

Ep. #313 - Yoga and Osteoporosis: Rewiring the Body's GPS



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With your host:
Susi Hatelly

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

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 00:00:23 Welcome and welcome back. I'm so glad that you're here today, because today I am diving into a topic that affects so many of our students and our clients: Osteoporosis. We're going to look at it through a slightly different lens. Not just the bones, not just the risk of fractures; but through the lens of movement, confidence and reconnection. Because a diagnosis like osteoporosis can do something beyond the physical, it can shake someone's relationship with their body truly to the core. It can make people second guess every movement or worse, disconnect entirely. And that's where yoga can really play a vital role. Instead of focusing on "don't fall," what if we helped our students reconnect with their bodies, rebuild trust, and rewire what I like to call the body's internal GPS: the sensory motor loop.

Susi 00:01:17 That's what today's episode is all about. Let's begin with this internal GPS. What do I mean by that? The sensory motor loop is the communication highway between the brain and the body. It's how the brain knows where the foot is, how the hip is moving, if the hand is gripping. Sensory input comes in, the brain processes it and motor output goes out. Ideally, this loop is smooth, clear and fast. But with age, injury, or chronic stress, especially fear-based movement or compensation patterns, that loop can get a little fuzzy. Think of it like static in a phone call: the message still gets through but it might be delayed, distorted, or unclear. And that's where poor balance, clumsiness, or hesitation often arise. So many students with osteoporosis aren't just physically fragile; they're living in a system with interrupted communication. Rebuilding the sensory motor loop is foundational for improving their movement quality and overall confidence. This is where we can see yoga truly as a recalibrator. Here's where yoga really shines:

Susi 00:02:30 Unlike traditional exercise, yoga emphasizes slower, more intentional movement. And that slowness? It creates space for communication. Yoga gives time for the body to listen, time to respond. Incremental movement is where the magic lives. We're not leaping into lunges or holding plank for two minutes. We're helping people find their footing, literally and figuratively. Quality over quantity; awareness over intensity. That's how we begin to recalibrate the internal GPS. How about restoring grounding and stability? Well, to have that happen, especially with our clients with osteoporosis. I like to begin with the feet. One of the simplest ways to start rebuilding stability, especially for folks with osteoporosis, is by reconnecting to the ground. For so many of our students, this connection is weak or barely perceptible. So that's why we start here. Really simple cueing. Feel the three points of contact on the bottom of the foot. Big toe mound, little toe mound, heel. Can you feel all three? Maybe, maybe not. What do you feel? How do you feel them? It's not about getting to all three, it's just what's there now.

Susi 00:03:53 Because as we move through a practice, chances are pretty good that we're going to help you gain that much more steadiness, that much more stability, and perhaps some more awareness of those three points. But for now, whatever you can feel, you now breathe

while also feeling those three points. Something that basic begins to create change. The nervous system takes note: "Oh, we're stable here." My point is that balance doesn't begin in a true pose. It begins the moment we reestablish a relationship with the floor, we now can begin to rewire with breath and interoception. Interoception is the ability to feel what's going on inside. It's how we know we're hungry, thirsty or tired. But it also can let us in on these signals, those tension-filled signals: braced, grippy, holding the breath. And with osteoporosis, fear often creates these subtle, unconscious bracing patterns. The bracing patterns that affect breath perhaps stiffen the diaphragm, even narrowing the ribs. So here is a simple practice that might be guided.

Susi 00:05:21 Place your hands on the side of the ribs. And just notice where the breath is. Let the hands slide to the front of the ribs. And notice where the breath is. Maybe slide one hand down to the belly. Another hand to just below the collarbones. And notice where the breath is. I'm not suggesting to breathe anywhere. Just notice. Where is the breath? Now, they might not feel anything at first. And that's okay. The key is we're drawing focus and attention to certain parts of the body. And as they do, as they are able to tune into these, their focus to other parts of the body, like their feet that we mentioned earlier, starts to improve. And this repetition and the safety can help them tune in better and better each time. This connection, sensorily and through breath, becomes an ultimate bridge from unconscious holding to conscious feeling. This then leads us into proprioception, which is distinct from interoception as it's your ability to sense your body in space. Is. It's how you can touch your nose with your eyes closed.

Susi 00:07:08 It's also how you know if your heel is on the floor or if it's hovering. With aging or trauma, with a diagnosis like osteoporosis, proprioception and connection to one's body can decline. And the beauty is that it's absolutely trainable. So try this. Consider having a student who's in standing, feeling their feet on the ground and then tuning into their breath. So I'm combining what I've just said above in the first two points. So they can feel the three points on their feet and they can feel their breath. And then ask your student to shift their weight side to side while standing. Keeping it slow, eyes open. And what are they sensing as they shift their weight left and right? We're not chasing perfect balance. We're training awareness. As they are moving left and right, what shifts in terms of their breathing? And are they able to move in ranges where they're not gripping? Because keep in mind that those gripping sensations as they arise are a protective mechanism. So we want to be able to move in ranges where their system feels safe, because we want to keep building and building that trust.

Susi 00:08:37 And if they can feel and be proprioceptively aware in spaces of trust, then oftentimes their range of motion grows, their confidence grows, the trust in their feet grows. Their nervous system down-regulates. The high-alert feeling starts to settle. And only at that point, when there's that confidence, then maybe there's a little bit of eye closing. But only if safety is present. Over time, this process increases confidence because of that internal trust that is developing, that internal sense of awareness, their interoception, their proprioception, the way that their body is processing sensory input. So instead of fearing the next step, their body and their mind, their inner intelligence knows exactly where it is. And the GPS is working again, from safety now to possibility. Okay, so now they've connected with their feet. They've

connected with their breath. They've begun to move one foot to the other foot. They are becoming more proprioceptively aware. Let's widen the lens. So if safety is a starting point that's arising out of connection, clarity and trust, then possibility is the next step.

Susi 00:10:21 Safety starts. Possibility then comes. When we help students rebuild their sensory motor loop, we are giving them the tools to feel, breathe, to move again. And as they do, a shift happens. One of my students once said to me, I stopped looking at the ground when I was walking. I started to look up again. And do you know what else happened? My neck started to feel more easeful. That's what's possible. Not just safer movement, but freer movement. Joyful movement. A return to agency. Let's consider a few myths that are often shared around working with people with osteoporosis. Number one: students with osteoporosis should not move their spine. Let's reframe that. Let's differentiate between unsafe spinal movement and smart spinal movement. Spinal movement is a part of life. Think about parallel parking, a shoulder check, pushing a grocery cart and grabbing a can of food or some produce off of a shelf. Spinal movement is life, and we can teach that safely, with intelligence, with clarity, with interoceptive and proprioceptive awareness.

Susi 00:12:04 That is where confidence shines, and that is where clarity resides. Myth number two: someone with osteoporosis just needs to build strength. Reframe: strength is a part of the equation, yes. But to build strength on top of compensation patterns is not necessarily the right first step. Awareness and connection are foundation. And when we build strength there, it becomes more sustainable and we see some really cool results from a numbers perspective and a bone health perspective. When we build strength on top of disconnection, often what is created is more gripping, more bracing, more fear. Myth number three: yoga is too risky for this population. Reframe: risk exists everywhere. And with yoga, when it's taught with intention, it can restore the very systems that reduce that risk. This is what building the internal GPS system is all about. And with a more improved GPS system, we improve balance, coordination and confidence. So let's bring this all together. Osteoporosis doesn't have to mean disconnection or fear. By initially working with this sensory motor loop of reconnecting to the feet, of tuning in interoceptively and proprioceptively, we can guide our students back into relationship with their bodies, and we can help them trust themselves again.

Susi 00:13:54 And if you want to go deeper, then I invite you into our on-demand program, the Yoga and Osteoporosis course that includes the most up to date science, as well as teachers who work with specifically people with osteoporosis. And every single one of these teachers has had clients who have improved their bone density scores and these folks have not been taking medication. Now, I want to emphasize something: we're not advocating "you always have to increase bone density scores." It's just really cool that that is what happens. People are getting stronger, they're feeling more confident, they're having more balance. They are feeling "in" their bodies again. And isn't it darn cool that their numbers are improving? And we've also added a standalone Yoga and Osteoporosis guidebook. And that guidebook will be available in May. So if you would like to have access to that guidebook then here is the link: functionalsynergy.com/guide. If you would like to get the guide for free, you get it along with the Yoga and Osteoporosis program.

Susi 00:15:08 And you can find that program over at functionalsynergy.com/bonehealth. So you can grab the course and get the guidebook for free or you can get the standalone guidebook itself which will be available in May. You can get onto the list that we can send it out to you over at functionalsynergy.com/guide. Here is to helping people gain better health through better movement, better connection, more confidence and feeling free in their bodies. Until next time, thanks for listening to From Pain to Possibility. Here's to staying grounded, staying curious and moving with care. See you next time.