



HOW PHYSICAL THERAPISTS MANAGE PAIN

As America combats a devastating opioid epidemic, safer, non-opioid treatments have never been of greater need. Physical therapy is among the safe, effective alternatives recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in guidelines urging the avoidance of opioids for most pain treatment. Whereas opioids only mask the sensation of pain, physical therapists treat pain through movement.

Here's how:

- 1. Exercise.** A study following 20,000 people over 11 years found that those who exercised on a regular basis, experienced less pain. And among those who exercised more than 3 times per week, chronic widespread pain was 28% less common. Physical therapists can prescribe exercise specific to your goals and needs.
- 2. Manual Therapy.** Research supports a hands-on approach to treating pain. From carpal tunnel syndrome to low back pain, this type of care can effectively reduce your pain and improve your movement. Physical therapists may use manipulation, joint and soft tissue mobilizations, and dry needling, as well as other strategies in your care.
- 3. Education.** A large study conducted with military personnel demonstrated that those with back pain who received a 45 minute educational session about pain, were less likely to seek treatment than their peers who didn't receive education about pain. Physical therapists will talk with you to make sure they understand your pain history, and help set realistic expectations about your treatment.
- 4. Teamwork.** Recent studies have shown that developing a positive relationship with your physical therapist and being an active participant in your own recovery can impact your success. This is likely because physical therapists are able to directly work with you and assess how your pain responds to treatment.

.Courtesy of APTA



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DRY NEEDLING OR ACUPUNCTURE?

Because it involves a needle, dry needling is often misunderstood as acupuncture. The difference lies in the approach— same needle, different technique. The ultimate goal of dry needling is different than acupuncture. Acupuncture is typically used in holistic medicine. Dry needling is used for a musculo-skeletal purpose. Designed to reset a dysfunctional muscle, dry needling releases tension and quiets an overstimulated muscle. Acupuncture is based on eastern medicine, and acupuncturists insert needles based on body meridians. Dry needling, in contrast is based on western medicine and the science of neuromuscular function. It's a professional physical therapy technique that gets to the root cause of the pain and is designed not only to decrease muscle pain, but also to increase mobility and stability.

DRY NEEDLING

Dry needling is a technique physical therapists use to treat myofascial pain. The technique uses a “dry” needle, one without medication or injection, inserted through the skin into areas of the muscle, known as trigger points. Other terms commonly used to describe dry needling, include trigger point dry needling, and intramuscular manual therapy. Dry needling is not acupuncture, a practice based on traditional Chinese medicine and performed by acupuncturists. Dry

needling is a part of modern Western medicine principles, and supported by research.

What is a Trigger Point?

A trigger point is a taut band of skeletal muscle located within a larger muscle group. Trigger points can be tender to the touch, and touching a trigger point may cause pain to be referred to other parts of the body.

“Dry needling is a tool used to release muscle tissue. It doesn't just treat the symptoms— instead it addresses the cause of pain.”

HOW DOES DRY NEEDLING WORK?

Dry needling acts as a hard reset of the dysfunctional muscle. Spontaneous electrical activity occurs in that dysfunctional muscle and dry needling quiets that spontaneous electrical activity and restore a more normal function.

Our body's natural response to pain is to go on the defensive. When an injury occurs, either from repetitive use or acute trauma, that muscle becomes inflamed and overstimulated, causing pain.

Damaged muscles create scar tissue and shift into a protective-yet-painful state of constant contraction. Pain results due to our body's creation of more chemicals, which causes our muscles to build more chemical receptors. Your muscle experiences more stimulation, more blood flow and tension.

As anyone who has been injured has experienced, one injured muscle can cause more problems to other body parts too. Limited mobility results, creating greater stress on the body's joints. Other parts of the body step in to overcompensate, and the way we move begins to change for the worse.

Physical therapists insert a thin filament needle into overstimulated, tight and painful muscles. When the needle is inserted into the skin and the muscle, that local twitch response is an involuntary reflex, which quiets the muscle, allowing it to resume to normal activity. One treatment session may involve multiple needles, depending on the type of injury and pain. The needle gives the muscle a blank slate, and helps restore the proper function.



“Patients frequently wonder if dry needling is painful. It may be uncomfortable, and only for a second. But the needle is not what causes the pain. “

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF DRY NEEDLING?

Many patients become interested in dry needling as a way to relieve muscle pain, and that’s the key benefit of the treatment. Needling stimulates the muscle’s healing process, resulting in a muscle reset. For many patients, pain relief happens instantly.

Dry needling results in greater mobility, often immediately. The needling stimulates the muscle, which allows for better lengthening of both the soft tissue and muscle. As a result, patients enjoy a wider range of motion.

Alongside greater mobility, another long-term benefit of dry needling is injury prevention. As proper mobility is restored, the body returns to natural, healthy and full function. This decreases the risk of injury as the patient returns to favorite activities, exercises and sports.

Dry needling results in fewer side effects. Many pain relieving medications, particularly opiates, can bring negative side effects. In contrast, dry needling is a natural solution with no long term risk. While pain relievers have limited doses for a reason, dry needling can be repeated as needed without risk to a patient’s body. Downtime for recovery is minimal as well.

Like all medical treatments, how many dry needling sessions a patient needs depends on the individual situation. Many patients experience less pain and more motion immediately after the treatment. Dry needling is not a quick fix, but when accompanied with a full plan of care directed by your physical therapist, you will have long lasting benefits and resolution of pain.

21ST CENTURY REHAB COMMITTED TO PROVIDING COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES LOCALLY

As part of their entry level education, physical therapists are well educated in anatomy and therapeutic treatment of the body. Physical therapists who perform dry needling supplement that knowledge by obtaining specific postgraduate education and training. When contacting a physical therapist for dry needling treatment, be sure to ask about their specific experience and education.

Dry Needling services are offered at all 21st Century Rehab locations and the following therapists have undergone specialized training to be able to perform dry needling:

Steve Cassabaum, DPT

Matt DeWall, DPT

Clint Lutterman, DPT

Steve Olsen, DPT

Justin Plum, DPT

Lauren Plum, DPT

Trina Stone, DPT

Matt Wanderscheid, DPT



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WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

“I started therapy 2 weeks after Rotator Cuff surgery. At the time, my right arm/shoulder was in a sling form surgery and I had hardly any movement in it. I was also having pain in my left elbow. I had 2 cortisone shots in my elbow with limited success. The shots caused discoloration in my elbow. After starting therapy for my right shoulder, I mentioned to Steve my left elbow hurt. Steve performed dry needling on my elbow at the appointment. That was several weeks ago and I haven't had pain since then. My therapy for my shoulder lasted a couple of months. In that time, I regained complete mobility. The staff and therapists at 21st Century Rehab have been excellent to work with. I am so thankful that I have access to such great care close to home. “

-Nancy P.



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