

## Ep #225: Shoulder – A New Mini-Series



### **Full Episode Transcript**

**With Your Host**

**Susi Hately**

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

## Ep #225: Shoulder – A New Mini-Series

**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 really glad that you're here because today I'm digging into the shoulder. And this really kicks off a whole mini series on the shoulder and the shoulder girdle, the impact of the movement of the arms and the hands, and integrating what I know from all the years that I have been utilizing therapeutic aspects of yoga, biomechanics and kinesiology to support people in reducing and eradicating pain.

And my hope through this mini series is really to touch on a number of different areas. First of all is to simply understand the pieces and the functioning of the shoulder girdle and their impact on movement. Why injury happens, I'm obviously not going to be exhaustive in those lists. But why injury happens particularly in movement-based practices like yoga and Pilates and fitness.

And how to work to allow the shoulder girdle to become stable, strong and mobile so that the things that we do, whether we're in a yoga practice or whether we are in a cross-fitting type of practice or any of those movement type of things that we are utilizing the arms quite strongly, how can these movements we're doing become light?

How can those of you who run or walk and those arms are moving and sometimes there can be added tension through in and around the shoulder which can limit how you move. But how can those other activities become easily active, feel free, right? You just move more smoothly, right?

What's the relationship to our breath, to the spine, to the pelvis, to core stability? And how our ability not to force and to move in a range that is less pain or even no pain, how that can really impact our progress with relationship to our shoulder.

## Ep #225: Shoulder – A New Mini-Series

I'll be talking a little bit about rotator cuff injuries and winged scapulas. And then I will touch on when it comes to yoga because I do work with a lot of people who have yoga practice, things to consider when in standing poses and twists. Even inversions, like really anything that has weight bearing is what I'm referring to as an inversion so that could be simply downward dog and then going into back bends and twists.

Ultimately what I hope that you gather from this is really the extraordinary nature of the shoulder girdle and how so much, surprise, surprise, is possible. So much as possible. In fact, I just received an email from someone just today about their experience in the Power of the Pits program that I run and how she has had shoulder pain for years.

And I want to read to you just a little bit of what she wrote and how she had tried so many things, and after doing the Power of Pits, movements her shoulder pain is gone. So this has been something that's been ongoing for a few years and was progressively getting worse and caused chronic pain in practically every muscle of her shoulder, but mainly her jaw and in and around the pec.

So the key here is she did an hour session recording, learning some of the principles of pure movement and tuning into the whispers. And she's had a very substantial shift in her awareness and in also what she's experiencing. So that really is an additive piece to what I'll be sharing with this mini series.

And I'll also be spending more time in a training, a multi-hour training called Power of Pure Movement: Strong Stable Shoulders. So if what I am sharing here really resonates with you and you would like to join me in that program, we get going in February and you can read all about it at [functionalsynergy.com/shoulders](http://functionalsynergy.com/shoulders). That's plural, shoulders. Okay?

So let's get into it. Now, when I talk about the shoulder girdle, I mean I love the body I find the whole human body and being extraordinary. Even when there are really rough patches I find it all extraordinary and the shoulder girdle is just right along with that, I find it quite extraordinary. I mean when

## Ep #225: Shoulder – A New Mini-Series

you really look at it, one way I like to see it is that it's designed to act as a bridge between the arms and the spine, the torso. So it's providing both delicate strength and immense stability, right?

It enables, when you think about it, emotion to be transmitted into action with shoulder girdle stability being transformed into strength, power and endurance. And I use the word emotion on purpose because the shoulder girdle is part of a chain of events responsible for hugging and squeezing, caressing, reaching out, grasping. So simply by its postural position it can express someone's pain, depression, suppression, shock, openness, receptivity, willingness and or comfort with one's own personal power, right?

So it's so much more than just physically what it's providing. But when we take a look at the physical practice of yoga or fitness or CrossFit, but we'll stick with yoga and then we can make the leap to other practices, is that think about how it has a role of transmitting and transforming energy by how it impacts our ability to raise the arms overhead or out to the sides.

Like think about Tadasana or Mountain Pose or into Warrior Two. Think about shoulder press or chin-ups, right? It influences our ability to balance in crow pose or plank pose, downward facing dog, Chaturanga. And think about bringing our arms into Eagle pose or any other shoulder type of mobility work; cow face pose, reverse namaste, bringing the arms behind the back.

Or in back pins, if you're going into something a little more complex like wheel pose. But the same can be said, as I mentioned, through Pilates or fitness or CrossFit. There are lots of ways that our shoulder girdle plays into those particular activities. And how is that process?

The other piece is that it doesn't act alone. Its ability to influence the positioning and strength of the arms also is heavily impacted and affected by surrounding forces like our ability to breathe and our ability to relax, the relative positioning of our spine, rib cage and the head, functional leg strength, pelvic and core stability. And one of my favorites, our ability to not

## Ep #225: Shoulder – A New Mini-Series

force and to move in ranges that have less or no pain, right? These have an impact on the way that our shoulder girdle functions.

So the functioning of all of these parts, these ideas as they relate to that shoulder girdle, as well as our personal nature, as well as our thinking will impact the ability of the shoulder to impart a grace of freedom and ease through our entire system. Right down through the arms, to the tips of the fingers, right?

So it's amazing. It really, really is amazing when we are able to move beyond just the mechanical nature of the muscles, right? There's more going on that can really play into those muscles and how they function.

The other way that I like to think about the shoulder girdle is it really is this orchestra because there's skeletal and muscular and nervous lymphatic respiratory and circulatory systems that are all involved through and around the shoulder girdle. So it really is this orchestra of action.

And much like any orchestra, if there is a part of the orchestra that's not functioning well, that will have an impact on the way the music is played or is heard. Not necessarily in a bad way, but it will have an impact. So these things have an impact on the way the shoulder girdle functions.

I remember taking a visceral manipulation course, and some of you might be wondering okay, Susi, you're not a massage therapist. How on earth did you get into a visceral manipulation course? And let me tell you, that's a story for another time. And it was awesome.

I was level one and I learned about this relationship between the liver, not the liver organ itself but the tissue in and around the liver and the right shoulder and seeing how that right shoulder really shifted up when the tissue in and around that liver area shifted up. Same for gallbladder and the left shoulder.

So it's curious. These pieces that are related, I spend a lot of time working with my acupuncturist and understanding some of the theory and energy

## Ep #225: Shoulder – A New Mini-Series

systems around Chinese medicine and acupuncture and there's some really important acupuncture points in and around the armpit area and how the heart connects down through to the hand. So there are so many places and ways that we can view how this functions.

And lots of times when people have multiple different ways of looking at a body, it's easy to fall into the trap of we're going to look at it through a lens. And I've recently been training my cert folks to say okay, let's not actually look at it through a lens, all of this is a lens.

So the information I've learned through all the various things that I have learned across the board; mind-body different ways of viewing like acupuncture, Chinese medicine, Ayurveda, they all feed into the way that I view someone. I don't just look at someone from an anatomy perspective. Or I don't just look at someone from a part of their body or from an energetic perspective. It all feeds into and has me looking at the wholeness of the person and the wholeness of the situation.

So when you start to really layer in these pieces, it's not segmenting things out but rather it's being able to get clearer on what's contributing to what. And so it makes our work as movement folks very, very powerful. And if you're a body worker or a PT who has a whole host of other skills in your toolkit than I do and you incorporate these things the work you do becomes super powerful. Really, really powerful.

As an example is you in your own body and your view of your own body and the way that you're seeing your own function and how that plays into your own energy. And how you touch someone else will have such an impact on the way that they receive that touch. But digressing, we'll come back and kind of bring myself back into the shoulder girdle piece.

And the point being is that we're this orchestra of many different ways and energies and pieces and they all have impact and influence. And they can be supportive in the reduction and eradication of physical pain and of improving post-surgical outcomes and helping to just get back to where you want to go, really from this place of pain to possibility.

## Ep #225: Shoulder – A New Mini-Series

So when I'm looking or when I've looked at over the years, what I have seen contributing to injury happening, particularly in the yoga practice, I often see six key things. And I'll be getting into these more and more over the course of the mini-series.

What I find is when I work with folks who've been longtime yoga practitioners or yoga teachers or yoga therapists, these are what I find show up the most. This is by no means an exhaustive list, it's just what I notice in terms of patterns.

So the first one is that I'll often see scapula, like one or scapulae, so the shoulder blades, being somewhat stuck, right? So that can occur from sitting or overuse or a military posture or one-sided activities. It can also just come from compensatory patterning in a braced position further upwards in the upper body to compensate for something lower in the body.

I also notice a thoracic spine that has limitations. Sometimes it appears to be tight. Now, maybe tight is not quite the right quality to be describing it, but it has that sort of shortened or limited in some way type of function.

And so sometimes what I find is that if people have learned that there are certain muscles that are not functioning as well as they should or they're weak or they've been turned off or there's some sort of atrophy, then they might start to strengthen these muscles. Sometimes they might get into an overdone-ness or even to a compensated way, and that can actually lead to more tension and more limitation through the thoracic spine. And that can impact the way that the overall shoulder girdle functions.

There can also be tissue, like the subclavius or the pec minor or coracobrachialis or biceps that can impact the way the head of the humerus functions, or even the scapula or clavicle. And that can reduce space in and around anatomical structures like the brachial plexus.

And that, whether it's the brachial plexus that has been a reduction of space around it or whether it's just the tissue all in and around that area may be impacting the way the nerves flow, this can possibly create some

## Ep #225: Shoulder – A New Mini-Series

numbness, tingling, muscle fatigue, pain or tension through the shoulder, arm, elbow and wrist.

So when we can start to do practices that shift up the functioning between the arm and the rib cage and the collarbone or the clavicle and play with the muscle or fascia tissue in that area, a lot can really shift in terms of what someone feels through the hand or their elbow.

Now you'll notice I didn't say open up this area. I'll sometimes drop that word but I don't love the word because I don't think I'm opening anything. I really leave opening into the hands of physicians with scalpels. I prefer to help improve or reduce limitations to create better connections and coordination. And that can often change up the way that someone feels or how the tissue is responding to various other forces and loads.

A big one that I often see is a disconnection between the shoulder and the pelvic girdles. Like the two of them work really, really well together and there's a dependency between the two of them. They enable force, energy, and movement to transfer from the center of the body to the limbs, right?

To balance that motion a series of muscles including erector spinae and the lats as well as chains of muscles moving up the lateral sides, front and spiraling around the body. Like I'm talking about the myofascial meridians here, they connect these key, key girdles. And so when they're out of balance there's not a great communication and more tension, pain and poor movement can occur. And that can lead to even more instability, just a lower bandwidth which can create that much more fatigue.

There can also be an impact on the shoulder girdle when the way that the legs are moving in the pelvis. Now, someone might say that this is more related to the pelvic girdle but I really like to separate it out when I'm describing things that are related to shoulder issues. The way that leg bone moves in the hip socket can help or hinder the movement and stability of the shoulder girdle.



## Ep #225: Shoulder – A New Mini-Series

So if you think about if someone's stepping back into a lunge pose or into a warrior one pose we'll start with, and how that leg bone swings, what happens with the pelvis can really impact the way the rib cage then is positioned. So if someone steps back further than they really ought to or it can feel, they might get into too much of an extension through their spine and just disconnect, truly, between the leg and the pelvis. Like there's a lack of harmony in that movement.

And so when that starts to happen, then tension patterns might develop into the shoulder girdle or simply things can just be cut off. Like I've seen people who, obviously, their arms move and their shoulder girdle has a level of function, I mean they can live life. But there's this almost lifelessness to it.

And when they start to move their legs better, whether it's through their yoga poses or their squats or whatever, something of a switch gets turned on and their arms just begin to function better. Like there's a really strong correlation between, what I see anyway, between how those legs move in the pelvis, what happens with the pelvis and then what occurs with the shoulder girdle.

And then this is actually a bonus one, this is a seventh one, but holding the breath. And this is becoming more and more obvious to a lot of people. Breathing is becoming a really clear, important thing to ensure you are at least training or you are improving because the way that we breathe can bring grace and ease to our movement.

And when we hold the breath or when the breath has a lot of tension in it or strain in it, that can create further tension in the jaw, the neck, the chest, upper back, abdomen, between the shoulder blades, I mean the list can really go on.

We can also move into forced breathing, which is interesting because with the increase of knowledge about breathing sometimes people get into forceful breathing that their system might not be quite ready for, like something like a Ujjayi breath is a great example of this and sometimes

## Ep #225: Shoulder – A New Mini-Series

Kapalbhati is an example of this. These are both terms in the yoga world that are known, and when they're done improperly can create more tension and imbalance than freedom.

And this is another way to kind of get over limited in the thoracic spine and also for that matter the pelvic floor. So when things aren't functioning well with breathing, it's not uncommon then to see this limitation in the middle thoracic spine and then through the blades or the scapula and down through the arms into the hands. And when we start to shift up how those pieces function, then a lot can really fundamentally change.

So as we go through into this mini series, I'm going to be talking more about how to support you in starting a process of helping your tissue to settle. We'll be talking a bit about practices that I sometimes do with my clientele, why or what drives me to utilize those practices. I'll dig into the principles of movement that I've highlighted already on the podcast, but I will also talk about them in relationship to helping to improve shoulder function.

And just as a reminder, those principles of movement are nourishing relaxation and awareness, connecting or beginning with your spine in mind before you get into movement. Connecting the spinal movement with movement at the largest joints, the shoulders and the hips. Moving the joints in their optimum range of motion.

Connecting with your core stability in a way that connects with ease and grace, building up effortless effort or adopting a relaxed resilience. Moving in a range that does not increase pain and do all that needs to be done and nothing more, starting with simple. Simple, what you can feel before moving into things that are more complex.

So I'll be speaking to those principles as well, as I go through this mini series so you get a really good feel about how I work and also how you can do this with your own self or with your clients.

## Ep #225: Shoulder – A New Mini-Series

I'll also talk more about the recovery process. And I've sort of mentioned that already, but I'll be digging more and more into this of what I have seen in terms of supporting people moving from a place where they may have pain and limitation that's been ongoing to a place where they can actually get back into some of these more complex movements in a way that does not have pain rippling through it.

And how I go about doing it because there is both an art and a science to this and a level of support and safety that a client needs in order to move through that transition from sort of a rehabilitative or recovery space into what I often refer to as more of a fitness-based space. Not to say that you can't do fitness in pain, I would just prefer to help people move towards a fitness practice that has less or no pain because I've seen that to be a possibility for many people.

So I hope you continue with me on this journey of this particular mini series on the shoulder girdle. And if you would love to dig into it more, you can join me at [Power Of Pure Movement: Strong and Stable Shoulder Girdle](#). It would be an honor and a total pleasure to share with you what I know more and in-depth about the shoulder girdle and helping people to reduce and eradicate their shoulder girdle pain. So with that, you have a great, great rest of your day and we'll see you on the next episode.