

Ep #271: Mastering Movement and Mindfulness



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Susi Hately

[From Pain to Possibility](#) with Susi Hately

Ep #271: Mastering Movement and Mindfulness

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 that you're here because today I dig into a concept that I've spent a lot of time over the years thinking about and teaching, helping trainees and clients figure out. It's a concept that truly does need to be experienced to understand how powerful it can be. It's a key concept that's really, I think, foundational for why my clients get the results they do, why my grads get the results they do, and for why the people who attend my Power of Pure Movement workshop series and the Therapeutic Yoga Intensive get the results that they do.

And this concept at its core fundamentals is reducing and eradicating physical pain through the process of movement, breath and connection. Not in the sense of exercises to strengthen, stabilize or immobilize, and neither in the sense of exercise to improve muscle imbalance. But rather how you are feeling through a movement is as important and sometimes more important than how you are doing the movement.

When we are feeling, and feeling through a movement, the result is consistently more effective and longer standing improvement in stability, strength, agility, nimbleness, and here's the kicker, with a lot more ease, more fluidity, with less tightness and tension, or as one client recently put it, just a whole lot less muddy of a feeling.

So saying it again, how you are feeling a movement and how you are feeling through a movement, what you are feeling is as important and perhaps more important than how you are doing or the actual movement that you are doing.

Now before I go on, I think it's important to discern what I'm saying here with simply doing an exercise to strengthen or stabilize or improve a muscle imbalance, because there's lots of like here are the top ten

[From Pain to Possibility](#) with Susi Hately

Ep #271: Mastering Movement and Mindfulness

exercises to strengthen this or stabilize that or to improve this muscle imbalance.

The way I'm describing doing, and I put that in caps, is it's just so easy to knock it off. It's like you're doing your three sets of ten and you're just getting it over with, boom, done, done, done, done. You're not actually feeling the movement from a sensory interoceptive or even proprioceptive experience.

So yes, you might be using proper form and following the key cues, but the result is one of more tightness and strain. Like think about it, think about the times that you've done, whether it's a yoga practice or a weight practice or you've been out for a ride or a run or a tennis play or whatever, and at the end of it there's been a great workout or a great experience, but you're tighter and there's more strain.

The reason that this so often happens when people are simply doing a movement without feeling it or feeling through it, is that they're often using bracing or gripping patterns as part of the stabilizing force. So as a result, the neuromuscular patterns that build that are then ingrained also have an element of grip and brace to them, right?

And that's just a form of a compensation pattern. It's not an underlying solid infrastructure on which you can continue to build strength and stamina. Gripping and bracing is not something of an enduring strategy. There's often an element of borrowing from the areas that we're gripping and bracing in order to get the movement done.

When I talk about how to feel movement or even how to feel through a movement, I mean how you are interoceptively and proprioceptively experiencing the movement. So in the case of the grip and the brace, let's start there. Can you sense the tension, the grip, or the brace? Can you feel that? And I'll give you an example of this in a minute, but can you actually feel that? Like that's what I mean by interoception, right?

Ep #271: Mastering Movement and Mindfulness

Lots of times if you're new to the concept of interoception, oftentimes people will give like when you sense thirst or you sense hunger. I'm talking about sensing what's going on muscularly or through your body tissue, we'll say, because we can't necessarily pinpoint where some particular sensations are really arising from or where they're actually in, you can just feel them in your body. And I mean those sensations that aren't related to where your body is in space, which is what proprioception is about.

On the flip side of tension, grip, or brace, can you sense ease, lightness or connection? And at the risk of sounding repetitive, if you are moving with tension, brace, or grip, that is what you will build. If you move with ease, lightness and connection, that is what you will build. And again, as I mentioned a moment ago, when we are gripping and bracing, that is a way of movement. That is a way of borrowing in order to get a job done, but it's ultimately making our system weaker.

The bottom line here is that anybody can move. Anybody can do an exercise. Anybody can knock that off and do their three sets of ten. And how you are feeling the movement, how you are feeling through the movement, what you are feeling has an impact on how those neuromuscular patterns will groove, how your brain, body and connection will grow, and your overall results.

Let me give you an example of this. I was working with a client with bridge pose. And by the way, I see this a lot with bridge pose. My client had been given bridge pose in order to regain strength in her glutes. She had been told that her glutes were atrophied and they needed activation. They weren't engaging properly.

So she set herself up on her back, knees bent, feet on the ground. She pushed through her feet, squeezed her glutes and lifted. All very common cues, the cues that she was provided. She did the movement. As I saw the movement, yes, she did bridge pose, she got herself into the pose. And I also saw a lot of breath holding and gripped movement patterns.

Ep #271: Mastering Movement and Mindfulness

So I asked her as she came back down, how did that feel? What did you feel? Her response, my back is sore. Hmm, that's not the result we want. So then I asked her what she felt while she was moving. And she said, my butt was contracted and gripped and my breath was held. Okay, great ability to sense what is going on, and not the things that we want to be building in terms of patterns.

Knowing how closely connected the breath is to overall stability, strength, pain reduction, nervous system down regulation, digestive function, et cetera, et cetera, I suggested that we begin there with the breath because that is what she could feel and that she could articulate.

There was no point in bringing awareness or attention to an area or cue that she wasn't aware of, it would have made the process probably a bit more lengthy, perhaps a bit more difficult, perhaps a bit more frustrating. So I could focus on something that she was tuned into already and help to refine that.

So I suggested that she move with an easier breath. That she moves with a breath that's not held because her day to day is just talking with me and engaging with me, her breath is not held so she knows how to not hold her breath. So let's have her breathe while she moves.

So away she went, feeling a more easeful breath as she moved into the bridge. Right away she felt stronger as she lifted. She reported that she didn't need to push with her feet, but she also noted that she wasn't actively using her glutes to lift. I asked her how she knew and she said, well I wasn't squeezing them first in order to lift, so they must not be firing.

Awesome, so that she felt stronger was progress. We were moving in the right direction. In the pause between repetitions, I offered that maybe the glutes don't have to actually engage before the movement, so they didn't have to squeeze before lifting, but rather during the movement.

I showed with one of my mini skeletons what the movement of the bridge was and that while there is movement of the rib cage and the shoulder

Ep #271: Mastering Movement and Mindfulness

joint, where I focused was the movement of the pelvis and the hip, the leg bone, that connection and the connection between the ribs and the pelvis. And I focused her attention on the skeleton and how the skeleton was moving.

She found it initially a little bit odd because so much of what she had been taught about bridge was about squeezing the glutes first, but she ran with it. We focused more on lifting the pelvis and the connection of that hip joint extending and not on pre-squeezing the glutes, and also on the easy breathing she had done in a previous repetition.

So as she did the movement, what I could tell from her doing the movement, first of all I could see that she wasn't engaging first, she wasn't pre-engaging her glutes. She told me that she was focusing and attending to the hip extension and focusing on the skeleton, and she was also telling me that she could feel her breath. And I could see that she wasn't holding her breath as she was moving. Said another way, she really was focusing on how the skeleton was moving, not focusing with a muscle contraction.

After she came back down, I asked her what she noticed and felt. And much to her surprise, she said that her glutes fired organically and it was really awing, like she was in awe that her butt was engaging. But she also added what was more interesting is that not only did she feel stronger, she also had no back pain. Aha! More progress.

This is all in one session by the way. Me just doing one repetition, watching her movement, watching what was going on with her breath, connecting with her in terms of how she was feeling the movement and feeling through the movement and what she was feeling. Bringing some attention to the verbiage of her interoceptive and proprioceptive awareness.

When she stood up, she felt taller, lighter and more grounded and her jaw and her neck weren't as tight. Yay! More progress. Now the beauty of this is she was tuning into her sensory self, learning about and then listening for and honoring the interoceptive and proprioceptive cues. That's our

Ep #271: Mastering Movement and Mindfulness

subjective sensory self. She was connecting her brain and her body, her body and her brain.

Okay, now let me just take a pause and reflect on what just happened. Was the way she was doing bridge before wrong? No, I wouldn't go as far as to say that. There's lots of people who squeeze the butt first before going up into bridge and having great results.

I think I have casually seen a headline or a study which I haven't actually dug into that talked about how pre-squeezing the glutes can actually have an impact for runners. I haven't dug into this study. I don't know a lot about it, but it's just there could be some evidence towards that. I mean why would that be a thing that many in the rehabilitative world do? There's got to be something to it. And it doesn't work for everybody, just like anything doesn't work for everybody.

So of course I'm not going to go so far as to say that the movement that she was doing before was wrong. I will say how she was feeling it, i.e. she wasn't, was giving her a result that she didn't want to have. So the missing piece or a missing piece was that she wasn't tuned in to what or how she was feeling the movement or through the movement. When I added that piece in it was game-changing.

Let me repeat parts of this for emphasis. It wasn't about what she was doing that was the issue. It was how she was feeling through the doing of it or what she couldn't feel through the doing of it that was facilitating patterns that were leading to results that she didn't want. They were leading to results that were more pain and more tension.

This bridge movement was supposed to help her, but it actually was facilitating more tension and more pain. And when she shifted her focus and her attention to how she was feeling through the movement, things changed. So the movement itself wasn't wrong. She needed to learn how to connect to it, connect to what she was feeling, how she was feeling it, how she was feeling through it, both interoceptively and proprioceptively.

Ep #271: Mastering Movement and Mindfulness

Now here's what's cool from my perspective and from a bigger picture point of view. Bridge pose created a huge opening. Huge. It was one of those novel experiences, not that bridge in and of itself is a novel experience, but it was how she was doing it, the experience that she had, that was what was novel. She quickly learned, quickly saw, quickly experienced how she was feeling in the process of doing the movement, how she was subjectively sensing her body was as important as doing the movement.

And what she took from that was if I breathe more easily, my movement feels more easeful. When my movement feels more easeful, my pain goes down and stays down for longer. And not only do I feel stronger, I can do more things that require strength.

This was game-changing. She had so much more connection. She had so much more trust in what her body was doing, there's that doing word, in what her body was saying to her, the messages it was providing, her thoughts about her body were changing, as was her belief, as I've mentioned, in herself and her body.

All from simply shifting from doing and knocking off a bunch of exercises, three sets, four sets, whatever sets of whatever repetitions to how you are feeling through a movement and articulating what is being felt.

So here's the important thing, I never told her what she needed to feel. What I asked her was what she was feeling. She didn't start off with anything on the spectrum of ease. Where she started was, my back was sore, my breath was held. That's where we started.

I didn't try to start convincing her about moving with ease. I focused on what she was already feeling and it happened to be something that she didn't want to have. That's what we could then start to shift.

So I didn't say, let's have you feel more ease in your breath. What I said is, how about not holding your breath while you move? Because she knows how to not hold her breath. I could see, and this might sound really silly, but

Ep #271: Mastering Movement and Mindfulness

it's important and significant because I know she could actually not hold her breath.

She knew she did not need to hold her breath. She knows what it feels like to breathe. So I'll just bring that already knowingness into her movement. See, I didn't have to convince her or teach her about what to feel. I simply brought in what she already knew how to do into the movement itself. That is what then started to make the shift.

So let me say that one more time. I didn't tell her what to feel. I simply asked her how she was feeling and what she noticed. I asked her for that inventory. And we began with what she felt.

So if you're someone who's thinking, yeah, but there's so many people who are not aware, they'll never be able to say that. Yep, I get what you're saying. And you know something? If people are coming to me as a client, part of my job is to teach them about movement, interoception, and proprioception. Part of my job is to help them tap into that inner sense of feeling, that which exists inside of us. So I tap into whatever that is.

So if someone shrugs their shoulders and says, "I don't know. I don't really know what I'm feeling." Then I might draw attention to, alright, so when you're doing bridge, we know that you've already said that you push your feet down. Let's pretend we use the example that I just shared. That you're pushing your feet down. When you're pushing your feet down, how would you describe that?

And then they will say, I push my feet down. So then I can start there. Because really and truly, we don't need to push our feet down to go up into bridge. You don't need to push your feet to the floor in order to extend your hip. I recognize there are people who do that, and it's not a requirement for hip extension.

So if I'm helping someone retrain patterns, I'm wanting to help them retrain the pattern. They don't need to push the feet down in order to extend that hip. Now, once they've learned how to do the extension of the hip, then

Ep #271: Mastering Movement and Mindfulness

maybe we come back to activating or connecting to parts of the heel. I don't know, that might be a possibility.

But to get to the fundamentals of the movement pattern, those granular pieces, the better, more efficient patterning so that they grow a more connected, grooved pattern, yeah, let's focus on hip extension. Yes, we feel the feet. We can feel the feet. And can you do the movement with simply feeling the feet and not pushing them down and then start from there.

Then what we may discover is there's a breath holding or there's whatever. Each person really has their own unique way of approaching these movements. And it's, I think it's incumbent on myself as the teacher/trainer, to help them learn about their movement. And when they simply feel their feet, now some other things may arise, which is great, because then now we've got more data from which we can teach from to support them in the improvement of their neuromuscular patterns, which is where we start to grow, again, their capacity to feel the movement and feel through the movement.

I'm going to summarize this with the following. Pain is a subjective experience. If I want to help someone connect to their subjective world and shift up this experience that's subjective, then I see it as being highly important to train someone to feel their sensory subjective world. I'm not trying to direct their attention away from their pain, I'm simply helping them recognize their subjective world with their movement because when people reduce compensatory patterns time and time and time again, what I see is their pain goes down.

And when they're connecting with how they're feeling and they can name what they're feeling, it gives them the fuel for making the change, much like the client I described as bridge pose. When someone taps into the possibility of what it feels like to be lighter and taller and grounded and stronger, without the experience of pain, that changes lives.

If this has resonated with you, it's pulled your heart and you want to learn more from this and with this, I encourage you to take a look at the

[From Pain to Possibility](#) with Susi Hatley

Ep #271: Mastering Movement and Mindfulness

Therapeutic Yoga Intensive. This is a six day immersive experience all online that I'm running in October. Payment plans are currently open. And you can read more over at functionalsynergy.com/intensive.

And when you're over on the site, you can also send me a message through the contact page if you've got questions about the program. We are in enrollment for it now. It really digs into all of these fundamentals so that when you are finished with the six days, you are equipped to work with your clientele.

You not only are equipped, but you've had the experience of seeing it in other people. And you've got the embodied experience of what it's like to actually move through your movements with a cognition and attention and awareness of what you are and how you are feeling. Because a lot of what I teach requires an experience because there's a feeling element to it. So yes, there's logic and there's analysis and there's science and there's biomechanics. And we're taking that into that feeling, embodied world.

So if you're ready to make some change, if you want to make some change, if what I'm sharing really resonates for you and tugs and pulls at the inner knowing that you know, it's like, yes, this is it, then I encourage you to take a look at functionalsynergy.com/intensive. It would be an honor and a true pleasure to share with you what I have seen works so incredibly well for helping people reduce and eradicate physical pain. Take good care. See you next time.