

Ep #66: Better Balance



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With Your Host

Susi Hatelty

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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 to *From Pain to Possibility*. With this episode I want to dig into better balance, particularly for when we get into our 60s, 70s, and 80s. Whenever I get into speaking about this and speaking about my older clientele, I often like to begin speaking about my dad and what my dad taught me.

My dad lived until 88 years of age and he passed away in January of 2020. Now, what was remarkable about my dad is that he just innately knew what he wanted. I sometimes chuckle when I say he was a dude in his 80s. And so there was a lot of unawareness that he had, which was typical for people within that generation.

But there was also something that he just innately knew. Like he knew that he wanted to stay as mobile and as strong as he could. He wanted to be independent. He wanted to stay in the apartment that he began to rent after selling the family home when he was 80, I think, is when he moved. But the point being is that he got into yoga at 79.

And it was myself and my husband Stu that brought him to his first yoga class. But he had such great benefit from the experience and how his legs felt so much younger, he actually told me in an email his legs felt 25 years younger, that he continued to go to yoga class on his own week after week after week.

Simply doing the restorative classes that were offered there. But he became a bit of a fixture at that studio. To the point that when he passed away, we actually heard from a number of people from the studio and the instructors that taught him.

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But the point being is that it's amazing how much can change and how much one can maintain as one moves up into those decades of their life. And I find it really quite striking, because even when I first began teaching, and I was in my late 20s when I formally started teaching yoga, most of my clients were older than me. Most of them were in their 50s, and their 60s, and their 70s, even back then.

And what really struck me is that through my work as a kinesiologist at university, I had learned that the older we got, the more decrepit we become, and that it takes a lot longer to get better when we're older. And yet what I saw over and over and over again back, oh gosh, that's almost 25 years ago or so, I didn't see that happening.

It was quite striking because what I actually saw is the older that my client was, the faster they got better. And it was one of those gobsmacking moments where I'm thinking, "What's going on here? The evidence in my practice is not meeting or matching what it was that I learned at school."

Then what I began to understand is a couple of things. First of all, yes, there are things that are slower, obviously, as we get older, we know that to be true. But there are these other components around the desire for quality of life. The recognition that people are in the second half of their life and they want to live it well. There is a motivation towards independence. There's less of a need to go fast. There's just a different mindset. There's a different interest.

Even for myself, who I am now 50, which still stuns me a little bit, is I just recognize that when I notice something, when I noticed a little nudge or a niggle inside of me, I'm more apt to address it faster now at 50 than I was when I was 30 or 35.

So there's just something that is there that when we give ourselves the stimulus that we need, which is really my mantra no matter what age you are. But when you meet yourself where you're at and you give the stimulus

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that you need, it's pretty remarkable what can happen functionally with our system. So things can change.

And I think the last piece that's really important about what I learned about my schooling, is that a lot of the research back then, we didn't do a lot of it on older people. But the research that was done was done where most older people hung out, which were back then we called them long term care facilities. And most people in long term care facilities, they weren't that able bodied.

We saw them in their state, that's what was being measured. And when we gave them some basic activity, we actually saw a great improvement. But now what's becoming very interesting is there's so much more research being done on what we consider to be the older adult. To the point where it's very clear that age does not matter.

To the point now that the older adult programming that I'm now offering, I've changed the name to Your Age Does Not Matter. Because what I'm seeing over and over again with my clientele is that there is significant shifts that can make. Tissue can change, no matter your age.

And I sort of now want to get on top of the mountaintop and scream that out loud to people. Or I could just speak it softly, I realize. But the point is, is that it's just interesting what the reality is.

Now, I think part of that, of what starts to happen is I think this is starting to shift a little bit within the way that we think. But we often think that when there's an owie or a pain or a strain, that there's something wrong in our tissue. And it's been well shown that sometimes that's not the case. That there might be an owie or a strain, and how we interpret that owie or strain is in our brain.

And how our brain interprets it, meaning how we think about it, what our opinions are about it, and if we feel threatened by it, then how we're going to experience it is a little bit more like, "Oh my god, there's a problem here."

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And if we're not so threatened by it then we're going to experience it like, "Oh well, not a big deal." And how we experience it changes.

Now, the opinion that we have about it isn't right or wrong. The key of this to note is that how we're experiencing it with our opinion is more about what elevates or reduces the experience that we have, not that there's tissue damage. But what I want to emphasize there that's also important is it doesn't mean there's something not wrong.

Not that wrong is bad either, but that if there is an owie or a strain, that there is a message being delivered to say, "Hey, pay attention." It could be a yellow light, it could be an orange light. We don't need to wait for tissue to be damaged to then start doing something.

I realize, and this might sound bad, but I realize that that's generally what happens in the medical model. That what physicians are really, really awesome at is when things get to a screaming level and their scans can pick something up. We don't need to wait till that point. We can actually trust our own inner wisdom, what I call our own inner authority, and then address what needs to be addressed.

And I think that is one thing my dad really showed me, is that even though I wouldn't have called him the most aware bear in the group, he was aware enough based off of what he wanted in his life. And that if he felt better with his legs, he was going to darn well do the things that made him feel better in his legs.

And so that was what became very interesting watching him and watching him navigate the 70s and the 80s. Now, one thing that he did say to me when he turned 80 was he said, "You know, Susi, you know what's different between 70 and 80? You've got to work so much harder at 80 because life just is catching up to you."

I'm not sure he used the word entropy, but basically, he said you've really got to stay on it every day or life just starts to nip at your heels a bit. Where

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at 70 he could easily keep up, he could match the pace of life, where at 80 it was a bit more difficult. He really had to stick with it. So it becomes really curious.

And so when I think about my clientele and most of the people who come to do work with me, most of them are at that place and they want to maintain. Not even maintain, they want to continue working on themselves.

They've been, for the most part, people who've been interested in yoga for a period of time. They've been active. They may have had some tissue damage over the course of their life and they've worked with it, and mitigated it, managed it. Some of them have compensated really, really well. Others of them, their compensations have caught up to them.

I've worked with people who have hip issues and have needed to have hip replacements and knee replacements, both partial and full. I've had people who have plantar fasciitis and back pain and disc protrusions and all sorts of stuff. And the one thing that's consistent amongst all of them is when they started to reduce their compensations, they started to feel better, move better.

And I've got one person right now who is working at becoming a competitive pickleball player. Another one who's got these big ideas for herself around what she's going to hike. And another one who is working on improving her cycling. And at each time there have been moments with each of them who are like, "Oh boy, you know, I am this age."

And then it's noticing they're thinking about their age. And then I'm watching them and I'm working with their body. And then something opens up and they feel bad and they're like, "Hey, you know what? This is the actually pretty good."

So it's not that they have clear thinking all of the time around, "I can do this, I can do this." Like all of us at any age there can be doubt, there can be

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concern. But when they start to move in a really specific way and they start to tune in with awareness and clarity, there's a lot that's possible.

And this pertains also to balance. And a lot of time when we think about balance, we think about standing on one leg. That is what balance is for a lot of trainers and what I see of what's available for people over 60 is working on balance, get into tree pose, get into warrior three. There's a lot of focus on that.

And while that's very important for balance, being on one foot, for sure, that's not really where I start. And when I run my Better Balance program, people are often surprised when I don't begin there, to the point of like, "Why are you starting so slowly?" Because there's a really important fundamental key that's necessary to improve balance. And that is you need to have great biomechanics.

You need to have the component pieces that are going to enable you to even stand on one leg. And those component pieces have to do with what your stability is like. What your mobility is like. Can you even feel the bottom of your foot? What's that plantar fasciitis like on the bottom of your foot? That's going to impact your ability to bear load through that whole leg.

So there's those pieces that become really important in terms of focusing your awareness on what's going on mechanically in your body. It's so, so, so important. And what's great is it pertains to any type of work that you've had done around hip replacements or knee replacements, any sort of back pain or piriformis syndrome, any foot stuff, because foot stuff can just start to escalate in a big way as we get older.

So when you can really understand how your body parts are interrelating, then you start to kind of tune more into those owies and those strains where there isn't specific tissue damage. But there are functional issues that when you improve those functional issues like muscle imbalances, or compensation patterns, you just bear load better, your posture improves, how you embody your structure improves, and you stand taller. And you

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stand more perpendicular between heaven and earth. Which is just inherently more efficient and more effortless, and you start to feel better.

And it's funny, when I've had older folks in my certification program it becomes so interesting because we're seeing each other very, very regularly and I'm taking them through exercises. And so I'm monitoring over a period of time, and innately what we find is that in training weeks you'll see faces lose wrinkles because they start to recognize that the wrinkles have in part something to do with the tension that is held in their face, in part.

And it just becomes very, very interesting as someone starts to move better, breathe better, hold less tension, just from a mechanical standpoint how that changes so much in terms of how they feel. And if it's important to them, how they look. And so far, I might get a bit of negative feedback on this, but so far, I've had a lot of people when they see what their face looks like, they're actually quite pleased with it. And if that's a motivating factor, so be it.

There's two other areas that are important to address when it comes to balance beyond just the standing on one foot scenario. It's that we have to appreciate that vision and what goes on in our inner ear, our vestibular system has a huge, huge, huge part to play in our ability to balance.

And so when I'm working with people within the Better Balance program, we're paying attention to what kind of stimuli are coming in through the eyes. And what kind of stimuli are coming in through that inner ear. And how that's being processed through the brain.

Because how that sensory information is coming into the brain and then how it's being, I'll use the word transmuted which might not be the best word but I kind of like that word these days. But it's just how that's turning into a motor output becomes really, really important.

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So as I work with people to really recognize and improve what goes on with their eyes and what goes on with what is being trained in our inner ear, interestingly enough, how that balance shows up becomes way better. Much, much better. And then the confidence shows up too.

And so when we're working on it from these different arenas, now when you're going out for the walk your reaction time starts to get faster. So if you were to sort of slip on ice, or come off the curb in a funky way, or you're walking on trails and you see the roots that are in front of you and you might kind of get scared, you find that that scare, that fear starts to fade away.

And what is replaced is confidence and clarity. Knowing that you've got this. That if you were to sort of lose your base of support or that your head would kind of shift off of that base of support then you can catch yourself. You can grab something to hold on to. You've just got a greater sense of reactivity.

Now there's one other component I want to mention before we finish up the episode, and that is this idea of deliberate rest. Of being able to tune into your nervous system and helping it down regulate. Now, years ago what we called this was the relaxation response. And these days the terminology has been shifted to something more round, deep down regulation. Which is really helping you come into this place of rest.

And when we can come into that place, now we start to pick up our energy reserves. We're less depleted, and when we're in a less depleted state we can respond much faster than when we're in a bit more of a wired state. So rest is a huge component as well to improving one's balance and to staying on top of one's feet.

What's interesting about balance is a lot of my 50 year old clients start to mention to me, "You know what? I think I need to keep improving this." And it's like, "Yeah." I mean, balance can be improved at any age. But like I

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said, as you turn 50 and you start to head towards 60, it becomes something that people pay attention to.

And it's something that can be so easily trained. And in turn, because of the experience that one has as their balance improves, the confidence starts to go way up. And then there's less fear about going skiing, whether it's cross country, or downhill skiing, or walking on ice. The idea of going for a run isn't so obtuse, if I can use that word.

If this inspires you as you're listening to this, I want to offer up to you the next running of our Better Balance program, which is coming up in October. And it's an eight week program where you will learn all the goodies that I share with my folks about improving their balance. And you can actually measure yourself from the beginning to the end.

And you have contact with me throughout that program as well through email as well as through live supportive calls where you can get your questions answered and really dig into that which contributes to the loss of balance and how you can improve it, knowing that it can be improved, really, no matter what.

You just need to pay attention to some key factors around what's going on in your motor control, in your muscle balance, how you're staying on your feet, what's happening through your sight and your vestibular control. And then ultimately too, what's going on through your nervous system and your ability to rest.

It would be such a delight to work with you. And to connect to that program. please email us at health@functionalsynergy.com and just say to Kia or Caitlin, "I am interested in the Better Balance program that begins this October. I would love to teach you, it would be a great honor. You have a great time exploring. Take good care.