

Ep #179: The Power Of Pure Movement: Helping Your Psoas Heal Part 2



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Susi Hately

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Male Announcer: You're listening to *From Pain to Possibility* with Susi Hatley. 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 Hatley.

Welcome and welcome back to *From Pain to Possibility*, a podcast that helps you reduce and eradicate physical pain for yourself and your clients. I am your host Susi Hatley and I am so happy that you're here today because I am going to come back to another conversation about the psoas.

This is a continuation of my last episode where I spoke about supporting the psoas from the perspective of the seven R's; rest, symptom relief, renew inner awareness, retrain neuromuscular patterns, rekindle brain/body connection and refine new patterns and grow resiliency. I began with the first five R's in the last episode, and today I will complete with the last two: refining new patterns and growing resiliency.

Now, I've also spoken about the psoas in earlier episodes. Episode 14 about the sacred, subtle and powerful aspects of the psoas, and episode 62 about integrating psoas release that you have gotten from a body worker. Collectively, these episodes highlight how the psoas is also a very strong compensatory muscle.

I like to call the psoas the Queen of compensation, swooping in to support in areas that it isn't designed for. And when you can improve your connection and also your sensitivity as well as this connection between ribs and pelvis, you can make a lot of gains in how your psoas functions and feels.

Now, to reiterate from the last episode, I love the seven R's because they really help my client be able to experience a transformative change that comes with this cultivation of internal suppleness and a very quiet feeling of inner power. Now, I understand, yep, that sounds goofy when we're talking all about biomechanical stuff. And it may even sound cheesy. And yet, this is what happens when we fundamentally shift up our biomechanical habits.

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There is a very quiet feeling of inner power. There is an internal suppleness. How you move and relate to and with your body has you shift your relationship to the world. It's true, this happens time and time again when you're really making those fundamental changes, which is why the seven R's are so vital and you have to move through them all if you want to have this experience.

And I will add that how this shift and change actually happens as it relates to the psoas specifically cannot be forced. In fact, I find that when people with psoas issues really are facilitating change, that the slower and steadier they go, the faster their results. I liken it to a quotation which is attributed to, I believe, the Navy SEALs, which is fast is rough, slow is smooth and smooth is fast. Which is very much aligned to how I like to say that the turtle wins every time. Slow and steady wins the proverbial race.

So how does this relate to these last two R's, refining new patterns and growing resiliency? Well, these are super important R's and truly are often missed. It's a big reason why a lot of clients come to see me ultimately, because they've done, in some cases, some of the previous R's, but they haven't quite made that fundamental change yet. So they're kind of playing Whack-a-Mole chasing after symptoms.

People can feel so much better when they rest, they've gained relief, they've renewed some inner awareness and they've retrained some of their patterns. They've rekindled some of that connection, it can lead to them thinking that they're done, that they're through the line, they've made it, they're out of pain. And in some ways they are, for sure.

They have figured out so many of the patterns that are contributing to the pain that they have, and they have had some issues resolved. However, if they want to really get over the hump, if they want to gain the stamina for the gains that they've made and make that transformative shift, then refinement and resiliency are necessary.

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So what do I mean by refinement and resiliency? When I first work with someone I am looking for where they are compensating because my experience over almost 30 years is that when I help someone reduce compensatory patterns, there is a correlation to the reduction of physical pain. And when there is a reduction of physical pain, there is often an opportunity for their body to do more. There's this inner feeling of like, aha.

Sometimes the opportunity presents itself. But other times it's like there's this inner desire to do more, whether it's a walk, or a run or an activity or play with the kids or I mean any number of things. Except that even though there's this inner feeling to do more, the person and their body is not quite ready, even if they feel so. Let me share this as an example.

So back in 2010, the day after Christmas I fell down my stairs. I was carrying a box of files back downstairs to the storage area in my house and I fell smack square on my coccyx. Landed, I don't even know where the files went, but I remember sort of like I didn't pass out, but it was one of those big bangs and sort of coming to and thinking, "Oh boy, I am going to be my own best student."

And I sort of got myself back up and was like, "Oh boy, this is not good." I was in a bit of trouble. So I sprained my coccyx. And over the next six to seven weeks the chiropractor I worked with and the PT were able to get my pieces back into place, free up some of the local neuromechanical patterning and some of the spasming that had arisen because of it. And I started to feel awesome. Like awesome, to the point of euphoria. I still remember the feeling, it felt so good.

In fact, I remember this was winter here in Calgary and I remember having parked my car, walking across the street towards the chiro clinic. And then I jumped over a sandbag. And then I kept walking a few more steps and I looked back and I'm like, "What the eff just happened? I just jumped over a sandbag." And I felt so good, like I didn't even think. The key part is I wasn't even thinking about how I was walking. I wasn't thinking about oh, wonder what will happen if I will jump over that snowbank.

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I didn't even notice myself looking for where there was an easier way to get through the snow over onto the sidewalk. So it was astonishing when I was like, wait a second, I just did something really freaking cool there, right? So not only was there a realization of like, hey, I am on my way here. There was this just inner sense of euphoria, likely because my tissue had been shifting, my parts were back in place. Neurologically, things were settling out.

But I also knew I wasn't ready to do the things I wanted to do. I wasn't ready to get back skiing, that's downhill skiing. I wasn't ready to get back running. I wasn't ready to do a number of other things yet. But even so, the internal feeling was so strong of like, let's just go.

And I remember having a conversation that same day with my chiropractor about this and I said, "I just need some reinforcement from you because intellectually I know I'm not ready. But everything in my body is saying go." And she agreed. She said I was very textbook in my recovery. I was seven weeks in, much of my compensation had settled out.

The reason I wasn't ready to get back running and skiing, though, is that even though my parts were in better relationship, I was highly deconditioned. It had been seven weeks. It had been seven weeks. It was a long period of time for not having done the activity that I normally do.

So even though from a rehab perspective those base levels of functioning patterns were back, I was nowhere ready to go skiing, to go running, to lifting weights. Those were movements that were much, much more complex. So yes, I needed to add more load. Yes, I needed to retrain myself, refine the patterns I had already grown in order to get myself back to running and skiing and more complex yoga.

This is so important for people to understand and I think a major reason why people fall back into a rehab cycle is because they do not honor this piece. It's so easy to get caught up in the euphoria of, "Yes, I'm feeling so

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good.” And not like holding yourself back, but yeah, sort of holding yourself back.

So I was then able to refine my new patterns that I gained in basic rehab and then elevate my mechanics to be able to do more complex movements. And then that I did over another period of time. So then how does my example relate to the psoas? Well, first, consider what it is that you or your client wants to do.

So maybe it’s, like me, downhill skiing, yoga, lifting weights, walking, getting on the floor with kids, lifting them to touch the ceiling, like going, whoa, up and touching the ceiling. Or doing the airplane stuff with them where you’re on your back and the feet are in the air and you put your feet on their belly and they fly around like they’re on an airplane. Maybe it’s something like that.

I saw something from a friend of mine on Facebook where she was being able to go through these caves and she had to get onto her belly and squeeze through really small areas. For other people, it’s playing basketball. I mean, it’s all sorts of many, many, many ways to move your body that might be desirable.

So the first thing here to do is you need to be able to look at what that big activity is or that next level activity is and break it down into component parts. Something that I call reverse engineering. So with skiing for an example, there’s hip flexion, there’s knee and ankle flexion. And then there’s the shifting of weight between left and right.

There’s also this ability to sit on a chairlift. And that was a big one for me, I couldn’t yet sit fully on a chair. So being able to sit on a chairlift without footrests was going to be important. Also, driving out to the ski hill had to be considered. There was also the carrying of the skis. So whether you put them under the shoulder or under your arm or over your shoulder.

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And then if you're with children and they're young, like mine had been, not when I had hurt myself, but it's something that I consider for my clients who have young children and they're downhill skiing with them, is you might need to twist backwards and hand your child a pole for them to help them move towards a chairlift, for example.

So there's a number of different activities there that might be involved in the activity. And some of them you can then say, huh, that's not possible, or huh, that is possible, let's start to work toward that. And so then with that, we can support people to be able to do the activities.

Now, the activity that someone might need to be able to do might have nothing to do with activities like I've just mentioned. It might be doing housework, like cleaning the toilets, or pushing a vacuum and pulling a vacuum, or doing any number of things like that. And you start to be able to look at, okay, what is required to be able to move your body into a position to clean out a toilet or to push and pull a vacuum?

And those are two very difficult activities to do. So if you break them down, though, and you begin to understand them, then you can start to help someone move towards those activities by improving the neuromuscular communication in order to get them there. So it starts to become really interesting to be able to explore these things and then seeing how far someone is from doing those. Like A, do they have the components, yes or no?

And then starting to grow the components perhaps, and or building greater complexity and greater endurance with them. So you have to refine the patterns and then start to build some resiliency around them. And in that phase of time you can also decide, all right, you know what? This person is not going to be able to do it, or they don't want to do it.

So a classic example is, maybe the person does not want to be able to do the toilet or to do the vacuuming, so then there's other things that one must

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be considering in terms of seeking support for those things, which is often something that a client and I will have a conversation about.

The key, key piece here though is I'm making this related to activities because I have found over time that simply challenging a muscle like the psoas, and it goes for really any muscle group. Challenging the psoas for the sake of challenging the psoas doesn't often have a lot of runway because there's nothing really compelling about challenging the psoas for the sake of it.

But rather when we consider how the psoas functions inside of or related to these activities a person is wanting to do or is currently doing, that changes a lot. There's a lot more compelling reason toward the latter idea than the former, right? More people are interested in getting to the activity, as opposed to simply challenging the psoas for the sake of it. I mean, that exists, but when it's something that someone can't do and their life is restricted, there's a lot more of an interest in being able to be able to do it.

So then where we can start to consider is, all right, with these components of these activities do we have the connection not only between the rib and the pelvis to do the activity, but also the connection between the femur and the spine and the ribcage? We can also throw the shoulder girdle in there as well because if we don't, then there's likely going to be an issue for that psoas to be able to do its work. Or if there isn't a connection, there could be an issue for the psoas swinging in and being a compensatory strategy and then ultimately get strained.

So we want to be able to improve the rib/pelvis connection as well as the femur, spine, thoracic spine/ribcage connection which can also include the shoulder girdle. Otherwise we're going to find ourselves, and or our clients depend on who we're working with, cycling around continuing to manage the same issue over and over and over and over again.

Because remember, the psoas attaches to T12, along the lumbar vertebrae and then on to the femur. It is a diagonal orientation crossing lots of viscera

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with close connection to the diaphragm and its crura and the adrenals. So the stability of our hips and pelvis, the shoulder girdle and ribcage, and connecting ribs and pelvis are super, super important.

Okay, so then how do we do this? How can we actually facilitate this happening? Well, this is an example of a client of mine that I worked with to support her skiing. And we helped her psoas remain responsive so that she ultimately felt grounded and light. And she also began to feel more nimble through a variety of terrain.

She was a decent enough skier, like she would talk about herself as being a strong blue run skier with some ability to do basic blacks. So think about the easy runs like the greens, the groomers, a little bit of bumps, managing some of the ice. So a big piece of this is how can I support her moving through the sagittal plane, the flexion and extension through the ankles, the knees, the hips? And then with that, she needs to have really good stability through the frontal and transverse planes to enable that smooth sagittal plane movement.

So this is just a sample of things to consider as you're moving beyond just the basic rehabilitative exercises. When I've done these exercises, and along with some other things that I do, remember, it's not just four exercises and you're off and you're ready for the races. But these will give you some ideas to think about. When you can incorporate these, you'll find that people will have a longer ability to be out on their skis.

So some of the ones I will incorporate are things like wall sits. And so a wall sit is you're on your feet, your back is against the wall and you slide down so that your hip, your knees and your ankles are moving into flexion. The reason why I liked this exercise is you can really tune in the depth to which you are moving.

It's not a big depth. This is not about strengthening the legs, but rather refining the connecting pieces between the hips, the knees, and the ankle while also starting to build some strength. And with the wall sit you can also

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include things like hip abduction and adduction, where you might put a strap around the legs, press the legs out into the strap, connect into the hip abductors. Put a block between the legs connecting into the inner thighs.

Those two muscle groups can be really supportive in building out hip stability. You can also slide a block down between the heels and very specifically from the heels thinking about doing some rotation of the hip. So you're generating the rotation at the hip, but it's coming from squeezing the heels.

Now, there is a slight caveat with that, you can press the block between your heels in a way that creates adduction, and that's not the aim here. The aim is to create rotation of the hip. So it's really just tuning into those lower glute fibers and the deeper rotators that's actually what's happening.

So you can do that in a wall sit. You can also play with these same concepts in Goddess Pose. So if you're standing in Tadasana and you take your legs wide, and then rotate your leg bones in the sockets, I do this movement a lot in the Facebook videos and the YouTube videos that I have. And then from that position, you start to bend through your hips, knees and ankles. So moving through flexion again.

And then you can land your hands to the back of your thighs and press those thighs back into your hands. Same thing with the rotation element, you can really think about the deeper rotators and the lower fibers of the glutes connecting in to do the rotation. And that feels very different than doing plain old abduction.

And you can do these things while maintaining some contact with the feet on the ground. You don't need to lift your toes, I mean, you could. But just maintain connection with the three points of the feet; center of the heel, ball of the foot and base of the pinky toe. And then from here, we can then start to challenge a bit more into warrior two because now you're taking the legs in different orientations.

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With wall sits and Goddess the legs are doing the same thing on both sides. With something like warrior two, you now have the front leg doing one thing and the back leg doing another thing. So this puts inherent instability between the legs and the pelvis. Which is great, because now we're training some instability factors but helping ourselves be stable in instability, right? This helps build some agility and some nimbleness as we start to explore the basics of this movement of warrior two.

Again, you notice that I use the word movement, I didn't say pose. I don't want you to think about, oh, I'm going to do warrior two. But rather think about your movement into it. So if you're coming from Tadasana, stepping the legs wide, and that front leg begins to move into rotation and then you move into some flexion at the hip and the knee and the ankle, and the back leg is moving, sometimes depending on who you are and how you do the warrior two it might be moving into some internal rotation there to set you up. But there's no flexion of that knee, right, or of that hip.

So then you can be here, again, you can work with that front leg, you can work with the abduction and rotation. You can even play with it a little bit through the back leg just a tad, right? Depending on what's going on between the pelvis and the foot, sometimes that can be really interesting to explore.

That may lead you into doing an extended side angle, but only within the range of motion where there's stability and ease present, right? You're not just jumping into an extended side angle, but really noticing how your movement is moving into the position. And so what's going on through the spine? What's going on through the ribcage? What's going on through the pelvis and the pelvic floor and the legs? Are you increasing more tension and strain?

As an example, I remember when I was recovering a big, big piece for me that became very, very important was noticing if my pelvic floor wanted to spasm. I could go through the range of motion needed to do most of the yoga poses, but not without my pelvic floor spasming. And I quickly learned

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that, well, if I didn't want to have a pelvic floor spasming, guess what? Move in a range without the pelvic floor spasming.

And what happened is my movement became smaller. But in the end, my pace of recovery got faster, right? Fast is rough, slow is smooth, smooth is fast. The turtle wins. So I was able to very step by step, bit by bit improve my underlying neuromuscular patterns, much like I'm teaching my clients when they've got psoas issues, is improve those underlying neuromuscular patterns so that that psoas can really enable itself to do the work it's meant to do and not be the compensatory patterner.

That's a funny word, patterner. To not be the compensatory strategist. To not use it as the tactic to get something done, but rather let's have all the parts doing what they're doing. But oftentimes, it requires you to be slow and steady to really be able to tune in. And that is fundamental to this process of refinement and resiliency.

All right, so with that, if you would like my help I am running Power of Pure Movement: Grounded and Light Psoas, where we can really explore this idea of gaining relief, retraining neuromuscular patterning, reconnecting, and I will move you also into ideas for refining neuromuscular patterns and building resiliency.

It's two hours on Tuesday, July the 11th. It would be such an honor to work with you if you want my help to support you in this process. So you can learn more about that program and register at learn.functionalsynergy.com/psoas. I would love to see you there.

And next week, you can come back to this podcast because I'll be talking about psoas and breath, the relationship to diaphragm and its crura and some other components of breath that I think you will really, really love. All right, so we will see you then. Until then, happy exploring.