

WHY IS MY JAW CLICKING AND POPPING ?

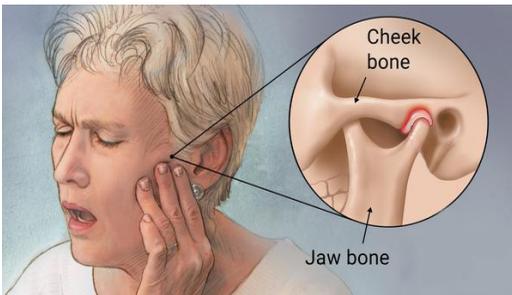
By Dr. Pamela Marzban

Ever wonder why a jaw joint pops? Some are so loud, you can hear it across the room. The pop usually occurs while eating more so than talking. The purpose of the article is to explain why jaw joints pop and what should, if anything, be done about it.

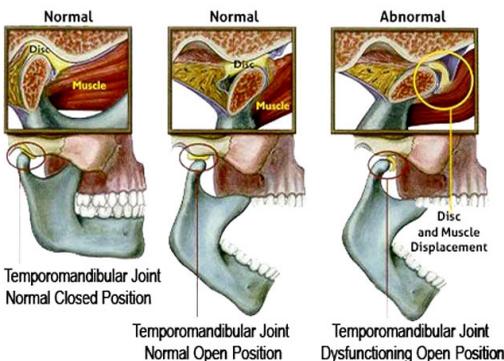
Why does my joint pop?

Put a finger in front of both ear canals and open and close your jaw. Feel both joints move? Those are your temporomandibular joints (TMJ). If you feel a pop, even a slight one, something is out of line. The louder the pop, the more out of line the joint is.

Every joint is like a ball in a socket and needs something in between to glide the movement so it's not bone on bone grating.



With the TMJ, there is a floating cushion called the disc that sits between the joint (ball) and the skull (socket). The disc is a round circle and looks like a Lifesaver and is designed to sit on the top of the joint. The purpose of the disc is to allow the joints to move and glide more efficiently. Unfortunately, the disc doesn't always stay where it was designed to.



A popping joint is the noise of the jaw joint slipping on and off a misplaced disc. On opening, the joint pops out to the disc, on closing, the joint pops back off the disc. It's a complex situation but one that is easy to understand. There are many variables of the pop depending on the location of the misplaced disc.

Self-assessment

If you have a popping joint or joint problem, try this simple experiment:

Look in a mirror and slowly begin to open your jaw. The jaw should open in a straight line. If it deviates to right or left, there is a joint or muscle problem on that side. Why is the jaw deviating to one side? The TMJ is that it is the only joint in the body that works bilaterally simultaneously, meaning both right and left joint must work at the same time for the jaw to move.

Think of it this way, if you were pushing a wheelchair down a smooth sidewalk and hit an obstruction on the right wheel, the wheelchair would turn to the right. It's the same with this joint; the displaced disc is in front of the joint not letting it slide down properly. This causes the jaw to move to the direction of the affected joint same as the wheel chair.

To treat or not treat

It's only common sense that the body should not make noise or hurt. In the case of a popping joint, the key indicator for treatment would be pain. This pain can radiate all over the face and neck and can mimic sinus headaches and migraines. The joint will become arthritic and the jaw can lock open or closed.

If the joint popping is new, by seeking immediate attention you can stop progression of the pathology. If it's been a chronic problem that has not really been painful yet, ask qualified dentist to see what you can do to slow down the arthritic process in hopes to prevent pain and further complications.

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