

Ep. #360 - Strength



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With your host:

Susi Hately

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

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 really glad that you're here because today I want to talk about strength in a perspective that shows up in a quiet way, but very persistently, in the worlds of rehab and fitness, and in the lives of people who really are doing a lot of things correctly, but are still feeling stuck.

It's this notion of what strength can't solve. And as I get into this, I think it's important to emphasize—and I know you know this—but it's important to emphasize that this is not an anti-strength conversation. I love strength. I teach strength. Strength matters deeply. Strength restores capacity, it builds tolerance, and it gives people confidence again.

And for many people, a lot of people, strength is an essential part of healing. There's a point where strength stops being the thing that's missing, and we don't recognize that moment. We keep adding more of the wrong ingredient, expecting a better result, but it's not happening.

Strength has become the answer that so many people reach for first because it works, especially at a certain point in the process. When someone experiences pain or injury, they often lose trust in their body and they lose capacity. So they reach for strength because they're feeling weaker, and strength gives them something concrete to rebuild.

It's also measurable, tangible, and feels productive in a process that can feel otherwise very vague and uncertain. In the rehab world, there's a leaning on strength because it can provide structure, and in the fitness world, there's a celebration of strength because it's visible and empowering. And it all works to a point, but there's still this quieter truth, as I mentioned earlier, that doesn't get talked about enough.

Strength works the best when the system already knows when and how to use it. When the timing isn't there, strength doesn't resolve the underlying issue. It reinforces whatever strategy the body is already relying on.

Think about it. You've got clients who've done the rehab. Maybe you've done the rehab, and the injury is no longer acute. There's capacity that's been regained. Maybe you or your client is back walking, hiking, and moving, and most of the time things are fine. Then something happens—a stare, a change in direction, fatigue at the end of the day, a moment of rushing—and there's a catch. A big one.

Not enough to stop, but just enough to kind of go, “Ooh, oh, what? What was that?” It's that moment a lot of people don't know what to do with, because on the outside things look good. They feel good. They may even look strong. Yet on the inside it feels like something is still

unfinished. And this is where people can begin telling themselves stories like, maybe I'm still weak, maybe I need more strengthening.

Maybe I'm just not there yet. But that explanation never quite fits, because if it were a weakness, it would respond very similarly each time, yet it doesn't. What's actually happening here is what I like to call quieter—which I've used that word twice already. Your system knows how to do something, right?

Your client knows what to do from a systematic space. It just doesn't know when to do it, and that's a very different problem. And this is the point: just getting stronger stops working. It's not because strength is bad, it's because force can't solve the issue. In this case, it's a timing issue. You can't muscle your way to better sequencing or better coordination.

You can't effort your way into support arriving at the right moment, and this is where people get so frustrated, because nothing feels wrong enough to fix, but nothing feels settled either. When people hit this phase, when they're here, they have a tendency to try harder: brace more, concentrate more, grip more, engage more—and their effort feels responsible and disciplined.

It's the thing you do when you care, and it can work. That's the thing. Effort can override uncertainty for a moment, but it also has a cost. And over time, our nervous systems will start to associate load and all that effort with threat. Bracing becomes anticipatory, and movement becomes guarded. Now, strength in this form is not supporting movement.

It's propping up protection. Now, if you've been following for any length of time, you know that none of this, I view, is a mistake. It's not wrong. It's not something to eliminate. If you've followed me for any length of time, you'll have heard me say compensation is creative. The reality is that our bodies are finding ways to get a job done, and that's brilliant. And that's what I love about the work I do and the people that I help.

The next piece of this is important, because what bracing is actually saying, to a degree, is that "I'm not sure yet, so I'm going to prepare a little bit early," and I just add a little bit, or a lot of tension, just to protect myself. It's brilliant. Thank goodness our system is doing this.

When this becomes a default, even in safe and familiar situations, it limits adaptability, and it actually does make us weaker. Continuing this vicious cycle of thinking and feeling that you need more strength. But the reality is, in this situation, adding more strength on top of this pattern does not free your system. It just reinforces the pattern that you have: this bracing pattern.

So let's summarize it up to this point, because this is a phase that hardly anyone really names well and talks about. You or your client are not injured anymore. You or they are very capable, and they can do a lot of things. You can do a lot of things, but you're not adaptable yet. You can't shift and change, and going up in complexity of movement starts to hamper you.

So yes, you can manage load in familiar contexts. When the conditions change, when you add more complexity, you struggle. And because we don't have really good language for this phase,

it gets mislabeled: feeling weak, needing more strength, just not ready yet. But again, what's missing here is this element of coordination—of really recognizing compensatory patterns. Neither of these things are things you can brute force.

So this is where my attention goes instead, especially with clientele who have made so many gains, but have that niggling feeling of weakness. When really, what's happening is there's a coordination and rhythmic error in a way, and lots of compensation.

So we need to be thinking about: all right, with this movement that you want to do, with this activity that you want to do—whether it's walking or hiking, whether it's deadlifting, whether it's riding, whether it's skiing—this is where, as a movement detective, I break down the movement into small component parts, and then I watch the person move.

Can they do the things that are required of that movement? Do they have the capability, or are they compensating? And that is where we begin. We gather the information, then we begin to retrain coordination. This helps to build confidence and clarity, and it helps the nervous system to recalibrate in real time.

Because as we move in these small, very deliberate ways, we're building clarity and confidence, and a recognition that bracing and gripping aren't needed—and they fall away. Not because I'm making them fall away, but because of where I'm helping a person attend their attention. And then as they grow that component part, that fundamental capability, now we can grow capacity.

This is where awareness is so important. It's where awareness really is what's doing the work. And it's not the kind where you're watching yourself like a hawk. It's not the vigilance kind. It's the kind where the system—your system—finally gets enough information to change its coordinating patterns. Maybe you noticed that you were holding your breath when you did some of these small component movements.

Maybe you noticed you were rushing, or you noticed that you were bracing before anything actually asked for it. And that noticing isn't about correcting yourself. It's about letting your system simply register context, because coordination doesn't shift through control. It shifts with clarity. It's why, in my Healing Helix, I begin with awareness, understand the clarity, then choose movements to help create connection.

That helps improve feedback. And it's that four-step process, which fundamentally changes so much in how somebody moves in a very step-by-step, clear way. And the crazy thing—or funny thing, cosmically—is that then they become stronger, and they don't feel weaker, because more things are working in the way they're meant to.

And as a result, they become more calm, more relaxed—not because they're trying to be, but because their system is working better anatomically and physiologically. They're able to breathe better, and movement doesn't feel so heavy. Effort doesn't spike before it's needed. And there's a sense of, like, "Oh, I am here. I'm home."

Here's the part a lot of people don't expect: when things in their system really start to settle, as their coordination gets clearer, strength feels very different. Exercises that used to feel exhausting don't anymore. The ones that felt like work start to feel like support. It's not because you got stronger overnight.

It's because the coordinating patterns gave strength a place to land. You're not holding your whole system together anymore, and your system can express something very clearly. Coordinated patterns—clear coordinated patterns. Strength stops being protection and starts being expression.

So you might feel like you're in that in-between place, and you really want to get stronger. You're not injured, but you're also not feeling free. You're capable, but things are inconsistent. You may very well be in this phase of healing that doesn't respond to brute force. It's a phase that's not asking you to try harder.

It's asking you to listen more carefully to coordination, context, and response, because what strength can't solve, coordination can—and a lot quicker than you might even imagine. And this is really the way that pain really and truly gives way to possibility.

If you're a yoga teacher and you want to dig into this more with me, I'm running the Therapeutic Yoga Intensive, and this is really where we dig into the concepts of the movement detective, where we're truly helping people move from pain to possibility, understanding coordinated patterns. This is not about trying to find a fix.

We know fundamentally that that doesn't work. In the Therapeutic Yoga Intensive, you get the skills and tools to truly help your clients move out of pain and into possibility. You can learn more over at **functionalsynergy.com/intensive**. I'd love to help you. We begin in April. See you there.

Did this episode resonate with you, and would you like to become more skilled? As a therapeutic yoga teacher or a yoga therapist, it all begins with the Therapeutic Yoga Intensive. I'm running it this year, April 2026, and you can learn all about it over at **functionalsynergy.com/intensive**. Early bird is on until March 15. See you there.