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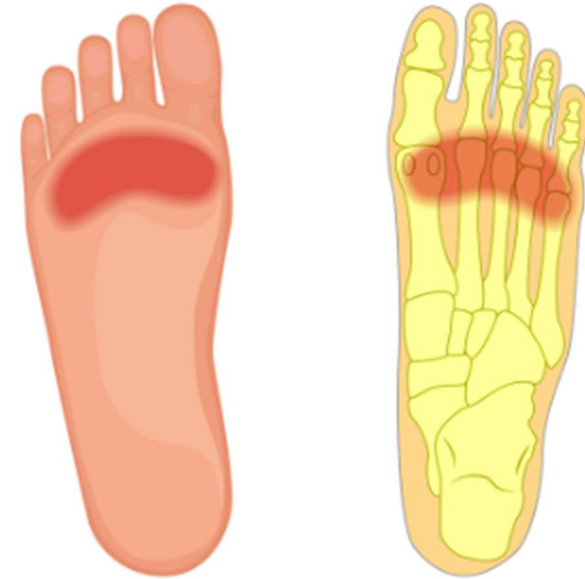
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Metatarsalgia

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What is Metatarsalgia?

Metatarsalgia is a general term used to refer to any painful foot condition affecting the metatarsal region of the foot. Traditionally, the term tends to refer to pain under the balls of the feet or “metatarsal heads”. However, there are a range of specific conditions that exist under the umbrella term “metatarsalgia”.

What are the symptoms of Metatarsalgia?

- Pain in the ball of the foot.
- Some people describe this as being like walking on pebbles.
- Others describe a general aching under the ball of the foot.
- The symptoms can be localized i.e., under one or two metatarsal heads or can be general and felt under all the metatarsal heads.
- The symptoms can be made worse by standing, walking, or running and may affect both feet.

What causes Metatarsalgia?

This is a common foot condition where one or more of the metatarsal heads (balls of the foot) becomes inflamed and are therefore painful. The most common cause of Metatarsalgia is excessive pressure on the bones at the front of the foot. Pain and inflammation of the joints at the ball of the foot can develop for several reasons:

Offers a list of all surgeons carrying out specialist foot and ankle surgery across the UK as well as patient information.

Arthritis Research UK / Versus Arthritis

<https://www.versusarthritis.org/>

Phone: 0300 790 0400

Offers a wide range of information and articles as well as a selection of self-help booklets which can be downloaded on the Internet.

National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society (NRAS)

<https://www.nras.org.uk>

Phone: 0845 458 3969

Helpline: 0800 298 7650

Email: enquires@nras.org.uk

Provides information and support for people with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA), their families, friends, and carers.

Further Information

We endeavour to provide an excellent service at all times, but should you have any concerns please, in the first instance, raise these with the Matron, Senior Nurse or Manager on duty.

If they cannot resolve your concern, please contact our Patient Experience Team on 01932 723553 or email asp-tr.patient.advice@nhs.net. If you remain concerned, the team can also advise upon how to make a formal complaint.

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Having a stiff ankle or Achilles tendon

This can affect the way that pressure is distributed across the foot and may lead to extra stress on the metatarsal heads. You might consider using a heel raise in your shoe.

Calf stretches

Gentle calf stretches can help. The easiest and best way to stretch your calf muscles properly is by using a slant board at home every day.



Stand on the slant board for 3 minutes x 3 times a day initially and gradually progress to a minimum of 5 minutes x 5 times a day for - at least - 3 months. You should always wear your trainers (with appropriate insoles) when you do this exercise.

Useful Links

British Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society (BOFAS)

<https://www.bofas.org.uk>

- As the result of a bunion (excessive bone growth on the outside of the big toe) that is putting pressure on the smaller toes.
- In people who are very active and take part in high impact sports resulting in overuse / pressure on the balls of the feet.
- In older people: As we age, the fat pad under the balls of the foot becomes thinner and this can contribute to pressure at the front of the foot.
- High arched feet: People with this foot shape are more likely to develop Metatarsalgia because their foot is less flexible causing a tight Achilles Tendon.
- Muscular tightness in the calf muscles results in greater pressure at the front of the foot with each step. This can cause or exacerbate Metatarsalgia.
- Due to either Arthritis, Gout, or Diabetes.
- Previous surgery to the foot.
- Stress fracture of the metatarsal bone/s. If your pain is worsening, see your GP or visit your local Walk in Centre.
- Claw foot (pes cavus)
- Very long lesser metatarsals

Being Overweight

This can put extra stress on the feet in general. Think about what your goals are and how you can achieve them without overdoing things for your feet, e.g., if you are exercising to lose weight and your feet have developed metatarsalgia, consider the below advice on footwear plus use low impact exercise as well as diet to lose weight e.g., swimming or cycling.

“Challenge the clock” by swimming or cycling at an increased speed that you can comfortably cope with to raise heart and breathing rate - this helps to burn the calories and helps you to lose weight without overloading the feet. If you walk/run certain distances, spread the volume across a greater number of days.

Footwear

Wearing high heeled shoes can put extra stress on the metatarsal heads. Footwear that is poorly fitting or too tight can also be a cause.

How is this condition diagnosed?

Metatarsalgia is usually diagnosed by a doctor or physiotherapist on physical examination. X-rays are not necessarily needed, unless there is a suggestion of a possible fracture following an injury or stress fracture (worsening pain / swelling).

Initial treatments for Metatarsalgia?

Thankfully, Metatarsalgia can usually be treated through activity modification, addressing certain footwear, appropriate insoles, better weight management where appropriate and exercise. Most patients are treated non surgically, but occasionally surgery is required. The physiotherapist may also need to address any lower limb alignment problems that may be contributing to your foot pain.

Relative rest and modification of activity:

- Metatarsalgia can be caused by overuse, which can cause some mild inflammation in the metatarsal heads and nearby joints e.g., in runners or sports that involve jumping may also put extra stress on the metatarsal heads and lead to inflammation and pain.
- If you experience this discomfort, you can protect from further injury by relative resting e.g., reduce the amount of non-essential exercise such as running, jogging, aerobics, Zumba.
- Try, if possible, to avoid or minimize long periods of unnecessary standing/walking.

Well-padded shoes possibly with soft gel inserts will help reduce the pressure on the metatarsal heads. If it is essential to wear smart dress shoes, e.g., dress code for work - consider wearing wider, deeper shoes outside work e.g., trainers, rocker bottom shoes. This should help to reduce the amount of discomfort you are experiencing with your metatarsalgia. Replace worn out footwear, as this footwear will have less shock absorbing ability and may compromise your foot 'biomechanics' further prolonging the symptoms of metatarsalgia.

Padding

Padding using materials such as fleecy web, fleecy foam, felt or gel covers can help alleviate symptoms of metatarsalgia. Sometimes though, applying any material at the level of metatarsal heads, can cause more pain. Therefore, insoles with a metatarsal dome or bar are considered a safer option.