



Is it OK to crack your own joints?

This is a commonly asked question and as musculoskeletal expert physiotherapists, this is a question we are highly qualified to answer.

Q: What is 'cracking' of a joint?

A: Well... it's not the bone cracking as many comments suggest.

The cracking sound is the result of a quick pressure change within the air-tight, fluid-filled joint. When a skilled musculoskeletal physiotherapist performs a 'manipulation' technique in the form of a [painless] quick, short, sharp movement of a joint, the result is to restore more normal movement and send a signal to the brain that an effective 'release' has been achieved.

When a quick pressure change occurs in a fluid, in this case the joint fluid, a process called cavitation occurs. Cavitation is the rapid formation of a gas bubble with vibrations that create a cracking, or popping sound.

Practically speaking, the cracking sound is merely an indication that quick pressure change occurred. The **main aim of the manipulation technique is the pressure change** and this achieves the desired result of freeing up a 'locked' joint. Freeing up a locked joint also results in decreasing pain. So, the cracking sound is of secondary importance.

Extra information: a joint that receives a technique that changes pressure without a cracking sound is also an effective treatment technique. This is performed with slower, skilled, movements of the joints and the pressure change is not quick enough to create a cavitation, or crack.

Q: Is it safe to crack your own joints?

A: If your joint moves in normal ranges and 'cracking' occurs during this movement, then this is a natural change of pressure and is safe.

The key here is 'normal range of movement'. For example, if you straighten your fingers as far as you can and observe how far they bend backwards, then this is normal movement for your knuckles. If you link your straight fingers, from both hands, pushing your palms away from you, and move through this same degree of movement and some cracking sounds occurs then this is harmless. If you stretch your knuckles further backwards beyond their normal movement and this creates a crack, then this is an excessive and unnatural strain to the joints – not because of the crack, but because of the stretching of the joint beyond normal movements.

Some people do this excessive stretch repetitively for the sake of creating a cracking sensation and this has a

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good chance of setting up long term problems with the joints.

It is highly recommended **to not push any body part** beyond its normal range to try to achieve cracking of the joints, especially in the neck.

Q: What does it matter to you if your joint cracks when you move in normal ranges?

A: Well, as mentioned above, no harm results from cracking during normal range movement, but what do you get out of it? You get a good feeling for the sensation this creates and you release some pressure from a joint.

BUT, there's more to it. A joint that has not accumulated pressure in the first place does not crack when you move yourself through normal ranges. When you move and a crack results this is an indication that you have been doing something to create pressure and strain to your joints. This strain isn't too severe...yet. But it is an indication you are **setting yourself up for future injury and pain**.

For example, if you have been sitting for a while and stand up, twist your trunk, and a low back joint cracks, then this is a result of poor position and poor muscle control while sitting. Since the vast majority of our musculoskeletal pains result from [accumulative strain](#) then this is a classic example of the strain accumulating.

The **release of pressure with a manipulation is permanent** when followed with optimal joint position control and optimal muscle control. If you return to sitting poorly the cracking of your joint serves no purpose other than a temporary 'feel good' and is even **bad for you if this creates a habit** that you rely on.

If you rely on performing the twist and crack to feel a release of this pressure after sitting for a while, then what are you really doing? You are actually **ignoring the problem** of poor sitting control which is one of the major causes of us suffering significant pain.

We highly recommend that you don't use a cracking release of pressure after building up strain on your joints! The alternative is much more successful, productive and saves you time and money in the long run...that is **learn to develop the skills of correct position and muscle control to prevent accumulative strain developing in the first place!**

At **Moore Health** we are **experts at teaching you the best skills for ideal position and muscle control for your body**. If you would like to experience this then [contact us](#) and we'll explain how you can achieve optimal control.

Q: What is the effect of having musculoskeletal physiotherapist manipulate [crack] your joints?

A: When it is appropriate and applied to the right joint with a skillful technique that performs the manipulation in the right direction, a good musculoskeletal physiotherapist is able to dramatically release pressure and strain in joints that have suffered accumulative or traumatic injury. This is one of the many effective methods we use of restoring free movement and eliminating pain.

These manipulation (cracking) techniques are not suited to some people and are certainly not suited to some conditions. This is not a problem because we assess the appropriateness of you and your condition for manipulation techniques. We also clearly explain every technique before performing them and we are very happy to avoid manipulation and use another more gentle and effective technique if this suits your preference.

We highly recommend you **don't allow anyone other than a registered health professional perform manipulation on you** [for the above reasons].

Please feel free ask us any questions about this topic; we are only too happy to help.

***Important:** All information provided is the general opinion of highly qualified and experienced musculoskeletal physiotherapists. Individual conditions vary and advice regarding your specific condition requires consultation with a registered health professional.*