

Ep #155: Exploring Your Feet Part 2 - Your Feet: Healing Your Feet Beyond Foot Mechanics



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 or welcome back. With this episode, I continue the mini-series on exploring your feet. And this is a run-up to my new program, Power of Pure Movement: Strong and Supple Feet, that I'm running this February.

So if what you're listening to here really resonates with you, and you want to dig into these concepts deeper, then have a read of learn.functionalsynergy.com/feet to get all the details. It would be such an honor to work with you to support you with your feet. Or if you're a health professional who works with other people who have feet issues, it'd be so much fun to share with you what I've seen work so incredibly well.

So with this episode, I want to go more into some of the ideas that I have around helping people move beyond just thinking about their feet as the mechanics of their feet. It's so easy to get caught up and almost stuck into what's going on in the feet when there's foot pain. And what's so, so, so significant, what's so important, is if you want to get out of foot pain, you have to look beyond your feet. It's something I've seen consistently over time.

There are so many people who have foot pain who are putting up with it. They've done the exercises, and they've made some progress, but really not a lot of sustainable change. So they're now at the point where it's like, well, maybe this is as good as it gets. Maybe this is all there is. So it's a common way of thinking, especially when the focus has been solely on the foot.

But what we have to remember is that the foot is at the bottom of the kinetic chain, right? So think about your body, and you've got your torso, and the weight moves down through your pelvis, through your legs, through the

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knees, lower legs, through the ankles, through the arches of the feet, and then into the toes.

It's easy, I understand, to assume that because the foot is the part that touches the floor or the ground, that it's solely responsible for bearing our load. And while yes, it does have a role in that, we have to keep in mind that the way that we absorb or transfer load further up in our body has a huge impact on the way the foot functions.

So what do I mean by absorbing and transferring load? Well, if you're standing and you shift your weight from one foot to the other foot, that is a transferring or a shifting of load. And then when you walk, you are shifting or transferring load from, again, your left to your right or right to left, forward to back, back to forward, bottom to top, and top to bottom.

And to enable this transferring of load, we need to have really good structural integrity. If we don't have good structural integrity, we will find other creative ways to enable that transfer of load so we can get around in life. Because if we're not shifting our weight left to right, forward back, top to bottom, bottom to top, all the ways, then it's going to be really difficult for us to get around and about.

So we'll find ways to do the job. They just won't be the most stable ways. It might be ways of bracing, gripping, or holding the breath. It might even hyperextend some joints or a pelvic tilt or tuck. And that's just a short list of ways that we find some kind of stability. It's not great stability, but it's some kind of stability to enable this transferring and absorption of load.

So what do I mean by absorption? So if the transferring of the load is what's happening left to right, forward to back, up down, top bottom, it's the tissue that absorbs the load. So if the tissue is having a challenge absorbing the load, then that can also create some issues.

Now, for me, when I'm watching a client move, what I ultimately see is movement that sort of stops. It becomes unharmonious if that's a word.

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There's a lack of fluidity. There is a lack of coordination. There's a lack of congruence. There's more tension, tightness, and constriction that's present in the overall flow.

If you think about it like an orchestra, and I mean, I'm not someone who knows music really well, but I can certainly tell when things just aren't in sync. That's what I mean by that, is that when there's something that's not quite in sync, that's what I can see in a movement pattern. And that's what I'm looking to improve so that when I do help to improve that by way of unwinding patterns, improving stability, improving coordination, improving connection, then the transferring and the absorption of load also improves.

So what does this have to do with the feet? The people that I typically work with who have foot issues often fall into three categories. People who have specific foot issues, like ankle sprains or bone fractures. The second group are people with persistent tension or pain in their feet that isn't related to a specific foot injury.

The third group are people who have a foot or a lower limb that tends to turn out. And as we start to unravel the body elsewhere, we begin to start to see how that turnout is not so much related to the turnout itself, but tension holding patterns further up in the torso, even further up into the ribcage.

With the latter two groups particularly, there's often a significant amount of tension patterning through the legs, the pelvis, the abdomen, and the ribcage. And as we help them unwind, we notice that their breath starts to settle, they become more free overall in their body, their movement becomes easier, and they feel lighter. Clients will also report that they feel generally more spacious and more buoyant. They feel younger. They feel lighter.

And, for me, what I see is that there's a more coordinated flow in how they move. It looks more harmonious. And if we come back to the orchestra

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analogy, not only are each of the sections of the orchestra playing better, but collectively as a whole, the whole unit is playing better.

So you see, this is why for some people who do corrective exercises for their feet specifically, but they don't make significant connections elsewhere in their body, what they're actually doing is they're working their feet in isolation of the whole of themselves. In some cases, they're actually strengthening the compensatory creative strategies further up the chain because they've learned that they need to become stronger through their legs and through their hips and through their torso and get better core stability.

But they're not actually changing the underlying movement pattern. They're doing some great work on their feet. They're getting stronger, yeah, awesome. But they aren't changing the actual dynamical patterning. And that's one reason why they're making the gains, but they're not making significant change.

Okay, now, some people might say okay, but Susi, what happens if there's actually a real issue? Like the issue has been shown in a scan, an MRI proves it to be so. There is some degeneration, there is some narrowing, and there are structurally major things happening. And I nod my head, and I totally understand.

Now, I don't read MRI reports, but I'm told the MRI reports. And often what I'm told is, is not only what the report says, but the concern that my client has. And what I say to them is this, from all of the health professionals who I know who know all about MRIs, an MRI is a picture in a moment in time. An MRI tells you structurally what is happening in a moment in time. It is not telling you functionally what is happening or what is possible.

We do, for sure, live in a culture where when we see tissue that's damaged, we assume game over. But the reality is that what's going on structurally does not indicate what's going on functionally or what has the possibility to occur. I see this all of the time because we can change up

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compensatory strategies further up, improve the overall integrity of the body, have the tissue better absorb the load, and have the body better transfer the load.

So guess what? When the rest of the body is doing that functioning better, guess what happens for the feet? The feet don't have to do a whole bunch more work. They don't have to compensate as much. They can feel lighter. So despite or in spite of whatever structural issues are going on there, things can still change. I see this all of the time. Structure does not dictate function in this circumstance.

So where you get to look toward then is how can you start to pay attention to the patterning further up the chain. And how does this actually relate to your feet so you can bring a more cohesive movement pattern overall to your whole system?

Now, I'm going to help you out with this. On the episode show notes, I'm going to help you with this with a series of sequences that you can do for yourself. There's a bit of a focus on the feet, and it's helping to connect through your whole body and your feet. And people have given me amazing, amazing, amazing feedback.

When I started running my videos on Facebook during COVID times, I couldn't see anybody. I would wake up in the morning, and I'd get in front of the camera. It was live streaming, and I was just teaching to thin air. And yet I would get people time and time and time again telling me how much better their feet were feeling.

So I'm going to put a few of those sequences for you in the episode show notes, so go and check them out and see what I mean in terms of being able to both connect to your feet and connect to your whole body in relationship to your feet so you can zoom out to your whole body and zoom into your feet and then go back and forth and really help to bring the pieces of a coordinated whole together better and better and better.

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To bring this more to life, I'm going to give an example before we finish up. I have a client who is a cyclist. And what we discovered is that when she pedals, she tends to grip her toes. So I asked her when she was going out for her next ride to really notice what was going on with her toes and what else was contributing to her toes getting really grippy, which was creating a lot of pain and tension in her feet.

So when she was out, she started thinking about how does her foot sit in her shoe and how does her foot rest on the pedal? She noticed that there was tension through the toes and the forefoot, so she really focused on the two front points of her feet, the ball of the foot in the base of the pinky toe.

And then, she could feel the center of the heel in the shoe itself. So she could feel those two points on the pedal and then feel the center of the heel in the shoe itself. What she started to notice is when she would pedal in a certain way, the gripping of the toes related to her pistoning the legs down. So instead of really utilizing her glutes and her hamstrings to do the movement pattern, she was pushing down with her legs and really hammering out her hip flexors.

So her hip flexors were more involved in the pedal stroke down rather than her hamstrings and her glutes. When she started to recognize that and began to change that, guess what happened to her toes? They started to settle out.

But you know what's even cooler? She also started to notice that she was sitting in her seat differently. How she was leaning onto her handlebars was different, which led to a change of feeling through her shoulders and her neck, and she got a whole lot less tension and that nerve kind of tingling that can happen through the hand sometimes when you ride.

So her whole body started to shift up by her helping herself tune into what was going on throughout her body. And then she started to get stronger. And I didn't mention that her power output also went out. It's a classic example of how often where the problem is, lies under our awareness,

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right? Where the pain is, is not the problem. Where the problem actually exists lies under our awareness. And when we can really take a moment to tune into what's really going on, then we can make some significant shifts.

So, if you want to take this a step further, do go to the show notes on the episode website, and you'll find those YouTube videos. And then, if you want to take the step much further in joining me for a Power of Pure Movement: Strong and Supple Feet, check out learn.functionalsynergy.com/feet. I would love, love, love to see you there. Until next time, happy 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.