

NECK CREPITUS AND CLICKING

WHY DO YOU HEAR NOISES WHEN YOU TURN YOUR HEAD



When people come to see a physiotherapist with neck pain, there are often several secondary symptoms. This can include crunching, clicking or cracking in the neck. It's not uncommon to experience this clicking in your neck and can occur when you move your head in certain ways or when pressure is applied to the joints in your neck.

Our necks are comprised of 7 vertebrae separated by discs. These vertebrae are able to move across each other via facet joints. Facet joints guide the movements of our necks, allowing us to look up, down, left and right. These joints, like most in the body, are surrounded by a capsule of synovial fluid to lubricate the joints.

This fluid contains natural nitrogen gas, so when movement occurs at the joints this gas can be released from the fluid and is known as cavitation. This is even more common with rapid movements like fast turns or impacts to the neck. The release of the gas is what can create a clicking, crunching or mainly a popping noise.

HOW CAN YOU TELL IF ITS CAVITATION

Repeat the movement that made the pop, if it doesn't pop again it was probably gas, because it takes awhile for the gas to build up again. The typical gas bubble formation crack, takes about 20 minutes before cavitation, or the cracking, can again occur.

OTHER POSSIBLE CAUSES OF NECK CRACKING

Crepitus, refers to any type of noise or sensation such as a cracking or grinding sensation with neck movement and can occur if the cartilage has worn down in osteoarthritis. It occurs gradually with the normal aging process, or it can be accelerated if there has been a traumatic injury such as whiplash or a sports-related injury.

This degeneration of the cartilage causes rough spots which may grind or crack with movement. With advanced osteoarthritis, many patients will experience pain, as they have lost the cushioning of the cartilage.

This type of crepitation can be also be accompanied by limited neck motion, and the cracking sound is usually repeated over and over with each movement in contrast to the typical gas bubble formation crack.

In the vast majority of neck noises, this will be the main cause. It can also be unrelated to pain, even in those with degenerative changes to the joints such as arthritis. Recent research suggests that between 33% and 80% (age-dependent) of people aged between 20-70 years old with no pain at all had degenerative changes at the neck during their scan.

One of the reasons that these noises can seem particularly loud or uncomfortable is due to the joints of the neck being so close to the ears. Therefore, it's much easier to hear. This is amplified when neck pain is experienced. Hesitancy to move the neck in the anticipation of pain only heightens our awareness of joint movements.

Another possible factor in neck cracking could be the snapping sound of ligaments and/or tendons as they move over bones or other muscles or tendons located in the neck region.

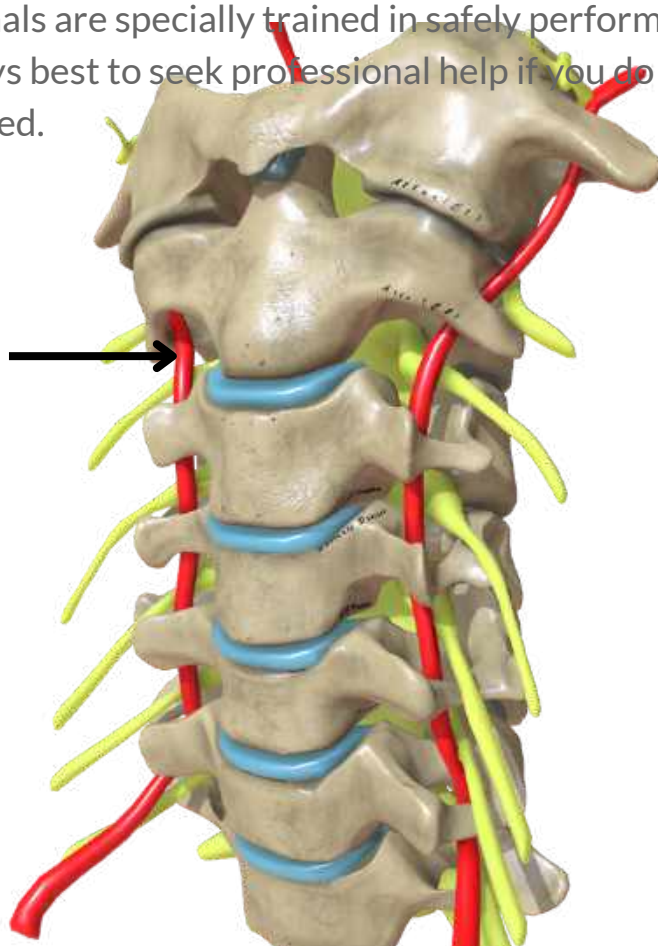
SHOULD I CLICK MY NECK?

Despite people often reporting their neck clicking as a symptom, it is sometimes reported that by clicking their neck, their pain is eased. Although the associated noise is mostly harmless, deliberately clicking your neck by applying rapid forces in rotation of the neck can be harmful.

In each side of your neck, your vertebral arteries run in between the joints, which are an incredibly important pair of arteries carrying oxygenated blood to the brain. As the primary source of oxygenated blood to the brainstem, although rare, compromising these arteries can cause significant injury and disability.

The chances of this occurring during “normal” movements of the neck such as looking behind you or looking up and down are incredibly small. However, placing your neck in very extreme positions and applying force to deliberately cause neck cracking carries a greater risk. Healthcare professionals are specially trained in safely performing these manipulations, therefore it is always best to seek professional help if you do wish for these manipulations to be performed.

Vertebral artery



WHEN SHOULD I BE CONCERNED ABOUT MY NECK CRUNCHING?

As a sole symptom, crunching of the neck is usually not a problem. However, if you are experiencing any of the following symptoms with or without crunching, then please seek medical advice:

- Dizziness
- Problems with speech
- Double vision
- Headaches
- Vomiting
- Problems with swallowing
- Fainting
- Weakness in one or both arms

HOW CAN PHYSIOTHERAPY HELP

Research has shown physiotherapy to be effective for neck pain and often the best results are achieved by a combination of therapies. Our Physiotherapists will combine a number of the following treatments as indicated by your presentation.

Spinal joint mobilizations to restore proper movement of the vertebrae. Helping both to increase range of movement and improve the quality of movement within your range.

Soft tissue mobilization — If the cause of your neck crepitus is contributed to by muscle tightness acting on the joints or tendons

Strength and flexibility training. By conditioning your neck to be stronger and more flexible, you could lessen your neck popping along with any pain that may be accompanying it.

Posture-correcting exercises — Sometimes poor posture may exacerbate neck conditions and symptoms.

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Ergonomic recommendations — Things in your everyday life can also be contributing to your neck issues. For instance, a non-ergonomic desk chair could be a position putting more strain on your neck.

Don't let persistent pain interfere with your work, study, sport and lifestyle. See one of our caring physios to help relieve your symptoms to move and feel better.

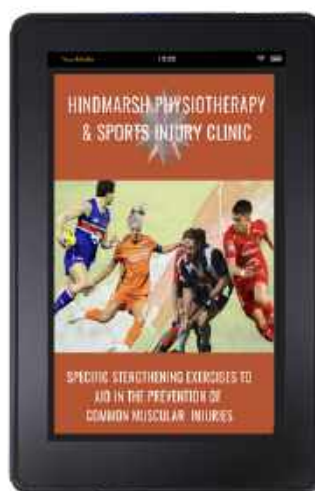
Call us on 83462000 or email us below for an appointment.

By all means grab your own copy of our expert Guide on managing your Neck pain below

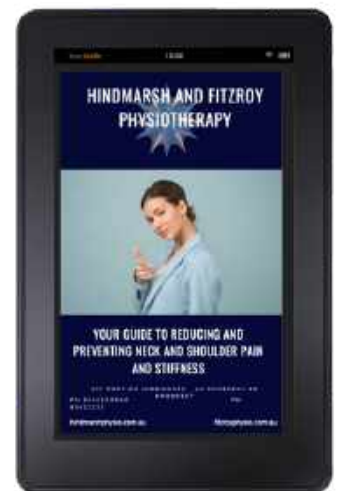
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