

# Ask The Experts

## Banging noise and snapping sound in her head

**Q** I am a 71-year-old woman. When I wake up in the middle of the night or in the morning, there is a banging noise in my head.

**It sounds like someone is hammering a nail at a constant rhythm. I also hear a snapping sound in my head when I turn my head sharply while doing a golf swing.**

**I was seen by a doctor at a neuroscience department for a facial twitch. The last visit was seven months ago. He ordered a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan. I was discharged without a review of the MRI.**

**Please advise.**

**A** The noise that you have described could be pulsatile tinnitus which is the perception of sound when there is actually none present.

It could take the form of ringing, clicking, banging or a multitude of different sounds. When it occurs in a regular rhythm, it is called pulsatile tinnitus.

There are many causes of tinnitus, including hearing loss, ear infections, atherosclerotic vessels, intracranial hypertension and tumours.

You also appear to have some facial twitching which is known as a hemifacial spasm.

When you couple both symptoms together, it suggests some form of neurovascular compression syndrome.

There are many vessels in the brain and when they press on some of the nerves that exit the brain, the person can experience symptoms associated to that particular nerve that is being compressed.

An example is trigeminal neuralgia, where the trigeminal nerve (cranial nerve V) is usually compressed by the superior cerebellar artery.

This causes a severe pain through the distribution of the nerve.

Similarly, in your case, the nerves involved would likely be the facial and auditory nerves. These two nerves exit the brain and enter the skull in the same areas, and run side by side.

The facial nerve is a motor nerve, controlling the muscles in the face. When it is irritated, it would result in the twitching or spasms you have experienced.

And the auditory nerve, if affected, would cause a person to suffer from tinnitus or imbalance.

### 'CRACKING' OF SPINE

The snapping sound that you hear when you turn your head quickly is possibly due to the cervical spine. It is similar to the cracking of knuckle joints – except that it is happening in the cervical spine.

It is fairly benign and there is no definitive evidence that excessive cracking of your joints causes an earlier onset of arthritis.

It is important for you to get a proper diagnosis.

In this respect, an MRI scan of the brain is probably the safest choice.

You would need to include an MRI angiogram to chart the path of your vessels better. You could request for an MRI of the cervical spine too.

Such tests allow doctors to exclude more sinister causes, such as a tumour or vascular malformation.

Lastly, you do need a review after your MRI. Request for your previous MRI to be given to you on films or saved in a CD, so that you can show it to a specialist neurosurgeon who I suggest that you consult.



**DR ROY KOH,**  
consultant neurosurgeon at FeM  
Surgery @ Alvernia

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## It could be more than you think...

Numbness, involuntary shaking, weakness to the limbs and memory loss could all be signs of a neurological disorder. People with these conditions sometimes think that they are "imagining things". However, more often than not, these could be the initial warning signs for neuro-related disorder like Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease. Early detection, followed by treatment and lifestyle changes, will help to maximise recovery levels and return your life back to normalcy as soon as possible.

To understand more about neurological disorder, you can reach out to our panel of doctors at the clinics listed below at Mount Alvernia Hospital

### NEUROSURGERY

FeM Surgery @ Alvernia  
Medical Centre D #07-54  
Tel: 6259-8880

K K Tang Adult and  
Paediatric NeuroSurgery  
Medical Centre A #06-08  
Tel: 6259-8994

Pacific Specialist Centre  
Medical Centre A #01-06  
Tel: 6256-7130

The Brain And Spine Clinic  
Medical Centre D #08-63  
Tel: 6472-2022

### NEUROLOGY

Siow Neurology Headache  
And Pain Centre  
Medical Centre D #08-59  
Tel: 6254-5289  
www.siowneurology.com

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