
Understanding Knee Pain: A Self-Care Guide

Our knees take a lot of abuse, and a common site of wear and tear. However, many people don't realize that trigger points farther up in their thigh muscles are frequently a contributing factor. That pain from tendonitis, bursitis or arthritis you're experiencing might be partially due to trigger points, which is something you can take care of through acupuncture and self massage.

The Connection Between Trigger Points and Acupuncture

Trigger points are small, sensitive areas in your muscles that can cause pain both at the point itself and in other areas of your body (referred pain). These points often correspond with traditional acupuncture points, which isn't surprising given our growing understanding of how the body's myofascial (muscle and connective tissue) system overlaps with traditional acupuncture meridians. When you apply pressure to these points, you stimulate the same nerve fibers that respond to acupuncture needles, making self-massage a powerful tool for home care.

Getting Started with Self-Massage

The key to effective self-massage is gentle, sustained pressure rather than aggressive rubbing. You'll need a massage ball - while a tennis ball works to start, I recommend the Yoga Tune Up therapy balls for their durability and perfect density. When working on a point:

- Start with light pressure and gradually increase as the tissue releases
- If you find yourself holding your breath, that's a sign you're using too much pressure
- Spend no more than a couple of minutes on each area.
- Repeat every 2-3 days
- If you experience any nerve sensations (tingling, numbness, or sharp pain), adjust the position of the ball

Key Areas to Address

For pain in the front of the knee or the inside of the knee, check the inside of the thigh and just below the length of the hip crease. Also check along the thigh from the top of the knee up to the hip crease.

For pain in the outside of the knee, check for points along the the outside of the thigh, from the knee up to the hip crease.

For pain in the back of the knee, check for points both in the back of the lower leg in the calf muscles, and the back of the thigh in the hamstring muscles.

There are various ways to massage these points. For the front and sides of the thigh, you can try a ball against the wall or your elbow. For points on the back of the thigh, try sitting on a hard chair and putting a ball under your thigh. For the back of your knee, it's best to use your fingers, as this is a sensitive area with nerves and veins.

See the illustration below for help locating common trigger points.

