

Dry Needling Fact Sheet

What is dry needling?

Dry needling is the application of fine needles into the skin at specific sites. It is used to reduce pain and restore function by stimulating tissue healing and normal tissue function.



Dry needling vs acupuncture – what is the difference?

Although the needles used in both are identical, the principles of each application vary.

Dry needling is based on our understanding of anatomy and neurophysiology. It is used to treat muscular pain and myofascial dysfunction. The site we insert the needles

is based on where we believe there is a mechanical issue. For instance, the place where we feel a taut band of muscle which reproduces a familiar pain is the site where we will insert the needle.

Acupuncture however is based on the restoration of energy and energy balance throughout the body. Needles are placed along 'meridians' to redirect or reposition energy flow. Acupuncture is often applied to unblock energy channels.

How does dry needling work?

The exact mechanism is quite complex. Put simply, we have explained the process in two ways:

- Mechanical

The insertion of needles stops pain signals along its path and stimulates the release of pain-relieving chemicals like endorphins. These pain-relieving chemicals allow restoration of normal function via diminishing pain.

- Biochemical



When the needles penetrate your skin, it disrupts the tissue cells creating an acute inflammatory response. This triggers the release of various chemicals, such as leukocytes, which aid in healing and recovery. When the needle is removed, the tissue resets, remodels and repairs as healthy tissue.

There has been a lot of recent research evidence to support the positive effects of dry needling.

How does dry needling fit into my rehab plan?

Dry needling may be used at the beginning of your rehab to break through the pain cycle. Alternatively, if physiotherapy progress without dry needling is slower than anticipated, we may perform dry needling to elicit a change in your symptoms.

How frequently should I have dry needling, and how long do I have the needles in?

As with many patients, it all varies depending on the individual.

Acutely, some patients may have dry needling twice weekly, while chronic patients may have it once a week until symptoms subside.

The needles may be inserted at trigger points and removed immediately, or they may be left in for up to 20 minutes. This is the optimal time for dry needling to achieve and sustain positive effects.

What will I feel?

Most often patients will feel nothing. Other times, there may be a slight numbness, ache or referred pain. The brief pain response will generally subside within 30 seconds to a few minutes.

On some occasions, the needles will create a twitch response. This twitch response is not uncommon.

What conditions will dry needling help me with?

Acute and chronic musculoskeletal conditions that could potentially have a positive response to dry needling include:

The logo for Winston Hills Physiotherapy Centre features a stylized blue figure of a person in motion on the left, followed by the text "Winston Hills" in a bold, sans-serif font and "Physiotherapy Centre" in a blue script font below it.

Winston Hills Physiotherapy Centre

- Osteoarthritis
- Spinal or paraspinal pain
- Adhesive capsulitis i.e. frozen shoulder
- Impingement syndrome
- Rotator cuff syndrome
- Carpal tunnel
- Piriformis syndrome
- Hamstring tear/ tightness
- Calf tightness/ tears
- Patellofemoral pain syndrome
- Tension type headaches
- Shin splints
- Acute/ chronic ankle sprains
- Bunions
- General muscular tightness
- Ligament and tension issues such as sprains and tendinopathies