If you have any questions about the information in this leaflet, please contact Podiatry Services.

For more information about our services and how to manage common foot problems at home, please visit our website:

www.livewellsouthwest.co.uk/project/podiatry

Contact Details

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Livewell Southwest

Podiatry Services

Patient Information Leaflet

Metatarsalgia (Forefoot Pain)

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We support people to lead independent, healthy lives

What is metatarsalgia

Metatarsalgia is a general term used to describe pain in the forefoot, around the ball of the foot. It can have many causes and may result in a variety of symptoms.

What are the symptoms?

- Sharp, aching, or burning pain in the ball of the foot.
- Pain that worsens when standing, walking, running, or flexing the toes.
- Pain that improves with rest.
- Sensation of having a pebble or marble in the shoe.
- Tingling or numbness in the toes.
- Pain that radiates into the toes.
- Swelling or redness in the forefoot area.

What are the possible causes?

- **Footwear** - thin soles, high heels or flat heels (no heel) can increase the pressure under the ball of the foot, tight shoes can squeeze the foot into an unnatural shape.
- **Certain sports/activities** can increase the pressure in the forefoot, for example high impact sports such as running, tennis, badminton.
- Your **foot shape** may contribute, for example if you have a high foot arch, reduced movement in your big toe joint, hammer/claw toes, or bunions.
- Being **overweight** causes your feet to bear more load during the day, which can lead to forefoot pain.
- **Joint and foot conditions**, such as Morton's Neuroma/bursitis, osteoarthritis, reduced big toe movement, and callus/corns can all result in forefoot pain.

What can I do to help myself?

Fortunately, there are a wide range of treatments that you can start at home to address your forefoot pain. These are outlined on the following pages and would form part of any treatment plan from a health professional such as a podiatrist.

Treatment

Many people will find that their symptoms resolve within 12 months without treatment.

Activity modification is a first-line treatment option. We don't advise ceasing any activity that you enjoy, however, temporarily reducing the intensity, duration, or frequency of any aggravating activity, exercise, and if possible, during work can significantly reduce pain levels and aid recovery.

Footwear with thick cushioned soles with a moderate-high heel drop (8-12mm) can help to reduce forefoot pressure. Stiff soled shoes are recommended (soles that are more difficult to bend/twist). Shoes that have a "**rocker sole**" shape can further reduce pressure at the forefoot.

Avoid walking barefoot on hard surfaces. Find a thick cushioned and wedged sandal for use at home or consider rocker sole sandals.

Pain relief over-the-counter pain medications and anti-inflammatory gels may help manage symptoms. Your GP can recommend alternative pain relief to help with daily activities and improve sleep if pain is disturbing you.

Gel and Cushioning Insoles. Wearing cushioning, shock-absorbing insoles in your shoes can help with metatarsalgia. A good arch support will redistribute your weight more evenly under your feet.

You could also try metatarsal pads (see picture), which are widely available, to help cushion and reduce pressure through the forefoot.

Calf stretching can relieve pressure through the forefoot.