

Ep #189: Neck Mini Series: When Alignment Doesn't Work (You Aren't a Stack of Blocks)



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. Today I begin a new neck mini-series. I ran my first one with episodes 135 to 139, and now I'm back as another series to lead up to my Power Of Pure Movement: Unwinding and Unraveling Your Neck program I'm running this September.

With this mini-series I'll be covering four topics with the first and last episodes being more on theory, and the middle two being on practice. We'll be covering topics of alignment, how to make common neck movements or stretches work better, your neck to rib cage to pelvis connection, and then bringing it all together.

The premise of the series, and really with everything that I teach, is that ultimately there are a lot of ways to deal with and to even resolve neck pain, and they all work. The key here with what I'm offering is it's catered to two kinds of people.

The people who resonate with what I'm offering fall into these two groups, the first being people with persistent pain. It remains an issue, there's a chronicity of symptoms and they've tried a lot of things and they have a deep and fundamental knowing inside that they can resolve the issue. They know they need to change some things, they know it's not just a biomechanical issue, but how on earth do they do it, is what they're asking.

The second group are health professionals. And it's mostly yoga teachers who are also massage therapists or occupational therapists because they have a great understanding already of whole body brain and mind involvement in recovering and healing and they want more integrative techniques to support their clients. And the massage therapists, most of the ones I train, are wanting to get off the table or do a lot less table work with their clientele.

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So with that in mind, what I want to address here then is the neck to begin this mini-series. There tends to be a way of thinking about the neck that posture and alignment are at the core of resolving neck issues to the point that alignment principles are being used as if we or our clients are Lego people or our kid's wooden blocks.

So if the client has their head poking forward, they'll be told to push their chin back. Or if they have a pelvis that is anteriorly tilted or a spine that's overly lordotic, the cueing will be to tuck the pelvis or flatten their lower back or both. It's as if stacking the blocks just so will make the difference.

For me and the work that I do, I haven't seen that to be the case. And while I do understand the spirit of good alignment, we aren't kid's building blocks and we aren't Lego pieces, we are dynamic human beings. Human beings who move. We aren't static and the reality is neither is our posture.

What is important to note is that our posture, whether it's head poking forward or pelvis anteriorly tilted or really anything, I'm just using these two as a common example, is they're not just biomechanical realities. It is an embodiment of our structure.

So our structure, it's kind of like we're a skin sac with these bones and muscle and other tissue and fluid and electrical impulses. And that structure has come together and has been embodied into a posture. It is impacted by a whole lot of forces at play, not just biomechanical.

I sometimes like to say that posture is that place that our deeper, most innermost self has decided is the safest and most secure place for us. Now what's really important is that it's often way under our level of conscious control. Even if we might look at our posture and say, ooh, that posture is not that great, it's still the place that a part of us has chosen to be so.

So when a new posture is imposed, whether chin back or a pelvic tuck, and it doesn't correspond to that innermost knowing, even if it does make sense intellectually, the position won't have longevity and it might even contribute

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to harm through other tension patterns. It's why I don't push things back into alignment.

Alignment is interesting, for sure. When I'm watching and looking at someone's movement when they are standing still or laying down or in actual movement, it is curious. There is information there that the body, that the mind, that the brain is giving me. However, if I just push things back into alignment, I will be just compensating on top of the underlying compensation.

Stacking poor movement patterns on top of poor movement patterns. Increasing inner tension and strain. Not really honoring biomechanics and definitely building a less sustainable infrastructure. So the bandwidth becomes smaller. I would rather create ease, to create support, to allow a person's system to settle in order to help them tune in to what they aren't aware of.

Which is exactly what we're going to be doing inside of Power of Pure Movement: Unwinding and Unraveling the Neck. Over six hours where I will guide you in exploration so that you can reveal to yourself what is compensating in your body, what is contributing to your neck pain and how your neck could actually be a key compensating piece to other strain that exists in your body.

The last time I ran this, people were noticing all sorts of relationships from their neck to their plantar fasciitis, to their SI joint pain, to the piriformis syndrome. When they started to shift how they were moving, not only was their neck pain going away, but so much more relief was happening throughout. I will say that I will give you a bit of a taste of this in the next episode, so do come back to this.

But first, and to further give context to what I mean about alignment not working, let's dig into the word alignment. Alignment is defined as an arrangement in a straight line or in correct positions, I.e. like the tiles have slipped out of alignment. Related words include putting in order, putting in

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rows or columns, straightening, putting in place, a position, to situate, a set range.

So I want you to consider, is simply putting something in line or in a correct position meaning that you're going to be getting the change you are seeking? Is this alignment actually what you are wanting? Is it facilitating the change you are wanting? Is the chin pushing back? Is the pelvic tuck actually giving you the result you want? Intellectually, sure you might look better for the moment. But is it actually providing you the result that you want?

And in my case, the result that I am wanting with my clients, and usually what they're coming for, is to reduce or eradicate physical pain. Is the alignment enabling that to happen? Now, yes, I know people will say, but Susi, it takes time to retrain alignment. It takes time to retrain that pattern. Sure, it might and it will take an awfully long time, and maybe never, if what you're doing is training on top of compensation patterns or on top of a resistance from the deep sense of knowing within.

We can't ignore that, we're not just biomechanics. We have to honor that deep sense of knowing that we all know exists inside of ourselves. Ultimately, the result will be that your body will tell you. The body does not lie. Sure, in some cases, you need to remember how to listen to your body, for sure. Sometimes I need to teach someone how to listen, for sure. We can forget how to do that. And when we do, it's amazing what can happen.

Now, from a professional standpoint, when I am working with my clientele, when I am giving a cue or an instruction, I am watching to see if it's eliciting the change that me and the client are seeking, right? So part of the result will be to ask the client what's happening. Part of it will be objectively what I am seeing, and seeing the correlation or connection between those two things, their subjective experience and my objective experience.

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The body will ultimately tell you, whether it's through subjective experience with the client or objectively through their movement that I can see. It will tell you if you know how to ask. Let me bring this idea to life.

I had a client who had been told multiple times to push her chin back and tuck her pelvis to help her with her neck pain. So she had internalized that her posture was definitely the issue, but she couldn't keep the posture, so had further internalized that she wasn't going to get better. Do you see how that cycle goes?

So she was being told to push her chin back and tuck her pelvis. She had internalized that this chin piece and the pelvis piece was part of the issue, but she couldn't actually maintain that new posture. And that led her to the belief that she wasn't going to get better because she couldn't actually change it.

What went through my mind when I was speaking with her is, okay, so what support is actually needed to facilitate her desired outcome? Because yes, what I saw was a posture deviation for sure. And I also saw a lot of tension, which makes a lot of sense.

So what we did is we left her chin where it was. We left her head placement where it was, we left her pelvis where it was, and instead explored how her whole body moved. With this in the background of my brain thinking, why does her being, like her big capital letter B, why does her being want her head and pelvis and the position that they're in? What's contributing to that?

Now, of course, that's a rhetorical question. I'm not going to get an answer to that. But that's what was sort of fueling my discovery process as we were working together. And we saw, as we worked together, these changes of biomechanical relationship. We got to see through those changes what was contributing to the head poking forward and the pelvis anteriorly tilting.

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And this is what's so wacky about it, because we can see these other pieces that are contributing to the head poking forward and the pelvis anteriorly tilting. We saw, as she started to move better, her breath changed. We saw a change of skin color. I saw and she felt tension starting to settle away. And when she came back to standing, what do you think we saw? Where do you think her head and pelvis were? Exactly. Less poked forward and less tilted pelvis.

The point being is we didn't even address her head and pelvis directly. And even more importantly, she didn't consciously know about these biomechanical relationships because frankly, nobody knows about what's actually under their awareness because it's under their awareness. That's the point. I didn't know that was what was going to show up. I had to go on the exploration with my client.

So often it's what I call under our level of awareness, outside of our realm of conscious awareness that is contributing to both our posture and our pain. If you're willing to explore that idea, you may just be amazed at what results.

So in summary, does alignment matter? For sure, yes. Can we pull the head back or tuck our pelvis? Yeah, for sure, go for it. My question for you is, is it giving you the results that you want? And that's for you to feel for and decide. From my perspective, what I really, really, really, really, to the nth degree, want people to see and to experience for themselves is to cultivate this sense of internal ease with a capital E inside of themselves.

And curiously, as we reduce physical pain, that capital E ease starts to show itself more and more and more. And I see over and over again that that physical pain reduction comes as we reduce compensatory patterns, not add to them. What's even more interesting is this capital E ease is often the ceiling for safety. And when there is more safety inside, fundamental change can happen.

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Yes, we can use the understanding of anatomy and biomechanics to draw out and cultivate this inner ease. I do it every single day. And the opposite can happen too. If we get too focused on thinking and analyzing the anatomy of biomechanics, we will lose the connection with our bodies, with our breaths, and as a professional, between us and our clients.

We will disconnect. And said another way, which might sound a bit strange, change does not take time. Truly. Because change really is a series of results that consistently occur step by step by step. And if the stimulus is correct, I.e. if the exercise that we are providing, that we are doing for ourselves or with our clients is what the body needs, the body will tell you very quickly as well as the opposite. Pay attention, feel, see the results. The body doesn't lie.

If this has resonated, I look forward to taking you on an exploration in the next episode. So do come on back for the next episode. And if you want my support for six hours in September, I would love, love to teach you what I know about helping my clients reduce and eradicate their neck pain. And it would be an honor, truly, to support you in reducing yours. You can read more and register at learn.functionalsynergy.com/neck. See you there. Take care.