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Ask The Experts

TOE PAIN When Morton Shows Up

I have Morton's foot on my left foot, as my second toe is about 1/4 inch longer than my big toe. I've been a runner for 27 years, but the long second toe has just started bothering me lately. It gets achy when I run, but usually the pain subsides. Sometimes I feel it even when I'm not running. What can I do?

A.B., JACKSON, MISS

You're not alone, because about a third of the population inherits a second toe (metatarsal) that's longer than the first. When it's longer by 1/8 inch or more, podiatrists call it a Morton's foot. (Ideally, the big toe should be longer or equal to the second toe to distribute weight evenly across the ball of the foot during running.) Morton's foot can lead to bursitis or an irritation of the tendons attached to the second toe, which may be what you're experiencing.

For relief, try the same procedure I perform in my office. Buy a piece of 1/8-inch felt or moleskin (available at your local pharmacy), and cut out a U-shaped pattern

1/2 inch wide. Mark the sore area on your foot with lipstick or magic marker, and step down on the insole of your running shoe to transfer the mark. Then apply the U-pad to the insole surrounding the lipstick mark, with the opening toward the toes. If this doesn't work, see a sports podiatrist for full-length custom orthotics, which will provide more support to the problem area.

A longer second toe is also prone to jarring against the inside front of the shoe,



MITCH MANDEL

U CAN DO IT: A U-shaped pad will often relieve your foot pain.

causing further irritation. In this case, treatment consists of icing the painful area for 10 minutes after running or whenever it's painful. For prevention, wear a shoe with extra cushioning at the ball of the foot, and with at least 1/2 inch of space between the longest toe and the end of the shoe. If you wear replacement insoles, choose ones with gel cushioning in the forefoot, such as Dr. Scholl's Advantage Sports insole.

Finally, Morton's foot is a leading cause of overpronation, as the shorter big toe can allow the foot to tilt inward at push off. This can lead to several common running injuries. So, when runners are injury-prone, I always check for Morton's foot as the possible cause.

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