

Ep. #359 - Yoga Advil vs Retraining - When Relief Masks What Isn't Changing



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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Welcome and welcome back. I'm really glad that you're here because today I am starting a series that is called Becoming a Movement Detective, and this episode really is kind of the crux of this process because it addresses a confusion that a lot of people face. A lot of people who move, whether they're in pain or they're not in pain, and the people who help them to move better. A lot of folks run into it at some point, and it's this notion of yoga Advil versus real change.

Now, before anyone really tightens up at the title, I wanna just begin by slowing things down because sometimes when people hear me talk about yoga Advil, they assume that I mean that it's bad. People hear me talk all the time about from pain to possibility, and we're wanting to help facilitate this healing process, but I wanna emphasize that this notion of yoga Advil, using a movement to simply get relief, it's not bad.

Relief is not wrong. Not at all. If something hurts, nags, irritates, or just won't leave you alone, of course you're gonna reach for something that helps, whether it's Advil, the actual Advil, or whether it's a movement that provides that relief, like whether you're rolling something out or whether it's a stretch or anything.

It's not avoidance. It's actually a really intelligent use of movement. The point being that the issue here isn't that people want relief. What I'm wanting to dig into is that relief and retraining, while they may often feel the same in the moment, they're not. And if you don't know the difference, both intellectually, prefrontal cortex, and somatically.

It's very easy to believe you're making progress while staying in the exact same pattern. So this episode is not about a sore back, nor is it about a specific exercise, and it isn't about yoga props or stretches or techniques because those are vehicles. This is an episode about learning how to think while you move.

Because movement can do at least two very different things. On one hand, it can quiet symptoms, create comfort, reduce noise, and help you get through the day. It can also reveal patterns, expose protection, show you what's coordinating and what's compensating, and give you real information about what's actually going on.

The problem is that those two uses of movement often get blended together. So someone twists while sitting at their desk or they stretch before bed or does some familiar movement that they've done for years and they think this must be helping. I feel something. I feel better than

doing nothing. While that thought is completely 100% understandable, that feels helpful is not the same thing as changing how my system works, and this episode lives right in that space between this feels like I'm doing something and is this actually changing anything?

Because once you can tell the difference between those two, movement stops being something you do automatically and starts becoming something you use deliberately. And that's what becoming a movement detective really is all about. Not doing more, not doing it harder, and not finding the perfect exercise.

And that's what we're unpacking in this.

I wanna begin with a line that came up in a recent client session, and it had me pause in the best possible way. When I asked what a particular movement was doing for her, the answer was, well, besides making me feel like I'm doing something, I'm not sure. And I love the answer, not because it was polished. It wasn't.

Not because it was confident. It was. But because it was honest. That one sentence captures a lot of what people feel but rarely say out loud. So many people are doing movements, stretching, twisting, strengthening, mobilizing, not because they know it's actually helping, but because it feels like action, and feeling like you're doing something can be incredibly comforting.

Especially when your body has been unpredictable or irritating, or when something keeps flaring and you just want it to stop. Doing something can feel better than doing nothing. It gives a sense of agency, of control, a sense that you know you're at least trying, and there's nothing wrong with that.

And here's where this honesty matters because "it feels like I'm doing something" is not the same thing as "I know what this is doing." And that gap between action and understanding, true understanding, is where a lot of people get stuck. They're not lazy, they're not unmotivated, they're not ignoring their bodies. They're actually paying attention, just not in a way that helps them differentiate relief from change.

So they keep moving, they keep stretching, and they keep repeating the same things. Over time, a quiet question begins to form underneath it all. Why am I still dealing with this? That honesty moment, the "I'm not sure what this is actually doing," that's the doorway, because the moment you can actually acknowledge that, you're no longer just chasing sensation or chasing a fix.

You're starting to look for meaning, and that's where becoming a movement detective, whether as a client or as a professional yoga teacher or yoga therapist, where that actually begins. Not with a better exercise, not with more effort, but with the willingness to pause and say, okay, what is this really giving me?

So what is yoga Advil actually? Let's define this term more clearly. When I say yoga Advil, I'm talking about movement that's used primarily for relief. You do it because it reduces discomfort, calms irritation, gives you a little bit of breathing room, and helps you get through the day. And

that might look like a seated twist at your desk, lying down with your legs up the wall, a familiar stretch you've done for years.

Rolling on a ball or some gentle movement before bed that just gives you that little bit more ease before going to sleep. And I really wanna emphasize that none of it's wrong. In fact, you know, it makes a lot of sense if something hurts or feels tight or irritating. Your system is clearly asking for support, and movement is a very reasonable place to look for that support.

What makes yoga Advil different from medication is that movement gives you feedback. Medication quiets symptoms, but it doesn't tell you much about why those symptoms are there. Movement, though, can, but only if you're listening. And this is where things really can start to blur because yoga Advil feels active. It feels engaged. It feels like you're participating in your own care, which you are.

As a result, it's easy to assume that because something feels good or even just feels better, it must be fixing the problem. But relief is not the same as resolution. Yoga Advil becomes a problem only when it's mistaken for the solution. When the goal becomes "make this sensation go away, please," instead of "what is this sensation showing me?"

If you're using movement for symptom quieting, you may never notice what's actually driving the pattern underneath. You might quiet it temporarily. You might manage it skillfully. You might even get very good at managing it and still not change anything. Yoga Advil is not the enemy. Confusing relief with retraining is, and that confusion is really common.

Especially in bodies that are tired, vigilant, or just wanting a break. So the question isn't "should I stop doing yoga Advil?" The better question is "am I using this consciously or automatically?" Because yoga Advil, when used consciously, can actually become the doorway to real change. Here's a key principle I wanna slow way down with.

Relief creates bandwidth, and bandwidth matters. When something in your body settles even a little bit, you can think more clearly, move with less guarding, breathe more easily, stop racing against discomfort, and that's important. In fact, without some degree of relief, it can be very hard to learn anything at all when a system is irritated or overwhelmed.

It's just trying to survive the moment. So relief can be incredibly supportive, but here's the distinction that's easy to miss. Bandwidth is not retraining. Relief does not automatically change coordination, load transfer, protective strategies, or how your system organizes itself under stress. It simply buys you space.

If you don't know what to do with that space, you'll often default back to the same strategies that created the issue in the first place. And this is where people get stuck in cycles. They feel better temporarily, they move a little bit more easily, and they assume that something has changed, and then the symptoms come back.

Not because they did anything wrong, not because they didn't try hard enough, but because nothing actually shifted for real. Sure, the system quieted down, but then it returned to business

as usual, and that's why relief can be both helpful and misleading at the same time. Helpful because it does reduce the noise temporarily and misleading because it can mask what hasn't changed.

So when relief happens, the real question isn't "can I stop now?" It's "what does this relief make possible?" What wasn't possible before? Does it allow you to notice a pattern you couldn't feel earlier? Does it allow a segment to move that was previously guarded? Does it give you enough safety to explore something new?

If relief creates space and you don't use that space differently, you'll keep repeating the same loop. So in a sense, you can look at it as relief buys you some time and retraining is what changes the pattern. And learning to tell the difference between those two is one of the core skills of becoming a movement detective. This is where becoming a movement detective really starts to take shape because instead of asking "what exercise should I do," you start asking:

How do I know if what I'm doing is actually helping?

And there's a very simple filter I come back to again and again. It's not complicated, and it's incredibly clarifying.

At its core, there are three layers. There are other components to this. For this episode, we'll talk simply about this core three-layered question process. Layer one: what do I feel while I'm doing it, right? This interoceptive sensation matters. We don't want pain, we don't want strain, and we don't want effort that's actually bracing in disguise.

If something feels awful while you're doing it, that's information. If it feels forced, aggressive, or like you're muscling through, well, that's information too. Feeling okay during movement is important as well. But here's the catch: feeling okay is an entry point, but not the end point. A lot of people will stop here. If it doesn't hurt, they assume it's good. If it feels intense, they assume it's effective. If it creates sensation, they assume it's doing something meaningful. But sensation alone doesn't tell you what is changing.

With that thought, let's come to the second layer. What do I feel after I'm done? Not just immediately, but a few minutes later. When you stand up, when you walk, when you reach for something, when you sit back down at your desk, did anything actually shift? Did something move more freely? Does something feel quieter?

Do you feel taller, easeful? Did your breath change, or did everything go right back to where it was? This is a layer where the movement gives you feedback because some movements can feel great during and do absolutely nothing. For a result after. Doesn't make them wrong, but it does tell you which role they're playing.

So with that thought, let's move into the third layer. Am I making progress over time? This is the layer that separates managing symptoms from changing patterns. Are you recovering more quickly, flaring less often, able to do more with less effort, noticing improvements that last beyond the session, or are you repeating the same cycle over and over and over?

Feel better, feel worse, do the same thing, feel better again, feel worse again, do the same thing, and onward you go. If you only ever ask the first question, "how does this feel?" then you're practicing sensation management. When you ask all three, you're beginning to move into movement intelligence, and that's what this three-layered filter provides you.

It doesn't tell you what to do. It teaches you how to think about what you're doing, and that's what a movement detective needs.

Let's take this into the next step, which is why doing the exercise is not the same as learning. Think about this pattern. I mean, I see it all the time, and so do many health professionals. Someone has given exercises. They do the exercises. They check the box. They're consistent, and yet nothing really changes.

Sure, the symptoms might quiet for a bit. They might feel productive, but a few weeks or months later, they're asking the same question: why am I still dealing with this? And the answer usually isn't that they didn't try hard enough. It's that repetition without interpretation doesn't create adaptation.

When movement is treated like a prescription, do this 10 times and you're done, the body isn't really learning how to coordinate in a new way. It's just asking to comply. But bodies don't change because they comply. They change because they learn. And learning requires attention. A movement detective doesn't just do a movement and move on.

They pause. They notice. They ask, what unlocked? What stayed guarded? What felt easier? What felt forced? Did it change my walking, my breathing, or nothing at all? And that last question matters more than many people think because movements that change nothing are still teaching you something. They're just teaching you what doesn't influence the pattern.

This is why doing the exercise can feel busy without being effective. You can be very diligent and still not be directing your effort toward change. Learning happens when you start treating movement as a conversation instead of a task. When you stop asking "did I do it right?" and start asking "what did this reveal?"

That shift from compliance to curiosity is subtle, and it's one of the most powerful shifts that you can make.

Here's something that often surprises people. You don't need big movement to create meaningful change. In fact, a lot of the time, big movement is exactly what a system cannot tolerate, especially if it's been protecting itself for a long time. What's often holding a pattern in place isn't stiffness, it's protection.

Embracing holding, not trusting a particular segment to do its job. When that's the case, adding more force or range doesn't help. It just reinforces the strategy that's already there. This is why the smallest of inputs can sometimes create the biggest shifts. A subtle change in support, a quieter side bend, a small drop or lift of the pelvis.

These aren't impressive movements, and they don't look like much from the outside, but internally they can change everything because they alter the strategy. And strategy is what the nervous system really cares about. When a system realizes, "oh, hey, I don't need to guard here," or "hey, that part can actually move," or "huh, I'm safe enough to let this go,"

Coordination starts to reorganize on its own. That's not exercise. That's movement literacy. And that's why chasing bigger, deeper, and stronger movements can sometimes move you further away from change and not closer. A movement detective isn't looking for the biggest input. They're looking for the right-sized one, the one that shifts how a system coordinates.

Rather than asking it to work harder inside the same pattern. So here's the reframe I wanna offer. Yoga Advil is not something to eliminate. It's something to use consciously. When you stop expecting it to fix you, it can actually become incredibly useful. You can use yoga Advil to reduce noise, calm irritation, create a bit of space, interrupt a flare, and most importantly, you can use it to gather information.

Once the volume turns down even slightly, you can start to notice things you couldn't feel before. What moves more easily, what still feels guarded? What changes when you stand up, when you walk, and what changes nothing at all? This is where yoga Advil stops being a dead end and starts becoming a doorway.

The mistake is thinking, "because this feels good, it must be fixing me." And the wiser question is, "what does this relief make possible that wasn't possible before?" Does it allow you to explore a movement that you couldn't before? Does it give you enough safety to notice coordination instead of just sensation?

Does it show you where support or scaffolding is still missing? Used this way, yoga Advil doesn't compete with real change. It supports it. Relief quiets the system. Curiosity guides the next step. And that combination, relief plus inquiry, is what allows movement to actually do its deeper work. So here's where I want this to land.

Becoming a movement detective isn't about doing more. Not at all. It's not about finding the perfect exercise or about working harder, and it's definitely not about chasing sensation. It is about learning how to see more clearly. It's about listening more honestly to what your body is actually telling you, not just while you're moving, but after and over time.

Relief can be incredibly supportive. It can quiet things down. It can create breathing room. It can get you through a hard day, but relief alone does not change coordination. Real change happens when you can take the space that relief creates and use it intentionally, when you start valuing coordination over sensation.

Feedback over rules. Curiosity over compliance. That's when movement stops being something you do automatically and starts becoming something you understand. And once movement becomes something you understand, you no longer are just managing symptoms, you're participating in change, and that is the work of a movement detective.

In subsequent episodes, we're gonna continue to build this skill, one distinction, one question, and one insight at a time. We'll see you next time.

Hey, if this is interesting to you and you wanna dig into this further, you're a yoga teacher or health professional who loves yoga, and you wanna get really skilled at becoming a movement detective, then check out the Therapeutic Yoga Intensive happening this April, synchronously from April 18th to the 25th and asynchronously beginning in March.

I would love to have you join me. And for you to become an amazing movement detective, check out **functionalsynergy.com/intensive**.