

Ep #286: Neck Relief Toolkit Part 2 of 2



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Susi Hately

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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 am so glad that you're here because today we're getting into part two of the neck miniseries and I want to talk about two key compensatory patterns that I see a lot with my clientele. And when I can help bring awareness to those compensatory patterns and help my clients retrain them, they make such gains.

They feel so much better in their bodies and they don't feel trapped by their devices or by their computers because so often there is blame put onto our computers and our devices and sitting. And while there are factors associated with computers and devices and tech neck and all the things, the reality is that neck pain has been around for a long time, far before computers even arrived.

And when I've helped my clientele retrain, they're able to utilize their devices in a much more effective way and they don't have neck pain. So I think it's really, really important because I'm also saying clearly here that I'm not doing something to my client.

There are so many amazing healthcare practitioners that are out there who do amazing work with their clients and they feel so great, the client feels such great relief. And then because they haven't grown the awareness of what's contributed other than saying, well, it's just the computer, but what's really contributed to why that neck pain is arising, they go back and they go back and they go back and they go back.

And they become the person who really loves the awesome rub down or the awesome yoga class or the awesome whatever. Which is really great because they're feeling better, which is good. But they're not making any gains and they are maintaining the status quo thinking like, well, this is just what it is to be a human living in this time.

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And the reality is that is not the case at all, that yes, there are these devices, there is tech, there is impact of course. There's women who wear handbags that are a bit heavy and that can pull out things in relation to between the neck and shoulders. I mean, there's all sorts of things that contribute, even police officers who wear really heavy belts. I've worked with them and they've often not had back pain, but they've had neck pain and in part it has been due to the belt of tools that they are wearing.

Now again, what I'm saying here is we've got to help the person retrain. If they want to continue in the line of work, doing what they're doing, living the life that they're living, we've got to help them retrain into, which includes growing this capacity for interoceptive and proprioceptive awareness. It's so, so fundamental to this process.

So if you're like me and you have a belief that healing is possible, if you have a belief around pain to possibility that you can change the way that your tissue functions, no matter your age, you're in the right spot. This is what I do. More of my clients than ever are over the age of 50. And I put it that way in an interesting way because I've always worked with people who are older than me right from the get go of my career.

So even though I'm saying more than ever people over 50, people have always been older than myself and I'm over 50 now. And people who are older get better faster than those who are younger. And I know that sounds bonkers because that's not what we're told. And yet when we're older, I find that there is a tendency for a certain group of folks that if they want to grow their awareness, if they want to improve function, they will, they can.

I mean, the beauty about the internet these days, it's filled with people who are older who are just knocking it out and just, you know, they're doing great, great, great work. So that is what we're digging into today. I want to share two of the common compensation patterns and things that you can play with.

Now, most people who are listening to this podcast are professionals. Most of the professionals I work with and train with also have pain. So how I'm

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going to set this episode up is what those compensation patterns are, how I notice them, and how I help someone to retrain them. And then you can work with this on your own.

And of course, if this really resonates with you and you want to dig in more, we've got the Power of Pure Movement Neck Program. That's all about unwinding and unraveling your neck the way that I do it. Really growing that interoceptive and proprioceptive awareness so you can really and truly take care of it. It's not just surface level symptoms. You start to see the relationships between the parts that are contributing to why your neck is the thing screaming or why your client's neck is screaming.

And if you are a professional and you're listening to me and saying, Susi, this is really great and all, but my client's not going to do the work. Well, I'm going to call it a little bit of like, I don't believe you on you. And what I recommend that you do is check out our Committed Client Blueprint, because having clients do the work is like an easy peasy task for me.

All of my clients do the work, all of them, and they all get better. It's how I approach it. And I've got a whole process that I've become very, very, very conscious of because for so long it wasn't something that I was conscious of. I was just very effective at helping my clients get the work done without conniving them or manipulating them or giving them stars. So if that's something that's interesting to you, I recommend checking out that Committed Client Blueprint, and we'll have the link in the show notes.

So let's get rolling here. So the two key compensatory patterns that I see that when I can help them clean up really make a game changing difference for people is rib cage movement and breath holding. And I'm going to explain two key areas where I see these happen, and then you can start to explore them for yourself.

One of the key movements that I utilize when I'm in an assessment and also in a treatment phase with a client is they're on their back and they're taking the arms overhead. If you've followed me at all on YouTube or Facebook in my videos, if you've taken any of my previous programs, you

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see me doing this movement so often. And the reason why is because it's so fantastic from an objective standpoint to see how the arm bone moves in the shoulder socket.

Really, really easy. Does the arm bone move or not? Yes or no. And then when it moves, what else is happening? Is the head moving? Is the rib cage moving? Is the pelvis moving? Are they breath holding? When the arms move, do they move side to side? Is there a clunk or a click? Like what are all the bazillion ways compensation can occur?

And the beauty is that I can see it and my client can see most of it and I can easily take video footage of it and show them. So it becomes a really great tool for both my client and I to objectively see what's happening with that movement pattern.

I can clearly say to them, if you've got a clunk or a click, or if you have pain and you still are moving more in your range, that's fine. You can do that, but you're still going to have that as your range. You'll still have a painful range and you'll still have a click and clunk range. That is what will happen. And so if you want to have that, you can have it.

But if you want a range without the clink and clunk, if you want the range without pain, then there's another way to train this, and that's within a range without click or clunk. That's in a range without the pain. So then they bring their range back a bit smaller to the range where that doesn't happen. And now we see what the range looks like without those things occurring, without those compensations occurring.

And that can bring really great insight and awareness about what else in the body is contributing to what's happening because sometimes the limited range of motion when it's more pure and more precise has nothing to do with the shoulder. The click and the clunking or the tension or the pain has nothing to do with the shoulder.

I know that sometimes we can be bonkers because we're so culturally trained that where the pain is, is the problem. But more and more and

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more, I get more convinced the more I see it, that as people are moving, even if they've got a rotator cuff issue and that's persistent, so often there's something going on somewhere else, which will hearken people then to say, well, okay, well, where is this something else?

Well, I can't answer that question because as many parts there are in the body are the many different myriad of options where you might be holding or using or compensating or bracing with or, or, or, or, or, or. Like there's so many reasons why a body part doesn't move in the range of motion that it's actually designed to move.

So I start initially with, let's just move it in a range that's a little bit smaller. The range that doesn't have the pain, the range that doesn't have the click and clunk, the range that doesn't have the compensation and let's discover what's going on.

And out of that discovery, something will bubble up into one's conscious awareness. And sometimes I have to share it with them and say, okay, here's what I'm seeing. And then say, oh, I didn't even notice I was doing that. But it's in that, oh, I didn't notice I was doing that, that now they notice it. The genie's out of the bottle. They see what's happening, now we can work with it because as I've said many, many, many times, you can't change what you're not aware of.

So now I've helped them in a very gentle, compassionate, calm way, here's what's going on. And that opens the door. And the piece around the rib flaring, what is very interesting is when someone brings their arms over the head, this common pattern of rib flaring is I will see the ribs move. Like the lower ribs will start to move, which is indicative typically that there's extension of the spine happening.

So the arms are coming over the head, ribs start to move, they start to flare. And we can often see that with extension of the spine, but it's a bit harder to actually see or even feel the extension of the spine because it's not in our visual purview.

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So when I see someone doing this, right, I see the ribs moving, I do something really, really simple. If I'm in person with them, I slide my hands underneath the ribs and I say to them, okay, can you feel my fingers? And they say, yep. And then they start to move their arms overhead. And then I ask them, so do you feel my fingers? And they say, nope.

And I say, all right, can you move your range now only as far as you feel my fingers? And they're like, huh, I'm not moving very far. I'm like, you betcha. And they're like, huh, how do I get better at that? I'm like, that's what we're going to do next. So now we've got some clued-in-ness on what's going on.

Now you might be asking, well, what if you're on Zoom, because Susi, you work mostly on zoom. Yep, I do. And so then what I'll do is I might grab my phone and take a video of them and then show them the video and they'll say, huh. Or I'll have them put their hands on the ribs and I'll say, all right, there's the movement. And they'll say, huh, who knew? Or we might slide something underneath their back, like a spinal strip or a pad that they can feel when they haven't moved. And then as they bring their arms over the head, they can feel they lose contact with it.

Now, a typical thing people often will do because it's typical human behavior is, oh, I'll just push my ribs down so that they don't move. I'm like, well, that's kind of compensating in a whole other way. Now you're bracing against the compensation. And so you're adding a new layer of tension and strain and pain.

So now the question is what to do? And that's when I simply say, move only as far as that compensation doesn't happen. And let's see what happens. And then lo and behold they do that, again they notice, like I've mentioned earlier, their range of motion is a lot smaller than they thought, but oftentimes other things bubble up.

Feelings of freedom, ease, peace, less strain, and dah, dah, dah, dah, their neck feels better. And they usually say to me, well, but what does this have to do with my neck? And that's when I pull out my skeleton. That's when I pull out some anatomy photos and I show them the relationship between

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their neck and their shoulder movement. And it's like, oh, okay. And kind of, it's like this moment of like, okay, I get it.

And then we'll continue on with other things that we can do, whether it's around the shoulder blades or the pelvis or really what the person's body shows. I don't have like, here is the template approach of what I do next. It's more how the patterns and relationships are showing up in the body. And that's where I then go.

And it's a real art and a science to do this process, which is what we get into in the neck program, we go even more deeply into with my therapeutic yoga intensive, and then of course go full onto mastery level in our certification program of really being able to see these relationships. Because if we get caught up and stuck in a templated way, we won't see the person. We won't see the dynamic.

So often people have this like, you start at the shoulders and then you go to here and then, dah, dah, dah. And that works for a lot of people, but you're missing the human being who is being the human being. And when you can actually connect with the human being and help them grow that inner awareness, their interoception, and tune into where their body is in space, their proprioception, as I've said over and over and over again, you'll be blown away by how people progress in your practice, and for that matter in your own body.

So this leads to the next one, which is breath holding. And breath holding is huge for people because it's an amazing stabilizer effect. It increases intra abdominal pressure, body parts stay still, and then we can keep moving. It's just a go-to way of creating a sense of inner stability, even though the stability is not really the best source of stability. It does create some level of control with a capital C.

And in those cases, it's a little bit trickier because to ask someone to not brace when bracing is their go-to patterning, that can feel like ripping off the bandaid a bit. That can feel a little bit scary. So, oftentimes in those cases, I will just ask them to notice. And for some people who are more occasional

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bracers, then they may go, oh, I don't need to do that. And it's just an immediate quick shift because now they're aware of it.

Other people, I might throw in a breathing exercise, like one that I learned from Donna Farhi, which I won't name it the way she names it because I've evolved it over time. But she was my initial source and it's like an open focus type of breath where if we place a hand at the base of the breastbone and they look with their eyes at a point, whether it's on the wall or on the floor or some part in front of them, and they really focus their eyes and just like almost straining.

And they'll notice that their breath becomes held and gripped. And then I'll ask them to still focus on that point, but allow for the focus to be more expansive. Still focus, but more expansive. Even as I say this, I can feel the difference in my body. And now there's a little more movement in and around where that hand is. There's a bit more breath.

And for the people who this instruction really works for, it's like, oh, I'm like completely bracing and gripping through my body when I get that focused. I'm like, yeah. I'm wondering when you're doing your movement, are you doing the same thing? And that's when they get curious and are saying, okay, well let's just try this out.

So another way I might add onto this is can you now do the movement with 15% less effort, but still have the same range? Or can you do this movement with 15% more ease and still have the same range? And that last part of the statement is really important, that you can have more ease bit. Because anybody can go with less effort and more ease and less tension, and lots of people can do that, but they just don't move as far. And so I'm adding the piece and let's move as far.

So it becomes really, really interesting and exploratory and super curious. And sometimes that simple shift into curiosity is what changes the breath holding pattern. Other times the breath holding pattern has a little more rooted and groove to it. There's other factors in their past that have contributed to the breath holding pattern, and that's not something I want to

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dismantle. That support is kind of like duct tape. It's holding them together. I don't want to rip that off.

But simply bringing the awareness to it without going into it can be a gentle way of just showing, right? Bring it into awareness and also saying at the same time, you know, we don't have to actually do anything about this. But being aware of it's kind of interesting because then you start to notice when it picks up even more so, when it settles back, when it becomes free, because there maybe are times in your day where there is more freedom, even just a glimpse of it.

And even if you have a glimpse, even if it goes right back to being that braced pattern again, even if it's just a glimpse, it still tells us your body can do it. And so we'll just keep working away at it. We'll just keep plugging away at it. And oftentimes with that sort of openness of experience, lots of shifting happens.

I've even had people where the braced breathing doesn't change dramatically, but their neck pain still goes away because of the simple awareness factor, the interoceptive awareness, the proprioceptive awareness. If there's a fear or a trauma pattern associated with the breath holding, I haven't told them that it's wrong. They become more curious about it and it's less of this kind of thing for them.

And they'll even say, I get that this is happening and I get that this is happening. And there's just a greater ease around it. And then as their healing process goes on, they might then engage with some other people who can support them with some of the trauma work that is outside of my particular scope and they get more out of it because they've gotten more tuned in with their body.

So it's interesting, so I started off with this as being, here are some key compensatory patterns around the neck. And what I want to share with you, which was quite deliberate on my part, is that these compensation patterns are happening for a purpose and very deliberately. And oftentimes they have little to do with the tech, little to do with the devices.

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There's a correlating piece to it because this is the way that we live our lives, but there's more to it than just simply blaming tech and devices. There's more opportunity to facilitate change.

So if this is interesting to you and you want to dig into this further, I really and truly recommend you join me for the Power of Pure Movement, Unravel Your Neck. It'd be such an honor to work with you because this is an area of the body where so many people have strain and pain. It's an area of the body that takes it on and it doesn't have to. And I would love to show you how.

So that's coming up and I'd love for you to join me. All you need to do is go to functionalsynergy.com/neck. And if you're a professional and you really are resonating with this and you want to take this even further, we have our asynchronous therapeutic yoga intensive running and I would love to work with you to really hone your skill. And you can learn more about that by emailing us at health@functionalsynergy.com. Okay, take good care, bye bye.