
Top Two Facts

You REALLY Need to Know about

DRY NEEDLING

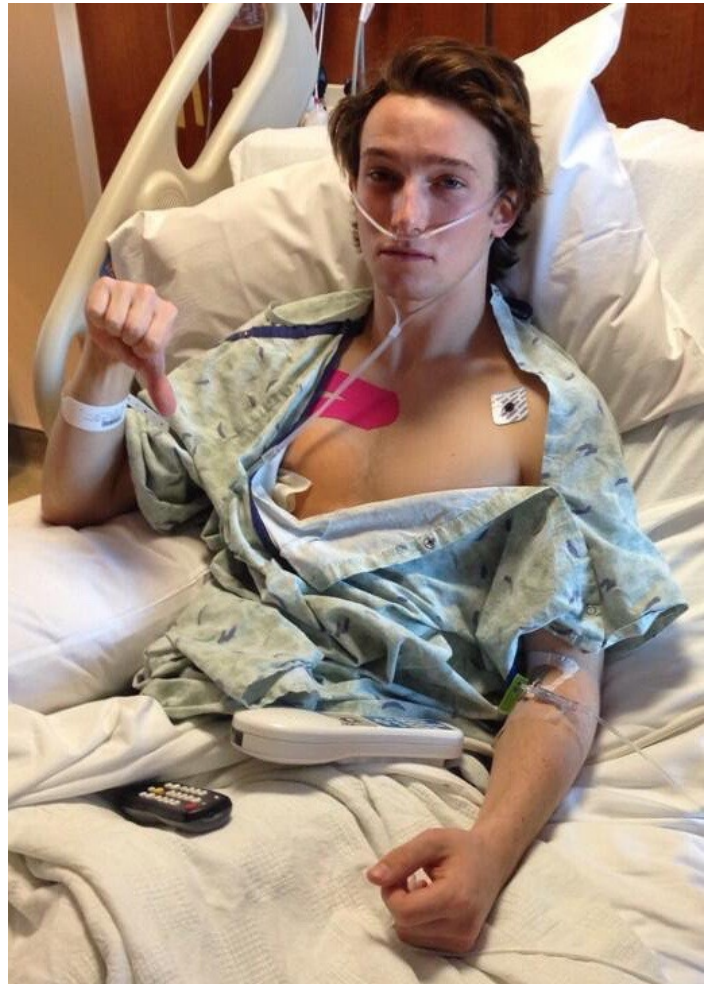
1. Dry needling is acupuncture.

More specifically, dry needling is acupuncture that involves inserting acupuncture needles (U.S. Food and Drug Administration [FDA]-regulated medical devices) through the skin and into reactive (painful) acupuncture points detected by a flinch reaction during palpation (1). These acupuncture points, now commonly referred to as trigger points, have been used in acupuncture for more than 2,000 years to treat or prevent musculoskeletal and connective tissue disorders, including musculoskeletal pain (1).

2. Dry needling is unsafe when performed by physical therapists.

Dry needling is safe when performed by qualified practitioners of acupuncture, such as physicians and acupuncturists, but it is unsafe when performed by physical therapists—due to inadequate and improper training in acupuncture—as evidenced by the following examples:

- In Colorado, a physical therapist punctured freeskier Torin Yater-Wallace's right lung with an acupuncture needle, causing damage to the lung that led to a pneumothorax (an accumulation of air between the lung and the chest wall, causing the lung to collapse) (2,3). He required surgery to treat the pneumothorax and was hospitalized for five days (2).
- In Georgia, a physical therapist performed dry needling on a 15-year-old girl without obtaining the consent of her mother (4). She collapsed from the dry needling (4).



Freeskier Torin Yater-Wallace gives a thumbs down in the St. Anthony Summit Medical Center in Frisco, Colorado, on November 29, 2013, during recovery from surgery to treat a pneumothorax that he suffered after a physical therapist punctured his right lung with an acupuncture needle. (Photo: @TorinWallace)

- In Maryland, a physical therapist punctured a nerve in high school teacher Emily Kuykendall's left leg with an acupuncture needle, causing damage to the nerve that led to pain, numbness, and paresthesias (abnormal sensations of

tingling [pins-and-needles]) (5). She required drugs to treat the pain (5).

“This is really taking a physical and emotional toll on me,” Ms. Kuykendall wrote three weeks after the nerve injury. “There is almost not a minute in the day that goes by that I wish that I had not gone to see [the physical therapist]” (5).

- In Arizona, three physical therapists performed dry needling through patients’ clothing, which resulted in “findings of substandard care” (6–8). This placed the patients at risk for injuries (for example, to the heart or lungs) and infections (for example, with “flesh-eating” *Streptococcus pyogenes* or methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* [MRSA]) (6).
- In Arizona, a physical therapist disposed of used acupuncture needles in a public recycling container, which violated Arizona’s Biohazardous Medical Waste Regulations (Arizona Administrative Code [A.A.C.] R18-13-1401 et seq.) (9). This placed the public and recycling workers at risk for needlestick injuries and infections (for example, with hepatitis B virus [HBV], hepatitis C virus [HCV], or human immunodeficiency virus [HIV]).

“Dry needling is unsafe when performed by physical therapists.”

CNA, a professional liability insurance company, provided the following examples:

- A physical therapist punctured a patient’s right lung with an acupuncture needle, causing damage to the lung that led to a pneumothorax (10). She was hospitalized and underwent treatment for the pneumothorax (10).
- A physical therapist punctured a patient’s left lung with an acupuncture needle, causing damage to the lung that led to a pneumothorax

(10). She was hospitalized and underwent treatment for the pneumothorax (10).

- A physical therapist punctured a patient’s lung with an acupuncture needle, causing damage to the lung that led to a pneumothorax (10). She required surgery to treat the pneumothorax and was hospitalized for three days (10).
- A physical therapist was performing dry needling on a patient’s hip when the handle of the acupuncture needle broke off, leaving the shaft of the acupuncture needle lodged in the hip (10). This was probably due to the physical therapist using excessive force when manipulating (rotating or pistoning) the acupuncture needle. She was hospitalized and underwent surgery to remove the shaft of the acupuncture needle (10).
- A physical therapist performed dry needling on a patient’s calf while failing to adhere to basic infection prevention and control practices, resulting in the patient developing a calf infection (10). She required “intravenous therapy and two surgical procedures” to treat the calf infection (10).

Patient safety and quality of care are paramount. Therefore, the National Center for Acupuncture Safety and Integrity (NCASI) agrees with the American Medical Association (AMA) that dry needling should only be performed by qualified practitioners of acupuncture, such as physicians and acupuncturists (11).

For More Information

For more information about dry needling, please visit www.acupuncturesafety.org.

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