

Ep #99: Yoga Therapy and Concussion: Completing a Yoga Therapy Certification with a Brain Injury



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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.

Well, welcome and welcome back. I am so delighted for this episode because I have Bobbi Lalach here. And Bobbi and I have known each other for quite some time. And I'm going to let Bobbi introduce herself more so than what I will do. But Bobbi first started working with me as a private one to one client, and then she came aboard our certification program.

And what's more important here is her history of concussion. And what I really want the outcome of this episode to land for you all is that, A, recovery is possible. B, that you can absolutely do a higher learning process having a brain injury. And so I want to really allow Bobbi to, if I could put it this way, be an example of what's possible. Because she's not the only person in our certification program, nor in my private series, who has had concussion history or other brain injury history.

And we just want to show people there's some good stuff that can arise out of something that was not so good when it happened. So welcome, Bobbi. And how about you give a little bit of background about who you are, you have a kinesiology background, so share a little bit about that. And then tell us about your concussion.

Bobbi: So my name is Bobbi Lalach, I'm a kinesiologist and now yoga therapist. And I've been practicing with ICBC clients for many years, and sustained a concussion after a car accident in December 2018. And took a while to, first of all, get the diagnosis, didn't think there was anything wrong when I wasn't sleeping every night and having memory issues and cognitive issues.

And once I was diagnosed, went down the regular medical path of what you should do when you have a concussion, and wasn't really recovering

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

Ep #99: Yoga Therapy and Concussion: Completing a Yoga Therapy Certification with a Brain Injury

as everyone thought I should be. And that's when I found you and then did have some more success. And then continued on because I liked what was happening when we were working together and wanted to learn more.

Susi: So when you see yourself from back then, and then where you are today, give a perspective. Like I'm thinking that there are people who are listening to this who either have had concussion or multiple concussions, or they know someone who's had a concussion. And concussion, like anything, is expressed differently and uniquely depending on who the person is. But what I'm curious is like when you look at your life back then and you look at your life now, what's different?

Bobbi: Everything. I didn't have enough energy to barely get through my day. I could only work one or two hours, three times a week. I had to have one day off from any appointments or any clients. I wasn't sleeping, I had anxiety, I had nausea, I had dizziness, I had daily headaches. And now I don't.

Now I'm sleeping properly. I can work 20 hours a week. I still take one day off just for myself. I still see Chinese medicine just as I'm increasing my workload and changes. I don't have the anxiety, I don't have the headaches, I don't have the nausea, don't have the dizziness, I don't have the cognitive challenges like I did.

Say for example, grocery shopping was a challenge. I couldn't scan the shelves to find the items that I wanted because it would make me dizzy. Or I had to plan, I could only do a certain activity for a certain amount of time, because then I would have to have a rest period after doing whatever activity I was doing. And now, I still do that, but I don't have to be as diligent about it. Or I'm just more aware of when I need to take the breaks, which are further apart. I can have longer work periods than before.

Susi: So would you say in our world, like in the functional synergy world, we often use the yellow lights analogy or this idea of listen to the whispers so

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

Ep #99: Yoga Therapy and Concussion: Completing a Yoga Therapy Certification with a Brain Injury

you don't have to hear the screams. And we use the traffic light analogy where the red light is the scream and the yellow lights are the whispers. And the aim is to move from red to yellow.

So most people when they come for private sessions, they're at red, and they want to get down to yellow. And then we kind of help them navigate that yellow realm so that then they start to move between yellow and green. So do you remember like how long it took for you to really start to get a sense of your whispers, like your yellows and your ability to listen to them? Because that's the other piece of it, right? It's one thing to become aware of them and it's another thing to actually listen to them.

Bobbi: Probably into the certification program is when I could really listen and be more aware of what I needed to do and when I needed to do it. Instead of, like you said, blowing through them. And I think there was also so many factors contributing to the yellow lights that until some of them are quiet you couldn't even discern what was causing what, right? Like I could get nausea and dizziness, not just one. Now, it's usually just one. There's only one light instead of five lights, I guess.

Susi: And what do you think contributed to your being able to have some of those resolved and separated out so you can have one at a time versus them compounding each other?

Bobbi: That's a good question, I think the structure and, you know, talking about with Ayurveda, following the routines, and the structure, and the diet, and you were talking about scheduling, right, pre-planning, because then my head wasn't so busy with all of the things. Do you know what I mean? It was more laid out so my brain could have some time to rest, I think contributed.

I could sleep better then. I just knew what was happening in my day therefore, there would be less anxiety, better at writing lists, and planning. Because planning was also a challenge, right?

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

Ep #99: Yoga Therapy and Concussion: Completing a Yoga Therapy Certification with a Brain Injury

Susi: Yeah, and then you've got how many kids?

Bobbi: Five.

Susi: Yes, so planning is a thing. When you've got kids, like kids planning goes up and then you add to it with your concussion, that changes things again. So this is really interesting. So tell me, because I remember there was a period of time when we were working one on one where you were seeing a few medical practitioners and it wasn't going well.

Now what I don't want this to be, just so the listener understands I'm not knocking medicine or medical science or the traditional rehabilitation approach. Not at all. More of what I want to highlight is the integration between the two worlds of what I like to call yoga and medicine or yoga and mindfulness or something of that sort. So what did you find didn't work when you were in that kind of traditional rehabilitative modality?

Bobbi: So when they would say these are your eye exercises, go do them. And I did three and my symptoms were off the chart. What should I do? And then they'd be scratching their head wondering, well, I don't know. Do you know what I mean? Just keep doing it, it'll get better.

Well, it didn't. It got worse so I'd be emailing, should I have had a four hour headache? Should I be dizzy for seven hours? And so yeah, that didn't work. And it also made me feel like there's something wrong because I'm not fitting the pattern, I'm not fitting into the mold. They don't know what to do with me, now what am I supposed to do? Which is kind of why I sought out you, because I wasn't fitting into X, Y, Z. protocol.

My Chinese medicine, they were more supportive, I guess, in where I was at. So that was okay. So I kind of had, you know, was being pulled in two different directions, in a sense.

Ep #99: Yoga Therapy and Concussion: Completing a Yoga Therapy Certification with a Brain Injury

Susi: Did you struggle at all when we started to work together and I was broadening this idea of like there is nothing wrong? I don't want to say there's nothing wrong, that the options are endless, possibility is available, you need to tune in more closely to those whispers so that you can sense when those eye exercises, as the example, like at what point those eye exercises were not working before it was too late, right? Did you struggle at all with that listening piece?

Bobbi: Yeah, because it was kind of vague. I didn't really know what you meant. Do you know what I mean? And plus my brain wasn't working right, I'm like what is she talking about? And I think back to those days a lot now, because it makes more sense about where you were going and what you were talking about.

But back then I'm like, well I don't know, I'll just keep going because she knows what she's doing. And I had faith in you and more so than, I guess, the other rehab's way because it wasn't working. Right? And I was seeing improvements in working with you. But yes, it was definitely a head scratcher to where we were going.

Susi: Yeah, and it's interesting. I want to actually do an episode on this because I received a Facebook Messenger message the other day about listening to your body. And people throw that term around a lot in yoga, and mindfulness, and in fitness, in some aspects like that. And it's really vague, like it's a really vague term, because what are you actually listening for?

Particularly when we're very cognitive human beings of like, just tell me what to do. Like, give me the structure. Give something that my intellect can understand.

Bobbi: Yeah.

Susi: Where what I'm actually seen is well, your body is a barometer. Your body is going to let you know. You've got to do the work to determine, okay,

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

Ep #99: Yoga Therapy and Concussion: Completing a Yoga Therapy Certification with a Brain Injury

what's the whisper? And the whispers can be subtle, right? And so it can be difficult or challenging to feel them. And yet, you did.

Bobbi: Yes, it was a long, roundabout way, I think. But I did.

Susi: When you couldn't quite comprehend what it is that I was offering, yet you saw results. Like was the only reason you kept up, was because you saw the results?

Bobbi: I don't know, I had faith in you as well, right? I had nothing to lose. I tried everything else, right? I didn't want to be that person labeled with fibromyalgia or chronic fatigue or whatever. I was also determined to heal myself. Do you know what I mean? I should know what I'm doing, but I didn't for this injury when it's yourself.

So yeah, I did struggle, but there were little improvements so I'm like, just keep going. One day at a time. It took way longer than I thought it would. It didn't fit the, what do they say, two weeks for a concussion? Two months? I don't remember the number that you should be healing at. What has it been? Three and a half years just about now.

Susi: Mm-hmm. And now you would say, like how many days a week are you working now?

Bobbi: Four days a week.

Susi: And how many hours a day?

Bobbi: Four to five.

Susi: Interesting, hey?

Bobbi: Yeah, like night and day. I had already increased my workload, what in May of last year when we were just newly into the program, right?

Ep #99: Yoga Therapy and Concussion: Completing a Yoga Therapy Certification with a Brain Injury

Susi: Yeah.

Bobbi: Which was good. I still had headaches, I still had the nausea, you know, I still had to make sure I had all those supports in place and be aware. And I still do now. But the whispers or the yellow lights are much less. And it can be resolved much quicker.

Susi: Well, what's so interesting is the number of people who either come into my private practice, or who are coming into certification who have had a concussion or multiple, like the number is growing. I find it quite fascinating. And right now we have five people enrolled who have had a brain injury of sorts.

And because of the way that we work with the program and we're helping trainees learn how to help people recover, and in the process of doing that, what we're helping them do is their own recovery. Because people have symptoms and sensations and all those things, and so we work with the individual, the trainee as they are learning. So the learning process is partly their own process.

So earlier Bobbi had mentioned Ayurveda. Ayurveda is a really key foundational component to our training process in how it really helps to address the individual and their constitution and the characters and the qualities that make up who they are, and then how we direct treatment protocol or just techniques to who that person is. And it's really foundational for really meeting a person where they're at. And so that's what Bobbi was a was referring to. Now that you're through it, you now can see the benefit that it was, right?

Bobbi: Mm-hmm.

Susi: But before you came in, were you hesitant at all? Because you know it's intense, right? Like there's an intensive component to it, there's a

Ep #99: Yoga Therapy and Concussion: Completing a Yoga Therapy Certification with a Brain Injury

commitment to it, there's deadlines and all the things. Was there a concern that oh my gosh, I'm not sure I can do this?

Bobbi: For sure, I didn't even know if I could make it through one day of Zoom, let alone eight days of Zoom. Right? I hadn't been on Zoom that long, or concentrated, or focused for that long for almost two years, right? So I was very, very hesitant.

Susi: Yeah, what Bobbi is referring to there is we have training weeks that we run online virtually. And those training weeks or eight days in length. And they run a good chunk of time during that day. And so we're there and we're present, we're not necessarily on screen all of the time. But we're on screen most of that time. So yeah, so it's a duration of time that that's required. And surprisingly, you found it not to be nearly as difficult as you thought it might be.

Bobbi: Mm-hmm, and also we were getting the tools as we went along, what you can do to recover, what you can do to support yourself, turn your video off if you need to, right? Learning all of that stuff. And I think part of it being recorded and you can go back, because I was worried about cognitively am I going to remember? Am I going to understand? But it's there, the recording is there, you can always go back if you have to.

Susi: What about the overall pace of the program? Were you concerned about meeting those milestones?

Bobbi: Yeah, because we learned a lot. And there's a lot of books, you should read this book and this book, right? I'm like, oh my goodness, how am I going to look after the kids, and work, and look after me? But again, it's like you don't have to do it all at once. You didn't expect us to learn everything all at once, right? Everybody was kind of going at their own pace and it worked how it worked and it all fit in as it did, right?

Ep #99: Yoga Therapy and Concussion: Completing a Yoga Therapy Certification with a Brain Injury

Susi: Yeah. When you think about this process of where you're at now, what would you like people who have had a concussion or multiple concussions, what would you like them to know is actually possible for them?

Bobbi: Yeah, definitely change is possible and you can do it. I always jump into my life with both feet, right? Give 100%, which can be good or bad. So I just trusted everything that was being taught to us and implemented what I thought I could implement with, again, no pressure that you have to do it all. Right? So you'll get out of it what you put into it. And you can change.

Don't listen to the statistics that if you haven't recovered by this time, you're never going to get better, because it's not true, right? You can change, like you've said before, at any time, any age, any condition. We don't know until you try.

Susi: Right, because if you had said the stat that you've read is, I can't remember if you said two months of some sort. Maybe it was longer than that. I think I've read different numbers from different people.

Bobbi: Yeah.

Susi: But you were definitely outside of it and you were taking longer than people had wanted you to take.

Bobbi: Definitely. So yeah, change can happen. And look how dramatically it happened. I'm pleasantly surprised, and I'm still improving.

Susi: Right, so the tissue can consistently change.

Bobbi: Yeah.

Susi: What about health care professionals? Like people who are in the medical system, if you could tell them about how something integrative or collaborative, and not necessarily this process, but a process that can be

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

Ep #99: Yoga Therapy and Concussion: Completing a Yoga Therapy Certification with a Brain Injury

integrated and collaborative, what would you want them to know, to look out for that can be helpful for their own results with their patients?

Bobbi: Well, I think not to disregard what their patients are telling them, just because they don't fit into the box of what they've learned and what they've been taught. And I guess if they don't feel like they can help them, then refer them to somebody else, right? Because it's not good for the patient to think there's something wrong with me, I'm not getting better. What am I going to do? I'm going to be like this forever.

Susi: Because that was the message you received, right? Like because you weren't getting better, there was something inherently not right with you.

Bobbi: Yeah, and then you begin to question anything that's happening to you. Oh I'm not really dizzy. Oh I shouldn't have a headache. Oh I shouldn't be this tired. I should be doing more. So you do more and then you get worse, right? The symptoms flare up again or become worse. And yeah, so don't give that message to your patients.

Susi: This is really awesome. You're working with people, because you're now integrating Kinesiology. So up here in Canada we have, again, I'm the same, so Bobbi and I have similar training that we're both kinesiologists from our university days. And we've been utilizing that training. We've both now integrated, so Bobbi now has integrated yoga into that process. And you're working with people like across the board, right? Is it mostly motor vehicle accidents that you're working with? People who have been in motor vehicle accidents?

Bobbi: Correct, yeah.

Susi: And how has the process for your own recovery, how do you think that's made a difference for them? Like where you're at now, like how has

Ep #99: Yoga Therapy and Concussion: Completing a Yoga Therapy Certification with a Brain Injury

that made a difference for them? Like can you see a palpable difference, say from three years ago to now?

Bobbi: Definitely, I'm more willing to sit back and hear and kind of get a better picture of everything and hear who they've seen and what's worked and what hasn't worked. And not necessarily just jump in where I would have jumped in before. I take that information and then maybe a subtler or slower approach to it. And then see what happens with that first movement or whatever we do. And then back off or move ahead, right?

Whereas before it's like, go ahead and do these exercises and then we do that, right?

Susi: Yeah. And it's so interesting because so often that slower approach, which you've actually told me that some of the OTs that you have worked with, had said, no, no, we've got to go faster. And in fact, it's like, well, sometimes the slower that we go, the faster the results become. So sometimes the action needs to be slower in order for the results to become faster.

Bobbi: And that just happened like a month ago, I had a client that has multiple injuries from head to toe in a head on collision. And his pelvis wasn't working, his hips weren't working quite right. So I'm like, okay, we're not going to do weights, we're going to start on the floor. But within four sessions he could do all of those hip movements properly. And like, okay, we're ready for the weights, we can load you up and get you ready for work.

Whereas before I would have probably started there and then we would have had to back up, right.? So that was so exciting.

Susi: Yeah, and it's interesting because so often in those cases the person is seeing that they're starting to get strength. And then oh, well, we just had a that didn't work. So now we're having to go backwards, which can be a

Ep #99: Yoga Therapy and Concussion: Completing a Yoga Therapy Certification with a Brain Injury

problem around confidence. Whereas you just began at a component level, let's just make sure we've got your body working better before we add the load and add the force, and add all that extra training. So slowing down actually enabled everything to go faster.

Bobbi: Yeah, I was actually surprised how quickly we were able to add the weights because the way his pelvis and hip were moving I thought, oh boy, this is going to be a while. But he picked it up so quickly that we could progress faster than I thought.

Susi: Really, really interesting. Really interesting. So, Bobbi, you do online work too, right?

Bobbi: Yes.

Susi: Okay, where can people find you if they want to reach out to you and either connect with you for work or any other information about concussion or any of that sort of thing? How can they reach you?

Bobbi: Just my email is Bobbi, B-O-B-B-I L-A-L-A-C-H @shaw.ca.

Susi: Great, okay, we'll put that into the show notes. And I think what I wanted to get out of this episode, and I hope this landed for you listeners, is that you can absolutely recover. And when you can put these structures in place that really helps you to listen deeply to the signals and sensations that let you know that something's happening. Like those big red lights, those screams that can arise in our systems after a concussion, can be really uncomfortable. Like beyond uncomfortable, really, I mean, horrible, right?

Bobbi: Yes.

Susi: And when we can start to tune in to the whispers that let us know that they're coming and intervene at the whisper level, then a lot of change can

Ep #99: Yoga Therapy and Concussion: Completing a Yoga Therapy Certification with a Brain Injury

begin to happen. And starting at that small level, a lot of shifting, a lot of shifting can happen.

And if you are a professional and this has resonated with you, and you're like, hey, this is making a lot of sense. Then reach out to us about our training programs, because we'd love, love, love to work with you. And you can reach us at health@functionalsynergy.com. And that's all in the show notes.

So, Bobbi, thank you so much for being here. We'll see you next time.

Bobbi: Thank you.

Susi: Take good care.

Bobbi: Bye.

If this episode has resonated and you're looking to deepen this idea of getting your body back on board, of listening deeply to your symptoms, of listening to the whispers so you don't have to hear the screams, and you're looking for one to one support or professional training, then reach out to us at health@functionalsynergy.com where we can customize your learning path. That's health@functionalsynergy.com. Looking forward to hearing from you.