

Ep #253: Exploring Your Feet: A New Mini Series



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Susi Hately

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

Ep #253: Exploring Your Feet: A New Mini Series

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

Welcome and welcome back. I'm so glad that you're here because today I'm starting a new mini-series on the feet. Now, it's not the first time I've run a foot mini-series. I have run previous ones in the past and we'll put the other episodes I've run in the past in the show notes so you can hearken back to those.

The reason I'm doing it is because it's a great example of how we can have persistent issues in an area of the body and that those issues in that area do need to be addressed. And we often find that there's relationships to other areas in the body that also need to be addressed. And as is a consistent and constant drumbeat for me, it's like where the pain is is not a problem.

Yes it does have to be addressed and a reason for some people why it continues to come back, whether consistently or occasionally, has to do with other factors that are going on in our movement practices, how we're doing our movement practices, how we might be breathing, what we're thinking about the situation. So the feet is just a great place to return to to really highlight some of these ideas.

Also if you enjoy what you're hearing this is a lead-up to my Power of Pure Movement: Strong and Supple Feet that I am running very soon. All the details can be found at functionalsynergy.com/feet. I would love for you to join me.

Now, you might find that as you go through these episodes that you get everything you need. And so many people have said to me I get so much from just listening to these episodes. My pain has gone down or it's been eradicated. And other people are like, oh, I want that girl that much more. So whatever you feel, it would be an honor to share with you what I know about working with my clientele.

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

Ep #253: Exploring Your Feet: A New Mini Series

It would be great to work with you if you're someone who's a professional and you're looking for new ideas and how to think about things, especially if you're in a struggling phase with figuring out how to work with people with their feet. And if you're a consumer, if you're someone who's not a professional and you've got sore feet and you can't quite crack what is contributing to them, what's correlated to them, then this might be really helpful.

Now I will say, and it's really important for me to say this, I don't speak about causes per se because there are so many bazillion reasons why feet can become sore. And so I'm a yoga teacher, I'm a kinesiologist by training, that's where my BSC lives. I spend time working with the body, integrating mind and body through breath connections and deepening one's awareness, really listening to the whispers of our body, listening to our senses, feeling into that arena.

And that opens up the doors to really understand correlations. And when we can pay attention to correlations and do something there, then we can make some great trajectory, right? And make forward movement.

And so I want to be really, really clear about that because there are so many causes or potential causes. And there's so many things we can't see and there's so many things we can't measure. So many things we can't measure and yet we can feel them, yeah?

And so my aim is to teach you how to feel, because of our interoceptive capacity, our ability to feel, I know, that four-letter word, feeling. But our ability to perceive and to feel is golden. Golden, golden, golden. So we're going to play with this idea through this episode and in context to the feet.

So this will share the ideas I've learned over 30 years of working with people and why I spend a lot of time with the body first and how I work with people and how I interweave the work of sensation.

Now, you'll notice over the past number of weeks on Tuesdays I've been offering out a yoga nidra or a body scan or a breath practice. And the

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

Ep #253: Exploring Your Feet: A New Mini Series

reason for that is because I want to give that opportunity for you just to learn how to chill. And to chill in an alert and an engaged way, right? There are lots of different ways that we can relax, all of them are awesome. And these are ones I can contribute ways of being alert and connected and engaged, tuning in and kind of nestling or absorbing or sinking into the realm of sensation.

We don't spend a lot of time there a lot of our days, and it's a great opportunity to grow that capacity so that you can spend more of your days in that feeling space. Because when we can feel, so much opens up. Let me tell you, so much opens up.

So we're going to keep this in context to the feet. One thing particularly cool about the feet is that oftentimes we think about the feet as being the foundation because they are the part of our body that touches the ground. So we tend to have this thought about them as they are the foundation of our standing. They're the foundation from which we move.

And it's not wrong, but I think that thought is actually a bit of a limiting way of thinking about the feet, because the feet are indeed the foundation. The way that they are placed on the ground, the way that they move through our gait pattern or our walking pattern, the way they strike the ground and the way they push off the ground all has an impact on what goes on further up the chain into our body. And what goes on further up the chain in the body has a definitive impact on our feet.

So our pelvic stability, for example. Or the way our leg bone swings in the hip socket, for example. Or how limited we are in our abdomen or our rib cage. And the reason I mentioned those last ones is because if we're really tight or grippy in our abdomen or rib cage, those areas can limit the way that we breathe.

And if we're limiting the way that we breathe, there can be a tendency to hold ourselves kind of up and like – I'm going to do this as you can listen to my voice. I'm kind of holding myself up in straining in the upper part of my rib cage and up into my shoulders and my neck. I'm lifted up, I'm not

Ep #253: Exploring Your Feet: A New Mini Series

relaxed into myself. And that can contribute to the way, or can influence anyway, the way that we move about.

When we think about gait patterns there are a number of factors that are involved. So the first is that, well not first but a factor is that the leg bone needs to swing in the pelvis, right? That leg bone needs to move. The pelvis needs to be stable in order for that leg bone to move. And there's also some rotation between the pelvis and the spine.

Now we can throw in the arm movement as well but I'm going to leave that out for the purposes of this episode. So we've got this rib cage and pelvis rotation that's happening, like between those two areas is rotation. There's a pelvis that's stable on which the leg bone swings, and then how the leg bone swings will influence where that foot lands.

So it's why I like to focus not only on the feet, but also further up the chain because how the feet actually are in their process of being the foundation is influenced by how that leg bone swings. And that leg bone swinging is influenced by how stable that pelvis is. And that can be influenced by whether we can rotate or not through our torso.

So while the feet are our foundation, their ability to be the foundation is highly influenced by what's going on through the chain. So when someone comes to see me, whether they have plantar fasciitis or they have bunions or they have pain in their feet or they have just like whatever is in their feet, I always – I know that's a long and strong word, but I always look further up the chain just to see what's going on between that leg bone and the pelvis.

And if they are a yoga practitioner, a lengthy one especially, then likely there's something going on. Because in the yoga world there's a lot of cueing on the feet. So if we're stepping from Tadasana into a prep for warrior two for example or triangle or standing split leg forward bend, usually what is said is take your feet wide. And then if there's some rotation of the legs, it's usually rotate your feet out or in some direction.

Ep #253: Exploring Your Feet: A New Mini Series

And what's interesting about that queuing is that most of those instructions are actually meant for the leg bone moving in the hip. They're actually meant to be hip joint movements, but because they have a tendency to be cued to the feet, a person's focus comes to their feet and is directed at their feet. And that can create more or less actual movement at the hip, as an example, and more tension at the feet.

Now, if you feel like I am reaching when I say this, what's interesting is I remember going to a myofascial therapist who used to have an office beside a local yoga studio. And I went to see her asking her, well, you must see a lot of yoga people because you're just down the hallway from the yoga studio, what do you see as primary issues? And I thought for sure she was going to say something like SI joint or knee issues. And she said their feet. I'm like, oh, so cool. Why is that?

We had a long conversation about what we were noticing with the feet. And lo and behold, as she freed up their feet guess what happened? Their knees start to free up. Their SI starts to free up. Not all of the time, but there is a strong correlation between that.

But when you look at the way people hold their feet, lots of cues around, like I mentioned, the way we step into a lot of positions focusing on a joint area or a body part area that is involved but is not really the primary driver of that movement creation.

Then there's also this idea of lifting the arches. And I'm not against lifting the arches from the feet. I don't find it incredibly sustainable as a way of helping to curate a better arch of the foot. But rather when we can help improve how the leg bone moves in the pelvis, how we improve the abduction and the external rotation through that hip joint, that can have tremendous shifting on the arch.

All you need to do is stand in Tadasana with your knees slightly bent, slight, slight, slight hip flexion. Place your hands on the outside of your legs, look down at your feet, the arches of your feet, and press wide into your hands just a little tiny bit. And you'll notice the arches of your feet, particularly if

Ep #253: Exploring Your Feet: A New Mini Series

you're an overpronator or you pronate a little bit more than normal. And you'll see that the arches start to lift and you didn't lift the arches per se, right? You didn't go into the arch of the foot to lift them, you actually created that by what happened at the hip.

So lots of people generate this arch lift and some will make tremendous gains and a lot, from my experience, create more tension through the toes and the dorsal side, the top side of the foot, the bottom side of the foot. And they can create lots of tension in and around the back of the heel and up to the Achilles tendon and that can create other scenarios as we kind of follow that trajectory.

So when we can connect up to the hip, lots can change. So it made a lot of sense when I was talking to this myofascial therapist about her view on what was happening in the feet because, I mean, it makes a lot of sense. There's a lot of conversation, a lot of instruction, a lot of focus that then goes to the feet and doing something at the foot, when really a lot of what we can do of that cueing can be at the hip. And again, it starts to show this correlation between hips and feet.

So what becomes important is yes we need to relieve the symptomatology of the feet. And as we're going about relieving that symptomatology at the feet, to pay attention to what's going on further afield. Allowing yourself to explore and to engage with what else is happening. How are your hips responding? How is that SI responding? How is your back, your pelvis, your ribs, your breath responding?

And it becomes super fun when we then add in something really direct to the foot, like massaging with a ball or doing some specific massage work at the foot and noticing what happens further up the chain. It's not uncommon for people to feel their ribs starting to shift, or the tissue behind their breastbone relaxing a little bit, or even up in behind the back of the head settling out.

Ep #253: Exploring Your Feet: A New Mini Series

People have told me about their levator scapula relaxing as someone is massaging and working along through the bottom of the foot and in and around the heel and up through that Achilles.

And if this seems far-fetched, we can just read up on the myofascial world and the work that they've done, especially what Tom Myers has contributed to the world. And you start to see many of these connections. Then what becomes super fun is then to play with the connections in the opposite way.

So play around with some breathing exercises or some neck exercises or improve your function through your shoulder girdle and you might find that your feet start to shift. Because when we can better transfer load, better absorb load, dissipate load through our body, then the feet don't have to be the bottom end of that absorption.

But if we're absorbing it better and we're transferring it better further up the chain, the feet don't have to do it at the bottom of the chain, that's how I meant to say that last bit. So then the feet don't have to be so heavy, they can be a lot lighter and we can feel more buoyant.

So let's explore this with some ideas and just take a tennis ball or a small massage ball, you can even use a golf ball. Golf balls are a little tiny, but you can do it. And simply roll out the bottom of your foot with the ball. And there's lots of different techniques out there now on using balls and you can use those, I just play around with just moving the ball and forth in different ways.

But the key is the tempo with which I move that ball. I don't rush through it. I allow the ball to linger in certain areas, maybe if there's an area that I perceive as being a bit short or tight or something, there's some sensation that's indicating, hmm, it's time to stick around here. I don't push hard. It's like I'm carrying a baby or I'm teaching a child how to pet a dog. I'm gentle with the tissue. I'm just gently rolling that foot.

And then after I do that for a little bit, I pause and just let the foot come back down to the ground without it being on the ball and I notice. I take a

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

Ep #253: Exploring Your Feet: A New Mini Series

pause and I notice the difference now and if there's any difference further up the chain to the pelvis, the hip.

I might notice a difference in the opposite foot or even the opposite hip, or the opposite rib cage or shoulder because it's not just necessarily on the same side that the change might happen. It can happen anywhere, really, in our body. It's allowing ourselves to zoom out and simply notice, all right, what am I noticing?

And sometimes, especially when people are new to this, they might say well there's not really much changed, but you know, my breathing is different. And that's a change. Well I don't really feel much else. That's okay, the breathing has shifted. Whether it's specifically massaging through the foot, I can't answer that, but something in the act of doing this shifted.

And then we go to the other side and then we have a data point. It's like, hmm, interesting. And then maybe the next day we practice it again or the next day after that we practice it again. And notice does that happen again? And we start to recognize the correlation between these things that we're doing to our feet. And that often opens up awareness of, oh, interesting.

This actually happened with a client. I grip through my rib cage, I had no idea. Huh. And then when I roll out with a ball, I breathe better is what they told me. And I feel lighter. I feel more aligned. I feel more connected. All without trying to become more aligned or more connected. It happened because of this momentary rolling of the ball.

And again whether it was exactly the ball that was the mechanism, I don't know. But there was something in the moment there that did. And as you practice the exercise, you start to recognize, ah, nope, it was the ball. Each time it's the ball. Or maybe it's just taking that pause in the moment of the day. So then take a moment of your day and pause and breathe and be quiet and be less distracted and just notice.

Which stimulus, because each of those are stimuli, whether it's a ball or whether it's a pause, whether it's the deliberateness of that pause, that's a

Ep #253: Exploring Your Feet: A New Mini Series

stimulus. And as you take those moments and simply notice, you start to recognize more of what are really strong correlators to the way that your feet feel. What contributes to your feet feeling better? And what contributes to, as your feet feel better, other parts of your body feeling better?

See how this goes? It's this notion of working with our body and paying attention to the result of the stimulus we provide. Not just in the local area of the foot, but further afield because we know further afield has an impact on the foot. But to get there, we need to do that four-letter word which is the word feel, that word of perceive, that word of quieting down so we can actually tune into the result that happened when we did the thing called rolling out the foot with the ball.

Another thing you can do is simply notice the spaces between your toes. Now you might have feet where you've got toes that are overlapped and so you might be thinking well there is no space. So then just notice where there is space between your toes and then notice where one toe meets the next toe. And of course, what I'm suggesting here is not a demand. It might be uncomfortable for you to do this, so if what I'm suggesting makes no sense or is not available, then please replace my words with something else.

Perhaps paying attention to one's breath or even paying attention to the bottom of your feet, to the center of your heel and where the center of your heel meets the ground or meets your sock or your stocking or the heel of your shoe. And then as you're connected to that, then notice the next part of your foot that you become aware of that is touching your sock, your stocking, your shoe, your floor. And then you keep playing with that.

And then notice by simply bringing your mind's eye to the bottom of your foot, resting your attention there to whatever material or whatever surface that it's connected to and just pay attention. There's no pushing, no forcing, just paying attention to that connection. That becomes really interesting when we start to play in the pool and you're, say, front crawling or butterfly kicking and noticing the water against the bottom of your foot.

Ep #253: Exploring Your Feet: A New Mini Series

It may be that you hold your feet really tight when you swim. Or that they're very floppy when you swim. Maybe someone told you of how you hold your feet. But simply bringing your awareness to them, not necessarily changing them but just bringing your awareness to them and how the water and the feet connect, something might shift further up but you wouldn't know until you try it.

Same for being on the bike. Now, this one's very personal to me because I love being on my bike. I'm clipped into my pedals so it's the forefoot that feels the sock or the shoe, the pedal. My heel is only feeling the shoe, there's not anything under the heel. But I can be aware of those three points, the heel, the ball of the foot, the base of the pinky toe as I pedal stroke.

And out of that awareness I've been able to tune into when my toes get a little bit tighter, which happens when I get tired. And then if I can notice that, I go, oops, hold on let's just bring some space to the foot. Bring some breath to my foot. Can I feel the spaces between my toes? Then, curiously, my pedal stroke becomes stronger. The wattage on my computer reads higher. The movement of my hips becomes better.

What's curious about this is that I've also noticed that my feet will have a tendency to start to get tighter when I'm sinking a little bit through my shoulder girdle. So as I notice my ability to be more resilient in my bike posture, as I've become fitter and stronger and I've been able to ride for longer in a stronger position, my feet don't get as tight. They don't get as sore in that way. And I can feel more a collapse through that shoulder girdle and it's like, oh, okay. Let's start to notice what's going on. And then I can almost feel the response of the foot to that load change.

So you see that there's these connections that start to become obvious in some ways as we pay attention. We can start with the feet, we can play with the feet. And then as we get the relief in the foot, notice what else has relief. Notice where your attention is drawn. And there might not be any, any logical reason for why your attention would be drawn to that area, but still pay attention.

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

Ep #253: Exploring Your Feet: A New Mini Series

Even if you're saying to me right now, oh my god, that sounds so crazy. I will guarantee I bet you've been out in the world and you just went and did something because you felt like doing it. It's no different. You're pulled towards an area of your body because you're pulled towards an area of your body. Let's get curious, let's get creative, let's see if there is this connection. And don't go digging for it, just allow it to show itself. Allow it to show it to you. And then as you play with this you start to notice more and more these correlations.

We had someone take the power of the tongue program and she felt her feet free up. I mean, I even think that's so kooky. It's awesome that how she was holding and how she was experiencing her face, her jaw, her head, she started to get connection and awareness to what she was compensating with through her face and her head and she felt correlation in the bottom of her foot. It's so fun, all of these connections through our body, which myofascial research is showing quite clearly that we do have connections.

So here is what I offer to you as we enter into this mini-series, is pay attention. Explore your foot with the ball, notice what happens. Notice what happens with your breath. Notice what happens with your foot. Notice what happens with you. Play in the game and the experience and the curiosity that is sensation.

If you perked up to that comment I made about the power of the tongue, you can go check that out at functionalsynergy.com/tongue. And if you're curious about the upcoming footwork workshop, you can check that out at functionalsynergy.com/feet. It would be such an honor to work with you. For you to delve into this world of sensation while also learning a ton about your anatomy and your biomechanics and how these worlds of sensation and mechanics come together in a very, very, very healing way. Again, functionalsynergy.com/feet to learn all about your feet, your hips and the rest of your body.