

Trigger Point Injections

What is it?

A trigger point injection is an injection (shot) into a painful area of muscle. Normal muscles tighten and relax as you use them. A trigger point is a tight knot or band of muscles that forms when a muscle will not relax. They can be very painful. An injection into the trigger point can help it relax and relieve the pain. Trigger point injections are usually accompanied by muscle strengthening and flexibility exercises. Many patients receive a series of trigger point injections, usually a few weeks apart.

Why do I need it?

Trigger points can irritate surrounding nerves and cause pain in the muscle, or cause “referred pain” in another part of the body. The pain can affect posture, cause weakness and reduce your range of motion. Trigger points can be caused by a number of conditions, including:

- Muscle tension conditions, such as myofascial pain syndrome (chronic pain that surrounds muscle tissue), or fibromyalgia (chronic pain in the muscles of soft tissues surrounding joints)
- Tension headaches
- Muscle injuries or repetitive use injuries
- Spine conditions such as herniated discs, pinched nerves, and fractures

What happens during the procedure?

Trigger point injections can be done in a doctor’s office. The actual injection takes only a few minutes, but plan on 30 minutes for the whole procedure. You will remain awake and able to communicate the entire time.

These steps will be part of your procedure:

- **Position:** Depending on where you will have the injection, you will be sitting or lying down.
- **Numbing the skin:** You may be given a local anesthetic near the injection site so you do not feel it.
- **Injection:** A small needle will be inserted into the trigger point. The injection will contain a local anesthetic. If you are allergic to the medication, a dry-needle technique (involving no medications) can be used.

- Brief Pain: The injection may cause some pain that can last from a few seconds to a few minutes.
- Pain Relief: The injection will allow the trigger point to relax, and the pain should go away.
- Additional Injections: Several sites may be injected in one visit.

What happens after?

- You will be monitored in the doctor's office for up to 20 minutes after the procedure. This allows the doctor to make sure you don't have reactions to the medication.
- You may feel numb in your arms or legs for about an hour after the procedure. You may also get a bruise at the site of the injection.
- You may feel sore around the area for a day or two. Your doctor may recommend that you put ice on it for short periods throughout the next few days.
- If the injection is in to an arm or leg, you will not be allowed to drive. Someone else will need to drive you home.
- In the first day after the procedure, it is important to stretch the treated area.

What can I expect for pain relief?

Trigger point injections have been found to be very effective in relieving pain, especially when combined with exercise and medication. For many patients, the pain will go away and not return. For some, the pain will decrease but not go away entirely. In this case, your doctor may recommend another injection.