

Ep #223: Walking Program Part 1



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With Your Host

Susi Hatelty

[From Pain to Possibility](#) with 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 start a new two-part series on helping you or your clients to get back into walking, into a walking program with less or no pain. I have quite a few clients who, when they start to experience longer-term results with being out of pain, they want to get back walking. So they're thinking, how do I go from zero to 30 minutes?

Now, for some of them, they've been in pain for so long and they are so thrilled to be able to even consider getting out for a fitness type of walk that has less or no pain at all, that sometimes this exuberance of like, "Yes, I'm through the line, I am good," can lead them to forget about listening to their body.

And the reality is that there's still some of those neuromuscular patterns that even though we've retrained, they're obviously moving much better with less compensation patterns and more connection. It's so easy to forget about them. And that can lead to returning to older habitual patterns and then an increase back into pain.

So I want to use these two episodes as guides to support you, and if you have clients to support them, in getting back to walking for fitness with more ease, less pain, and much more fun. And if you've got a client or you are someone who wants to be walking regularly for 30 minutes, well let's help you get there.

So to give context to these two episodes, it's important for me to remind all the listeners that I work with a wide range of clientele who have physical pain. Their pain is persistent or it has been persistent. Some have osteoarthritis in their hips or their knees. Some are returning to walking post-hip or knee surgery. Some have been overcoming plantar fasciitis. Others have had back or neck or other forms of physical pain that have impacted their ability to walk for periods of time.

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Now that their pain has gone down and they want to feel that fresh air on their skin or breathe it in through their nose and just experience the freedom of being able to walk for fitness again and build up some strength, some cardiovascular capacity, and really just feel like themselves again. And as I mentioned earlier, finally I'm feeling so much better in my body. It can lead them to not listen and then go further than their bodies actually can go, which can then lead them to become more sore.

And this can lead to frustration, resignation and that deep sigh of doubt. I'm also hoping that this episode and the next one that follows with it provides a bridge. Because a lot of people, when they get out of pain and they want to go walking, they're feeling good and they just think, all right, I'm good. I'm through that line. I am good. And they are in one regard, but they're not where they used to be.

They're walking and they're going out for a longer period of time. And even though they might walk to do grocery shopping or take the kids to school or do whatever other things they do that require walking, to walk for a period of time that's moving more to a fitness-based is a different type of walk. Especially if you want to get out with friends, that kind of adds another layer of complexity because oftentimes there's a lot of conversation, there can be a lot of emotion. And then in those cases, listening to the body really can fall off to the side.

So I want to provide a bridge for people and to recognize that when you go at this in a bit of a slower process, you actually get to your end goal, your desired outcome a lot faster. So if you want to walk for 30 minutes, it's probably very possible for you. And if you can map it out and listen more in a compassionate kind of way to both the proprioceptive signals and the interoceptive signals that are going on in your body, you'll just make such better choices about the way that you move toward that end result.

There are lots of different programs that are out there, things that you can find free online that will help you or give you guidance, but they don't necessarily teach you about what you are feeling inside and letting the feeling on the inside guide you.

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So as I am outlining how you can get to 30 minutes, it's not about doing five minutes this week and six minutes next week and seven minutes the next week. It's not about following some time thing. It's following what your body is indicating to you and paying attention to that.

Now, when someone's been working with me and they've been in a lot of persistent pain that they're now out of or it's significantly reduced, in order to get there, we've reduced a lot of their compensation patterns and they have tuned in enough interoceptively and proprioceptively to recognize those whispers that are in their body and to recognize some of those yellow lights.

And I'll talk more about that in a moment. But it's when they can take that knowledge and that understanding into this transitional period of moving into more walking for a longer period of time, they can make such great gains.

With today's episode, I want to outline two key ideas that I walk through – ha ha, pun intended – with my clients to help them prepare for these first walks. The first is to be with the emotion that is often present on that first walk. And that emotion can be a deep, deep desire bordering on exuberance. It could also be laced in with a bit of fear or concern as well.

And then the second is to really integrate the listening that they've already gained in the process of getting out of pain with the biomechanics of walking. And when we integrate these two components, they make some very great gains. So let's talk about the first walk.

When a client of mine is beginning to talk about their desire, perhaps weaved in with a bit of concern, to begin a walking program, they've often already reduced quite a bit of pain. They've had longer periods of time without any pain. And this is correlated with substantial gains in their self-awareness of how their body moves, how and what they think about how their body moves and what they know works and doesn't work in terms of their body movement and how their program goes and just the way that they're living their life now.

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There's more confidence. There's more clarity, compassion and kindness toward themselves and what they can do and what they're hoping to do more of. So here my job, I find, is very transitional. So before, when they were working with me, it was about growing their awareness, helping them to improve their neuromuscular function so that they reduce pain in a sustainable way.

And now it's taking that awareness into more complex movements of walking, whether they're on a treadmill or out on the road or on the sidewalk. So this transitional part of my job really is being this bridge to overcome a very common gap that exists for people who are at this stage of the process.

They're feeling really good and they want to jump into this idea that they should go out for walking 20 minutes at a time, three times a week, and move their arms to get the heart rate up because that is what will help improve their strength and improve their cardiovascular ability. And anyway, that is what an effective walk is. I'm not saying that that's the case. Lots of people might believe that.

And the reality that I've found is that when people kind of get into that mindset, so often that process can lead to a quicker injury. So I outline this for them and I help them step it back. Now, if they're someone who really wants to be out for 20 or 30 minutes, three times per week or even on a daily basis, we have that as a desired outcome and we're starting at zero.

So we begin at zero and I outline that we're starting at zero. And I call this transition the transition of the first few walks and to simply go out over the next week, over these first few walks, for maybe five or 10 minutes and simply pay attention to what's happening in their body. To pay attention proprioceptively, to pay attention interoceptively, to notice what sensations are showing up. And likely those sensations are going to be similar to what they have already noticed inside of their therapeutic practice, right?

They've already been doing this. They've been paying attention to their breathing. They've been paying attention to their movement. They've been

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tuning in in this interoceptive and proprioceptive way for how their body moves and how their body responds to movement. And also they can tune into their thoughts, their emotions and how those might fuel or respond to the walking process. So this five or 10 minute first walk, or first few walks, is really reconnaissance. It's really simply to notice.

Now if they're a really busy person who has a lot of walking already through their day, meaning they're walking through the grocery store, they're getting their kids or whatever else goes on in their world which requires walking, the difference with this walk is that there's not really a purpose. Sure, yes, there's a purpose toward walking for 30 minutes at a time and there's fitness involved, but there's not this outcome of like the grocery shop or the kid pickup. It's to be with their body.

So I call it not having a purpose because most of the time when they're out and about, they need to walk to get somewhere and to do something. And so I want to make this more of a less purposeful walk and simply a being with walk. So over these five or 10 minutes, just simply notice how their body moves, what happens with their breath and what they are recognizing is occurring in their brain, meaning their thoughts and their beliefs. And to simply notice what they notice.

I'll often suggest to not do this first few walk series with a friend since, as I mentioned earlier, that talking and catching up, there can often be a lot of distraction and either positive or negative emotion depending on what's being spoken about. And often the walk will last longer and there's a lot less body awareness as they're getting into the conversation.

So it's keeping a container around stepping into – ha ha, another pun – into this process of walking for fitness and walking for just the enjoyment of walking. So again, for the initial phases, I sort of let go of this notion of 20 minutes, three times a week or getting arms moving or getting the heart rate up. It's not about that. We're starting at zero. We're starting at a new baseline.

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So when they first came to see me and they had a whole bunch of pain, that was their initial baseline. They grew their awareness, they grew their body mechanics, they grew their understanding of the way their parts function, the way their tissue functions and releases and shifts and changes. And now they're at a new level of function and we get to set a new baseline.

And so out they go for the walk. Five to 10 minutes of just simply being and paying attention, noticing their breath, noticing their body and seeing what is what. Then they can notice what happens after that period of time, maybe a few hours later or the next day. They can tune into how they slept, how they rested and just what's happened.

Now initially, this is very common, I will have clients sort of look at me and roll my eyes and say, "5, 10 minutes, what? That's going to do nothing for me." And I'll remind them that we're starting a new baseline and it's not about getting out for the 20 minutes, it's not about getting out for the 30. It's about setting the baseline for where they are at and for where their body is at so that we can recognize what is the next step, so to speak.

So then part two of this is really building upon this listening that I just introduced a moment ago. As I've mentioned, they already have tuned in quite a bit to what I call the whispers or the yellow lights. When they initially came to me, their pain was more of a scream or it was a red light kind of pain.

And part of their recovery was tuning into the compensation patterns, reducing the compensation patterns, tuning into breathing patterns, helping reduce neuromuscular tension, helping settle out the nervous system. And then as they do and they come into that more restful, relaxed space, they can feel into and name and recognize and work with those pieces of their body and sensations that I would call whispers or yellow lights.

When you can listen to your body when it whispers, you don't have to hear the screams. If you recognize the yellow lights, you can do something at that point to not have to go to red. So the more they can tune into, the more

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whispers that they have a recognition for and understanding of the better. So when they're out for the walk, again, what do they notice? What other whispers that they've already got an understanding of are showing up? And then what do they do in response to that?

This I then tie into the mechanics of walking and the four key concepts that I focus on that I've seen to be of the most benefit to clients. Walking is a PhD concept and I don't get into it to that depth. So anybody listening to this who has a lot more depth of understanding of walking, you might roll your eyes and say, "Come on, Susi, there's not four key concepts."

And I have found when I've helped my clients with these four, that so much changes and really helps them along to get to that amount of walking, the duration of walking that they really want to get to. And can then lead to more challenging walks that involve uphill or hikes or downhill or icy conditions or other more complex types of walking, trails and all the such.

So the four key concepts that I talk about are the stability of the pelvis. The pelvis is the platform on which the leg bones move. That pelvis, this is the second one, connects to the rib cage and the leg bone. So how is this connection between the rib cage and the leg bone, right through the myofascial tissue? Then the third one is how the leg bone is swinging in the hip joint. And then there's the placement of the foot.

When we can pay attention to and work with those particular four concepts, a lot can be realized and recognized and worked with depending on what is recognized and realized. So an example of how this might look in terms of guidance I might provide a client. So as they start to head out for the first minute or two minutes or so, I'll say just pay attention to your breath. Like you're out there, feel your breath.

If you're outside, what I'm talking about at this moment is that you can feel your breath. You feel the air on your face. You might feel the breath coming in through your nose or your mouth, and you can feel the outdoors on yourself.

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And then if you happen to be indoors on the treadmill, it's not dissimilar. It's just noticing the movement of the treadmill underneath your feet, noticing the breath and paying attention to how that is feeling and being experienced in your body and the response of your brain. What's going on with your thoughts and your beliefs as you go about this practice?

And then paying attention to the feet. The feet being the punctuation, I like to call it, of the posture. They are what are connecting to the ground, whether that's the treadmill or whether that is the sidewalk or the roadway. And onward they go, feeling the bottom of their feet connecting to the ground.

I love to use this idea of the three points of the feet; the center of the heel, the ball of the foot, the base of the pinky toe. Now, there is a roll through of the foot, it's not just center of the heel and then the two points at the forefoot. That doesn't happen with walking typically. So it's just paying attention to those three points as the foot moves through the gait pattern.

I don't tend to ask people to get really granular about that movement because I simply want them to feel and to take what they had learned to feel with me when they were getting out of pain and taking the same concepts into the activity of walking. So it's just tuning into what's happening with the toes and what's happening with those three points and how does it feel for that foot to land with each step?

And then how does that leg bone swing? Because the way the leg bone swings in the pelvis has an impact on how that foot lands on the ground. So how is that leg bone swinging? What's going on there? And then there's a noticing around the pelvis and perhaps the rib cage simultaneously.

And I'm saying this in this way, simultaneously, because like I mentioned, they've already been through a lot of gains of awareness about these parts of their body. So they can pay attention to the pelvis as the platform and also this rib cage. And they start to recognize, I call it sometimes like an analog watch where there's these various gears, that they're all working together to make the watch move. So these gears or these parts of our

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body, these segments of our body that work together to make the gait process happen.

And it's why I begin at the feet in this way, because they already have tuned into their pelvis through the process of their therapeutic work with me. So they're out for the walk, they're tuning into their feet, they're tuning into the leg swing, they're tuning into the way the pelvis is as a platform, maybe how it's moving and its connection to the rib cage.

And from that, they may also notice their arms and they just start to pay attention. And that can take five minutes right there. They can extend it out to 10. And they're simply noticing what things feel like. They might also notice some muscle contraction. They might notice some other sensations that's related to tuning into the segments of their body, but they can keep coming back to each of these segments.

They don't have to do them all at the same time. They don't even have to do all of them in one walk. It might just be that for this session they pay attention to their feet or they pay attention to their ribs or they pay attention to their breath. They just pay attention and they start to notice if they feel any yellow lights.

Now, for the first walk I'm usually more structured to say make it a five or a 10 minute, keep it short, even if you're feeling really good. Just go out for a shorty and then come back. Then when you go out for the next one, still keep it short. Let your body continue to get used to it. Notice the emotion, whether it's concern, desire, exuberance, or anything in between and just get used to this process.

Then, after say two or three sessions, they've got enough data for themselves of how they went about the movement part of the process and how they felt afterwards. What went on with their beliefs? And then they can take that data and we can work together and say, all right, what makes sense for the next walk?

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And so the next walk might be 10 minutes again, it might be 11 minutes, it might be 12 minutes. It might have nothing to do with time. It might be that when they're out for a walk, they see that there's a fire hydrant in the distance and that's where they walk to, right, if they're outside. Or maybe there's a light post or a certain house. Maybe if they're on the treadmill, it is more about time, but it's just recognizing that there's these milestones that can be very loose.

And part of them determining that milestone is, it is that milestone, but it's how their body feels. It's how their breath feels. It's how their knees or their plantar fasciitis or the tension in their feet or their whatever, how that feels and the indicators or the communication that it's offering back to them.

When clients go about it in this way, it's really interesting just to notice how much stronger they become, how much more cardiovascularly fit they become in a shorter period of time because they're paying attention. They're clueing in. They're honoring what their body is giving back to them as opposed to saying, I have to follow this particular protocol in order to get to a 30 minute process.

So, overall, the key features in this initial stage of getting back to walking are really straightforward. It's, first of all, noticing if there's that desire to get back out there. Recognizing that your pain has reduced or settled out to a point like you can sense into yourself interoceptively and proprioceptively how your body is responding, same for your client if you're working with clients.

And then progressively helping them make those initial steps toward some regularity of a practice that really is about honoring what their body is saying to them, turning back when it's a yellow light or stopping on the treadmill when the yellow light comes up and just taking it step by step, piece by piece. And they'll be really quite amazed at how much quicker they get to where they want to go in a way that really honors where they are at now.

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If this has resonated with you, I am running a walking program called Zero to 30 Minutes, applying the power of pure movement to walking pain-free and in a consistent way. You can read all about it at functionalsynergy.com/walking. I would love to see you there.