

How to Prepare for a DOT Physical Exam

Proven Strategies to Pass a DOT Physical



URGENTWAY
WALK-IN MEDICAL CENTER

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DOT Physical Examination

The Department of Transportation (DOT) has strict guidelines for Commercial Driver's License (CDL) holders. One such requirement is a physical performed by a certified Medical Examiner. The DOT wants to safeguard against accidents and damage that may occur if physically unfit drivers operate heavy vehicles.

As CDL holders also operate vehicles that carry a large number of people, any rules that protect the safety of drivers and passengers can only be a good thing.

Not everyone needs a DOT Physical. Only the following must appear for a DOT examination:

- A driver who is paid to operate a vehicle that carries 9 – 15 passengers. Additionally, the vehicle is driven on interstate highways for commercial purposes and takes the driver over 75 miles away from where they report for work
- Driver of a vehicle that holds 15 passengers including the driver and is used for interstate commerce
- Operator of a vehicle that has a combined gross weight of minimum 10,001 pounds and is operated for interstate commerce reasons
- Driver operates a vehicle that that transports hazardous materials in various quantities

CDL holders cannot go to just any doctor to get their physical completed. The DOT physical needs to be performed by a Medical Examiner who is licensed and registered with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA). If you want to find out if your doctor is an authorized Medical Examiner, try searching the [FMCSA's National Registry online](#). This database contains updated information on all certified doctors in the United States.

Restrictions

The DOT does not allow drivers with specific diseases or illnesses to operate vehicles under a CDL. If you have the following issues or health problems you will not be able to pass a DOT physical:

- Diabetes which requires injectable insulin
- Lower than 20/40 correctable vision in either eye. However, it is permissible to use glasses or contact lenses to satisfy this minimum requirement
- Use of any drugs which are addictive such as amphetamines, narcotics, etc.

The Procedure

DOT Physical Form

There are only two sections that the driver needs to fill out. The remaining parts are related to the actual physical that are to be filled by the Medical Examiner.

Personal Details. Prior to the actual medical exam, the upper portion of the DOT physical form needs to be filled out before meeting with the examiner. In this section, the personal details of the driver are required which include name, birthdate, SSN (social security number), phone number, driver's license number, and address.

Medical Examination Report Form
(for Commercial Driver Medical Certification)

SECTION 1. Driver Information (to be filled out by the driver)

PERSONAL INFORMATION					
Last Name: _____		First Name: _____		Middle Initial: _____	Date of Birth: _____ Age: _____
Street Address: _____		City: _____		State/Province: _____	Zip Code: _____
Driver's License Number: _____		Issuing State/Province: _____		Phone: _____	Gender: <input type="radio"/> M <input type="radio"/> F
E-mail (optional) _____		CLP/CDL Applicant/Holder*: <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No			
Driver ID Verified By**: _____					
Has your USDOT/FMCSA medical certificate ever been denied or issued for less than 2 years? <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> Not Sure					

Health History. In the second section, the forms will ask for the driver's health history. It is important to answer these honestly. There are serious repercussions for providing falsified information. If the driver has any of the following conditions, they must be mentioned:

- Neurological disorders
- Limited or lack of hearing
- Heart issues (disease and attacks)
- Seizures
- Epilepsy
- Limited vision
- Digestive issues
- Stroke
- Some limbs missing
- Chronic pain
- Any injuries on spinal cord
- Kidney disease
- Psychiatric problems
- Paralysis
- Fainting
- Dizziness
- Brain injuries

DRIVER HEALTH HISTORY

Have you ever had surgery? If "yes," please list and explain below.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not SureAre you currently taking medications (prescription, over-the-counter, herbal remedies, diet supplements)
If "yes," please describe below.☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure

Last Name: _____ First Name: _____ Middle Initial: _____ DOB: _____ Exam Date: _____

DRIVER HEALTH HISTORY *(continued)*

Do you have or have you ever had:	Not				Not		
	Yes	No	Sure		Yes	No	Sure
1. Head/brain injuries or illnesses (e.g., concussion)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	16. Dizziness, headaches, numbness, tingling, or memory loss	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Seizures, epilepsy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	17. Unexplained weight loss	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Eye problems (except glasses or contacts)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	18. Stroke, mini-stroke (TIA), paralysis, or weakness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Ear and/or hearing problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	19. Missing or limited use of arm, hand, finger, leg, foot, toe	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Heart disease, heart attack, bypass, or other heart problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	20. Neck or back problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. Pacemaker, stents, implantable devices, or other heart procedures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	21. Bone, muscle, joint, or nerve problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. High blood pressure	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	22. Blood clots or bleeding problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. High cholesterol	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	23. Cancer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. Chronic (long-term) cough, shortness of breath, or other breathing problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	24. Chronic (long-term) infection or other chronic diseases	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. Lung disease (e.g., asthma)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	25. Sleep disorders, pauses in breathing while asleep, daytime sleepiness, loud snoring	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. Kidney problems, kidney stones, or pain/problems with urination	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	26. Have you ever had a sleep test (e.g., sleep apnea)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. Stomach, liver, or digestive problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	27. Have you ever spent a night in the hospital?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13. Diabetes or blood sugar problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	28. Have you ever had a broken bone?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Insulin used	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	29. Have you ever used or do you now use tobacco?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14. Anxiety, depression, nervousness, other mental health problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	30. Do you currently drink alcohol?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15. Fainting or passing out	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	31. Have you used an illegal substance within the past two years?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
				32. Have you ever failed a drug test or been dependent on an illegal substance?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

DOT Physical Exam

During the actual exam, the medical examiner will first go over the driver's health history before conducting the physical. They will then inquire about any medications being taken on a regular basis. It is prudent to bring the actual medicine bottles to avoid any confusion. After all this information has been taken down the doctor starts the physical exam which includes the following:

- Check abdomen if there are any abnormalities by pressing on it
- Check blood pressure
- Check for hernia
- Check pulse
- Conduct a vision test
- Conduct an exam on eyes, ears, nose, throat, and mouth
- Listen to lungs
- Listen to heartbeat
- Check the spine if there are any deformities
- Conduct a neurological exam

Post-Exam Discussion

After the physical has been completed, the Medical Examiner goes over any issues the driver's medical condition and history may pose. These problems will then be mentioned on the DOT physical form. This information is then used by the examiner conducting the exam to determine if the driver satisfies the conditions required to acquire a DOT medical certificate. The form will also mention if any eye enhancement is required such as lenses or glasses. Impediments that may require a hearing aid will also be listed.

Medical Certificate

A typical medical certificate lasts for 2 years. If a health condition like high blood pressure or blood sugar requires periodic checkup, the DOT medical card may be issued for a shorter period of time. This can range from 3 months to a year. If the requirements to pass the DOT physical are not met, then it is unlikely that a certificate will be awarded.

Convenient DOT Physicals

UrgentWay provides DOT physicals at convenient locations across New York. To find a walk-in clinic near you check out [*UrgentWay's location page*](#).

Exemptions

Drivers can apply for exemptions to certain conditions including hearing, diabetes, vision, or seizures. The Federal Diabetes and Vision Exemptions Programs have certain requirements that drivers will need to meet before they are approved for the exemption. In a typical exemption request, the following information is requested:

- History of employment
- Previous experience driving
- Record of motor vehicles
- Medical exams
- And any other similar documents

After filing out the application, a final decision is made within 3 months from the date of application. It is important to note that these exemptions are only possible for those who drive a commercial vehicle for interstate commerce.

Another exemption that a driver can receive is for injectable insulin. This is a fairly recent development and previous drivers could not gain a waiver for diabetes if they used insulin. Things have changed and now the law allows a [*Diabetes Exemption Application*](#). In order to clear the application with the FMCSA, a driver must pass several screenings and provisions.

4 Things to Know about the DOT Physical

Drug Test

The DOT physical has a 5-panel urinalysis that checks for:

- Marijuana
- Cocaine
- Opiates (heroin included)
- Amphetamines
- Phencyclidine (PCP)

This [laboratory test](#) is extremely sensitive and can detect even the tiniest traces of drugs in the drivers urine sample. Marijuana will show up as positive even if it was smoked 30 days before the test.

Urine Test Isn't Only Testing for Drugs

The urine test also checks for sugar and protein within the sample. The presence of glucose can point towards diabetes and kidney related issues.

Blood Pressure Requirements

High blood pressure will not automatically disqualify a driver from the DOT medical card. According to the FMCSA:

- Drivers who have blood pressure readings lower than 140 systolic and 90 diastolic are eligible to acquire a DOT card for 2 years
- Drivers whose blood pressure is 159 systolic and 99 diastolic can be issued the DOT card for 1 year
- Drivers with a blood pressure higher than 160 systolic and 100 diastolic can only get a 3 month card. This is on top of the condition that they need to go back to the examiner for proper medical treatment (drug therapy to reduce hypertension). If their blood pressure goes down to normal levels, then the driver can acquire a medical card for a year

Disqualifying Conditions

Aside from uncontrolled blood pressure and diabetes, drivers can get disqualified from getting a DOT card because of poor vision, mental issues, advanced heart disease, epilepsy, and other conditions. Drivers can also fail the DOT physical due to lifestyle choices like alcoholism. Additionally, a driver with missing or damaged limbs will also fail the DOT physical since it impacts their driving skills.

Tips for Success

There are certain actions that an individual can take to increase his or her chances of succeeding in a DOT Physical Exam. Below we will tell you how.

Things to Avoid

Limit Intake of Energy Drinks, Caffeine, Alcohol, Over-the-Counter Medicines, and Cigarettes. Nicotine, alcohol, over-the-counter medicines, and caffeine are all known to increase blood pressure in the long-term and short-term. Energy drinks, coffee, certain medicines, and nicotine will increase blood pressure almost immediately. If a driver's blood pressure temporarily rises due to increased intake of caffeine, alcohol, medicines, or nicotine, then this individual may end up being permanently banned from getting a DOT medical certificate, even though there may be no long-term problems. These products are known to raise blood pressure and someone with a normal reading of 120/80 can jump up to a reading of 140/100 in the short-term. Therefore, it is wise to eliminate intake of these products at least 24 hours before the DOT physical. If you can avoid them for longer it will improve your results during the physical. Additionally, alcohol and nicotine have other harmful effects including long-term hypertension and cardiovascular issues. If you can stop smoking for 7 days, nicotine is removed from the body. Alcohol also causes a number of kidney problems which is tested in the DOT physical.

Limit Food before Exam. It is important that the driver doesn't eat a large meal before going for the exam. This is especially the case if the driver is diabetic or is at risk of developing diabetes. Excessive intake of food before the test can cause elevated level of sugar in your urine. The Medical Examiner may see this as grounds for ordering a blood sugar test, which can lead to potential disqualification or a limited DOT physical card.

Minimize Salt intake. Limiting salt consumption will positively affect blood pressure. High sodium is found in many common every day foods including fast food and processed products. You should generally avoid such foods but make a particular note to keep salt intake lower before the physical to avoid any higher than normal blood pressure readings.

Things to Do

Take any Required Medication in the Morning. If you are on any blood pressure or diabetes medication, take it in the morning and bring the bottles to show the examiner. Should a driver's blood pressure or diabetes be under control with the medication, a [DOT physical medical certificate](#) can be granted.

Eat Foods that are Rich in Potassium. Eating foods rich in potassium have a number of short- and long-term benefits to lowering blood pressure. Foods like bananas, greens and potatoes all lower blood pressure in a few hours after eating them.

Be Well-Hydrated. People who do not drink enough water retain a much higher amount of sodium (salt) and sugar in their system, which is a leading cause of high blood pressure and other issues.

Drink Beet Juice while Eating Vegetables and Fruits. According to the American Heart Association, foods that have high levels of nitrate in them like beets significantly reduce blood pressure. Eating various other fruits and vegetables have numerous benefits to overall health which will help one pass the DOT physical.

Eat Raw Garlic Regularly. Aside from boosting one's immune system, raw garlic has a number of benefits for your cardiovascular system. Drivers can chop up garlic and swallow it with water, chew it, or eat it with food. Having about 4 cloves of raw garlic is known to have the same effect as blood pressure medicine like Atenolol. Garlic is also responsible for improving the level of cholesterol in an individual which improves heart health and limits heart disease. Furthermore, garlic also regulates blood sugar with increased insulin in the body, which helps control diabetes. However, it is important to moderate the amount of garlic that one eats to avoid any potential issues such as excessive blood thinning and odor.

Lifestyle Changes

Exercise/Physical Activities. Exercise has tremendous benefits to your health and the American Heart Association recommends 150 minutes per week of moderate exercise or 75 minutes per week of vigorous exercise to improve overall cardiovascular health. Drivers can add physical activity to their daily routine to gradually improve their overall health and in turn improve the chances of them passing their DOT medical exam.

Hygiene and Good Manners. One of the most important unstated things that the examiner checks is the character and demeanor of the driver. If the driver comes in with poor hygiene and isn't polite to the staff, then that alone can form grounds to fail the DOT physical. A driver's temperament is extremely important because road rage can cause serious accidents and harm to others. Furthermore, hygiene is an important indicator of disposition and a well presented driver has a very positive impact on the Medical Examiner.

Get a good nights sleep. A proper night's sleep before the exam can help reduce the overall stress before a DOT physical. Sleep deprivation is responsible for cardiovascular (heart) issues, increased blood pressure, and a number of other negative effects.

Meditate and Think Pleasant Thoughts. The American Heart Association also recommends alternative methods of reducing blood pressure and stress. One such means is meditation and thinking pleasant thoughts. This may sound unscientific but research has shown over and over again that positive thinking and pleasant reflection help reduce tension.

Bring Along any Compliance Letters for Medications or Illnesses

If the driver has any compliance letters regarding any conditions or medicines, the examiner will be impressed as it will show responsibility. Even if the driver does have some underlying conditions, having these compliance letters can make the difference between passing and failing.

Conclusion

This guidebook is meant to inform the reader about what takes place during a DOT physical and why the physical looks at specific parts of a driver's health. Just by having the knowledge in this guidebook, you are better off than the majority of drivers that go into the medical exam without any knowledge of what to expect. Make sure to follow all the tips to increase your chances of success and getting a full 2-year DOT physical card. Drivers should also keep in mind that many of the points presented in this guide can be followed all year long to help improve general health making it easier to clear DOT physicals in the years to come.

NO APPOINTMENT NEEDED

(718) 285 7801

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