

Ep #215: Mechanics of Breathing Part 1 – A New Mini-Series and Practice



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Susi Hately

[From Pain to Possibility](#) with 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. I'm so glad that you're here because today I launch a new mini series on the mechanics of breathing. This is a multi-part series and includes both embodied practice as well as intellectual interviews with experts in the fields of dentistry, Ayurveda and hypermobility.

It's designed for both clients with sleep apnea and other related breathing issues, as well as the professionals who are working with them, because I work with both groups of people. And many times the professionals that I work with also have the issues themselves. And as they improve systematically, anatomically and physiologically, they have the experience of what is possible and they can share that with their own clients and they become better teachers.

Now, I'm including dentistry, Ayurveda and hypermobility for key reasons. When we are looking at an issue like sleep apnea, sleep apnea is not an issue that shows up out of the blue one day. This is something that has taken some time to evolve into. In the world of dentistry, one of the data points that often precedes sleep apnea are issues with the TMJ. So there tends to be something in the jaw, something around that TMJ that can then impact what's going on at sleep with the airway.

So the dentistry aspect becomes really important for one other reason that I need to include. And that is that for a long time, the CPAP machine has been the gold standard for sleep apnea. And in some cases, it's still the case. And what we're seeing with some emerging research that's been happening over a period of time, is that the world of dentistry is providing a really great insight with mouth splints in supporting airway.

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This is really important because it's tackling the issue of sleep apnea in a different way. So for some people, this dentistry mouth focus can be the way in to really support them. What you will notice is that the dentists who do the really, really good work when it comes to the mouth splints, as they are designed for sleep apnea or supporting someone who has sleep apnea, is that those dentists have a very full body, full mind understanding of a human being.

They're not just sticking a mouthpiece in someone's mouth. They're often assessing from head to foot, all of the relationships to the sleep apnea diagnosis. Oftentimes even going into hormonal discussions and food discussions because all of these play into the development of a situation like sleep apnea, which is also why I'm bringing in the Ayurveda piece.

Ayurveda is very distinct from any other medical sciences and they provide a different angle and a different lens to the process of supporting someone healing and getting well again. And what we often see in the Ayurveda world is that there are digestive issues that are related to or precede sleep apnea issues.

So as someone begins to shift up the way that they're eating, the way that their tongue sits in their mouth starts to change, the inflammation in their tongue starts to change, the tongue stops becoming bigger than the mouth. And that can be huge because when the tongue is apparently bigger than the mouth, that can create issues around the airway.

So it can be that shifting up the way that you are eating, shifting up the way that you're digesting can change overall systemic inflammation as one idea. In the episode related to Ayurveda, we will be bridging this gap between how Ayurveda supports from the digestive side, how it impacts the tongue, and how this actually plays out more fully into supporting someone in healing from sleep apnea.

Now then why hypermobility? Now the reason I'm including hypermobility is because hypermobility is becoming diagnosed more often. And a lot of

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times with that diagnosis, people feel like they have this life sentence and it's horrible. It's not. Not in my practice anyway. What I see is there is some physiological impact on tissue someone was born into the world with, so now let's work with what that is and improve function to support that person.

So the outcomes that I have with my clientele with hypermobility issues, whether it's EDS or some other form of hypermobility, can be very, very positive and life affirming, right? Confidence building, a really clear understanding of what's going on in one's body. It's also really important to include in my trainings because there are still a lot of health professionals who don't know a lot about hypermobility.

So if you're going into a dentist or you're going into a physician or you're heading into surgery even, and a physician does not have an understanding of the impact of hypermobility, it's important for you to let them know what they need to know. And I've got many clients who have had to really take that role of educating because hypermobility is really a newer diagnosis and so it's just in that emerging space that more and more of the professionals are needing to learn about.

So sometimes there's an education piece that you, as the person with hypermobility, needs to provide the professional. And from what I have seen is that they are very open to the learning and understanding because it provides the professional more data and understanding why your jaw is doing what it's doing, why sleep apnea has evolved into a person's physiological space and can really support them in moving forward.

This is why I include hypermobility training in all of the major programs that I offer, so that there is this breadth of understanding and experience because more and more people are receiving this diagnosis.

This particular episode is also about setting a baseline so that you have a place to start, a place to compare to as you continue to move through these episodes. And it's something that I'll harken back to as we go through each

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episode of just reminding you of where you have come so you can start to see more and more of this relationship to your breath and your body.

I really like to think about our bodies as a mechanical pump, that before breath was breath, it was air sitting in front of our face. Then there was some vacuum and some pressure changes and in comes the air, it turns into breath, it does its respiratory thing and then out it goes again. And it's not just those pressure changes. It's also our whole body.

So if we aren't very supple and our rib cage doesn't move very well, then the ability for that air to come in will be limited. I see this over and over and over again with my clients, especially those with asthma and they're taking regular flow meter readings. And we help them shift up the suppleness of their body, their flow meter readings will improve. And we can do that, not just with the ribcage, but also with the abdomen, pelvic floor and feet. Really whole body tissue suppleness is what we're aiming for.

And it's not just about stretching or strengthening or mobilizing. Sometimes this is a down regulation of the nervous system. It's a relaxation piece, and there will be an episode around doing just that. Sometimes it's our thinking, our beliefs, and that can play into the way that we hold our tissue. That's something we also get to explore and address. And there will be an episode on R&R sleep meditation to give an experience and a taste of that.

So we're really looking at the whole being here, the whole body, the whole human in this relationship of sleep apnea, breathing issues and TMJ. And what I hope you get out of this mini series is, overall, that there is a pathway from pain to possibility. That there is an integrative process that you can walk yourself through step by step, and the first one is growing your awareness.

So what we'll begin with is setting this baseline of tuning into your breathing, and specifically into three aspects of your breath. The phases, the pace, and the feel. Now, some of the instructions I'll provide you as I

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guide you through this will have some overlap. And just allow yourself to follow my words and explore what you notice.

To begin with, let's start in a comfortable position. You can be seated, you can be standing, you can be lying down. You might even want to try the exploration in different positions and notice if you feel anything different because sometimes when people lay down, their breathing changes. Sometimes when they're sitting or standing or moving around, their breathing changes. So again, it's just becoming more aware of what's going on in your system.

When we think about phase, I like to think about four phases of breath. Inhale, pause, exhale, pause, where the inhale and the exhale are more of the active phases and the pauses are more of the passive phases. Now that doesn't mean in the pauses you're doing nothing. It's more that there's this engagement between all four where there's an active engagement with the inhale and exhale, and then there's a restful engagement with the pauses.

Now, there are breathing systems out there who will disagree that there are pauses at the top and the bottom of the breath and that's fine. It's just different approaches to the process of breathing. So if you don't agree with the idea of a pause at the top and the bottom, you can disregard that and just focus on the inhale and the exhale. I will be talking through the pauses, so as I do that you can just ignore what I'm saying.

So to begin with, just notice the phases of your breath. Notice that inhale. Notice what happens at the top of the inhale. Notice the exhale. Notice what happens at the bottom of the exhale. Notice if there's any dominance of one phase to another. Is there a phase that's lacking? Can you feel the distinction between the phase beginning and the phase ending as it moves into the subsequent phase?

Now let's move into pace. So pace relates to the timing or speed of each phase or between the phases. And typically in yoga, we tend to train

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ourselves to have a longer exhale than an inhale. The benefit being a calmer nervous system, and a more adequate emptying of air from our lungs. And if we do a great exhale from our lungs, our inhale will be more full quite organically.

Now, while this is ultimately something that I train my clients toward, I'm really sure not to impose a breathing practice upon them, especially when the physical structure is unable to absorb or integrate it.

So I like to first just have people recognize where they're at with the pace of their breathing, recognizing what is true and what is real now. And curiously, oftentimes, as someone becomes more supple overall through their body, they quite organically naturally notice a longer exhale and a more full inhale.

So sometimes the process is not one of having to lengthen the exhale, but rather, it naturally occurs because the way the tissue is starting to change. So this being the baseline phase, let's just play.

Can you notice the tempo of one phase relative to the other? So is the inhale longer than the exhale? Or is the exhale longer than your inhale? Are you noticing if any of the phases are specifically rushed? Is there a grasping of breath as you finish one phase and head into a subsequent phase? Is the pace appropriate for the activity that you're performing?

This leads us into the feeling or the quality of breath. So this is about texture and smoothness, maybe how the breath might be ragged or ratchety. Noticing the quality of breath, I find, to be a very cool exploration because so much information can be elicited.

Now I want to just emphasize that I don't mean, oh, the breath is smooth, this means such and such. Or the breath is ratchety, this means such and such. But rather, as you notice the patterns of when your breath is smooth versus when it's ratchety, you'll probably notice other factors associated with this.

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We all have experiences of limited breath at times and we've all experienced smooth breath. So the why or what's contributing to a smooth or a limited breathing depends on us. It depends on what's going on in our life. And the key is if you can become aware of those patterns, you'll become more aware of yourself.

So, again, through this exploration do your best to not try and make the quality mean anything, simply notice what is and how it relates to you and your life and the various goings on in your life.

So noticing your breath. Notice where it's moving your body. So do you feel the rib cage moving? Do you feel your abdomen moving? Does your breath feel full or slim, weak, empty, warm, cool, present? Maybe there's another word that I haven't used here. Does the breath feel ratchety or smooth or some variation between these two?

Ultimately, the exploration of our breathing pattern enables us to connect with our true and authentic breath, which can be a connecting point between our conscious and unconscious, our physical world and our mental and emotional world. The experience can be supported or limited by the relative balance or imbalance in our physical structure.

In becoming aware of our patterns and how our breath moves through our body, we can then take steps towards creating new patterns, so our true breath is nurtured and naturally arises.

Now, you might be also noticing that as you are doing these exercises that your body might be shifting as well. Maybe you're noticing more thinking or less thinking or more relaxation. Maybe your body is settling more into the floor. Notice the impact on the rest of your body when you focus in on your breath.

This can play a huge, huge, huge part into how you breathe throughout your day, which can impact how you rest throughout your night. So simply notice, explore and discover.

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If this episode was interesting to you and it's resonating with you, and you are a professional or you are a client and you're seeking an integrative approach to supporting you in better breathing and understanding what is contributing to what's going on with sleep apnea, whether you have hypermobility or not, and you're looking for a full-body integrative way to explore and perhaps have a new possibility in your body and in your mind and in your breath, I encourage you to look at Mechanics of Breathing 4.0 program that's beginning this January. And you can read all about it at functionalsynergy.com/breathing. We'll see you next time.