

Metatarsalgia

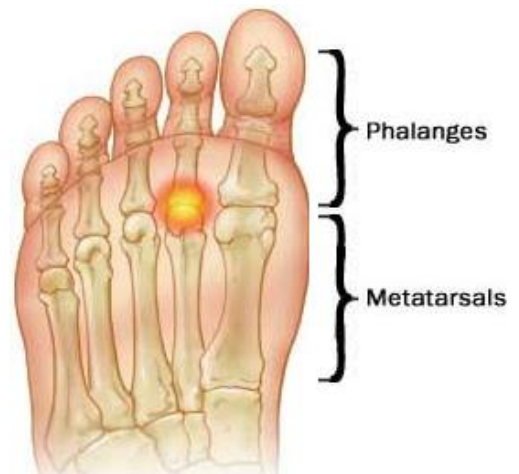
⦿ What is metatarsalgia?

Metatarsalgia is a term for pain or discomfort affecting the balls of the foot. It is an inflammatory condition of the *metatarsal heads*, and can be caused by overuse, poor footwear choices or structural irregularities in your feet that cause increased weight to be applied to this area. Metatarsalgia can affect people of all ages and activity levels.

⦿ What are the symptoms?

The main symptom is pain in the ball of your foot during weightbearing activities. It may be sharp, aching or burning. Other symptoms include:

- A sharp or shooting pain in your toes
- Numbness or tingling in your toes
- Pain that is aggravated by bending your toes upwards
- A bruising sensation, or a feeling of walking on pebbles
- Increased pain walking barefoot, worse on hard surfaces
- Callousing (hardened skin) underneath painful areas



⦿ What causes metatarsalgia?

Anything that applies extra load on the forefoot can cause metatarsalgia. These include:

- *Intense training or activity* – high impact activities such as running
- *High arched (cavus) feet* – less of the foot is in contact with the ground to distribute the weight, so loads to the ball of the foot are increased.
- *Hammer/Claw toes* – curling up of the toes depresses the balls of your foot, exposing them higher stresses.
- *Excess body weight* – means extra weight on the ball of your foot
- *Inappropriate footwear* – high heels shift body weight toward your toes. Runners with insufficient support and cushioning may also cause pain.
- *Stress fractures* – small cracks in metatarsals can be painful and alter weight patterns
- *Morton's Neuroma* – fibrous tissue growth between the metatarsal heads can cause pain and contribute to metatarsal stress.
- *Calf tightness* – has the same effect as high-heeled shoes
- *Wear and tear* – the fat pads under the balls of your feet thin out with age, making the bones more prominent and susceptible to injury.

⦿ How is it treated?

- *Icing* – reduces inflammation
- *Rest* – modify activities instead of reducing them. Try low impact exercises such as swimming, cycling, rowing and cross-training as alternatives to running.
- *Forefoot pads* – provide cushioning for the painful area
- *Orthotics* – to shift weight away from the ball of the foot
- *Stretches* – only if calf tightness is the cause
- *Anti-inflammatories* - gels (Voltaren) or cortisone injections
- *Footwear* – plenty of room in the toe box, low heels and good forefoot cushioning. Rocker-soled shoes can reduce time spent on the ball of the foot when walking.
- *Surgery* – realignment of the metatarsal bones, always a last resort!

⦿ How do orthotics help?

Custom moulded orthotics are most effective, as they address structural issues of your foot to avoid recurrence. They redistribute pressures applied to the ball of your foot to areas that can tolerate it. They will also have a “metatarsal dome”, placed behind the ball of your foot to take further weight off the painful area. Orthotics can be made of softer, thicker materials to compensate for lost cushioning under the balls of the feet.

⦿ Calf Stretching

With one knee bent and one knee straight, lean forward against a wall with both heels touching the ground. You should feel a stretch in your calf, usually just below the knee, as you do this.

Hold for **30 seconds** before switching to the other side. Then repeat with both knees bent to feel the stretch lower down near the heel.

HOW OFTEN? – 30 seconds each side, 4 times a day



NOTE: This stretch will **only** benefit you if the cause of your forefoot pain is calf tightness.