

Metatarsalgia

How you should be involved in decisions about your healthcare and treatment.



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MVC 220355 Podiatry Service - Metatarsalgia Leaflet (Version 01)
[Artwork MVC 220355]

Who is this leaflet for?

This leaflet is for patients requiring information on how to manage pain affecting the forefoot.

What is this leaflet about?

This leaflet will provide you with the required information to help you decide whether you can self-manage your symptoms or whether to seek support or further treatment from an Allied Health Professional, e.g. podiatrist or physiotherapist or orthotist.

What is metatarsalgia?

Metatarsalgia is a general term used to describe pain or discomfort in the front of your foot, typically across the ball of the foot. There are many tissues and structures which make up the forefoot, including bones, joints, ligaments, tendons, bursa and nerves and all of these structures can be involved in metatarsalgia.

There are a number of different conditions which can affect the forefoot and examples of these include;

- **Inflammation of the small toe joints.**
- **Arthritis of the small toe joints.**
- **Ligament injury of the small toe joints, also known as plantar plate injury.**
- **Bursa or Bursiitis.**
- **Morton's Neuroma.**
- **Reduced fat pad under the ball of the foot.**

It is also possible to develop metatarsalgia if you have another condition affecting your foot, e.g. arthritis in your big toe, bunions, toe deformities, weak muscles or ankle problems.



Metatarsalgia symptoms are common. They can be present in all age groups and typically affect women more commonly than men, often due to footwear choices.

Symptoms may be caused for a variety of reasons, including;

- **Increased weight or BMI.**
- **High activity levels, including running or jumping.**
- **Occupation.**
- **Footwear.**
- **Foot function.**

underlying medical reasons, e.g. arthritis, diabetes or neurological conditions.

What are the symptoms?

Metatarsalgia symptoms typically include;

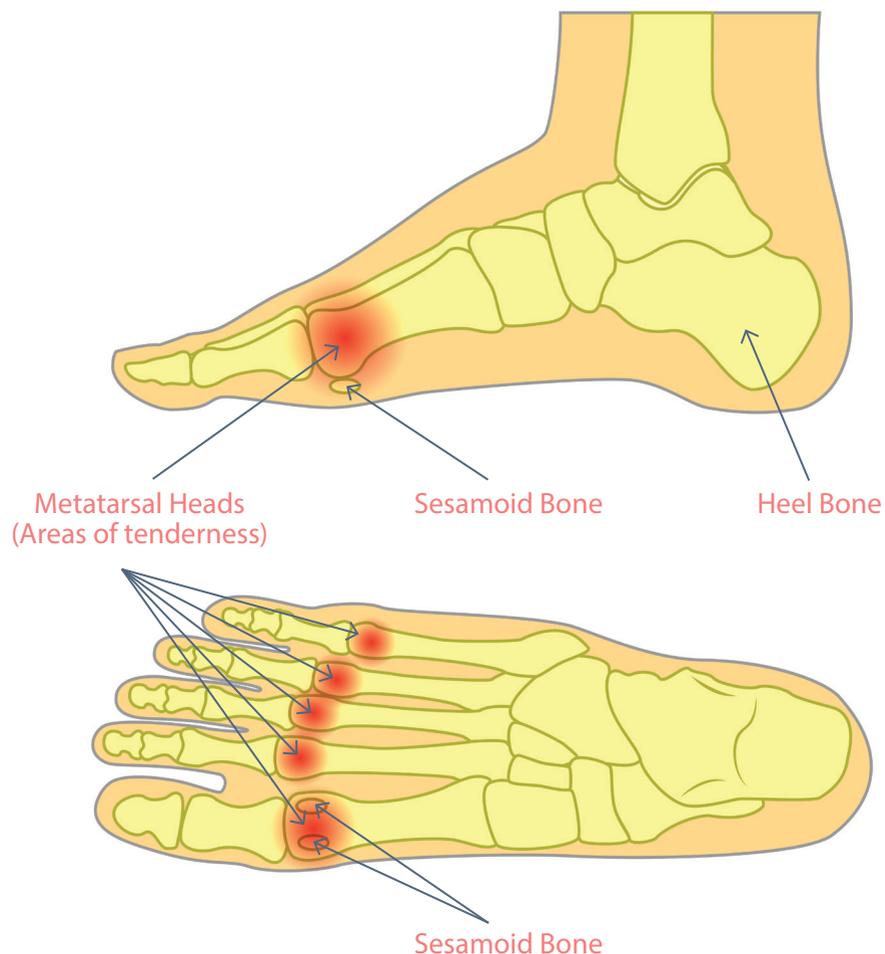
- **Sharp or burning sensation across the ball of the foot.**
- **Feeling like walking on a stone or marble.**
- **Numbness or altered sensation.**
- **Difficulty or pain with prolonged standing or walking.**
- **Discomfort walking barefoot.**
- **Difficulty finding comfortable shoes.**

Do I need imaging?

Clinical presentation is sufficient to assess and diagnose this condition therefore imaging is not typically required in order to form a conservative management plan.

Further investigations may be used to rule out specific problems. It is important you understand that imaging is used to guide clinicians with an appropriate management plan and if the results of the image would not change the treatment plan then imaging is not required.

Metatarsalgia



How can it be treated?

There are 2 treatment options in managing your metatarsalgia symptoms, these are;

- **Non-surgical management.**
- **Surgical management.**

Non-surgical management:

There are a number of options available to help you manage this condition and your symptoms.

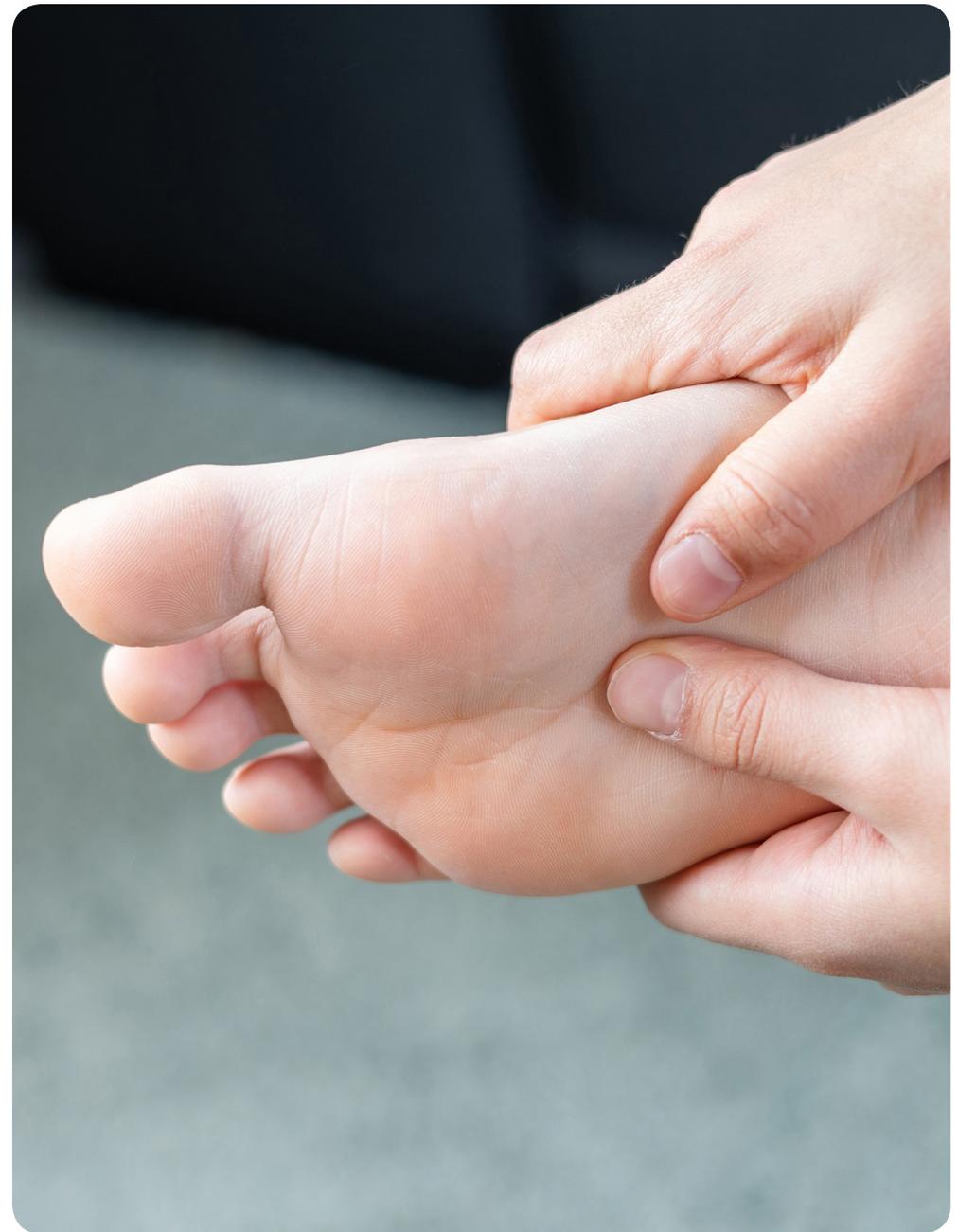
Suitable footwear is often all that is needed to manage your symptoms. Wearing suitable footwear should allow this condition to improve over time.

(Please see separate leaflet for advice on suitable footwear).

Maintaining a healthy weight and managing your activity levels will also be effective in helping you to manage your symptoms.

Some patients may benefit from other therapies which may include:

- **Footwear advice:** Changing footwear to accommodate the width and depth of your foot can reduce the pressure on the front on your foot. Wearing shoes with a thick, cushioned sole is recommended.
- **Rehabilitation exercises:** Strengthening exercises of the muscles in your feet and toes can be beneficial.
- **Padding and strapping:** Padding and support can be self-bought or prescribed by your podiatrist to provide cushioning and comfort for the front of your foot.
- **Insoles:** Insoles may be prescribed to alter the function and pressures of your foot. These can be self-bought or prescribed by your podiatrist.
- **Management of soft tissue conditions:** E.g. blisters, hard skin and corns. You can use a file and moisturising cream to manage areas of hard skin or corns.



- **Pain relief:** Anti-inflammatory medication e.g. ibuprofen (if these are suitable) and paracetamol may be indicated. Pain gels or creams applied to the skin on a regular basis may be beneficial. You should discuss this with a qualified healthcare professional.
- **Steroid injections:** This is a specialist invasive treatment which can be delivered as a one off treatment which may provide short term pain relief (approx 12 weeks). This treatment option may not be suitable in all cases.

How can I prevent this condition from getting worse or reoccurring?

Footwear is key to managing pain in the front of your foot. You should wear good quality, supportive footwear with sufficient length, width and depth for your toes. Ensure the footwear have sufficient length and width of the shoe and sufficient space over the top of your toes to accommodate your foot. When purchasing new footwear, be mindful to measure your shoes to accommodate your longest toe (which is not always the big toe).



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Surgical management

Metatarsalgia is a generalised term for pain in the front of the foot and may include many different tissues, e.g. bones, joints or soft tissues.

As a consequence, surgery is not indicated unless there is a specific tissue to target. A surgical opinion would only be considered if all other non-surgical treatment options have been exhausted and ineffective.

Surgical options may include soft tissue correction or nerve excision or bony procedures depending on the cause of the symptoms. There are complications associated with surgery including swelling, infection, scar sensitivity and recurrence.



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