

Ep. #350 - The In-Between: The Misunderstood Space Between Pain Relief and Real Strength



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With your host:

Susi Hatelly

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

Introduction (00:00.00)

You are listening to From Pain To Possibility with Susi Hatley. You'll 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 Hatley.

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Welcome and welcome back. I'm so glad you're here because today we're exploring a stage of healing that's often misunderstood, often feared, and yet absolutely essential for getting out of pain and truly into sustainable strength and doing the activities you wanna do without the concern or fear that pain is gonna recur.

It's the moment when things feel different, not quite the old way, not yet the new way, and you don't really know what to make of it. Sometimes people worry that something has gone wrong or things are going too slowly. But in my experience, it's actually the time where our system is really in a place of reorganizing.

It's the moment that change really becomes possible, and I call this moment the in between, and I wanna show you why. It's really the opportunity for possibility, a doorway to strength. It's not asking you to be patient, and it's certainly not a setback. So let's dig in. Let's dig into why do people get stuck and we'll start with one of the biggest misconceptions that I see.

Most people believe that pain changes when muscles change. They think, I just need the right stretch. I need to activate the right muscle. I need to fix my posture. If I could just strengthen my core, but persistent pain is rarely a muscle issue. It's a pattern issue. It's a nervous system talking with the rest of the body and the body talking with the nervous system.

Pain persists because the system, your system, your student system is bracing, gripping, anticipating, protecting, expecting the same outcome it has always had. This is vigilance. It's not a conscious choice. It's a learned response. So even when you change the exercise, the nervous system doesn't yet trust the new pattern and it pulls you back into the old one, and until the vigilance softens.

The system can't actually reorganize. When things do begin to shift, when breath becomes more available, when a grip releases, when a movement feels smoother, there's a moment where the old pattern feels like it loosens. There's like a shift, there's a space, but the new pattern isn't quite steady. This is the in-between zone, and here's what I think is actually happening.

There's a change to the sensory motor loop. Now, the sensory motor loop is the ongoing conversation between our bodies and our brains, where our bodies are feeding sensation up to our brain. Our brain is interpreting that sensation, and then it's offering out motor information of sense and telling tissue how far and how fast to contract and when to stop, and then that leads to more sensation.

And then up it goes to interpretation and movement and onward it goes. The sensory motor loop is consistently happening, and when you're in a pain pattern, this loop can actually run on protection. So a sensation is coming up to the brain. The brain is interpreting that, and that interpretation might be something along the lines of, you better be careful.

You better hold it here. Oh, that's kind of a big load. Oh, you better hold your breath. Let's just stabilize everything. Now, of course, our brain's not coming up with those words per se, but the response to our beliefs about what this sensation is. This is all happening unconsciously, can then output results that match the be careful, grip here, hold your breath, stabilize everything.

And again, this is not by conscious choice. It's by wiring. And this is a very real thing. You can be somebody who's actually cognizant of what's going on. As you're moving into patterns that you're concerned about, you can feel, even though you know you can do them, you can feel the stopping pattern of fear.

This is one reason why when you introduce either new way of moving, where you haven't moved for a while, or a more loaded movement, that sensory motor loop might not yet know, if I could use that word, if it's really safe. There hasn't been a learning or a trusting of this new option, and it's one reason why this in-between can feel so very unfamiliar.

The unfamiliarity though doesn't mean that it's wrong. It just means that there's some updating to the loop, and this is where yellow lights become very important. The yellow light as a metaphor is what I utilize and describe as the very early whisper before true discomfort or pain emerges. And there's lots of different words to describe a yellow light.

It might be a tug or a catch, a subtle tightening, a breath shortening, a hesitation, a bit more effort than that's needed. It's really something that's quiet. Oftentimes, you don't even notice it. In the line of work I do, in the trainings that I run, we'll talk about blowing by yellow lights because they tend to be quiet.

Think of it like a traffic light. Where red is telling you to stop, those are the screams. Those are the things that are saying clearly you keep doing this and you're going to be really, really sore or hurt. Whereas green, there's nothing there. It actually feels really easy and simple and strong and fluid. But then as you start to run outta steam or you get hungry or you move to your capacity, these whispers of yellow lights let you know that if you keep doing what you're doing.

Things are gonna become a little bit more strained. They're informational, truly, but they're not threatening. They tell you, you are reaching the edge of what the system, your system, can currently manage without bracing or straining or tension. And if you override it by pushing or stretching, or just going for it.

It's very possible that your nervous system can revert back or even snap back to an old protective pattern. But if you honor it by pausing, softening, or choosing a smaller range, you're giving the sensory motor loop accurate, trustworthy input, and this is how your system learns. Hmm, this new pattern is safe.

The yellow lights build trust and trust is what dissolves vigilance. Now, to help with this process, it becomes important to name. Naming is something as simple as, oh, that's a tug. Hmm, I feel my breath shortening. There's a pull on the right. My effort just increased. I'm noticing my leg bone starting to internally rotate and I don't think it should.

My toes are gripping, my knee is falling inward. My rib cage is bracing now and it wasn't before. Ah, I feel my tongue going up to the roof of my mouth in a plastering against the roof sort of way. It could be anything really. But the key is, is that by naming, you're in the real realm of sensation. And sensation is what heads up to our brain for interpretation.

If you don't name sensations, our brain, which is quite predictive, can then fill the gap, and it fills the gap based off of memory. So if you've had quite an injury, then it wouldn't be surprising for the gap we filled with fear, concern, caution, even catastrophizing assumptions from past experiences. And if you just think about those words, how do they land and resonate in your body?

Even as I say them, I can feel a tightening happen, a breath holding happening, a sort of like believing my body sort of kind of feeling. When you name the experiences, then there's clarity, orientation, accurate information. Even just then, as I named the experiences when I said the words fear and catastrophizing, I settled back in my body.

Isn't that wacky? Here is what's so cool about actually naming the sensations you have. It allows your sensory motor loop to actually change, and without naming, the loop stays either vague or highly, highly noisy. With naming, the loop becomes more precise, and this is why in the in-between zone, people will often say, Hmm, this feels really weird.

It feels different. I can do it, but I just, I don't know, it just feels like weird. It's new, but it's manageable. That lets me know that the system is beginning to update itself. It's got this new information. It's moving forward with progress. This is why this in-between peace and space really matters.

The in-between zone is the moment when compensations really begin to unwind. Breath begins to deepen, effort starts to drop, coordination improves, and the nervous system really takes on learning in another way. And the reason I say it all in that way is because when I'm working with someone and we're in a private series, and I run my private series over three months, in that first session, their pain will drop in that first session.

That's not a compensation unwinding. That's not a long-term breath deepening. That's not a coordination has improved. There's been glimpses of what's possible. We can see that we're tracking in the right direction, but it's as we continue to practice and as we grow the new patterning and as we really shift away from those pain sensations because there's movement that's better.

That's when we get into that in-between zone, right? It's not repairing, it's not even relief. It's re-patterning, and it's this re-patterning stage that is so, so vital. So let's take a look at these four

stages that happen inside of this window of time. I've noticed that there's a predictable sequence that people seem to follow as pain resolves.

In stage one, there is an old pattern, which often has with it vigilance, bracing, gripping, and over efforting. Their system is doing the best it can with the tools that it has. In stage two, there's a softening. Where the breath starts to feel easier and sometimes in a much, in a suddenly kind of way.

There's muscles that start to let go more and more often. Symptoms that settle, and these small changes feel significant. And now we get into the true, true in-between phase of this stage where we have improved coordination, but it's not quite consistent. It's more so than the relief phase. Symptoms start to fluctuate more, there's more movement, more mobility overall in the system.

And I don't mean mobility like there's more range of motion. I mean in the system and in the tissues and the way that a body is moving. And it's as if the nervous system is learning a new way, a new language where the language of being in pain was one way of being, and now we're in a new one, but it's still trying to find its way.

But as the practice continues, the new pattern emerges. Coordination, efficiency, lightness, easy breathing, stable without gripping, and this is when true strength really starts to become available. It can't happen before. It's based off of this foundation where strength really starts to make progress, which leads me into this idea of the forest and the trees.

As people move through this path, their perception will change and they start to notice the forest, the big patterns. The trees, the details, and in a sense, the space between the big patterns and the details, or even the space between the details. It's in these moments where they can start to perceive change happening.

People will often say, I can feel something changing, but I'm not sure how to describe it. And that's it. That's the re-patterning in real time. That's seeing the forest, the trees, and the space in between. So let's take a moment and speak to vigilance versus safety. Pain hangs on when the nervous system is vigilant, and by vigilant, I don't mean worried in a psychological sense.

I mean, the body is bracing for what it expects will happen. It's tightening in anticipation, it's preparing for impact, it's stabilizing through tension rather than coordination. This kind of vigilance shows up as bracing, gripping, shallow breath, rushing through movements, or holding yourself in a way that feels slightly armored even if you don't realize you're doing it.

It's the body's best attempt to stay safe, but it comes at a cost. The key here is that you can't really strengthen a vigilant system. When a system is on alert, it won't be able to access the muscles, the tissue, the mechanics that create efficient, coordinated strength. It will just tighten harder. So the real work, especially in the in-between zone, is to create the conditions where a body can truly downshift.

And what does that look like? It looks like breath staying available, right? Nurturing and nourishing the breathing. It looks like movement in ranges that feel manageable, and you can feel your yellow lights and green lights. You can sense intercept and proprioceptively rather than trying to be heroic in your movement.

It's noticing, as I mentioned with those yellow lights, those earlier whispers, and honoring those early whispers and naming them so the brain has clear, accurate information instead of filling the gaps with old assumptions. When vigilance softens even a little, the nervous system reorganizes quickly and coordination improves. Load transfers more smoothly, and muscles that have been offline suddenly come online without effort.

This is where strength becomes available. Clean, efficient strength, not compensatory gripping, and this is where pain really has some room to ease. Which then leads us into the moment that I really, really love when the new pattern truly begins to show itself, and clients will say things like, wow, my shoulders haven't gripped for so long.

My hamstrings feel longer, and I didn't even stretch them, and this has been going on for a week or 10 days. I can feel how my foot mechanics have changed. My bunion has shifted. My standing is more even, my walking feels smoother.

In some cases, the shifts might seem small, but they're truly significant. They're signs of the sensory motor loop. That cycle of sensation, interpretation, and movement has reorganized. The system isn't defaulting to its old protective strategies anymore. It's choosing a different route. One that's more coordinated, more efficient, and far less effortful.

And what's important to understand is that these changes don't show up after months of hard strengthening. They show up after a nervous system trusts the pattern, after vigilance drops, after breath returns, after the body feels safe enough to let go of the bracing, and it doesn't take long. It does take precision, deliberateness, and connectedness.

So in that vein, what can you do today? Here's what you can practice. Notice your yellow lights, really do your best to not override them. And then even if you do, because we all do, just notice that they're information and notice what led you to override them. See if you can name the sensations that are occurring in your body.

This really helps your system, your sensory motor loop, work really effectively. Consider choosing a smaller range where your breath is easy. I love to use the line of move with five to 10% less effort and still move in the range of motion you wanna move in. So the key is, is effortless effort, relaxed resilience.

Let sensation lead, not habit.

And as you do, that will build coordination and your strength will naturally emerge in ways that might surprise you. This is the functional synergy process: awareness, coordination, and strength.

So, as I come to a close, consider that as you're moving through your own healing, or if you're helping someone move through theirs, that this in-between zone isn't requiring you to be patient. It's the transition. It's your nervous system reorganizing. It's where pain begins to let go more and more, and strength begins to arise.

If you wanna learn how to work with your nervous system instead of against it, then join me in January for therapeutic yoga for shoulders and hips. This is a program that will support you in improving your coordination, reducing your vigilance, and raising the game for your strength. You can read more over at **functionalsynergy.com/shoulderships**, and if you're a teacher and you wanna dig into how to actually do this with a client.

Join me for the Therapeutic Yoga Intensive in April, where I dig into all of this goodness and provide you with the skills and tools, gain the mastery that you want to have to help your clients reduce and eliminate pain quicker, more easily, and more fluidly. You can read more over at **functionalsynergy.com/intensive**. Thanks for listening, and I'll see you next time.