

Understanding Metatarsalgia

Pain in the
Ball of Your Foot



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What Causes Metatarsalgia?

Metatarsalgia is often caused by wearing shoes with thin soles and high heels. This puts extra pressure on the bones in the ball of the foot. Standing or walking on a hard surface for long periods also puts added pressure on the bones, causing pain. The pain can occur under any of the five metatarsal bones. Bent or twisted toes and bunions can make the problem worse. So can being overweight. Sometimes high arches or arthritis can also cause metatarsalgia.

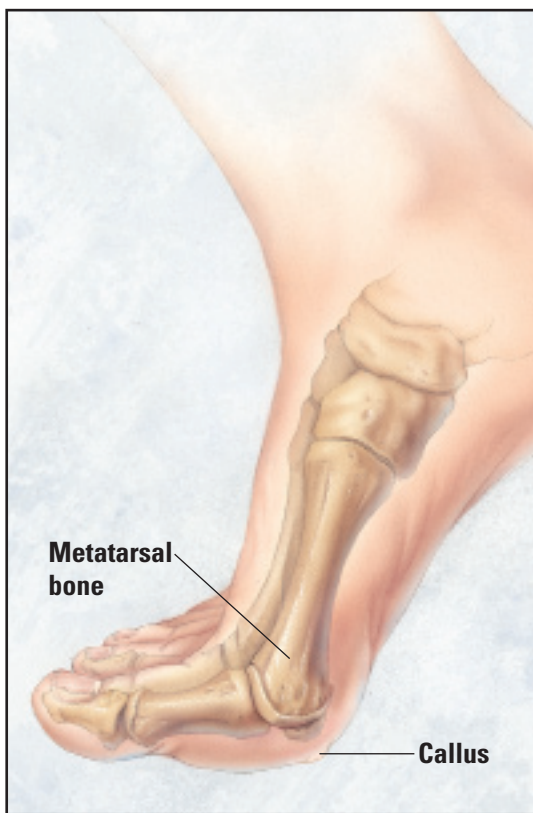


Symptoms

The most common symptom of metatarsalgia is pain in the ball of the foot. It may feel as if you have a stone in your shoe. The ball of the foot may also become red and inflamed, and a callus may form under the end of the metatarsal bone.

Inside the Ball of Your Foot

The long bones in the middle of your foot are called the **metatarsal** bones. Each metatarsal bone ends in the ball of the foot. When you walk, these bones bear the weight of your body as your foot pushes off the ground. If there is more pressure on the end of one bone, it presses on the skin beneath it. This causes pain and inflammation in the ball of the foot (**metatarsalgia**). A **callus** (a hard growth of skin) may also form on the ball of the foot.



Diagnosis and Treatment

Your doctor can most often tell if you have metatarsalgia by the look and feel of your foot. In most cases, wearing low-heeled, well-cushioned shoes and filing down the callus will relieve the pain. If these don't work, your doctor may suggest surgery to remove part of the bone.

Examining Your Foot

Your doctor examines the ball of your foot for a red, inflamed area and a callus. You may also have x-rays to rule out a bone fracture or arthritis.



Treatment

To take pressure off the ball of your foot and relieve the pain, your doctor may suggest that you do one or more of the following:

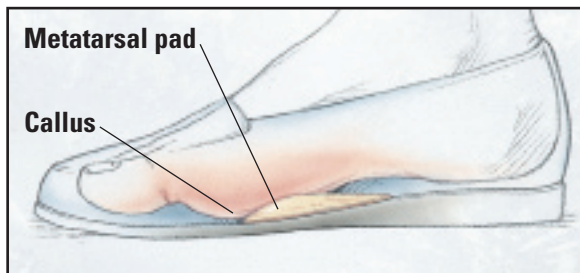


Wear shoes with thick padding in the soles.

Keep heels low, and make sure the shoe is wide across the ball of the foot and the toes.

Put a metatarsal pad in the shoe. This lifts and takes pressure off the painful area. To insert the pad:

- Put a small lipstick mark on the callus.
- Step into the shoe to leave a mark on the insole.
- Peel the backing off the pad. Then put the pad in the shoe just *behind* the lipstick mark.



File down the callus.

Soak your foot in warm water for a few minutes. Dry the foot. Then gently rub the callus with a pumice stone or nail file to remove the hard skin.

Preventing Future Problems

To help prevent metatarsalgia, wear shoes that are roomy across the front of the foot. Also make sure the soles are well cushioned and the heels are low. High heels put more pressure on the ball of the foot.



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