

Building Body Strength

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One of the most common heard complaints about women driving truck is that 'women are not strong enough to do the job'. One does not have to be a body builder to drive truck, but a certain amount of body strength is required to do one's tasks easily.

In '85, while working personnel for a trucking company, a lady applied for a driving job. When it came down to her road test, I found that she did not have the upper body strength to pull herself up into the cabover trucks we had. On asking her where she got her experience, she said that she had learned how to drive from an o/o partner with a conventional truck. I had to send her home, but she returned after a month and was able to climb in and out of the truck. She went on to be a very good driver for the company.

Most loads are not fingerprinted on or off by the driver these days, but you never know when a load will shift, or cartons will fall on your load. You may have to climb into your trailer to replace cartons onto a pallet or at least shift them back straight. Moving load bars to either secure your load or get them out of the way of a loader requires some lifting ability.

Pulling the pins on the tandems is a problem everyone, regardless of gender, runs into. That task requires some knowledge of leverage and upper body strength. Add having to bend over while pulling the lever can strain muscles in your arms, shoulders and back.

After being off the road for 10 yrs and not grand fathering my chauffeurs into a cdl, I had to return to driving school to re-certify. There was another lady there that failed her driving test because she could not pull the hood to do her pretrip. She was a very tiny lady. She had to return to school and work hard to learn leverage and develop the strength needed to do that simple task. She finally passed her test.

Thankfully the days of 'arm strong' steering are gone, but even with power steering, holding the rig steady in high winds, on rutted/grooved or rough roads, or an uneven load, required wrist strength more than upper arm strength. High profile trucks such as condos add to the problem in that even the slightest breeze or wind shift can 'rock the boat'. After a day of stormy driving or driving on curvy roads can make you wish for a wrist brace.

You may not be driving yet, and if so, you can do some things to strengthen your wrists and upper arms that do not require any special equipment or gym charges. If you are driving already, the following can be of benefit also.

To strengthen your wrists: hold a can of soup or vegetables in your hand, support your forearm on the table or chair arm. Curl your wrist back and forth. Start slow and build up repetitions.

To strengthen your arms: use the same can and do arm curls moving up to a larger can as you build strength. Also, standing up: lift your arms from your side to shoulder level holding the can both frontward, backwards and out to the side, again moving up to a larger can as you continue. Sitting down or standing up: holding the can at shoulder level with your arm bent in front or your body or at the side of your shoulder, extend your arm upwards and downwards. These exercises also build up your gripping strength.

To strengthen your back, arms and shoulders: stand in front of a counter with your feet approximately a foot back from the counter. Place your hands on the counter edge and lean into them

holding your body straight, push your body back to a standing straight posture. Repeat. Start slowly with perhaps 5 repetitions and as you add reps, move your feet back further from the counter. Make sure you are not on a floor surface or rug that will slide. This is like a standing up push up.

One's legs should not be ignored in strength building. A long day in slow moving stop and go traffic will take it's toll on the left (clutch) leg specifically. To help get the muscles built up in one's legs many exercises will help. Walking, leg lifts, squats, and cycling are a few.

After a long day of driving make sure that you stretch out your muscles to get the blood flowing and to ease the muscles. Take a few minutes to stretch each muscle group and joint, flexing them in different directions than what you use when driving. One of the main problems that happens to drivers is circulation problems from sitting still for long periods of time. Stretching and exercising cut down on circulation problems, keeps one's system working and can relieve fatigue.

Developing body strength and keeping healthy muscles will add to your enjoyment of your trucking career. It will help you avoid the pitfalls of joint disease and injury leading to shortened careers or lost work time.