

Ep #227: Shoulder and Hips Connection: Exploring Bridge Pose and Supine Twist



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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. I'm so glad that you're here because today I'm going to take you through an exploration of the relationship between your shoulders and hips. I'm going to share a little bit of academic information, but mostly I want to guide you through a process for you to explore this relationship. Because in the concept of improving shoulder function and reducing shoulder pain, very rarely, especially with chronic persistent symptoms, rarely is the issue the actual issue.

So with shoulder issues, you can make some gains, but if the gains are not continuing, the likeliness is that the issue does not actually live in the shoulders. Even if you've got like a torn rotator cuff or you've got arthritis in the shoulder and you can pinpoint that anatomically something is happening there, we can shift up the way the neuromuscular patterns are existing in your body, the way the tissue is responding in your body, particularly in and around the hips and between the ribs and the pelvis, and so much can shift up in the shoulder, even with damage like a rotator cuff injury or arthritis.

So it's really, really good news that just because there is pain in that joint area, doesn't mean that it has to be long-term, even if there is some anatomical change. So this is partly what I want to guide you on over the course of this short episode, is to see and feel for yourself what this connection is from the shoulder girdle to the pelvic and the hip girdle.

And then if you are a teacher, whether it's a yoga teacher, a yoga therapist, or you're a health professional who integrates yoga into what you do, you'll have some more cues and some more ideas of how you can take this into your practice. And if you're someone with shoulder pain, it can be actually quite enlightening to you around how your body functions.

Ep #227: Shoulder and Hips Connection: Exploring Bridge Pose and Supine Twist

So often we can be thinking about our bodies and certainly feeling them, particularly when they're painful, but thinking about what's contributing and just what the pain is. And it can be very academic and very intellectual. And that goes so far. I mean, I have a kinesiology background, my degree is in anatomy and exercise physiology, so I can nerd out on the academia of this all day long.

And then when I'm teaching, and even when I'm working with my own body, dropping into an interoceptive experience, into a proprioceptive experience is just totally game changing. It really helps us recognize that there's some exercises or movements, there's some science that actually isn't sort of clinically relevant to the person who is needing help.

Not everything works for every person. So when we take this time to truly feel what's going on in our systems, how our tissue is responding, we can make so many more gains. So if you have had shoulder issues that have been long-standing, you've been doing all the things and you haven't been getting the gains, and this is to both the professionals that you're working with your clients or the clients themselves, then this might be a way into your process.

Okay, so let's get rolling. This short little practice series, we're going to use bridge pose and a supine twist. And what I'd love for you to have handy is a strap, it might have a buckle or it might not, the buckle is not important. But a strap that you can hold between your hands. Now, you might not have a strap handy, so a tie or a bathrobe tie or a TheraBand, something that you can place between both hands and is easy to hold.

Then when we get to the twist, you may or may not want something underneath your head. When we get there, I might suggest it, it just depends on what and how you are feeling.

Putting something under the head is not often what I encourage, but sometimes, especially when you're receiving an audio of instructions and you're sort of fiddling around and figuring out where you are in space,

Ep #227: Shoulder and Hips Connection: Exploring Bridge Pose and Supine Twist

sometimes that little extra lift in the head can just provide the necessary ease in this moment to support yourself and make the process simpler and easier and just softer overall.

So let's get rolling. What we're going to begin with is on our backs. And I'm just going to begin with an exploration of an exercise. So if you take your arms up to the sky, not overhead, just to the sky. So you're on your back, knees are bent, and your fingertips are pointing up to the ceiling, AKA the sky. And can you place the strap between your hands so both of your hands are holding onto the strap.

And then start to move your arms over your head. Now as you move, notice if anything else is moving along with the arms, because the movement itself, taking the arms overhead, we're moving into something called flexion, taking the arms overhead is only the arms coming overhead.

In many cases, people will notice that their ribs move with, they have a little bit of extension through the spine. Or their pelvis moves with, or their head gets involved. And can you move only as far as those things don't happen? Can you only move as far as your elbows don't start to bend, or that you deviate left and right with the arms as you go overhead?

Can you move in a range that doesn't increase strain or tension anywhere in your body? Yeah? All right, that is an initial contextual baseline of exploring what's happening in your body. Take another few more repetitions and just notice now what your breath is doing. And can you easily breathe? Try not to make your breath better, just notice what your baseline is in terms of what your breath is actually doing now.

And then let the strap go to the side and just let your hands rest beside you, arms alongside you. Awesome. So the next thing we're going to get into is moving into bridge. And if you're familiar with the pose of bridge, I want you to consider that what we're going to focus in on is the movement into it.

Ep #227: Shoulder and Hips Connection: Exploring Bridge Pose and Supine Twist

A lot of times in the yoga practice we talk about asana in a loosely translated way as a pose or a position or a shape. So more of a noun. We're getting into something, and it's the something that we focus on. And instead, what I'd like you to focus on is to think about it as a movement. Think of it as a verb.

There's a point A, which is where you are now. And there's a point B where you will be. We're not trying to get to point B. Point B will show up, it's more what happens between point A and point B that I'm curious about.

And all you'll need to do here is from being on your back, knees bent, feet on the floor, is simply lift your pelvis into the sky. And then come back down. You'll notice I didn't say to tuck your pelvis and to peel the lower back off the ground and then wave into peeling the rib cage or the thoracic spine off the ground and then weave back down in a wave-like way. That's undulation and that's not what I'm speaking about.

What I'm speaking about is simply extending through that hip joint and lifting up into bridge. It's a movement of extension so your glutes and your hamstrings are involved. And coming back down. Now, I'm not saying that undulating is a bad movement. I'm just not teaching that in this particular episode.

Okay, so now, as you're moving, one thing I'd like you to notice, and maybe you have a mirror close by or maybe you are able to feel this for yourself, but I'd like you to notice as you lift your hips, do you clench your butt cheeks or your glutes first before you lift? And instead of doing that, can you simply lift and feel the tonality of your glutes engage as you lift because you have lifted?

If you are clenching your glutes first, what I've seen with my clientele is that when they do that, it's like they lose the fuel which is going to actually drive the movement up into extension. And then what happens is they fall into using their back or their rib cage or grip through their neck and their jaw.

Ep #227: Shoulder and Hips Connection: Exploring Bridge Pose and Supine Twist

So can you just allow for the glutes to be where they are on the ground, and then when you lift, think about lifting from the gluteal fold. So where the bum meets your leg, imagine lifting from there. And the hip joint extends and up you come.

The next thing I'd like you to notice as you're doing this movement is what happens through your rib cage and your shoulders, because the movement of bridge is actually a hip and shoulder movement. As we lift through the hips, the rib cage also lifts and rotates around those shoulders. So it's vertical, it moves around the shoulder joint.

A lot of people, when they lift, when they lift their hips up they stop at the rib cage. And so the rib cage doesn't move. And I'd like you to consider that as you lift the glutes, as they lift up, as you go into extension, so the rib cage follows. And the rib cage, you can see it moving around those shoulder joints. And then come back down and notice what is happening for you.

Now notice too, like as you're moving are you pushing your head back into the floor? Are you pulling your shoulder blades to your spine? Are you driving your movement from your back? Are you clenching your toes? Are you lifting your toes or your heels before you lift? And can you not do that? Can you, from supine, simply lift your hips to the sky?

You're moving through the hips. You're moving through the shoulders. Does that rib cage follow? You see, what's really interesting about doing bridge in this way is that as you're lifting, the glutes are actually helping drive that rib cage up. And there's a great vector of movement between your glutes and behind your breastbone to the point that when people really get this, and then they come back up to standing, they're like, hey, I feel taller. I feel connected between my butt and my chest. And there's just this natural lift into a posture that they didn't have before, right?

It's different than the movement of your pelvis up, but you're not moving your rib cage. Like some people just lift through their hips and they don't move their rib cage at all. And that's a very baby movement, not a bad

Ep #227: Shoulder and Hips Connection: Exploring Bridge Pose and Supine Twist

movement, just a very small movement. And what we're wanting to consider is moving through that whole rib cage and that rib cage moves around the shoulder.

And you might find that as you play with this, you might not have a lot of movement there. That's okay. It's just recognizing what you do have. After a few of these repetitions, bring your hips back down to the floor, grab hold of that strap again, and take your arms into a movement overhead. And what do you now notice?

Anything different or new as you take the arms overhead? Is your breath any different? Do your ribs want to follow? Does your pelvis want to tuck or tilt? How about your head or your neck? Can you feel your arm bones a little differently moving in your shoulder sockets? What's happening there? What are you noticing? What's new or what's different?

Now from here, let the strap go and we'll move into a supine twist. And the supine twist has you bring your right leg towards your belly. So the knee comes towards your belly. And just watch that as you're bringing it, that it's a very smooth movement, that you're not kind of grasping with your arms to reach for your leg.

Can you allow for that leg to move smoothly through your hip socket, bringing that leg to your belly? You don't need to hug or pull the knee really wackily or wildly into your belly. Just hold it really gentle. And then with your opposite hand, holding onto that knee very, very gently, bring the leg across your body.

Now, as you do this, can you keep your shoulder girdle easy, easy peasy on the floor? Notice if your shoulder, the one you're moving away from, wants to lift off of the floor. Notice if your head wants to push into the floor or press in your neck or any part of your body. And then if it's available, can you continue to move your pelvis into that rotation noticing what happens with the rib cage and with the shoulder.

Ep #227: Shoulder and Hips Connection: Exploring Bridge Pose and Supine Twist

Is there any bracing? Is there a wall? Is there any strain or increase of tension? And then come on back, letting the legs come back down and take a pause. Notice if there's anything new or different in your body.

And then let's come to the other side. So bringing your leg to your body, that's your left one. You're not hugging it hard. You are gently grasping it with your opposite hand and then across your body, that leg comes. And again, notice if you want to hold your breath, press your head back into the floor, push your neck down to the floor or any other number of tension patterns. And there's bazillions of different things that we can do with our body to compensate for movement.

And just notice. Now, can you come out of the movement and come back into the movement with less of those compensations? So making the movement a little more pure. Are you able to do that? Can you do these movements with 5% more ease through your shoulder girdle and have the same result?

To explore this, you can come out of the twist now, take a breather, maybe even bring the arms back to the sky with the strap, taking the arms overhead and seeing what's now present. And you can take this notion of can you do these movements with 5% less effort and still have the same result? Like that's the important bit here.

When we're thinking about really slowing down and tuning in, it's easy to not do as much in the interest of ease. But my challenge for you is can you be that much more at ease and still have the same result? So we're not just taking stuff off our plate, we're not just backing up the movement. If you reduce your compensation, you can reduce the amount of effort and notice what happens with your movement, stay tuned in.

What happens to your breath? To the quality of tension? To the quality of pain? To the quality of movement? To the distance of movement? What's now happening?

Ep #227: Shoulder and Hips Connection: Exploring Bridge Pose and Supine Twist

Now, it's interesting because when we move into a supine twist, the primary drive initially is that leg coming up to the belly. And then we're starting to move that leg across and then asking the obliques to get involved to drive that pelvis into the rotation.

Now, if there is some sort of limitation that's going on in the hips or the obliques are not firing for whatever reason, what we might do is press back with our shoulders or with our neck or with our head in order to leverage that movement into a twist.

It's a great compensatory process, and sometimes it can be not supportive, even though we think it's being supportive because it's helping us get into the range we want, but it's actually doing it at the expense, right? It's borrowing from one area, thinking that we're going to make ourselves stronger, more mobile, but we're actually making the whole system weaker because we're asking parts of the body to do a job that they are not designed to do.

So if you're noticing that you're getting really involved with your upper body when you're doing these movements, the opportunity here is to make the movement a little more pure and a little less compensated.

Yes, your range of motion will initially be less, and that can sometimes be a bit gobsmacking or blah, just like blah. I want to say disappointing or frustrating or whatever, but usually when I'm working with clients it's more like blah, because that's the response they give. Because on some level, they always knew that they were going at it a little bit hard and now they're realizing it's like blah. And if you practice in that range, the actual range that you know is available to you starts to arise quite organically.

When you're through with this practice, then bring the strap back into it and bring the arms overhead. So knees bent, feet flat on the floor, and then take those arms overhead and notice what you feel. Is there anything different from a quality perspective? Is the quality of movement any different? Is your range, the quantity of your range any different? How are

Ep #227: Shoulder and Hips Connection: Exploring Bridge Pose and Supine Twist

you feeling in your body? What's happening with any related tension or strain? Has any of that changed or shifted?

There's such interesting correlations through the tissue that's vertical in our body as well as the tissue that runs spirally around our body and the impact between these two major functional areas, the shoulder girdle and the pelvic girdle, and what happens in between them. And when we can bring more coordination and more ease, more harmony between these movement patterns, so much tension can be released. So much can change and how you feel in your body can really be different.

Sometimes when people hear these episodes and feel good doing them, they wonder and they ask me questions through email and say, you know, how often should I do these exercises? My response to them is do them when your body feels like it needs them.

I really like to teach people to feel into their system and to sense the signals that are saying to them, I need this. Because there's a variety of different levels of sensation. There's the screams that are like, emergency, we've got to handle this now. And then there are the quieter, quieter and quieter and quieter whispers.

So said another way, thinking of the traffic light analogy, those screams, those reds, that's the red light asking you to stop, the emergency. But then there are all these yellows and the yellows are indicators. If we know traffic signals, some of those yellows can be stale, they can be almost done, almost turning to red and some of them can be fresh.

And so you get to notice within your own system which ones are fresh and which ones are stale. How can you listen to those messages to help guide you in supporting your own being? So you're feeling, not just thinking, but feeling through this process of what your body is asking for and tuning in to those messages.

Ep #227: Shoulder and Hips Connection: Exploring Bridge Pose and Supine Twist

That, for me, is really the process for supporting my clientele in reducing and eradicating orthopedic types of pain of all different sorts and how we can really support that shoulder girdle to find more ease and more comfort connecting between, in this case, the shoulders and the hips.

If this has resonated for you, by all means, continue to practice it as you need. If you want deeper experience and more of my attention with you, consider the Power of Pure Movement: Strong and Stable Shoulders. We're running it on February the 20th, it would be such a joy to work with you. Again, that's Power of Pure Movement: Strong and Stable Shoulders. We'll see you next time. Take good care.

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.