

Sharp Pains in the Forefoot

By Ben Benjamin, PhD

Question: Sharp pains felt between the metatarsal bones of the feet indicate a strain of what muscles?

Answer: The interosseous muscles.

The interosseous muscles lie between our toes, and help stabilize the foot in walking and running.

When they are strained, they often precipitate sharp pains felt on the top of the foot or beneath it. The pain from this injury is often confused with a neuroma of the foot (inflammation of a nerve in the foot) that causes similar sharp pains.

This injury and this type of pain may be brought on by fatigue of the foot muscles through excessive standing or running activities. Other causes include a blow to the foot, a fall, excessively tight shoes, very high heels, or walking barefoot on a foot that needs a shoe for support.

Interosseus muscle injuries can occur between several metatarsals at once. Although rarely identified by health professionals, strains of these muscles are common. To identify this injury, one only needs to gently squeeze the metatarsals together. This usually reproduces the pain sensation. Most of the interosseous muscle is accessible to palpation and hands-on work from the dorsal or plantar surfaces.

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