



Women's Health & Wellness



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Introduction

Many people assume women judges live in privilege and serenity, but research from different parts of the world tell a different story.

The Judicial profession is highly demanding and judges are most exposed and vulnerable to workload-related occupational stress and burnout.^[1] Moreover, female judges experience greater work-related stress and are more concerned with safety issues, particularly personal safety, than their male counterparts.^[2] The judicial profession has various types of safety hazards classified into environmental, ergonomic, physical, psychosocial, and workload hazards.^[3]

The judicial aspect of the profession is sedentary in nature, as judges sit for prolonged hours, listening, writing, reading, and facing the public in court. The administrative aspect of a judge's work is no less sedentary. Behind the scenes, a woman judge performs her gender-specific roles as daughter, sister, aunt, wife/partner, mother, or grandmother, sometimes in combination of some, or in exceptional cases, concurrently as all.

To perform optimally in professional and private life, a woman judge needs to prioritize overall wellbeing, as this has an impact on judicial integrity and public perception. However, judges often do not take time off work for healthcare visits or consultations, and they have insufficient time for optimal physical and mental wellness.^[4] This may contribute to late diagnosis and treatment of diseases,^[5] particularly those associated with occupational hazards.

This paper outlines various strategies for health and wellness for women in the judicial profession. First, it identifies the pertinent ergonomic hazards of the profession and their associated health risks for women. Second, it outlines strategies to mitigate these risks. Third, it offers practical approaches for achieving and maintaining optimal health and wellbeing.



Defining Health and Wellness

Health

Health is the state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing and not just the absence of disease or infirmity. This means health encompasses the overall quality of life and not just a life devoid of illness. Factors, such as socioeconomic conditions, environment, and lifestyle (genetics, education, community support)¹ are major determinants of this state of well-being.^[6]

Wellness

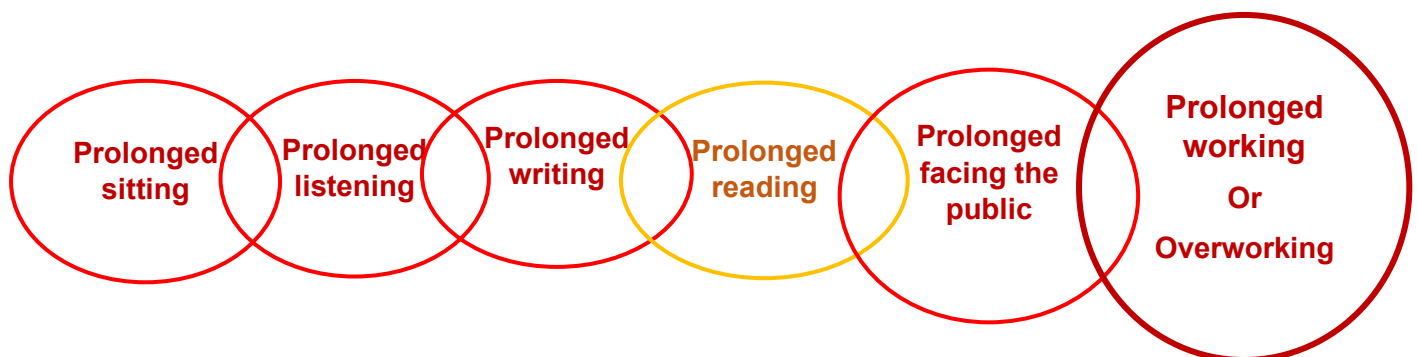
Wellness is the active, conscious pursuit of activities, choices, behaviors, and lifestyles that lead to a state of optimal holistic health and wellbeing, encompassing physical, nutritional, mental, emotional, social, spiritual, intellectual, financial, and environmental aspects. It is a proactive, multidimensional approach to achieving one's full potential. ^{[7], [8]}

Ergonomic Hazards of the Judicial Profession

Ergonomic hazards are physical factors in the work place, improper workplace practices, or poorly designed work spaces that can lead to musculoskeletal injuries and disorders. Ergonomic hazards of the judicial profession that are pertinent to this discussion are identified in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1

Ergonomic Hazards of the Judicial Profession



¹ Lifestyles comprise internal, external, and temporal dimensions and are behavioural patterns of individual choice, influenced by the socioeconomic context in which a person lives. On the one hand, the responsibility for one's choices is emphasised, with individual agency as the primary source of health and the prevention of pathologies; on the other, the focus is on health determinants as factors that combine themselves to define the possibilities of choice. ^[9]



Table 1

Summary of Ergonomic Hazards, Associated Health Risks, and Mitigation Approaches

Hazardous Activity	Associated Health Risks	Mitigation Approaches
Prolonged sitting — negatively affects every system of the body	Physical: Cardiovascular, ^[10] deep vein thrombosis, pulmonary embolism, metabolic, and musculoskeletal disorders, poor posture, spondylosis, hormone imbalance, chronic inflammation, cancer (lung & endometrium) ^[11] Mental: Cognitive problems—poor executive function, memory, attention, and visuospatial skills—all important aspects of work performance. ^[12] Neural pain, anxiety, and depression Social: Isolation, job dissatisfaction, etc.	Exercise regularly: 60–75 minutes of moderate-intensity activity per day, 5 days/week Use ergonomic office setups, Take active breaks of 2-3 min every 30–45 minutes of sitting or 5–6 min every hour Practice daily self-care/self-love, regular mindfulness and meditation; Do periodic health checks/know your numbers
Prolonged listening	Physical: Physical exhaustion, musculoskeletal pain, chronic sleep deprivation, systemic disease risks: heart attacks, strokes, etc. Mental: Mental fatigue, depression, anxiety, vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress disorder. ^[13] Social: Work-life imbalance, chronic irritability, decreased creativity and productivity, job dissatisfaction, etc.	Exercise regularly Practice daily self-care/self-love, regular mindfulness and meditation; Do breathing and visualization exercises; Participate in a community that you value, pray/meditate/connect to the outdoors Seek support—therapist or peer support network
Prolonged writing	Physical: Chronic hand pain, writer's cramp, tendonitis, tenosynovitis, ^[14] etc., vision problems Mental: Isolation, depression, anxiety, etc.	Use the appropriate equipment/hand movements; Take active breaks and do stretches Use ergonomic setup or adjustments
Prolonged reading	Physical: Neck/shoulder pain, vision problems Mental: Cognitive overload/impairment Social: Isolation	Take breaks (follow the 20-20-20 rule) Maintain a balanced lifestyle (exercise, sleep, self-care, etc.)
Prolonged facing the public	Physical: threats of/fear of violence, intimidation, and harassment Mental: anxiety, depression, stress from fear, worry, uncertainty, etc. Digital and media: cyberbullying and public hostility. Social: insecurity, decreased productivity, job dissatisfaction, etc.	Exercise regularly Prioritize self-care/self-love Practice mindfulness & meditation Do breathing and visualization exercises Seek support—therapist or peer support network



Hazard Mitigation Strategies

Figure 2

Measures to Mitigate the Hazards of Prolonged Sitting



Note: Source ^[15]

General Strategies

Ergonomic Setup: Use an ergonomic supportive chair and table to maintain good posture to minimize spinal strain (the 90-90-90 rule² is useful here).

Use appropriate materials and hand movements when writing, maintain proper viewing distance (about 25 inches, i.e., at arm's length) from the computer screen. Position the screen so your eyes gaze slightly downward, not straight ahead or up.

Take active breaks: Stand up or walk around every 30–45 minutes during the work day to counteract muscle inactivity and reduce strain. Incorporate “**exercise snacks**”³ and/or stretches throughout the day to boost circulation.^[16] Focus on stretches for the back, neck, shoulders, and legs. Perform hand, wrist, and neck exercises regularly.^[14]

Exercise regularly: Do 60–75 minutes of moderate-intensity activity per day, five days per week to counteract the associated health risks of excessive sitting.^[17]

² The 90/90/90 rule is a basic sitting guideline used in ergonomics to promote better posture. It refers to keeping three parts of your body at 90-degree angles while seated: Hips at a 90° angle to your torso, knees bent at a 90° angle with your feet flat on the floor, and elbows resting at a 90° angle while using your keyboard or mouse. When these three points are aligned, your body is in a neutral and relaxed position, which minimizes stress on your muscles and joints.

³ Exercise snacks are short, intense bursts of physical activity—lasting 30 seconds to 2 minutes—performed throughout the day to boost heart rate. Examples: running or marching in place; sets of 10–20 push-ups, squats, or lunges; dancing, jumping jacks, wall push-ups or calf raises; brisk walking around the office/house, sit-to-stands, foot flexions and extensions, or arm circles.



Mindful Movement: Practice and maintain good posture by being aware of your body and making small adjustments to improve your posture throughout the day. Make a conscious effort to sit up straight and avoid slouching.

To sit upright: Keep your back straight and feet flat on the floor when sitting. Do not cross your legs, as this can disrupt alignment.

To stand tall: Distribute your weight evenly between both feet, engage your core muscles, keep your chest open, and keep your shoulders down.

Cognitive/Mind–Body Strategies

Practice meditation, focus on positive thoughts, affirm your strengths, do breathing and visualization exercises.

Participate in a community that you value, pray/meditate/do readings, connect to the outdoors, sing, etc.

Strategies to Mitigate Eye Damage

Practice the 20-20-20 Rule: Every 20 minutes, take a 20-second break to look at something 20 feet away to relax focusing muscles.

Increase blinking: Consciously blink frequently to keep your eyes hydrated or use lubricating eye drops to combat dryness.

Adjust screen brightness: Keep screens at a comfortable distance and avoid excessive brightness. Try using a matte screen filter to cut glare.

Use Computer Eyeglasses.⁴ These are prescription glasses that allow your eyes to focus specifically at computer screen distance. Some of these glasses have multifocal lenses that help shift your focus quickly between close, intermediate, and far distances.

Sedentary Thresholds and Risk Levels of Chronic Health Issues

Sedentary Threshold	Risk Level
Less than 4 hours per day:	Low Risk
4–8 hours per day:	Medium Risk
8–10 hours per day:	High Risk
Greater than 10 hours per day:	Very High Risk

Above a threshold of 6–8 h/day of total sitting, the risk for chronic health outcomes rapidly increases. ^[18]

⁴ Note that computer glasses for reducing eye strain are not the same as “blue light blocking” glasses.

Also, the relationship between screen time and glaucoma is complex and still under investigation. However, the potential risks highlight the need for awareness and preventive measures to protect our eye health in the digital era. ^[19]



Total time matters: The total, cumulative time spent sitting matters, not just consecutive hours. Exercise helps, but it is not a cure-all. Even if you exercise, long hours of sitting can still increase your risk of chronic health issues.

WHO Recommendations for Physical Activity⁵.

The following physical activity levels provide substantial health benefits.

1. Children and adolescents (5–17 years):

- At least 150–300 min of moderate-to-vigorous intensity, mostly aerobic, physical activity, throughout the week
- Vigorous-intensity aerobic activities, as well as those that strengthen muscle and bone should be incorporated at least 3 days a week.

2. Adults (18–64 years):

- At least 150–300 min of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity per week, or
- At least 75–150 min of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity throughout the week
- Add muscle-strengthening activities at moderate or greater intensity that involve all major muscle groups on 2 or more days a week.

For additional health benefits (when not contraindicated for those with chronic conditions)

- Adults may increase moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity to >300 min, or
- Do >150 min of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, or a combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity throughout the week.

3. Adults (65 years and older):

- As for Adults
- Do varied multicomponent physical activity that emphasizes functional balance and strength training at moderate or greater intensity on 3 or more days a week, to enhance functional capacity and to prevent falls.

4. All pregnant and postpartum women without contraindications:

- Undertake regular physical activity throughout pregnancy and post-partum
- Do at least 150 min of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity throughout the week
- Incorporate a variety of aerobic and muscle-strengthening activities. Adding gentle stretching may also be beneficial.

⁵ This refers to the World Health Organization 2020 guidelines on physical activity and sedentary behavior. [20]



Wellness Strategies for Optimal Wellbeing

- Prioritize hydration and a healthy diet
- Prioritize sleep
- Prioritize physical activity/exercise
- Prioritize rest, relaxation, mindfulness, and breathing exercises
- Prioritize self-care/self-love
- Take time off work to relax and rejuvenate
- Maintain a satisfactory work-life balance
- Seek support/networks on stress and wellbeing
- Avoid risk behaviors/stressful conditions
- Get regular health screening and tests

Prioritize Hydration and a Healthy Diet

- Get 15 minutes of early morning sun exposure daily to maintain your vitamin D levels, which is essential for many body functions, including bone growth, remodeling, smooth muscle contraction, and blood sugar-to-energy conversion.
- Drink water frequently, at least two liters per day or as much as is comfortable for you.
- Eat real food, savor the aroma and each bite of your food, chew your food 30 or more times before swallowing. This aids digestion and satiety.
- Eat at least one full meal per day (three meals per day recommended)
- Eat more slow release foods (complex carbohydrates, e.g., tubers or unripe plantains)
- Eat enough proteins, choose fish, white meat (goat, deer, chicken, duck, etc.), and healthy plant proteins (legumes, lentils, peas, etc.) instead of red meat.
- Eat more fruit and vegetables. Focus on eating seasonal fruits and vegetables, like watermelon, soursop, cucumber, waterleaf, to nourish your body and stay energized.
- Eat foods with anti-inflammatory properties: unripe plantains, unripe bananas, hazelnuts, dark chocolate, pomegranates, blueberries, and strawberries.
- Add spices with anti-inflammatory properties to your food: garlic, ginger, rosemary, cloves, turmeric, etc.
- Eat healthy fats and oils: Olive oil, avocado oil, palm oil, but use them in moderation.
- Avoid added sugar, junk food, alcohol, caffeine, saturated fats, processed foods/white rice, and added salt.
- You may consider intermittent fasting, which helps to improve heart health.



Prioritize Sleep

- Go to bed on an empty stomach (i.e., eat your dinner at least 4 hours before going to bed)
- Avoid stimulants (e.g., coffee, kola nuts, or black tea) at least 6 hours before bedtime
- Avoid phone, computer, and TV screens about 90 minutes before bed
- Keep bedtime consistent—go to sleep at the same time and wake up at the same time every day
- Get 8–10 hours of sleep daily
- Keep your bed room quiet, cool, and dark.
- Have a sleep routine: do a wind-down ritual one hour before you sleep (e.g., dim the lights, read a book, drink a cup of warm water or calming tea, listen to soft music, do meditation, or do breathing exercises).

Prioritize Physical Activity/Exercise

- Take 10–15-minute walks post-meal to aid digestion and blood sugar regulation.
- Aim for 30–60 min/day of moderate-intensity or 15–30 min/day vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity 5 days/week for regular exercise.
- Aim for 60–75 min/day of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity 5 days/week to counteract the hazards of excessive sitting.
 - Moderate-intensity activity raises heart rate to 50–70% of your maximum heart rate⁶. It is challenging but not exhausting.
 - The talk test: you can speak in full sentences but cannot sing comfortably.
 - Vigorous-intensity activity raises the heart rate to 70–85% of your maximum heart rate⁷ and requires a greater oxygen demand, resulting in faster breathing and higher energy expenditure.
 - The talk test: Vigorous activity limits conversation to a few words at a time.
- **Do resistance training 3 times/week:** Use weights, resistance bands, your body weight, etc. This improves cardiovascular health while also reducing the risks of diabetes and high cholesterol, and improving the function of bones and joints when performed correctly.
- **Aim for 7000 or more steps/day:** The more you walk, the better it is for your body and brain.

A sedentary lifestyle (walking fewer than 5,000 steps per day) is associated with a rapid decline in cognition and daily functioning.

⁶ This is rated at about 5–6 on a 0–10 perceived exertion scale and burns 3 to 5.9 METs (metabolic equivalent of tasks) in terms of energy expenditure.

⁷ This is rated at about 7 or 8 on a perceived exertion scale and burns >6 METs



Prioritize Rest, Relaxation, Mindfulness, and Breathing Exercises

To better manage stress over the long term, try the following mind-body therapies ^[21]

- Mindfulness meditation
- Gentle yoga
- Tai chi
- Deep breathing exercises
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Biofeedback
- Guided imagery

You can practice the following deep breathing exercises daily

One-Minute Relaxation Breathing

Close your eyes, breathe in for a count of four, and exhale for eight. Repeat this taking four or five more deep breaths, visualizing the stress leaving your body. This simple practice reduces stress and anxiety and can help you feel more centered and calm throughout the day.

Five-Finger Breathing

Hold one hand in front of you and trace the outline of your fingers with the index finger of your other hand. Inhale as you trace up a finger, and exhale as you trace down. This exercise combines deep breathing with a tactile element, making it a powerful tool for calming the mind and body.

Combining breathing exercises with tactile stimulation can enhance relaxation and reduce stress more effectively than breathing exercises alone.

Square Breathing

Breathe in for a count of four, hold for four, exhale for four, and hold for four. Repeat this cycle several times. This exercise is simple yet effective in calming the nervous system and reducing stress.

Mindful Breathing at Your Desk

Take a minute to focus on your breath while sitting at your desk. Inhale slowly through your nose and exhale through your mouth. Notice the sensations of breathing and how it affects your body. This quick exercise can help reduce stress and improve concentration.

Three-Minute Breathing Space

Spend the first minute asking yourself how you are feeling right now. In the second minute, focus on your breath. In the third minute, expand your awareness of your body and surroundings. This exercise is a quick way to practice mindfulness and reset your mind.

These brief breathing practices can reduce stress and improve emotional regulation. ^[22]



Prioritize Self-care/Self-love

Daily hygiene practices: Bathing/showering, handwashing, oral care, facial cleansing, hair care, nail care, clean clothing, etc.

Schedule a daily “me time” for yourself: do something for your own pleasure every day.

Practice gratitude: Keep a list of blessings or activities you are grateful for, no matter how small. This fosters a sense of peace and contentment.

Have more intimacy: Intimacy can improve your overall well-being, giving you the incentive to take better care of your health.

Declutter/freshen your mind: Assess your daily activities and thoughts, and discard those that drain your energy or don't serve you.

Relaxing shower/baths: Enjoy periodic memorable bubble baths or scented body-wash showers

Routine beauty treatments: Do periodic facials, manicures and pedicures, massages, and hair treatments.

Treat yourself to a gift once in a while

Declutter/freshen your space: Periodically, throw out old/worn clothing items and replace them with new ones. New clothes attract positive energy around you.

Take Time off Work to Relax and Rejuvenate

During your time off, avoid ALL forms of work:

- **Turn off notifications:** Remove work-related apps or disable push notifications from your phone.
- **Do a digital detox:** fully disconnect by limiting or eliminating technology use (including phones).
- **Do not check email:** Checking may re-engage your brain in work mode and break the relaxation cycle.
- **If changing environments, choose the right type of trip:** Choose appealing natural sceneries or resorts that help you switch off.
- **Prioritize sleep:** Ensure you get enough sleep to recover physically and mentally.
- **Engage in hobbies:** Enjoy activities that bring you joy and happiness, such as reading, walking, or creative activities.
- **Stay physically active:** Light physical activity—gentle walking, swimming, or cycling can help you relax.
- **Practice mindfulness:** Use deep breathing, meditation, or yoga to calm your nervous system.
- **Be still:** Sometimes, doing nothing is the best antidote to stress.



Maintain a Satisfactory Work–Life Balance

- Spend time with loved ones (e.g., read bedtime stories with your little children or grandchildren)
- Have daily quality time with your spouse or partner to discuss the events of the day, family matters, or just listen.
- Have periodic outdoor dinners or movie nights with family and friends: Converse about each other's, interests, plans, or engage in mutually enjoyable activities to reduce stress.

People who engaging in meaningful relationships tend to have better health and wellbeing.

Seek Support/Networks on Stress and Wellbeing

- Have access to high-quality counselling and/or join a support network to share experiences on stress and wellbeing
- Counselling can empower you to resolve personal challenges, improve mental well-being, and develop healthier coping strategies without feeling judged or directed.
- A support network can be a powerful way to share experiences, gain perspective, and feel less alone in managing stress. This may be a local group, an online platform, or a workplace initiative.
- If you cannot find a group that fits, start one by inviting friends and colleagues who share similar interests in wellbeing and establish a respectful, confidential environment where everyone feels safe to share.
- Practice active listening and empathy; share coping strategies, resources, and small wins; avoid judgment and focus on encouragement.

Avoid Risk Behaviors/Stressful Conditions

Certain risk behaviors are associated with significant loss of life years as follows:

- **Prolonged sitting:** Loss of 2–4 years
- **High blood pressure:** Loss of 4–5 years
- **Chronic underweight:** Loss of 4–8 years
- **Smoking:** Loss of 5–7 years
- **Alcohol abuse:** Loss of 5–7 years
- **Physical inactivity:** Loss of 5–7 years
- **Type 2 diabetes:** Loss of 7–10 years

Several co-occurring risk factors compound the risk. For example, inactive people with diabetes and obesity have anywhere from an 8- to 13-year loss of life. ^[23]



Get Regular Health Screening and Tests

- Visit your healthcare provider(s) at least once yearly for comprehensive physicals, dental checks, eye exams, and blood tests.
- Get routine medical screenings, such as mammograms⁸, colonoscopies⁹, Pap smears, and sexually transmitted infection (STI) screenings, based on age and health condition.
- Manage chronic medical conditions, following up with your primary care provider or specialists as needed.

Preventing diseases or treating them early assures you of uninterrupted good health over the long term.

Wearable Wellness Devices

- Wellness monitors are wearable or digital devices that track physical and physiological health metrics to help users proactively manage their health.
- Some of these monitors are useful as screening tools for actual existing cardiac pathology, primary prevention tools for several diseases, or biofeedback tools providing actual real-time data.
- There are no conclusive comprehensive data on how reliable, accurate, precise, reproducible, sensitive, and specific each of these measurements recorded by these monitors are, or on the status of false positives, false negatives, or predictive values of each device.
- Unless a device has undergone peer review, third-party investigation, and meets approved standards, its clinical utility remains a gamble. ^[24]
- Wellness monitor measurements should not replace standard clinical screenings/tests.

Recommendation:

- **It is my particular recommendation that every judge should use an ergonomic chair while working.**

Conclusion

Wellness is positive, affirming, and contributes to living a long and healthy life. Optimal wellbeing is achievable through a conscious, self-directed effort.

⁸ Mammograms can detect cancerous breast changes long before symptoms appear. They are recommended annually or every 2 years for women aged 40–74, with adjustments based on age, risk factors, and personal health. Screening should continue as long as a woman is in good health.

⁹ Regular colonoscopy screenings are vital for early detection and prevention of colorectal cancer and are done every 10 years starting at age 45. For people with higher risk factors, screening plans are personalized in consultation with their healthcare provider.



Judges have immense powers to dispense justice and save others. In safety practice, the primary focus is on oneself. I urge my Lords to equitably invoke same and innate powers, to respectively ensure ergonomic working environment as well as safeguard and maintain personal health and wellbeing.

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