

Ep #166: My 8 Principles of Movement



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With Your Host

Susi Hately

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Ep #166: My 8 Principles of Movement

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 continue my mini-series on getting out of pain, really reducing and eradicating pain. And it's designed for both the health professional as well as the person who has no ambition at all to even enter into the professional yoga-sphere but you've got pain and it's really highly annoying and you're frustrated. You're in the right place.

So I've been running a few episodes already and I've got another one for you, which I call the eight principles of movement. And these principles, I really crafted out and realized I was using back in the early 2000s. And I put sort of words around what I already saw myself do with my clientele as a part of the first book that I wrote called *Anatomy and Asana: Preventing Yoga Injuries*.

If what you hear today sounds interesting, you might want to pick up my book, *Anatomy and Asana: Preventing Yoga Injuries*, you can find it on Amazon, you can find it at my store. It's a great book. I still like it many, many, many years later. It was published in 2004 and I still really like the book today.

And if you hear today some things that really resonate and you want to take it deeper, this is all a run-up to the therapeutic yoga intensive that I'm running from April 15th to 20th where we get into these concepts that much more deeply. And you can learn more about that at learn.functionalsynergy.com/intensive. It would be a great honor to work with you.

So the principles of movement, these eight principles, what the heck are these? Well, for me in my mind, these are the basis for the practices offered in the programs I run within my business, Functional Synergy.

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

Ep #166: My 8 Principles of Movement

They're found in fields of biomechanics, movement science, physiology and anatomy.

And when you understand these principles and are able to blend them with your knowledge of muscle function and movement, your practice really will change, even if you don't practice yoga. If you are more of a Cross Fitter or an exerciser of any other fitness realm it will change. You'll become more aware, more mobile, stable and strong. Your pain will drop and your performance will dramatically rise. And you'll experience so much more suppleness and so much for freedom and ease.

Now one thing as I read through them and as I explain them, it's really easy to hear them in a linear fashion, right? Number one, number two, number three, number four. But rather I want you to think of them as conjoining circles like the Olympic rings, with each one impacting the other.

So here we go. The first one, nourish relaxation. I chose those words quite on purpose. Nourish relaxation, it's not just about becoming relaxed, right, doing something. But it's really thinking about this idea of nourishing as in thinking about how relaxation is a time to come into yourself. Of getting in touch with how you've been today. How you were with your day, how your day was with you.

It enables you to set a baseline from which you can work to do your practice. Supporting you to not get ahead of yourself. And to honor patience over ambition so that you're able to stay diligent in the process of unwinding tissue, tapping and connecting to who and what you are. It's also a time to connect and become aware of your breath. Noticing, for example, how your inhale and your exhale are flowing in and out.

Are you having to concentrate to relax? Are you able to truly watch your breath with ease or are you trying to change it? Notice your energy levels. Watch to see if there is a desire to push through that which is telling you to slow down. Allow your practice to honor your experience of your body that you are having right now in this moment.

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

Ep #166: My 8 Principles of Movement

Allow yourself to hear what your body is saying to you with respect to its ability to inhale and exhale, to settle and be still. Recognize where you are now. Notice what is driving you to do the program, the exercises, the yoga that you are doing now. Let this be a practice.

The second principle, begin with the spine in mind. I love this principle and that it comes right after becoming settled in your body and breath. Because once settled, now you can begin to move. The spine is a central hub of movement from which all movement occurs.

At its essence, the spine is a collection of bone and muscles and fascia, blood, lymph and nerve vessels. When tight and imbalanced, the spine will impact shoulder and hip range of motion. It will impact your ability to twist, bend and move upside down. And more specifically if the superficial spinal muscles are tight and short, the deeper spinal muscles quite possibly are weak. And you may feel a mishmash of symptoms and limitations and pulls and twangs in your shoulders, elbows, wrists, possibly your knees.

This is why I love to think about just before you initiate any movement in the body, just consider how all the intended movement will impact the spine. And particularly what range of motion is available within the spine. So if you just notice where your spine is in mind, it's not that you start movement at the spine, but you're becoming aware of where it is at, where you can feel it, how you can tune into it.

From here, we move into principle three, you're connecting your awareness of your spine, where that central hub of movement is, with movement at the largest joints first. Once your body is relaxed and you're able to feel the spine as the place from which movement radiates, the next intention is to enable free and easy movement of the limbs.

The simplest way to create this is by focusing on the largest joints, specifically the shoulders and the hips. Because from an anatomical perspective, the shoulder and hip joints are much more proximal and closer to the spine than the hands and feet, making it easier to maintain this

Ep #166: My 8 Principles of Movement

awareness. And they also have the largest amounts of movement available.

So when we look at how much the hip can move in the six different directions, same with the shoulder, plus the shoulder can move in circumduction, there's so much that can get congested, that can get limited. And when there's inefficiency in movement at the hips and the shoulders, that can lead to issues down through the knees and the feet. And at the shoulder area it can lead to issues in the elbows and the wrists.

So when we can clear up and clean up the way the movement happens at the hips and the shoulders, we can make so much significant gains down the limbs, but also into the central part of our body, which can also impact the way we function at our spine.

Which then leads to the fourth principle of movement, which is moving the joints in their optimum range of motion. And what I love about this is this is where you really get to choose, because what is optimal for you? For example, do you have osteoarthritis or bursitis? Does one joint move more smoothly and easily through its range of motion than another? Did you go for a hike yesterday or a ski yesterday and are you feeling a little bit more stiff today?

So you want to be able to tune into the degree of motion where you are feeling ease. Where you can breathe and the joint is moving in the direction it was designed to move, keeping your compensations as quiet as you can as possible, and so that you can feel no increase of pain.

Which leads us to the fifth principle of movement. And this one is kind of meaty and fun because it's all about core stability and how core stability really, in my mind, arises from control and coordination over a range of motion.

Let me dig in more, core stability is the steady eddy of our practices and workouts. It keeps us solid, unwavering and fluid, as well as enabling us to respond to the twists and the turns, the increases and decreases in tempo

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

Ep #166: My 8 Principles of Movement

and rhythm. The result as you tune into this core stability is you stand taller, you breathe easier, and your back, your hips, and your knees feel so much better. Not to mention your feet and your shoulders, your neck, your head.

To define core stability I really like to follow these following three ideas. Core stability is control and coordination over a range of motion. Said another way, if you don't have control and coordination, even in a small range of motion, you're not going to have it in a big range, right?

If you don't have it in that small range, then what are you going to do when you push that range? You're likely going to brace. You're likely going to compensate in other ways and grip, move a part of your body that's really not intended for the actual movement, which then makes things less stable. They make things less balanced. They make things less connected.

The second descriptor, core stability is a balance of strong core muscles found along the mid-line of the body from the base of the skull to the bottom of the feet. Combined with freedom of movement at the hip, the shoulder and the vertebral joints, as well as at the elbow, the wrist, the knee and the ankle joints.

Now, it's curious, if you want to take this even a step further, without this balance your body will either be too rigid, so too much strength with too little mobility through the periphery and then out towards the feet and the hands. Or limp and spiritless too much mobility with too little strength.

And then this third descriptor, core stability is all about enabling you to go from fast to slow and slow to fast, as well as supporting you to be in any position and staying in that position for an extended period of time. So staying in a static position, right? So this idea of being able to change up pace, stop and twist and turn, being agile, enabling for variability of movement, that is at the essence of what core stability enables us to do.

So having said those three things, there's a real misnomer that you need to lift or contract your core in order to be stable, when in truth this type of

Ep #166: My 8 Principles of Movement

instruction or cueing really has led to a ton of over contraction and tightness and tension, right?

And that leads to a lot of professionals who are working with people who have pelvic floors that are hypertonic, or upper abdominal muscles that are overly engaged, or a tendency to lock and load with the latissimus dorsi or the obliques, or even hold the breath. These are all great examples of an attempt to gain more core stability, and in fact we're actually gaining less.

So that was a little bit meatier, which leads us into number six. And number six is adopting relaxed resilience or effortless effort. And I like to use these terms interchangeably. When we think about relaxed resilience, remember that first principle, nourish relaxation?

Well as you start to grow more capacity of recognizing how your largest joints move, when you connect that with your moving from the spine, keeping the spine in mind. And you're moving in a way that's connected in optimal range of motion for where you're at in this moment and you're tuning into your core, not from a place to lock and load and brace, but to really enable nimbleness and agility variability in motion.

Now you're starting to pick up pace in terms of how you're feeling and what you're able to do and you grow your capacity. So as you do this, you start to grow your ability to have more and more relaxed resilience or resiliency in your relaxation, or effortless effort. So it's where depth and stamina are developed.

Relaxation occurs in layers, beginning with breath, continuing with awareness. And with more awareness, you'll be better able to perceive deeper or more nuanced levels of tension and freedom that exist in your body. This is what I call depth.

Imagine this, you're halfway through a class or a workout and you're feeling tired or distracted. So reconnect by noticing where you are and how you're breathing. Try not to change it, just notice it and practice there and see what happens.

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

Ep #166: My 8 Principles of Movement

As you tune more and more into this nuance, it's really interesting what continues to start to open up and what becomes available to you. Things that you thought you couldn't do from a movement perspective, or even a breath perspective, or even a concentration perspective, start to open up to you.

These next two are really bonus principles that weave throughout all of the previous six. So this leads to the seventh principle, which in many ways weaves through all of the previous six. I could have started this list with this seventh principle, but I've kept it here near the end because I want to emphasize that it really does weave through it all. Move in a range that doesn't increase pain.

Now, I recognize in saying this that what pain means to one person could mean something entirely different to another. And so for clarity I like to consider a spectrum of pain, where we're looking at something like good pain that consists of muscle fatigue, to the point where the muscle fibers can no longer contract.

The nerve fibers keep sending stimulating signals, but the muscles are not responding, either because the energy reserves are exhausted or there's a buildup of lactic acid. I think about this lifting weights and you're getting closer to fatigue as an example.

Then on the other side of the spectrum, there's the bad pain that burns and strains and rips and tears. It is the pain that causes your brow to furrow, your teeth to clench, your breath to be held, and your body to reverberate with tension. If you take a moment and move only in the range that does not increase pain, you will notice that not only will your range improve, it actually improves faster.

And not only that, it continues to be in a space where the pain doesn't increase to the point where bit by bit, it becomes more and more pain free. Why does this work? Well what I've seen over and over and over again is that when we move in a painful range of motion, we increase tension. We

Ep #166: My 8 Principles of Movement

also send signals to our nervous system that this is a normal way to move. And by doing that, then it's normal and the pain often doesn't get resolved.

Whereas when we can start to move and continue to move in a range that does not increase the pain, and better yet, move in a range with less pain or no pain, now we're sending a different signal to the nervous system. And that is what starts to get honed as a new pattern. So consider to breathe and nourish relaxation. Move a little more slowly, be aware, and play around with moving in that range of motion that's not increasing pain, and even in a range that is pain-free entirely.

And principle eight, do all that you need to do and nothing more. A great principle. I used to often say less is more, but I found more and more often many of my executive clients just did not want to hear those words, even if they knew it was true. And I think because they thought I might be saying take stuff off your plate, which is not what I'm saying at all.

Do all that you need to do and nothing more. Allow your movement to be efficient. Let things be simple. Start with movements that require fewer joint motions. Standing poses, for example, like Tadasana, are simpler than tree pose. In tree pose we're moving into more complexity because now one hip is doing one motion while the other hip is doing another set of motions. We're balancing on one leg. Then go into lunge, now we've got even more different things going on between the hips, the knees, the ankles.

The more joints that are involved, the more body parts that are involved, the more complex it gets. That's why so often triangle pose or extended side angle has such a reputation in the yoga industry for creating issues, because there's so much going on in the joints that are involved in that movement.

Simply put, when there is more going on, there's greater complexity. And with greater complexity, there is greater potential for strain and injury. The key then is to start small, take baby steps, bite off no more than you can chew. And then as you gain the mobility, the stability, the strength and the ease, these simple movements will begin to move more and more into

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

Ep #166: My 8 Principles of Movement

complex movements, but in ways that are so much more ease filled, so much more fulfilling, and really, truly build some depth of strength and stability.

So now you've got the principles and some descriptors about what I think about the principles. So how do you take them into your yoga practice, into fitness, or to your rehabilitation routine? Try these two ideas, create a theme for your practice or your routine.

Maybe take on noticing your breath. Or maybe when you're doing your movements, are you actually moving through the shoulders and hips when you're intending to? Or are you compensating? Notice if you get into a locking and loading mode or a bracing mode when you're attempting to use your core. Or are you truly enabling a responsive nimble core?

And then, number two, when you practice, notice if your pain is increasing. Notice if pain is present when you're finished. These might be signs that the movement isn't as good as it could be and there might be an opportunity to become aware of what is and what isn't working so your practice can actually serve you.

Do these principles resonate with you? Do you want to dig in deeper? Well if so, come and learn with me at the therapeutic yoga intensive by simply going to the information page at learn.functionalsynergy.com/intensive. And you know what? If you just want to bypass the intensive and get to work with me privately, starting now for three months, you can do that too. We've got two spots opening up next week. You can learn more by emailing us at health@functionalsynergy.com. We will see you next time. Have a great day.

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

Ep #166: My 8 Principles of Movement

path. That's health@functionalsynergy.com. Looking forward to hearing from you.