

Trigger Point Injections What To Expect



A trigger point injection may make it easier for you to exercise and to participate in physical therapy sessions.

Trigger points are very sensitive areas in muscles, causing them to be sensitive to touch. They can send pain to other areas of the body. For example, a trigger point in the neck may produce pain in the back, shoulder, or arm, but not in the neck. This pain usually comes from the trigger points in muscle groups and not from nerves in the body. Trigger points can:

- cause muscle spasm
- limit your arm and leg movement
- decrease strength

What is a trigger point injection (TPI)?

A TPI is an injection that will help diagnose and treat certain chronic pain conditions where muscle sensitivity and pain exist.

Will the injection help my pain?

It is hard to say for sure if the injection will help you. Your pain may go away after the injection and never come back. Sometimes the injection only helps to lessen pain for a short time. In this case, a second injection may be helpful. If the second injection does not help, then TPI will most likely not help with your pain for the long-term. A TPI may make it easier for you to exercise and to participate in physical therapy sessions to help improve your condition overall. It is important for you to take an active role in your treatment plan.

How long will the pain relief last?

The length of pain relief varies from person to person. In most cases, the pain may be lessened for a few days up to a few months. Your doctor may recommend TPIs as well as other types of pain management as part of your treatment plan.

How is a TPI done?

The procedure may include:

- Injecting the skin with a local

anesthetic. You may feel a stinging and burning sensation.

- Trigger point injection. When the tip of the needle touches the trigger point, you may feel a brief increase in your pain. This pain is a good sign that the medicine is in the correct spot; the pain usually goes away quickly. The actual time it takes for your doctor to complete the procedure may be different for each patient.

Are there any side effects?

Yes, TPIs can cause some side effects, including:

- injection area may be sore for several days
- bruising in the area of injection
- muscle stiffness due to muscle spasm.

If this is a problem, you might try acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or aspirin. Also, try applying a cold pack. If it doesn't work, try warm, moist heat, and then gently stretch the muscle in the affected area to relieve muscle stiffness. Talk with your doctor about managing these side effects.

Is a trigger point injection safe?

Yes, however, there are risks, and side effects. More serious complications are possible for some people.

- Very rarely, if the injection is done in the chest wall or low in the neck, the needle may puncture

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the lung. This would cause chest pain and difficulty breathing.

- The needle may hit a nerve that could cause pain.

Talk with your doctor to weigh the risks and benefits of having the injection.

When can I go back to my normal activities?

Limit activities as much as possible the day of the injection. The following day you can resume your normal activities, including your muscle stretching exercises as directed by your doctor.

How often can I have a trigger point injection?

You'll want to discuss your treatment plan with your doctor. Sometimes your doctor will prescribe a series of injections. These injections are done several weeks apart. After this series, your doctor can determine how the injections are helping you. If the second or third injection does not help, then TPIs most likely will not help your pain.

What do I do if the TPI does not work for my pain or I don't want one?

Trigger points can cause a cycle of suffering, inactivity, and disability. The good news is that there are

many things you can do to help manage your chronic pain. Using several methods together is often the most helpful approach. Studies have shown that strategies such as exercise, relaxation, and changing negative thought patterns can help people cope better with chronic pain.

Who should not have a trigger point injection?

- If you are thinking of becoming pregnant, or are currently pregnant or breastfeeding.
- If you have severe allergic reaction to local anesthetics.
- If you are taking blood thinning medicine like coumadin (Warfarin), clopidogrel (Plavix), aspirin/dipyridamole (Aggrenox), Enoxaparin (Lovenox), Fondaparinux (Arixtra) or heparin. You will need to stop taking them before the procedure. Discuss this with your doctor or cardiologist in order to weigh the risks and benefits of stopping these medicines. It is OK to take Tylenol for other pain like arthritis, pain from previous operations, abdominal pain, and headaches.

You should discuss any questions regarding the use of any other medications with your doctor.

Call Kaiser Permanente if after the trigger point injection you experience:

- redness, pus, or swelling at injection site;
- persistent numbness, "pins and needles," or weakness that develops after you leave the clinic;
- any difficulty breathing.

Call 911 or go to the nearest Emergency Room any time you think you may need emergency care. For example if:

- breathing is very difficult
- after the injection you develop any new numbness or weakness in your hands or legs; or if you are unable to control your bladder or bowels.

Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at kp.org to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- [Check your Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook.](#)
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.
- If you are hit, hurt or threatened by a partner or spouse, this can seriously affect your health. There is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to ndvh.org.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.