

Ep #163: 4 Common Questions About Practice: How Often, For What Duration, What Time of Day, How Many Repetitions



Full Episode Transcript

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. With this episode I continue my podcast mini-series on reducing and eradicating pain. And this is a lead up to my therapeutic yoga intensive that I'm hosting this April, which is six days, 36 hours, where you work with me from 8 to 2:30pm from Saturday, April 15th to Thursday, April the 20th. And it's designed primarily for health professionals and yoga teachers who want to dig in and learn concepts that work so well for me helping my clients reduce and eradicate pain more consistently and with sustainable results.

And I also want to invite you if you're someone who is not a health professional, not a yoga teacher, but you really resonate with what I'm teaching and you think that what I've got for you would be very helpful and you want to join me for the six days and work on your body. You'll get more of a professional take on the way that I work, meaning that you'll understand more of the why about why we're doing what we're doing.

But the program is more than just a lecture, it's really an embodied intellectual experience where you actually are experiencing and doing the things. And a lot of people who come, even though they're health professionals and yoga teachers, they have a lot of pain themselves. It's one of the reasons they want to train with me because they want to help others in doing what I'm doing, and in the process, they also reduce pain.

And for many people they eradicate it in these six days. So it can be quite powerful of a process, whether you are a health professional or not. I encourage you to take a look at learn.functionalsynergy.com/intensive.

So let's get into today's episode. And with today's episode I want to cover four of the common questions that I receive from my clients when they

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have finished their first session, or even before they come to a session with me. They'll often ask me, how often should I practice this during the week? What time of day should I do my practice? How many repetitions should I do per exercise or movement technique? And for how long should my practice session be?

So I want to address those questions here on this episode. As you know by listening to this podcast if you have been a longtime listener, and if you are a relatively new listener this might be new for you, is that I give a lot of responsibility for my clients process to them. I learned a long time ago that in order to help someone recover, they've got to really own the work.

By owning what I mean is they already have a ton of experience being in their body. They've been in their body for their entire life, they have a lot of knowledge about it. Now there might be some levels of awareness that they need to grow, but they have a long standing experience and relationship with their body and mind. And that's what I want to help foster and cultivate.

So I want to help them really feel into what makes the most sense for them. And the reason for that is because I ultimately want them to grow internally their own inner locus of control. When someone has that, they are building out the probably most important quality of support and stability.

And what we know about support and stability is that the brain interprets sensation, and then if the brain interprets sensation as a threat or danger, then the sensation tends to be viewed as negative. And the more threat or danger it feels to be, the higher and heightened it is experienced. And the more support and stability that somebody is experiencing relative to a sensation, then more positive is experienced and the less problematic that it feels. So it won't be as highly intense.

So what I want to ultimately help people cultivate is this internal locus of control where they know for themselves what is the right way to go about it,

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and not looking outside of themselves for that answer. Because as we know, we all have the answers inside. And part of my process is to help someone really hone and refine and cultivate that inner knowing, that inner wisdom, because that's ultimately where health resides. That's where recovery resides. That's really where the transformation of the healing process resides.

So a big part of my answering these questions is really addressing more questions for someone and things to think about in the process of them really discovering the answers. So the first question, which is probably the most common, is how often should I practice? Sometimes people think they need to do this daily or twice a day. And I'm like, right out of the gate here's what I say. And it might sound sort of funny, just follow along with me and see how ridiculous my answer is, but it's ridiculous on purpose, okay?

So what I say to someone is I'll say, well, don't try even doing it every day. So don't commit to seven days because if you don't do it tomorrow, you've already failed. And what I want to help cultivate for you is success, because success breeds success. So you could do it six days out of seven, which would be great.

You could do it five days out of seven, and that will be awesome. It would be so tremendous if you did it four days. And if you do it three days, you're going to knock this thing out of the park. If you do it two days, you're going to get better so much faster. And if you get one day in, you'll blow your mind with how fast you get better. Then I finish talking.

Now, partway through that I will interject and say, do you see what I'm doing here? Because they're kind of looking at me and I'm sort of smiling and I say, here's why I'm saying this. Because what I've noticed is the number of days that someone practices does not have a bearing on their rate of recovery. Let me say that again, the number of days that somebody practices per week does not have a bearing on their recovery.

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It's true. I've had people practice every day and not get better. I've had people practice once and they come back and their pain is gone. It's not about how many days a week that someone does this, because people can do a practice as a to-do item. They're not thinking, they're not feeling, they're just reaming off the exercises and not paying much attention.

And from my experience with the work that I do, that's not super helpful. So that won't lead to results. So you can do that every day all day. And it won't make a big difference if the work you're doing with me is the work you're doing with me.

So what I say to them is I say it's really not about the number of days per week, it's really what works because number one, I don't want you to have this be a to-do item. It's really difficult to do your way out of pain. You've got to feel your way out of pain. And the way you feel into it is to feel into your life. And what makes the most sense, if you don't have to shoehorn this thing into your life, what makes the most sense for you? And then follow that.

Which often leads to the answer to the next question, which is what time of day should I do this? Because there's lots of different conversation about practicing in the morning or practicing before bed or practicing at the end of the day, or before you go to do an activity which might be problematic, or after you do that activity. There's lots of different permutations and combinations to that.

And so my response is, do it when it makes sense. So if you want to do it before bed because that's when you have quiet in your house and the kids are asleep and all the things, then you do it before you go to bed. If it makes more sense for you to wake up in the morning because you're a little stiff and you can feel just getting rolling during your day makes sense, then do it when you wake up in the morning.

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Does it make more sense to take a break at work? Does it make sense to do all of it? That's what you get to feel into and decide for yourself. What's the inner hunch telling you to do?

And so what's cool with just that simple way of describing it for somebody is that I'm asking them to pay attention to that inner hunch. And what I really want people to understand is that inner hunch isn't some woo-y concept. It actually is related to a part of our brain. It's our brain processing information, not in the same way that our left prefrontal cortex does, but it's part of our brain to process and have us feel somatically hunches.

So it's not this woo-y thing that comes out of nowhere, it's actually a thing that's going on through us neurophysiologically, neuroanatomy. So when I ask them to pay attention to the hunch, I'm asking them to tune in and to really notice what makes the most sense. Because then when they start to see the result of when they make that choice and how they make that choice, they get more evidence of what works and what doesn't work, they get to refine that. And that grows, their ability to keep doing that.

And that there is the essence that's required to really help the healing process, which then can sometimes lead to another question because when someone sees my programs that I provide, they'll notice that there aren't many directions around how many times they should do it. And traditionally, when someone's used to getting rehabilitative exercises they see three sets of 10, or three sets of 30, or something of that sort. Like there's a time limit on it or something like that.

So when they don't see that from me, they can sometimes feel a little bit lost, honestly. And they say, well, how many of these should I do? And my response to them is I can give you numbers, but more of my interest is that you pay attention to the experience of the movement. Because you could do 10 or 20 or 30 of these and not pay attention to how the experience is and they don't make a difference, which is much similar to that first

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response that I said about how many days a week. So you really need to tune into what's going on.

Now, to provide direction, start with three or four or, or seven or eight and just notice when your compensatory patterns start to shift. Notice when your yellow lights start to arise. Notice when the red starts to maybe come. And if you can catch things before you get to red, then you will notice that your neuromuscular patterning will improve a lot faster.

Now, as an aside, if this is the first episode that you're listening to of mine and you're wondering what the heck am I talking about yellow and orange or red, I use a traffic light analogy when I'm supporting people in their recovery from pain. And that when they come to see me they're in red, and my aim is to help them get to yellow.

So in that first session we often get to yellow pretty quickly. And then I have them recognize what contributes to yellow, and then what contributes to red. And so then as they're doing their practice, for them to notice when they're moving toward red, like when they're going through orange toward red, right? Or can they feel more dimmer pieces of yellow?

So it's like they start to be able to tune in from an embodied somatic perspective of what the impact of the exercise is. Because as we know, not all exercises, not all techniques work for everybody. It's why there's a bazillion different types of back pain programs that are out there, because no back pain is expressed in the same way. I mean, goodness, you can go to five different medical specialists because of your back pain and get five different diagnoses, right? All just because of the way that they view it. None of them are necessarily wrong, but it's just their view.

So the key is, is that you're experiencing the movement or other techniques, whether it's movement or breath or whatever it is that you're being provided, and really tune into, like, what's the impact of this? So you can catch things early, so that then if later on you might be sore or you

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might feel a bit funny, it's not quite a surprise because you've tuned in and haven't done too much when you've been in practice. Or you recognize, ooh, maybe I just did too much there.

So then that response becomes not so much like three sets of whatever or two sets of whatever, it's I'll give you the guideline to start with, but really allow your brain to focus in on the quality of the movement, how you're doing the movement. And then when you come back to your next session, let me know how that went and what you noticed.

Another piece I will often add, particularly if a movement where I'm asking them to hold something, where there's an isometric hold, I'll ask them to do it for a certain number of breaths. And the reason they utilize that instruction is because then they're not trying to count down something or watch a clock, which can sometimes lead to a bracing pattern.

But rather, when they're focusing on their breath, now their breath often, not always, but often can become smoother and just more connected. And that can have that much greater benefit towards their healing process because it often enables them to down regulate a bit more, tuning them in to more of that rest digest cycle and not so much in a sympathetic fight or flight type of I'm going to do this right kind of way, and they can settle and relax into the process.

Which then can lead to a question I don't get as much anymore. And it's often a question around the length of a practice that they should be doing. Sometimes in the past I've had clients come to me and say, I want something that's five days a week, one hour practice, right? So the question of how long should this practice be. I will then also add to them, it's however long makes sense for your schedule.

So for example, I don't want people to shoehorn in 30 minutes of a practice if 30 minutes isn't available. And for the most part, from what I see in my clients, many of my clients have many things going on in their schedules.

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And so I purposefully provide them with four techniques or exercises to begin with, which usually takes about five to seven minutes.

And I have found that five to seven minutes works really, really well. And four as a number is very easily digestible and easy to follow. And so then when they come back after their first session and they've done the four things and they've noticed how long it takes, and they feel really good and they have developed more evidence about what works, then it just naturally evolves into maybe more than four and maybe a longer period of time. But it becomes something that opens up to them, as opposed to them trying to shoehorn or force something in.

So really the answers to these questions, you can tell they're all very much related. And a consistent theme through them all is that it's about not forcing. It's about paying attention and feeling in because that's exactly what I want them to do.

So how I respond to them with those questions is as much about how I want them to do the movements so that the essence of the process weaves through the whole experience. So when they choose to do it, for how long they choose to do it, for how long they do each exercise, it all just makes sense for them and they keep honing in to what that inner wisdom, that inner hunch, that inner knowing is really asking of them. And when they can get there, that's when I notice the greatest gains occur.

Now, if this resonates with you and it makes a lot of sense to you and you're like, "Oh yes, I like what Susi is talking about," then join me in April at the therapeutic yoga intensive. You can read more at learn.functionalsynergy.com/intensive. It would be so, so great to work with you.

If this episode has resonated and you're looking to deepen this idea of getting your body back onboard, of listening deeply to your symptoms, of listening to the whispers, so you don't have to hear the screams, and you're

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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.