

Ep #77: Bloating and Breathing



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Susi Hately

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

Ep #77: Bloating and Breathing

Male Announcer: You're listening to *From Pain to Possibility* with Susi Hatley. 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 Hatley.

Welcome back to the show, I'm so delighted that you are here. We are into December. We are definitely into the season of indulgence, and for some bloating. Yes. And so with this episode I want to talk a little bit about what you can do with your breathing and with a couple of self-massage techniques to help your digestive tract move through some of that overindulgence that you might be consuming and how you can support yourself.

Now, this is not a nutrition episode, this is truly a breathing episode. But what you might find is as you continue to overindulge your brain might start to get foggy. And you'll start to see the patterns of what might be contributing to what it is that you're experiencing. And so then you can make a choice about whether you're going to consume it.

But since I am somebody who makes between 1,000 and 2,000 pieces of chocolate and turtles and truffles every single year for, oh my goodness, for almost 12 years. These are scrumptious treats I give away to all of my friends, and family, and vendors, and clients, I'm not going to say don't indulge or overindulge. What I am offering up is that if you overdo it, then what can you do to support yourself to support that digestive system moving things through and helping you feel better?

As we know breathe work is really, really helpful for lowering blood pressure, decreasing muscle tension, increasing blood oxygenation. It helps with circulation, increases energy and motivation, increases focus. It activates our system's sort of body wide relaxation response. And as we know, it's free. We can do it anywhere, anytime, something that you can so easily connect into.

And when it comes to bloating, what's so fascinating is that when we're overeating or overindulging in this way and we're probably consuming

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

Ep #77: Bloating and Breathing

some foods that might not be entirely agreeable. Maybe there's issues around sugar, or dairy, or alcohol or those types of things that make your system slow down a little bit.

And then there's a greater bulge of the belly and that can be impeding to the diaphragm. And then that can slow down or just hamper the breathing a little bit, hamper the ability of that rib cage to move, can turn you into more of a mouth breather. And it just slows everything down. It could even make you more foggy in your brain and more lethargic and it just kind of keeps that cycle going.

So using breath work can be really great to sort of settle that temporary discomfort that's being experienced and sort of help you move through that experience.

What I want to say before I get into the three exercises is I'm not providing a cure here, I just want to be clear on that. And I'm also not addressing other reasons for why bloating can occur. I'm talking merely the overindulgence of the season.

So it's important for me to state that there can be underlying medical causes for the bloating, irritable bowel syndrome, celiac disease, gallstones, pancreatic insufficiency, anxiety, hyperventilation, cystic fibrosis, COPD, peripheral neuropathy, polio, ovarian cancer. I mean the list kind of goes on and on and on, right? So it's important that as you're working with this and intuitively, you're getting a sense that there's something else going on to make sure to reach out for medical support.

Because this is an amazing breathing exercise and some self-massage technique, and the purpose here is to address those moments or those hours of the day where we are overindulging and it's like, uh, the stomach is full, the belly is impeding the way the rib cage or the diaphragm is moving. You might have some constipation that's going with it, or the digestion has really slowed down or you almost feel dried out. That's what I'm more addressing here.

Ep #77: Bloating and Breathing

So what I'm sharing here is a few exercising that you can work with from breath work to self belly massage. These can be really powerful when we are acting gently. Now, before I get into them, I want to provide some bit of disclaimer around my own view on diaphragmatic breathing. This might be surprising but I'm not a fan of that terminology, and this could be merely a semantics thing.

The reason why I'm not a fan of the terminology is, if you've followed me for any length of time you know that I like to have objectivity. So I can't tell for certain when someone is breathing diaphragmatically. People will say and professionals will say you are breathing diaphragmatically when your belly expands.

Well a lot of people, not bloated even, can push their belly out when they breath. That does not mean that their diaphragm is now starting to be a part of the process because we can just push our bellies out with the inhale. So because I can't tell for certain that that's diaphragmatic breathing I don't tend to talk about have your belly push out and that will tell you that you're doing diaphragmatic breathing.

Also, when people are talking about chest breathing, I don't think that's necessarily entirely bad. I understand it, and again it could be a semantics thing, that when people get too caught up only in their top of their rib cage or their chest area, and their breathe has become shallow as a result of that, yes, that can be a problem.

However, when you really look at the torso our lungs sit in the rib cage and the diaphragm sits below that. And the lungs move when we inhale and exhale. And those lungs move the rib cage, which is in part our chest.

So rather than trying to discern or teach a distinction between chest and diaphragmatic or abdominal breathing, I like to teach people about full torso breathing. So that I want them to breath through their whole torso because as air is coming in, in order for that air to come in effectively the rib cage does need to move, the lungs do need to move, the diaphragm obviously

Ep #77: Bloating and Breathing

does need to drop. And that creates an internal increase of pressure, which is what pushes that belly forward. And also there's the pelvic floor.

So really, from nose to pelvic floor, the whole body can be and ideally is involved in the breathing process. So when I'm helping people with their breathing, it's that whole body— Whole torso process that I'm working with.

Now I stumbled with my words there where I said it was whole body, and in some ways it can because I can help someone with their feet and that can change up their breathing. I can help someone with their calves and that can change up their breathing.

Now, that's a topic for a different episode but I really want to make certain that that's clear in terms of you knowing where my bias comes in and where my lens of this all comes in. And why you won't hear me go on and on about diaphragmatic breathing, or abdominal breathing, or chest breathing. Because I don't think they're very useful terms, at least not in the way that I teach.

So if I'm going to help someone really improve their breathing, particularly when it comes to bloating, then the more that I can help them feel their body and then bring in some massage technique to help them bring more full torso breathing, the better that they'll do.

So with that in mind I want to begin with just your noticing your breath. I have a number of clients who what they notice when they start to get bloated is that they'll move into mouth breathing when they've been typically a nose breather.

They often find this at night, that their snoring starts to increase or they wake up with a dry mouth. And they can start to find patterns when they've had either their last meal of the day, like dinner, and then maybe after dinner with the consumption of more food and alcohol, that can lead to more mouth breathing. And some of them have tied the bloating bit to it as well.

Ep #77: Bloating and Breathing

So it becomes interesting just to notice the pattern because, yes, I understand if you over drink, that's a totally different thing that we're talking about. So I'm going to keep bringing it back to the bloating part that clients of mine have noticed that as they feel more distended in their abdomen and they can feel the limitation that that then puts on the diaphragm and puts on the ability of the ribcage to move with inhale and exhale.

That can then push them into a mouth breathing and state. And they can feel that often their sleep is often disrupted and they wake up with a very dry mouth. And it's not surprising for their bed mate to comment that they were snoring quite a bit that evening. So it just becomes really, really interesting.

So when you can start to understand and really clue in and get a sense of what your baseline for breathing is, it becomes a nice reminder so that when you are in that place of having indulged and you're like, "Oh boy, that's rough." Then you can start to just sort of settle in, feel your breath, and start just to inhale easy, and exhale easy.

We're not trying to release anything per se. It's more just about reconnecting with the breathing. And something that I find can be very helpful is placing one hand or both hands either on the sides of your ribcage or giving yourself a gentle hug and so that the right hand comes around to the left side of the ribcage and the left hand comes around to the right side of the ribcage.

The point being is that the feedback is your hands are on the lateral aspects of your lower ribs. And with that focus you can then, without increasing the volume of your breath, you can then direct the breath to the side ribs.

So again, try to do this without increasing the volume of your breathing. You're just mentally in your mind's eye taking whatever breath you're breathing and moving it, directing it to the sides of your ribs.

Ep #77: Bloating and Breathing

Now coming up in a future episode I'm going to be talking a lot more about the ribcage and how the ribcage as a whole plays a huge part in recovery and healing in a variety of different scenarios. So stay tuned for that. But for now just allow the breath to move laterally and notice if it's sticky. Notice if there's a wall. And you don't need to make it move more, just notice.

And then start to take the breath to the back ribs, to the back of your body. So the same set of ribs, so the lower few ribs. This can sometimes be a bit more difficult to do. So if you want to take your hand, if you can reach behind your body and take your hand to the back ribs and then breathe into your back ribs.

You can also do this laying on the floor and then you take the breath and imagine the ribs pushing back into the floor. And again, we're not trying to make the ribs move a whole ton. We're not trying to increase the volume of the breath. We're just directing the breath and helping create some space in and around that ribcage. Changing up the neuromuscular patterning of where that breath has been going and what it's doing.

Okay and then combine the two. So the lateral sides of the ribs and the back of the ribs, can you allow that breath to move the ribs laterally and posteriorly?

Now sometimes when we are in an overindulgent state it can be tied with stress too. That we're in a scenario, perhaps with family, perhaps with other organizations or groups that we're a part of that either they're not our group, maybe they're our spouse's group or friend's group and we're not super comfortable. And that can then lead to a stress type of soothing type of eating.

So the eating is then on top of an already stress response. So if you find yourself doing this and it's quite limited or it's starting to increase any type of anxiety or panic, then just pull back on the exercise. Trust in the experience and safety that you have in your own self and just work within that space.

Ep #77: Bloating and Breathing

Okay, so now what we're going to do is we're going to take the hands and bring them over your shoulders, like closer to your neck. And so your fingers tap the back of your upper ribs. So the fingers tap, they're just gently resting on the back of your upper ribs.

So it's as if you are giving yourself a massage of your trapezius muscles while your shoulders come closer to that neck area. And then your hands come over so you can feel the upper ribs a bit.

And can you bring the breath into the upper back ribs? So just like we were doing with the side and the back lower ribs, can you bring it to the back upper ribs? And again, we're not trying to increase the volume of the breath.

So can you do all three now? Where you're taking the breath laterally and posteriorly, the lower ribs, and then also in those upper set of ribs in the back, bringing the breath there too. So now you're feeling the ribcage expand in a few different directions. And notice as you're doing it what it feels like, even if it feels very limited. Just notice what it feels like.

Sometimes people will notice that their belly starts moving a bit better, that the sides of their body feels a little bit more at ease. Some can connect them to their pelvic floor more effectively or the muscles in the bottom of their feet relax, their eyes clear, neck pain can go away, the breathing becomes a bit more rhythmic.

Those are just examples of what people have told me. Notice what it is for you in terms of what you've noticed. And then let the breathing technique go completely. And just notice your natural breath emerging, inhale in, exhale out.

Okay, so now where I want to go is into some very gentle belly massage. And this can be really useful when you're lying in bed or lying on a couch. You want to go gentle with this. And take your hand initially on top of your belly button, you can either be skin to skin, so palm of your hand resting on

Ep #77: Bloating and Breathing

your skin of your abdomen. Or you can place it on a shirt or a sweater above.

And just easy, easy, easy breathing. And then gently move your hand in a very, very gentle circle and press your fingers into your abdomen ever so slightly. And then gently just keep pressing the fingers and releasing and pressing the fingers and releasing. You're not going in deep, just noticing what your abdomen feels like, what the skin feels like, what it feels like a millimeter in as you press your hands in.

What I'm teaching you here is a very, very, very much adapted version of belly massage that I learned from a book called *Unwinding Your Belly*, and I'll put that in the show notes. But this is a very adapted version from it.

And then just keep allowing your hands to move through your abdomen. In the book they actually refer to this as cat's paws. And that will only make sense to you if you've ever had a cat lie on your belly and they paw your abdomen and they purr. So it's like that idea.

I haven't come up with a great alternative for those of you who have never had a cat lie on you, except just to simply say bring your fingers into your belly about a millimeter and then relax. And just keep breathing as you gently massage out your abdomen all around, from the lower ribs to just below your navel.

Just notice what it is that you feel. Sometimes it can feel tight and tense, particularly if you are in a space of overindulgence. Sometimes it can feel sore, like in a surprising kind of way. It's like we know it can be sore because we have overindulged, but it can be sore in a like— The actual sensations can be surprising.

So give yourself some space, allow for that experience to be. And then start to bring your fingers up to the left set of ribs. And remember how you breathed into the side of your ribs a little bit? Well you're now going to take that breath to the left side of the ribs again, allow that breath to expand those ribs and gently massage in and around the lowest rib.

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

Ep #77: Bloating and Breathing

And then follow that lowest rib towards the midline of your body up towards where it attaches to the base of the sternum. And then come back laterally along that lowest rib. So you're just lower than the lowest rib, you're actually massaging out the tissue that attaches to the lowest rib, right out to the side. And maybe you repeat that one more time, paying close attention that you're breathing into the side of those ribs.

And that can allow you to get into more tissue in that area, which can help digestion move along. And then when you've had enough of that, let that go and just breathe easy and normal, resting your hands on your belly. And then bring your hands over to the right side and do the same thing.

So you're allowing the right side ribs to expand, keeping the breath normal, we're not increasing the volume of the breath. And then gently massage the tissue that's attaching to that lowest rib. Gently working towards the midline where that rib attaches up to the base of the sternum.

And this can be an area that can be quite, quite tight, right in this area of the solar plexus. Particularly if your breathing was limited, or if your belly has become distended it can feel uncomfortable. So be gentle with yourself knowing that as you're being gentle it's going to be helping with your whole digestive response.

And then when you're done with that, just let the breath go and let your hands rest on your belly. Gently, gentle, easy breathing. And then you can find your way into the front or the side of the hip, like the side of that hip bone.

So if you slide your hand over to the left hip bone and just gently massage the tissue on the inside of that hip bone that connects. So this would be the lowest fibers of your rectus abdominis, obliques. If you go in a little bit deeper you might connect into iliacus, psoas.

But be careful with the depth that you go to. We don't want to dig things out, so to speak. Allow yourself to go only as far as your body can receive your hands and you can use your breath as a guide.

Ep #77: Bloating and Breathing

Sometimes it can feel that you're not going in deep enough and I have found that when those thoughts bubble up, it's a really good indication just to ease back even more. And then bring your hands over to the right side and feel the tissue that's connecting to the right side hip.

Easy, easy, easy breathing. And then you can gently massage all through the lower part of the abdomen. And especially if you're quite bloated and there's not a lot of give, just be super gentle and easy with yourself. And then start to massage all through the abdomen again like those cat paws and notice if there's anything different.

The key here is that you're breathing as best as you can. So you're not holding the breath. You're not pushing in too hard. You're not creating more tension in your system. Even if it does feel a little bit icky as you're doing this or maybe more like a wall, or it may just feel difficult.

And then when you're ready just rest your hands, either on the ribs or on your belly and just gently breathe and notice what it is that you experience. And feel how that breath is being experienced now, noticing where it exists in your torso.

Now, a third thing you can also do is to lay on a ball that's got some give. So I would not recommend a ball like a basketball, or a soccer ball, or a tennis ball, those don't have a whole lot of give. But I've picked up a small-ish, so smaller than a basketball, bigger than a tennis ball, kids ball from the dollar store.

So they come already inflated and then you can lie on that. And you can kind of place it either down the lower part of your belly, or in the middle of the belly, or closer to the solar plexus. You've got to decide for yourself which feels the best. Just resting on that.

If it's too big or if it's still too firm, rolling up a soft pillow or a blanket, anything that provides a little bit of a roll, circular type of experience. And then resting on that can be really, really, really nice to help put a bit of

Ep #77: Bloating and Breathing

pressure against the abdomen to support the abdomen and its digestive process.

But if you find yourself getting nauseous, or lightheaded, or any of those types of symptoms, then just come right off of it. It's a way to be prone, so belly down, and lie on something which can feel more relaxing for people than being on their backs.

So it just depends on whether you want to self-massage yourself with your hands on your back, or if you want to connect in with the ball and just lie on something. And like I said, you can use a pillow, you can use a rolled up blanket. Really, anything that is very, very gentle but could put a little bit of pressure in any part of your abdomen that feels good.

So for some people, if I'm putting that pressure on the lower part of the abdomen is what does it for them. For others it's closer to the solar plexus. Again, it really depends and you want to make sure that this is comfortable. Okay.

So those are three ways of exploring your breath and gentle massage techniques to support yourself during this season of indulgence, because sometimes it just happens. And the more you can kind of connect to it to support yourself, because it can be really fun to indulge, we just overdo it at times and our system says, "Whoa, Nelly, that was a little too much." And so these are little techniques that you can do to support yourself to help move that through your system and start to feel a whole lot better.

If you have found that this has been helpful, I would love, love, love it if you could rate the podcast a five and place a comment there. One of the things that Apple Podcasts and the other platforms do is they rank podcasts by the number of ratings and or comments that exist. And it would be so awesome and support the podcast in general and reach more people to get these tips and techniques. So I would be so grateful if that is something that you could do for me.

Ep #77: Bloating and Breathing

And hey, if this type of exercise is really interesting to you, you're a health professional, or a yoga professional, or a fitness professional and you love the idea of integrating yoga therapeutically into your practice and you really want to grow with this. Well, I have got the program for you because we are opening up registration for our certification that begins this spring.

It's a rigorous program. Our grads do remarkably well with the information that they gain, and the presence that they grow, and the ability to really work with any person with any condition integrating yoga therapeutically. So if that is something that is of interest to you, then send us an email at health@functionalsynergy.com. I would love to connect. We will see you on the next episode. Take care.