

Pain in the Forefoot

The aim of this leaflet is to give you some understanding of the problems you have with your foot, and to provide some advice on how to manage this.

What are possible causes of pain in this area?

One of the main causes of pain in this area is footwear. Research suggests that there is a high association between ill fitting footwear and foot pain with up to 6 out of 10 people (60%) associating pain with shoes they have worn.

Being overweight has also been shown to contribute as has spending long periods of time standing or walking - whether at work or in activities. Finally, tightness or weakness in specific muscles will add to the pressure at certain areas and may well be an issue that needs addressed along with footwear and weight. Some specific long term conditions, for example Rheumatoid Arthritis, can also cause pain around this area.

What are the possible symptoms?



- Sharp or burning feeling in the area on the soles of the feet shown above
- Feeling like walking on a stone or marble
- There may be some numbness or odd sensation
- Difficulty finding comfortable shoes
- Difficulty or pain when walking long distances, or standing for long periods of time.

What tests may be done?

In the majority of cases of forefoot pain, we do not need an x ray or any other tests to confirm what is wrong. The main way to diagnose this problem is through what you tell us and examining your foot. Sometimes, however, we may refer you for further investigations to rule out specific problems.

What can you do to help this problem?

- Aim for a healthy body weight.
- Wear appropriate footwear. You should try to wear wide shoes with a low heel that fit you comfortably. Avoid wearing high heeled, narrow or tight shoes as this will make your pain worse.
- Follow the advice from your community pharmacist or other healthcare professional about taking medication. It is important to take medication regularly.
- Rest and massage the feet when they become painful as this will relax the muscles around the nerves and joints.
- Follow the exercises outlined below

Exercises

It is important to do these exercises only to the level which you feel comfortable, they can cause some different feelings in your feet and legs but this should only last for a short period of time.

1. Calf stretch, knee straight



Figure 1: Calf Stretch, knee straight

Stand with affected leg behind the other leg, keeping the heel down on the floor and the knee straight. Lean forward bending the front knee forward until you feel a stretch in your calf and Achilles tendon (ankle area). Hold 30 seconds and repeat 10 times.

2. Calf stretch, knee bent.

Repeat as exercise 1 but with knee of affected leg slightly bent.



Figure 2: Calf Stretch, knee bent

3. Intrinsic Foot Muscle Exercises - Tennis Ball Exercise



Figure 3: Tennis ball massage

While seated using a soft tennis ball, applying pressure under your foot, roll it in all directions under the sole of your foot working it from the heel towards the toes and then from side to side.

Perform this exercise 10 – 15 times and repeat 2 – 3 times per day.

4. Foot Arch Exercise

Place your foot flat on ground, gently press your big toe into the ground and be careful not to claw it. Keeping your heel in place raise your arch upwards and hold for 2 seconds.

Repeat 15 times



Figure 4: Arch exercise

5. Toe scrunching exercises



Figure 5: Toe Scrunching exercises

This is an exercise to strengthen the small muscles of your feet.

Either seated or standing place your foot flat on the ground on top of a towel. Use your toes to scrunch the towel or paper or pick up your socks.

Repeat this exercise as often as you can

6. Toe extensions

This is a demonstration of an exercise to strengthen the small muscles of your feet.

Either seated or standing hold the big toe on the ground and raise all 4 smaller toes off the ground together. Then keeping the smaller toes on the ground raise the big toe up off the ground. Repeat both these exercises as often as you can.



Figure 6: Small toe extension exercise



Please note: If you do not see any sign of improvement after 8-12 weeks of following the advice and exercises you may need to be referred to a Podiatrist for professional help and advice.