



ERGO SUCCESS

Neck Pain

The Use of Loupes Improves Posture and Health of One Hygienist

The use of loupes while performing work on dental patients allowed hygienist to minimize the use of awkward postures.

The Problem

A few years into practicing dental hygiene, the hygienist began to experience back and neck pain. She realized that the postures she used were probably not ideal but was not sure how to correct them while still maintaining adequate views of the patient's mouth. When the pain became more chronic she went to see a chiropractor. X-rays were taken of her spine and it was determined that the problems were muscle related. She went in for a series of adjustments with subsequent massage and ultrasound therapy which alleviated the pain, but required visits 3 times a week. This became very time consuming and eventually impossible to fit into her busy schedule. She self medicated with an occasional Motrin or Advil from that point on, but still worked in pain.

The Solution

In February 2006, she attended a seminar at the Midwinter Meeting of the American Dental Association on the topic of ergonomics. The speaker was a hygienist who discussed many changes that can be made in a hygienist's workstation and equipment to improve the dental hygienist's posture and extend the longevity of her career. She advocated the use of surgical loupes because they provide much greater magnification than normal corrective eyeglass lenses. They improve the field of vision so the hygienist can then work with less bending and hunching of the body and with less eyestrain. Loupes can also be purchased with attached lighting, which more fully illuminates the field of work, again further reducing eyestrain and the attendant body tension. After the course, she stopped by a manufacturer's booth to "test them out"

and was very impressed. She made an appointment to have a technician come into the office to fit her for a pair. The technician measured the distance between the hygienist's eyes and the patient's mouth while the hygienist sat with proper posture in her clinician's chair. The magnification was then tailored to suit her individual needs. No other changes were made to the workstation.

The Impact

The hygienist has been using surgical loupes for a little over a year and says she feels feel 100% better. Her back and neck pain are gone and she feels less tired after a day of work. In addition to working in a private dental practice, she is also on the faculty of a dental school. She shares her experience with her students, and uses loupes when demonstrating procedures. She does not recommend that students use loupes during their first year treating patients because they may have difficulty mastering mirror usage and the difference between direct and indirect vision, but approximately 50% of the second year students now use loupes.

Although loupes are expensive, the savings in pain, fatigue, and the cost and time of medical visits have justified the expense.

Kim Fvasula, RDH, works in a private dental practice in Chicago, and is on the faculty at the College of Dentistry, University of Illinois-Chicago.

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Other Resources

American College of Sports Medicine

www.acsm.org

American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons

www.aaos.org

McKenzie Institute International

www.mckenziemdt.org

Athlete's Performance

www.athletesperformance.com

Arthritis Foundation

www.arthritis.org

American Physical Therapy Association

www.apta.org

Healthy People 2010

www.healthypeople.gov

North American Spine Society

www.spine.org

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advocate for oral health

alliance
An OSHA Cooperative Program