

Ep #136: Exploring Your Neck (Part 2)



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With Your Host

Susi Hatley

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Male Announcer: You're listening to *From Pain to Possibility* with Susi Hatley. 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 Hatley.

Welcome and welcome back. With this episode I want to take you on an exploration around your neck, and the keyword here is around. Around the collarbones, up to the jaw, into the base of the occiput. And the reason I'm doing this is to build upon last week's episode of exploring and unwinding and unraveling your neck.

And the idea is to highlight and just show you that we can work specifically with the neck, but oftentimes what is contributing to neck strain and persistency of symptoms is not where the tension is screaming at us, but rather other areas that might be correlated.

And so I want to utilize the power of touch to have you be able to explore the quality of your tissue in and around the collarbones, the jaw, and the base of the occiput to see if for you those are areas that might be contributing to what you're feeling in your neck.

Like I said, this builds upon last week's episode, so if you have not experienced last week's episode I do encourage you to explore it because we do work at the neck but then we go beyond the neck and then come back to it. So you start to be able to experience as you start to move better and feel things differently in parts of your body your neck begins to change as well.

If what I'm sharing here really resonates with you, I encourage you to join me November 14th, 15th, and 16th where I'm deep diving for four and a half hours into your neck, and every other participant's neck for *The Power of Pure Movement: Unwinding and Unraveling Your Neck*.

And you can read more about that at learn.functionalsynergy.com/neck. And it really is about getting to the roots of your neck issue, understanding

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that where the pain is is not the problem, and being able to be curious and exploratory.

One of the key things that I remember learning years ago when I was involved in some research projects at the university, I was talking to one of their mindfulness researchers. And what he said that's very clear in the mindfulness literature and research is that when we go about doing a practice where we're really right about it and there's a right way to do it, we tend to go into sympathetic drive in our nervous system.

When we can be more curious about our exploration and about doing what we're doing, we're more into a parasympathetic drive. And what I've seen over and over again is that when we're in a sympathetic doing it right, there's a lot more tension and recovery is much, much slower. And yet when someone can be more curious about the exploration, their process goes way faster. Much, much, much faster.

So what I encourage you to do as we go through this episode, and if it really resonates with you and you join us in November is to be curious about this. I love this idea that sensation and symptoms are messengers trying to get our attention. They are not necessarily indicators that you're broken, I mean unless obviously a bone is broken, but there is nothing that is actually broken. They are indicators that something needs to be paid attention to.

And when we can really take on this idea of like, "Oh, what is this trying to let me know about?" and it could be that you've got to shift up your posture or you've got to do some movement. I mean there's many things that could arise out of where your attention should often go next. And sometimes the message is a bit subtler than that, or a bit different, or a bit kind of wackadoodle or woo. And it's fascinating.

So that's where I want to guide you, because the process of recovery and healing is so much more than just your anatomy. We can start the conversation through our anatomy and our mechanics, and then it opens up to something so much more broad than that, okay? So let's get going.

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The first thing I want you to explore is we're going to be placing our fingers, sort of the tips of our fingers and the pads of our fingers, we're going to be using those through the upper part of our body from the collarbone, the breast bone, the jaw, the base of the occiput. And if you're not a body worker, sometimes this can be a little bit tricky to explore in terms of how much pressure that you use.

The analogy that I like to use is that I make bread and I knead bread. If I squeeze that too hard, if I push too much pressure on it then the bread doesn't rise. So there's a firmness in doing the kneading, but there's a softness. So when I'm talking to clients I will sometimes say at the pace of your breath, move at the pace of love, move at the pace of nature.

I have one client who talks about when she is not moving in her pain range of motion, she's moving in a peace range of motion. So sometimes those abstract notions can be really, really helpful. So what's your love range of motion? Or your peace range of motion? Or what's the speed at which nature goes? Which is sort of steady, it's not fast, it's not rushing. You're going at the pace of your breath so that you can tune in to the sensation and the tissue of your body, okay?

The other thing to think about is, if you were to put your pad of your middle finger against your thumb and squeeze, and then you feel pressure around the nail, or behind the first knuckle there, you're going too hard, right? If your fingers are getting white and you're losing blood flow there, you're going too hard. You want to be gentle.

I also sometimes will say imagine that you're teaching a young child how to pat a dog. And the idea is to go gently, gently, gently, gently, gently, really gently. So it's super soft, that's how I want to guide you to explore your body, okay?

So what I'd like to do is just begin by finding your collarbone, or your clavicle, and you can feel above it. And there's a number of neck muscles that attach to it on the top part. And you can also feel below it, which is where the subclavius musculature and related fascia is.

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And we're just going to take a couple of minutes, and just with the second and the first, maybe even the third pads of your fingers, whatever is the most comfortable to get in there, is allow your fingers to just gently find that collarbone or clavicle, and then hook over the top part of it.

So you're closer to your chin further from your navel. You're on the top part of that clavicle, and just gently press. Make maybe a little circles, or just gently press the tissue in that area. What you're kind of feeling for is the quality of the tissue. And just follow the length of the collarbone from the center of your body out towards the shoulder, just really gently and slowly, remembering to go at the speed of nature.

And when I say nature, I don't mean like hurricane, obviously. I mean something a little gentler than that. And going at the pace of your breath, being able to tune into the texture that is your tissue. So some of you might feel this as being hard or rigid, some might feel buttery and soft, and anything in between.

Okay, and now come to the other side and do the same thing. Now, you can be doing this in sitting, or in standing, or in laying down. And now you know what the movement is, can you also tune yourself into your breathing so that you're moving only at the pace of your breath? So be able to feel yourself breathing as you place your fingers in through this area.

Now, I don't know about you, but my right side feels very different doing this than my left. So my fingers can really hook in and around my left collarbone. My right collarbone, there's a bit more density to the tissue. So that's really curious to me. I'm now going to start to get in under the collarbone here, so on the bottom side of it. I'm going to work one collarbone at a time.

And again, I'm gently pressing, maybe doing a few little circles. Kind of just I love the word noodling because it makes me smile and it makes me laugh. And it's not really a doing word, it's more of an exploring word. And it's just getting a sense of what's going on underneath the skin here.

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Okay, and then we'll move over to the other side and then do the same thing here. It's just gotten a feel of what's underneath that collarbone. And you might find as you do this, that something frees up in your neck or your face or your head, but something also might free up somewhere else.

That's what's so fun about this, that even though this is an episode about the neck and we're doing some self-massage technique, you might discover so much other things. Like I'm even noticing as I'm sitting here that my pelvis position is changing and that my knees are feeling a bit different. It's interesting, isn't it? My breath has certainly shifted as I've continued this on.

Okay, so now, here, take a pause and now just feel yourself. Feel yourself breathing. And is there anything different in this experience of you having just done this? I can feel like there's this sort of tempo shift inside of my body. I've been teaching private sessions this morning and I can feel just a settling inside. And there's a difference in my breath and my neck is longer.

All right, so now we're going to take the index finger and the pad of the index finger and bring it up to the jaw and find that temporomandibular joint, the TMJ. And so to find it open and close your jaw, and it's close to the ear area, and you'll feel, I'm going to talk as I move my jaw. Can you feel it opening and closing?

And now just gently with either the pad have the index finger and or the pad of the second finger, or if you need to use a third finger or thumbs, whatever works, just gently, gently massage around that TMJ. But be really, really gentle and feel around that. And you might even go down towards your chin.

And I like to do one side at a time. You can certainly do both at a time, but I like to do one side so I can really attend my focus to the one side. I sometimes also hook my thumb underneath the jaw bone so that my index finger and my second finger pad are in and around that TMJ and circling down, and then my thumb is hooking around underneath. And that can be really interesting to experience.

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Okay, and then come over to the other side if you are shifting sides, and doing the same thing. And again, you're being super gentle and you're moving at the pace of your breath. Slow enough that you can actually feel what's underneath your fingers, allowing yourself to be curious about what is here and noticing the result of what's happening as you work with this with yourself.

So as I'm doing this, what I'm noticing is my head has become lighter and I'm breathing better in my ribcage. And if I move my head left and right, even though I didn't do that as a baseline measure at the beginning, I can feel that there's just a smoothness in the movement of my neck.

Okay, so then what we can do is bring the hands around to the base of the occiput. So if you're taking your hand the back of your head, then you'll feel the back of the skull. And in behind where that back of the skull almost starts to come towards the neck area, like where that round bit of the back of the skull comes around there and just let your fingers, the pads of your fingers find the base of that round bit and just tune into that.

I find for myself if I've been sitting, whether I'm teaching or whether I'm writing, this area can get a little bit tighter on me. And coming into this after doing the work of my collarbones and the TMJ, it's very, very free here right now, which is fun.

So just gently massage in there. Maybe nod your chin forward and then bring your chin up, kind of in a nodding up and down. And again, moving at the rate of your breath, watching how much effort you're putting into this process. And just keep it super, super easy.

Okay, now let your hands come down and now notice what it is that you feel. Notice what you feel in your head. Notice what you feel in your jaw, and your neck, and your collarbones. We've worked areas that are in the neighborhood of the neck but are, like they're on either side. So it's a very local connection to the neck, and just notice if there's any relationship.

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And whether there is or isn't, then also notice if there's a relationship to something further elsewhere in your body. As you shifted this up did something else change? Sometimes people find a difference in their pelvic floor when they've worked around the base of the occiput and the TMJ, for example.

All right, so you can play around with those different techniques and just continue to explore what the tissue feels like. And as you practice, you'll start to get more creative with how you're placing your fingers, the softness, and the depth of that softness that you can work with. You might move your head around or move your shoulders around, and just kind of play and be soft.

But be soft and slow with this. Like really think about the love from your hands into this area and let that lead you and guide you through the practice.

And if this is something that is of interest, then do check out the neck workshop that's coming up, The Power of Pure Movement: Unwinding and Unraveling the neck, November 14th, 15th, and 16th. Four and a half hours of training, from 12:15 to 145 each day. It's 197 regular price. We're currently on early bird registration, and you can see more and read more at learn.functionalsynergy.com/neck. It'd be so terrific to see you there. All right, take care. Have a great time exploring.

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.