

Ep #235: Healing & Synergy: Lazy Glutes, Dead Butt, and the Art of Reconnection



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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 in the middle of my mini series, which at its essence is about reducing and eradicating physical pain for your clientele. And if you are not a health professional, you'll get some great ideas to support yourself.

This is a lead-up to my professional certification, IAYT accredited yoga therapy program that we have entry that is now open for registration and our first live online training happens in April.

So if this is something that is of interest to you, if you are listening to this podcast, if you've taken any of my shorter courses and you have this deep, deep, inner yes that you are feeling very drawn to the program, then I encourage you to check out the website at functionalsynergy.com/ certification, and you can read about the program there. And the first step is the therapeutic yoga intensive that's happening in April. All the information is there and you can fire emails to me with questions if you have questions about the program.

I'm also going to be bringing on people into this podcast over the next few weeks who are current trainees and they'll share with you what they have gained from the program and to give you a taste of what to expect in the program. They're already helping their clients get out of pain is the spoiler alert for this. And we are only in March, we started in January. So just to give you a heads-up of what is actually possible with supporting yourself and supporting your clientele.

So with that, then let's get into the topic for today's episode, which is the glutes. Specifically this ongoing, common conversation about the glutes being inactive. If you go online you'll also hear terms like dead butt or lazy

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butt or my lazy glutes, which truly I think is an unfortunate terminology when you really think about talking to our bodies that way.

I won't go down the rabbit hole, I promise. However, when we do talk to our body that way, is it really that helpful? Knowing that the way that we think about our symptoms, knowing that the way that we think about our body really does have meaning and impact, then is there another way that we can explore that?

And this is one reason why I love to think about this area of the body, and maybe its being a primary issue is being not connected or needing to be reconnected. And when we can reconnect it, then we can start to improve the motor control and coordination and lots of change can happen.

So I'll do that little plug about how we're speaking to our bodies, how you might be speaking about your clients' bodies and how we can really support our bodies to gain the function that we really want them to gain and have ourselves live the life we really want to live.

So the breaking down of this particular episode, I want to talk first about the glutes, the anatomy of the glutes, and then what I see as key compensatory patterns that I see as being contributory to not having those glutes reconnect.

Now, I want to be really specific here, I'm not saying that these compensation patterns led to the glutes being inactive, or disconnected, or lazy or fill in the blank. I don't know that. What I do know is when I see people who are trying to re-engage and reconnect with their glutes, what I also see are these common compensation patterns.

And when I can help them reduce those common compensation patterns, then their glutes start to fire and things start to change. They feel more grounded below their belly button, they feel more in their pelvis. They feel more in their legs. There's more of this embodied experience of being in their legs more and they feel longer through their torso.

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So there's less of a felt sense of being compressed or of being sort of heavy in their bodies. And I've seen that these common compensation patterns, when they can be cleared up, can make those results happen.

So let's begin by first looking at the glutes themselves. And we're looking at these three muscles, the glute maximus, medius and minimus. And the glute maximus is the biggest, it's really the one that forms the roundness of our butt, and it's primary job is it's a powerful hip extensor as well as being an external rotator of the leg bone in the hip.

And then we have the glute medius, which is a powerful, powerful hip abductor. And the glute minimus is often considered more of a stabilizer muscle and it's also an abductor.

Now, it's interesting because there's been some more research about the glute maximus because the glute maximus has two points of attachment close to that leg bone. So it has an attachment through the iliotibial band, as well as onto the femur itself.

So the top two-thirds to three-quarters feeds into the IT band. And then that bottom third, bottom quarter, feeds directly into the femur itself. So there's been some interesting research, and I've spoken about this before, about how those lower glutes actually act as an external rotator or stabilizer.

Now, people argue with this, saying it's too superficial of a muscle to act this way. I'm just quoting the research and what they're suggesting is happening there. So it becomes kind of curious, right? Whether you agree or disagree, it's just curious, right? The difference between part of the muscle attaching to the IT band and part of that muscle attaching directly into the femur.

All in all, however it's functioning, however one wants to debate it or consider it, there are these three sections, the fiber alignment is different, the attachment points are different, and they act on that leg bone and the pelvis in different ways. And then collectively, they all need to function well.

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Now, some of the common movements that I see being taught to help people reconnect with their glutes is they can often do movements like bridge pose, that's being supine and then extending through the hip into bridge, or being prone on the belly, and doing leg extensions.

I've also seen people take the bridge pose onto a ball and do bridge on a ball, maybe even adding load to that and do something that's then called hip thrusts. Donkey kicks are another one when you're on hands and knees and then lifting the leg back into extension. And you can do versions of that partly like Superman or pointer pose, which is extending the back leg backward.

And then there's movements that are more hip abduction, so raising the leg out to the side, might add abduction rotation and do clamshells. All of these are really common exercises that you can easily Google by just doing like, what are the best glute exercises and you'll find them. And there's others that I have not included, but you'll find them easily, easily online.

And that's not the problem. There is not a dearth of information. There is plenty of information out there on what you can do to engage your glutes. That's not the problem. I think the problem to solve is how people are actually doing the movement. And I'm going to give a few different examples here for you to explore.

You can explore them on yourself and then with your clients, explore them with your clients. And try to really take on the notion of curiosity as you're doing this and that you're not trying to get the movement right, but helping someone grow awareness about how their body parts move.

This is something that's so fundamental in both the therapeutic yoga intensive and in the certification program, because what I'm training people to do and what the essence of this whole podcast really is about is your growing your awareness. And the fundamental vibe of this is that I don't think there's anything inherently broken unless there's something broken.

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There's nothing inherently wrong with anyone's body. There are things that aren't quite connected well, so let's help reconnect. But there's nothing inherently wrong. So I don't need to fix anything or get something right. And so when we can come across as being curious about how these pieces are working together, we make a lot of gain.

And so when I'm training my folks, because again, many of my folks are yoga teachers, some of them are physios, some of them are OTs, some of them are massage therapists, so they've got other sets of skills that do have a hands-on component, but for the majority they don't. And so they're learning the ability to see and the ability to teach what it is that they see and help their clients grow their awareness. And that's what I'm wanting to help you with here as well.

So when you're playing around with this, really consider what's going on in your body, be curious about what's happening and then help nurture it and then quiet the compensatory pattern.

So let's begin with being prone and into hip extension. And a really common thing that can happen is when people are moving one leg into extension, they rock their pelvis left and right. Or instead of focusing on the leg bone actually extending, they start to extend through their lumbar spine.

And it's not about not doing that by tucking your tail or pulling your navel to your spine, because that's just another compensation pattern. The focus really is on extending the leg bone in the pelvis. That's it. So can you extend the leg bone in the pelvis without that pelvis rocking, without driving it from your lumbar spine?

Now, someone might say to me, but that's really hard to do. Yeah. Yeah. And it's one reason why those glutes might stay in a disconnected place, because your brain is thinking about, all right, I'm going to extend my leg. But in fact you're rocking your pelvis and you're extending your spine instead of, or in addition to, extending the hip.

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And so the glutes are not doing the movement purely. You're getting other muscles in the back involved. You're getting left and right motion involved, right? You see? So you're making it really inefficient. So you think you're doing something, but you're actually not.

So then people add, well, squeeze your butt. And unfortunately, I shouldn't say unfortunately but I'm going to say that, I read some research recently about how when people squeeze their glutes, they actually improve over a period of time their ability to extend their leg more.

And I wondered to myself, okay, that's great that that's what that research says, but who cares if someone can extend their hip more? Is it actually a functional extension? I know people who have plenty of range of motion, but it's not a functional range of motion.

So just because someone has grown their range of motion, to me, it's not a meaningful piece of evidence. It's, well, how is that supportive for the activity that's being done, right? So when you're prone and you're doing hip extension, for what purpose are you pulling that navel to the spine? For what purpose are you kind of tucking your tailbone in?

Is it actually serving the outcome? Because like I said a few minutes ago, if you're doing the movement that's appropriate and effective for you, you will see change very quickly. Very quickly. It's why I can run my private series in a three month window because I can help people reduce their pain quickly. I can help them become aware of their movement patterns quickly.

And then we can retrain that which they become aware of and they can make gains quickly yet again, and then get up to a place of real strength within that whole three month window. So they're getting out of pain, they're retraining and they're getting stronger in a very timely manner because they're doing the things that are appropriate for what their body is needing. Okay, so that's the first one with prone leg extension.

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The second one is bridge pose. And a common thing that people do with bridge pose is that they squeeze their butt before they lift. Now what I have seen for a lot of people who squeeze their butt before they lift or squeeze their glutes before they lift is that they end up utilizing other parts of their body to drive the movement.

So again, they might be gripping through their rib cage or pushing with their back, or a common one which might seem really benign but they press their feet into the floor. And they push their feet into the floor in order to try and lift up. But when they do that, what you'll notice a lot of people do, not everyone but a lot of people, is when they push their feet and they actually slide backwards.

So there's a vertical movement up towards their head, which actually can make someone quite unstable. And then they start to use other muscles like their quads or their calves to actually get in on the movement to resist some of that motion up or down. So it becomes interesting. Watch that next time you see someone pushing their feet into the floor. What direction does their body actually go?

So I tend to not utilize any butt squeezing or foot pressing when I'm initially teaching someone how to do a bridge. I simply want to teach them about how their leg bone and their pelvis and their rib cage work together in a coordinated fashion. And I'll often ask them to either touch or imagine that they can feel where that gluteal fold is, where the roundness of their bum meets their leg.

A lot of people's arms aren't long enough, but they can get an idea of where that is and I'll ask them, can you lift from there? Lift from there. So then they lift from there and now they'll say, "Ooh, not only did I lift higher but my legs are more free and my back's not involved and I'm noticing that my rib cage feels less compressed." That's a really, really common experience that I have when people are coming up into bridge in the way of not squeezing their butt first.

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They also notice that their glutes become more toned, very what I call organically. Because they're doing hip extension, the glutes ought to engage as opposed to willfully engaging them and by willfully I mean squeeze first then lift.

Squeezing first is like, okay, I'm going to squeeze now, squeeze, and now lift. As opposed to organically being, I'm going to lift my hips into bridge and I'm going to feel the response of my glutes as I lift, yeah? And so there's this tonality that just starts to come on because the load has changed in one's body.

Now, the other thing that can happen with bridge pose is people can get highly involved in their neck. And so sometimes what I'll ask people to notice is what's going on in and around the occiput or in and around to where the neck portion of the spine starts to meet up towards that head, whether it's upper or lower neck muscles, just to feel what's happening. Is there a bracing pattern that's happening when someone is lifting.

With the feet what I'll teach is, can you feel the three points on the bottom of your feet; the center of the heel, the ball of the foot and the base of your pinky toe? Try not to push your feet in because really the driving force here are your glutes. Can you just let your feet be on the floor and not roll out to one side or the other side? Just feel the feet. Now go with your hips. That can often be a really big piece of the puzzle.

The next piece that I often will see with many different glute med particularly and glute min type of exercises, like when they get into abduction is that they are often bracing with their rib cage. I see it with clamshells. I see it with like monster walks or when they're standing and they take one leg out to one side and then one leg out to the other side. Or even leg lifts, abduction, is because the glutes aren't as connected and they might be a little atrophied even, that they'll brace with their ribs or in and around their shoulder girdle and hold their breath.

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So when I can actually help people move into, this is going to sound interesting, but move into a rotation or a side bend and free up the connection of the rib cage and the tissue around the rib cage and how that rib cage connects with the pelvis, so much fundamentally changes. And we don't even need to get into some abduction work, but rather because they have freed up some of the tissue that is around the rib cage and they're breathing better, they notice when they start to do other exercises that they feel more stable.

Do you see what happens there is that they are freeing up some of the tension patterns, some of the holding patterns that have been holding them together because they haven't been using the musculature around their pelvis as well. They don't have that innate pelvic stability. But when they free up some of the tissue further up the chain, that pelvic stability can just come online and they feel more grounded in their feet, more light in their feet and taller through their body.

Then at that point, I might start to get into, all right, now let's work some degree of abductor work to see how those legs move in the pelvis without your rib cage being a bracer, without your rib cage or your breathing being the compensator. And that can become really interesting because now they're not utilizing the rib cage or their breath to hold themselves together.

Now they have to use their legs even more. They have to use their glute max even more. They have to use more of the muscles in and around their pelvis more. They have to use more of their abdominal musculature between their pelvis and rib cage. And they inherently become more stable, more nimble because they're not bracing against forces. And that becomes very interesting.

Now, in my practice, I don't tend to do a lot of clamshells. They're not my favorite exercise. And I've talked about that in a previous episode, which I will put into the show notes. I'm also not a huge fan of monster walks, for no other reason than I just don't really like them.

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But I do love movements like goddess pose in yoga or warrior two or warrior one where we're working through some interesting multi-joint movement, but I can really help someone connect into the abductor and the external rotator action of the leg bone in the pelvis, and also cue them into their abdomen and their rib cage and how soft and easy they're being.

And when I can use language like that and help them connect into those legs more effectively, then the result becomes that their glutes engage better and they're more connected between their lower body and their upper body and they're more stable overall. So it just becomes this easier process and we're using these multi-joints. They're working at different layers of their functional structure.

So those are some key areas that I like to pay attention to. I gave a couple of examples of movements, as well as areas of compensation that can play into them. So when you're with your clientele, when you're working on your own self, consider what are you doing in your movement pattern to really support your movement forward, or to support your client's movement forward?

How aware are you helping them to become so that they can tune into and bear witness to where they're compensating and help them to reduce that compensation pattern, to help them tune in more closely to the way that they're connected? And you may just surprise yourself at how quickly someone can make change.

I'm going to be sharing more episodes of a similar vibe talking about common movement patterns that are out there, where I can see them kind of going sideways for a lot of people and how I utilize them or how I think about them a bit differently, which then really helped my clients get better. So stay tuned, more is coming.

And if this really resonates with you and you want to work more closely with me in an intensive way, then come check out the certification program over

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at functionalsynergy.com/certification. Looking forward to hearing from you,
take good care.