

Eliminate Pain & “Snap-Crackle-Pop” of TMJ

Part of the HealthWorks Pain Relief Series covering ALL TYPES of pain

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Not Just a Headache

Many of us suffer from chronic headaches, jaw or ear pain. Though these symptoms can have a variety of causes, one that is often overlooked is a misalignment of the jaw often referred to as TMJ dysfunction.

What’s in a Name?

The Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ) is one of the most frequently used joints of the body and one of the most complex. The name comes from the two bones comprising the joint. The temporal bone of the skull and the mandible (jaw bone) fit together to form a hinge-like jaw joint. The combination of names produces, the Temporal-Mandibular joint, or TMJ.

What’s that Noise?

TMJ dysfunction can cause popping, clicking or grinding sounds when the jaw is opened and closed. Other signs include sharp, or dull and constant pain each time you swallow, yawn, talk or chew. The pain may be localized over the joint, immediately in front of the ear, but can also radiate to the temple, cheek, lower jaw and teeth. Some people get ringing in their ears or a headache that does not improve with over-the-counter medications.

What causes TMJ dysfunction?

Everyday stress causes most of us to clench our jaws and teeth. Some of us do this to excess, causing it to become an unconscious habit. Clenching the teeth repetitively over time alters the normal mechanics of the jaw. This can cause misalignments in the joint.

TMJ dysfunction can also be brought about by a variety of other causes. Simple activities like excessive gum chewing fatigues the jaw and strains the muscles and attachments and may bring about TMJ dysfunction. Or, it may be caused by trauma to the neck—as in a car crash where your head is suddenly thrown backwards, which stretches the muscles under the jaw to the maximum and may sprain many of the tiny ligaments that attach the jaw to the skull.

Your Dentist Knows it’s a House of Cards

Dentists have long known that TMJ dysfunction can also cause many varied symptoms. Interestingly, these can be far removed from the jaw joint itself. In fact, evidence also shows TMJ can cause functional problems throughout the body. Headaches, neck pain, and pain across the shoulders are often relieved after TMJ dysfunction is corrected.

Do the Snap, Crackle, Pop Test

If you have TMJ dysfunction, you can feel this for yourself by placing your fingers at the sides of your jaw (just in front of the opening to your ears), and make movements as if you were chewing. With your fingers in this position, you can feel for popping in the jaw.

There should be no clicking or popping as the TMJ moves through its complete range of motion. Sometimes this noise can even be heard by people close to you. Other times it can only be felt as a lack of smooth movement and you might be the only one who can hear it. Any sort of popping, grinding and clicking of your jaw joint indicate that it is not functioning normally.

What if I Flunked the Test?

Many of us will have some sort of popping or clicking in the jaw, but have chosen “just to live with it”. I can tell you from personal experience that this is not a wise choice.

In my professional experience, I have seen too many people who have not corrected a simple problem, just because it was not bothering them and then... when they finally get around to seeing their dentist or me about it, they’re suffering from constant headaches or jaw pain that is not easily relieved. In the worst cases, surgery is necessary to make the necessary corrections that otherwise could have been prevented with a little proactive treatment.

Can I Get Better Again?

YES! Yes, you can get better again and there are several ways to do so, depending on the severity of your case. In many cases, your dentist can prescribe a mouth splint to prevent you from grinding your teeth at night and thereby alleviate the issue. However, this does not address the muscular aspect and is not always enough, depending on the origin and nature of your problem. In this case, a specialist in musculoskeletal issues (a.k.a. a chiropractor!) can pinpoint the source of your problem and provide the treatments needed to correct it.

Leave it to the ART-ist

One of the most effective techniques used by chiropractors for the treatment of TMJ is the Active Release Technique (ART) – a treatment protocol that involves active therapy to the muscles and ligaments for the restoration of normal function. The use of ART will remove scar tissue adhesions in dysfunctional muscles that cause alterations in normal joint motion and function, allowing normal function to be restored.

We’re On Your Side!

If you’re suffering from the symptoms of TMJ, call and make an appointment. We can help you determine whether TMJ is the cause or whether it is the result of some other condition. Either way, we can help get you out of pain and bring that smile back to your face.

All the best to your health,

Dr. Katie