

# Use of Credit Cards by Orthopedic Surgeons: Evaluating the Pros and Cons

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## Learning Point of the Article:

Orthopedic surgeons, especially those in the early stages of their careers, should receive structured guidance—formal or informal—on financial literacy, including responsible credit card usage, taxation, and cash flow management. When used judiciously, credit cards can become valuable tools for supporting career growth, travel for conferences, practice development, and continued professional advancement.

## Abstract

Orthopedic surgeons operate in a demanding environment that involves not only clinical and surgical expertise but also a high degree of financial responsibility. Whether managing their private practice, funding continuing medical education (CME), or making lifestyle-related transactions, surgeons routinely engage with a broad spectrum of financial tools – one of the most prominent being credit cards.

Despite their widespread use, the financial behavior of orthopedic surgeons, particularly related to credit card usage, has received little academic attention. Surgeons often utilize credit cards for major expenses such as surgical equipment purchases, conference registrations, medical indemnity premiums, and international travel. In addition, features such as EMI conversion, high-value reward points, and lounge access make credit cards attractive for professionals with demanding travel and expenditure patterns. However, this convenience comes with the risk of poor financial discipline, unanticipated debt, exposure to fraud, and tax misreporting, especially when personal and professional expenses are not clearly separated.

A growing number of surgeons – especially early-career professionals – are turning to credit cards for liquidity, but many do so without fully understanding their terms and long-term implications. Issues such as overspending, missed payment penalties, hidden fees, and difficulty in claiming professional deductions during tax filing often arise due to a lack of financial literacy. On the other hand, those who are strategic in their usage benefit from efficient cash flow management, professional expense tracking, and tax optimization.

This review aims to explore these dual aspects – the advantages and disadvantages of credit card usage among orthopedic surgeons – providing practical insights into how such financial tools can either empower or encumber practitioners in the absence of proper planning.

**Conclusion:** Credit cards have the potential to serve as powerful allies in the financial ecosystem of an orthopedic surgeon. Their advantages are numerous: improved liquidity, streamlined professional spending, valuable reward redemptions, and enhanced control over travel and lifestyle expenses. Surgeons who are diligent in managing their credit utilization can use cards to their advantage – whether for optimizing CME travel, managing EMI-based purchases, or building a strong credit profile for larger business loans (such as for setting up a clinic or buying equipment). However, these benefits are not without risks. Surgeons who lack structured financial knowledge may fall prey to debt cycles, increased financial anxiety, fraudulent transactions, and difficulty in reconciling expenses during tax filing. Unmonitored usage, card sharing within clinics, and

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failure to distinguish personal and professional expenses can also lead to accounting errors and legal complications.

Therefore, financial education, particularly about credit usage, should be integrated into medical training and professional workshops. Surgeons, just like they follow protocols in the operating room, must adopt disciplined financial protocols to ensure that tools such as credit cards contribute positively to their career, rather than becoming liabilities.

**Keywords:** Credit cards, orthopedic surgeons, professional expenses, EMI, tax deductions, financial literacy, rewards optimization, medical finance, fraud risk, credit management, and practice-related expenses.

## Introduction

The modern orthopedic surgeon is not only a clinician and surgeon but also a self-employed professional, entrepreneur, and administrator. The evolving nature of medical practice – ranging from solo practice to hospital-based consulting – demands efficient financial tools. Among these, credit cards have emerged as a convenient, flexible, and widely accepted financial instrument.

However, credit card use is not without potential pitfalls. Surgeons often face high operational costs-subscriptions to medical journals, surgical equipment, conference fees, travel, and even EMIs for professional gadgets. While credit cards provide liquidity and rewards, misuse or poor planning can lead to debt traps, tax confusion, and fraud exposure.

Understanding the pros and cons of credit card use in the context of an orthopedic surgeon's professional and personal life is essential for effective financial management and risk mitigation.

## Discussion

### Pros of credit card use among orthopedic surgeons

1. Cash flow management:
  - Credit cards provide up to 45–55 days of interest-free credit, offering surgeons the flexibility to manage high-value expenses such as surgical instruments, medical insurance premiums, or continuing medical education (CME) fees.
2. Expense tracking and tax planning:
  - Monthly statements act as an automated expense record, aiding tax filing and business accounting
  - Categorized expense reports can help separate personal and professional spending for CA audits.
3. Reward programs:
  - Frequent flyer miles, cashback, and reward points for medical purchases (journals, equipment) add tangible value
  - Premium medical cards offer lounge access, concierge services, and curated benefits for busy surgeons.
4. Convenience for online transactions
  - Many registrations for CMEs, online medical databases

(e.g., UpToDate, PubMed access), and software subscriptions require credit cards.

#### 5. EMI conversion:

- High-end purchases such as laptops, implants for demo practice, or digital imaging devices can be paid in no-cost EMIs.

#### 6. Building a credit profile

- Regular, responsible use improves the credit score, aiding future financial borrowing for clinics, nursing homes, or equipment loans.

### Cons and risks of credit card use

#### 1. Overspending temptation

- Easy availability of credit may lead to unnecessary expenses on luxury items or non-essential gadgets, impacting savings.

#### 2. High interest rates

- Missing a single payment can lead to exorbitant interest rates (30–45% annually), which quickly snowball into large debt.

#### 3. Fraudulent transactions

- Surgeons often travel, use public Wi-Fi, or delegate card use (clinic manager, secretary), increasing the risk of skimming or phishing

- Complex chargeback processes can delay recovery of disputed amounts.

#### 4. Tax ambiguity

- If not carefully documented, professional expenses made via credit card may be confused with personal expenditure, reducing deductions during tax filing.

#### 5. Hidden charges

- Annual fees, foreign exchange conversion fees, and penalties for revolving credit usage can go unnoticed.

#### 6. Impact on mental health

- Debt anxiety from poor card usage can lead to stress, especially for younger surgeons not financially literate.

### 1) In-depth Comparison of Best Credit Cards for Orthopedic Surgeons

Card Name	Joining Fee (INR)	Annual Fee Waiver Criteria	Key Benefits	Best For
HDFC Infinia Metal	₹12,500 + GST	₹10L annual spend	Unlimited global lounge, Club Marriott, 5X SmartBuy	High-spending consultants
ICICI Emerald / Private	₹12,000 + GST	₹15L annual spend	No late fee, unlimited lounges, 1.5% forex	Frequent international travelers
Amex Platinum Charge	₹60,000 + GST	N/A	Concierge, Taj/ITC elite, Centurion lounges	Luxury-focused senior surgeons
Axis Magnus	₹12,500 + GST	₹15L annual spend	25k bonus points/month, 12 intl lounges	Travel/CME-focused surgeons
HDFC Biz Black (Metal Edition)	₹10,000 + GST	Waived on ₹7.5L annual spend (₹1.5L in 90 days for joining waiver)	Unlimited lounges (domestic & international), 5X rewards on tax/software/utility spends, Taj/flight vouchers, golf access	Doctors/professionals with high tax or business spends
Times Black ICICI	₹20,000 + GST	₹25L annual spend	Unlimited lounges, ₹30k+ vouchers, concierge, visa support	HNIs valuing luxury & travel
HDFC Regalia	₹2,500 + GST	₹3L spend/year	12 domestic lounges, milestone bonuses	Mid-career doctors
SBI Card Elite	₹4,999 + GST	₹10L annual spend	Vistara Silver, Trident, lounges	Established practitioners
HDFC Millennia	₹1,000 + GST	₹1L spend/year	5% cashback, EMIs on devices	Young consultants/residents
ICICI Amazon Pay	₹0	Lifetime Free	5% cashback (Prime)	Online-heavy junior surgeons

## 2) Use-case-based Recommendations

a. For CME and International Travel – HDFC Biz Black, Axis Magnus, HDFC Infinia.

Biz Black offers unlimited lounges, concierge, and Taj stay vouchers.

b. For Medical Equipment and EMI – HDFC Millennia, HDFC Regalia, SBI Elite.

EMI options and milestone bonuses make them practical for professional purchases.

c. For Tax-Deductible Spending – HDFC Biz Black, Amex Platinum, HDFC Regalia.

5X rewards on income tax and professional spends with detailed statements.

d. For Lifestyle & Wellness – Amex Platinum, Times Black dining, and luxury travel perks.

e. For Young Surgeons – ICICI Amazon Pay, HDFC Millennia.

Cashback-based, low-cost, simple usability.

## 3) Lounge Access Comparison

Card	Domestic Access	International Access
HDFC Infinia	Unlimited (PP)	Unlimited (PP)
Amex Platinum	Unlimited (Centurion+PP)	Unlimited
ICICI Emerald	Unlimited (Dreamfolks)	Unlimited
Axis Magnus	12/year	12/year
HDFC Biz Black	Unlimited	Unlimited
Times Black	Unlimited	Unlimited (Dreamfolks)
HDFC Regalia	12/year	Limited PP
SBI Elite	8/year	6/year

## 4) Rewards and Redemptions

### 5) Pitfalls for Orthopedic Surgeons to Avoid

a. Annual fee traps – Biz Black is high-commitment; ensure value extraction.

- Reward caps – 5X benefits have monthly caps; monitor your usage.

- Underusing perks – Golf, Taj vouchers, and lounges must be utilized.

- EMI overuse – Restrict EMIs to professional purchases only.

- Mixing personal and practice expenses – Keep cards separate

Card	Value/ ₹ 100 Spend	Type	Redemption Options
HDFC Infinia	₹3.30–₹5.00	Reward Points	SmartBuy, travel
Axis Magnus	₹3.50–₹4.00	EDGE Points	Edge Travel Portal
HDFC Biz Black	₹2.50–₹4.00 (5X categories)	Reward Points	SmartBuy, flights, Taj vouchers
Times Black	2% domestic, 2.5% international	Reward Points	EaseMyTrip, Tata CliQ, concierge
Amex Platinum	₹1.50–₹2.00	MR Points	Taj/ITC, travel partners
HDFC Millennia	₹1.00–₹1.50	Cashback	Auto statement credit

for taxation clarity.

#### 6) Special Notes for Doctors Without GST Registration

Doctors without GST registration can still apply for and use the HDFC Biz Black card if they meet ITR criteria. While GST-related benefits won't apply, they can still leverage the 5X rewards on income tax, CME expenses, software tools, and

professional travel. The lack of GST input credit has minimal impact on overall value.

### Conclusion

Credit cards can serve as a valuable financial tool for orthopedic surgeons when used responsibly. Their benefits – ranging from liquidity and convenience to reward optimization – make them particularly attractive for managing professional obligations. However, unmonitored usage can lead to debt, tax confusion, and potential fraud.

With rising practice costs, conference travel, and increasing digital payments, orthopedic surgeons must be educated not just in biomechanics and surgical precision – but also in basic financial literacy. Just as surgical tools require training and control, so does the use of credit cards in professional life.

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