

Ep #218: Mechanics of Breathing Part 4 – Exploring Your Feet, Your Breath, and “Breathing with Your Feet”



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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. I'm so glad you're here because we are in the middle of a mini series on exploring your breath in so many different angles. And it's all lead-up to my program Mechanics of Breathing 4.0. And I say the 4.0 in that way because I've been running Mechanics of Breathing for quite some time, but in recent years I've been up-leveling and up-leveling and now have components related to TMJ and sleep apnea and airway in general, and how the work that I do really blends well with the world of dentistry.

But also I'm including, this year, more on hypermobility, because more and more people are being diagnosed with hypermobility. And that has an impact on what goes on with their TMJ. It has an impact on the way that they breathe. And let's face it, if we're not breathing really well, particularly at night, we're not going to rest really well, our sleep will likely be disrupted and we're going to wake up feeling very, very, very groggy, right?

So these are sort of the underlying pieces of mechanics of breathing. I like to look at the body as a mechanical pump. So the air sits in front of the face, I like to say, and then there's a pressure change and vacuum and in comes the air, it turns into breath, does its thing through the respiratory system and then out of goes.

But what's not spoken out a lot is how the tissue in your neck and around your neck and rib cage and abdomen, and yes even the feet, have an impact on the way that that breath comes in, or the air comes in and then goes out. And when we can shift up the suppleness of our body, and today we're exploring the feet, how we breathe can really change in a very significant, sometimes nuanced, but overall a powerful way.

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So join me on a ride here exploring your feet. And if you are a professional, you are so welcome to use what I'm teaching here with your clientele. And if you're someone who is not a teacher, but is sort of interested in how your breath and your feet relate, well just come along for the ride. Here we go.

So what I'd love for you to do to begin with is to simply notice your breathing, feeling how the inhale comes in and the exhale goes out. And if you've been following the mini series since the beginning, you may even notice there's a distinction in how you feel or what you feel. Sometimes it's the quality of the breath that changes over the time that we practice. Other times, it's simply that we begin to notice more.

The act of placing our awareness on something just enables us to see it with more clarity. And as we come to the feet, I want to bring into our consciousness the field of reflexology and how we can map out our body on the bottom of our feet, where the heel reflects the pelvis and the pad of the forefoot reflects the chest. And you can dig in a little bit deeper and see more specifically about where the lungs are and all that. But it becomes curious as we explore these areas, how they feel.

It's also curious, too, when you look at even the arches of the feet and key points that I like to teach around standing on the three points of your feet, meaning the ball of the foot, the base of the pinky toe and the center of the heel. And how those are reflective, yes, of the arches but also of some attachment points of myofascial tissue.

And then if we harken into the work of Tom Myers and how he has popularized the notion of myofascial meridians through his work of Anatomy Trains, we can see correlations of all of those myofascial meridians landing down at the feet. So what happens at our feet really plays out in other areas too. And it's always fun to explore how the feet can impact our breath.

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So find yourself in a comfortable position. And bring your ankle up to your knee. So you might be sitting for this or you might be legs up the wall, crossing the ankles and sliding that foot down towards you. But take a moment and simply massage out the bottom of your foot.

If bringing your foot up to your knee, or down to knee depending on your position is difficult, you can also take a ball, tennis ball, lacrosse ball, massage ball, place it under your foot and very slowly move that foot along the ball. Take some time and simply massage the bottom of that foot and notice what you feel as you do that, allowing the thumbs to move around the forefoot towards the heel.

Notice how it feels right in and around the big toe and each individual toe. You might notice your thumbs are on the top part of the dorsal part of your foot and allow your thumbs to just find their way between each of the metatarsals, between each of those bones. Maybe wiggling that forefoot left and right, in a slight rotation. Maybe pull each of the toes. And notice as you're doing this what's happening with your breath.

Sometimes people feel a change in their breath. Either their breath really settles out, other times, they might feel their breath getting really held and braced or you might even grip your jaw or hold through your face or neck. If you're noticing the tension pattern that I just mentioned or something similar, I might not have mentioned the body part for you, ease off on what you're doing with your feet. Use less pressure. Be a bit gentler with your feet.

And once you finish one side, come over to the other and begin to massage around that foot, whether it's using the ball, thumbs between the metatarsals, exploring each of the toes and also the space between the forefoot and down toward the heel.

Now, you might be familiar with tension or strain in your foot, so this might not be novel for you. But others of you might notice this has been surprising

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like, oh, I did not notice that my foot had this much tension in it. Or it might be, I didn't know my foot moves so well.

So if you're finding anything novel or new, be sure to register it and keep it just in mind as we continue to go. And if you continue to listen to the rest of these episodes, keep it in mind as you practice and explore, seeing what other relationships you're noticing between your feet and the rest of your body and your breath.

Now, take a moment and just let your feet relax. If your legs are up the wall, let the legs stay there. If you're sitting in a chair, let the feet just come to the floor. If you've had the massage balls or tennis balls underneath your feet, let those come off to the side. And now simply pay attention to your feet.

And imagine that you can actually breathe through your feet. So, obviously, you don't. Your respiratory system is much further up in your body, but I want you to imagine you have a set of nostrils on your feet. You can choose whether it's on the top or the dorsal side of your foot, or in the ankle, or around the toes, or on the underside of the foot, maybe in the plantar fascia. But allow yourself to notice some nostrils on your feet.

And it may be more than one set of nostrils. Just feel what it's like to imagine yourself breathing through your feet. And as you do this, notice if your breath changes at all. If anything new arises, whether that's in the quality of your breath or the pace of your breath, how it feels. Notice if anything changes in your face or your jaw or your head.

Now gently begin to point your toes. And then bring your toes to your nose. Point your toes and bring your toes to your nose. So you're moving your ankle into plantar flexion when you point, dorsiflexion when you bring the toes to your nose.

And again, notice yourself really breathing. Not the imaginary through your feet breathing, but the real breathing and notice the quality of your breath

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as you do this. And can you have your breath be easy as you move your foot into plantar and then dorsiflexion? And if you want to add a layer and the visualization works for you, bring in the nostrils on your feet as you plantar and dorsi flex.

In a moment, I'm going to guide you up into standing. Now, if you prefer to stay where you are, by all means just listen to my words in the position you're in. Or if you're wanting and ready, come up into standing and notice the center of the heel, the ball of the foot and the base of the pinky toe. Be aware of your toes.

And if you're standing, start to take a walk around, being aware of the inhale and exhale through your body. But also if you want to use the imagination of nostrils on your feet, breathing through your feet as you walk, feeling the three points; center of the heel, ball of the foot, base of the pinky toe. What do you feel? What are you noticing?

If you're standing, look around to see if you can find a space like a door or a piece of wall where you can do a very, very, very small wall sit. Very small, like a wall sit you could be in for 30 minutes if you needed to. And gently come into that very small mini wall sit, sipping your tea if you need to. Super easy position.

But as you're settling in again, be aware of the three points of your feet; center of the heel, ball of the foot, base of the pinky toe. And take a moment and imagine that you've got blueberries underneath your right foot and press your right foot into the ground a little bit so that the right leg becomes a bit stronger and the left leg is less, it's lighter. Notice what happens with your breath.

Now shift over to the other side doing your best to keep your pelvis and your rib cage nice and quiet. Pressing with your left foot, allowing that left leg to become strong, the right leg light. As you move over to the right side

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again, notice your breathing and can you allow it to be nice and easy and smooth? And then back over to your left.

This time, pay attention to those three points of your feet, add in the imaginary breathing through your feet and notice if there’s anything new in the connection between your foot and your leg as you press that right foot into the floor and strengthen the right leg. And what’s happening over on the left?

And then come back to the left. Same thing, feeling the three points, perhaps imagining the breath through your feet. And then press both feet to the ground, both legs strong. And feeling those three points of the feet, slide up the wall and come into standing. Now what do you feel?

If you’re someone who walks quite a bit, or stands quite a bit, or runs or cycles, or if you are moving into your winter season and you’re a snowshoer or a cross-country skier and this practice has resonated with you, then explore this in those activities, especially if you’re in standing.

If you work at an assembly line or you’re a cashier or you spend a lot of time on your feet, just notice what it is when you can feel the bottoms of your feet, or the breath in your feet, and how that may shift the way the rest of your body sits on top of those feet. Your feet, after all, are the foundation. They punctuate your posture.

And as we really settle into our breath, we become so much lighter and grounded simultaneously. If this practice has resonated with you and you want to explore this further and deeper in the Mechanics of Breathing program, you can read more at functionalsynergy.com/breathing. Have a great practice and we’ll see you next time.