



Dry Needling

What is it? Dry needling is a highly effective form of physical therapy for the treatment of a multitude of musculoskeletal and neuromuscular conditions. It is not appropriate for all conditions or pathologies and the use of the technique will be at the discretion of your physical therapist.

How does it work? Dry needling is NOT acupuncture (traditional Chinese medicine); it is based on neuro-anatomy and modern scientific study of the musculoskeletal and neuromuscular systems. A very fine filament needle is inserted through the skin and into the deeper tissues that are considered trigger points to your pain. Dry needling works by causing a microlesion within the pathological tissue thus breaking up shortened tissues, inhibiting a reflex arc from the nervous system to the tissue, normalizing the inflammatory response, and centrally mediating the pain. This mechanical and neuromuscular effect provides an environment that enhances the body's ability to heal which ultimately reduces pain.

What conditions can be treated? Conditions include, but are not limited to neck, back, shoulder arm pain (tennis elbow, carpal tunnel, golfer's elbow), headache to include secondary effects of migraine and tension-type headaches, jaw pain, buttock pain and leg pain (sciatica, hamstring strains, calf tightness/spasms, etc).

Are the needles sterile? Yes, we only use sterile, disposable needles.

Is the procedure painful? The fine filament needle is very thin, solid, and flexible, which allows for the needle to be pushed through the skin versus cutting into the skin. This helps reduce any discomfort that may occur with the procedure. We strive to make the treatment virtually painless however at times a local twitch response of the muscle may be felt. When the needle is inserted into the pathological tissue the local twitch response sensation is normal and is felt only momentarily. Many patients describe this twitch response as a little electric shock, cramp, or an ache sensation. These sensations are perfectly normal and even a desirable response. Your PT will make every effort to make your experience comfortable and therapeutic.

How will I feel after the dry needling treatment? This will vary but many patients experience immediate relief of their symptoms and an increase in range of motion. Soreness can also be a common response from the needling but does not occur with all people. Some individuals may experience an immediate achiness or delayed soreness the next day. The soreness, if present, will usually last 1-2 days, use of heat and light massage and movement will be beneficial. Mild bruising may occur at the needling sites and is more prevalent in certain parts of the body. Larger bruising may also occur, but is rare. Application of ice on the bruise will help with the soreness and skin discoloration will last several days but is not harmful.

It is uncommon but possible that the treatment may temporarily increase your symptoms. This is not unusual but if this continues past the 1-2 day window, inform your PT to allow adjustment of

your program to enhance your comfort the next time. This does not mean that needling will not be beneficial to your condition.

Will I continue to do exercises or receive other treatments? Yes, your personalized physical therapy program will still integrate traditional physical therapy methods including manual therapy, therapeutic exercise, endurance training, stabilization, and postural training. Dry needling is just one element of the treatment program. In general, research supports programs that include a combination of manual therapy (which dry needling can be considered a part of) and active exercise.

How many treatments will I need? This will depend on the category you fit in, which is determined by the state of your injury and overall health. Remember we are attempting to cause mechanical and biochemical changes without any pharmacological means. Therefore, we are looking for a cumulative response to break the pain cycle. Your PT will be able to give you more insight after your evaluation.

What should I do to prepare for the treatment? Wear loose fitting clothing, shorts, etc for easy access to your painful areas. If you forget these items, we do have shorts and gowns for you to change and use while you are here. Be well hydrated before and after the treatment.

What should/can I do after treatment, what should I avoid? Our recommendations vary depending on the amount of soreness you have and on the individual response to the treatment. Recommendations may include increasing your water intake, applying heat or ice over the area, gentle stretches and modifications of activities only in certain circumstances.

Is dry needling covered by my insurance? Unfortunately, at this time, dry needling is not covered by insurances. The assessment, massage and other manual therapy often done in conjunction with/during dry needling is, however the time actually spent inserting the needles (which often is seconds to a few minutes) is not. At New Life Physical Therapy and Sports Medicine, we have a \$5.00 surcharge, per visit, when dry needling is completed. This will cover the treatment that your insurance will not cover as well as your needling supplies and the remainder of your visit will be billed to the insurance company.

Before your first treatment: Please inform your physical therapist about conditions such as pregnancy, having implanted devices, the use of blood thinners (Warfarin, Coumadin, etc), recent surgeries, systemic infections, disease or infection that can be transmitted through body fluids, or use of immunosuppressant medications prior to the treatment. While these are not absolute contraindications, it will need to be discussed with your physical therapist to determine if you are an appropriate candidate at this time.

Risks of the procedure: As with any medical treatment and procedure, there are possible side effects and complications. While complications are uncommon, they do sometimes occur and must be considered prior to giving verbal consent for treatment:

1. Dry needling often causes “post-needling soreness”; please see above for more information on how to minimize and manage if you experience this.

2. Anytime a needle is used there is risk of infection. Your PT is certified in performing dry needling and knows how to take necessary precautions to minimize your risk, therefore infections are extremely rare. We use only new, disposable, and sterile needles.
3. A needle may be placed inadvertently in a superficial artery or vein. If this occurs, there is possibility for a small drop of blood and bruise that may develop. This is a common occurrence and should not be a concern unless you are taking a blood thinner. As the needles are very small and do not have a cutting edge, the likelihood of any significant tissue trauma is unlikely.
4. If a nerve is touched, it may cause a prickling sensation which is usually brief, but may last for a couple of days.
5. When a needle is placed close to the chest wall, there is a rare possibility of a pneumothorax (needle puncturing the lung which may cause air in the chest cavity). This may cause pain or shortness of breath that can last for several days to weeks. More severe punctures may require hospitalization and re-inflation of the lung. All New Life PT's performing dry needling are certified in this procedure and know extreme precautions to take to avoid this happening. It is a very rare complication and in skilled hands should not be a concern.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact your physical therapist.