

# Ep #156: Exploring Your Feet Part 3 - Your Feet: Is Overpronation a Bad Thing?



## 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, I continue my mini-series on exploring the feet. And this is a lead-up to my new course in February called *Power Of Pure Movement: Strong and Supple Feet*. Now the reason I am running both the mini-series as well as the program is to highlight that foot function is not just about the foot.

Now, I realize that most listeners of this podcast already recognize this. But where a gap remains is, well, like, what's next? And I'll have people ask me, how do I reduce pain? How do I improve function? How can I just not suffer when standing, walking, or running? Or any of the other many activities that you might do, right? Bottom line, what do I need to do next?

So in that spirit, with this episode, I want to dig into overpronation. To begin with, it seems like everywhere that I surf online that speaks about overpronation, so whether it's on short little videos, blog posts, or articles, overpronation is a bad thing, according to lots of places on the internet.

And there are lists of problems that can arise from overpronation, everything from plantar fasciitis to bunions and heel pain, shin splints, Achilles tendinitis, knee pain, corn calluses, flat feet, hammer toes, and really the list can go on and on and on, right?

I'm just talking about things close to the feet. I didn't even mention ankle sprains or any other issue further up the chain. So there's a lot that's correlated to overpronation, and I certainly don't want to suggest that anything that I read was wrong because there are correlations. And there may even be some causal relationship.

But where I want to kind of put my stake in the ground is that there are a lot of people who have overpronation and don't have any of those things. So

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simply because there is overpronation present doesn't mean that it's a bad thing. Ultimately, in my mind, and this is really at the heart of my approach, is that our body, our body and mind for that matter, is consistently seeking balance.

And so, for whatever reason, whether your feet started out like this or have moved into this as an adult, this is a place where balance is found. So my hope by the end of this episode is that there's a little less fear and a lot more possibility about what is available in your body.

So when we first look at the term overpronation, let's pull it back first and think about the word pronation. And pronation is a movement term. There are other joints other than the foot and ankle that move through pronation. So, first of all, let's recognize that this is a normal movement. And when we are looking at the movement of gait, for example, when we move from heel to toe, the foot is pronating, rolling inward, and transferring the weight from back to front. So it's a natural movement.

Now, when there is what's considered too much inner rolling, or the inner rolling isn't checked by other opposing or supportive muscles, then pronation can become overpronation. Now, unfortunately, because of the word over, I mean it's in relation to what is considered to be normal pronation, whatever normal really means, right? But my point is, is that overpronation is in relationship to a term called normal pronation.

So there's an assumption that there's something not right. Whereas my approach, again, I'm just going to re-emphasize is that you might have a great way of finding balance. So the key here is that when there's overpronation, it's merely that it's more pronation than what is considered to be normal.

And if we really want to see if there is an issue here, what we're really getting a chance to look at is what's going on through the whole body. So when my clients, for example, when they see me, and they've got

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overpronation through their feet, what I'm really curious about are the results that they experience.

Most of the time, when people are coming to see me, they're not coming to see me because they want to fix overpronation. They're coming to see me because they have pain because they have other symptoms and sensations that are really, really bothering them. Now, some of them might suggest that it's because of the overpronation, and they would love to work on the overpronation as a part of the process of them getting out of pain. Is that a truth or not a truth? Not all the time.

However, I have also seen people as they've gotten out of pain because a big part of the work I do is helping people reduce compensation. And I have seen a strong correlation between reducing compensatory patterns and a reduction of pain. What we also see through that reduction of compensatory patterning is better structural integrity. And it's structural integrity that's coming from within, and it's a very natural organic regainment of integrity, right?

So we're not imposing on the outside in, because we're shifting up the way joints are moving back to the way they're meant to move, there's a greater congruity sort of at its essence. And so sometimes what we see as a result of that is that the foot position changes. Not all the time, but some of the time.

But even for the person who does have a more overpronated foot, what they still find is that the activities that they do that require foot movement, so whether it's walking, or running, or hiking, or climbing, or I mean, the many myriads of other things that their feet are involved in, that they have more power, they have more ease, they feel lighter, and they feel more buoyant, even if the position of their foot has not changed.

So, again, I just really want to emphasize, maybe overstating the point, that an overpronated foot isn't necessarily bad. However, when you've got a relationship between already an integrity that's not as fluid or as congruent

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as possible, plus an overpronated foot, which the two of them are likely related, and there is pain present when I can support someone in how they're reducing their pain, then we start to see all sorts of relationships that are occurring with their feet, okay?

So we can zoom way out here and say, okay, so just because we see this so-called structural limitation, this so-called structural anomaly perhaps, it doesn't actually mean it's even structural. It doesn't even mean that it's an anomaly. It may be absolutely perfect the way it is. So then, from that idea in mind, let's carry on.

So I have seen correlations between the way the foot functions and people's issues up in their pelvis, through the SI, lower back, any sort of skeletal deterioration, whether it's a facet joint deterioration or anything of that sort, all the way up through to what's going on between their shoulder blades, at the rotator cuff in their neck.

So I've seen a correlation to all sorts of things that as we start to shift up the way those body parts move, how they are through their feet can change, and sometimes even that shape of the foot and the way the tissue in the foot is responding can also change as well. With that in mind, let's consider the following.

We need to remember that the foot does need to be pronate when you walk or when there is that weight shift. So let's just say that you're in standing tree pose, for example, and there will be some weight shifting back and forth and side to side on that standing leg. And that movement is really, really normal, and it's natural.

So try not to make your foot rigid as a way of opposing the overpronation because often what will happen is in the act of trying to prevent the overpronation by having your foot be rigid, you can actually create more tension up and through the Achilles and around the ankle and up through the calf and around the peroneal, and then right up to the knee.

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And so it's almost as if you're not really giving the lower leg a whole lot of space to breathe, and you can cut off the energy flow from the foot up the rest of your body upwards towards the pelvis, which means you're not going to be able to absorb gravity and your body weight as well through your feet. Nor will you be able to absorb ground reaction force, which is the opposing force coming from the earth up your body.

Your ability to receive the force through your feet is just not going to be as great. So it's a consideration to play with in your head if you're trying to prevent overpronation. Is it actually helping you? Of course, I can't see you move, so it may very well be helping you. But really tune in. Is it actually supporting you in the progress that you want to make?

The next consideration when we're playing around with the overpronation is to consider working the foot both intrinsically as well as extrinsically. And by intrinsically, I mean looking and working with the muscular tissue and the myofascial tissue that's local to the foot. It only attaches to the foot. And they're in layers, and they're connecting between the back of the heel upwards towards the toes.

And you can get into them by massaging out all aspects of your feet, both the bottom of your foot, the plantar side of the foot, as well as the top of the foot or the dorsal side. You can massage, you can roll the ball out on the bottom of the foot, you can slide your fingers between the toes and kind of get in between each of those metatarsals of your feet and just kind of play around in that area.

As I mentioned in a previous episode, you can walk on, if you're near a beach or a river and you walk on rocks, you can kind of let that foot or both your feet kind of move around an uneven surface. You can do the same thing with a block even. But it's like you're getting a sense of the foot moving in and around like a stone or a rock or a ball. And you're just starting to work some of the ways that that foot currently moves.

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Extrinsic exercises then are working with the muscles and the myofascial tissue that attach to the foot in the lower leg. So now we're looking at more from the knee down through to the foot to the toes. And so here you get to work with placing your fingers on the inside of your lower leg and just kind of massaging in around that inside shin.

The same thing is you can take a ball and roll out the outside of that leg right along the peroneal and massage in and around that. So it's like you're really massaging in and around the outside and the inside of the calf. You can also place your foot up onto a slant board and stretch out through the calf.

Those are all examples of working with the lower leg, whether it's through using a ball or your hand to massage the area or whether you're standing on a slant board as really, really basic examples. But what you're working with is not the muscles that are simply intrinsic or local to the foot, but the ones that come down from the calf and then come onto the foot from the calf.

Now, those are intrinsic and extrinsic. The next place where you can start to play is then upwards towards the pelvis. And here's where I actually find a lot of great, great work is done. Obviously, I mean, I speak a lot about the pelvis and the importance of pelvic stability in a lot of things. But again, remember that the pelvis is a platform, and the leg bone swings in that pelvis. And so how that leg swings is going to have a direct impact on the way the foot lands on the floor.

And there's a strong correlation between the hip rotators, abductors, and overall pelvic stability and the positioning of your foot in excess of pronation. So while a lot of people will talk about the pelvic floor and foot arches having a strong correlation, I really see that the whole pelvis needs to be examined.

And since, in my work, I see a lot of people who have SI and back issues and have foot issues, they also have hip issues and foot issues. When we

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can clear up a lot of what's going on in the pelvis, we often notice a subsequent change in the foot. And it might not be a structural change like the foot might not become less overpronated. But there's a lightness and a buoyancy that is felt that is different, right? There's just this overall greater sense of freedom and ease.

So in the previous episodes, I've spoken a little bit about exploring your hip mobility, exploring some hip stability with coming into standing, placing your hands on the outsides of your thighs, and a variety of different exercises. So I would encourage you to go back to those previous episodes if you haven't.

So with this particular episode, what I want to focus on instead, knowing those other exercises have been discussed, is to think about as you go into those movements, or really any movement that you're doing, so if you're a CrossFitter, or you're a Pilates person, or a yoga person, or any other activity that you're doing, notice how much you're driving from your foot or your ankle, or even your toes.

So if you're doing some squatting, do you start to grip your toes? Or do you use your feet to kind of split the mat? Like how much stability are you attempting to generate from your foot itself? And then, when you do that, are you utilizing the act of overpronation to create that stability? I know that's going to sound a little bit crazy because a lot of people do not think that overpronation is inherently a stable position.

But feel it. Feel what you do as you start to load your body into a squat or as you load yourself if you're a Pilates person and you're loading yourself onto the reformer or onto the Pilates chair, or when you come into yoga, and you're in standing position, what are you doing with your feet? And are you locking and loading yourself with your foot arch or with your toes? And is there a combination between toe gripping and then an overpronated arch in order to lock yourself into a place that gives you more stability?



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What you might also be doing is sort of shoving that heel either inward or outward in correlation with that drop of the arch in order to find a place to like suction cup your feet almost toward the floor. And I know it sounds odd but just notice, are you doing that in a way to gain strength? Are you doing that in a way to gain stability?

Now, is it the best form of strength and stability? Probably not. But notice if that is what you're doing, whether you're doing it intentionally or whether you're doing it because it's just where your habitual neuromuscular patterns are taking you.

So then, if you can tune into that, and let's just pretend that that's what you're doing, like you're utilizing overpronation as a driving force to create some level of stability and strength as you go into whatever movement you're doing.

Okay, now, then consider not doing it. So now, only move as far into the movement where your foot position doesn't change. Then start to see what happens. Start to see what happens between the foot and the knee, and the hip. Maybe even your breath or your jaw, or your face.

So what you're starting to see is that you're utilizing this foot shape as an incredible approach to finding stability and stamina, and strength. Not the most efficient way of going about it, but heck, it's a great strategy. So now that you actually see it, now, you can start to shift it. And then, you can start to see what movement and mechanical patterns might be more limited that you weren't aware of before.

So in my mind, where the pain is, is not the problem. Now we can start to really tune into it, all right. We've uncovered what's under the level of awareness. Now let's start to improve that. And as you start to improve that, I'm going to bet you one of my favorite lines, dollars to donuts. I'm going to bet you dollars to donuts that there's going to be some pretty interesting changes that begins to happen in your body and through your

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body, perhaps your breath, also in your mind, and just how much more grounded you feel through your feet.

Now, again, your overpronation as a shape, per se, as a function, or as a movement pattern might not specifically change out of doing this exercise or even out of improving some of the other limited patterns that are now coming into your awareness. But what might shift is just how you feel within that structure, right?

You might feel innately and more naturally and organically stronger. More stable without utilizing that shape, or that position, or that movement pattern as a stabilizing force that's inefficient. So just food for thought there because there are amazing ways that we find are ways to compensate. Very, very creative strategies to support ourselves.

Not all of them are inherently bad. And they also highlight, when we can tune into them, some of the things that are actually going on that when we start to improve them, the natural results kind of fall from that. And then we start to function with much better buoyancy, much greater ease, and a whole lot more stamina, all right?

So consider then how you can take this into whatever activity you're doing. Consider how much less effort you need to do to get what you need to get done, right? Effortless effort. Consider how you can do less but actually get more. Consider that you can do the exact same movement pattern and get more strength because of how you're actually doing the movement.

So with that, a different sort of take on overpronation, a way of looking at it from a structural standpoint, as a responsive standpoint, as a way of trying to get a job done. And what does that reveal to you?

All right, well, if this resonated with you, and you want to dig into more of the mechanics related to your overpronation and your hips and what's further up the chain towards your neck, and your head, and out to your hands, I would love, love, love, love, love for you to join me at Power Of

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Pure Movement: Strong and Supple Feet. You can read all about it at [learn.functionalsynergy.com/feet](http://learn.functionalsynergy.com/feet). It would be so much fun to see you there. Take good care.

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](mailto:health@functionalsynergy.com) where we can customize your learning path. That's [health@functionalsynergy.com](mailto:health@functionalsynergy.com). Looking forward to hearing from you.