

Ep #95: 3 Ways to Improve Plank Without Pulling Your Navel to Your Spine or Tucking Your Tailbone



Full Episode Transcript

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 back. With this episode, I want to dig into plank pose and share with you three ways that you can improve your plank without pulling your navel to your spine. Without tucking your tailbone, without having to endure, without having to watch a timer, read a magazine, add some leg lifts, make it all dynamic, throw in a push up or two, brace your ribs. All those things, just let's make it easier. Like how about that?

And what I mean by easier, I don't mean like lazy. I mean, allow for ease to lead into strength, right? Imagine that ease was the foundation of strength, that strength was actually easy and that you didn't have to endure plank. Would that be a concept or what?

So with this episode, I want to share with you three ways to improve your plank. With this, you'll also see a show note on a video that I've done that has seven of them, so you'll want to look at that. And they'll also be some photos of the ways that I'm talking about inside the podcast write up on my site. So you can take a look at that so you can get some ideas for how to improve your plank.

Now I'm being really specific here about not pulling the navel to the spine. I'm not a huge fan of that cue, I find that it over engages through the obliques a little too much. And it can really limit one's breathing, and breathing is super necessary for improving one's core stability and overall, just general ability to move.

And then when the obliques get over engaged, that too can really shift the dynamics of what our core is doing, which can make you a whole lot less agile and have less core. And so then you're now enduring this experience of plank, but for what? So I'm just a big fan of overall creating more and

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more and more and more ease, being really exploratory in the process of building out plank so that plank can really serve you.

So let's get into it. Here are three ways that I would love for you to explore with your plank. But to begin with, what I'd like you to do is get into a plank. Like just get your baseline first in your plank, however you do it, whether it's on your hands or whether it's on your forearms. And just get a feel of where you're at and just become aware of what your plank feels like today.

And then where we're going to begin is at your hands. And that might sound surprising because most people think of me as someone of let's improve the largest joints first. Don't worry, we'll get there. We're going to begin with the hands, but not hand placement. Rather, I want you to move your fingers and your palms in a certain way.

So if you've got two yoga blocks you can use those. Or if you're at a desk or a tabletop or a counter, you can use the edge of the tabletop or the counter. Basically what you'll do is you're going to slide your hands on top of that counter or on the yoga blocks up to the point where the fingers meet the palm.

And I've got a photo of this on my website in the podcast write up. So look at it in the show notes if what I'm saying needs a photo for clarity. But the fingers are attached to the palm of the hand, that's where the edge of the block or the tabletop is going to go. And then the fingers are just going to lay easily on the tabletop or the block.

And then you're going to move through that knuckle. So you're going to feel perhaps a bit of a stretch through that knuckle area where the finger attaches to the palm. Just make sure that as you're moving, your shoulders are not lifting. Yeah. So now you've done all four of the fingers.

Now what I'd like you to do is put the index finger, the tip of it with the thumb tip together so you're kind of like an okay sign. And then put all three

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fingers, middle, ring, and pinky on either the block or the tabletop and do the same thing. Okay, good.

Now take the middle finger and the tip of the thumb and do the same thing. So now you've got the index finger, the ring finger, and the pinky finger on the tabletop or block. And then bring the ring fingertip and the thumb tip together, do the same thing. And the pinky finger and the thumb tip together.

And you'll notice that as you take each finger to the thumb tip that the coordination might feel a bit different between them. Some people actually find it really difficult to do one of the fingers versus the other ones. But after you do both hands now come back into your plank and notice what your experience is.

All right, now the second way to free up your plank and to make your plank easier is to free up your blades. So for this one, we're going to explore it with a massage ball or a tennis ball. So if you've got massage balls, choose the one that's about the size of a tennis ball.

And then lift your left arm up and bring your right hand to the armpit, and then feel around the outer edge of the armpit. And those tender spots that are there on the outside edge of your armpit, you might need to go a little bit closer towards the shoulder blade. But find those little tender points. And for some of you, it will be up closer to the arm bone or the humerus for others, it'll be closer toward the blade itself.

But those little tender points, those little sweet spots, I like to call them, that's where we're going to place the ball. So you're going to place the ball on the floor or against the wall and just lean that part of your body up against the ball and just roll out along that lateral edge, that outside edge of the shoulder blade.

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Go slow, slow, slow, slow, don't go fast. And just find each individual point and just spend a little bit of time. Just roll around a little bit. Take your time. That's it, easy breathing. All right, and then if you haven't moved to the other side, move to the other side. Explore that.

And as you're exploring that, you'll get a feel of how that tissue, which consists of the lats, serratus anterior, the rotator cuff, how those connect into the blade, so that when you come off of this and you come back into plank you might be really surprised as to what you feel.

Some people just feel like there's a whole rush of energy through their arms, they feel lighter, between their hands and their shoulders. Their feet just are solid. Their abdomen connects without having to think about it. And their jaw is often more relaxed. For you notice what you experience. So when you're ready, if you haven't gone into your plank, go into your plank, experience what you experience.

All right, lovely. Okay, now you're going to come on to the floor, grabbing a strap, and you'll be on your back. And if you don't have a strap handy, then you can do something else, which is bringing your thumb tips together, have your fingertips pointed towards the sky. But having a strap is really handy because it keeps you a bit better connected and your arms can be shoulder width apart.

And from here, all you're going to do is bring your arms over your head towards the furthest place you'll go is your ears. And as you do this movement, it's an arm bone movement in the shoulder socket, so your ribs are not flaring. You don't want to hold the ribs down and over connect through the upper abs, which can also impede the transversus abdominus and the diaphragm.

You're just moving those arm bones really easily and freely through that shoulder socket. Going over your head, the furthest you'll go is your ears

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and then coming back up. And what's important here is that you're moving in a pain free, click free, and a clunk free range of motion.

And the reason I say that is because when we're getting some clicks and some clunks, there's just some sort of tissue that's a bit limited. And I don't exactly know which it is. It was something that I learned many, many years ago with clients of mine, who quite literally I found it really gross. How professional is that? When they started to click and clunk and I'd just say, "You know, can you move in the range that it doesn't happen?"

And then to both of our amazement, what occurred was they're able to have greater range and greater strength when they didn't move in that click and clunk free range, and the range actually increased and they didn't have to force it. So they just got better neuromechanical patterns happening.

So then play around with doing those arm movements. And in the video that goes along with this I actually include utilizing two balls through and up around the thoracic spine as part of this. Which can really open up the area and provide a lot of freedom through the ribcage so that you don't have to push really hard or make your shoulder blades wide or do anything extraneous to make your alignment better because you'll find that as you free up the tissue, the alignment just becomes easier, right? You don't have to think about it.

And part of that is what makes the whole process easier, is you're not having to think so hard about your alignment, so you can just be in it. And it's a lot lighter, a lot easier, a lot freer, your breath is easier, your core is stronger, you're more responsive. And you'll find that when you come up and out of it, you just feel taller. There's just a lot less work that you've done.

Now that in and of itself might make your brain a bit crazy, but really imagine that, like you can feel a lot better. You worked so much more efficiently. And you fine-tuned your patterns so much more effectively. So if

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you want more of this, if you want some images of what it was that I was doing here, first of all, go to the podcast episode and you'll see those photos.

And you'll also see the link to the video that goes along with this where we have seven ways to improve your plank. So you can feel way more free, way more agile, taller, lighter and not have to endure the beast of plank, as it's sometimes thought to be. You don't have to endure it, you can really truly enjoy it for what it is. Happy planking.

Now if you've enjoyed this and you want to explore more of the mechanics as it relates to movement, you are going to love the therapeutic yoga intensive. The therapeutic yoga intensive is six days of time with me, small group online, where we break down movement, explore how to help people get out of pain, really explore all of these concepts as they relate to your own body. So you're getting out of pain and you're learning how to help another person at the same time.

It's the foundational training to my whole certification program. Its standalone so you can take it and it alone if you want, or you can use it to carry on to the rest of the certification program. You get to decide.

If you want more information, you want to talk to see if it's a fit, then email us at health@functionalsynergy.com and have a conversation with Kia. She'd be more than happy to share with you to see if it's a fit for you. Enjoy.