What is metatarsalgia?

Metatarsalgia is a type of pain that occurs in the ball of the foot, also called the metatarsal region. The pain can range from mild to severe and often gets worse when you stand or move. It is sometimes described as a burning or aching sensation and you may have shooting pains, tingling or numbness in your toes. Some people also experience a sensation that feels like walking on pebbles. The pain often occurs in the area where the second, third and fourth toes meet the ball of the foot.

What are the treatment options for metatarsalgia?

There are non-surgical and surgical options to treat metatarsalgia.

Non-surgical options

Non-surgical options usually focus on symptom management such as:

- Modify activity
- Correct fitting or specially modified footwear
- Use of protective and cushioning shields, splints / insoles / orthoses
- Regular palliative podiatry care to reduce painful lesions
- Joint injections

Surgical option

- Weil osteotomy

Surgery is usually recommended if you are experiencing pain and limitation / disability along with:

- Persistent severe pain, callus or corns affecting the ball of the foot.
- Positional deformity of the toe
- Difficulty with shoe fit and comfort despite wearing sensible footwear.
What are the benefits of surgery?

- To reduce pain and deformity
- To improve pressure distribution in the ball of the foot and reduce callous / corn formation.
- To improve toe alignment if possible
- Improvement in pressure distribution in the ball of the foot to improve comfort.

What are the specific risks of this operation?

- Joint stiffness (10%)
- Floating toe (20%)
- Transfer of weight (2.5%)
- Infection (7.5%)
- Recurrence of symptoms (2.5%)
What does the operation involve?

A cut is made on top of the foot between the metatarsal bones. If you are having your toes straightened at the same time, the cut may extend into the toes or there may be separate cuts on the toes. The metatarso-phalangeal joint at the base of the toe is opened and freed to relax the tissues. A cut into the metatarsal bone allows it to slide back sufficiently to relax the joint and relieve the pressure under your foot. The amount it needs to slide is measured by your surgeon on X-rays taken before the operation. The bone is then fixed in its new place with 1 or 2 tiny screws and the cut is closed. This process may be performed on one or more metatarsal bones.
How long does the operation take?

The operation usually takes between 30-45 minutes.

Is this a day procedure?

Yes, you can usually go home the same day (you will usually be admitted for half a day).

Will I have a plaster cast?

This is not normally necessary. If your particular operation requires a plaster cast we will let you know in advance.

Will I have any screws or pins in my foot?

Internal fixation (bone screws or pins) are usually used. These are buried beneath the skin so you will not normally notice them and they do not usually need to be removed.

How long will I need off work?

This will depend on the job you do and the speed of your recovery. For non-manual work we usually recommend approximately 4-6 weeks, for manual work approximately 6-8 weeks.

Consent

It is important that you understand what the procedure involves before giving consent. This includes any potential risks, benefits and alternatives. Although these will be explained to you beforehand, please don’t hesitate to ask either your consultant or one of the team if you have any further questions.
Lesser metatarsal surgery

The day of the operation

The operation is usually performed under a local anaesthetic. You may eat and drink normally and take your prescribed medications as normal unless otherwise instructed. Injections are given around the ankle, sometimes an injection behind the knee will be offered. You will be in the Day Surgery Unit for some time after your operation to allow you an opportunity to rest and recover. We will check the wound, provide you with discharge information and packs as required. Please make sure you have an adult with you for the first 24 hours after surgery.

First 2-4 days

- It is not unusual to experience some pain / discomfort. You will be given painkillers to help.
- You must rest completely for 2-4 days with your foot raised just above hip level. You may be advised to keep the circulation going by gently drawing circles in the air or wiggling your toes.
- You should restrict your walking to going to the bathroom only.
- If you have been given crutches please use them as you have been shown. You may be able to bear a little weight on the foot carefully using just the heel.
- You can get about a little more after 3-4 days.

One week after surgery

- You may need to visit the clinic for your foot to be checked and re-dressed.
- You may start to do a little more if comfortable to do so (pain may mean you are doing too much).
Two weeks after surgery

- You must attend clinic again for the removal of your stitches. For dissolvable stitches this normally means just trimming the ends. Stitches on the sole of the foot may need to stay in approximately a week longer.
- You should no longer need the bandage and you should be able to get around without crutches.
- Your foot will still be quite swollen but you should be able to get a roomy shoe on. You should bring a lace-up, broad fitting supportive shoe (ideally a trainer) with you.
- Provided that the wound is well healed you should be able to get your foot wet.
- You will be advised on a gradual return to activity and may also be advised on scar care.

Between 2-6 weeks after surgery

- Your foot starts to return to normal and you can resume wearing your normal shoes.
- Your foot will still be quite swollen, especially at the end of the day. You may require a review appointment at 4-6 weeks.
- You may be able to return to work but may need longer if you have an active job. If in doubt, please discuss this with a member of the team.
- You may return to driving if you can perform an emergency stop comfortably. Please check with your insurance company before driving again.
- Whilst you can resume normal activity, you should avoid sport.

Between 8-12 weeks after surgery

- The foot should continue to improve and begin to feel more normal again. There will be less swelling.
• Sport can be considered after 3 months depending on your recovery.

Six months after surgery

• You will attend clinic for a final review between 3-6 months following surgery.
• If swelling is present it should now be slight and you should be getting the full benefit of the surgery.

Twelve months after surgery

The foot will now be fully healed.

Please note, if a complication arises recovery may be delayed.

Who do I contact if I would like any further information?

If you have any questions about the procedure or would like further information please call the podiatry surgery team on:

• 0114 271 4668