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MORTON'S NEUROMA

The most common cause of neurologic pain in the forefoot is due to MORTON'S NEUROMA. A neuroma is a benign tumor of the nerve's sheath or covering. It occurs between the metatarsal bones at the base of the toes. The problem was first described by Dr. Morton in 1876, hence the name, Morton's Neuroma.

The usual symptoms are a burning, cramping, numbness, or tingling type of pain in the forefoot area that may radiate out into the toes. Sometimes it feels like a sock is wadded up under the ball of the foot. The discomfort may be relieved temporarily by removing the shoes and massaging the foot. Tight shoes have a tendency to aggravate the problem.

The exact cause of neuromas has not been identified. Implicated factors include abnormal foot mechanics, lack of room between the metatarsals, and certain shoes. Trauma to the nerve is thought to be the most important factor.

Conservative treatment for neuromas includes cortisone or alcohol injections, NSAIDs (anti-inflammatory medication), metatarsal padding, and changing shoes. Sometimes, orthotic shoe inserts can help.

If conservative care is not successful, surgery may be necessary. The approach is usually from the top of the foot. The neuroma is identified, dissected free, and removed. Weight-bearing is allowed immediately afterwards in a surgical shoe. Stitches are removed in two weeks and return to regular shoes usually occurs in four weeks.

Morton's neuroma can be a very painful and aggravating foot problem. However, proper diagnosis and care rendered in a timely fashion can provide much needed relief.

