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NorthPointe News



BALL OF THE FOOT PAIN



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A FOND FAREWELL Darcy Elwart Retires

Long-time NorthPointe Office Manager, Darcy, has retired! She is setting up the next phase of her life in sunny Florida with her husband.



Darcy was first employed by Dr. Hoffman in 1983 and transitioned to the NorthPointe office when it opened in 2007.

At NorthPointe she helped many patients with financial and insurance matters. She was also the person that helped set us up to run smoothly each day.

We wish her the best and will miss her smiling face and cheery disposition.

Congratulations Darcy!

Metatarsalgia is a condition of the feet that affects the ball of the foot; impacting both bone and joint. The metatarsals are the lengthy bones that go from the toes to the mid-foot. While the name may sound strange, this foot condition is very common. Most people experience pain near the heads of these bones. Some may notice discomfort around the big toe while others endure pain that impacts that area by toes two, three, and four. Common symptoms include pain and burning in the ball of the foot, worsening discomfort when pressure is placed on the area, pain or tingling in the toes, and sometimes loss of feeling. You may notice that the pain becomes worse if you flex your feet.

Causes

Improper shoe gear is the primary cause of painful inflammation in this area. For instance, high-heeled shoes force pressure on the forefoot. This is compounded if there isn't enough toe space due to the style or size. Purchase shoes that fit well, provide plenty of wiggle room in the toe box, and have a heel that is less than two inches. If you're holding onto your old favorites, it's time to let them go. Worn out shoes are often a problem, especially for runners.

Aging affects the entire body, and the feet are no exception. While many people complain of gaining weight as they get older, fat in the feet actually diminishes. This is problematic since the extra cushioning provided by this padding protects against some conditions such as metatarsalgia.

Some physical activities put excess stress on the metatarsal regions of the feet. Running is just one example of a common exercise that can exacerbate this painful condition. If you participate in high-impact workouts, monitor your feet closely.

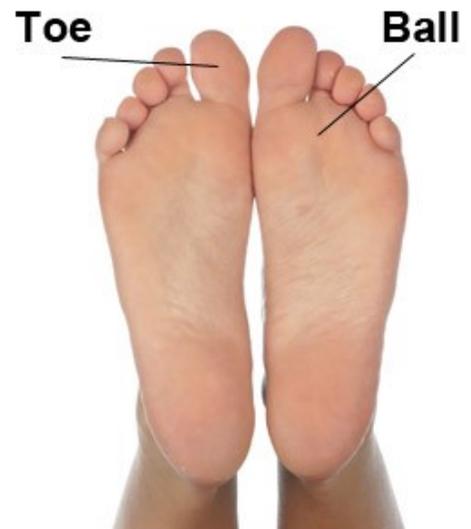
The structure and condition of an individual's feet plays a role in this condition as well. A bunion, or other common deformities, can change the way that weight is distributed

across the feet. If your arches are high, gait and weight distribution is also affected.

Treatment

Once a diagnosis is made, your NorthPointe Foot & Ankle podiatrist will explain the best treatment options for your case. Their recommendations will be based on the cause of your pain, so imaging tools may be used to ensure that there is not a fracture present.

Invasive measures are not usually necessary. Instead, conservative treatments such as rest, changes in footwear, icing, anti-inflammatory medications, custom orthotics, and padding may be recommended. It is im-



portant to seek treatment at the onset of pain in order to get the most benefits from these methods. Orthotics can redirect pressure from the ball of the foot which will aid in recovery.

If you are active, taking a break from your normal routine may be suggested. This doesn't mean that exercise must be eliminated. Instead, switch to a low-impact activity, such as swimming, while you are recovering.



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Stay on Your Feet

Many people experience increasing difficulty with balance and safe mobility as they age, which leads to the common and serious problem of falls. These problems are associated with loss of confidence and decreasing ability to function independently. In many cases it leads to the consideration of institutional care. Injuries from falls are a major cause of death in the older population. Fortunately, most causes of falls and instability can be treated successfully and the risk of falling reduced.

How common are falls and balance problems in older persons?

Each year, falls occur in over a third of persons over age 65, and in over half of persons over age 75. About a third of the older population reports some difficulty with balance or ambulation. This percentage increases in frequency and severity after age 75.

What are the major causes of falls?

The most common causes of falls include environmental hazards (such as slippery floors and loose rugs), weak muscles, unstable balance, dizziness, vision problems and side effects from medications (such as dizziness and confusion).

How can I tell if I am at risk for falling?

The most important predictors of fall risk include: muscle weakness (difficulty rising from a sitting position without use of hands to push off); unsteady balance (needing to walk slowly or with a wide base of support to maintain balance); having fallen in the past year; and taking certain medications (some blood pressure medications as well as psychoactive medications, such as sedatives or anti-depressants).

What can I do to decrease my chances of falling?

Ask your NorthPointe Foot & Ankle physician to evaluate your strength, balance, gait, entire medication list and overall risk factors for falls. The chances are good that there will be a number of things that can be done to reduce fall risk, such as adjusting medications, obtaining physical therapy, starting an exercise regimen, or receiving an assistive device such as a cane or walker, to make walking safer.

How can I make my home environment safer?

There are many pamphlets available to assist in hazard-proofing your home environment. Alternatively, a home health provider, such as a visiting nurse or occupational therapist, can come to your home and provide a hands-on inspection and set of recommendations. Common recommendations include installing bathroom grab bars, improving lighting in key areas, removing hazardous conditions on the floor, and making stairways and entrance areas safer.

What kind of walking aids are available and whom should I talk to about getting the right product?

A whole spectrum of walking aids are widely available, ranging from simple canes to elaborate types of walkers and wheelchairs. Any walking aid should be carefully measured to the right size and provide the optimal level of stability without creating too much dependency. Your NorthPointe Foot & Ankle physician can help you with proper fit and advice.



What are Orthotics?

Sometimes your feet need extra stabilization or padding to function normally. When your feet are sore or weak, every step can be a challenge. Custom orthotics can help relieve pain in your lower limbs, help with balance issues, and allow you to return to your favorite activities pain free.

Orthotics are special inserts that slip into your footwear to add extra padding or support. Custom insoles are prescription-based support pieces. A doctor, like those here at NorthPointe Foot & Ankle, examines your feet and determines what is causing the problem—a biomechanical weakness, a pressure point, or some other injury. Then the doctor measures and makes a mold of your exact foot shape and proper positioning. This helps the trained technicians craft a unique support piece specifically designed to meet your needs and relieve your pain. That support piece not only accommodates your uncomfortable issue, but can help correct it as well.

Custom orthotics, prescribed by our doctors, can help correct conditions and offer real relief for your lower limbs. NorthPointe Foot & Ankle also offers substantial savings on a second pair of custom orthotics for those wishing to add support to an additional pair of shoes. Our professional team is available to help you easily obtain the support you need.

American Diabetes Association Alert Day March 28

American Diabetes Association Alert Day® is a one-day "wake-up call" asking the public to take the Diabetes Risk Test to find out if they are at risk for developing type 2 diabetes. Individuals should take the Diabetes Risk Test. The test is free and only takes a few minutes. Visit www.Diabetes.org to answer the questions online, or create a printout of the test.

NorthPointe Foot & Ankle encourages anyone with risk factors to schedule a Comprehensive Foot Exam to find out if treatment is needed.

Receive our monthly newsletter. Send your email address to:
Doctors@NorthPointeFoot.com