

Trigger Point Injections

A trigger point is a painful area in a muscle. It may feel like a “knot” or tight area. Pain from a trigger point can also spread to other parts of your body.

A trigger point injection is given in the painful spot to help lessen the pain. The injection includes a local anesthetic (a numbing medicine) and sometimes a corticosteroid (a medicine used to treat inflammation or swelling). In some cases, the doctor will simply put the needle into the trigger point to break up the knot, and no medicine is needed.

By lessening your pain, a trigger point injection can help you go about your regular activities. Physical therapy may also help after an injection.

You should not have a trigger point injection if you:

- Have allergies to the local anesthetic or corticosteroid
- Have an infection
- Have a bleeding disorder
- Are pregnant

What to expect

- First, the skin around the painful area will be cleaned to prevent infection.
- Next, your doctor will find the trigger point by feeling for the painful area with his or her fingers.
- Then the doctor will inject the medicine into the trigger point with a thin needle.
- If you have more than 1 trigger point, you may need several injections.
- You will be awake during the procedure. You may feel some stinging from the needle or the anesthetic. You may also feel some pressure or a “twitch” when your doctor places the needle into the trigger point.
- The injection usually takes a few minutes.

Possible side effects

Like all procedures, a trigger point injection has some side effects, but they are rare. Possible side effects include:

- Tenderness, bruising or bleeding at the injection site
- Infection
- Dizziness
- Allergic reaction to the medicine used
- The need for other treatments if the injection does not relieve your pain

In very rare cases, the injection might cause damage to organs (such as a punctured or collapsed lung). If this happens, patients will feel shortness of breath or chest pain.

After the procedure

- Once the numbing medicine wears off, you may feel sore where you were injected for a couple of days or weeks.
- To help relieve soreness, put ice or a cold pack on the injection site. Do this for 15–20 minutes, at least 4 times a day for several days. Before using the ice, wrap it in a towel so it does not touch your skin.

- Take over-the-counter pain medicine, such as Tylenol (acetaminophen), ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin) or muscle relaxants, as recommended by your doctor.
- Follow your doctor's instructions for doing physical therapy. You may need to meet with your physical therapist soon after the injection to take advantage of the pain relief in your muscles.
- If you have any of the following symptoms, call the Spine Center:
 - Fever over 100°F
 - Chills
 - Problems at your injection site. This could include redness, swelling or bleeding.
 - Shortness of breath or chest pain
 - Any new or unexplained symptoms

Trigger point injection effectiveness

Trigger point injections work better in some people than in others. You may have relief from pain for weeks or even months. But some people need to have a few trigger point injections to feel relief. Talk to your doctor about how often you will need to have a trigger point injection. If the injections do not help you, we will work with you to find the source of your pain and explore different treatment options.

If you have any questions, please call the Pain Center at 617-754-5450 and ask to speak with a member of the clinical team.