

Self Treatment for Tender Points and Trigger Points

Tender Points

Tender points are areas of soreness in the muscles, tendons, and other soft tissues that occur throughout the body. They are usually caused by minor injuries, overuse, tension, stress, or some combination thereof.

Tender points typically don't refer pain to other areas. They usually hurt where (and only where) you touch them, similar to poking a bruise. Tender points respond well to massage techniques such as kneading or compressive strokes.

One technique is to simply roll a tennis ball back and forth over the tender point, starting with light pressure and increasing intensity as you can tolerate. The tenderness should decrease throughout the treatment, not increase. Work on the tender point no more than 60 seconds at a time, and no more than 5-10 minutes a day. Foam rollers and massage sticks can be used instead of a tennis ball if this works better for you. Massage guns are good options as well.

Trigger Points

Trigger points (TPs) are areas in the muscle or surrounding tissues that are painful when pressed upon. TPs are different than tender points as they refer pain to other areas of the body. For instance, a TP located near the shoulder blade may create feelings of pain up into the neck, or down into the arm. Trigger points may be associated with poor posture, deconditioning, and injury, as well as some diseases and skeletal disorders.

One technique used to treat TPs is called 'deep ischemic pressure'. In other words, squashing them. If the TP is one you can reach, a thumb will work well to apply pressure.

Start off by scanning sore and tight muscles by pressing with your fingertips. If you find a spot that radiates (shoots) pain to another location, you have found a trigger point.

Next, press hard enough on the TP so that the pain shoots, but not so much that you cannot tolerate it. Hold this pressure for no more than 30 seconds. If the pain becomes less, you can press a bit harder. Again, for no more than 30 seconds.

Spend no more than 60 seconds on one point. Move to another TP if you are able to find one. Each session should last no more than 5-10 minutes and be performed every other day until relief is obtained. If the radiating pain is completely gone and you only feel tenderness underneath your thumb, you have broken up the trigger point and treatment is complete.

Quite often, the TPs are found near the shoulder blades and mid back where it is impossible to reach. One way to do deep ischemic pressure in these areas is to use an ordinary tennis or lacrosse ball. Find a firm surface to lie down on, such as a firm bed or a floor. Lay on the tennis ball, positioning it over the TP. Gently let more weight rest on the ball until it "hurts good." Hold this position for 30 seconds and slowly release the pressure.

This treatment can be paired with sessions of moist heat and gentle activity or stretching.