

Snap' Crack, POP



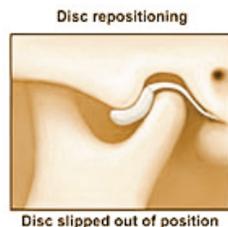
Goes the Jaw Joint...

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Many people notice that their jaw makes a popping or clicking sound. Very often these sounds are nothing more than an annoying awkwardness. But sometimes these noisy joints are trying to tell us that something is badly out of alignment. Just like if your car were to start making strange sounds, it's important to find out what is causing the problem.

The jaw joint (TMJ) is a ball and socket joint, located directly in front of the ear, which connects the lower jaw to the upper. There are a variety of orthopedic disorders that can affect it. A common problem associated with this joint is a slipped disc. Between the ball and socket is a small cushion called the disc, designed, among other things, to act as a shock absorber and keep the bones from rubbing against each other when moving the jaw. This disc can slip out of position and when it does, popping and clicking occur when you move the jaw. This may be caused by injuries, missing teeth or an improper bite, as well as developmental disorders of the jaws or facial bones. A slipped disc in the jaw frequently causes headaches, facial and ear pain. In addition, congestion, buzzing, ringing and pain in the ear may result.

If the clicking joint is not treated, it may lead to "locking" of the jaw. In this condition, the disc becomes deformed or wedged between the ball and socket and the sufferer experiences a limitation of jaw movement, often with a feeling of "catching" or "locking" in the joint with movement. These patients usually experience



headaches and jaw or facial pain, in addition to various ear symptoms. If caught early, most patients can be treated without surgery, but if allowed to progress, degenerative changes may result requiring surgery.

The dentist can listen to your joint with a TMJ Doppler. Different joint sounds need different treatment. A mouth guard can help relax the jaw so the disc can reposition to where it should be. Your bite should be measured to make sure that your teeth mesh prop-

erly. If not, the dentist may need to stabilize your bite by building up the teeth or smoothing out interferences. If your jaw continues to hurt when you talk, chew, yawn or open your mouth, your dentist will refer you to a specialist trained in diagnosing and treating the TMJ.

If you are having orthodontic treatment and the teeth and jaws do not fit together properly, the disc in the jaw joint can be affected. This happens if the fit of the teeth do not match where the disc needs to be. It is not unusual for the disc to start clicking or popping while in orthodontic care. If that happens, bring it to the attention of your orthodontist – the joint and its disc should be treated before things get worse.

If your joint does make noises, use these tips:

1. Don't force your jaw to open more than it can.
2. Don't chew things that are hard (like bagels).
3. Don't grind or clench your teeth.