

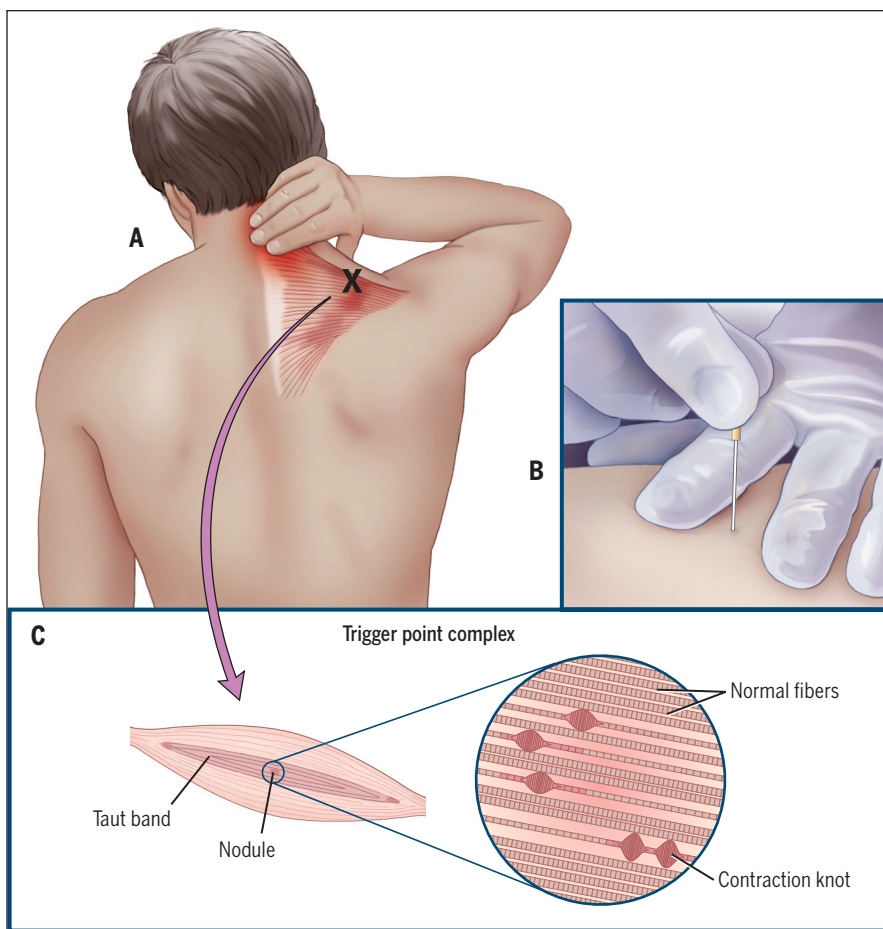
Painful and Tender Muscles

Dry Needling Can Reduce Myofascial Pain Related to Trigger Points

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Trigger points are irritable, hard “knots” within a muscle that may cause pain over a large area, leading to difficulty performing everyday tasks. When a trigger point is touched, it hurts and can also cause pain in nearby areas (see illustration). When a person has painful muscles and trigger points, it is sometimes called myofascial pain syndrome. Common locations for these problems are the arm and neck. Dry needling is

a treatment that involves a very thin needle being pushed through the skin to stimulate a trigger point. Dry needling may release the tight muscle bands associated with trigger points and lead to decreased pain and improved function. In a study published in the September 2013 issue of *JOSPT*, a group of researchers analyzed the results of the best clinical studies that have been conducted thus far to determine if dry needling helps to reduce neck and arm pain.



NEEDLING TRIGGER POINTS. Trigger points, often a component of myofascial pain syndrome, are irritable, hard “knots” within a muscle that may cause pain over a large area (A). A potential treatment option is dry needling, which consists of a very thin needle that your therapist pushes through the skin to stimulate the trigger points, muscles, or connecting tissues (B). Dry needling may release the tight muscle bands and decrease pain (C).

NEW INSIGHTS

After reviewing many sources of information and evaluating both the quality and results of the relevant studies, the researchers determined that dry needling can be effective in providing pain relief. These studies noted that a “twitch” often occurs when a needle is inserted into the trigger point, and this “twitch” may be a sign that the treatment will be helpful. The authors of the *JOSPT* article also found that the effects of dry needling varied across studies and that more research needs to be done to determine whether dry needling is better for this condition than other treatment options.

PRACTICAL ADVICE

Myofascial pain syndrome, or trigger points, can be a source of pain and limit function. Dry needling is a specialized treatment for trigger points provided by some physical therapists. It is one possible treatment option, usually combined with other techniques including exercises, to manage myofascial pain. Your physical therapist can perform a thorough evaluation to help determine if you are a good candidate for this treatment as part of a program designed to reduce your pain and improve your function. For more information on the treatment of myofascial pain, contact your physical therapist specializing in musculoskeletal disorders.

For this and more topics, visit *JOSPT Perspectives for Patients* online at www.jospt.org.

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