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Q/ Do trigger point injections effectively treat fibromyalgia?

EVIDENCE-BASED ANSWER

A | **POSSIBLY.** Trigger point injections appear effective in reducing pain and increasing pressure thresholds in patients with fibromyalgia and myofascial trigger points (strength of recommendation [SOR]: B, small randomized controlled trials [RCTs]).

Consensus guidelines suggest that trigger point injections may have a role in the treatment of fibromyalgia (SOR: C, expert opinion).

Active injections produce sustained improvement

A 2011 double-blind RCT randomized 68 female patients with both fibromyalgia and myofascial trigger points to either active trigger point injections with 1 mL 0.5% bupivacaine or placebo-like needle penetration with no medication to an area near the trigger point.¹ Patients were evaluated for both local and generalized fibromyalgia symptoms at 4 and 8 days (trial period) and after 30 days (follow-up). Injections occurred on Days 1 and 4, with an option of additional injections on Days 8 and 11.

Compared to baseline (7 days before the injection), patients receiving active trigger point injections had decreased myofascial pain episodes 7 days after the injection (5.6 vs 0.97 episodes; $P < .001$), decreased pain intensity (62 vs 19/100 mm Visual Analog Scale score; $P < .001$), and increased pressure threshold at the trigger point (1.5 vs 2.9 kg/cm²; $P < .0001$), whereas the control group showed no differences.

During Days 1 to 8, patients receiving active trigger point injections required less acetaminophen (0.2 vs 2.7 tablets/d; $P < .0001$). At Day 8, no patients in the active trigger point injection group requested additional injections, whereas all the patients in the control group requested an injection ($P < .0001$).

At Day 8, patients also had significantly decreased intensity of fibromyalgia pain, fewer tender points, and higher tender point pressure thresholds; none of these differences were statistically significant in the placebo injection group (data presented graphically). The improvements persisted at 30 days of follow-up (data presented graphically).

Small study shows improvement with injections after 2 weeks

An uncontrolled prospective before-after study in 1996 evaluated the effectiveness of 0.5% lidocaine trigger point injections in 9 patients with myofascial trigger points plus fibromyalgia compared with 9 patients with myofascial trigger points alone.²

Immediately after injection, patients with fibromyalgia had a nonsignificant worsening in pain intensity (pain scale 8.1 to 8.4/10; $P > .1$), but there was a significant improvement at 2 weeks (5.9; $P < .01$). The pressure threshold also decreased initially (1.7 to 1.4 kg/cm²; $P > .1$), but significantly increased at 2 weeks (2.4 kg/cm²; $P < .01$). In comparison, patients without fibromyalgia showed immediate improvement in all domains, which persisted at 2 weeks ($P < .01$).

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What the guidelines say

Recent Canadian Fibromyalgia Guidelines discuss trigger point injections in the sec-

tion on “off-label” medications, stating that they “may have some place in treatment of fibromyalgia.”³

JFP

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