

A multicomponent structured health behaviour intervention to improve physical activity in long-distance HGV drivers: the SHIFT cluster RCT

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Disclaimer: This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research, or similar, and contains language which may offend some readers.

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Plain English summary

SHIFT cluster RCT

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Plain English summary

Long-distance heavy goods vehicle drivers are faced with many barriers when it comes to leading a healthy lifestyle. The working environment of long-distance heavy goods vehicle drivers means that they spend long periods of time sitting, have limited opportunities to be active and tend to make unhealthy food choices. Given that the well-being of heavy goods vehicle drivers can directly affect the safety of other road users, as well as their own, strategies are needed to improve their health. The Structured Health Intervention For Truckers (SHIFT) programme is designed to increase physical activity, improve diet and reduce sitting (during non-work time) in heavy goods vehicle drivers. The programme includes a 6-hour interactive education session, use of a Fitbit® (Fitbit Inc., San Francisco, CA, US) to monitor steps, health-coach support and equipment to carry out stretching exercises while in the cab.

To test whether or not the intervention worked, we recruited 382 long-distance heavy goods vehicle drivers from 25 transport sites. Drivers from 12 sites received the intervention, and drivers from 13 sites carried on as usual (forming the control group). Data were collected from both groups at the start of the study, immediately following the 6-month intervention and at 16–18 months from the beginning of the study. We measured drivers' daily step counts and sitting time using a small device worn on the thigh. We measured drivers' sleep and took several health measures. We also spoke to drivers about their thoughts on the intervention.

Following the 6-month intervention, our results revealed that participants receiving the intervention accumulated 1008 more steps daily (i.e. equivalent to \approx 10 minutes of walking) than participants in the control group. This difference was largely driven by the maintenance of physical activity levels in the SHIFT group and a decline in physical activity in the control group. The intervention was well received. Drivers reported that the SHIFT programme had a positive impact on their health behaviours; however, the differences in activity levels between groups were not maintained at 16–18 months.

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