

Ep #234: Healing & Synergy: The 5 Key Components to Help Clients Reduce and Eradicate Pain



Full Episode Transcript

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 am talking about the five key components for helping someone to reduce and eradicate physical pain. Now, this will be geared mostly towards trainees and people who are yoga teachers, or Pilates teachers, or fitness folks, or health professionals who want to integrate yoga.

And if you're not a health professional, but you are someone with physical pain, I think you're going to get some really great benefit out of this, particularly if you want to get inside my head and understand how it is that I'm thinking about this process of helping people to reduce and eradicate pain.

I mean, I've got decades now of experience with helping people. I started off, and I don't mean this disparagingly at all, I started off as a lowly graduate from kinesiology. I did a bunch of work in chronic pain centers. I've always had an affinity to working with people who have pain and to help them reduce pain.

And because I never gained the skill of a massage therapist with hands-on technique, I never became an acupuncturist or a physical therapist who can use needles or pins or manual technique, or a chiropractor who has a whole host of techniques too, like I'm just kind of listing off all the various tools that different health professionals can use to support their clients. I didn't have any of that stuff.

So the only thing that I really could utilize was my understanding of the body and the body function, and meeting people where they're at and understanding the human being. And I just naturally gravitated toward that. I think that background that I have is also really effective because I really never have seen someone who has pain as being a problem.

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

Ep #234: Healing & Synergy: The 5 Key Components to Help Clients Reduce and Eradicate Pain

I've never seen that the scenario that they're experiencing is a problem. I just saw it as, well, if we shift up the load, if we change up how you move, how you are absorbing and dissipating that force, that load through your body, you're going to feel different. And I didn't have to come up with that before I started what I was doing, it's what I saw.

So people would be coming through the clinic when I was working at the chronic pain center or they'd be coming through yoga class or whatever. And I would see how they moved, which wasn't awesome. I would help how they moved, which made things better. And lo and behold, their pain went down.

So it's interesting. So it's been a lot of years since I've been doing this and I still remember way back when I had a health professional email me when I was talking about I help people reduce and eradicate pain. And she kind of tore a strip off of me and said, you can't say that. You have to say that you manage pain. And I'm like, well, why would I say that when that is not the experience inside of my classes?

Clearly, there is something changing. There's nothing needing to be managed. When we shift up the way someone moves, we help connect that to the way someone breathes, so much changes. So much changes.

So I'm going to kind of take what I've distilled over a number of years into these five key components. And the important thing here is it's not just a physical thing, even though, yes, what someone is experiencing is physical pain, the process is not one of just working with their body.

Now, that might lead people to say, oh, so because you're in yoga, you must do mental stuff and mindset. And I kind of look at them and inside I'm sort of cocking my head a little bit like a dog looks at their owner when they're kind of like a little bit like, huh, what are you talking about? And no, that's not at all how I work with somebody.

Ep #234: Healing & Synergy: The 5 Key Components to Help Clients Reduce and Eradicate Pain

What I can say, though, is that when someone starts to improve the way they move, they have a different result that they're experiencing in their body. And that different result changes their mind. I don't have to change someone's mind about their body. A, it's not what I do. I am not someone who enters into that mindset world of let's just change your thoughts about what's going on here.

I mean, we can talk about that, but the reality is why don't we just help someone actually move better so they have a different result of what they feel and have an embodied interoceptive/proprioceptive change in their body? That is what's going to shift up someone's belief and thinking pattern, like truly, right?

I remember hearing once a long time ago from an excellent leadership coach, and she said in order to shift belief, which is really just a longstanding thought, you need to have a novel experience. You can't change your belief by simply trying to change your thinking pattern about it. It doesn't work because it's a longstanding pattern.

But when you have a novel experience, like having a different experience of your body, having reduced pain, you don't have to do any mental gymnastics. You simply just go, wow, look, here it is. Here's the change. That means a body can change.

And that's probably the closest thing I might get to mindset work with people, where it's like, all right, so you notice that your pain has gone down. Guess what that means. That means your pain can go down. And they look at me like, how do you know? Because your pain came down, your pain is reduced. So it means that it can, now we need to grow some better habitual patterns now, but now we just continue to get to work.

Do you see that distinction there is that we're working with helping someone connect to their body with clarity, understand what's working and not working, and then helping them improve their movement patterns. And

Ep #234: Healing & Synergy: The 5 Key Components to Help Clients Reduce and Eradicate Pain

then out of improving their movement patterns, they will feel differently in their body. And that will start to shift that mental mindset piece on its own.

So that's really where my focus lies and where I want to take this conversation. So with that, let's get into the key components.

So the first key component that I work with all of my people, and now granted, these aren't going to be linear, but we start with the healing relationship. And the healing relationship is the relationship that someone has with themselves, because they need to be able to tune in to their bodies and to themselves, and that is a relationship.

We can't change anything that we're not aware of, so that starts the healing relationship. I actually call it the healing helix. And that awareness is what starts the process. So then they start to grow their awareness and they then start to recognize what's working and what's not working.

And then with what's not working and what's working, we can start to nurture what they're already doing well, and then start to shift up the patterning to quiet that which isn't working. Like quiet the compensation patterns. And then that leads to a greater connection with their body and that creates better feedback between their brain and their body. So we're doing this whole body brain.

So this healing relationship is really, really important. And the reason why I lead with it is that it's the bigger picture principle that runs through all of the components that I'm teaching. If we lose that healing relationship with ourselves and we just kind of go after exercises or go after techniques, the chances are not as high that they're going to stick.

So then one way that I play with this, as an example, is because this is an overarching concept that we build throughout but we start with it, is my relationship with my client is vital because I'm modeling the relationship with them that they're ultimately going to nurture and cultivate with themselves. So they see it in action, right?

Ep #234: Healing & Synergy: The 5 Key Components to Help Clients Reduce and Eradicate Pain

And so my ability, their ability to grow their awareness, to grow clarity, to grow better connection and to grow better feedback is very much linked to my own ability to be present with them. So as I'm present with them, then there's a space that is created where we can just watch how they're moving.

And I don't look at their movement as being anything right or wrong. I simply watch it for what it is. And that helps my assessment purposes and I can simply let them know, here's what we're seeing. They can validate that through what they're feeling, tune in and that grows greater clarity. And that conversation back and forth about what's going on, and sometimes I need to nurture that conversation along, but that then enables me to become even better at selecting a technique or a tool or an idea that will help them grow the connection that they have with themselves.

And then I get to evaluate if it worked or it didn't work, which ultimately grows their inner feedback mechanism. Do you see how that plays out? So I've got a big, big role to play in my own presence, my own assessment skills, my own ability to choose a tool and my own ability to evaluate. And as I work that, that is my role in the relationship with them and me, and it ultimately helps them grow that role in themselves.

And so I like to say to my clients, I like to say to my trainees that ultimately what I am doing, ultimately what I'm training them to do with their clientele is help their clients become their own very, very best teachers so that they become more present to themselves, that they can tune in with greater clarity over what's working and what's not working and assess their own selves, choose tools and techniques and see if they work and then grow their evaluation skills.

So now they've got this ability to be able to listen to their body, understand its messages, recognize its whispers, tune into what's working and what's not working. And then their body becomes less of this mystery. It's still a mystery, but there's an honoring of the mystery because the things that we

Ep #234: Healing & Synergy: The 5 Key Components to Help Clients Reduce and Eradicate Pain

can get clear about, the things that we really can see, start to become a lot more prevalent and a lot more noticing and noticeable.

So then we can make the shifts. And then as we make those shifts, then sort of the undercurrent of mystery that is innate in all healing processes can then happen. But we're working with helping our clients really grow this capacity to become their own very best teachers. And they grow it quite organically because of the way that I am with them.

And when I look at my trainees in the certification program, they're getting the very same results as I am because they're doing the same thing. They're not kind of like, I am going to do these exercises to you or I'm going to give you a list of exercises that you should do for your back or for your shoulder because this is what the evidence says.

But rather they're saying, hey, all right, so we know this about the evidence and what it says about backs and shoulders, as an example. But hey, you know what? Looking at the way your body is moving and the way that you are, hmm, let's see, does it really make sense? So there's this ability to critically think and analyze, to really be able to tune into what's going on with the client, have a conversation and a relationship. And it really, really, really supports forward progress.

So that really starts this whole piece. This healing relationship is at sort of the core of the process. This then leads to a compelling reason. And this is a really important piece to it. A lot of people, they'll show up in my Zoom room, I say Zoom room because I work solely online with my private one-on-one clients. But they'll show up in my Zoom room and their key reason initially is they just want to get out of pain.

They've followed me long enough, whether it's on the podcast or on social, or they've taken some of my courses and they're like, now is the time. I am ready. I want to do the work and I'm ready to get there. And I think you can help me. There's a fervor that many of my clients have of like, yes, now it's time.

Ep #234: Healing & Synergy: The 5 Key Components to Help Clients Reduce and Eradicate Pain

And with that sort of clarity, they've got something compelling. And the reason why this is important is because you can be inspired by hearing this podcast episode or many of the others, or listening to the interviews that I've had with clients and trainees. You might like the videos that I do on social and get some benefit from them and get that sort of initial spark of like, yes.

And we need to nurture that spark because at some point that spark will sort of shift. And in order to have consistent change happen, that shift in the spark needs to be nurtured. And that compelling reason is a big piece of it because it's difficult to change. It's really difficult to change.

There's so many messages out there, like I started with, which is, you know, there are people out there who still believe that pain has to be managed. And there's people who believe after a certain age, there's no getting out of pain, it's just part of it. Or that there could be you had this happen, so this is just the way things are.

And when you hear that enough, I mean, I had a trainee who once asked a health professional, how long would it take for her to get back to doing some formal education after she'd been hurt? And the person said, it will take you eight years. And that could very well be, as the person's opinion, but that actually led – My trainee is now a grad, it actually prevented her from doing anything.

And then one day, she'd been working with me for a period of time. She was out for a walk and she said, you know what? I feel really good. Maybe I don't have to believe what this other person has said. They obviously had good intentions. They meant it in the best way possible, but I'm not noticing that I'm going to have to wait X number of more years before I'm ready to take on more mental load or more physical load.

And again, I'm not knocking that health professional, but it's just these kinds of things are so insidious. All you need to do is look online to like,

Ep #234: Healing & Synergy: The 5 Key Components to Help Clients Reduce and Eradicate Pain

how long will something take to get better? This is what happens after a certain age.

And I'm not being a Pollyanna, but I am saying there's also plenty of stories out there and plenty of examples of how people can make a lot of shifts in many different age groups. And I'm fortunate because I'm one of the ones who when I started teaching, all of my clients were older than me. And still today, the majority of my clients are older than me.

And it's awesome for me to bear witness to because I see it consistently that change can happen, pain can reduce, people can function better. They can get stronger no matter their age. And a big, big piece of that is the compelling reason. Like what is driving you? What is the fuel for what you're doing?

That is necessary because change is difficult, only because people shy away from it, I think. And if there's something compelling that can really motivate you, because the motivation comes from within. I don't motivate anybody. I do zero motivation. I do zero kind of goal setting. I simply help people move better. They feel better and that nurtures their belief pattern. And then that opens up opportunity.

Their own belief patterns open up the opportunity. And as the conversation goes, that's how it happens. So I don't have to do all this external extra work. I simply help nurture the compelling reason that my client has, right? Do you see that? And I think it's so, so, so important because it's not putting on me, and I don't put this on my trainees that they need to come up with these techniques, when really what we want to help foster is in that person. It's in the person. Help foster that which is within them. And then it really helps move things forward.

So the compelling reason becomes really interesting. Now sometimes trainees will ask me or say to me, I don't know what my person's compelling reason is and they're not really telling me. What I will often say

Ep #234: Healing & Synergy: The 5 Key Components to Help Clients Reduce and Eradicate Pain

is, well, first of all, they're showing up. So there's something that's driving them to be here. So let's just start with that they want to get out of pain.

Then as you listen to them have a conversation with you, maybe it's at their intake or even just as they go along, they will be sharing things with you, things that they're saying and things that they're not saying, which are clearly outlining what really matters to them. And then you can simply engage in that conversation, right?

So for example, I had someone who was talking about, this was a couple of sessions in, about how she really misses running. Yet running had never showed up in the intake. And I said, hey, so tell me more about this running thing. And she was like, oh man, I would love to be able to run three days a week.

I said, all right, so if we could actually help you run three days a week, would that be an all right thing? And she's like, yes. So then I just asked for more clarity. I said, so when you say that, do you mean like one mile, two mile, 10K? Like what's the thing? And so then that started to open up the conversation.

So sometimes the compelling reason does not show up clearly at the front end, but it can as someone's belief in themselves because their pain is going down and they can see that they're doing this to themselves, sometimes that opens up more dialogue that someone just starts to speak, right? And it just starts to come out of them around what it is that they would love to do more of.

Okay, so then this leads to really the big chunk of the reducing pain work. Now, I mean, I've said this on the podcast about how I help people reduce pain, but I don't think I've ever said that I reduce pain. I don't think I've ever said that I eradicate pain, because I don't believe I do that.

I do help people to do that, yes. I help them learn the skills and tools to do that, yes. And I'm clear on that because I see that it is important that people

Ep #234: Healing & Synergy: The 5 Key Components to Help Clients Reduce and Eradicate Pain

know that they're doing this for themselves. I'm simply teaching them skills and tools. And that role that I have is vital and it's important and it's necessary and I'm not doing the work. They're doing the work. I'm helping them with the skills and tools for them to solve the problem that's related to this pain.

So in this chunk, this third chunk, I am helping people improve their function by helping them teach them skills and tools. And in that improving of function, I'm helping them improve their neuromuscular patterns. I'm helping them to have more control and coordination in their body, so I'm improving their motor control and coordination. I'm helping them improve their proprioceptive awareness. I'm helping them improve their interoceptive awareness. And I'm simply helping them do that through movement and through breath and through stillness, right?

And so this is a huge piece of it because, again, as I've said lots and lots and lots of times, with the work that I do, I'm not trying to reduce the pain. I'm not trying to eradicate the pain. My focus is on the vehicle by which that result occurs. And that vehicle is helping someone to move better. That vehicle is helping someone to perceive more clearly that ability to apply the skills and tools.

And this is really important because after this phase, we move into a progression phase because people will reduce pain. People will have more moments and more moments of not having pain because their nervous systems are more downregulated. They are more relaxed. Their breathing is better. They can manage their stress better. They have belief in themselves that they can actually do this because they're witnessing the very act of their pain going down.

And so that's their own self-motivation. And what can happen now, they're like, woo-hoo, I am through the line. I have solved my pain. The number of times that's happened is, if I had a dime for that I could buy some really, really lovely soap. And I don't mean that in any other way than full of love.

Ep #234: Healing & Synergy: The 5 Key Components to Help Clients Reduce and Eradicate Pain

It's a human thing, right? Human thing that the pain is gone, it's like, now let's go. Let's go, let's go do my thing. And it's like, whoa, hold on. We're not there yet. We're not there yet. We've got to progress, right? We still need to grow better neuromuscular habitual patterns.

A really great example of this is when I fell down my stairs back in 2010. It was the day after Christmas, I was carrying a box of files and I slipped and fell square on my coccyx. And it was one of those where I kind of realized what I had done and I was getting up and I could hardly get up. And I'm like, oh boy, I think I'm about to become my own best teacher. And I held either side of the hallway, where I was living had a very narrow hallway, and shuffled my way through.

I couldn't sit on the toilet. I couldn't sit on a donut. And, man, I was coming up with, I was engineering all sorts of ways to live my life for the next number of weeks. And what was interesting is I remember so clearly I was working with a physical therapist and a chiropractor in those early stages.

And I remember going back to the chiro and saying, I'm feeling incredibly awesome. Like the pain had all gone away. But I knew, like I was only about six weeks or seven weeks in. I said, but I need you to tell me I'm not ready to go out and do stuff because I am having feelings of euphoria of feeling so good. I said, can you just tell me that I need to not do that?

And she laughed and she said, yeah, exactly because your pieces are all back in the right place and things are more stable and things are more functional, but you're still atrophied from before you got hurt, right? So I needed to hear that, right? And I'm the one who helps people out of pain too, right?

And so it was like I knew what was going on with me because I was feeling so good. I just like, yeah, now's the time. But I knew, I knew I had to buffer that a little bit and be reminded, yes, you're still not as strong as you were before your injury. So then that was where I really focused on, staying in

Ep #234: Healing & Synergy: The 5 Key Components to Help Clients Reduce and Eradicate Pain

my lane. Now let's grow the movement toward getting to what I could do before.

That was very wordy. And the reason why it's very wordy is because this is the phase of progression. So many people forget about progression. They just go, all right, I'm going back to what I was doing before. I mean, this was in the middle of winter, I'm a skier. I wanted to get back to the hill. I hadn't been skiing really because I had fallen on the day after Christmas.

And yet I could get around in my day to day life, but I wasn't ready to sit on a chair and have my legs dangle. I wasn't ready to go down any steepes. I was nervous about my, when I started to really think about it, I was nervous about my leg strength. And so I was like, all right, how am I going to get to that place?

This is great thinking for when you've started to reduce or eradicate your pain, is just to pause and step back and say, all right, I'm in this new phase. I know what I need to do to reduce and eradicate pain. I know that the early phases of this are done. Now how do I move to that next phase without going for the 10K run that you've been dying to get back to, or going up to the ski and hitting those awesome slopes?

And the reality is that there's this progression phase. And in this progression phase it becomes important from, if you go back to the compelling reason or maybe there's a new one that's arisen, what is the activity that you really want to be doing that you now think you can do? You've got to break that activity down into its smaller component parts and then ask yourself or ask, like engage with your client, ponder this about your client. Do they have the component parts to do this? Yes or no.

And if the answer is no, that's where you get to work next. And if the answer is yes, well now you start to build some stamina around those component parts coming together.

Ep #234: Healing & Synergy: The 5 Key Components to Help Clients Reduce and Eradicate Pain

So let me use my skiing as an example. So in order to be able to ski, I need to be able to move through my ankles, my knees and my hips. And I need to have some stability through my pelvis and rib cage. I need to have overall great core stability. And if I can do that – And I need to be able to move my arms back and forth when I'm skiing. If I can do that, then I'll be good. Even if I can only ski on a green run, like the easiest run, that's fine. Those are the key things.

Now I need more stamina and a little bit more angular training to be able to do more of the steeps or to get into some of the moguls, but at a base level, that's what's needed. But there's more because I need to be able to carry my skis. I need to get the skis out of the car. So if they're on a ski rack or if they're in a ski bin, I have something called a Yakima that sits on top of my car. If I carry my skis up there, or maybe the skis are in a locker or maybe they're in the back of the truck.

The thing is you have to look at how do we get the skis out of the vehicle, if they're in a vehicle, and how do we carry them to the hill? How about getting the boots on? There's all sorts of components to be able to do that. But here's the one that, for me, was the real kicker, sitting on a chair. Because after all I had sprained my coccyx. I could not sit on a donut even. I could hardly even come down into a chair.

And with the ski hill that I was looking at to go back to, the chairs were a little bit older and they didn't all have foot rests. So I would have to be able to be on a chair, A, sit without all my engineering of props with my legs dangling. Could I do that? And what would I need to have grown in terms of my function to be able to do that?

So that really was the biggie for me, is being able to build out that component. Now it's not something that I had absolute ability to train. I mean, I could sit up on a, I've got a set of drawers that I could sit upon. And I did a little bit of work there and, and played with some of my movement patterns there. But really I couldn't really train that particular movement, I had to train around it, right?

Ep #234: Healing & Synergy: The 5 Key Components to Help Clients Reduce and Eradicate Pain

I had to think about what were the movement components associated with that, the supportive movement components associated with that? And then work those into better functionality. Now what was cool is when I went through that process, I became so much stronger and so much more nimble.

Remember that euphoria that I was talking about earlier? That euphoria really settled out and great confidence really started to grow. So when I was ready to go back to the hill, I had sort of a muted excitement that I kind of muted myself because I wanted to make sure that I was being clear in my being. And it was great.

It was great. I went out for half a day and it was awesome. It was terrific. And then I just progressed from there. And because I have the foundational neuromuscular patterning for skiing, I was able to kind of pick it up pretty quickly because of the work I had done previously, right? That's an example of progression.

So this then leads to the final phase, which is what I call strengthening for real. And I make this very clear and different from the strengthening that ultimately happens in that third phase of improving function and in the fourth phase of progression, because strengthening is happening through those phases. But those kinds of strengthening are like foundational, base-level, neuromuscular patterning, which leads to strength.

I'm talking about, like for me, I like getting back to the weight room. I like getting back to training and being active and that's what I mean by that. Now we're not worried so much about the injury part of it anymore. We recognize there's a history of it, but now we can get back to like, let's go.

So I've had clients who are CrossFitters. I've had clients who are multi-day event runners/walkers. I've had people who want to get back into the gym and haven't been for a while. Like there's a variety of different things like that, that people want to get back to. Now let's get training.

Ep #234: Healing & Synergy: The 5 Key Components to Help Clients Reduce and Eradicate Pain

Now we're into training mode. And it's important here to recognize what those neuromuscular patterns that were improved upon in that third phase, and then in the progression phase, because that's what we're going to build upon in real strength. And as we grow that ability to load and to add speed and to add more joint complexity and to start different types of complex movements, now we really start to build our resiliency in our body and our mind.

We grow the confidence. We grow the clarity. And we keep honing the compelling reason because now at this point in the real strength component, now we've got a lot more clarity around maybe an evolved compelling reason of something that we really want to do that was different earlier on because we've already surpassed some of those milestones and now can really get to work.

Now, I've got clients who do stick with me through the real strength phase because they want to build upon what they've already gained. And trainees, same thing. They'll come to me and say, okay, my client is now at this place where their pain has gone down and they're moving through progression. What do I do now with helping them grow their strength?

And so that all happens inside of the certification program, of how I actually train the yoga therapist to be able to do that. But we're building upon those foundational patterns, basically adding more load, adding more nimbleness, adding more creativity to all the ways that we can move.

And people are really, really thrilled because now they're moving with more ease. They've got more longevity in their patterning. And if there's any kind of whisper that starts to show up, it doesn't actually surprise them. They recognize that their body is sort of talking with them.

There's a messenger that's there and they listen to it because they've already grown the confidence around what them and their body are engaged with. Their body has something to say, their body is their friend. They can listen and there's a working together. Their healing relationship

Ep #234: Healing & Synergy: The 5 Key Components to Help Clients Reduce and Eradicate Pain

has grown. Their compelling reasons continue to hone and they've got a new life and a new vitality toward their life.

So those are the five key components that I have found to be very helpful in helping clientele reduce and eradicate physical pain. These are the components, plus many more, that we get into in the intensive and in the certification program, which really help train my trainees to become super effective at helping their clients reduce and eradicate pain.

And to do it in a way that it's not slow, but it's engaged with their clientele in a process of curiosity and in discovery and really healing them on multiple different levels. Gaining confidence and gaining that most golden opportunity inside, which is that internal locus of control and really feeling into this amazingness that is us as a human being.

If this is interesting to you, if you are a yoga teacher, a fitness professional, if this resonates with you and you're eyeing my certification program and you'd like to enroll, then do take a look at functionalsynergy.com/certification. You can read all about it there.

And I will say that for people who love, love, love this podcast and the videos that I have already shared and it deeply resonates with you, you will love this program. Again, you can go to functionalsynergy.com/certification. Take good care.