

## **Understanding Functional Dry Needling (FDN) in Physical Therapy**

### **Helping You Move Better, Feel Better, and Recover Faster**

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#### **What Is Functional Dry Needling?**

Functional Dry Needling (FDN) is a specialized treatment technique used by licensed physical therapists to relieve pain and improve movement. FDN involves inserting a very thin, solid filament needle into tight muscles, often referred to as trigger points, to help “reset” the muscle and promote healing.

It is called “dry” needling because no medication or fluid is injected. The benefit comes from the mechanical effect of the needle on the tissue.

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#### **Why Is Dry Needling Used in Physical Therapy?**

As part of a comprehensive physical therapy program, FDN helps:

- **Reduce muscle tightness and pain**
- **Improve flexibility and joint mobility**
- **Restore normal movement patterns**
- **Speed up recovery from injury**
- **Improve athletic or functional performance**

Your physical therapist may include FDN to target muscles that are contributing to poor movement or causing pain, helping you get back to doing the things you love—safely and faster.

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#### **How Does It Work?**

When a needle is inserted into a tight or irritated muscle, it can create a small twitch response. This response helps:

- Decrease pain by reducing tension in the muscle
- Improve blood flow and tissue healing
- “Reset” muscle function, improving the brain-muscle connection
- Enhance your body’s natural ability to heal

It often complements other physical therapy interventions like exercise, manual therapy, posture correction, and movement retraining.

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#### **Is Functional Dry Needling the Same as Acupuncture?**

No. While both use similar needles, **FDN is not acupuncture**. FDN is based on modern science, anatomy, and evidence-based physical therapy principles—not on traditional Chinese medicine or meridian theory.

FDN focuses on musculoskeletal pain and dysfunction. It is used specifically to restore normal muscle and joint movement.

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### What Conditions Can FDN Help Treat?

FDN may be part of your treatment plan if you're dealing with:

- Neck, shoulder, or back pain
  - Hip or knee pain
  - Headaches or migraines
  - Tendon pain (e.g., tennis elbow, Achilles tendinopathy)
  - Sciatica or nerve-related symptoms
  - Muscle strains or tightness
  - Chronic pain conditions like myofascial pain syndrome
  - TMJ (jaw pain)
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### What to Expect During and After Treatment

During treatment, you may feel:

- A dull ache, muscle twitch, or slight cramping—this is a normal and expected response
- Temporary soreness afterward, similar to post-exercise muscle soreness
- Improvements in range of motion and pain levels over the next 24–48 hours

Your therapist will discuss how to manage soreness and what activities to avoid immediately after treatment.

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### Is It Safe?

FDN is very safe when performed by a trained and licensed provider. Physical therapists offering this treatment have completed specialized training through programs such as those provided by **Evidence In Motion**, one of the leading organizations in the U.S. for FDN education.

Your therapist will always perform a thorough evaluation to ensure dry needling is appropriate for you.

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## Training and Expertise – Evidence In Motion

Originally developed by Dr. Edo Zylstra through KinetiCore (now part of **Evidence In Motion**), FDN training is rigorous and clinically focused. Physical therapists are taught advanced techniques to safely and effectively integrate FDN into your personalized care plan.

EIM's Functional Dry Needling program is nationally recognized and ensures your therapist is using best practices supported by current research and clinical outcomes.

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## Questions or Concerns?

Your comfort and understanding are important. Please ask your physical therapist if you have:

- Questions about how FDN fits into your treatment
- Concerns about safety or side effects
- Previous experiences with needling or acupuncture

We're here to guide you every step of the way toward recovery and better movement.

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**Learn more** about Functional Dry Needling from Evidence In Motion:

 [fdn.evidenceinmotion.com](https://fdn.evidenceinmotion.com)