

Ep #145: Exploring Your Breath Part 3 – Breathing to Relieve Migraines



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 we continue the miniseries that I've recently started on exploring your breath, and today's topic is going to be on migraines. Now this miniseries is a run-up to the Mechanics of Breathing 3.0, which is my updated mechanics of breathing course which runs for 10 weeks beginning January the 16th. It's so good.

You'll get pre-recorded video that drops each week. Plus you'll get weekly calls, like group live interaction where you and I can get your questions answered, we can go deeper into concepts as well as to practices. Plus I've got some amazing trainers coming in. So yeah, you've got to come and check it out, learn.functionalsynergy.com/breathing.

But today we're going to play around with migraines. I have had a lot of great success working with people with migraines. And you'd think that a lot of the success would come from tension related migraines, like the ones that it was very obvious that there was a relationship between tension and tightness, like tissue tightness in the neck or around the ribcage or anywhere else in the body.

And yes, there can be because being someone who works with a body, being someone who works with tissue, helping people move better and breathe better, become aware and become still, it makes a lot of sense that when I can help someone move better, that their migraines could shift. But what's really curious is how somebody can tune into their body and their mind and their system overall and then recognize correlations to the migraine.

So when I was working a lot with people who had auras or migraines that didn't quite have a, there may have been relationship to tightness or tension, but we wouldn't have said or their health professional wouldn't

[From Pain to Possibility](#) with Susi Hately

Ep #145: Exploring Your Breath Part 3 – Breathing to Relieve Migraines

have said that there was a causal link, but it was a correlated link. That there was something else more physiological going on, rather than, say anatomical or biomechanical. There was still some really amazing results that occurred.

And you know why? Because I was able to help people through practices like breathing and movement. I was able to help them tune in their awareness so that they were able to see more and more of what was correlated to the impetus of the migraine.

I love to share about how I believe that healing is possible. I'm not someone who says that curing is, not in my line of work anyway because it's not what I do. People will still have the triggers toward episodes like migraines or other things, like my husband has psoriasis, for example. There's still triggers for that to flare up a little bit.

But in like my husband's case, which I talk about a lot on this podcast, he's able to feel it come on so much sooner that he can catch it. So you would never know, if you met him you would never know he has psoriasis because his skin is so clear.

The same is similar to folks with migraines, I find. Is that yes, they still have the opportunity for the migraine to come back. There's still this physiological anatomical functional process, that when the conditions are what the conditions are, a migraine can result.

But when someone becomes more aware of the conditions that lead to that expression of the migraine, that's where the power lies, right? That tuning in. So then what starts to happen is we become less at the whim of a condition or a set of symptoms that we have. And we're not really controlling them, but we're beginning to understand what they are indicating to us, right?

I love to say that our symptoms are our messengers, they're letting us know that something's up. Now, sometimes it's difficult to figure that out. But

[From Pain to Possibility](#) with Susi Hatley

Ep #145: Exploring Your Breath Part 3 – Breathing to Relieve Migraines

through this process of tuning into your breath, tuning into the mechanics of the breath, so much can be revealed if you're willing to notice that experience, right? So it doesn't say your migraines will be gone forever. No, I would never say that because I don't actually believe thought to be true.

However, the expression of your system can be totally, totally different because you'll tune in to what I like to call the yellow lights or the whispers so that you don't have to hear the screams. Like you're able to make a difference earlier on, catch things sooner because you can tune into that quieter aspect of yourself and then what might be leading to the trigger of the migraine, right? Like coming into that quiet, quiet, quiet, quiet space.

And it does take training. Like lots of people who listen to this podcast overall are a combination of health care professionals, yoga teachers, Pilates teachers. When I say health professionals it may include physios, physical therapists, OTs, massage therapists, physicians, psychiatrists, like it's just like across the board.

And what I'm doing through this process is I'm enabling them to utilize their skills inside of the medical world that much better. Because so much in the medical world focuses in on measuring the things that are screaming, and I'm teaching how to listen to the whispers so you don't have to hear the scream, yeah?

All right, so with that said, when we're looking at migraines then, because migraines can be stress induced, but then they also can sometimes not be stress induced. Like here in Calgary we have a weather system called a Chinook. And what that means is because of the mountains, the air comes over and then can invert and we can move from being super, super cold, and then go up 15, 20 degrees in a matter of three, four, five, six hours. And it's because of the pressure change.

And for people who experience migraines, it can be an absolutely brutal experience with this change of pressure. And what's interesting is that

[From Pain to Possibility](#) with Susi Hatelly

Ep #145: Exploring Your Breath Part 3 – Breathing to Relieve Migraines

people can, like we can see the Chinook arch coming in across the sky because our sky is so big, and people can feel it too. Like they can feel that pressure change starting.

And what's really interesting is that those folks who are willing to play, it's very interesting for them to tune in and how their diet needs to shift, or how their sleep needs to shift, or other things they can do for themselves to mitigate that change of pressure. They realize that they don't have to be at the whim of the change.

So it's very fascinating. It's very fascinating when someone can tune in. But you've got to be able to or willing to do the awareness work to see what is different during those times of pressure change and how you might then operate in your life a bit differently to change up the way that those symptoms are responding.

So when we're playing around with breath in this context, so we can play around with it in a couple of ways. One, it can be induced or utilized when the migraine is like at full tilt and you just need some level of relief. You can also utilize it when you're noticing the whispers and kind of go, okay, I'm noticing my breath is held. I'm noticing my breath is sort of almost dissociated from my body or my belly is numbed out.

Or there's something going on that that you're noticing, you're getting a signal of like you've got to tune in or you got to come back into your body a bit more or settle into your pelvis. You might just realize other things, but the other things are leading you to let's start breathing.

And if you Google online, there's a lot of information around how it's important to learn how to slow down your breathing. And there's a lot of methodologies around breathe in for five, hold for five, breathe out for five. Or breathe in for four, hold for six, and breathe out for eight.

I'm not a huge fan in the early stages of counting breath. I'm not a huge fan of retaining breath, or even trying to make a breath longer, the exhale

[From Pain to Possibility](#) with Susi Hatelty

Ep #145: Exploring Your Breath Part 3 – Breathing to Relieve Migraines

longer than the inhale at the beginning phases for someone. It doesn't mean not to do it, it's just not a technique that I like to teach initially.

What I like to do initially is show someone and help them feel into what their mechanics actually are, and then very slowly and deliberately, bit by bit, step by step they are tuning more in and recognizing the relationship between the way their tissue is responding and how when they relax a bit more, how things change.

And then as they get a more understanding of their mechanics, the way their body is, the way the breath is and the relationship to their symptoms, then we can start to go into some of those more involved exercises like breathing in a certain count, holding for a certain count and breathing out for a certain count. Not to say that it's bad, it's just how I orient the way that I teach those exercises. I typically do them later in the process and not with someone who's a beginner.

This exercise though, is something I do near the beginning with people and I started teaching it, gosh, many, many, many years ago, simply utilizing the hands, and I'll get into the details in just a second. And then one of my clients who had migraines, who had a lot of migraines, she started to utilize it to help her with their migraines.

So she kind of led me towards this. And then since then I've just adapted it and expanded it and learned from my clients who get a lot of migraines, how they have adapted it. So the exercise really is about nostril breathing, but using nostril breathing in a way that's a bit more imaginative.

So to think about placing an imaginary set of nostrils at the palm of your hands to begin with. And I know that sounds a bit kooky and strange, but I want you to imagine, just using your imagination, that you can breathe through your hands. That no longer do you breathe through your nose or your mouth, you breathe through your hands.

Ep #145: Exploring Your Breath Part 3 – Breathing to Relieve Migraines

So the imagination of your nostrils at your hands and just breathing through your hands, just feel what that feels like. And you can do the same thing with your feet, you can place nostrils at your feet and imagine that you're breathing through your feet.

Now, in truth you can do this with any part of your body. I find that it tends to be easier to begin at the hands because we can see our hands and we can feel our hands pretty well, typically. So that tends to be a place where I begin. But really, you can take this idea anywhere.

This actually all started way back when I first started to teach and in yoga we talked about breathing through the hip, or breathing through certain muscles when we were in a particular held movement. And people were like, "Oh my gosh, this stretch is really, really big." And so a lot of times the direction would be just breathe in through that muscle area. So I evolved that into just breathe through your hands and see what that does to your body, never mind the movement.

So then when it comes to the migraines, now start to take the nostrils to your third eye, so the space between your eyebrows. And perhaps take some nostrils to the sinuses under your eyes. And then come back to the top of your head and feel where two sides of your head come together and imagine a line going down the center of your head and dot that line with some nostrils. So now you're breathing through the seam of the two halves of your head.

And then, if it makes sense, allow for more nostrils to show up in other areas of your head. So now that you have these nostrils moreso all over your head, and this is what my client who introduced me to this process, after she had learned how to breathe through her hands, she took nostrils and put them all over her head. And that's what settled out her migraine.

So as you're playing with this, start to notice where it makes the most sense for you to place the nostrils. For some people going right into an area that feels to be a source or like a particular hot spot, some people

[From Pain to Possibility](#) with Susi Hatelty

Ep #145: Exploring Your Breath Part 3 – Breathing to Relieve Migraines

really like just going straight there and breathing through that hot spot. Other people that's too intense, or as they breathe through there they start to feel a little bit restless or ungrounded and it's more about breathing around that spot or even breathing into a totally different spot in the head.

Other times it's being in the jaw, or the mouth, or an area of tension in the neck. And then as you do this, as your awareness grows and as your body settles, you might find your attention drawn elsewhere. And then as you breathe to that point elsewhere, you might feel your head starting to settle out again. And then that becomes really interesting to start to see the pattern.

And then what you might see is that, let's say you were drawn to your belly, for example. And then you were breathing more through the belly and you felt a difference in your head. Then I've had experiences with clients where then they start to notice these other sensations or other signals in their belly that lead them to realize a migraine is about to come on.

So allow yourself to follow what we often call the wisdom of your body and where is the sensation, where is that intelligence drawing your attention as you get quieter? So then what starts to happen is this connection to your body via your breath and your migraine in your head and how that starts to settle you down a little bit more. Maybe there's less concern about the migraine because you've got a tool that can settle out the symptom and it doesn't hurt as much.

You've also got a tool that can give you a bit of control, a bit of management, which then opens the gates to further awareness, to deepen and get quieter to get even a greater understanding of what's contributing, perhaps to the onset of the migraine. So breathing through your head, or wherever your attention is being drawn, and just allow yourself to feel and sort out and notice what's related to what.

And even if it just seems totally absurd, just roll with it. Sometimes the things that occur in our bodies to our cognitive processing feel entirely

[From Pain to Possibility](#) with Susi Hatley

Ep #145: Exploring Your Breath Part 3 – Breathing to Relieve Migraines

absurd. But that that's okay, oftentimes the reasoning for it comes later. But allow yourself to follow it and just see what arises.

And then as you're settling back out and you're wanting to complete the exercise, bring yourself back to your hands or your feet, allow the breath to be there. And then just feel the breath as it is through your nostrils, like the real nostrils.

And notice what's happening. Feel what you feel. And even if you can't make sense of anything that has arisen, just notice what did and if there's questions that you have about the process, by all means, send me an email, health@functionalsynergy.com.

I can't get into detailed answers on email, that's too difficult without having seen you. However, if there is a question that I can respond to, I'll be happy to type out a response to you if I'm able to do that, all right?

And if you want to dig into this further, then take a look at learn.functionalsynergy.com/breathing. I would love to teach you in January, early bird registration is on now.

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.