

# RUNNER'S WORLD

MEDICAL & TRAINING



## ADVICE

EDITED BY ADAM BEAN AND BETH MOXEY ECK

FOOT PAIN

### HITTING A NERVE

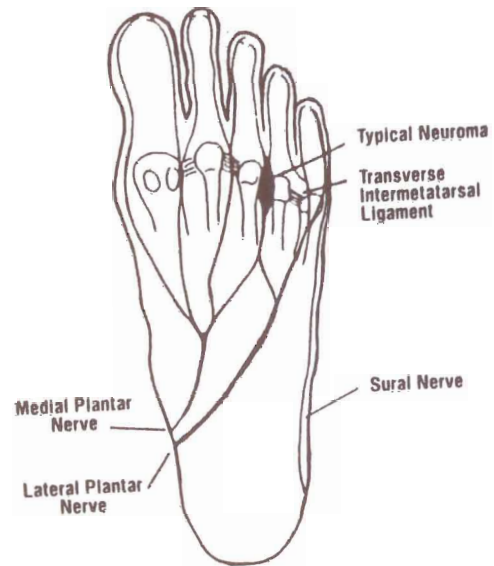
**Q:** I often get a sharp pain between the third and fourth metatarsals when I roll off the ball of my foot. The only thing that helps is to stop running, take off my shoes and curl my toes under. Do you have any answers?  
*J.M., Pensacola, Florida*

**A:** The type and location of your foot pain are characteristic of a pinched nerve, in this case Morton's neuroma. I see this fairly frequently in runners and those who wear tight-fitting shoes.

Here's what happens: Between the third and fourth metatarsals of your foot, there is a sensory nerve that is normally the thickness of pencil lead. During running, increased motion and shearing forces can cause the metatarsal heads to rub together, irritating this nerve. The rubbing eventually causes the nerve to thicken, which makes it even more susceptible to pressure. Narrow shoes that compress the ball of the foot will further compound the problem by pressing the metatarsals together.

To break this cycle of pain, I recommend you try wearing wider shoes, take ibuprofen, ice the injured area for 15 minutes several times a day and apply a metatarsal support pad underneath the arch, next to the ball of the foot. This pad will spread the metatarsal heads apart and reduce the pinching of the nerve. Orthotics and B-complex vitamins (for nerve conditions) have also proved helpful in these situations. If the pain continues, you should see a sports podiatrist who can help diagnose the root cause of your problem.

—*Richard T. Braver, D.P.M., sports podiatrist practicing in Englewood, New Jersey, and former 3:51 1500-meter runner*



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