Physical Therapists at Motion Stability aim to reduce recurrent pain and injuries by focusing on an integrative method that improves tissue pathology and movement dysfunctions. Our treatments include specialty techniques to improve joint injuries, nerve pathology, muscle imbalances, and myofascial dysfunction. A specific intervention our Physical Therapists provide is the clinical technique of trigger point dry needling or also known as intramuscular manual therapy.

Below is information regarding the use of dry needling as a part of your care.

**What is dry needling?** Dry needling is an invasive procedure in which a solid filament needle is inserted into the skin and muscle directly at a myofascial trigger point. A myofascial trigger point consists of multiple contraction knots, which are related to the production and maintenance of the pain cycle.

**Is dry needling similar to acupuncture?** There are many similarities and differences between dry needling and acupuncture. Licensed physical therapists in a growing number of states can use trigger point dry needling under the scope of their practice. Physical therapists at Motion Stability are not licensed acupuncturists and do no practice acupuncture. In contrast to most schools of acupuncture, dry needling is strictly based on Western medicine principles and research.

**How does dry needling work?** The exact mechanisms of dry needling are still being investigated. Based on the pioneering studies by Dr. Jay Shah at the National Institutes of Health, we know that inserting a needle into trigger points can cause favorable biomechanical and physiologic changes, which assist in reducing pain. It is essential to elicit so-called local twitch responses, which are spinal cord reflexes. Getting local twitch responses with dry needling can be the first step in breaking a patient’s pain cycle.

**What type of problems can be treated with dry needling?** Dry needling can be used for a variety of musculoskeletal problems. Muscles are thought to be a primary contributing factor to the symptoms. Such conditions include, but are not limited to neck, back and shoulder pain, arm pain (tennis elbow, carpal tunnel), headache to include migraine’s and tension type headaches, jaw pain, buttock pain and leg pain (sciatica, hamstring strains, calf tightness/spasms).
Is the procedure painful? Most patients do not feel the insertion of the needle. The local twitch response elicits a very brief (less than a second) painful response. Some patients describe this as a little electrical shock; others feel it more like a cramping sensation. Again, the therapeutic response occurs with the elicitation of local twitch responses and this is a desirable reaction.

Are the needles sterile? Yes, we only use sterile disposable needles.

What side effects can I expect after the treatment? Most patients report being sore after the procedure. The soreness is described as muscle soreness over the area treated and into the areas of referred symptoms. Typically, the soreness lasts between a few hours and two days.

What should I do after having the procedure done? Our recommendations vary depending on the amount of soreness you have and on the individual response to the treatment. Recommendations may include applying heat or ice over the area, gentle stretches and modification of activities.

How long does it take for the procedure to work? Typically, it takes several visits for a positive reaction to take place. Again, we are trying to cause biomechanical and physiologic changes without pharmacological means. Therefore, we are look for a cumulative response to achieve a certain threshold after which the pain cycle is disturbed.

Why is my doctor not familiar with dry needling? In the US, dry needling is a relatively new method for treating myofascial pain and not everyone is already aware of this effective modality. Feel free to inform you doctor about this treatment option. It is upon all of us to educate others about new and innovative ways to treat pain.

Where does dry needling fit in the entire rehabilitation program? Our physical therapists perform a comprehensive evaluation assessing multiple tissue structures and movement patterns that may be involved in a patient’s pain complaints. Based upon the specific examination findings, dry needling may be the priority in treatment to help break the pain cycle, while with other patients it may be a complimentary intervention. Again, every patient’s pain is unique, the specialty of our physical therapists is to know when to apply specific techniques to improve the patient’s condition.

Once I am feeling better, how often do I need to come back to maintain progress? The musculoskeletal system is under constant pressure from gravity, stress, work, etc. A regular exercise program combined with good posture can prevent many problems. If the pain comes back, a visit to improve the tissue dysfunction is recommended to treat and reduce occurrences.

Where can I get more information about dry needling? Please visit our website at www.motionstability.com, or call us at 404-254-4193 for further information.

Adapted from Bethesda Physiocare — a Jan Dommerholt Company