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Debunking Medical Myths: Knuckle Cracking Causes Arthritis

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Green 20: Rana Elhamzawy, Alexis Malecki, Logan Nguyen, Ehsan Noori, Neil Patel, and Ben Sliwinski

Medical Myth: Knuckle Cracking Causes Arthritis

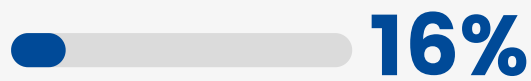


How does it work?

Increase in joint space and decrease in joint pressure allow gases in joint fluid to make bubbles -> collapse of bubbles = "crack" sound (1)

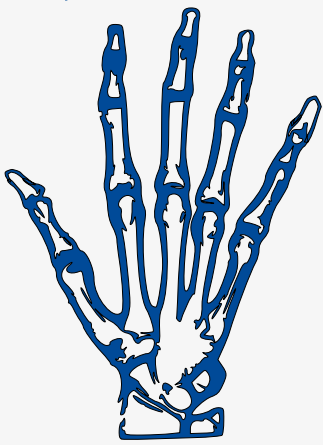
Studies show...

When looking at 300 patients, osteoarthritis (OA) had a prevalence of 16% in both knuckle-cracking and non-knuckle-cracking populations (2)



Knuckle crackers had increased hand swelling and lower grip strength but no increased tendency to develop OA (2)

Radiograph-confirmed OA did not show higher rates of disease in groups who cracked knuckles, even when looking at frequency of knuckle cracking (3)



To conclude...

While knuckle cracking is not a harmless habit, it does not contribute to increased risk of OA

Don't let it get out of hand!

(1) Deweber K, Olszewski M, Ortolano R. Knuckle cracking and hand osteoarthritis. J Am Board Fam Med. 2011;24(2):169-174. doi:10.3122/jabfm.2011.02.100156

(2) Castellanos J, Axelrod D. Effect of habitual knuckle cracking on hand function. Ann Rheum Dis. 1990;49(5):308-309. doi:10.1136/ard.49.5.308

(3) Rizvi A, Loukas M, Oskouian RJ, Tubbs RS. Let's get a hand on this: Review of the clinical anatomy of "knuckle cracking". Clin Anat. 2018;31(6):942-945. doi:10.1002/ca.23243