



Suffolk Podiatry

Forefoot Pain: "Metatarsalgia"

What is Metatarsalgia?

Metatarsalgia is a general term used to describe pain in the forefoot (the front part of the foot, just behind the toes). There are many possible causes of this pain. Some of the most common are listed below:

- **Morton's neuroma:** This occurs when a nerve in the forefoot becomes trapped or compressed, often between the toes. It can feel like burning pain, tingling, or as though you are walking on a pebble or something inside your shoe.
- **Capsulitis:** In this condition, the tissue (called a capsule) surrounding a joint in the forefoot becomes inflamed. It often causes pain beneath the ball of the foot and may feel worse when walking barefoot.
- **Bursitis:** A bursa is a small fluid-filled sac that cushions and protects joints. In bursitis, this sac becomes irritated and swollen, leading to pain and tenderness under the joint.
- **Bunions & Hallux Limitus:** These conditions affect the big toe joint. A bunion is a bony bump that forms on the side of the big toe. Hallux limitus is a condition affecting the big toe joint, sometimes referred to as 'wear and tear', where movement gradually becomes reduced, causing stiffness and pain.



For more information on painful toe joints, please see the leaflet "Painful Toe Joints" available on our website: <https://suffolkfed.org.uk/healthcare-services/podiatry>

Managing your foot pain at home

Wear the Right Shoes: Your forefoot needs space to move naturally. Avoid shoes that are tight, narrow, or have a raised heel. Choose wide, supportive footwear with a cushioned sole.

See the Footwear Advice leaflet on our website <https://suffolkfed.org.uk/healthcare-services/podiatry/> for more guidance.

Avoid Walking Barefoot: Hard floors can increase pressure under the forefoot and may worsen symptoms.

Rest: Take pressure off your feet when possible. Elevating your foot can help reduce swelling and pain.

Use Ice: Apply an ice pack or frozen peas, wrapping the ice in a tea towel to avoid ice burns and damage to the skin, for 5–10 minutes every few hours to reduce pain and swelling.

If you have diabetes or poor circulation, consult your GP practice or podiatrist before using ice.

Pain Relief: Over-the-counter medications like paracetamol or ibuprofen may help. Always read the instructions. If you are unsure, consult a pharmacist or your GP practice.

Reducing Pressure on Your Feet: Reducing excess pressure on the feet, including through weight management where appropriate, may help improve symptoms.

Support for healthy lifestyle choices: Feel Good Suffolk offers support for a range of lifestyle changes, including smoking cessation, healthy eating, and exercise. <https://feelgoodsuffolk.co.uk/>

Try Insoles or Foot Pads: Insoles can help relieve pressure on painful areas. They are available from: Shoe shops, Cobblers, Pharmacies, Online retailers

The leaflet “Buying Insoles to Help Your Foot Pain” is available on our website at: <https://suffolkfed.org.uk/healthcare-services/podiatry/>

Further help

If you have followed the suggested self-care advice and are still experiencing significant pain, your GP practice may be able to refer you for specialist assessment and treatment, which may in some instances include surgery.

Alternatively, you may want to consider visiting a private podiatrist who can provide an assessment of how your feet and lower limbs function and advise on insoles if appropriate. We recommend that any podiatrist you see is registered with the HCPC. You can check their membership details by going to: <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/>

Further advice is also available on the NHS website under “Pain in the ball of the foot” <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/foot-pain/pain-in-the-ball-of-the-foot/>

If you also have pain in your hands/fingers or morning stiffness that lasts for longer than 30 minutes, this could be a sign of inflammatory arthritis and you should speak to your GP practice if you are concerned.

Suffolk Podiatry
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