

# Argus Orthopaedic Zone

## Metatarsalgia? What's That!

By Thomas J. Haverbush, M.D.  
Orthopaedic Surgeon

### *Transforming patient information into patient understanding.*

At this time it would be appropriate to tell you about a problem I see a lot in the office.

Metatarsalgia is a \$5 word for foot pain in the area of the ball of the foot. It can spread out from there, but originates in that area. It is more of a description of where the pain is in the foot.

The pain can originate from one or more of the five metatarsal heads, the five joints next to them or a variety of soft tissue structures in between. The pain is almost always on the sole of the foot.

The exact location of the pain is often elusive and hard to identify. The source of the pain has to be identified before treatment can be started.

### **Two types**

Metatarsalgia has to be thought of in 2 ways.

1. Primary - pain coming from the foot structure causing imbalance of pressure.
2. Secondary - pain from an outside source like rheumatoid arthritis, gout, infection, foot deformity.

Primary is much more common. Metatarsalgia origin is pretty complicated, but I'm trying to make it understandable.

### **Treatment**

Reducing metatarsal head pressure has been the goal of treatment. The use of metatarsal pads in many shapes and sizes has been the most common method of in-shoe adjustment.

Studies have shown the critical difference in placement of the pads, which can be the difference between success or failure of treatment. Metatarsal pads can do the job in reducing pressure and relieving pain. If they are not as effective as hoped the use of custom fabricated orthoses may be necessary. Custom foot orthotics have to be made by a certified person with much experience in the field.

### **Orthotic prescription**

I write the prescription for the orthotic or pad, but do not make or fit them. That is the job of the certified foot orthotist.

The size, shape and placement varies depending on the foot's size, shape and the metatarsals involved. There are many types of materials used in construction. The ideal orthosis for most metatarsalgia patients

is a semi rigid device. The certified foot professional is by far the best source of help. If the device is not placed in the proper place or if the wrong material is used relief is not possible. These methods of treatment have to be placed in correct shoes.

This approach can improve quality of life and reduce pain in patients with metatarsalgia.

**Office Website and Argus Orthopaedic Zone Archive**

I sincerely appreciate all of you loyal readers and patients present and future and welcome all newcomers!

Besides what you read today there is a huge treasure trove of Orthopaedic and musculoskeletal information at [www.orthopodsurgeon.com](http://www.orthopodsurgeon.com). It contains the Website Library, Your Orthopaedic Connection and complete archive of every Argus article I have written.

I specialize in you. Be well.

Dr. Haverbush