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Clicking joints: 3 causes and how to prevent it from happening

Plus, the one thing you can do to prevent it

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Clicking joints may only happen for you as you climb aboard a spin bike or set out for your daily 5k. For some, a downward dog might be the catalyst. Other times, clicking joints (medically known as crepitus) can be triggered by something as simple as getting up from a chair or doing your **morning stretches**.

No matter the cause, clicking joints can be an unwelcome reminder of something happening in your body you're not so sure about. To the layperson (i.e you and me) the causes of clicking joints and what clicking joints actually are is largely unknown – they're just something that happens when we go to start a **gym workout** or extend after long stints at your **standing desk**. To remedy this, we asked the experts to set us straight.

What are clicking joints?

'Like most medical conditions, the clicking noise in your joints actually has a very formal sounding name called Crepitus,' explains Sonia Khan, senior pharmacist at **Medicine Direct**. 'The clicking, cracking or popping sound of your joints is due to little air bubbles contained within the synovial fluid (also known as joint fluid) popping inside the fluid.'

Did you know that you typically won't be able to click the same joint within a short space of time? This is because it takes time for the little air bubbles to build up in the synovial fluid again, usually around 10-15 minutes.

3 common causes of clicking joints

Clicking joints happen for a few different reasons. Khan breaks down exactly why.

1.Air bubbles

As mentioned, 'the clicking within a joint can be caused by a number of things, most commonly it is caused by air bubbles that pop and produce a clicking noise. Clicking joints become more common with age, it is natural for your joints to make a noise, however; as long as this is not followed by pain or swelling, there is no cause for concern,' advises Khan.

2. Ligaments

'Other causes can be the tendons or ligaments snapping back into place, this can be quite painful. Imagine putting an elastic band around your wrist and pulling it and letting go, your ligament will make a similar movement and noise as a result of snapping back into place.'

3. Natural wear

'General wear and tear can also contribute to the clicking noise, as cartilage naturally wears away, there becomes more movement within your joints which will result in more sounds.'

Are clicking joints bad?

'As a general rule clicking joints don't often allude to any serious underlying issues but there are certain conditions which lead to an uptick in clicking or cracking,' says award-winning osteopath **Anisha Joshi**. 'Hypermobility, for instance, is characterised by the ability to move joints beyond their normal range of motion. Clicking is more common because joints can stretch further apart, allowing an air cavity to form.'

'I would say to avoid clicking your neck and back yourself; this is really something an osteopath should do. Constantly clicking your back can lead to hypermobility and instability within the joints which can, in turn, lead to more pain as the muscles get tighter in order to support the joints.'

How do I stop my joints from clicking?

So you want to know how to prevent clicking joints? While they're often no cause for concern, as with so many elements of wellness, they can be helped with daily movement.

'Movement is one of the best ways of preventing clicking. The more you move throughout the day, the more your body lubricates itself. Sitting in the same position for hours means the fluid in your joints doesn't move either,' says Joshi.

'Regular exercise to maintain healthy joints and keep muscles strong is essential. Excess body weight can also lead to joint problems so maintaining a **healthy diet** alongside regular movement will do your body a world of good.'

Clicking joints and arthritis

You've probably heard that clicking joints and **arthritis** go hand in hand. Whilst this isn't necessarily true, they do have some crossovers. We asked the experts how clicking joints and arthritis interact and why it's beneficial to get a second opinion if you're unsure.

Are clicking joints a sign of arthritis?

'It's a common misconception that clicking joints are an early sign of arthritis (but this is not always the case.) Osteoarthritis can affect the movement of a joint, causing a crackling sensation as the smooth surfaces inside the joint become rougher.'

'If you have a joint that clicks regularly and causes discomfort, then it's worth getting it checked by an osteopath so that they can come up with an effective rehab plan to ensure you can keep exercising and moving how you want to,' explains Joshi.

Can arthritis cause clicking joints, though?

'Yes, noisy joints can be the result of arthritis due to wear and tear of the cartilage and tissue within the joint. Interestingly, the pitch of the clicking noise can indicate which type of arthritis your joints could be suffering from,' says Khan.

'For example, high-pitched clicking sounds can indicate inflammatory arthritis, whereas low-pitched clicking noises can indicate either inflammatory or non-inflammatory arthritis. However, to the untrained ear, this can be very difficult to distinguish between and will usually require a specialist to listen to the different pitches of the clicks.'

The final expert word on clicking joints

'The vast majority of people with clicking joints do not have any underlying disease,' says Lucy Macdonald, a chartered physiotherapist at London's **Octopus Clinic.**

'However, there are some specific conditions where people might have a general increase in clicking joints – think osteoarthritis or being **hypermobile**. But, just because you have clicking joints, it does not mean that you are at a higher risk of either of these conditions. People with severe hypermobility syndromes may experience a clunking sound when their joints dislocate but they will also have a number of other significant symptoms.'

Speak with a medical professional if you have concerns, suggest Macdonald.

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