

Trigger Point Dry Needling

What is trigger point dry needling?

Trigger point dry needling (TPDN) uses needle insertion to help treat painful areas of muscles known as trigger points. These trigger points, or knots in a muscle, form when muscles do not relax or are overused.

TPDN involves placing a small needle (without medication) into the muscle at the trigger point in order to help decrease pain, prevent muscle spasms, and improve muscle activity. The treatment is called “dry” needling because the needle itself stimulates the tissue, and nothing is injected.

What are the benefits of TPDN?

TPDN may be an option for treating pain, muscle stiffness, or spasms. Other methods provided by your physical therapist, including manual therapy, exercise, and stretching may help improve the effects of needling.

What are the risks of TPDN?

Like any treatment, there are possible risks. While these are rare, they are real and must be considered.

- **Infection** is a risk whenever a needle is put into the skin. Please tell your physical therapist if you have any conditions that can be transferred by blood or if you have an immune deficiency.
- **Puncture of a lung (pneumothorax)** is a rare complication and the most serious risk associated with TPDN. If this were to occur, you would likely need a chest x-ray and no further treatment. The main symptom of lung puncture, shortness of breath, may last for several days to weeks. A more severe lung puncture can require hospitalization and reinflation of the lung.



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How do I prepare for TPDN?

Let your physical therapist know if you could be pregnant, have any known infections, have a fear of needles, are on any blood-thinning medications, have a suppressed immune system (your immune system isn't working properly), or have a history of lymphedema.

What can I expect?

Your physical therapist will insert small needles into your trigger points. For some people, the needle insertion is painless while others may feel mild discomfort or pressure.

You may have several sites treated in one visit.

What are the side effects?

Possible side effects (negative reactions) include:

- **Bruising**, which is common and should not be a concern unless you are taking a blood thinner. The needles are very small and do not have a cutting edge, so significant tissue injury from TPDN is extremely unlikely.
- **Muscle soreness**, which should go away within 24 hours.
- **Dizziness or nausea**, which may occur immediately but shouldn't last too long.

What happens next?

Dry needling should be done in combination with other treatments. Your physical therapist will provide other treatments that may include manual therapy, exercise, or stretching to help with your pain.

If you choose to exercise after your dry needling session, be sure to take it easy as your muscles may be tired and are more likely to get injured.

When should I call my therapist?

Call your physical therapist if you have:

- Trouble breathing or chest pain.
- Bleeding or bruising issues.
- Heat, redness, swelling, or drainage at the site of the treatment.

Questions for my physical therapist

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