

Ep #135: Exploring Your Neck (Part 1)



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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.

Hello and welcome, and welcome back. With this episode and the next few episodes I want to speak about the neck. The neck anatomy, the neck function, neck movement, and how different parts of the body correlate or are related to what is felt in the neck. And how the neck is correlated and impacts and influences other parts of the body.

The idea here is that even with the most direct blows to the neck, I find so often in the recovery process that rarely do I focus on the neck specifically. Yeah, I will spend some time. But so often we find much of the issue is not in the neck per se, even with neck issues. That there are relationships to ribcage, to armpits, to pelvis, to lower back, to feet even, to guts.

So in this starting phase of this first episode about the neck, my offer and my invitation to you is for you to become aware and to tune in so that you can gain more clarity about what's related to what. Remember that the power that we have in improving, recovering, and in healing is in the pattern. And pain is often one data point.

So when we can start to see the relationship to other areas and then begin to see the pattern, sort of the thread that moves through it all, now we can start to make major shifts in the way that our body absorbs load, dissipates load, and then in turn how our neck feels.

So whether you've got strain in the suboccipital area, maybe you've got strain through your scalenes, or your levator scapulae, or the upper trap area. Maybe the neck strain you experience, you've even noticed is related to that surreptitious stealthily trigger point-ish like feeling between the shoulder blades that just shows up after a long day in front of the computer. Maybe you notice a relationship to headaches and head tension.

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More and more, we're seeing this relationship between neck and guts and stomach function and the way we digest food. It's really, really interesting. And then of course, there's a lot of work I do with dentists who see a correlation between the jaw, neck function and the pelvis.

So lots to explore here, lots to experiment with. And in the realm of movement and of therapeutic yoga and therapeutic applications of yoga, we really can allow our eye to simply notice and become aware. That can give us such powerful understanding.

So often I'll work with people who have something anatomically structurally at issue. Like there's been a change in their body where there has been a physiological and anatomical structural shift. And there can be this idea that game's over, like your life is done in the sense that the structural problem is going to be a problem forever and ever and ever.

And what I have found more to be the case is that yes, there is structural change, there is physiological change. And there's still so much potential movement wise. Because how we respond to that structural change shows up in terms of compensation.

So when we can start to move better, when we can start to breathe better, when we can get quieter inside, a lot of the other tissue around that area and in through the rest of our body can shift. And then we're dissipating and absorbing and transferring load in a different way. So now that structural change, that physiological change doesn't have that same impact.

So yes, there is change. But it's a great example of the change in structure, or the change in physiology doesn't dictate function. It doesn't necessarily dictate movement or what you are capable of doing or not capable of doing.

And I really want to bring that out in these next series of episodes, and really throughout the whole podcast. I mean it's the big reason that I'm here teaching and I'm alive on the planet, is to really step on my soapbox and

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say that there's so much available when we can tune into these parts of our body.

All right, so that's what we're going to do on this episode. And if you like what you hear, I am running a Power of Pure Movement Program over three days in November, November 14, 15, and 16, which is all about the neck. And you can read more about that at learn.functionalsynergy.com/neck.

And I get into it all there, it's a great program where you'll be able to, if you're a teacher or a health professional, you'll get some great ideas for working with your clients and integrating your profession with the therapeutic aspects of movement in yoga.

And if you're someone who has neck pain and you really think that what I'm saying resonates, then you will love the program. And you'll get a lot of awareness and clarity on what's going on. And then learn and understand more about what can create better connection, which creates relief, which creates better stability, which creates better strength, and then you feel better. Awareness comes first, clarity of the problem comes second, and then doing the work to help gain better connection is what is the next big piece.

Okay, so what I want to do today is just take you through a couple of movements for you to experience your neck. Because like I said earlier, where the pain or the strain exists in the neck really depends on you. The things that you do, how you hold your breath, or how you hold tension. The activities that you do, the injuries and activities you've done in the past.

So either in standing or in sitting in a chair, my preference is for you not to be on the floor sitting because so many people, when they sit on the floor, their knees come way higher than their hips. They tend to round through their lower back and it becomes a bit of a strain to lift upwards. So I'm not a huge fan of doing a bunch of sitting on the floor, even if it's on a bolster.

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So my tendency is to move people to a chair or to do this in standing. And I'll take you through two exercises with the neck, and then we'll move through a twist. And between these three, I'm curious about what you'll notice through your neck.

So I want you to think about turning your head left and right. So in the motion of a no. So just take your head towards the left. And then take your head toward the right. Do your best to not strain coming into that movement. Just taking your head to the left, taking your head to the right. Notice where your end range is.

And by end range, I should be very specific here, it's not like where your head stops moving. It's where you feel that strain starts to arise. In fitness and in yoga there tends to be a conversation about the edge. And different people have different ways of talking about the edge. Where I would like you to think about your edge is what I just said, is not where you stop the movement, not where you feel challenged. But rather where the strain begins.

And I would love it if you notice where the strain begins and then back it up a little bit. So we want to find a range where you're in a strain-free or a reduced strain range of motion. Said another way, in a range that you are symptom free or the symptoms are reducing.

The reason why is because if we want to have a shift of tissue, like the way our tissue is expressing pain or strain, then if we continue to move in ranges that have pain and strain, the likelihood is you will continue to have ranges that have pain and strain. And if you want something different, then you need to move in a range where there's something different.

So move in a range where symptoms are less or none, where strain is less or none because now we're giving the nervous system something different. We're now changing up what is normal. To give an analogy or a metaphor for this, when you are making stew, a tomato stew and it's too spicy, you don't add more spice. You add more tomato or water or something else other than spice in order to bring the spice down.

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So if you move through strain, you're telling your nervous system that is the normal way to move. And then the likelihood of you getting out of that is pretty low. So back to the left and right movement, just move your head in an easy, easy range, either reduced or no strain, reduced or no symptoms. Just notice where that range is.

And then take your left ear to your shoulder. And then take your right ear to your shoulder. And again, in a symptom-free or reduced symptom, or a strain-free or a reduced strain range of motion. Okay, and then once that's complete, come back to the left and right movement.

And if you want to add to it, you can bring in breath. So on one phase of breath you're turning your head to the left. And then on the other phase of breath you're coming back to center and then over to the right. So you can play with which phase you're moving on, I don't have a preference per se. I just want you to breathe.

So it might be that one phase is when you turn your head out and then another phase is when you come back to center, and then you breathe again on the way out towards the right and then back. You play with it of like what brings you fluidity, what brings smoothness. Feel what feels right in your body.

And try to move, if you're using this technique of moving with the breath, really try to move only as fast as you can breathe. Move only as fast as you can feel. Okay, and then let's come back to center. And when you're ready, take your ear to the shoulder.

Same thing, as you're taking ear to shoulder is bring in your breath, moving only as fast as you can breathe. Moving only as fast as you can feel. So the likelihood of you moving quickly is pretty low. You're going to be moving pretty slowly to start with.

All right, a couple more. And as you finish up these couple more, notice what you feel through your body. Feel what you notice in your breath, feel what you notice elsewhere in your body as a result of doing this movement.

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Has anything changed up in around your head or the base of your occiput, or down through your neck or your ribs? Or are you standing taller, sitting taller? What else are you noticing?

Okay, so now where we're going to move is into a twist. And the reason I want to do this twist is because a lot of what happens through our ribcage and our abdomen, relative to our pelvis, can have a huge impact on what goes on in our neck.

So we're going to do two things inside of this twist. The first one is we're simply going to twist. So those of you listening who are regular yoga people and you just go into a twist, just do you the twist that you know to do and go left and right.

And then for this next version I'd like you to take your arms out of it if you actually used your arms to bring yourself around. I want you to bring your palms together and place your middle fingers at your chin. Now the reason I'm asking you to do this is because I want to make sure you're leading the twist from your ribcage and abdomen, and that your head and your neck are not generating the movement.

Oftentimes when we're limited in the ribcage and our obliques, which are the engine of a twist, when they aren't kind of coming on board, we'll generate the movement by driving with our head or our neck. And that can create some issues because even though the neck does twist, it does rotate, with this particular movement of twisting we want to be able to facilitate it from your abdomen.

With this head in place with your hands I want you now to rotate to your left. Your pelvis is going to stay quiet. Your ribs are going to move and it's your obliques that are generating the movement. And then come on back. And then the other way. Take yourself into the twist and then come on back.

Now notice what's happening up into your neck. What do you feel into your head? Okay, coming back to your twist again, hand positioned at the chin.

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Begin to take yourself into a twist, rotating your ribcage around by generating the movement with your obliques. And now once you're here, start to move your head ever so slightly.

Finding that range, symptoms are reducing or are none. Strain is either not there or it's reducing. And then bring yourself all the way back to start. And then take yourself to the other direction. With your middle finger underneath your chin, start to take yourself into a twist. Think about your ribs and your abdomen leading the way.

Ease through your neck, ease through the base of the skull. And then when you get to the end of the true like reduced sensation range of motion, then if it is available, start to move your head into the movement. Really lovely. Okay, and then come on back.

All right, so now notice what it is that you feel and come back to the original neck movements that we did. Taking your head one direction, left, then the other direction, right. Ear to your shoulder. Ear to your shoulder.

Is there a distinction or a difference in how you move your neck? What your neck feels like? What is occurring in terms of symptom or strain or tension? Or what you're noticing with your breathing or how you're feeling around your pelvis or SI or down through your legs? What else do you notice?

Awesome. All right, now if what you're noticing is really helpful and this is starting to kind of percolate of like, "Ooh, I'm starting to recognize a relationship between my neck and other parts of my body" and you want to enroll in the November program, then come check it out at learn.functionalsynergy.com/neck.

I would love to teach you, it would be a true joy. You have a great, great time exploring and we'll see you next week when we get into the next piece of the puzzle around improving how your neck feels. See you then.

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

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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.