

## Ep #274: Improving Pain Scales: Enabling Breakthroughs of Healing



### **Full Episode Transcript**

**With Your Host**

**Susi Hatley**

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

## Ep #274: Improving Pain Scales: Enabling Breakthroughs of Healing

**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 you're here because today I am sharing a concept that I've been using for a really, really, really long time that's really important and significant in helping my clients reduce and eradicate pain. And it's a tool that I've been using with my trainees to help them with their own clientele.

And we've seen the tool really work well not only for my clients, obviously, but also as my trainees get more and more familiar with it and learn to language with it and integrate it into the work that they do, we see some really, really, really great results.

It's all about helping people really sort out and figure out their pain. Notice when their pain is going down, and what to actually do with that information in order to help their pain continue to reduce and eradicate. And if their pain does come back, what to actually do and what it actually means and how they can think about it and how they can work with it, both from a movement perspective or a breath perspective or a belief or thinking perspective.

So it's really a conversation and an exploration of intangibles. And so we're talking about intangibles today and I'll give lots of context here. As I mentioned in a previous episode, I'm really good at helping people to connect with and understand the intangible nature of their pain.

And part of the reason for this is that I'm able to help people feel safe in their ability to pause, to recognize what is really going on, and then retrain more effectively and more on purpose. I have a number of tools and techniques that can help guide me and my client, and today I'm sharing one of them with you.

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

## Ep #274: Improving Pain Scales: Enabling Breakthroughs of Healing

So to introduce the tool, I need to share some more context. I'm going to give a couple of minutes here of context and then we'll get into it.

So I already mentioned this word intangible. So much of the work to support someone in their healing process, particularly around reducing and eradicating persistent pain, is being with, like us as the professional being with and then teaching our client to be with the intangible. So I need to be with the intangible as the person, as the teacher, and I'm teaching my client to be with the intangible.

We're so trained to think about pain as being something we've got to solve right away and find the quick fix. The reality though is that physical pain is subjective. We know that it's not necessarily correlated to tissue damage. We know that there's a relationship to how much pain is felt and the quality of how that pain is felt and how internally safe someone feels, and their ability to change the state of pain.

So if someone feels safe internally and they feel safe in their ability to change their state of pain, there's a relationship to how much pain they feel, and their ability to eradicate physical pain has a strong correlation to the clarity and confidence with knowing that they themselves can get out of pain.

Now they might need professional support but they can do it, right? Because this is a job that we need to do on our own, even if we seek the support of a yoga teacher, yoga therapist, osteopath, PT, chiro, other body worker, psychologist, any professional in this sphere. They can provide ideas and guidance, and we're the ones who still need to do the work, right? So if someone has a strong sense of clarity and confidence that they can do it with the right support, there's a strong correlation to them being actually able to do it.

So all in all there are lots of intangibles here, and because of the high degree of intangibility, it really makes getting out of pain for some people and working with some health professionals really, really, really tricky.

## Ep #274: Improving Pain Scales: Enabling Breakthroughs of Healing

A key way that Western medicine works and works really well is they want to standardize. And when we try and standardize the intangible, it can become a lot harder to navigate. It's one reason why while the pain scale, the common pain scale is common, it can often not be entirely useful. It's trying to standardize and make tangible things that are intangible. There's certainly a place for it but there's really only so far that we can go with trying to quantify something that is actually qualitative in nature.

So it's a reason why I'm so great at being a bridge between Western medicine and people who are on this healing path of reducing and eradicating persistent pain, because with my Bsc of kinesiology, because of my work inside of a Western based chronic pain center early in my career, and that I still work very closely with a lot of PTs and MDs who work solidly in the Western model, I get it.

I get where they work. I get where I work. And I get the bridge and I can so often help my clients who often have a medical team to be with and learn from intangible. So rather than making the intangible tangible, a big skill that I offer is helping them to be with the intangible, right?

So this is leading to this tool that I'm going to be sharing with you about how to be with the intangible. I can't tell you how vital this is. The more that we can pause, recognize, be with, it can really be quite game-changing. From what I've seen with the results of my clients it's my fundamental belief that this idea of being with the intangible rather than trying to standardize it is foundational for helping people get out of pain. I think it's like a huge, huge piece of the puzzle.

Said another way is that being with the intangible is a key missing piece. It shifts the conversation from this pain thing being a problem to fix, which can ultimately lead people to chasing symptoms. Yes, they get relief but because they're going after a quick fix and not something that's really the underlying patterning, the long-standing sustainable change often remains elusive.

## Ep #274: Improving Pain Scales: Enabling Breakthroughs of Healing

So by learning to be with the intangible, we become present. There's that word present. We can tap into the medicine of present, the medicine of awareness, the medicine of that gentle abiding focus. Where we place our attention and awareness we can recognize the relationships between our anatomy and biomechanics, our physiology and our psychology, and our ability to rest and reset.

And like anything, by approaching the situation we want to change from a more holistic place, rather than chasing symptoms, rather than going for a quick fix that doesn't lead really to long-term sustainable change, we can actually see what the contributing factors are.

This goes for anything in our life. Anything that is relational because with persistent physical pain, so much of the issue is already long-standing. The persistence in itself and in that word is long-standing. So much compensation has occurred on both the body level, the brain level, as well as the level of the mind and so much of this compensation lies under or outside of our awareness.

So this process that I'm outlining, that I'm clearly passionate about here, it's this ability to pause to recognize this is what helps us to really see what's going on to help us take steps to improve the relationship, rather than just apply a quick fix, a quick exercise or a tool.

Sure you get the relief. Yeah, it can open the conversation. But my aim here is to tell more and more people, to really share the message that they can get out of physical persistent pain. I have decades of this. I know how possible it is and so many people just do not know that it is even a possibility.

So today I want to go through one of the tools that I use to help people along this path and I'm calling it the gradient scale, which bridges left and right brain function with body experience to reduce and eradicate physical pain. It's very effective for people to make connections and in turn progress for reducing and eradicating pain.

## Ep #274: Improving Pain Scales: Enabling Breakthroughs of Healing

And the scale uses two metaphors currently, one is visual the other one's auditory. And I'm working on a few other metaphors just to have this more people in the way they process information. But currently I use the traffic light, I.e think red yellow green, and also auditory, the whispers and screams. So we've got the visual metaphor of the traffic light and the auditory metaphor of whispers and screams.

So here's how it works. When a client signs up for my program, the reason why they're signing up is because they have an issue that's restricting their life and they would like to have my help in resolving that. So in the fact that there's something restrictive, that's a red. The red light is the pain is at a point where their life has become smaller and they don't like that.

So lots of people have high levels of pain and they're okay with living their life. So there's not this compelling reason or compelling nature of change. They're not quite there at that red, they're not quite there at that scream that there is this ability or openness or space that there's an availability for change. So that's what I define as red or a scream.

So they've got a red light pain, their body is screaming and they want to facilitate the change. So then our work together is then about initially helping to bring that red light pain down to a yellow, or to bring that scream down to more of a whisper or a talk or a conversation.

And then as they start to recognize what's contributing to what brought it to an orange or a yellow or a conversation or a kind of talking level versus a scream, they start to develop a very felt sense, a very embodied sense, an interoceptive and proprioceptive sense of what they themselves are doing to facilitate that change.

So I've guided them through a series of movement patterning and breathing and other techniques that I have, and they are then now in a subjective sense noticing how their red light is moving towards say orange and then towards yellow. How that scream is settling down from something really loud and a loud tone to something a little more melodic, a little bit more conversational, towards that whisper.

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

## Ep #274: Improving Pain Scales: Enabling Breakthroughs of Healing

So do you see how I've guided them through but they're the ones experiencing this subjective change on the inside? And they start to be able to put words to it, their own words. So I'm not trying to standardize anything, I'm helping open up and recognize for them, like for them their words for what they're experiencing.

The reason why this is so important and so significant is that many people have been inadvertently trained to seek the solution for pain relief outside of themselves, whether it's the health professional or a quick fix tool, whether it's self massage or rolling out on a ball, or an exercise routine specifically designed for a particular ache.

They're getting relief so it's not inherently wrong, but the relief is more so about getting rid of the symptoms but not the underlying patterning that's facilitating the expression of the symptoms. So we can go to any body worker, we can use any kind of tool and technique and go, yeah, that's great. But if we're not recognizing what's actually contributing to that relief, then we're going to go right back to what the experience we had initially, which was pain.

So then we oscillate between these places. Oscillate between relief and pain, relief and pain, relief and pain. And then we train ourselves to think, oh, this is just the way it is. I'm getting older, I do these activities, this happened when I was younger. This makes sense, well at least I have these tools for relief. And if someone wants to live in that space, it's totally cool. Lots of people do.

That's just not my game, that's not my jam. My jam is to help people really recognize and tune into those underlying patterns. And those underlying patterns, in part, they get to name them. As we go through these various movement and breathing practices, these awareness and attention practices, they recognize what is present.

So the tool then of the gradient scale, this is where it comes in because to get out of persistent pain, in my experience and helping my clientele, the

## Ep #274: Improving Pain Scales: Enabling Breakthroughs of Healing

solution isn't just a stimulus like a tool or a health professional to fix the body issue.

We can use those, yes, but then we need to integrate how our brains view and process the information about what we're experiencing and how we bridge our left side logical brain with our sensing right side of the brain and integrate that with the symptoms we are physically experiencing on an embodied level interoceptive and proprioceptive.

So there's many different things going on. Now, the tendency here is for people to go, oh, it's complex and it's complicated. No, I don't think it's complex or complicated at all. Yes, there are a number of factors that are playing up, but it doesn't make it complicated, it doesn't make it complex.

When we have a tool like the gradient scale, it actually makes it really, really, really simple. It's a tool that helps us bridge the processing power of both sides of our brain, then we can calm our system overall, move from either a fight-or-flight sympathetic state or a resigned collapsed state into a more calm, clear and connected state. This helps us be in a more restful space, more available and able to recognize novel insights, which is really important and significant for the healing process.

So let me give an example of a client who has hip pain. Really long-standing hip pain that was getting in the way of her ability to walk. It was getting in the way of her ability to sit, which she does for work. And it was getting in the way of her ability doing activity. So it was starting to restrict her life significantly for the ways that she wanted to live.

She had a little bit of, well, maybe this is just the way it is because I'm getting older. But there was also another part of her that was like, well, maybe this could actually change.

So we started to do the things that we do to help her improve the movement patterning of her hip by first recognizing how her hip actually moved, and how her opposite hip actually moved, and how her pelvis and her spine moved, and how her pelvis and her rib cage moved. And even



## Ep #274: Improving Pain Scales: Enabling Breakthroughs of Healing

connected her hip to her shoulder and started to really explore in a very thoughtful and methodical way how all these pieces related.

Because when there is a chronicity to symptoms there have been many, many days and weeks of compensatory patterning, re-patterning to help people move away from pain to find more comfortable ways of being because our bodies and minds don't want to be in pain. So we find ways to try to get ourselves out of pain, but in doing that we end up compensating and utilizing other areas of the body to try and get more comfortable, to try and become stronger.

But in fact we actually make the body weaker. It becomes a bit less responsive because if we're pulling from say like lifting a hip to try and get out of the opposite hip or we try to load through an opposite leg to get out of the original hip issue, now we're using more weight through that one side.

And then that might lead us to brace with the rib cage and that might lead us to hold our breath, and that might lead us to over utilize the upper muscles around the shoulders and the neck, like the secondary breathing muscles to get air in. And that may lead to, and it kind of carries on and carries on and carries on, right?

And everybody has their own path of compensation pattern, it's all very unique biomechanically for a person. So to say that these are the pathways of compensation I don't think is accurate. And I can't even tell you how it maps out for any one person because it's all inside of them and it all happens under the level of awareness, right? That's the beauty of the compensation pattern, it helps us continue to live.

So in this process I'm not trying to unravel compensation patterns, I'm simply helping us be more aware and make objective and clear what the movement patterns are. And so whether I'm working in person with someone or whether I'm working with them online, and online is primarily how I work these days, we both get to see on the screen what's actually happening.

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

## Ep #274: Improving Pain Scales: Enabling Breakthroughs of Healing

So we can see, all right, is the leg bone moving in the pelvis, yes or no? What happens when the pelvis and the ribcage are moving in a certain movement? Are they actually moving well or not? Are we gripping through the jaw or pulling up with the toes or bracing anywhere else? And we get to really see what that patterning is.

So that's what we were doing with this client, we were helping her see what really was happening. And then when I checked in with her and asked her, all right, so now what do you feel? And she said, well, the ache and the pain is gone. And so then I asked her, well, then what do you feel? And she said, well, the ache and the pain is gone. There's just no pain there.

And so I took a pause and I said, all right, so I can't step over this right now because when you're saying the ache and the pain is gone and there's no pain, what is actually there? And she took a moment and she's like, I don't know, there's just no pain.

And so I'm going to pause here for a moment and say to the podcast listener, I can't tell you how important this is, this is so vital. When we stay in the place of, "Well, the ache is just gone, there's no pain," we're still in a place of ache and pain. Our brains are still associating with ache and pain. So I call this 1.0 and the aim here is to get to 2.0. The aim here is to move out of the pain conversation and into a healing conversation.

So to be all woo-woo about it, we're moving from a frequency where we're relating to pain, so whether it's pain ache or no pain ache, we're still relating to pain and ache. And we want to help move into a place, without forcing, without compensating, we want to move into a place that's relating to a different word, a different state, a different frequency.

So that's why I spend some time here and say, "Okay, but then what is there? If no pain is there, if no ache is there, then what is there?" And the word for her was softness. I was like, okay. So now we have softness. So let's move in a soft range of motion. And her range and the way she moved became smoother. That's what I saw in her movement pattern.

## Ep #274: Improving Pain Scales: Enabling Breakthroughs of Healing

What she noticed was, oh, interesting, when I move in a smooth range of motion, my breath is easier. So do you notice like I see smooth, but I don't need to tell her I see smooth because what she's noticing, which is much more important, is she's noticing internally this relationship to smooth has her breathing more freely and more fluidly.

So then as she continues to move she recognizes other features of what it is to be in a soft state, a soft range of motion. Then as she does this, it's like, okay, so now what do you notice? Well then she noticed clarity in her mind. And it's like, okay, so now you've got clarity in your mind and you have softness, yeah?

And so she continued to move and interestingly the range of motion of her hip, which we had earlier on made smaller so that she wasn't compensating as much and she was improving her movement patterns, her range of motion – this is still in the same our session – started to expand. Now here's what's important here, anybody can make the range of motion expand and they can still maintain their pain levels.

What I'm interested in is can you expand that range without it being painful? Without it being achy? And so for her, in this process of improving her range that was a soft range, that was also a clear range, with a breath that was fluid, her range improved. Her system overall was down regulating, resetting, recuperating. She was moving out of a sympathetic state to a more parasympathetic state, she was much more connected and her range and her tissue changed. That's why I like to say tissue can change, healing can happen.

Okay, so let's kind of go through this. She's now recognizing that she has a state called red light pain and ache, which she could describe and put lots of qualities around. Then as she started to move better and get more sense of these relationships between her body, which she could quantify as well as qualify, she could feel softness. As she continued to move in a softness range, she felt her breath change and she felt clarity of mind arise.

## Ep #274: Improving Pain Scales: Enabling Breakthroughs of Healing

So do you see what's happening here? She's getting more understanding of her intangible nature of the subjective nature of her movement patterns. She's getting more interoceptive experience for what it feels like to be in a state other than pain.

Now, I'm very specific about that wording. I'm not saying she can be in a state that's like no pain, because then that's still kind of manifesting, that's still associating with. Instead, she now has this totally new state which she now can live inside of called softness and clear and fluid or flowy breath.

And then what starts to happen, so now she's in a space where she feels so much better, it could even be a green light. It could even be a place of just a gentle relationship on a conversation level. Now, here's what happens is that there's still this imprint of movement patterns and breathing patterns that contribute to the expression of pain. That's still there. That hasn't like packed up and moved.

So if she goes through a really stressful time or she adds more load or she has an unrestful sleep or something else occurs, she could very well fall into patterning survival strategies that lead toward the expression of pain. But the difference now is now she can recognize the whispers or the yellow lights of that arising.

So then when she's at her work and she starts to notice oh my breath is starting to get held. Oh interesting, I'm starting to notice the clarity of mind starting to fade a little bit, huh. And then, huh, interesting, I'm now noticing my body is just a little bit stiff. I'm going to do something now to help retrain this pattern.

This is fundamental because now where someone's attention is going, their awareness is growing, the energy is flowing, they're now able to help reset before that pain even comes back. And so then what starts to happen is they gain that much more awareness, that much more clarity, and they gain more endurance for having a new neuromuscular pattern. And that is game-changing.

## Ep #274: Improving Pain Scales: Enabling Breakthroughs of Healing

They're growing the confidence and the clarity, the internal safety and support that they've got this. And sure they might get back to their exercise programming, their weightlifting programming and if they bring the awareness that they've gained in these early stages and bring it back and just pay attention to the whispers and yellow lights, working only up to and around those whispers and yellow lights, they continue to train but with more load.

Now, like with all of us, sometimes we push past or we miss a whisper, I mean it's quiet. We miss the yellow light or we see the yellow light, we've already determined if the yellow light is a fresh yellow or a stale yellow or if we can speed through it and kind of be like, I just don't want to go, I just want to get to where I'm going, and then some whispers of red might show up. And then it's like, okay, that makes sense that that's what happened, I get it.

But then they've got the tools and techniques to shift it and return to that space where they've got more softness and fluidity. So then rather than being in a space of like pain, no pain, pain, no pain, pain, no pain, I need to find something external to me, there's a relationship distinction that they have with themselves, with what they feel, with how their body is moving. And those folks are the ones who have more and more time being out of pain. They have an experience of being soft, fluid, clear in their mind.

I've had some people tell me that the process, like the words that they use, is that they feel peace or they feel freedom. So when they move in a peace range of motion or a freedom range of motion, they notice more and more and more peace and freedom in their system. That's where the softness, that's where the clarity, that's where the ease of movement really arises. That's where the joy starts to bubble over and there's this integration between mind and body.

And it all came from this ability to recognize and be with the intangible. Not necessarily fix it, but be with it and recognize the relationship to their movement patterns and to their breathing patterns and to their thinking patterns, because those are all messages and indicators about what's

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

## Ep #274: Improving Pain Scales: Enabling Breakthroughs of Healing

going on. I mean we see it all the time, people ignore that stuff. Because it's been subjective, because it's been intangible it has felt to be less than.

And yet the reality is it's where all the healing, in my mind, can really take off. We can really leverage this internal understanding, this internal world rather than shoving it aside.

And boy oh boy, when you take that, if you're someone who's been in pain for a long time and you really get this understanding and then you take that into actually strengthening, now what you're doing is you're strengthening not on top of a foundation of compensatory pattern, held breath, braced movement patterns, really tight and taught tissue. But rather you're strengthening on top of these patterns that are soft and fluid and responsive.

Ability to be able to shift and change, that is where real nimbleness and agility comes from. This deep understanding, this deep listening with ourselves, it's very, very powerful.

So if this is resonating with you, then I've got a suggestion for you and that is I'm running my Therapeutic Yoga Intensive. And we get into all of this and dive into it in a deep, deep, deep way. You learn to see the movement patterns. You learn to see relationships. You learn to name them.

You learn this in your own body and mind and you also learn from the people in the group. And you learn how to be able to work with it with people in the group and you start to see just how interrelated, interconnected our bodies and our brains actually are. You understand the neuroscience of this process along with the physiological and biomechanical processes.

You can use this for your own self, all the teachers that I train are doing this for their own selves as well as being able to do this really well with their clients. Because when you practice it for your own self, you're eating your own cooking and it just bubbles over so much more easily with working with your own clientele.

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

## **Ep #274: Improving Pain Scales: Enabling Breakthroughs of Healing**

All right, so I look forward to seeing you there. It would be so much fun, if this has resonated with you, to take it to the next step and you can learn more over at [functionalsynergy.com/intensive](https://functionalsynergy.com/intensive). It'd be great to see you there. We'll see you next time. Take care, bye bye.