

# SquareONE Rehabilitation

## Educational Tips

### **How to Manage Chronic Pain in the Transportation Industry**

Peter, (name changed) is a truck driver and has been driving for over 10 years, which had really taken a toll on his lower back pain. He was not able to go fishing or hunting without his pain restricting him. He thought, "This is it. The rest of my life. It's only going to get worse from here." His doctor told him surgery was inevitable.

Chronic pain like Peter is prevalent in the transportation industry. In fact, according to a 2018 study in the Journal of Transport and Health, almost 60% of truck drivers experience musculoskeletal (MSK) pain. The manual labor and prolonged sitting required by truck driver's increase the risk for developing and worsening chronic MSK pain. Understanding the nature of transportation work and its connection to MSK pain is the first step in finding a solution for these workers' pain.

#### **Heavy lifting at work increases risk of chronic pain**

Many drivers just drive 'pin to pin'. Meaning they load or unload their delivery. Peter, as part of his job required him to lift about 4,000 pounds every day. His lower back pain just got worse with continued heavy lifting. Lifting heavy objects without the strength and flexibility needed, can make chronic pain worse. Especially when this is a part of everyday life, the pain can become worse and worse if there is no intervention.

#### **Too much sitting worsens pain**

Driving 4,000 miles a month means Peter is sitting for a large portion of his days, which can lead to chronic pain. The problem is that for chronic pain, resting too much actually makes the pain worse. In fact, movement strengthens joints and helps relieve chronic pain. People suffering from chronic pain often transition to a more sedentary lifestyle. Pain makes it difficult and unpleasant to do daily activities, so people tend to stop doing them. For example, Peter enjoyed outdoor hobbies, such as hunting and fishing, but he began to stay home more due to his pain. When workers feel pain, they should be moving to build strength and reduce pain, especially when they are sitting while driving all day.

#### **Traveling makes it difficult to attend physical therapy**

Being in a different city each day makes it harder for transportation industry workers to make local physiotherapy appointments. According to a study in The National Center for Biotechnology Information, even without specifying industry, the adherence to physiotherapy is low due to barriers including low levels of physical activity, anxiety, poor support, and more. Peter found this to be the case

after his accident because it was difficult to find time to attend the extensive physical therapy needed to improve the strength and flexibility of his lower back. He needed a solution tailored to his lifestyle.

### **How a digital care program helps on-the-move workers**

Because transportation industry workers are often sitting for extended periods of time and then lifting very heavy loads, they are susceptible to strains, sprains, soreness and pain. This was true for Peter, but he refused to let his pain limit his lifestyle and definitely did not want to turn to surgery. The Digital Care Program allows people like Peter to take his treatment on the road and completed the program on his own time with ease.

SquareONE Rehabilitation offers the Digital Care Program as per the literature best practice for MSK care: exercise therapy, education, and behavioral health. Peter was able to set goals with his health coach, learn that movement is medicine through education, and strengthen his lower back and reduce pain through exercise therapy. Not only was he able to feel pain-free at work getting in and out of his car, but he was also able to jump from rock to rock while fishing and walk through the woods while hunting like he was able to do before.

### **References**

Senthanar, S., Bigelow, P., 2018, 'Factors associated with musculoskeletal pain and discomfort among Canadian truck drivers: A cross-sectional study of worker perspectives', *Journal of Transport & Health* 11, 244-252.

Jack, K., McLean, S.M., Moffett, J.K., Gardiner, E., 2010, 'Barriers to treatment in physiotherapy outpatient clinics: A systematic review', *Man Ther.* 2010;15:220–228.