



# DOT Physical Requirements for Sleep Apnea

## What Commercial Truck Drivers Should Know

The **Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA)** does not have requirements in place that mandate a commercial truck driver to complete a sleep apnea test during a DOT physical; however, the FMCSA does have a regulation called the **Pulmonary Standard** that grants a medical examiner the discretion to determine whether testing for a respiratory disorder like sleep apnea is necessary for a driver to be medically certified to operate a commercial motor vehicle (CMV).

### About Sleep Apnea

Sleep apnea is a serious, potentially life-threatening condition characterized by brief, frequent breathing pauses during sleep. A breathing pause of 10 or more seconds is considered an **apnea**. Frequent interruptions in deep recuperative sleep can lead to excessive daytime sleepiness and performance problems (e.g., drowsy driving). Sleep apnea disrupts the body's respiratory efforts while sleeping. Because the body is constantly fighting to breathe, sleep is fragmented.

Other facts about sleep apnea:

- Most people with sleep apnea snore, but snoring is not always a sign of sleep apnea.
- Sleep apnea can cause choking and gasping sensations.
- Sleep apnea often goes undiagnosed and untreated.

### Obstructive Sleep Apnea

When deemed necessary, Concentra® medical examiners recommend drivers undergo testing

for **obstructive sleep apnea (OSA)**. OSA involves a decrease or complete halt in airflow despite the body's ongoing effort to breathe. It leads to an increase in blood pressure and is a major contributor to heart disease – a condition that likewise can hinder a driver's ability to safely operate a CMV.

### Determining Risk for CMV Drivers

During a DOT physical, medical examiners look for deformities that might interfere with breathing or swallowing. These abnormalities and certain risk factors are predictors of sleep apnea and could prompt an examiner to order a sleep test. Risk factors include (but are not limited to):

- BMI
- Neck circumference
- Hypertension
- Diabetes
- Age
- Smoking habits
- Receding chin
- Sex

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The following are examples of findings that may disqualify a driver:

- Driver experiences excessive daytime sleepiness.
- Driver has experienced episodes of falling asleep when he/she should be alert.
- Driver was recently involved in a motor vehicle crash (or a near crash) caused by drowsy driving or sleepiness.
- Driver is not compliant with treatment plan following OSA diagnosis.

## Testing for Obstructive Sleep Apnea

If a driver is at risk of having moderate or severe sleep apnea, sleep specialists normally recommend a **polysomnography**. Also called a “sleep study,” this test can be performed either in a lab or at home.

### In-lab Sleep Study

- Overnight, in-lab sleep study
- Considered the “gold standard” of sleep studies

### Home Sleep Study

- Home sleep apnea test (HSAT) should record at least five hours of sleep time.
- Validity of HSAT must be determined by the examiner evaluating the test.

During a sleep study, a sleep specialist determines whether a patient has OSA using the **Apnea-Hypopnea Index (AHI)**, which measures sleep apnea severity. AHI is determined by the number of apneas plus hypopneas (i.e., abnormally slow or shallow respirations) divided by the hours of sleep time. A hypopnea is defined as at least a 50-percent airflow reduction for 10 seconds or more.

AHI	Level
<5	Minimal (no sleep apnea diagnosis)
5-15	Mild
16-30	Moderate
>30	Severe

## OSA Treatment Options

Treatment options vary by the severity of the disorder. For mild cases, treatment could range from weight-loss recommendations to over-the-counter remedies (e.g., nasal strips, dental guard). For moderate or severe cases, the most commonly prescribed treatment option is the **Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP)** machine, which consists of a mask and nosepiece that deliver constant, steady air pressure while sleeping.

## CPAP and Compliance Recommendations

To maintain compliance:

- Drivers must use a CPAP machine at least four hours per night, 70 percent 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 meet the minimum recommended compliance use. The compliance data should not be more than 30 days old and should be for a minimum of 90 days (some medical examiners may require a year of data if available).

## Sleep Study Referrals

Concentra does not provide sleep testing, however, we have a list of a few national sleep vendors that you can contact, or you can consult your primary care physician for a referral.