

Ergonomic Best Practices for Ophthalmologists: Minimizing Musculoskeletal Strain in the Clinic

Vidushi Sharma¹ and Suresh K Pandey^{2*}

¹Ex. Joint Secretary, Women Wing, IMA Rajasthan, Director, SuVi Eye Institute & Lasik Laser Center, C 13 Talwandi, Kota, Rajasthan, India

²Past President, Kota Division Ophthalmological Society (KDOS), Ex. Vice President, Indian Medical Association (IMA) KOTA, Director, SuVi Eye Institute & Lasik Laser Center, C 13 Talwandi, Kota, Rajasthan, India

***Corresponding Author:** Suresh K Pandey, Past President, Kota Division Ophthalmological Society (KDOS), Ex. Vice President, Indian Medical Association (IMA) KOTA, Director, SuVi Eye Institute & Lasik Laser Center, C 13 Talwandi, Kota, Rajasthan, India.

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Introduction

Ophthalmologists, like many medical professionals, are prone to developing musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) due to the physical demands of their work. The repetitive tasks, static postures, and prolonged use of specialized equipment, such as slit lamps and operating microscopes, place significant strain on various parts of the body. This editorial aims to provide a comprehensive overview of ergonomic best practices tailored specifically for ophthalmologists, emphasizing the importance of workplace ergonomics in minimizing musculoskeletal strain and enhancing overall well-being.

The prevalence of musculoskeletal disorders in ophthalmology

Musculoskeletal disorders among ophthalmologists are alarmingly common, with studies indicating that a significant percentage of practitioners experience symptoms. A survey by Venkatesh., *et al.* [1] found that 53% of ophthalmologists reported experiencing neck pain, while 29% reported lower back pain. Another study by Dhimitri., *et al.* [2] highlighted that over 15% of ophthalmologists considered leaving the profession due to the severity of their MSDs. These statistics underscore the critical need for implementing effective ergonomic interventions in ophthalmology practices.

Understanding ergonomics in ophthalmology

Ergonomics is the science of designing the workplace to fit the worker, thereby reducing the risk of injury and enhancing productivity. In the context of ophthalmology, ergonomics involves optimizing the setup of examination rooms, surgical theatres and office spaces to support natural body mechanics and reduce physical strain. The primary ergonomic challenges in ophthalmology include prolonged static postures, repetitive movements, and the use of non-adjustable equipment.

Ergonomic adjustments in the examination room

Slit lamp ergonomics: The slit lamp is an essential tool in ophthalmology, but its use often requires sustained awkward postures. Adjusting the height of the slit lamp and the patient's chair is crucial. The patient's chin should be level with the ophthalmologist's line of sight, allowing the practitioner to maintain a neutral posture. A study by Kumar., *et al.* [3] suggested the use of adjustable chairs with lumbar support for both the patient and the ophthalmologist to enhance comfort and reduce strain.

Chair design: Investing in ergonomic chairs with proper lumbar support and adjustability is fundamental. Chairs should allow for height adjustment to ensure that the ophthalmologist's feet are flat on the floor and their knees are at a 90-degree angle. Lumbar support helps maintain the natural curve of the spine, preventing lower back pain.

Proper lighting: Adequate lighting reduces eye strain and improves visibility during examinations. Adjustable overhead lighting and task lighting can be used to ensure that the ophthalmologist can work without hunching over or squinting. Implementing adjustable, anti-glare lights can significantly reduce the risk of neck and upper back strain.

Ergonomic adjustments in the operating room

Operating microscope positioning: The positioning of the operating microscope is critical in preventing neck and shoulder strain. The microscope should be adjustable in height and angle to allow the ophthalmologist to maintain a neutral neck position. Stereomicroscopes with inclinable binocular tubes are particularly beneficial. A study by Beckman, *et al.* [4] demonstrated that adjustable microscopes significantly reduced the prevalence of neck pain among ophthalmologists.

Surgical table and instrument layout: The height of the surgical table should be adjustable to allow for comfortable positioning of the arms and hands. Instruments should be within easy reach to avoid unnecessary stretching or awkward movements. Proper layout and organization of surgical tools can streamline workflow and reduce physical strain.

Foot pedals and hand controls: Foot pedals used to control microscopes or other surgical equipment should be positioned to allow for natural foot movements. Hand controls should be ergonomically designed to minimize repetitive strain.

Conclusion

Implementing ergonomic best practices in ophthalmology clinics is essential for minimizing musculoskeletal strain and enhancing the overall well-being of practitioners. By making thoughtful adjustments in the examination room and operating theatre, ophthalmologists can significantly reduce the risk of developing musculoskeletal disorders. This includes proper positioning of the slit lamp, use of ergonomic chairs, adequate lighting, and adjustable equipment. Additionally, incorporating regular breaks, exercises, and mindfulness techniques can further support musculoskeletal health. Addressing these ergonomic challenges not only improves the quality of life for ophthalmologists but also enhances their productivity and longevity in the profession [5-10].

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