

Ep. #307 - Beyond Correcting Movement



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With your host:
Susi Hately

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

Introduction 00:00:01 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.

Susi 00:00:22 Welcome and welcome back. I'm so glad that you're here, because today we're digging into a concept that I was just teaching in my certification program that was really opening the eyes for my trainees and leapfrogging them forward in a way that was really cool as a trainer to bear witness to. And really it's about "beyond correcting movement" and instead developing real connection between the brain and body. It's something I've been doing for over 30 years now, helping my clientele reduce and eliminate physical pain. And it's what leads my trainees and my grads to having really fantastic results with their own clients. So my focus today is hopefully to help you shift the way that you approach movement. Whether you're a teacher, a yoga therapist, fitness professional or someone looking to simply move better and feel better.

Susi 00:01:17 I want to dive deeper into why correcting movement isn't the actual goal, and what I think we ought to be focusing on instead. For so long in the movement world, we've been trained to think in terms of right and wrong when it comes to movement. We hear things like activate this muscle, engage your core, keep your knees in line. And while these cues have their place and they can sometimes be super helpful, they can also sometimes do more harm than good. Because when we focus too much on getting it right, we completely miss a deeper opportunity of connecting the brain and the body. So today we are going to explore why feeling better comes from moving better, not just doing it right. And I'll explain what I mean by moving better. I'm also going to explore how the yoga and fitness world really is missing a crucial step by adding strength first before movement quality, and why learning new movement can feel awkward, and why that's actually a good thing. And then practical strategies for teaching and practicing movement in a way that leads to real, sustainable improvement.

Susi 00:02:25 So if you're ready to rethink movement and discover a new way to engage with your body, let's dive in. So let's start by considering this idea of right to wrong and perhaps shifting to awareness and connection. And I want to begin by busting the myth of this idea to "correct" movement. Maybe the goal isn't to correct movement. Maybe correct movement isn't the thing at all. And the reason why I say that is because what's broken? Like what's really wrong here? Consider this: the moment we tell a client that they're doing something wrong, their nervous system will often shift subtly or very overtly into a state of defense. They can become hyper focused on not messing up rather than actually feeling what is happening in their body. And this is something I would see all the time when I used to go to the big yoga conferences and there'd be like 90 people in a room, and I'd be going through these movement patterns and I'd see yoga teachers not simply just exploring what we were teaching, but like, oh, I'd better be doing this right.

Susi 00:03:34 And then emphasizing that and starting to brace and grip. The reality is that moving well, truly moving well isn't about right or wrong, because right and wrong can lead into this gripping and bracing pattern I've just mentioned, but rather it's all about awareness. When someone moves in a way that feels better, it's because they're starting to connect the movement to their nervous system, their brain, and their internal awareness. Feeling better doesn't come

from moving right. It comes from moving better. It comes from coordinated patterns that are more fluid. And that might sound like it's the same thing, but it's not. There's a nuance here. Think about this. A great example is when someone who has chronic or persistent pain thinks, oh, I'd better fix my posture. Or better yet, a yoga therapist, or yoga teacher, or a physical therapist, or chiropractor or whomever says to their patient or their client or their student, you need to fix your posture. You have bad posture.

Susi 00:04:35 But that then can lead them to think, and I've seen this so often, oh I must be standing in the wrong way. But the reality is the posture that someone has chosen, either subconsciously or not, is because it's the safest, most supportive place that they can be in. So why would you pull away that which is inherently safe, just because to your eye it looks wrong or bad? A reality is that what's often missing is the awareness of how they're actually moving. And when we can combine awareness with better movement patterns, coordinated patterns, oftentimes the compensatory strategies fall away and posture just naturally arises. So posture becomes a result of better movement patterns not so much the vehicle towards better movement patterns. This then leads to the brain body connection as a key to strength. Right now, a trend in the yoga and movement world is a big push toward adding strength, which I think is fabulous because strength is truly important. However, if we pile strength on top of poor movement patterns, we're not actually fixing the problem.

Susi 00:05:53 We're reinforcing the dysfunction because the underlying coordinated brain body patterning is still there. If you add strength on top of that foundation, that foundation is still there. Said another way: is if your movement is limited and you add strength on top of limited movement, you still have limited movement. You're stronger and you're stronger at being limited. So consider that true strength comes from improving movement first. And when we move better, our muscles work in ways that they're designed to. And then tension lets go where it needs to. And our entire system becomes more efficient. And that's really where the real strength and real relief arises from. The number of times, particularly my male clients will say to me, I don't know why I'm getting more toned because I'm not doing anything, but it's because the extraneous movement patterns that were contributing to the gripping are going away, and the proper muscles are actually engaging. There's more tonality in their body. I've even seen this with myself where I might be gripping in a part of my body, that patterning starts to let go, and another part of my body all of a sudden starts to kick in.

Susi 00:07:06 And I see it with my clients all of the time. Our bodies and brains are fabulous at compensating. Fabulous. And I honour the compensations that they've come up with in order for me to live my life, to do my job, to do the activity I love. And there's an opportunity to consistently retrain those patterns to enable for better strength and functional outcomes. So this then leads into an obvious step here, which is the whole learning process and how learning can really be awkward. It can sometimes be really tough, which is why a lot of people don't do it. I think it's a big reason why the quick fix is an obvious go-to for people. The idea of facilitating change can be challenging, especially when we can't see what success looks like on the other side. If success is very obvious and clear, then yes, let's do it. But if it's not clear, or if the

journey toward that success is unclear, we are less likely to have a natural buy-in to it and maybe less of a willingness to go there.

Susi 00:08:22 And as we're learning, it can be awkward. I think about when I'm up-leveling my ability to speak French, or I started to learn Italian. And even though I've got French as a basis, the Italian, it's a bit different. And there's some awkward phases, like it's like "Tarzan" Italian I'm speaking. There's awkward phases in the way that I'm speaking. The same with hair. If you've seen pictures of me, I've got short hair. I've had long hair at different times. I've grown my hair out from being short a couple of times. I know what it takes. And I was talking to my hairstylist a couple of weeks ago and was saying, I'm thinking about growing my hair out. And then I remembered there are moments where you have to kind of wait a week, because it's in that really awkward stage where it doesn't quite get behind the ear or it's sort of falling in front of your eyes, and the mantra is just wait a week. It will get better.

Susi 00:09:13 And it's awkward. It doesn't look great, but if you just wait a few more days, it will look better. But then I decided I wasn't willing to go through that awkward phase, and so I decided to keep my hair short. So how does this relate to learning a new skill, strength, movement, getting out of pain, all the things? Awkwardness in the context of movement and learning about movement is actually a sign of progress. When you're learning a new movement skill, your brain and body are working together in a way they likely haven't before. You're literally rewiring your nervous system or relearning something that you knew before about your nervous system, and the wiring of the way that your nervous system and muscular system worked. And whether you are remembering or whether you are truly rewiring. This takes some time, it takes some patience and it can totally feel weird. I love the analogy of being lost at sea, and when you're learning something new, it can feel like you're drifting out in the ocean, perhaps on like a small piece of iceberg.

Susi 00:10:23 You don't know where land is and it feels a little, like, uncertain. But then you start seeing the signs. A seagull. A piece of driftwood. Little indicators that you're getting close. Signs of land. The same thing happens with movement. The first time you try something new it might feel impossible. But then, little by little, you start to notice subtle shifts. Signs of land. And before you know it, you're moving in a way that you never thought possible. And more so, it just feels natural. And if you don't catch it, it just sort of passes by you and you don't quite celebrate this moment of change. And yet that change happened and you notice it because your pain has gone down, moving more smoothly. You might be sleeping better and there's just a pep in your step. So how do we make this practical? How do we connect with practical strategies for teaching movement effectively? How do we teach and practice in a way that leads to real, lasting change? Here are a few key ideas.

Susi 00:11:42 I use a mini skeleton as a teaching tool, so this one's obviously for the professionals in the room. I use it a lot because even though it's a plastic skeleton and the shoulder blades are connected to the rib cage with little screws, it doesn't move a whole bunch and there's a rod going up the spine so the spine doesn't truly move, it moves enough. So when people can see how their body is designed to move, they can connect with the information in a

whole new way. Especially if we're talking about shoulders and where the head of the arm bone, that humerus, is connecting into the socket, and how that relates to, like the top that they're wearing, like where the seam of the shirt is or where it is in relationship to their tank top. They can start to be able to feel proprioceptively and interoceptively into their bodies more clearly using hands-on. Right? If you are in person with people, hands-on can be effective so that rather than just explaining, gently guiding someone's movements so that they can feel the difference can be the difference maker.

Susi 00:12:45 Now of course there has to be full on consent and you need to know how to place your hands. And so if you have the hands-on consent, that's going to be my assumption here, is you don't need to place a whole hand, but you can place a light touch. And that light touch is coming from your heart. So if you think about your hands as being an extension of your heart, which isn't so far fetched because the acupuncture meridians from the heart connect down to the hand, and you can connect with your hand and every time you place the hands on someone, think about connecting them with your heart. And then I find that that kind of touch is really soft, very intentional, and not overdoing it. You can start to feel some of the energy and the tissue beneath your hand as you connect with them, and it can be a gentle guide into someone's movement. As a result, they can feel more clearly. When it comes to being on zoom, which is where all of my teaching occurs, is very specific cueing and instruction.

Susi 00:13:50 And I've always been this way, and it's just ramped up ever since I've been fully online. And that iss being very, very specific about what I want to have move. And I look to the joint itself. So as an example, if we're coming into a tree pose or we're in standing and just lifting a foot off the ground, I won't necessarily say a lift a foot off the ground. I'll say more like, we're going to move the leg bone in the socket. Like I want to direct them to specifically what I want to see moving. I'll also balance intellectual knowledge with sensory experiences, because movement isn't only an academic exercise. It's not just this intellectual, evidence-based research left brain prefrontal cortex experience. There's also the right brain, the sensing part of ourselves. There's a subjective experience that we need to connect with in order for the evidence and the research to have meaning, and even to see the clinical relevance of that research for this particular individual. We need to blend both the sensory experience with intellectual knowledge. And then finally reframing homework into something more meaningful.

Susi 00:15:04 I don't know about you but, I mean, I was a decent student, but homework really wasn't where I thrived. Like, sure, I did it. But to do homework? I mean, how many people love doing homework? So instead I prefer calling it programs. So instead of assigning "exercises" and to complete them, I like to have a program to make it more purposeful, engaging, and meaningful. And when I write out their program, I often will put the purpose of it in terms of the actual outcome that they're seeking. And where I started doing this is when I first learned yoga therapy when I was in India. The programs that the key or chief yoga therapist would provide often wrote out, like, the condition the person had. And I started doing that when I got back home, and I found myself then thinking, who wants to read about their condition every single time they come into class? Like then that's just reinforcing the condition that they have. Like,

what do I really want to reinforce here? So then I started to put the purpose in terms of the outcome that they wanted: less pain, better movement, running 10-K, sleeping better.

Susi 00:16:14 That was the purpose. So then when they pulled out their program to follow, now that's what they saw every single time. That makes the process meaningful. Overall, each of these strategies really is about not trying to "correct" people, but rather helping to explore and be curious about their movement in a way that ultimately has them feeling better and leads to real change. Integrating that subjective and objective reality. So then, moving forward, what does this mean for you? For you as the yoga teacher or for you as the practitioner? How can you start applying this today? Well, whether you're a professional or whether you are a student or a client, first notice your own tendency to judge movement, yours or another's, as "right" or "wrong" because again, someone is choosing what they're doing subconsciously or consciously because that's their best choice. Why would that be right or wrong? It's the best that they've got. So build upon what's right about that choice because goodness me, at least they're making the choice. Second, start tuning into where you feel the restriction in your body without judgement, along with where you're already moving well.

Susi 00:17:37 So both where you feel restriction and also where you're moving well, so you can notice what's working and you can notice what's not working. And you get to hold both of those with love because goodness me, you're moving. And from there we can hold that space with compassion and clarity. Then we can take that next step forward. with a lot of love and patience and clarity. And third, experiment with small, subtle stimuli. And pay attention to the results. So by stimuli I mean choosing to reduce compensation patterns or choosing to add movement patterns in small doses. So nothing really super big or complex to begin with. Think simple before complex because as you focus in on connection rather than correction, the more the body will respond in a way that is more natural, sustainable and powerful. I hope today's conversation has given you a fresh perspective on movement. Remembering that movement isn't about perfection, it's about connection. And the more you build awareness, the better you'll feel, the stronger you'll become.

Susi 00:18:54 And of course, all with reduced and perhaps even eliminated pain. Because truly, this podcast is all about From Pain to Possibility. Pain can reduce. It can be eliminated and it can be done in a very simple way. If you want to dig into this further, I really encourage you to come and join me at the Therapeutic Yoga Intensive that we're running this April. April 26th to May 1st. And if you want to dig in even deeper and become super skilled at this with your own clientele, then join me for the Yoga Therapy Certification program. I would love to share with you more about what I know, what my clients and my students, my grads are doing, and how they are getting the same results as I am and making a living at it too. You can learn all about this over at functionalsynergy.com/certification. We'll see you next time.