

Family Chiropractic

*Courtesy of Harbourfront Family Chiropractic
by Dr. Warren Gage*



Snap, crackle, pop: synovial fluid

Sometimes when your chiropractor adjusts you, there may be a “popping” sound, and when you don’t hear it, you may think that you didn’t get a very “good” adjustment. On the other hand, there are those who associate that “popping” sound with the idea that a bone is cracking or breaking so they are frightened to be adjusted by a chiropractor. Allow me to explain.

What really causes the “popping” sound you may sometimes hear when you are being adjusted is similar to what happens when you open a carbonated beverage or a bottle of champagne and hear the “pop” that it makes – it’s just the release of gas and pressure.

Some of the spinal joint surfaces are encapsulated within a sac of thick, lubricating fluid that has the consistency of an egg white. Besides reducing friction, this fluid cushions the joints and permits them to turn and bend. Plus, the movement of this fluid helps provide nutrition to soft tissues and expel waste products.

Within this fluid are gases – nitrogen and carbon dioxide. When a chiropractor performs an adjustment, and the joint opens, the “popping” sound is actually a release of these gases (pressure) from the fluid.

After the adjustment opens up the affected joint, the fluid helps to return proper range of motion to the joint by lubricating it again.

You can also hear a similar type of “popping” sound if you crack your knuckles – not that we advocate that! What follows an adjustment is usually described as “relief,” you simply feel better because range of motion and easier movement has been restored.