

Ep #88: Core Stability and Pain Eradication



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With Your Host

Susi Hatelty

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Male Announcer: You're listening to *From Pain to Possibility* with Susi Hatley. 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 Hatley.

Welcome back to *From Pain to Possibility*, this is Susi Hatley. I am so glad that you're here for this episode. We're going to be digging into core stability and pain reduction and pain eradication.

And this episode was inspired by a session that I had with some trainees just last week where we started to get into core, and core training, and what actually comes up when you think about core? And what is the relationship between core stability and pain eradication or pain reduction?

So within this episode, what I start with are some questions about what core is. The relationship to what many people think about pain and core. And then I'll share how I work with the core and pain and what I see the relationship to be. So, super juicy episode. Let's get rolling.

When I posed the question to a group of my trainees, some new trainees, about what they think about when they think about core, here are some of the responses that they gave. Core is abdominal strength. Its stability, balance, center. Everything from the ribs to the knees. Six pack. I feel it comes from the feet. Strong abdominal muscles. Ab strength, abs container. Strength, stability, and balance. Stability. Pelvic floor. Lower back. Everything between the shoulders, hips, back, torso. It's the container.

How I responded to them was these are really great answers because they helped me track where they are at and what they believe core to be. They're also a little bit gushy. And by gushy, I mean what does balance actually mean? What does stability actually mean? What does the container mean? Or the center? What do those words actually mean?

Which then led me to the questions of well then why is being strong and stable beneficial? And can you have pain and be strong? Said yet another

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way, are the constructs of pain and core separate entities where one does not impact the other? Can you have good core, for example, and have pain?

There are a lot of people who will say yes to that answer. A lot of people believe that core stability and pain are very separate things. Then one trainee piped up and said, “I used to lift a crap ton of weights, was super ripped and strong. And I had ingrained poor muscle patterns. And I had a lot of pain.” Interesting conversations.

In the end of this conversation I summed it up with, there are many ways of recovery and rehabilitation. One of those ways is to not pay attention to pain and to simply get stronger so that you can live your life. You can “function” in daily life. You aren't comfortable and you can do life. You aren't comfortable and you can get back to work and back to your activities. You have something to measure, yep, there's pain there, and you can do those activities. So it's a both and scenario.

And then there's another way, and this other way resonates more with people who don't want to have pain, who don't want to “function” in daily life. They want to become more functional, and they innately know that their pain can reduce. They don't want to just have their “capacity” increase because they know that dealing with the pain is super depleting. It's draining them and in fact is dropping their capacity.

Instead, they want to reconnect, they want to reclaim. They want to get to know their body and their mind. And they see their pain not as something to ignore, but rather as a sign that something is up. Not that their tissue is damaged, because we know that those two aren't correlated. We know that pain and tissue damage are not correlated.

However, they know that pain is indicating that something thing is up. They innately know that something has to change and they just can't figure out how at this point. Yet they see their pain as significant, perhaps meaningful in some way. It's not something to be threatened by, but it is something to address.

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And while we know that pain is interpreted in the brain, it doesn't mean that the brain is broken or that the brain needs to be fixed. They simply believe at their heart of hearts, deep in their core, in their blood, in their bones, in their breath that they don't have to and they don't want to live with pain.

So what does this have to do with core? Well, there's a common conversation out there, which is in order to increase core you really just need to add more load, add more challenge, add more speed, and then you will get better core.

However, for the people that I just spoke about, those ones who don't want to simply live with pain, those ones that don't want to simply increase their so-called "capacity," for them that common conversation about core which is add more load, add more challenge, add more speed, it just doesn't fit for them. It also doesn't fit for me.

For me, I see core and pain reduction very, very closely correlated. This is because I see that movement patterns and core stability are correlated. I also see that movement patterns and pain reduction are correlated. So because I focus in on how somebody moves, because I support people improving their neuromuscular dynamics, and because what I have seen happen is that when someone's neuromuscular patterns increase and improve, so does their core.

And I've also seen that as someone improves their neuromuscular patterns, i.e. reduces their compensation patterns, their pain reduces. Everything I do works on people's core, and results in a reduction of pain and their function improves.

Not only their body function, but their function in their daily life. Their ability to get back to sport, their ability to get back to hobbies, their ability to get back to work, their ability to get on with their life. Their pain goes down and their agility, and their variability, and variation in movement patterns improves.

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They're able to move from fast to slow, slow to fast, stop, change directions, get down to the floor and back up again. They can stand on one leg, hop over a curb, balance. And then when something comes at them, like they're walking across the street and all of a sudden a car starts to speed up or a car doesn't see them, they can jump out of the way and be responsive.

They don't have to fear what's coming or brace or grip. Instead, they become lighter, they become more grounded. They almost float being less rigid and bracing less, holding their breath less. They become less concerned about their abdominal muscles, and more interested in how their body parts and segments are interacting and engaging with each other.

And they tune into what coordinated control is all about because they're tuning into themselves. How their body works, and the way that they move. They tune into the whispers, the ebb and the flow.

I see this all the time with my private clients. As they begin to improve their movement patterns, their pain reduces, their core improves, their whole nervous system settles down, they become more relaxed. They realize that the more they reduce compensation, the better their core stability. Because what they're ultimately creating in their core is responsiveness. This ability to ebb and flow. This ability to feel and to tune in.

So we'll take a pause for a moment and just touch on this word stability because stability is often together with the word core. Years ago, I read a definition of stability that I loved, which is that stability is the control and coordination over a range of motion. So how you move over a range of motion. How smooth is your movement over a range of motion?

So if you don't have great control and coordination over a small range of motion, the likelihood is pretty darn low to have it over a bigger range of motion. Nowhere in there is there rigidity or breath holding. Nowhere in there is there control with a capital C. In this case control is neuromuscular dynamics.

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What people begin to realize is as they tune into their core, into themselves, that they can discover and then change their neuromuscular dynamics. And they gain more confidence because as they do, their pain goes down. So core isn't something that holds us together or duct tapes us. But rather it enables us to become responsive. Because really, we don't need to be held together. And really, our system is meant to be responsive.

Jumping, moving, getting down, getting up, going down the stairs and up the stairs, taking stairs two steps at a time. There's less locking and loading, meaning like bracing with bigger power muscles like the lats or the abs, like the rectus abdominis, or the glutes, or the quads gripping and bracing. There's better breathing. Muscles are meant to be doing what they're supposed to be doing.

It's interesting, pre-pandemic in our certification program we had a physio come in with a real time ultrasound. And the real time ultrasound is the same ultrasound that is utilized when looking at kidneys and babies and such. And she was utilizing it to look at the way the muscles all interacted when we're talking about core. Particularly the inner core, so pelvic floor, transversus abdominis, diaphragm. And then how these muscles interrelate with the rectus abdominis and the obliques.

And what was interesting is she wasn't specifically looking at the pelvic floor and the transverses, but in relationship between those muscles, and the rectus abdominis, and the obliques. Because in reality, it's not isolating the rectus abdominis, they all work together in how they slide and move and contract relative to the other.

And what we could see on the ultrasound is when the transversus wouldn't kick in quite quickly enough, or the obliques would power over, or the rectus abdominis or power over, or the transversus would just be quiet. Or the pelvic floor would really pull up hard or not totally relax, or not engage at all. What became really interesting for people when they saw this was how each person connected with this area of their body in a totally different way.

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And when the physio would connect with them with cueing, she cued them, each of them in an entirely different way. And each person found freedom. They found lightness and it opened their eyes in a huge way because they recognized that not all cues for core connection or core engagement or stability were going to work for all people.

Now, not surprisingly, it did lead to a little bit of agitation and frustration with well then how are we supposed to cue? Now what? And this was our opportunity to really open up the dialogue around you improve movement patterns. When you improve movement patterns, there's less tension, there's less bracing. There's less compensation and better neuromuscular coordination.

You, your body, becomes more responsive. The bigger muscles no longer have to compensate for smaller muscles. The superficial muscles no longer have to compensate for the deeper muscles. You naturally become stronger, it becomes easier.

And for some people it feels really odd for something to be easier and simple because so many people are looking for the supercalifragilisticexpialidocious. Because it's got to be hard, right? When in fact, it's actually quite simple. That as the health professional or the yoga teacher, what you're doing is you're watching the person who is in front of you.

You are connecting with that person and seeing their movement patterns. Because no matter the condition the person has that's leading them to need to improve their core, how everyone expresses their core is going to be different. I mean, we saw it on the real time ultrasound. And in all the years we had this physio coming in with a real time ultrasound, when we were pre-pandemic, every single person that I saw on that real time ultrasound engaged their core differently. The cues were different.

So the idea here is if you really want to help people reduce pain and improve their core, you've got to be able to address the person who is in

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front of you. Which is what we do inside of the certification and inside of the therapeutic yoga intensive.

And I'll just take a moment here that if that's interesting for you, if this conversation is getting very interesting for you and you want to build your skill as a professional at doing this, then email us at health@functionalsynergy.com and Kia can have a conversation with you about both of those programs and when one might be the fit for you in terms of really developing your skill with this for where you're at right now.

Because as a trainer, as a teacher, as a health professional who uses yoga therapeutically, the skill at really building your eyes to meet the person who's in front of you by really watching their movement pattern and knowing what it is that you're doing. By tuning into mechanical patterns and really recognizing what's driving them in their movement, that's how you help improve people's core. You're reducing the compensation patterns.

And as you reduce those compensation patterns, you're improving the responsiveness. And interestingly with pain, the correlation I have seen is that pain levels and compensation patterns are correlated. So as you reduce compensation patterns, you reduce pain. So interesting, do you see where we're going here?

Reduce pain as you reduce compensation patterns. Increase responsiveness, increase core stability. They're all related. And it's not that you have to go after core because your core improves as you improve your neuromuscular dynamics. Your core improves as you improve your movement patterns, less rigid, less bracing, less anticipatory locking and loading.

So I think about core as an overall movement experience. It arises out of moving better, it's lighter, it's easier, E-A-S-E dash I-E-R. So then how do I work with people in this way? So with my diastasis, my abdominal separation that came with my pregnancy with my twins, I over utilized my obliques in a major way.

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And I know there's a lot of conversation out there about how it's not about closing the gap. But what I found is that when I was able to consciously start to reduce the work of my obliques, I was able to connect more into the central part of my abdomen.

That gap was not only able to close, but the tone of the abdominal muscles beneath that gap really started to tune in. This was so highlighted when I was working at improving my downward dog to my plank. And what I would find is I could actually do the whole range, I had the so-called "function" to do the movement from a growth external perspective.

But in reality, when I got to a certain angle through my shoulders and my hips, my diastasis separated more. I didn't have the control and coordination and what I ended up doing was grip in my ribcage. Now, luckily, I had the internal awareness to tune into that and I also had a postpartum physical therapist supporting me in my process.

So the idea here is that what I was able to do is feel into my abdomen as I was moving. I could feel when my core started to turn off, when my compensation started to kick in. And both were similar. I do share more about this in a previous episode and I talk about the physical therapist and the physical therapist who helped me. We've actually recorded an episode with her, Megan Jenkinson. And she's listed in the show notes. So go and find that in the show notes and you can listen more to my recovery as well as the work that she does.

The idea though is when I was able to tune into that, my abdomen became more toned, became more responsive. My pelvic floor didn't have to grip as much. Other areas of my body were able to tune in more effectively because I was able to move my body more appropriately. I was able to reduce the compensation, improve those neuromuscular patterns, less jaw gripping, easier breathing, less anticipation, less thought, and just more clarity, more connection.

It's this kind of work that I do with each person that I see, and then I train my trainees inside of the intensive and the certification program that

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whenever you are improving neuromuscular patterns, you are improving the efficiency of the mechanics. You are improving the efficiency of the overall body physics. And then what happens is you're able to absorb and dissipate the load so much better. And when that happens, there is a correlation in pain reduction.

So you don't have to live with pain. You don't have to have these separate constructs. You don't have to anticipate or wonder if your symptoms are coming back. Because as you tune into the compensation patterns that are contributing or correlating to your pain scenario, you also tune into the subtler feels of the ebb and the flow, your overall levels of depletion or fullness.

You're able to see your body as a battery. You're able to recognize that what the mind suppresses, the body expresses. You tune into so much more that your body is expressing. And when I harken back to the beginning of this episode when I said the people who are interested in this recognize that their pain is trying to tell them something.

Not that the tissue is damaged, but there is something to pay attention to. And sometimes it's this that they have to pay attention to, that their body is trying to whisper to them, or really rather scream at them. And they can tune into the whispers that are contributing to the scream. They can tune into what their mind might be suppressing that their body is expressing.

They begin to see the ebb and the flow, the correlation and connection between mind and body. They tune into the feeling as well as the biomechanical connection. And when you can do both, that is when you make tremendous gains. Because ultimately, we are more than a body. We are more than a brain. We are more than a mind. All of it works together. And you can use your movement patterns as a really objective way to tune in to those more subjective or nuanced things.

Now, as I've mentioned, if this resonates with you and you want to work more closely with me, either in a private setting or within our intensive or certification process, please send us an email. We would love, love, love to

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share this with you. We would love to be able to train you, we would love to be able to see you reduce your pain and actually feel what is possible, to be lighter and more free. So just send us a note to health@functionalsynergy.com. Have a great time exploring.