

Ep #103: Your Age Doesn't Matter - Arthritis When Moving Hurts



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Susi Hately

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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.

With this episode I want to tackle a concept around moving when it hurts. I often hear this from people who have arthritis and they know that they need to move. They've been told that they need to move, but there's pain present and it feels horrible. They're uncertain about if how they're moving is being helpful or being harmful. There's confusion about moving or not moving, even though they know they ought to move.

So with this episode I want to provide some considerations for you to ponder so that we can help you get to this place inside of you where you can trust the inner wisdom that is telling you to do whatever you need to do. Because I recognize that when pain is present, it can cloud our inner wisdom. It can really grab hold and take a grip and then we start making decisions that might be helpful, they might not be helpful.

But I tend to find that when people make decisions in spite of pain, they tend to be laced with like a, "Oh, I hope this works," or there's an anticipation for it. It's not like a rooted, felt sense, if I can use those words. It's not coming from a real sense of confidence, is a great way to put it.

So I want to be able to help you that by the end of this episode there's greater clarity, there's greater confidence. So whether you have pain, or whether the pain has reduced or whether the pain has risen, you can sort of sit back and able to discern more clearly from inside what your body is actually asking for so that you can really blend well your problem solving capability in your brain with the inner wisdom of your body and make a great choice for yourself.

So how this will go is I'm going to present to you what may sound like competing ways or conflicting ways of thinking about this process. One of

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them will be talking about pain and arthritis, the other will be talking about motion being lotion. And then even if you feel like in the moment as I'm talking about each of these that there is conflicting, I'm going to then bring the two of them together to show how quite collaborative they are.

So to begin with, whether you are new to listening to this podcast or you have listened to many episodes of this podcast, one of the key features that I say a lot is that your pain can reduce, your pain can eradicate, it's all possible. So along those lines, when we're thinking about arthritis you can have arthritis and have pain. You can have arthritis and not have pain. You can have pain and not have arthritis.

So the key here is that arthritis and pain are not synonymous, they're not a given. I've worked with people who have arthritis and their pain has reduced. The degeneration of their joint is still there, their pain has reduced. So how is this and why is this happening?

Well, the first reason why is because the way that I work with people is at the body first. When there's pain present, there's also compensations that are present. And what I mean by compensations is that you're borrowing from one area in order to make another area move. And a lot of it's unconscious but there's a thinking they're, conscious or not, that we're making ourselves stronger and we're making it happen. When in reality we're making the system weaker over time.

So when I initially begin to work with people, I support them in reducing those compensation patterns and learning to move better. And a really simple pattern of compensation is breath holding. So when I can help someone to move better with better fluid breath, that can often make a difference in the way that they experience their sensations in their body.

When I can also help someone actually move the leg bone in the hip joint better, then the muscles in and around the hip function better, there's

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greater stability that often results. There's often greater strength that results, there's often greater mobility that results.

And it's not that greater stability, greater strength, or greater mobility reduce pain. We actually know, evidence has shown that simply increasing stability, strength, and mobility do not correlate to decreased pain. But what I have found is when we simply move the joint better and help the muscles do what they're meant to be doing, that does change an experience of pain because the way that someone's forces are moving through their body is better.

So think about it from being in a standing position and standing on a scale. There's you and gravity, and that is creating a number on the scale. And then when you start to move, the number goes up. If you add a bag of groceries or a child, the number goes up. If you jump or walk, the number goes up. So the more load that you're placing through your body, that force is greater as measured by the scale.

What I have seen is that when I can help someone improve their inner integrity, the inner infrastructure of their skeleton and their tissue, meaning their muscles and their connective tissue, then the ability for them to dissipate the load and the force is both going down through their body to the ground, as well as absorbing the ground reaction force, that rebound energy from the earth upward, it just works a lot better.

Think about this, when you're walking or when you're running, you're taking one foot in front of the other. As you do that you're shifting your weight from upper to lower and lower to upper, as well as left to right. So when you have better infrastructure in your body to absorb that load, things feel different. I've seen that over and over and over and over again.

So when I help someone move better, we see that their pain goes down. There's another part to this that also happens, and that is how they think about their pain also changes, because now that they gain more clarity

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about how their body is moving, that often leads to greater confidence and greater connection with themselves. And they've got a better ability to tune in to what their body needs.

So even when there might be pain present, they have a greater understanding about how their body moves and what they need to do to make it move better. And then when they do that, their pain starts to go down. So there's a really interesting correlation to their belief pattern and their level of confidence.

Which leads me to the second part of this first concept, which is how we interpret pain. Pain is a true sensation that exists in our body, the sensation that we feel is absolutely real. What we now know is that that sensation is interpreted in our brain.

So we will experience the sensation, that sensation will go up into the memory banks of our brain. Our brain will say, all right, should I be feeling threat about this? Should I be feeling safe about this? And then if there's a feeling of threat, or concern, or worry of like, "Oh my gosh, what if?" Then there tends to be an increase of that sensation deeming like it's dangerous, it's a problem.

If, though, there's like, "Oh yeah, I get that there's pain here, it's not a problem, I have confidence that I know what to do to change it." There's feelings of safety or feelings of support, and then the experience of pain goes down. Even as I explain that to you, I can feel the distinction in my body when I say the word danger, or threat, or concern, or worry, I can feel my body starting to get tighter.

And when I hear the words to myself of confidence and clarity of like, "Yeah, I know what to do, I got this," there's a different feeling in my body. And that is a really great example of how we interpret something in our brain and how we ultimately feel.

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So the key of this is it's not suggesting that the pain doesn't exist, I don't want that to land in that way. What I want to land is how we interpret it. So when we start to recognize if we have this anticipatory fear, then we're going to start to notice that the pain levels go up.

As we gain more confidence about the way the body works, about the way your body, or our body, or my body works, then our own personal experience of how we're experiencing that pain or strain starts to shift because we've got confidence in what we can do to support ourselves.

So two key things there is that pain is not synonymous with arthritis. That even if you have degeneration of a joint, even if there's inflammation of the joint, when I can help a client move better, they can shift the way the forces are dissipated in their body and that can change the experience of the sensation that they have.

This then translates into what we experience in our brain about the experience of pain. Because pain is interpreted in the brain, the sensation is interpreted in our brain so that when there is confidence and clarity about how our body moves, for example, then we're like, "Yeah, we've got this, I can do this." Or when we're like, "I don't know what I'm doing. I am confused. I am not clear, I am scared," then we're going to notice that the pain levels go up.

So a big piece of supporting somebody in their recovery and healing process when they have arthritis is enabling them to learn and grow into the tools around understanding how their body moves, how it functions, so that they have that confidence and clarity to work with what their body is.

Which leads to the second part of this episode, which is motion is lotion. And this is a direct quotation from an orthopedic surgeon who talks about how movement is essential to enabling that lubricating fluid, that synovial fluid to do its job. Synovial fluid makes up about 80% of the cartilage as

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volume and plays an essential role when supporting weight and lubricating joints.

It used to be believed that physical activity was injurious, it created injury to joints. But what we're starting to really understand from this research perspective is that running, for example, walking, and other loaded activities aren't actually causes of osteoarthritis, but rather quite the opposite. That the risk of osteoarthritis is going down the more active that you are.

And one of the reasons they're considering for this is because what is happening in the synovial fluid and how the activity is a driving force behind maintaining the lubrication. That the activity is a driving force behind maintaining that lubrication, of enabling that synovial fluid to do what it needs to do.

So motion is extremely helpful. Helpful in lubricating the joint so that the joint can work more freely and easily. Helping the fluid to cushion the ends of bones and reducing friction when movement occurs. Protecting the cartilage, supporting it from wear and tear, absorbing shock.

So now here we are, we know that motion is lotion, there's an understanding from a research and an evidence based perspective that moving your joints is necessary for supporting that synovial fluid to do its work. And we also know that we can reduce pain and strain by moving better, by recognizing what our beliefs are about the pain. So now, how do you bring these two pieces together to be supportive?

To combine these two ideas I like to follow the principles of movement that I created back in 2002. And the first one is to nurture or nourish relaxation. And why I use that word, nurture or nourish, because it's not simply about being aware. It's really about being aware in a loving way. Just noticing what's going on in your system, what's going on in your brain, what's going

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on in your body, what's going on in your breath, and really taking stock of what's present.

So often we can move through life very, very quickly, or in a way that is numbed out or disconnected from what is true to ourselves. And we're just kind of putting our head down and going. So this is a moment to take a pause and to really, really connect.

When you take that pause to become aware, there's a tendency to move a little less fast, a little less spontaneously. And in this case, I don't mean spontaneously as bad, you're more tuned in about what you need. So maybe the word isn't so much spontaneous as it is impulsive, that would be a better word to use.

So when you can take that time to simply be aware and nurture yourself in that awareness, then you're going to find you're making better choices because you'll tune in to what's actually contributing to what's going on. Because, as I said, you're paying definitely has an impact on how it's being interpreted.

So what could happen is you're out and you're doing your walking or you're reading, the pain is increasing. And in your head you might be thinking, "Man, this is really, really sore." But then the other voice comes in and says, "No, this is really, really good." And then there's this back and forth in your head of like, okay, is this good? is not good? Is this good? Is it not good? And there can be this battle in your brain about what's going on in your body.

Whereas if you just take a pause for a moment and leave that back and forth-ness, just put that on the shelf and just pay attention, recognize that dialogue, or maybe that argument is present. And then take a moment and pause and be aware of what's going on.

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Because sometimes what you'll notice is the pain on your walks or on your runs goes up when other factors are at play like you had a poor sleep, or something's going on with your spouse or your kids, or there was something happening at work. Or you're just in a state or an emotional state that's like, ugh, that's when you might notice a correlation to when the pain goes up. Maybe not all the time when you're out for your walks or your runs that the pain goes up.

So just being cognizant of what the the other factors are that are in existence, not necessarily causal, but they're in existence of your world. Then you're going to start to see the patterns associated with that pain that's going up.

The second is to really recognize your movement patterns and to notice how you are moving and how you are breathing, I like to say begin at the largest joints first and keep your spine in mind so that when you do some of your stretches or you're doing some of your yoga therapy movements, like really tune in to how it is that you're moving.

So you're taking that nurturing awareness and relaxation idea that I just mentioned, and you're tuning into how it is that you're moving when you're doing stretches, or your yoga therapy movements, or the strengthening movements. You're not just knocking them off as to-do items, but really paying attention to how you're moving.

Are you gripping? Are you bracing? Are you utilizing your jaw when you're moving your hips and you don't actually need to hold your jaw to move your hips? Are you clenching through your eyes when you are doing movements around your shoulders or your hips? When you're stretching out are your feet getting all tight? And then just dial it back and can you do the movement with 10 to 15% less effort and a lot easier breathing?

If you just focus on those key components, you're likely going to notice different qualities to the experience you're having in your tissue, and you're

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likely going to feel a little bit different and you'll be more clued in to, again, as I mentioned earlier, some of the correlating patterns that are contributing to your pain. Because as I mentioned before, arthritis and pain are not synonymous. As you learn better movement patterns, you'll tune more into what's actually required to shift in order for you to have less pain.

Okay, so there's that one concept. So you can take this concept as well when you're out walking, and you're out running and that pain is going up. Now, ideally, what we want to not have happen is if your pain levels start to increase when you're out for your walk and your run and when you come back from it, those pain levels should drop back to what they were. That's really, really, really key.

So if you're noticing your pain levels are going up and they're staying high, then you likely overdid it or there's something else sort of in your awareness that you're not quite paying attention to. And it could be quite as simple as the shoes that you're wearing. Or whether you are walking on an incline or whether you're walking on a flat surface and you might need to shift that up.

What I also like to share with my clientele, if someone really wants to get their pain down, like reducing their pain or eradicating their pain even, what I like them to notice is at what point in their walk or their run does their pain start to increase a lot? And are they willing to only walk or run as far as the point before the pain goes up? So can they make that walk less?

Now sometimes people will push back on that because they want to get their walks in. And I say that that's fine, just see if you can notice at what point that comes in. And, again, remembering motion is lotion, notice what's going on in your brain in terms of dialogue around when the pain comes up, notice what starts to happen.

Is there a back and forth in your head? Is there an argument? Is there a fight with your body? Is any of that or all of that happening? And just tune

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into that, because if that's happening, if there's a little bit of mental drama and sort of an annoyance or an agitation that's starting to come up with regard to how the experience is in your body, then that's likely going to heighten your pain experience. So just pay attention to that.

The other piece of this is as you begin to understand your movement patterns and less compensation, you're going to notice those movement patterns and how you compensate when you're out for your walks. So you're going to tune a lot more into your overall awareness patterns. So then when you're out walking, you'll understand what's contributing.

It's not just oh, I'm moving and this movement is contributing to my pain. You'll actually have more of an understanding about what parts are contributing to what parts. So you'll tune more into what's contributing overall. And that will really support you in your progress of moving forward.

So there's key features to this. So the first is that how you move matters, and that as you move better and reduce your compensatory pattern you're going to notice that your overall infrastructure is going to shift and your overall awareness of what's contributing to how you feel also changes.

And if you're someone who is walking and running and you have pain while you're doing those things, understand that motion is lotion. But as you tune more into that awareness, you'll also tune more into, okay, is this actually an appropriate experience that I'm having? Is there a mental fight going on? Am I getting agitated with my body? And if that is, is that heightening more tension, which is contributing to more pain?

So then as an idea, can you back off to a point where that's not happening? Because if you want something to change, I've often found that making the change is what helps the change. But doing the same thing over and over and over again, typically does not lead to change. It's kind of like the chili analogy, where if you have a really spicy chili and you add more spice, it

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just keeps it spicy, right? You're doing the same thing, you're adding more of the same.

Whereas if you can back it up a little bit, or tune more into your awareness, or recognize some of the contributing factors, that's when you can start to make more confident and clear decisions about what it is that you do.

So overall the reality is, is both of these experiences can work together. So you can move in pain and motion is lotion, and you can also learn how to improve your movement patterns and change up some of the neuromuscular dynamics, help yourself breathe better, reduce your pain, and have that feed into the motion is lotion in the walking and the running that you're doing. And over a period of time, you'll notice your pain going down.

Pain does not have to exist, truly. It doesn't have to exist. Yes, it's a normal physiological process. And yes, it might be part of the journey towards getting out of pain that you're experiencing, for sure. And it can reduce. It does not have to be part of your experience, you just have to approach it in a way that you can recognize what's contributing. And just because there's a structural issue, called arthritis, does not mean you have to have pain, it can shift.

If this has resonated for you, and you are seeking some support in your own recovery process and you would like to work with me on a one to one level, do reach out to me at health@functionalsynergy.com. I would love, love, love to support you in your goals of walking and running and helping you walk and run with less pain or no pain.

And if you're a health professional or a professional yoga teacher, it would be a great honor for me to show you and teach you how I get the results that I do with my clientele. So, again, if that's something you're interested in, do reach out to us at health@functionalsynergy.com. Happy exploring.

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If this episode has resonated and you're looking to deepen this idea of getting your body back on board, of listening deeply to your symptoms, of listening to the whispers so you don't have to hear the screams and you're looking for one to one support or professional training, then reach out to us at health@functionalsynergy.com where we can customize your learning path. That's health@functionalsynergy.com, looking forward to hearing from you.