

Trigger Point Injections

What is a Trigger Point?

A trigger point is a localized, (hyper)irritable, taut band of muscle that is contracted and inflamed and can be a source of considerable pain. They can be identified by a palpable nodule in the muscle. The area is typically tender to touch and when rubbed or compressed pain radiates from the trigger point itself to an area around the trigger point. Trigger points can affect joint mobility, muscle flexibility, strength and posture. TPIs can compromise normal movement patterns leading to muscle spasms, pain and dysfunction. Prolonged trigger points can lead to satellite trigger points that can intensify the pain pattern and expand the area of pain, weakness, stiffness and dysfunction.

What are Trigger Point Injections?

Trigger point injections are done only by physicians. This is achieved by needling the trigger point which if done correctly causes a local twitch response of the muscle. This occurs when the trigger point is made inactive by release of the muscle from the tight band or knot and pain is relieved. Following the twitch response, a small amount of anesthetic is injected to help flush inflammation and other toxic metabolites around the muscle and makes it less likely to redevelop. Trigger point injections can relieve pain, improve muscle blood flow, strength and movement.

What happens during the appointment?

Your doctor might ask you to change into a gown. You will then be positioned so that your doctor can easily insert the needle into the affected area. Trigger points are identified by an experienced physician by palpation. The skin is marked and sterilized. A small needle is inserted into the trigger point and if a twitch is elicited a small amount of anesthetic is injected. The needle is used to break up the knotted muscle fibers forming the trigger point. This process is known as “needling”. The muscle twitch that occurs with needling is a sign that the trigger point released.

How quickly will I notice a change?

Typically, after the trigger point injections there is an immediate response. This includes decreased muscle spasm and tension, reduced pain and stiffness, improved strength and mobility.

How long will it hurt?

You may experience some numbness over the pattern of referral of the muscle injected for about an hour after the injection. There may be some stiffness and soreness, which slowly improves after typically within 5 days. Within three to five days you should experience a decrease in pain.