



What is Intramuscular Stimulation and Trigger Point Dry Needling?

Trigger Point Dry Needling and Intramuscular Stimulation (IMS) both involve inserting thin needles into tight, irritable muscles.

Trigger Point Dry Needling creates changes to muscles and connective tissue (fascia) near the needled areas. It also stimulates nerves to help release the body's own painkillers.

What should I expect from treatment?

The number and location of needles used will vary based on your condition and treatment goals. The needle is inserted into the muscle up to several centimetres deep. Sometimes the needled muscle will twitch.

Intramuscular stimulation and trigger point dry needling are rarely stand-alone treatments. Needling is used to address pain. When combined with other physiotherapy treatment methods, it also helps improve movement and function. Your physiotherapist will regularly check your progress to ensure needling is helping you.

Are there any complications associated with IMS and Trigger Point Dry Needling?

Yes. Any technique that punctures skin has a risk of complications. It is important you know the risks before treatment.

Common minor complications that usually resolve on their own include:

- Bleeding
- Bruising
- Pain during treatment
- Pain following treatment

Less common complications that range from mild to significant include:

- Aggravation of symptoms
- Drowsiness
- Fatigue
- Feeling faint
- Nausea
- Headache
- Release of emotions
- Feeling shaky
- Numbness
- Nerve irritation

A stuck or bent needle is an uncommon but significant complication that may require medical attention.

Serious complications are very rare and usually require intervention from other health-care providers include:

- Breakage of needle in the body
- Infection
- Puncture of vital tissue (e.g., a puncture of lung tissue causing it to collapse which is called a pneumothorax).

Can the risks of complications be reduced?

To reduce the impact of complications:

- Eat before your appointment
- Show up well rested to your appointment
- Tell your physiotherapist if you have any concerns, including past experiences where you have fainted from receiving a needle
- Let your physiotherapist know if you experience pain, dizziness, nausea, shortness of breath or if you are feeling unwell
- Follow your physiotherapist's advice about positioning and movement during and after treatment
- Inform your physiotherapist of any changes to medications such as blood thinners or pain relievers

Communicate with your physiotherapist throughout treatment. Discuss your treatment and ensure your questions are answered. You can request your physiotherapist stop needling treatment at any time.

Would a different treatment work?

Needling is one of the many techniques your physiotherapist may use. Discuss the benefits and risks of needling and other available treatments with your physiotherapist. For some, such as those with needle fear or a history of fainting, an alternative treatment might be a better option.

Do all physiotherapists perform Intramuscular Stimulation or Trigger Point Dry needling?

No. Physiotherapists who perform dry needling have completed training in addition to their university education. They have also received approval to perform needling from their regulatory body (Physiotherapy Alberta - College + Association) and must adhere to safe practice standards.