

Ep #129: How I Use Massage Balls To Reduce & Eradicate Pain and Increase Strength



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Susi Hatelty

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Male Announcer: You're listening to *From Pain to Possibility* with Susi Hately. You will hear Susi's best ideas on how to reduce or even eradicate your pain and learn how to listen to your body when it whispers so you don't have to hear it scream. And now here's your host, Susi Hately.

Welcome, and welcome back. With this episode I want to dig in and explore how it is that I use massage balls to help people reduce and eradicate pain and other symptoms and how I help people gain more strength. And the utilization of the massage ball as a tool.

A lot of people out in the world of massage balls are utilizing massage balls as a tool of release. So not going to the body worker, but instead utilizing the ball between training sessions or yoga sessions or whatever activity that they're doing. They're utilizing it to free up some tissue to provide some relief so that they can carry on and keep going on going on.

For me, I utilize the balls in a slightly different way, and the way that I use them evolved out of a scenario that occurred in the early 2000s. I'm going to explain that scenario for how it has altered the way that I use the massage balls, and I'll get more into detail about how I utilize them, why I think it's effective, and then I'll give you an example specifically of how I use them.

So let's begin. As I mentioned, a lot of people utilize massage balls or even rollers as tools for finding relief. Like a real quick relief so they can get back into the gym, get back onto their mat, get back into doing whatever activity that it is that they're doing. There's a release that happens and there's a relief that is very real and very palpable.

Back in the 2000s when I was working in a studio space with my clientele as well as with two other teachers, the three of us were also working with a body worker. There was a lot of common clients between ourselves and this body worker. And she was telling me, and this was during one of the waves of massage tools.

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And she was telling me that she was noticing with the clientele that she was seeing was there tissue was behaving differently. How she was feeling it in her hands was a lot different. And she was noticing the pattern between those people she was seeing as clients who were utilizing massage tools compared to those who weren't.

And those who were utilizing the massage tools, their tissue was becoming more constrained, more compressed, almost like it was sticking to the bone. Not that I think it was, but that's, to her, what it felt like underneath her hands. So when she was working on their bodies, she wasn't really doing the typical things that she would do. She was more feeling like she was kind of pulling that tissue away slightly.

She told me a story about working with an elite athlete who had anterior compartment syndrome. And she asked the person to stop utilizing massage balls and rollers and the various other tools of the day. The person was somewhat resistant to doing that, but did it anyway. And ultimately, the body worker was able to work on her body to a point where the elite athlete was able to avoid surgery.

Now was the avoidance of surgery due to the bodywork? Was it due to the stopping of utilizing the massage tool or other things? I have no idea. But the story and the correlations were very curious to me. And because I'm someone who is always interested in how I can continue to improve the way that I teach, that I can continue to improve the way that my clients get the results, and especially having results that have more sustainability that, of course, I became interested in do we need massage tools really?

So that led the body worker and I to conduct a very informal type of experiment and we pulled off, I pulled all the clients in my practice off of massage tools. I took out the rollers, I took out the balls, I took out all the various things. We didn't tell the other two teachers who were working in my space.

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And so we did this for about three months and many of our common clients were seeing the body worker about every three to four weeks. And what was really curious is that she found that how she could feel the tissue under her hands began to change. What I found is that range of motion, strength, connection and awareness to what was going on in their body was all starting to shift for better. So that became interesting.

What was even more interesting is that the results for the other two teachers remained status quo. So I was curious and I kept the massage balls and the rollers out of the practices that I was providing my clientele. However, I still had clientele who were very much interested in the balls and in the rollers. Despite the results that they were getting in terms of now they were getting more improvement.

I also had new clients coming in who were in love with their massage tool and had no intention of giving it up. And I'm not the kind of person who wants to convince anybody of anything, it's not really in my DNA. If someone wants to do what they want to do, then that's what they're going to do. And I'm not going to be euphemistic or be somewhat covert in explaining to them in some sort of covertly convincing way why they should or shouldn't do it because really, I don't see that as my job.

My job is to teach people about their body and their body movement, and to help them reduce and eradicate their symptoms. But I could see and feel inside of myself, and I still remember this. I mean, all those years ago I still remember this of like how do I find a space that feels true to me knowing what I have seen and knowing where this person is?

How can I meet my clients where they're at also knowing what I know to be true? And that's where this way, this approach of utilizing the massage balls arose from and has continued to evolve and to refine. What I began to do is utilize the massage tool as an awareness tool.

So coming off of the understanding that people were utilizing their massage tool for getting a relief, you know, a quick win, a sense of ease for a

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moment so they could get back and train. The person was still coming back and doing it again, and then doing it again, and then doing it again. And not really thinking much of it, it was just the thing that they were utilizing.

I've heard the term out there, especially with the balls as being like rubber drugs. And so I can see the use of that, right? My question was, What if you could have a more sustainable change and not have to use the massage tool at all? What would that be like?

It's not a dissimilar conversation to going back week after week after week to a health provider because they do give you a quick win. They give you a quick fix, but you need to keep going back time and time and time again.

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that that's a wrong way to approach care. That's certainly helpful for many people. What I'm offering is if that's not something you want, how could you have more sustainable change where your tissue actually shifts so the length of time between those visits extends, and even perhaps changes entirely?

Because what I was noticing way back is, this is when I first started my career about how people would go in and get adjustments but they wouldn't have neuromuscular change. None of their patterns of movement would change and so then the thing that was contributing to whatever segment of their body needing the adjustment, that would just occur again because the pattern hadn't changed.

This is very similar to utilizing a massage tool. You can get the relief and if you haven't changed the neuromuscular patterning, then you're going to continue to need to use the tool. For a lot of people, that's exactly okay with them. They're completely okay with the way that they move. Just give a ball, a roller, give one of the massage guns, give really any massage tool, self-massage tool that's out there and they're good to go.

So this message really is for you if you're like, wow, there could be something different here. I could have a longer standing symptom relief,

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because my tissue has changed. So that is how I started using the balls. I use them as an awareness tool.

So let me give you an example, a common movement in yoga Pilates fitness is the figure four stretch. So you're on your back, or maybe legs are up the wall and you bring your right ankle over to your left knee. And you'll see that there is a figure four, like it's an upside down for in that position.

A lot of people, when they do that movement they don't move their leg bone in the hip socket really all that well. Their pelvis might shift in that frontal plane, they might hike up on one side, it might roll in a rotational plane, it might even tuck or tilt. They might move more from their knee or brace through their ribcage. So despite or in spite of them getting into the movement, how they got into the movement was full of compensation.

And if you have listened to this podcast for a length of time, you know that the compensation part of this conversation is really important for me and is significant in the results that I get with my clientele. Because when I can help someone reduce their compensation patterns, what I have seen is that consistently as I help someone reduce their compensation patterns, their pain and other symptoms drop.

However, sometimes it's difficult to be aware of the compensation patterns, right? Our brain says let's move and our body says okay, and it finds the way in. So then I might then say to them, okay, let's focus in on your leg bone in your pelvis while keeping your pelvis totally quiet, or your ribcage quiet, or your breath, or whatever the most noticeable compensation pattern is. And the person might still have difficulty. Or they might be able to do it and there's still difficulty.

This is when I bring in the ball, or an example of when I might bring in the ball. And I might bring the ball, they might stay exactly where they are, supine on their back, and I ask them to place the ball underneath their hip area close to where their femur and their pelvis connect. They might come up into a slightly sitting position with their hands behind them, leaning back

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a little bit, and then place the ball under that hip, and then roll out the tissue there.

And I might, if the person has some range, ask them to bring their ankle, that right ankle onto the left knee and then move slightly over on to the outside of that hip. And usually we can see their face do a scrunchy and like, “Oh, ah, yeah,” and there's like a tender point or points in that area. And they tune into a sensation they might not have been aware of before.

They tune into it feels like tension or tightness or limitation. I mean people have different words for it and what the tissue is actually doing, I can't say. What I can say is what I see and how someone explains what they're experiencing in terms of sensation and feeling.

Then after they work around their hip with the ball, they come off of that and then come back into the movement and they're like, “Oh, this is how I move my leg. Ah, okay, now I know how to keep my pelvis quiet. Okay, now I get how to keep my ribs quiet. Now I feel more effortless in my movement.”

And then I allow them, or enable them, or we hang out in this movement pattern and it's like, okay, now let's begin to retrain this pattern. You've got the awareness, you see the possibility, now let's start to build a bit more retraining of this new neuromuscular pattern.

So now your brain can connect to your hip and say, aha, okay, this is what hip rotation is. Because previous to this, when they were compensating through their pelvis and through their ribs or their breath, or really wherever else they were compensating through, that is what their brain perceived as being hip rotation. And yet, it wasn't. It was all these other things.

So now they're starting to teach this relationship between their hip and what their brain perceives as what rotation actually is. So now they have this new view, this new pattern that can be improved upon and then honed and crafted a bit more. So now they can tune in. So they've got the relief

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from utilizing the ball and now they're starting to tune into, okay, this is how I move my leg bone in my hip socket.

So this is a key piece that I do with the balls. So when I use the balls, it's not just to get some relief. It might have that portion as an idea to help someone feel more relief, or sometimes someone needs to feel sensation because they have difficulty feeling their body at all. And after I utilize the tool, then I start to ask them to actually move and really tune into the actual joint component movement and retrain that pattern and really feel that pattern.

Because remember, in the healing helix model that I utilize, awareness, the awareness growing helps bring clarity to what's working and not working, what the real problem is. And that clarity then helps create better connection, and then better feedback between the brain and the rest of the body. And then that feedback helps grow awareness and then so it goes we just keep cycling around and around and around.

So the reason I think that this works so well, as I mentioned it slightly already here, is that we're helping to improve the neuromuscular patterning between the brain and the rest of the body. We're bringing into awareness what is actually happening. We're bringing the compensation into the awareness, into consciousness, and now we're able to change it. So now we're getting more accurate and more deliberate about working with the area of the body that needs to be worked with, right?

Do you see what's going on here? So many people have a persistency in their symptoms they're working with, and in some cases chasing after symptom reduction, which has them utilizing the massage tool or the massage ball over and over and over again, but they're not actually addressing the thing that's leading to the need for that ball or that tool.

Whereas the tool or the ball can highlight more about what the actual issue is and now we can begin to address it. And then that will start to reveal other factors which we can then address. And then that helps to continue to

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improve the movement patterns, improve the efficiency of the movement patterns, reduce the compensatory pattern, and as a result forces are better absorbed, better dissipated, there's a whole lot more effortless effort.

When we're now utilizing the muscle structures or the myofascial structures that we're meant to be using, and like way less extraneous, it's much less energy taxing and we can direct our force much more effectively. We can have more strength, have more power, and our endurance and stamina is longer because we're not draining our energy utilizing muscle structures or myofascial structures that don't need to be used.

We're not having to think so hard. We're not having to maintain some other symptom sensation pattern causal issue that's kind of under the level of awareness, but is eating away at our energy banks, we're just dealing with the thing that is the thing. So it becomes really, really, really effective.

And what's nice about this is, I mean, I'm just not a fan of making people wrong about the way they're choosing to move. Because just like posture, as I've mentioned in previous episodes, what people are choosing to do is I believe they're doing the very best thing for themselves. And it's not my job to tell them otherwise. I'm not in their brain, I'm not in their thoughts, I'm not inside of them, I don't know what's going on in their world.

And so my job is to support them where they are and then to help them move to that next level. And so utilizing the massage ball or any massage tool in this way can be super, super helpful for growing that awareness, growing that clarity, improving the connection, and overall improving the feedback.

I have added a video that resides both on Facebook as well as on YouTube that you can find on my website that connects with this episode that you can connect with and you can see how I explain this further. And there's other videos on there where I do utilize massage balls that you can get a feel for how to utilize them. So they'll be on the episode website so you can find them there.

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Now, if this way of working really resonates with you, there's two ways that you can work with me and really dig into this. The first one is my private one to one series. And in that series I work with you specifically and very individually to help you reduce or eradicate the symptoms that you're experiencing.

And also, if you're a health professional and you want to integrate this way of thinking and working into your client base, then the certification program I run the, IAYT accredited yoga therapy certification program, that is available for you to really up-level your skill. So you build your technical skill as well as your business skill so that you can really support your clientele and build a business that really hums for you.

And if that's of interest for you, in either of those situations, just send us a note to health@functionalsynergy.com. I would love, love, love to chat with you about how I can support you in whatever outcome with your body, or as a health professional, whatever outcome you desire. Happy exploring. See you next time.

If this episode has resonated and you're looking to deepen this idea of getting your body back on board, of listening deeply to your symptoms, of listening to the whispers so you don't have to hear the screams and you're looking for one to one support or professional training, then reach out to us at health@functionalsynergy.com where we can customize your learning path. That's health@functionalsynergy.com. Looking forward to hearing from you.