

## Ep. #342 - The Stance Phase - Where Gravity, Ground, and You Meet



Full Episode Transcript

With your host:

Susi Hatelly

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

Introduction (00:00.00)

You are listening to From Pain To Possibility with Susi Hatelly. You'll 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 Hatelly.

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Susi (00:24.71)

Welcome and welcome back. I'm so glad that you're here. Today, we are in episode three of my gait series, and this really is a launching point for the I Love Gait program, a program that's designed for yoga teachers and other health professionals who love yoga and wanna integrate a mindful yoga based, but also very much biomechanical, kinesiological, and anatomy-based program on improving gait.

So often in the gait world, there's a lot of conversation on which muscles are not firing, which muscles are firing, and how do we get things that seem to be broken and fixed. And I like to come at the gait conversation, much like many conversations within the yoga therapy lens, from this perspective, there's actually nothing wrong here, like our bodies are actually responding perfectly to the stimulus at hand.

And we can still improve. And when we have this perspective that there's actually nothing broken, unless there truly is something broken, then we're coming into it from much more of a parasympathetic space of rest and digest. Not in this stressful, gotta fix it state. When we come at scenarios that need to be resolved, we tend to call them problems, right? But when we come at them from a place that there's something wrong, there's a totally different feel in our system, versus it not being that at all.

And it's something that I'm becoming much, much more passionate about because I see it play out in so many arenas of my life and the people who come in, I'm able to help them really see that whatever symptoms that they have are indicators, their beacons, their messengers, that are letting them know that something is up that needs their attention.

Susi (02:15.26)

And it's not something to dismiss, but it's something to welcome. So. This really is the essence of a gait pattern because gait, much like posture, there's nothing wrong with it. It's the patterning that we have innately, creatively chosen to get us from in the gateway, from point A to point B. And sure, it might be a little bit funky, but it's such a creative way to get us from point A to point B.

So whether you're vaulting or hiking or your quad is avoiding, or your glutes have amnesia or whatever, it's like, that is what your system has chosen as your best option. I'm like, woo-hoo.

Like, can we celebrate that? And if we can just meet that and go, okay, *how can I capture the creativity in this and use that to then make improvements?*

And that's what *I Love Gait* program really is about, and of course my background in biomechanics, kinesiology, anatomy is woven all the way through it, but it comes from this place that everything is quite perfect. And I know that sounds really corny and all the things, but really and truly, when we can come to that place as a practitioner with our clientele and we can model that, holy smokes! What happens on the other side for that client?

They begin to see that for themselves and their systems settle. There's this less of an enduring of *"I will relax when things are fixed"*. It's like, ah, relaxation is here and present. So that's my long rumbling introduction to this third episode of my gait miniseries. And before I get into this episode and talk a bit more about it, I do wanna make mention that I've spoken about walking and gait in other previous episodes throughout this podcast.

Susi (03:58.55)

You might wanna check out. Episode 207 where I look at hip and knee mechanics post surgery and how to help get into smoother walking, and there's really the four keys for retraining. I also get into some more hip and knee related to some core stability in 208. I also speak about it in episode 97. So you can find more and more inside of this podcast series if you wanna dig into this more. Then if you wanna work with me for a period of time, then really do. Check out *I Love Gait*: [functionalsynergy.com/gait](http://functionalsynergy.com/gait). G-A-I-T. I would love, love, love to work with you for that period of time and really help you address what I think are so fundamental.

I'm not a physical therapist. I'm not a physician. I am a registered kinesiologist, a biomechanic specialist and a yoga therapist, and I've got amazing results at helping people reduce and eliminate limping and move and smooth out their gait patterns. And I would love to show you what I know.

Alright, so if you've been following over the past couple of weeks, you'll know that this has been an exploratory gait series and it's really about how we move forward, how propulsion happens, and how that movement reveals so much about what's going on through the hips, the knees, and really, the rest of the body.

In the first episode, we zoomed out and looked at how gait patterns can load or unload knees, and how fatigue, breath, and pelvic stability can all shape that pattern. And then last week, I shared a story about my son and the quiet power of re-patterning, propulsion, not pushing it for more output, but really refining the clarity of input.

Susi (05:43.22)

And today, we're dropping into the stance phase, this incredible part of the gait pattern where our bodies meet gravity and the ground, and it's where stability, adaptability, and efficiency really begin. When you start to sense this phase clearly, when we can teach this to our clientele, you and they will understand why the best movers aren't fighting gravity.

Rather, if I can put it very lyrically, they're dancing with it. So let's begin to look at first of all, **gait as a relationship**. Because every step you take is a relationship between your body, gravity, and the ground. These three are in constant conversation. Gravity, in a sense, offers a steady downward pull. The ground responds with ground reaction, force with an upward push, and the body really gets to receive, modulate, and redirect that exchange. If there's a resistance, then movement feels rigid and hard, and that resistance can come in either direction. And if we collapse, then we obviously lose spring instability.

Susi (06:52.56)

And between these extremes, lies a sweet spot. And in the stance phase, this yielding and rebounding phase can organize so much. When you land and maybe the land as you strike your foot, it could be heel, it could be midfoot, it could be forefoot, gravity draws your body mass forward and down. And the foot and the ankle yield hopefully just enough to control that descent.

And at the same time, the ground pushes back, sending energy upward through the leg and through the body. And that response travels through the knee, the hip, into the spine, the torso, straight up through to the head, and muscles and fascia receive and channel that load absorbing what is needed for support and storing elastic energy that will later become part of propulsion.

And when this exchange is smooth, walking looks effortless. And it actually *feels* effortless too. It's not because gravity has disappeared, but rather **the body, ground, and gravity have a harmony**. So let's pull the lens in a little bit and talk about the biomechanics of stance briefly.

Susi (08:07.62)

Roughly 60% of your gait cycle is spent in stance, right? One leg standing on the ground, and that is in reference to that swing leg, right? So we've got the stance leg, which has that standing leg, and then we have that swing leg. So 60% of the gait cycle is when we're on that standing leg, and this is the phase I like to think about as receiving and redirecting, right?

The heel touches down, the weight travels through the midfoot, eventually the forefoot, as that center of mass moves forward. And through that sequence, subtle rotations ripple up through the pelvis and the ribs, counter rotations help keep us balanced over the base of support. None of it's static, right?

It's dynamic stillness, yielding, stabilizing, and preparing. Now what I find fascinating, and this really comes from a yoga lens, is this yielding phase also mirrors how we meet support in life. Can we allow the ground to catch us without bracing? Can we feel supported enough to then move forward? When stance is efficient, the ground push flows cleanly through the chain.

It gets absorbed, transferred, and released into forward motion. And when it's not, energy can get stuck or dissipate. And we might see it in many different ways. You know, whether it's an

over pronation or a supination, or a locked knee, or a hip hike, and many other compensations that I'm not mentioning.

Susi (09:30.56)

But underneath those mechanics is usually a conversation problem, right? A relational problem somewhere in the system that isn't quite connecting. Maybe we can't listen to it or it's not listening, right? We can come at it from a few different metaphors in a sense. And this is really where, where queuing and instruction and feeling becomes an art.

And I find that as a teacher, my role here becomes really important because it's so easy when it comes to something like gait, with all the myriad components that make up gait, it's very easy to get overly fixated on a part of it, or try to get fixated on all of it. So then what that can lead to is a lot of bracing or holding.

Susi (10:14.43)

So what I like to do is, one of the reasons I spend a lot of time at the beginning with clientele is we work on granular movement. Like really, first of all, tune in and perceptibly and proprioceptively to how specific joints are moving. So then we grow awareness that we weren't aware of and we can integrate that awareness as someone is moving.

And some really common ones to begin with that I like to play with when someone's now, like they've done a little bit of the movement with me and we're now actually back out walking, is really thinking about how that leg bone moves in the hip socket. I think the hip joint is one of a few joints in the way that the leg bone moves in the hip socket that people are so disconnected from.

I know in the yoga practice, we cue the hip joints so little and yet so much movement happens there. So much of our QE in standing, for example, is foot movement or there's something about the knee. But very rarely is there any discussion about, *"okay, we're gonna be moving the leg bone in the hip socket"*.

And so because of that, people don't tend to focus there. And it's really the same in a lot of different arenas of fitness and of movement. We talk about muscle engagement, but not specifically movement connection. So that's where I like to allow for people's focus to come. So when they're moving, can you actually feel the swing of your leg and the hip socket? And maybe even, can you feel the pelvis as a platform on which that leg bone swings?

And just notice that as you begin to move and continue to move. And what starts to happen as you land that foot on the ground? How does that leg bone move in the pelvis? The pelvis moves on the leg? And it doesn't have to be every single step, but just gently connecting as one moves. Then it might be adding the foot position and just noticing what's happening with the foot.

Susi (12:21.53)

There's so many different ideas about the way the foot ought to move through the gait cycle, and as you've heard me in previous episode, I try not to get into the weeds around what that debate is, but rather, I want someone to focus on what is happening with their foot and what do they feel. And if I can simply bring some interoceptive and proprioceptive awareness to what their foot is specifically doing, and then connect that to what's happening in their leg bone and the pelvis, aha.

Now we've got some cool evidence that is really specific to them. Can think about it like  $n = 1$ , right? There's one case study of that person we can tune into, how that movement pattern is actually working for them as opposed to taking some scientific understanding about the way the biomechanics work and taking a theory about the way one should step or stride or propulsion forward, before we even understand what's going on with the person themselves. Because where that can lead to is mixing up and not being clear, and then that can lead to more compensations.

Susi (13:35.19)

So some examples that you can play with is when you're out for your walk – first of all, just start with like, notice your pelvis in space. Notice it as a platform on which your leg bone swings, and just that. Even when you're out for a run, notice how the leg bone swings in this pelvis that's a platform.

And then as that leg swings, notice what happens with the foot. How that foot lands and does the way the foot land have an impact or a relationship to then what happens through the hip? Because we know that there's quite a correlation between an over pronated foot and what happens or doesn't happen up at the hip, and simply not trying to correct it ahead of time, but simply just notice what is it, what are your mechanics?

And allow yourself to witness what's happening there. Just those three things: pelvis, leg bone motion, foot. Just those three will give you *so much* information. And as you play with it, maybe you add in some breath of like noticing how the breath, the easefulness of the breath maybe impacts or changes or influences.

And from that, you start to gain some data and understanding based of what you already know about your body, right? What you begin to notice too, is the more that you play with this, you start to see that stability and coordination isn't really about muscle effort. **It's about the body's ability to distribute load in intelligently.**

But in order to even recognize if our body is distributing load intelligently, we have to be present to what actually is happening before imposing a theory onto it.

Susi (15:30.33)

So let's play with this as an example and let me walk for a couple of minutes with you. So if you're listening somewhere that you can move, we can try this out.

If you're not able, if you're in the car or you're sitting somewhere else, you are not able to go for a walk and just imagine it and you can test it out later. So begin by standing still.

And feel your feet on the ground. And notice the contact points: center of the heel, ball of the foot, base of the pinky toe. And without adjusting anything, just notice where your weight naturally rests.

And then shift gently back and forth and notice how your body organizes around those shifts. What happens with your knees, your rib cage, your breath, your pelvis? Can you observe yourself without changing anything? Just notice what it is that you do. Notice this amazing creative way that you move and how you connect.

And then begin to walk. And because we started with the foot, just notice the connection with your foot to the ground, and feel your foot move through that cycle of landing, taking more load and then shifting load to the opposite leg.

And do that through a couple of steps.

Susi (17:32.60)

And after a few steps, take your attention further up the chain to your pelvis and notice your pelvis as this platform. Your foot's at the bottom of the chain, and it moves you forward. And what's in between your foot and the pelvis is your leg, and that leg bone is moving in the pelvis. In fact, how the foot is landing on the ground is very much influenced by how the leg bone swings in the pelvis, and in turn, how stable that pelvis is. And how you shift weight from one side to the other with each phase of gait.

So, because this episode is mostly about stance, notice how that stance leg absorbs the ground reaction force; from ground to foot up the leg through to the pelvis. And play with this one side to the other.

Susi (18:42.29)

As you continue to move in this way, connect with your breath now, and simply notice yourself breathing as you move. So it's not necessary that you inhale in one way and then land with your foot in one way. It's more that can you feel the movement of breath as you move.

And then notice. You might notice your stride smoothing out. You might notice your system is sharing the load more evenly. You might notice things in your gait pattern that you didn't know about, like the way you use your toes or a gripping pattern in your hip or something in your lower back. The awareness begins to bubble up and that is information to guide you and to support you in helping to improve your stepping and stance going forward.

Susi (19:48.88)

So why does this matter in this practice? How can it be so beneficial? If you think back to the first episode on the gait and knees, this is exactly why some people experience swelling or fatigue after longer walks. When the body stops receiving the ground clearly. Maybe because of breath holding, fatigue, or guarding, the load shifts and the knees being in the middle, end up doing more than they need to because they are great compensators. And as you restore the clarity of stance, you can restore clarity everywhere and your body begins to trust the ground again. And that trust frees up energy for propulsion, balance and yes, even emotional ease, as I made mention of in the last episode.

The idea here that's important is that **effortless gait isn't all about strength**. Yes, there are muscles that we likely will need to strengthen, but more importantly, **it's about the conversation between our parts**. And when that conversation is alive, you can walk further, stand longer, and move with a way more grace and less strain.

Susi (21:11.67)

So consider that, especially if you're doing exercises right now that are specific to your gait pattern and maybe they aren't giving you the output or the outcome you're wanting. Maybe there's some of this that I'm teaching here that could help. So often I'm working with clientele who have a program given to them by another professional.

And what the difference maker is, is simply awareness of tuning in, of recognizing the power of the gait that they have and where they're compensating and they're able to tune in the movements, the program they've already been given, that's actually an effective program, but it's just been getting some resistance by the way it was being utilized.

But by integrating some of the concepts here that I'm sharing, now, it makes a difference. So thinking about this as a takeaway: as you are teaching or practicing this week, just notice how are your students connecting foot to ground? Is there a collapse or a resisting or yielding? What's happening with that leg swinging through as it then meets the ground and comes into stance and how are they moving through that stance phase? What's happening to the breath rhythm? Play with this idea of receiving before creating motion.

So to bring this all together, gait begins with stance. Stance begins with receiving. And receiving begins with awareness. You don't have to perfect it. Just notice how your body meets the ground today, and walking, and standing, and running. And that noticing alone begins this re-education, this retraining of the system.

It really can be a difference maker.

Susi (23:24.24)

Now, if the essence of this is resonating with you and you wanna dig in deeper into the biomechanical concepts that can really fundamentally change gait, but with this connective piece to the nervous system, intelligence to our creative intelligence, recognizing that there's not

specifically a problem to solve, but some amazing retraining to do by connecting the relationships between mechanics, awareness, and ease.

If that lights you up, then please join me inside of *I Love Gait*. I would love to teach you. You can learn more over at [functionalsynergy.com/gait](http://functionalsynergy.com/gait). It's where we translate concepts like these into real teaching tools that you can use with clients right away. Until next time, keep listening, keep noticing, and keep giving your body the chance to move with clarity and with ease.

Have fun exploring.