

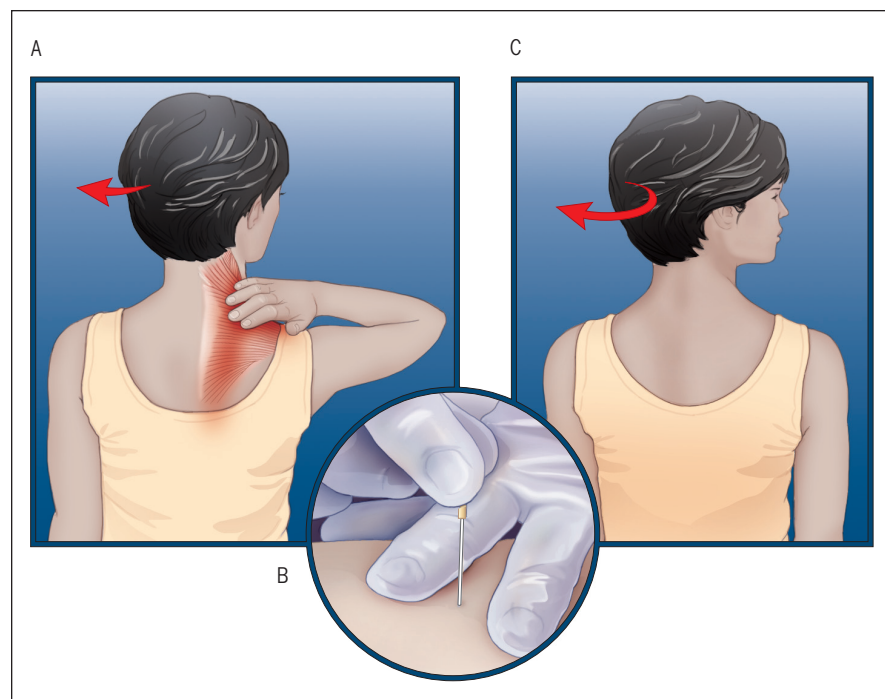
Neck Pain

Dry Needling Can Decrease Pain and Increase Motion

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When you have neck pain, the muscles in your neck are often painful to the touch. The irritable, hard “knots” within a muscle or connective tissue that may cause pain over a large area are called trigger points. These painful areas can limit your daily activities and movement. Dry needling, also called trigger point dry needling, is a treatment that involves pushing a very thin needle

through the skin to stimulate a trigger point. The needle may relax the tight muscle bands associated with trigger points. As a result, dry needling may be helpful in decreasing pain and increasing motion for patients with neck pain. In a study published in the April 2014 issue of *JOSPT*, a group of researchers measured the benefits of dry needling for patients with neck pain.



RELAXING TRIGGER POINTS. Neck pain can result in trigger points in the muscles or connective tissues. Trigger points are irritable, hard “knots” that may cause pain over a large area (A). A potential treatment option is dry needling, which consists of pushing a very thin needle through the skin to stimulate the trigger points in the muscles or connective tissues (B). This research team found that trigger point dry needling decreased pain and increased motion (C).

This *JOSPT* Perspectives for Patients is based on an article by Mejuto-Vázquez et al, titled “Short-Term Changes in Neck Pain, Widespread Pressure Pain Sensitivity, and Cervical Range of Motion After the Application of Trigger Point Dry Needling in Patients With Acute Mechanical Neck Pain: A Randomized Clinical Trial,” *J Orthop Sports Phys Ther* 2014;44(4):252-260. Epub 25 February 2014. doi:10.2519/jospt.2014.5108.

NEW INSIGHTS

The researchers studied 17 patients. All patients’ neck pain began within 7 days of the start of the study. Half of the patients received trigger point dry needling treatment, and the other half received no treatment. The patients who received the dry needling had better results. Immediately after the treatment, their pain decreased by 33%. One week after the treatment, their pain was 66% less. Also, those patients treated with dry needling were better able to bend their heads forward and backward and to turn their heads toward the painful side of their necks.

PRACTICAL ADVICE

Trigger points can be a source of pain and may limit neck motion. Dry needling is a specialized treatment for trigger points that some physical therapists provide. In the short term, the findings of this study suggest that a single treatment of dry needling can decrease pain and improve motion. Dry needling is typically combined with other treatments, including exercises to further lessen pain and improve motion and the ability to perform daily activities. Your physical therapist can give you 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 neck pain, contact your physical therapist specializing in musculoskeletal disorders.

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This Perspectives article was written by a team of *JOSPT*’s editorial board and staff, with Deydre S. Teyhen, PT, PhD, Editor, and Jeanne Robertson, Illustrator.



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