

Morton's Neuroma Can Irritate Foot

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Pain located under the balls of the toes can frequently be caused by a Morton's neuroma.

The pain is typically between either the third and fourth toes or less frequently between the second and third toes. Sometimes, the pain may radiate into the adjacent toes. The pain may take on different qualities and may at times be described as sharp, dull or burning. Also some people with a Morton's neuroma may feel like they are walking on a lump or marble and can also experience numbness in the toes.

A Morton's neuroma is caused by irritation of a nerve that runs under the transverse metatarsal ligament. This ligament connects the long bones of the foot together at the balls of the toes. The nerve along with its surrounding soft tissues become thickened and inflamed. Irritation of the nerve can be due to trauma or excessive pressure. High-heeled narrow shoes can significantly increase the symptoms and result in irritation of the nerve. Morton's neuromas are more commonly seen in women than men.

This condition can be diagnosed during a physical exam. The physician will apply pressure between the balls of the toes to localize and reproduce the pain. The foot is often X-rayed to be certain the pain is not from a stress fracture or arthritis. Typically, there is no need for advanced tests, such as MRIs.

Once the problem is diagnosed, initial treatment recommendations are to wear a wider shoe, avoid aggressive impact activities and to sometimes take anti-inflammatory medications. Additional non-operative treatments include using metatarsal pads or orthotic inserts.

A cortisone injection can also be helpful in treating a Morton's neuroma. The cortisone can help decrease the inflammation and irritation around the nerve.

While the majority of people with a Morton's neuroma will do well with the above treatments, those who do not may choose surgery. The most common surgery performed will remove the diseased portion of the nerve. The operation is performed as an outpatient and a stiff soled post-operative shoe is worn for about four weeks. Most people who have undergone surgery will notice a significant decrease in pain.

The improvements may be noticed three to four weeks after surgery, but maximal improvement may take up to six months.

Some permanent numbness is possible between the two toes nearest the neuroma.

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