

Ep #276: Core Recovery: How Core Stability Was a Game Changer for Easing Hypervigilance and Redefining Healing



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With Your Host

Susi Hatley

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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 really glad that you're here today because I'm getting into a topic that I haven't spoken a whole lot about directly. But over the course of the years of this podcast I've spoken around it a little bit. And the reason why I say speaking around it is because I'm talking about whole body, whole brain healing. And that is inherent in being a yoga therapist and in helping people get out of pain. We know that there's this multi-layered approach to it.

Nonetheless, because I come into the conversation as a body-based approach, I'm a body girl, I have a degree in kinesiology, I have utilized biomechanics therapeutically to support people, I work with breath. It's very body-based in what I do. I don't have any training as a counselor or a therapist. I don't do that kind of work with my clients.

However, it's really clear that when I'm working with people who have persistent pain, who've been to many different practitioners, who have gathered a whole lot of data about what works and what doesn't work, are still trying to figure out the missing piece to bring it all together, that the solution really is on all of the levels. All of the levels, right?

It's clear that how somebody's symptoms reduce and eradicate is very much correlated to their opinions about themselves, for example. Their diagnosis and the opinion about that. Their opinion about the prognosis. The actual felt sense of their condition, if they can even come into a felt sense of a condition and how they feel it limiting or not limiting them. If they want to fight it or love it or embrace it, whether they want to slow down or not, right?

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All of these things are the mental and emotional realms that will impact the process of healing. And early on in my career it became very, very clear that they had to be acknowledged in some way in order to facilitate the healing outcomes that they wanted.

Now, because I didn't have training as a counselor or as a therapist, I never talked about it directly with my clients, but I could see it. So I had all sorts of ways to be able to teach them about their movement, which then enabled them on their own time to come to see that the way they moved was related to who they were or how they moved was related to what they were thinking about their movement or about their condition. And it just naturally sort of fell into their lap about how these pieces came together.

And then over the past few months something has shifted for me and there's been a bit more confidence, perhaps clarity, because of my own experience of this multi-layered approach. I've been supporting my husband over the past several years with his journey through, I'm using the word through on purpose, through post-traumatic stress and hypervigilance from being a firefighter.

I've been sharing his and my story through email to the database of people who receive my email on a weekly basis. And we're kind of moving towards this place of being able to talk more about it publicly later this fall, because we've had quite the journey through that process for him moving through the PTS and hypervigilance and me supporting him.

The important piece and the important point for this episode though, is that when he got to another side of his healing journey, when he was more stable and steady psychologically and physiologically, I was able to recognize and begin my own process of retraining and letting go of my hypervigilance that I had been using in the process of supporting him.

And this is important because I couldn't actually recognize it fully until he got to a steadier space because even though it was a draining experience,

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which I'll talk more about in this episode. I had to hold on to it because it was the tool that I had in order to support him, really truly avoid some very potentially dire experiences that were possibly going to happen.

The whole journey all in all has been remarkable, very challenging, multi-layered. And the reason I say this is something that I've been tapping into more over these past few months has been my core stability and connecting more so into my core. I've seen something play out in my own being, really my body and my brain and my whole being, that I've seen with my clientele in the past.

But because I'm feeling it myself in a very visceral and somato-emotional way, I'm really gaining a whole new perspective on it. It really takes this notion of core stability well beyond providing support for someone's back or pelvis, and enabling them to become much more physically and also mentally and emotionally nimble and agile.

It's helping someone connect truly to the core being the stabilizer for one's whole being, right? So again, it's this multi-level notion of how we can integrate movement in a way that really shifts ourselves. What stability can actually provide when it's true stability and not braced or gripped.

To enter into this conversation, let's first take a look at some bullet points about the way our culture typically views healing. We know that in our Western systemic or systematic view of healing, it's very, very divided up. Our medical model is one of systems, right? Separate systems. And only in the recent past have the systems started to be acknowledged that there is a link between them.

We tend to have a body over here and a mind over here in that particular module way of thinking. And even though there is a connection between mental and physical health, the work that psychologists do or psychiatrists do, and then the work that physical therapists do, there is a gap between

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those, right? And there needs to be a bridge built in order to help connect those.

Conversely, when we look at traditional Chinese medicine views of healing or the Indian medical view, the Ayurvedic view of healing, there is no division. There's no bridge that needs to be built. Even in the way that they speak and talk about health and healing, there is no talk of mind and body or mind or body. It's just simply one.

So with my training and application in kinesiology and biomechanics, exercise physiology, along with yoga, Ayurveda, traditional Chinese medicine, there is a blending of all of them. Which really has made my process over my career so, so, so effective, because I can understand the system view of the Western model, where the benefits of that come in. And I can also be an interpreter and a bridge builder with the Chinese medical and Ayurvedic view and yogic view, more whole body brain view, more multi-koshic layer view of us as human beings. So it starts to really blend these things very, very, very well together.

When I dig deeper into the qualities of hypervigilance that I was utilizing, it wasn't that I was worried or anxious or concerned about the future. It was more that I was highly on alert, because there were aspects that my husband was not able to feel, but I was able to tune into. I'm a pretty intuitive being, I'm a pretty perceptive being, and I could see what was happening for him that he couldn't necessarily perceive.

So my heightened alertness was really helpful in being able to tune into and then provide support to him almost before he knew he needed it. So I could utilize this alert state while he was in a more fragile or vulnerable physiological or psychological state.

And so there were times that I was unsure of which version of my husband might show up. So my being able to tune in very, very, very closely to what was going on for him was, in a sense, a support mechanism that was

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outside of him. And granted, it wasn't very sustainable. It was tiring, but it was a necessary piece that was needed.

And even though there were a lot of things I was doing to take care of myself, because I was conscious enough and cognizant enough of what my role had become during that phase of our time together, I could tell that I needed extra support, which I got.

I utilized my own yoga practice, my cycling practice, and a number of other things to support myself physiologically. I had psychological support. I had lots of support. There was still a drain on my system, it was still very energy required in order to support and then do all the things that I needed to do to live life.

So it was when he got to a place where through the support of a psychologist and some other factors, he was able to come to a place of more physiological stability and more psychological stability. There was less of a need for me to use a level of alertness, which really was a wired alertness. Like think about intuition being channeled in a very wired way. I was able to start to recognize I didn't need to utilize it anymore.

Now, it's one thing to say that. But when you've got a pattern that's been grooved for a number of years, really, it's difficult to let go of, especially something that is so grooved neuromuscularly, physiologically, really, in all the layers of my being. So that was my experience of hyper vigilance.

Now, let me explain the way that I look at core stability. When I first defined core stability in my book, *Anatomy and Asana: Preventing Yoga Injuries*, how I described it was this ability to move fast to slow, slow to fast, go to the floor, get back up again, change direction. Like all of these ways to be agile and nimble.

It wasn't something I spoke about around, we're going to improve core to improve your back, or you're going to do core to improve whatever. It was a

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greater or a bigger conversation than that. Because when you have true agility and true nimbleness, then a lot of the tissue is responding in a much better way and you'll find that you won't have the back pain and the strain and all the rest of the things.

The other way that I like to describe core stability, which was a definition I came upon over the past number of years, which is core stability or stability is the control and coordination one has over a range of motion. So if you don't have control and coordination over a range of motion, then you don't have stability.

And so the aim is to build out that control and coordination. And when I say control and coordination, I mean motor control and coordination. I don't mean control, like bracing, holding, gripping, breath holding in that tension-filled type of control. I mean motor control and coordination, as in, if you think about an orchestra that all the pieces of the orchestra are working smoothly together, creating an awesome melody.

And so if you don't have that smoothness to create that awesome melody, you don't have solid, smooth motor control and coordination. So when I'm talking about control and coordination over a range of motion, that is what I'm aiming for is a smoothness, an efficiency, a fluidity, a melodic type of movement that has an element of ease to it, even when there's a real push.

So I think about when I'm on my bike, and I'm pushing hard up a hill. And I'm huffing and puffing, and I might be holding the handlebars a little bit harder, I might be getting up off my seat. But there's still this undercurrent of ease there.

The same when I'm doing my yoga practice and I'm getting into a more difficult movement pattern or I'm discovering a sticky pattern inside of my body that how I am with it within my mind, within my body, within my breath. If there's that easefulness that's there, even inside of the effort, there's an effortlessness to the effort. There's a resiliency with the relaxation, a

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relaxedness to the resiliency that I'm experiencing. That's what I'm talking about here when I'm talking about stability.

So you can kind of get a sense then that when that can be cultivated, things can start to shift and you can get the multi-layered idea here of how we go about or how I went about building greater core stability and how that ripple effect throughout the layers of my being.

So it's not so much that how physical stability can impact mental health through reducing stress and improving emotional regulation, those are just common sense. What I'm talking about here is a different kind of essence to this. I'm talking about the how of the movement, the how of the motor control and coordination has this ripple effect where there's a greater sense, stability, ease that exists in all the layers of one's being and how that can have a real fundamental shift.

And my experience, and I'll share more about some of the core work I've been doing. My experience here has been there's a gripped pattern around hypervigilance I found when I knew I didn't need it anymore. However, I was scared to let it go because what would happen without it? And even though logically I know that I could always whip it back up again if needed, but there was that pause, that space of but what if?

What I started to recognize is as I connected more to my core, its functioning, its relationships to my other movement patterns, how I was on my yoga practice, how I was on my bike, how I was in my weights, how I was doing a number of the other things that I was doing in my life, there was an emotional settling, the more motor control and coordination I had overall. It was like my bandwidth started to grow. My bandwidth for calm and clarity started to unfold and show up for myself.

I've started to be able to sense when I'm in a state of calm clarity and when I'm in a sense of more wired alertness. And I can now feel the distinction between the two. I can feel when I'm moving out of when that calm clarity is

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starting to fade and what contributes to that. I can feel as I'm getting into more of that alert state.

So the important thing is this doesn't just change on a dime. But there's this retraining pattern that's ultimately giving me a different seat in myself, a different sense of grounding and a much more open perspective. Curiously enough, I feel like my vision is broader. I can see more clearly and I'm just much more steady. And interestingly enough, I'm not as tired as I used to be.

So how did this all come about and how did I explore this? Well, the first piece that I really recognized is I was on my bike and I started to pedal a little bit faster. I had taken a break after having a big bike trip this summer, plus I did a Gran Fondo and I just wanted to take a break from doing a bunch of training. And it was about three weeks and then I got back on my bike and I was just kind of getting my legs back into the groove.

And I was doing a push phase and I found that my legs did not move quite as well, which makes sense, it had been a while. But they just didn't quite move as well. And instead what happened was the inside of my pelvis, think on the inside of the ilium, so on the inside of the pelvis, kind of think like an iliacus area, all of a sudden pulled kind of really, really, really taut.

It wasn't so much the pelvic floor, not that. It was more the walls of the inside of my pelvis. And it was sort of this, aah, kind of experience as I went into pushing my legs against the resistance on my bike. And I'm like, huh, well that's kind of interesting. What's that one about? And so of course I initially thought to myself, it's just because you haven't been on the bike for a while, so maybe back it off and let's see what happens.

But then when I got off the bike, what I noticed was when the alert factor wanted to kind of come in, that pulling up on that inside bowl of my pelvis, that tissue around that, it could be the iliacus or the myofascial tissue there, how that wanted to pull up. I was like, huh, interesting. There's a correlation

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between how I was on my bike pushing against force or pushing with effort, and then how I am here. Interesting that there is this pattern that I'm seeing.

And what was also interesting is I couldn't necessarily stop it from happening, but I could bear witness to it. So that was an emotional response to something that was going on. Then when I started to play with it further to see if it showed up in my yoga practice, lo and behold, there it was.

I noticed during some of my movement patterns that I did the same thing, and I was moving in ranges that I thought were quite reasonable for me, right? Just a very basic triangle, very basic warrior two, some very basic supine work, think like bringing your ankle to your knee and coming into a twist, like really basic stuff.

But lo and behold, as basic as it was, I could feel this efforting happening. This very, very reactive kind of response, which I could recognize was a way of creating stability. And it correlated with a version of holding my breath. And I'm like, huh, interesting. Here it is again. So then I allowed myself to come into movements that were much, much smaller and were only in the range where that didn't happen.

That was difficult to find at first. Those were smaller movement patterns that my brain initially was saying to me, but wait a second, you can move further? Really? Do you need to be doing this? And I said to myself, apparently, yes.

And I laugh at this because this is another time in my life, I can think back to when I had fallen down my stairs back in 2010. I can think back to in my late 20s, in the late 1990s and early 2000s when I had hurt myself in yoga, and, and I started this whole process of moving slower.

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And I could hear, I mean, those two times are very strong reminders of when I had to talk myself sort of out of pushing harder, and saying, alright, let's just go a little slower and a little gentler, find our movement patterns that are more effective, find the breath pattern that's more effective. And then we'll come back into doing a much more demanding kind of work.

And lo and behold, back in those times, it worked. And it started to work again here like, let's just move in the range, even though you have the full range, let's just move in the range where that kind of tension pattern doesn't need to kick in and let's see what happens.

And it was so funny, because even though I know all this stuff to be true, it was so funny to see some of the resistance that I had. And then after a little bit of time, even just in that session, like 30 seconds or one minute, everything started to settle. My breath started to settle, my movement pattern improved, and the actual range started to improve too.

And what then came out of that is a lot more ease, a lot more lightness. And curiously enough, more nimbleness, more agility, how I was climbing up the stairs or running up the stairs was different. How I could toss around my kids and wrestle with them was different. And not that there was anything palpably off, it was that I just felt better. And interestingly enough, so was my emotional state, that calmness I was talking about before, it just would return.

So then I started to kind of play with how this inner bowl of my pelvis played around with the lateral aspects of tissue up the sides of my abdomen, held into my ribs with my breath, and then will pull a little bit up through my neck and the back of my head.

And it was curious for me to really play with this and see how, as my legs moved better in the pelvis, my abdomen responded, the deeper core responded, there was less bracing with my power muscles like quads, hamstrings, rectus abdominis, lats. There was more stability in some of

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what's considered to be the global stabilizers. So the primary stabilizers of the shoulder girdle, primary stabilizers of the pelvis.

And there was more flow and melody between the layers of my tissue. So whether we want to call it deep core, power muscles, global stabilizers, the different roles of that tissue could be expressed much more effectively and more easily. It was really, really cool. And so over the time, I've just kept playing with this.

So what I'm doing is interesting because we already had planned to run a core stability program, an up-level core stability program that I already have available. And I'm going to be offering another one where we're going to be combining and exploring from a body perspective, this experience of how the various layers of core play out, how we don't need to brace and grip so much through the areas where we don't need to grip and brace, and then just experience what starts to happen in the other layers of your being.

Notice how those layers work fluidly or not, and then what might need to be added to support more nimbleness and responsivity and more overall support, like that melodic orchestra I was talking about. Because all in all, when you think about it, core stability is not about trying to create this iron balloon of gripped belly, pulled in rib cage, navel to spine, pulled up pelvic floor, but rather to enable a responsiveness of our tissue. A responsivity to the world around us in a way that is just that, responsive and not braced or gripped.

So I would love for you to join me in this particular journey, and you can read all about it over at functionalsynergy.com/core, C-O-R-E.

And if what I'm sharing here really resonates with you, then I'd love to also invite you to the Therapeutic Yoga Intensive, which is coming up. And we dig that much more into this multi-layered experience of what it is to be in healing and in recovery and really supporting your clients to get to that level

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of clarity and ease through all of the layers of their being, but coming at it from a body-based objective viewpoint.

Not going into the realm of counseling or therapy or any of those things. But being able to tune into and connect into our own bodies, our own minds, and how all of it relates together. You can find all of that over at functionalsynergy.com/intensive. Would love to see you there as well. You have a great, great time exploring and we'll see you next time. Take care. Bye bye.