and more information may be obtained from your workplace Employee Assistance Provider (EAP) family doctor, local community health centre or local mental health service.

Symptoms indicating when you may need to seek professional help.

- If you feel you cannot handle intense feelings or bodily sensations.
- If you feel your emotions are not falling into place over a period of time, you feel chronic tension, confusion, emptiness or exhaustion.
- If you continue to have bodily symptoms.
- If after a month you continue to feel numb.
- If you continue to have nightmares and poor sleep.
- If you have no person or group you can share your feelings with.
- If your relationships seem to be suffering badly or sexual problems develop.
- If you are having accidents.
- If you continue to smoke and drink, or take drugs to excess, since the event.
- If your work performance suffers.