

Ep #200: Getting Out of Pain: Gradient of Sensation



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Susi Hatley

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Male Announcer: You're listening to *From Pain to Possibility* with Susi Hatley. 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 Hatley.

Welcome and welcome back. With this mini-series I am digging into principles on getting out of pain. These are principles and practices that have helped my clients reduce and eradicate physical pain, and I'm sharing them with you designed for the person who is in persistent pain and is looking for a way to reduce and eradicate that pain, as well as the health professionals who work with them.

I'm covering topics that really range from understanding the relationship between you and you, what I think contributes to deep releases when we are doing movement practices, what is your compelling reason for getting out of pain, because the truth is sometimes this process is one of transformation and transformation requires change and change often requires a dose of conviction. How your body doesn't lie, how to actually listen to your body and how to use compassion as a driver in your movement.

These are fundamental, these pieces. Because if these are not understood, then you won't really understand the way that biomechanics can blend with breath and stillness as being a really remarkable equation for pain reduction and eradication because it's not just a physical process, it's a whole being process and we need to address the whole of your being.

Then this can lead to what happens with progressing, because so many people get out of pain and then they'll start doing stuff and they're not actually ready for it. So how do you really determine if you're ready for progressing so that you can actually strengthen for real? The reality with strengthening is it actually can be quite easy but it's often made out to be hard to do because there's not the underlying infrastructure there, so let's support you with that.

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We'll be covering all of these topics throughout this mini-series to support you in your process. The base of all of it though is that your body doesn't lie. There are important and vital signals that are communicating with you. So the question might arise then of like how do you actually listen and what are you listening for?

So often mainstream thinking is that pain is an on or off signal. Binary, on off, tick tock. So it makes sense when someone gets a treatment done or does a yoga class and their pain goes away and then just only comes back. It makes sense when that happens over and over and over and over again, that people then believe that they can't be pain-free.

It makes sense that they get frustrated about why something does or does not work. A key reason for why they aren't getting results is that they aren't being taught about this inner world of sensation, this gradient of sensation. And when they can learn what it is and how to work with it and how meaningful it can be, so much can change.

Now, to highlight what I mean by a gradient, come to Canada and let me take you on a tour of snow. A very short and mini-series of snow I could say. But here I live in Canada, I've lived here all of my life. We have a whole heap of snow. We also have a range of temperatures which impacts the way the snow is.

Now, this is important to know because I'm going to take you on the story of skiing. And I've been a skier since I have been knee-high to a grasshopper. Absolutely love it, and the quality of snow matters because there is a range of snow which impacts how one skis. Not that it can, I mean it can mess up skiing, but when you understand the quality of snow it makes a difference for maybe what wax you put on your ski or how you tune your skis or just even how you ski or where you choose to ski on the mountain on a given day.

What I can tell you if you haven't picked up on it already, is that snow is not universally snow. So I learned how to ski just outside of Toronto on a very, very, very small hill called Kaladan. And Kaladan, they've got some snow

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but for the most part that snow was human made so it had this very specific gritty sort of texture and there was a lot of ice. A lot of ice.

So then I pick and then I head out west. And let me tell you about Kicking Horse in Golden BC where the powder there, powder. So outside of Toronto, no powder. Kicking Horse, powder. Totally different skiing and this powder is light and powdery and dry.

So then we head over further west to Whistler. Whistler now, the snow is heavier. It's also denser and wet. So each of these are entirely different. Now think about the weather. How cold it might be, whether it's super, super cold, or how close we are to the warmth of spring and the slushiness that spring brings. Think about how long ago the previous snow fell, the texture will be different again.

Lots of different conditions when we ski because there's lots of different qualities of snow. The point being is that there is a gradient of snow. And if someone is a ski racer, or they do the jumps, or ski cross, or they ski big bowls and shoots, knowing and understanding what this gradient of texture is, goes a long way to how they prep their skis, but also to how they actually ski this stuff called snow. Because how they ski certain kinds of snow is going to be different depending on its quality and texture.

So just as understanding the gradient of snow can help you with our skiing, applied to our bodies it can help us understand the gradient of sensation. And then we can come from a really curious and calm perspective, you will be amazed at how quickly you can get out of physical pain.

Okay, so how to do this. I'm going to walk you through three steps. The first step is that you need to understand more than ever we are not working with an on and off switch. I still remember a commercial when I would watch TV, I don't watch TV so this is why I remember the commercials so, so well.

There was a security guard on a football field, and I think this is like two decades old. And he sees a football laying on the field. He picks it up and he runs down the field and he has a touchdown. Meanwhile, there's

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another security guard watching him on the TVs rolling her eyes like, who is this guy? In the background, there's this voice saying, "We don't really care what you do. You be you. You do what you do when you have no pain."

The point being is like, okay, so number one, your body is not intelligent nor is it wise. You have this pain, take a pill so that you can do these things, right? So that's the underlying message, I found, that is there. On or off, pill, no pill. The reality is that this is not binary. It's not black and white. There's a full gradient of colors.

Now, when I'm teaching for a long time I use very basic signposts, and I use the traffic light or a barometer because there's the metaphorical red, yellow, and green. Really, really easy around its meaning, many people understand what the traffic light signals are. Where Red is stop it's like the place where people feel the most restricted. It's why they have come in to see me. Yellow is letting us know that the red is coming. And green is go.

Then as they are working through this and they start to experience more and more yellow, they start to see these other pieces. So it used to be that they would call it the fresh yellow, like on the traffic light there's green, and then the green turns to yellow and it's like this fresh yellow. And then it becomes stale and we know that that red is turning.

Now, people would often joke of saying, yeah, and that's when I put my gas down and I burn through that yellow. And I'd jokingly say to them, kind of like the way you move, right? Like, how far can you push that yellow, right? And so they start to get what their yellow means. And then from the traffic light signal, we kind of impose a metaphor of a dimmer switch. And then the dimmer switch, how bright or dim the yellow is. And so now there becomes more gradient there within the yellow.

And then what's been happening more recently is this color gradient that I've been using, where we have the red and the yellow and the green. But in between red and yellow is a whole host of shades of orange. And between yellow and green, there's a whole host of green shades and yellow shades. So we can go from red to kind of orange to close to yellow.

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Then as more green comes into the yellow, then we move and move and move, right?

So now we can notice different flavors, I could say, of the orange or of the green, of the yellow, even of the red in some cases. And the pattern that I've seen with people is when they are able to tune into what their gradient is and understand the nuances between those color schemes, then they can understand what's contributing more to what is painful, and they understand the bandwidth more clearly and what contributes to that bandwidth.

The second step is that as they're learning the gradient of colors, they're learning it from the perspective of movement. And there's two techniques that I've spoken about so far, one is about reducing compensation patterns and the other one is the doing nothing technique. And this podcast, all the episodes from one to now, I speak about compensating patterns in many, many different ways.

The idea here is that when we can reduce compensatory strategies, we recognize the relationship between our body parts and we start to recognize the relationship between when we deviate in our movement, how that contributes to the habitual patterns that are correlated to where they experience pain.

When we can start to change up that compensation pattern, deviate less, have more smooth and coordinated patterns, we're changing up the habitual neuromuscular patterns. And then out of that, they start to recognize, ah, so this compensatory patterning has a correlation to my experiences of pain. That word correlating is super important. But they get to understand more and more of these puzzle pieces.

In the doing nothing technique that I've spoken about earlier, is that's where we're just in that space of not feeling anything. And just recognizing what do we feel when we're not feeling anything? When we're doing nothing, when we're feeling nothing, then what actually arises? And it can be a very, very, very, very powerful technique. In both situations we're

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tuning into the fact that one's actual range of motion is more and greater than the less compensated range of motion or the pain-free range of motion.

So said another way, when someone moves in a range where they're doing nothing, they are moving less than their actual range. When they're moving in a range where they are compensating less, they are moving less than their actual range of motion. Now, sometimes this can be super frustrating. And if we stick with this idea of gradient of sensation, they start to recognize this gradient of sensation in these smaller ranges and where the obstacles are and what's really correlated to their pain levels, to their movement patterns.

And that then leads them to actually getting to their actual range of motion in a way that's more functionally healthy and in a way that doesn't continue to contribute to physical pain. They do it with better breathing, more awareness and more wisdom, right? They recognize the potential they have. And then through the things that I'm teaching them that I've mentioned above, they get there because they can feel their way there.

The third step to this is really seeing these puzzle pieces for what they are. I've already mentioned that when you move in a less compensated way or in the way of doing nothing, you start to notice more. And when you notice more, you can become more clear. And when you are more clear, then you can create better relationships between your parts, between the how you're moving.

You can reduce the deviations. You gain a better relation of you and you because you've grown better trust because you're listening more clearly. You start to recognize what less pain feels like and you start to recognize what no pain feels like. And you recognize what contributes to that less or that no pain.

Now, what's really curious about this, is that these gradients of sensation, these varieties of yellow and oranges and greens and reds, they can be movement patterns, but they can also be thinking patterns. I still have a

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very, very clear memory of a client that I worked with. She was one of my first clients and she was doing a very common movement. It was a twist. And she went a certain distance into her twist, took a pause, then she kept going.

Now, overall she looked like she moved pretty well. I was still a pretty fresh yoga teacher, so my eyes were what they were, I saw what I saw. And she looked pretty good in her movement. But there was this pause that had me curious. When she came back out of the movement I said, so how did that feel? Because I thought she would say, yeah, it was awesome and that she did great. And instead what she said is I have more pain.

And I'm like, huh, what happened at that pause? And she said, Well, I felt good going through the movement until I got to that pause and I stopped. But then my brain said to me I should go further. I should really feel more, and so I did. And I'm like aha. So now when you feel that thought, when you notice that thought, stop there.

So then when she had the thought of I should really go further, and she stopped there, she stopped having pain on her movement. So the thought was her yellow light. It wasn't the movement, it was the thought. So that can happen as well. It's not just the deviations and compensation patterns in our own body, like the feeling sensations, those kinesthetic sensations, but also thoughts. And thoughts we could think of in this context as being sensations as well.

All in all, as you explore this, as you recognize what is contributing to your yellow lights, your red lights, your green lights, as you gain more fluency in recognizing what is contributing to what, at first this might seem overwhelming. But the reality is that as you get the fundamentals of what's red, yellow, and green, it will start to open up for you. The more you become aware, the more you become aware. The more that your body can tell that you're listening to it, the more it will give you in a positive way.

And I realized that sounds totally hokey and really far out there. Like what, you're telling me that my body can tell when I'm listening to it, and then it

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will respond to that? And I'm saying yes, that's what happens. There's this wackadoodle trust that starts to grow.

And the reason why I say it that way is because I know there are people listening to this who are used to convincing their body what to do. They're used to making their body do things for themselves. And this part of the process can be really challenging if you have come from a history of directing your body into certain states. It's really difficult to believe that your body has something to say to you or that your body ought to be trusted when you kind of have been whipping it into shape, right?

So here is what I can say, is that as you listen to the signals of your body and as you act on them, you just might be really amazed at what happens between this relationship of you and you, this relationship between you and your body. And what listening to your body really, really does for you, what it does for not only your pain levels, but for your recuperation levels, for your sleep patterns, for so very much. It's significant and it's powerful. And it's leading towards our next episode on compassion and compassionate movement.

So do come back, I look forward to sharing with you more. If this resonates with you, if you want to dig in more with me, if you want me to work with you for six days, then come join me at the therapeutic yoga intensive, October the 28th to November the 2nd. You can learn more at learn.functionalsynergy.com/intensive. Take good care and we'll see you next time.