

Ep #71: Solutions for Sciatica



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With Your Host

Susi Hatelty

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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.

Hello and welcome back. With this episode I want to cover off what I like to call solutions for sciatica. And the reason for this is because I find with a lot of conditions my clients have is that initially there is this tendency to want to go after symptoms. And it makes sense, right? The pain is there, the strain is there, and it's like, "I want this gone already."

And so they're trying to address the symptoms and they've been playing a game of pin the tail on the donkey where they're just trying to make something work. And they work with the piriformis or their SI joints and they're not sure if they should stretch, or strengthen, or stabilize. And something works and then something doesn't work. And they're feeling a bit lost.

And so with this episode I want to cover off a few things that might be helpful and then give you some more guidance about where you can go next in terms of support.

Now, the key is is that going after symptoms isn't necessarily a bad thing, we do want the symptoms to go away. I think the key though, that we have to remember is that the symptom part is only a step. It's the superficial step, it's the initial release step. But we have to step back a little bit further and question, "Well, where did the sciatic come from anyway? Where did it evolve out of it?"

And we might not know specifically that kind of causal type of questioning. But as you begin to move better, and as you breathe better, and as things down regulate and you feel better, you'll start to see more of a pattern of what contributes to the experience of sciatica. And those words I just said, I think are really powerful.

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

Ep #71: Solutions for Sciatica

So we're not talking about cause here, we're talking about contribution and correlation of what is going on around the same time that the sciatica showed up. So it could be sitting, it could be running, it could be many other things. And then we could step back even further and say, "Okay, well, if I'm out running or if I'm sitting, what about those movement patterns is contributing to the experience that I'm having?"

So it's not that sitting in and of itself is bad, or that running in and of itself is bad. And the reason I can say that is there are plenty of people who run and who sit who don't have sciatic symptoms, who don't have symptoms at all and they're fine. And so it's not that those things are inherently bad, it's just in your scenario they aren't working for you. So what about them, what about them in your infrastructure and the integrity of your structure is being impacted by running and by sitting, for example, right?

So when you can step back and take a bigger picture view at it as those symptoms are settling down, then you can start to see really what's correlated and then be more accurate in what you're doing to really support. And then when you get the relief, then you can retrain more effectively so that your symptoms stay gone for longer and longer and longer to the place where they might even get eradicated.

So we want to go beyond short term relief. We want to have something that's more consistent and something more ongoing. And what I want to play with here is I want you to recognize the huge structural role that your hips and pelvis play in sciatic symptoms. That there is also a relationship between your shoulders and your hips. That there are some key reasons why the pain is not going away. And then how you can integrate yoga into your rehab and medical process.

The other piece of this is recognize the necessity for mindfulness and rest, which is a part of the yoga philosophy that I hold. And then we can play around a bit with this biopsychosocial approach. Because when we talk about biopsychosocial, we're really talking about who is the human and who is having the sciatic issue.

Ep #71: Solutions for Sciatica

Because the sciatic issue, whether it's me who's having it, or my husband who's having it, or a friend down the street who's having it, all of us would have it differently because of who we are, the activities that we do, the life that we lead.

So we have to really address the human who is having the scenario, not just the scenario or the condition itself. That's just an incomplete way. And so we want to make it a bit more of a broader perspective, so that we can really give the stimulus and the programming that really serves the person.

So with my approach, what I'm doing is I'm really wanting to recognize initially what the movement is. I like to address problems from a biomechanical standpoint initially, because it gives me a very objective fact based sense of what's going on. Either your leg bone moves in your hip socket or it doesn't. Your arm bone moves in your socket or it doesn't. You're breathing limited or you're breathing full. It's kind of black and white.

And yes, there's spectrum of compensatory patterning and how you breathe, but it's very clear. It's something that I can point out to an individual and they can say, "Yep, I can see that." It's clear, it's factual. There can be agreement from all parties that it's what's going on.

When I can do that, then we've got a basis on which we can build from. And what's even more important in there is when someone expresses an opinion about the facts, it's even more interesting because it reflects on what I talked about a moment ago about biopsychosocial.

What someone's opinion is about how they move is huge because I'll have someone who I'll show them your leg bone is moving like this in your hip socket, and it could be contributing to why there's instability there. And some people might say, "Oh, thank goodness. You told me part of what the issue is, now I can actually resolve it." And there's some hope and some possibility there in their voice.

And there's other people who literally will go pale in their face and be like, "Oh, my God, I am effed." F bomb is what they say to me, and they don't

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

Ep #71: Solutions for Sciatica

say F bomb, they actually say the real word. And I say to them, “Hey, you know what? It's all right because this is what I'm really good at. I'm really good at helping you reverse engineer what needs to be done and helping the movement process to really support you and getting the results.”

There's a reason why, from mechanical standpoint, why there's pain present. And so when we can improve that, then we can improve a lot of things, and then that sort of settles it down. But it's important to recognize because if I just dealt with that, from a “Okay, we're just a purely biomechanical standpoint, and I'm not taking the biopsychosocial process in mind,” well then, I'm missing out on so much.

The opinion that someone has about what's going on their system is huge. Huge, I've used that word a few times already on this episode. But it really is, it's profound and it's necessary. And to discount it because it's a subjective experience or merely a thought, I think would be a mistake. And it's one of the reasons why I'm so good at what I do, because I acknowledge that which someone is experiencing and what their opinion is. And I take that in mind as I'm working with them.

So the idea here is to understand that compensation is any movement that is not necessary for the desired movement to occur. So that could be something like moving your leg bone in your hip socket and you move your jaw. You clench your jaw, you use your neck or something. It could also be that you're wanting to move your leg bone, but instead you move your pelvis. Something simple like that, and powerful.

And so when you start to quiet that compensation, some pretty big shifts happen. And so it's more than just say, “Okay, let's get stronger,” and throw some exercises at it and throw the top 10 list of how to reduce sciatic symptoms.

It's really, really paying attention to what's going on within your system and how your system is responding. And then also what your thoughts are doing in the process and how they're making you feel. Because when we have a thought, oftentimes there's a feeling that goes along with that

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

Ep #71: Solutions for Sciatica

thought, because when we have an opinion about something that opinion has us feel a certain way.

Which is what I was referring to a moment ago, where someone might say, “Oh my gosh, thank goodness, I now know what's going on and why my symptoms are what they are.” There's hope and possibility present with that opinion. And then there's the other person who is like, “Oh my God, I'm effed.” And there's a bit more despair that's present there.

And so there's different emotions that can be felt. And so when I can acknowledge that place and acknowledge where that is in their system, again sometimes people will acknowledge where that is, that plays a huge part into where and how they feel their sciatic symptoms.

The number of times that people notice an emotional relationship to the way that their back feels or the way that their nerves feel, it's so common. And when we can tune into that feeling state, both emotionally and semantically, that can be really a powerful metric.

We don't necessarily need to go after trying to change it or trying to create something better. It's more about noticing and being aware, that's the first step. Being aware of what's going on and being present to what's going on so we can tune in with more clarity about how we're moving. Because when we can tune in with more clarity about how things are moving, then we can actually choose movements or other techniques to support them in getting better.

So the real bumper sticker here is that I'm looking at how somebody moves. Somebody, I'm looking, I'm looking at how they move, where they're moving well and where they're compensating. So that when I bring all those together, I'm integrating there my own presence, helping them grow their awareness over what's actually going on and what's not going on to help them move forward. Because when I can help them become aware of what's happening in their body, big, big changes happened and occur.

Ep #71: Solutions for Sciatica

So the idea here is we want to teach about movement and teach about where compensation patterns are happening. And so what I want to share with you is to get clear on the problem that you might be having around your body, is simply notice how your leg bone moves in your pelvis.

As you bring, let's say you're on your back, and you bring one knee to your belly. When you do that, does your whole pelvis lift off the floor? Does your bum come off the floor? Is there a space that comes between the pelvis and the floor?

Now do that again, where you just lie on your back and gently bring your leg to your belly. And you don't need to press your pelvis down to the floor or press your bum into the floor. Just notice at what point as you bring your leg to your belly does your pelvis move. Or do you hold your jaw or hold your breath?

Another one is if you go legs up the wall, like you're on your back with legs up the wall, and you cross your ankle, and you slide that ankle down toward the knee. Now as you do that does your pelvis move? Or as you move your leg bone in your hip socket when you're in that position, or when you're tree does your pelvis want to move? Do you hold, or grip, or hyperextend the opposite knee? What else is involved that doesn't have to be involved?

When you start to get really clear on that, now you start to notice the pattern of what is contributing to what is going on. And so when you reduce that, then your problem gets a better shot at being resolved. And so you're watching that relationship of your parts, of your leg bone, to your pelvis, to your spine, and of your breath. You're noticing your opinions on the matter.

And you're gaining that awareness and grieving the clarity because when you're not aware, you can't change anything. Said another way, you can't change anything you're not aware of. You've got to grow that awareness and you've got to grow your level of presence so that you can really notice what's going on.

Ep #71: Solutions for Sciatica

So then what happens is you've got more accuracy, and then less hoping and praying that something will work. You're less likely to throw something against the wall and hope it will work, maybe this time this will work. But actually you're more tuned in.

But again, it requires you to kind of connect into what your body is doing so that you can get the rest and you can get the relief. And then slowly move into a retraining place where you start to improve your movement patterns, reduce your compensation patterns, like clearing up the hip issues, and start to experience more relief.

And then as you experience the relief, your nervous system settles. And then as that nervous system settles and you start to experience even more relief and more retraining, now you're starting to gain some strength. Which might sound odd, because a lot of people when they think about strength, what they think about is adding more load.

But I can't tell you the number of times I've had clients come in to see me, particularly my men, who are like, "Why am I getting so strong when I'm doing such small movements?" And the reason being is because now you're moving better and the muscles that are meant to do any given movement are the ones that are doing the movement.

Because when you compensate, you're asking another muscle group to do something that it's not designed to do so that's not inherently strong at all, it's weak. So then when you get the right body parts on board in doing that, which often comes with asking the body part that is compensating to stop. Then the other body part that's meant to be doing the job starts to come back on board.

When that starts to happen, now you start to become stronger, you find yourself standing, I like to say more perpendicular to the sky and to the earth. There is more effortlessness in your system, more efficiency. And you'll find that the symptoms of your sciatica will start to become more localized.

Ep #71: Solutions for Sciatica

So they'll move from where they were distally at your feet or your calf and then start coming up more towards your thigh. And then start to come up more towards your back. And then they'll start to fade away because there's just much more integrity present in your body.

So those are just a few things to consider. In the show notes I've got some links to YouTube videos that you'll be able to follow along that might be helpful for you to continue to explore this idea of feeling your body and feeling your body move. Now keep in mind that I can't see you, I can't see you move. But these are ideas for you that you can explore.

And then if you want to dig into this further, then just send me a note to health@functionalsynergy.com. And I would love to work with you to help you improve what's going on in your system so that we can really reduce that sciatic symptom for good. And then take it up to the next level in terms of being able to get back to the activities you really want to do whether or not it's running, or cycling, or skiing, or whatever it is given the season that you're listening to this episode.

So the bottom line is this, recognize that clarity is power. And the more that you can become aware of what is working and not working, the better it is for you and your body, the more you'll be able to find the stimulus that's really going to make the shift.

And as you're trying out different techniques, just noticing what works and what doesn't. Because I found that for the most part there was something that works in everything that we try. And it's nurturing that which is working and quieting the stuff that doesn't work. And then you'll find the unique solution specifically for you that really helps your scenario.

So I encourage you to go into the show notes to find the YouTube links. If you want to bypass that completely, just go to my YouTube channel. You can find it at Susi Hately. Again, that's also in the show notes. And you can find more there about solutions for sciatica and other items around healing and recovery, down regulation of your nervous system. And I'm also at

Ep #71: Solutions for Sciatica

health@functionalsynergy.com for further questions, or if you'd like more of my help through a series of private sessions. Take good care.