

Ep #146: Exploring Your Breath Part 4 – Mechanics of Breathing: A Gentle Practice 1



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With Your Host

Susi Hately

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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, so glad that you're here. We are in the middle of a miniseries on mechanics of breath and this is all a lead-up to a program I'm running this January from January the 16th through till March the 24th.

A multi-week series on mechanics of breathing. It's my third iteration of the program, which I've been running for over 10 years now. Which really is about helping you delve into the mechanics of your breath. And when you really tune in into how you're breathing, what impact it can have elsewhere.

So often we just think about breathing as breathing. And yet the air that sits in front of our face, before becomes air, it comes in, yes, via a pressure change and a vacuum. And part of how it comes in and the amount and the quality that comes in has to do with the way that our tissue and that our body functions.

So I like to think of our body as a mechanical pump that has such an impactful influence on the way breath comes in and breath goes out and the overall breathing experience that we have. So that's my take on this breathing course.

And we're going to be also adding this piece around sleep apnea, which is so incredibly cool because I'm bringing my dentist who is brilliant and awesome. He is a funny guy, just a gem of a man and amazing dentist. And some work he's doing with sleep apnea is just phenomenal when it comes to airway and mechanics and really recognizing the whole body's role in it.

So sleep apnea is not simply that you're stopping breathing, it's like we're looking at what's really contributing to that. So he's going to be involved in

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the program and I'm so delighted that he is and so delighted to be offering this to you again. So you can register at learn.functionalsynergy.com/breathing. I would love, love, love for you to join me.

With this episode I want to take you through a gentle practice. And the practice is really to tune you into your ribcage, your breath, how that breath moves your ribcage, the connection to your neck and to your head. And then, interestingly enough, I'm going to take you down to your feet as well.

So when we are playing here with breathing in this way, it's really about connecting you back into your body, tuning yourself in, helping you to down regulate. And I mean, really, it's the curiosity of what arises. Because when we can recognize what arises, we're becoming aware of things oftentimes that we weren't aware of.

And it's that which we weren't aware of that can have such an impact on our healing process. Because the reality is, at least the one that I see all of the time, I know all of the time is a strong set of words but it really is common, is that what really gets in the way for people trying to improve, whether it's eradicating pain or improving performance, it's that which they are unaware of that's the problem, particularly in the reducing and eradication of symptoms.

So we can chase the symptom all we want, but until we get to that which we're unaware of and really understand where the congestion resides, where the stagnation resides, where the compensatory patterns reside, until we can get there we'll just kind of be in this cyclical pattern of occasional or commonly chronic scenarios of symptoms.

So I'm hoping with this gentle practice we can tune you into an awareness feature around your breath and what's going on within your body and your mind. Okay, so let's get rolling.

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You can do this in seated, you can do this in standing, you can do this laying down. I would not recommend you doing this while driving. But allowing the ideas and the principles of connecting with your breath can happen anytime and anywhere, that's what's so amazing about breathing.

So become comfortable, and I'll offer up what I like to offer up in many of my practices, is can you be 5 to 10% more comfortable? And what do you need for that? So can we up-level, the comfort level? Whether it's changing the seat that you're sitting in or maybe grabbing a blanket. Maybe if you're lying on the floor you need something underneath your legs. Maybe you need to shift the lighting up. Close the door. Tell people not to bother you.

Okay, take a pause from me if you need to in order to get yourself just a little bit more comfortable. And then when you're ready, start by connecting to that inhale and the exhale. So feeling how your breath is coming into your body and how it's leaving your body. Remembering, as I mentioned earlier, that before breath was breath, it was air sitting in front of your face.

And there was a pressure in a vacuum change and in it comes through your nose or your mouth. And in part, what impacts that quality or quantity of air coming in and turning into breath is the tissue around your ribcage, your neck, your abdomen, your pelvis and so much more.

So just feel what you feel. No need to like dig around to search for stuff, but just what is bubbling up into your awareness about how that breath is coming in, where you feel it. Maybe you feel it coming in through your nostrils. Maybe you feel your ribcage moving. Maybe you feel your abdomen expanding. Maybe you feel yourself settling, down regulating. Maybe there's a sigh.

And maybe many other things that I haven't mentioned. So just tune in for your own self what this baseline level is. Okay, so now feel that breath moving through your body. And let's start at the ribcage. And notice how the ribcage is moving. The ribcage moves in all directions, forward, sides and back.

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Many times when we are heightened up with levels of stress or load in our life, the movement of that ribcage can be a bit limited. Sometimes when we have bracing patterns, or lung conditions, or asthma, or allergies the ribcage can be a bit limited. It can be limited after having a baby, while you're pregnant, while you're recuperating from any surgery or other types of injuries. So just notice what it is.

And I think the key that I want to really make present is that whatever the baseline is that you're noticing, is perfect. I know that's used a lot and almost sounds a bit woody. But however your body is responding, whether it's kind of bracy or grippy, or whether it's moving fluidly it truly is the response to whatever is going on in your system and it's the best response. It's the greatest and most perfect response.

And for a moment let's imagine, without changing the volume of your breath, can you bring your breath to the sides of your ribs? So imagine you can feel the breath expanding your ribs laterally. And then imagine that you can bring the breath to the back of your ribs.

And again, try not to increase the volume of your breath. Allow the breath, if you can, to be the same volume. And if you can't quite get the breath to the side or the back of the ribs, that's okay, it's more something to notice what's present.

And then begin to notice your neck and the connection between your ribcage, your neck and your head. I like to think of the space between the breastbone up to the mouth as being the chimney of the heart. So as you're sitting or standing or laying down here, can you feel that idea? If it resonates with you, can you feel it?

Okay, now be aware of your head. So if you're on your back right now you'll notice that your head is touching something, whether it's a floor or some other support under your head. And if you're not touching that, that's okay. It's just bringing your attention to wherever that head is in space, and gently nod your head.

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And the nodding happens between the base of the skull and the top vertebrae of your spine. It's called the Atlanta-occipital joint. When you're thinking about the muscles that are meant to make this happen, the affirmative forward motion of the chin towards the chest, that's the longus capitis, rectus capitis anterior, and longus colli. And then bringing the head backward, that's the splenius and the trapezius.

Now I was very deliberate in the word meant to, because those muscles are meant to be doing that but we can sometimes find many ways of compensating our movement of our head, like other parts of our body when things aren't working necessarily as they ought to.

So what I'd like you to notice is what else are you using other than these muscles? Are you clenching your jaw? Are you utilizing your ribcage? Are you using your abdomen? Are you clenching through your anal sphincter? Just make the movement as easy peasy as you can make it.

And if you want to play with your breath here, you can exhale as the chin comes toward your chest and you can inhale as the chin moves away from your chest. And see, even though I'm making the cue about the chin, see if you can bring your mind's eye to your head's placement on your spine. Where that skull meets the top of the spine.

Okay, notice if your ribcage wants to collapse or get tight. And then as you're breathing here, notice if you are really focusing on your breath and the head movement and you fall out of your ribcage. And what I mean by that is you almost dissociate from your ribcage because your focus is on your head and your breath. You lose touch with your ribcage or you lose touch with your abdomen or your pelvis.

And so can you allow your attention to zoom out and feel that head movement? Feel your breath movement with the head, if that's what you've also added. And also be aware of your ribcage and your abdomen and just aware of how they're responding to the way that your head and neck are moving.

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Okay, so now let that go. Let your head relax, quiet the movement. And now notice the breathing through your torso and your ribcage. And what do you now notice?

Now, sometimes a practice like this, which has the focus being on the upper part of the body can make somebody feel very light and airy. So let's now bring the attention down to your feet and feel the top of your feet and the bottom of your feet.

Feel the spaces between your toes. And then from the sides of your feet, start to feel up, or maybe in your mind's eye, feel the outer and the inner edges of your legs through to your pelvis. And then tune back into the breath in your torso and notice what you now are experiencing.

Now, if this practice has resonated with you and you'd like to learn more from me around the mechanics of breathing and other exercise practices similar to this, and also different to this but still taking your brain and your mind into mechanics but also into a felt sense of what breathing is like in your body and your mind, then come join me at Mechanics of Breathing 3.0. And you can read all about it and register at learn.functionalsynergy.com/breathing. Have a great time exploring and we'll see you next week.

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.