

Not Your Average Rehab

Functional Dry Needling

Functional dry needling (FDN) is a treatment technique used by physical therapists to address musculoskeletal pain and dysfunction. It involves inserting very fine, thin needles into specific muscle tissue or trigger points to alleviate pain, improve movement, and restore function. The goal of functional dry needling is to target muscle knots (myofascial trigger points), tightness, or other soft tissue restrictions that can cause pain and hinder normal movement patterns.

1. Needle Insertion

- A very thin, solid needle (typically an acupuncture needle) is inserted into the skin and muscle, specifically targeting areas of tightness or trigger points.
- These trigger points are often hyper-irritable spots within a muscle that cause pain or discomfort, sometimes radiating to other areas.

2. Purpose and Goals

- The primary goal is to reduce pain, increase blood flow to the area, and improve the range of motion.
- It can help with conditions like chronic pain, muscle spasms, tension headaches, neck and back pain, and sports injuries.
- It also helps correct dysfunctional movement patterns that might have developed due to pain or injury.

3. Mechanism of Action

- The insertion of the needle stimulates a local healing response, encouraging the body to relax the muscle and increase blood circulation to the area.
- This can lead to a reduction in muscle tightness, inflammation, and pain.
- Some patients report feeling a "twitch response" when the needle hits the trigger point, which can lead to immediate relief.

4. Functional Dry Needling vs. Acupuncture

- While both use needles, functional dry needling is based on modern, evidence-based principles of musculoskeletal anatomy and neurology, whereas acupuncture is rooted in Traditional Chinese Medicine, focusing on energy flow (Qi).
- FDN specifically targets muscle trigger points and musculoskeletal dysfunction, while acupuncture aims to address broader systemic imbalances.

5. Safety and Training

- FDN is performed by licensed physical therapists who have undergone specialized training. This ensures that the therapist has the expertise to safely and effectively target muscle groups and handle any potential adverse reactions.
- The needles used are sterile and typically very fine, reducing the risk of injury.

6. Conditions Treated

- Chronic pain (e.g., neck, back, shoulder pain)
- Tendonitis or tendinopathies

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- Post-surgical rehabilitation
- Myofascial pain syndrome
- Headaches or migraines
- Muscle strains or sprains

7. Recovery and Side Effects

- Some soreness or tenderness at the site of needling is common immediately after the treatment, similar to post-exercise soreness.
- Most patients can resume their daily activities following treatment, though some might feel mild discomfort for a day or two.
- Serious side effects are rare when the procedure is performed by a trained professional.

In summary, functional dry needling is an effective therapy used by physical therapists to release muscle tension, relieve pain, and improve movement in patients dealing with musculoskeletal issues. It is often integrated into a broader treatment plan, which may include exercise, manual therapy, and other modalities.