

# Metatarsalgia – A pain the foot!



of the specific bones or the joint that connects them to the toes.

Common patient descriptions for this forefoot condition are the feeling of a pebble in the front of their shoe, the sensation that their sock has rolled back or bunched up, as well as sharp shooting pain and /or numbness in the ball of the foot sometimes radiating out to the toes.

Treatment for Metatarsalgia often focuses on whether pressure to the metatarsal head or motions of the

metatarsophalangeal joints are the primary cause of discomfort. In some cases, it may be both.

Metatarsalgia is a generalized term used to describe pain that has developed in the ball of the foot. It is essentially an irritation of the metatarsal region. There can be more defined conditions that fall under this general term but causes are often similar or associated to the following contributing factors.

- Foot trauma
- Certain foot types such as high rigid arches
- Foot deformities such as bunions or depressed metatarsal heads.
- Arthritis in the metatarsophalangeal joints
- Fat pad thinning of the protective fat pads that cushion the ball of the foot
- Excessive weight
- Improper fitting footwear

Athletes engaged in sports that require sustained running and jumping may be more susceptible because they load the metatarsals with a high force load. Individuals in professions with many hours of walking can also frequently develop this irritation due to increased forefoot loading.

Foot characteristics such as higher more rigid arches along with collapsed metatarsal arches can increase localized pressure to the metatarsals and increase the incidence of this irritation. Foot shape, length of the individual metatarsal bones in relation to one another can also increase loading and stress to one

- Change to more comfortable proper fitting footwear (more width, support and some rocker).
- Rocker sole modifications to footwear is stock shoes did not solve the pain.
- Metatarsal pads added to stock insoles to relieve pressure on the ball of the foot.
- When indicated by foot deformity and pain severity, custom orthotics with metatarsal pads to reduce pressure to the effected area are often prescribed.
- Activity modifications to reduce stress to the region.
- Increasing flexibility of the ankle to reduce forefoot stress and reduce early raising of the heel in the walking cycle.

If you are experiencing persistent forefoot pain your first step is to see your family physician for proper diagnosis and screening for other causes of forefoot pain. They may refer you to a Canadian Certified Pedorthist to have further assessment on your foot mechanics and alignment that may be the underling cause of your condition.

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