

# The Benefits of Dry Needling

Why a newer treatment method is gaining attention—and getting results

Despite its scary-sounding name, “dry needling” is a safe, effective treatment involving needles that are the same size as those used in acupuncture. A practitioner will insert a needle along a client’s trigger points — the tight bands of tissue within a muscle — to promote the body’s own healing mechanisms.

The technique has long been used in Europe, but it’s only in the past 30 years that it’s risen in popularity in the United States. But look for it to catch on more widely, because when it comes to benefits, dry needling boasts plenty.

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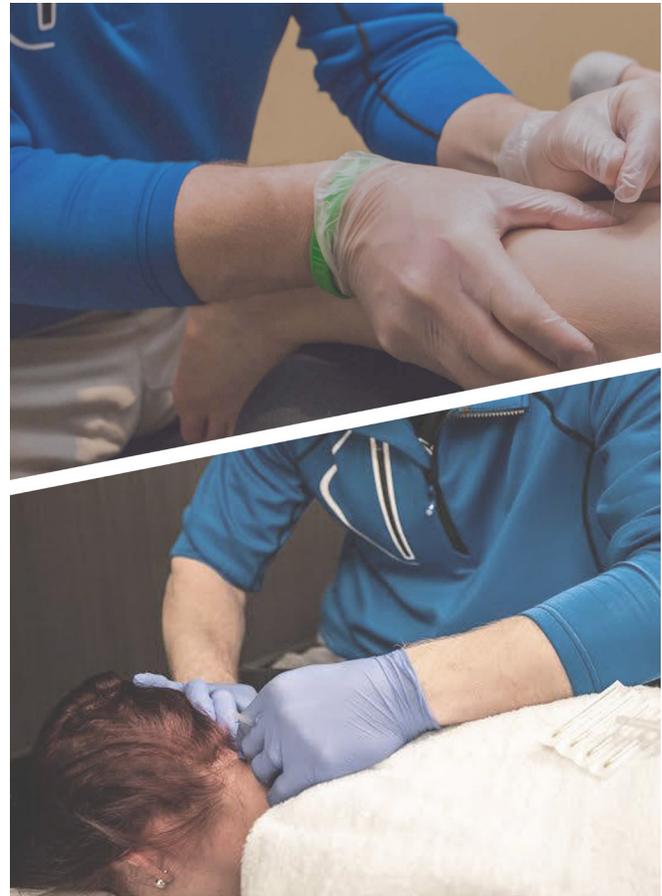
Dry needling can loosen stiff muscles, ease joint pain, improve blood flow and oxygen circulation within the body. That brings results for those who are trying to optimize sports performance, recover faster from injury, or prevent issues from becoming chronic.

**Here are three facts that can help you consider whether dry needling might be a treatment option to pursue:**

## 1. WHEN YOU ADDRESS TRIGGER POINTS, YOU CAN IMPROVE PHYSICAL FUNCTION.

There are two types of trigger points. Active ones are painful to the touch, and cause the body to compensate with other muscles, which may increase injury. Latent trigger points may not be causing pain yet, but could be on their way to becoming a problem. Dry needling treatments first address the active points, and needles are strategically placed to alleviate them.

When a needle hits a trigger point, metabolic waste chemicals including lactic acid that have been built up inside the tissue are released. Once this block is removed,



the body increases blood flow and oxygen circulation to the area, and the body’s natural healing capabilities come into play. In general, trigger points cause tightness in the muscles that block blood flow and oxygen; dry needling removes that block.

## 2. DRY NEEDLING IS PRECISE IN TRIGGER POINT TARGETING

A trained dry needling practitioner doesn’t figure out where your points are by literally poking around. Instead, he or she creates a map of trigger points by first doing a comprehensive assessment of your muscles and tight spots within them.

Once these points are found, a therapist will target the most painful ones first and then work to alleviate the others. Unlike acupuncture sessions, which can involve dozens of needles in several areas of the body, dry needling often utilizes just a few needles that are strategically placed along affected muscles.

### 3. DRY NEEDLING IS PART OF A LARGER TREATMENT PLAN

Another way that dry needling differs from acupuncture is that it's not considered curative on its own. It's often part of a multi-technique physical therapy plan that may also include movement analysis, targeted exercises, and other interventions.

The technique is one tool that therapists can use to address myofascial pain and muscle tightness. In some cases, a therapist might do two to three treatments of dry needling in order to make subsequent movement therapies more effective.

For example, a runner with active trigger points in her hamstring would likely benefit from a few dry needling sessions before going through therapy that can improve her running gait.

In the past, trigger point release was done mainly through therapeutic massage. While that's still fairly effective, manual trigger point release therapy struggles to achieve the depth, precision, and complete release of trigger points that the needles are capable of. Hands can't be as precise and targeted as one of the tiny needles used in dry needling. Making the technique part of a physical therapy strategy can help you reach whatever goals you have for pain prevention, performance optimization, and injury recovery.

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