

Ep #153: Upleveling Corrective Exercise with Yoga Therapy



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With Your Host

Susi Hately

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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 and welcome back. With this episode I want to dig into corrective exercise techniques and how they can be amplified by adding yoga therapy. I work a lot with clients who've been given corrective exercise techniques as part of their rehabilitation program. And I trained quite a few health professionals who have professional training in the application of corrective exercises. And many of them in both groups are frustrated because their results aren't working to the degree that they want them to. And that's why they have come to me.

Now, before I go on, let me address what I mean by corrective exercises. And what I mean by them is those exercises that are intended to fix movement compensatory patterning or imbalances so that overall movement is improved, whether that movement is during an activity or a workout, or daily living.

Typically, before the corrective exercise is given, there has been some sort of assessment to determine which muscles are at issue, which muscles might be locked long or short, maybe weak or inhibited. Some might call them tight. They then are given movements that increase flexibility or mobility, or there might be isolated exercises that are provided for improving strength. And overall, this combination is to fix a problem.

These techniques can work really, really well if the issue is primarily a physically based issue. So really, if it's just a physical body-based issue, it's only a matter of changing up the dynamic between muscle tissue or myofascial structures.

I tend to see the clients for whom these corrective exercises have not worked. So there hasn't been a physical-based issue, or they were simply just the wrong exercises that were given. And I tend to train the health

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professionals who are frustrated that the techniques aren't working as well as they think they should be.

So when we work together, we're blending what they know to be true from this corrective exercise perspective, and then we're adding yoga techniques that include awareness and breath, stillness to the corrective exercise techniques. And so then what ends up happening is the technique that they came with that wasn't working starts to morph into a powerful healing tool.

So what I really want to impart here is that really anything that is out there in the rehabilitative world works, if it works, right? And corrective exercise techniques can work. And also, like anything, they might not work, right? And when they're not working, there are three things that I see often present.

First, is that there tends to be, with corrective exercises, an assumption that the movement pattern that a person is utilizing is wrong and it needs to be fixed. That's all that needs to happen, is that the thing that is wrong just needs to be fixed.

The second is that the corrective exercise program tends to be a templated process. So, we're doing this series of movements to fix this specific problem.

Third, there tends to be a muscle-specific focus. So, strengthen the glutes, mobilize the piriformis, activate the supraspinatus, engage through the core, those types of things.

Now, these three points, none of them are wrong. However, when the results aren't what you want them to be, it can be really quite revealing to consider the process, right? There's something askew that's going on.

If not, then it's going to be really, really, really easy to fall into the trap of the erroneous belief that it's the client's fault for not getting better. Or that it might be how they're interpreting their pain, or it's pain, and it's just got to

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be managed. Change isn't possible. They've made all the gains that they're going to make, right?

So that is often where people can land. And I know that because I remember hearing those things being said by health professionals early on in my career. So these are things that are not uncommon to hear.

So what I want to offer up here is, what if nothing was broken? What if nothing is actually wrong that needs fixing? I think those two questions really sum up the way that I've embodied yoga in my own world, which is that there really is nothing wrong here, and there's really nothing broken. Unless there truly is something broken, like you've got a broken bone like other than that.

But really, is there? And I'm not trying to be woo-woo here. When I think about my client roster, clients who I'm currently working with, clients who I have worked with, the trainees that I have worked with, what goes through my mind is I sort of play the video back of them is that they are all very innately strong people who have symptoms.

And some of those symptoms are pain, some of them are flare-ups, some of them are recovering from cancer, and others are recuperating from knee or hip surgery. Some of them have a chronicity or persistency of pain. Some are overcoming plantar fasciitis.

I know that when I can help them move, when I can help them quiet a compensation pattern, and even more importantly, when I can help them see what's specifically contributing to the compensation pattern arising, now the compensation pattern isn't itself a problem, it's merely an expression of the problem.

So now we can zoom out a little bit, be less zeroed in on what appears to be broken, and then see the bigger picture of the relationship and then change it there, much like some human relationships, right? Rarely is the issue that is the thing that's being argued about, right? Like the ones that

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we often hear about around, like it's not about the toothpaste lid or how someone squeezes the toothpaste, or how they unload the dishwasher or any of those things. It's not those things.

So if we can have that sort of idea around where the pain is is not the problem. There is certainly something to do, yes. And when we can sort of step back and be less overly focused on the area that's symptomatic and see more of the bigger picture, now we can start to see more of the finer detail inside of that context, which leads to this idea around templated programs.

I realize that every single health professional out there will say that their clients are unique. I know that. And I also know that every single professional out there will say they will provide programs that are unique for their clients, I know that. Where I'm going here is another step around tuning into the subtlety that is beyond what is purely physical.

So as a professional, we're truly tuning into the person who is in front of us, and I'll also include ourselves in that moment, too. And when we can do that, it enables us to show up with a much greater understanding and love. Like it pulls us away from just the body that has a scenario going on. We see more of the person.

And then our cueing starts to change. The instructions start to change. How we put together a program starts to change. Things we offer start to change. And the person can actually feel it. They're not just another number at all. This then leads to how we even view muscles.

I have yet to see anyone whose issue is just one muscle. And even when there's been a diagnosis, say when the glutes aren't firing, for example, or a supraspinatus of the rotator cuff is not functioning as well as it could, rarely do I actually see it as that being the actual problem, that it's not the fault of that muscle.

What I often will see people do when they've been told that the glutes aren't firing is they'll off and do more glute exercises. But if the glutes aren't

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firing and you do more glute exercises, how is that going to make the glutes fire more? So a lot of times when people are doing exercises in that way, the neuromuscular dynamics aren't there to even help that muscle group start to fire in the first place.

So when we recognize that it's rarely one muscle, that the muscle is expressing the issue, the issue is not really there, when we're able to zoom out and see the whole as greater than the sum of the parts while also seeing the symptoms themselves, there's a clarity about which muscles are or are not engaging.

And examples of this that I've seen very clearly very recently are for people who have knee issues, I have also seen that in some of those folks when we clear up what's going on through their shoulder girdle, their knee issues will start to shift. It's not uncommon for me to support someone in improving their hip mechanics and their neck and jaw pain starting to fade away. Or with the glutes that aren't firing, oftentimes, when I change up how the shoulders or ribcage are working, that begins to change.

So a lot of times, I'll see people bracing or gripping in their ribcage in some way when they really ought to be utilizing their glutes to do a hip extension. And when I can help them to not brace in their ribs, all of a sudden, their glutes begin to fire with much greater strength, to the point where the client will say, "Whoa, I didn't even know my glutes could do that."

So a lot of times, the issue isn't really the issue. It's an expression of the issue. So consider, then, if you're somebody who has been given corrective exercises, so you're a client, and you're wondering if they're working or not. You're probably right in your doubt about how you're feeling about them. That's first off. And that's nothing about the person who provided them to you. It's just a series of exercises.

So consider this, consider when you're actually doing the movement, what is actually happening? Like when you look at one of the movements, let's just say you are doing a movement like ankle to knee. You're on your back,

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your knees are bent, and you're bringing your ankle to your knee. And then say both your feet come off the floor, so you're getting a stretch likely in and around your hips. Lots of people call this a piriformis stretch, and sometimes this movement is called thread the needle or figure four.

But here's what you can start to play with, notice what else is happening in that movement. So the only thing that is meant to be moving when you're doing that is your leg bone in your hip socket. That's it. So when you lift the one leg that you're crossing over, let's say you're lifting your right leg and putting your right ankle to the left knee, and you're bringing that leg on up, you're rotating it, you're moving the right ankle onto the left knee, right? Easy peasy.

Now, you lift the left foot off the ground. Now you're moving through the hips as the foot comes off the floor. So all the movement is really in the hips and the knees, that's it. What else is moving? Is your pelvis? Are you bracing in your ribs? Are you holding in your jaw? Are you hardening in your eyes? Are you flattening your back toward the floor? This is the awareness piece that becomes really important.

Now, what you want to be conscious of is that now you don't just do the opposite, like hold the back off the floor or brace with the ribs so they don't move, or harden through your abdomen, so your pelvis doesn't move, or somehow just force yourself to soften through your face. That's not the intention here.

More what I'd like you to focus on is as you do that movement, notice as you move if any of those areas I mentioned, or any others in your body for that matter, start to change in the quality. Like, does a certain kind of hardness or bracing pattern or tightness or any of that sort of quality, does it show up?

And then, can you do the movement from start to finish without any of it showing up, or at least less? So you're utilizing that tool of awareness, of mindfulness, quieting, tuning in. And if you find that your brain has a little

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story to say around, “Oh my gosh, I’m not doing this right,” it’s okay. You’re learning about movement, and it wasn’t that you were doing it wrong before. You’re just recognizing more of the pieces that are part of the puzzle.

And then my message for the health professionals out there is you now get to see. It could be that by simply watching, or listening, rather, to this podcast episode opens your eyes or clears the lenses of your glasses, so to speak, metaphorically. And then you go back in, and you see your client, and now you see the movie.

And what you might have seen before but didn’t really pick up on, you’re like, huh, wait a second. You’re moving your pelvis when you lift your leg up. Your ribs are coming in when you rotate the leg bone. Your jaw is doing this or whatever. And you want to be careful not to mention all the things to people because that can be a bit overwhelming.

But allow yourself just to notice the patterning and see what starts to happen as the person moves from point A to point B. Where and how do they compensate? Because that is really where the power is. And how you utilize that awareness for them to support them in their own feeling process, their own stillness process, and their own awareness practice.

All right, you have a really, really fun time exploring. If you want more of these and you want to dig in a bit more with me on looking at movement patterns, I’ve been starting to live stream on Facebook. Now, I know not everybody here loves Facebook, don’t worry. I’ll be getting back to YouTube in very short order. But right now, most of my audience is on Facebook, so that’s where I’ve gone back to for live streaming.

And I go on there a few times a week, and I just talk about a movement. I did bridge pose and warrior two this past week. So poke over there, over onto my Facebook page, and we’ll put the link in the show notes. And then I’ll make a note on my next episode when I’ll be on YouTube so you can catch that there.

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My aim here is to provide a combination of really, really short, short clips for you to be able to see compensatory patterns and just ways that I teach them so you can start to incorporate it for yourself as a client or as a professional. And then I'll get back into doing some more long-form practice sequences that you can explore, all right? So more details on that are coming soon. But for sure, I'm over on Facebook if you want to go and explore there.

You have a great time exploring, and I will see you next time. Take care, bye bye.

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.