

Ep #144: Exploring Your Breath Part 2 – Core Training and Your Breath



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Susi Hately

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

Ep #144: Exploring Your Breath Part 2 – Core Training and Your Breath

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 continuing a miniseries on exploring your breath, and this is a lead-up to the course I'm running in January, beginning on January the 16th. It's one of my favorite courses, I call it Mechanics of Breathing. It's a multi-week series with pre-recorded video and almost weekly group sessions with me where you can dig into concepts, get your questions answered, find out more answers to questions you might have about yourself or your clients.

I'm also including my dentist, who is a freakin' rockstar at helping people with jaw issues, airway issues, sleep apnea. Because what's cool in the dentistry world right now, is they're seeing how sleep apnea, and grinding even, are related to airway.

And what's so great about my dentist is that he sees the relationship to the whole body. He gets that posture has an impact, pelvis has an impact, abdomen and core have an impact on airway, right? Everything is related to each other, right?

So he'll be coming on to the podcast during this miniseries and he is so much fun to listen to. So he'll be one of the trainers inside of the Mechanics of Breathing program. If this is interesting to you and you'd like to dig in, come visit me at learn.functionalsynergy.com/breathing.

All right, so today we're going to be talking about core and the relationship to breathing. I'm going to be sharing my definition of core and how I view core, what I see the relationship of breathing to the core, how I work with people with their breath in the core, particularly as it relates to reducing pain. And I'll walk you through a really simple exercise that you can play with to just notice what you do with your core and your breath.

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

Ep #144: Exploring Your Breath Part 2 – Core Training and Your Breath

So when I think about core, I almost always have a memory way back when core became a bigger thing in yoga. And what would happen is like typically instructors would section out a 15 minute window during a 90 minute class of, okay, we're going to do core work now. And invariably what would happen is the room would have this collective exhale at the end of that 15 minute window of time.

And I often giggle because we weren't doing core work. For those folks who were holding their breath, they were doing breath holding work. So they weren't really getting the core training because when we hold our breath, we're not doing a lot of core training, right? The diaphragm interweaves with the transverse abdominus, there's a connection to the pelvic floor.

So there's a lot of internal bracing, we're increasing intra-abdominal pressure, which can be really helpful when you're lifting 450 pounds over your head if you're an Olympic power lifter. Or if you're moving one of those old school huge, huge, not that I've ever done this of course, but those huge big screen TVs. Which you absolutely need to brace and hold in order to get that thing up multiple stairs, right? But that's necessary, and that's the beauty of our bodies to enable us to do that.

But to do that with core training, that's not a super sustainable way to build core. So when I'm thinking about core I've got a few ways that I want to share with you. So the first is how I speak about it in my first book, *Anatomy and Asana: Preventing Yoga Injuries*. I published the book in 2004, and how I describe core stability is on page 39. I liken core stability to developing grace and ease.

And so some people move through yoga, and through life for that matter, with a grace and ease that is fluid, gently strong, and very relaxed. It's as if their strength of calmness permeates from the core of their bodies to the tips of their fingers, to the tips of their toes, and softly out their bodies. That is the essence of core stability.

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

Ep #144: Exploring Your Breath Part 2 – Core Training and Your Breath

The body is like a boat on water, where the body is the boat and the external stimulus is the water. Both are stable and able to respond to the inevitable wobbles, turns and shifts, only when they are balanced. In the body this balance enables us to move from slow to fast and fast to slow. It gives us strength and ease to movement, whether or not the limbs are involved, and it lets us know where our bodies are in space. It ensures our foundations are stable while our body parts move in a coordinated flow.

Core stability is a balance of strength and mobility. The balance of strong core muscles found along the mid-line of the body, from the base of the skull to the bottom of the feet, combined with freedom of movement of the hip, the shoulder, and vertebral joints as well as the elbow, knee, wrist and ankle joints.

Without this balance, the body will either be too rigid, that is too much strength or too little mobility. Or limp and spiritless, too much mobility and too little strength. So the aim here is we're looking at whole body. We're looking at building awareness, the ability to perceive, feel and be conscious of our patterns and positions. Versatility, adaptability and position and speed, agility, the ability to change our body's position efficiently, and stability, control and coordination over a range of motion.

That's the aim here. So bracing in anticipation can be detrimental to that end. I understand when bracing can be important, as I mentioned, when we are moving a massive large screen TV or when we're lifting 450 pounds over the head, yes, that is necessary and important.

But what we want to do is train our body to be agile and nimble. And when we are bracing and holding, when we're not allowing that diaphragm to move or to let any really of the deep core muscles to connect with that diaphragm, the diaphragmatic movement and work as this unified whole, we lose out on that possibility.

That possibility of versatility, agility, stability and awareness. So then how do we get there? How do we move from being an anticipatory bracer to

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

Ep #144: Exploring Your Breath Part 2 – Core Training and Your Breath

more agility, versatility, stability, and a depth of awareness? Well, I really like defining core, when we're thinking about anatomy and function, in three segments. And this isn't mine, I read about this years ago. And even though there was some criticism about the way that this is structured, I do like it to be able to explain a concept that I like to teach.

So, I like to define the core, I like to distinguish I'd rather say. I like to distinguish the core in three sections, the deep inner stabilizers, the global stabilizers and the power muscles. And even though like, as I mentioned in the writing from my book, is the whole body really is core. We work in a coordinated whole. However, power muscles can overpower deeper muscles.

And when I was pre-pandemic and I had a trainer come in who was a physical therapist, and she brought a real time ultrasound, which is the same ultrasound that you watch or you can look at babies and kidneys and other organs. She would utilize that to watch diaphragmatic movement, the inner core muscles, and the pelvic floor. And invariably what we saw was some poor patterning behaviors between the deeper muscles and a lot of overpowering through the power muscles.

But what was interesting is in all the times that I watched those, we never saw the same pattern twice, so there were so many unique ways that people braced and compensated. So when we're thinking about these three sections, if I can call them that, power, global stabilizers, and deep. When we're looking at the power muscles, we're looking at the big, big muscles like lats, rectus abdominus, glutes, quads, hamstrings, like those kinds of muscles.

When we're looking at global stabilizers, it's more about hip abductors, adductors, what I like to call the primary stabilizing structure of the shoulder girdle, trapezius, rhomboids, serratus anterior, pec minor, levator scapula. And there's probably other muscles we could include into that, but just to give an overview and just a perspective here.

Ep #144: Exploring Your Breath Part 2 – Core Training and Your Breath

So then when we get into the deep inner core, that's where we get to play with transversus, multifidus, pelvic floor, diaphragm. And that deep inner core works together like this canister, where the diaphragm is the top, the pelvic floor is the bottom, transversus is the casing around it. And so it all works together with the multifidus.

And when we overpower with lats, when we overpower with obliques, and obliques interestingly can be in the power muscles or they can be in the stabilizers depending on who you read or listen to. But we can overpower through those lats or the obliques and get into a lock in and a load situation.

This is something that certainly happened to me when I was postpartum after having my C-section and I had a diastasis. I definitely overdid it through my obliques, like a lot of women who are postpartum. And in order for my diastasis to close, those obliques had to start to quiet down and I had to do this very embodied and very connected.

So in part what I want to share in this episode as I continue on describing how I work with core, is it's not something that we think about to try and make our thoughts do something. We guide our minds to connect with our bodies and our body awareness. So we can tune into the sensations of what's going on between our pelvis and our ribcage.

And connecting with the breath can be such a great tool because when you move faster than your breath, or when you move faster than what your pelvic floor is doing, or if your pelvic floor starts to become hypertonic and over tight, or an over tight feeling, then chances are pretty good that you're not connecting as well as you could to what the core can do for you.

Think of it like a water balloon versus an iron balloon. In an iron balloon, do the words versatility, agility, stability, and awareness, do those kind of match over onto the iron balloon perspective? It's a bit hard with that iron balloon, so the aim is the water balloon. That's what's helping us grow versatility, agility, stability, and awareness.

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

Ep #144: Exploring Your Breath Part 2 – Core Training and Your Breath

So that's we want to have happen, we want this responsibility. And I've spoken about responsibility in other aspects of this podcast. And I talk about it because I know that it's easier to brace, I know that it's easier to hold one's breath, but it doesn't enable great power output for the average person who's not lifting 450 pounds over their head, right? It can be very draining and depleting.

And as I help my clients improve their breathing and their connection to their core, and have better organization between the layers, between the power and the global stabilizers and that deep inner core, their pain goes down, and their breathing improves, and their core improves. And that feeling of lightness and tallness, that ability to move easier, it's almost a weightlessness, but with groundedness.

It's amazing how that lightness that comes across people. It's almost shocking to many of them of how they feel because they have a deeper sense of stability of coordination and control so they don't have to hold so hard their pieces together.

So let's get into an exploration then. And what I invite you to do is to come onto your hands and your knees and feel the palms of your hands on the mat. And if your your wrists are bothering you, you can fold up your mat or fold up a firm blanket, or you can fist your hands.

It's not super ideal because chances are if you're having issues with your wrists being on hands and knees, there's likely some issues up in that primary stabilizing structure or in your thorax, which can impact your core. So be mindful as you play with this if that's your situation.

If you have your hands on your mat or on the floor along with your knees and your feet, placing your toes under, you have six points touching the floor, right? Toes, knees and hands. And in a moment, you'll be lifting yourself up so those knees come about an inch off the floor. Okay, so you'll be moving from six points to four points.

Ep #144: Exploring Your Breath Part 2 – Core Training and Your Breath

Okay, so now just lift up as you would lift up, and notice what you feel. What's very common is that before someone lifts they brace their belly. And I'm exaggerating this for effect so you can hear it through my voice. They brace through their belly and then they lift. But just consider this, if you're moving from six points to four points and the knees are lifting, but you brace first, where and how are you absorbing the change of load as you shift from six points to four points?

Okay, now come back to those six points if you haven't brought your knees down already. And let's do it again, this time allow your abdomen to be soft to start with and notice as you peel the knees off the floor, the change of load from having your knees on the floor to having your knees off the floor. What parts of your body take the load?

A lot of people feel it in their abdomen, and in their arms, and then in their legs. I have had a client who will feel it all in their arms or all in their feet. So then in that case I'll bring their knees back down again and I'll ask them to only lift their knees off the floor only as much as that's not happening. Because often when people are only in their arms or only in their toes, they're not dissipating the load very well through their body or they're holding their breath.

So then let's focus in on the breath now. And just be on hands and knees and connect to that inhale and exhale. To me it doesn't matter when you lift, which phase of breath it is. Just notice that you're breathing and then what happens to your torso as you lift and what happens to your whole body.

It's not uncommon that as people slow down and really pay attention to what's occurring as they lift their knees, that their abdomen starts to respond to that change of load. And the bracing through the ribcage starts to fade a little bit. There's less effort through their arms and their feet and their legs, it's like the load is more dissipated evenly.

Ep #144: Exploring Your Breath Part 2 – Core Training and Your Breath

So this is interesting to you try this a few more times. And then what you can do is from here, if you are a yoga practitioner, you can take this position up to a downward dog. But again, notice instead of just going up to downward dog, notice how your body responds to the change of movement pattern.

I know that we've been trained in many ways, in many forms of exercise, inadvertently really, to hold the breath. I don't think any trainer really wants people to hold their breath. But when we overload our bodies, when we're overthinking a movement, it's very easy to hold the breath. And it gives us this inner sense of perceived stability, which really isn't that stable.

But it gives us this perceived sense because there's a feeling that happens when we hold our breath, there's an intra-abdominal pressure. So we need to pay attention to where that change of pressure is coming from, and then tune into the quality of that change. Because if you continue to hone a bracing pattern, that's what you continue to hone and it's not surprising then to develop jaw pain and neck pain and rib issues. And in that it can also lead to pelvic floor issues.

So I've know a lot of people who have developed pelvic floor issues for any number of reasons. And then when they're able to tune into their breathing, which can help down regulate their system and reconnect better to their core, they can reduce some of the symptoms associated with those issues.

So food for thought for your practice, for when you're noticing how you're working your core. Whether you are on a yoga mat, or a Pilates reformer, or in the gym, just notice what you feel. Pay attention, are you being agile? Do you have versatility? Do you have variability and movement? How is that awareness? And how about your stability?

And as you integrate your breath a little bit more, not so much from an intellectual place, but really just feeling it, then what happens? And if you want to dig into these concepts more, come join me. Mechanics of

Ep #144: Exploring Your Breath Part 2 – Core Training and Your Breath

Breathing, learn.functionalsynergy.com/breathing. I would love, love, love to see you there.

If this episode has resonated and you're looking to deepen this idea of getting your body back on board, of listening deeply to your symptoms, of listening to the whispers so you don't have to hear the screams and you're looking for one to one support or professional training, then reach out to us at health@functionalsynergy.com where we can customize your learning path. That's health@functionalsynergy.com. Looking forward to hearing from you.