

# Ep #204: Reducing and Eradicating Physical Pain: Strengthening For Real



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Susi Hately**

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## Ep #204: Reducing and Eradicating Physical Pain: Strengthening For Real

**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. With this episode I'll be talking about strengthening for real. And I want you to imagine air quotes around strengthening for real because I want to distinguish it from strengthening during the rehabilitation process. And while both follow similar principles that I call the principles of movement, how they're applied is different at each phase.

I sometimes find people when they've hurt themselves or they've had a longer standing experience of physical pain, they have in their brain that they're weak and they have to get stronger. And what can they do to get stronger? And in that way of thinking they can get into doing things in the gym, or with their body weight or Thera bands, or whichever, but they're going too fast too soon.

They haven't resolved some of the underlying movement patterns. They haven't been able to tune in and hone their level of awareness first. So then they apply the exercises that they are hoping that are going to work. And oftentimes, at least with the people who interact with me, they don't actually work. And then they get stumped because they're not getting better. They think that there's something wrong, and they can't figure out what's not working.

So it's important to follow this process through. And that's why I set it up the way I did in this mini-series, is being able to, A, increase your level of awareness. B, get clear on what your movement patterns are or are not. C, tune into your breathing, and what it is and how it is functioning. Then, D, as you start to clear up those compensatory patterns, tune more into your breath, you're going to become more connected and more coordinated. And that will build out your internal feedback mechanisms.

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Those factors are so vital to either train or retrain, and you'll notice that many of those factors lie in the subjective realm. You need to grow your own inner knowing of what's going on in your body and recognizing how your body is moving and where things are working and not working, and clear that up before you start loading it up. Because if you don't, you're not going to rebuild that infrastructure.

And so if you put more load on it than it can bear, then the likelihood of increasing injury and maintaining a persistency of pain just goes up. And that's why there's this nuanced space, because the reality is that when I start to work with someone for strengthening for real, we're still following those fundamental principles. Growing their awareness, gaining more clarity, improving the overall connection and improving feedback.

That continues to happen over and over and over again, just at a higher and higher and higher level because there's a greater and greater nuance with the understanding of the way that we function. And there's such a greater capacity and capability that we're then experiencing. So it's beyond just the basics of relax and move, feel, repeat, right? Like we up-level that.

But if you rush through the process and don't do those initial pieces, you won't improve your ability to tune into your yellow lights. You won't be able to name that space that's so vital when you first experience the reduction or the decrease or the eradication of pain, even if it's for a moment. You won't take that time to actually name what that new state feels.

And that's so important because when you're in that new state, some people call it ease, some people call it freedom, some people call it length or height or, "Wow, that feels different." Because when you're in that new state, they can then start to notice when that new state begins to fade. And usually when it begins to fade is when the pain starts to come back.

But if you don't even take the time to recognize what that is and name that, then you can't, I mean, what I've found is you can't then build to the next level. And when I can help my clients get to this space, when I can help my

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trainees help their own clients get to this space, we all see the amazingness of what the human body is capable of. Truly.

So that's why it's like let's not rush into getting stronger if you don't have those fundamental movement patterns, those fundamental neurodynamics, the understanding of what it is to come to rest and tune in. Because there's one thing that I think is also really important, oftentimes when people are rushing forward to get stronger, they're doing it from an element or a space of fear or concern or worry.

Whether they're afraid of the pain coming back or afraid of getting older or afraid of losing ground or concerned or worried about any of those things, plus more. And so the fuel for which is driving them to get stronger, is actually not a sustainable force. There's a lot of sympathetic nervous system drive in there, as opposed to a calmer and more relaxed drive.

And what I've found is when I can help my clients get into a space that's calmer and more relaxed, their nervous system responds in kind and the length of the gains that they make, the length of time they maintain them is longer and it's just a more sustainable, easier space.

As opposed to coming from a place of fear or concern or worry, there's just a more hyped up or opposite to that state that is driving them. It's coming out of a less sustaining place. So again, there's nuances here that if we can come into this place that is generally calmer, we will build out a generally calmer state as we become more stable and stronger, as we recognize our yellow lights.

It's much easier to tune into the subjective experience of our body from an introspective place, but also really tuning into our bodies from a proprioceptive place of really perceiving what is the range of motion. We don't need to push the range of motion to improve it. And what is our strength? We don't need to push ourselves to gain more strength or stability. We just need to recognize where things are at and work from that space.

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So let me give you an example. I'll give a personal example of how this all plays out. So back in late 2010, it was the day after Christmas, December the 26th 2010 to be exact, I fell down my stairs and I sprained my coccyx. I want you to imagine this, I'm carrying a box of files that I was moving from the main level down to the basement and bang, square on my coccyx.

It was one of those moments that I still remember very clearly where it was like I realized what I had done. There was no one in the house and I thought to myself as I pushed the box off of me and put my hands on either side, and the hallway was narrow enough that my hands could fit on either side. And I heard myself saying I am going to be my own best student.

And I could barely walk. I had to still get up the stairs. I don't remember how I got up the stairs, but I know that I could not sit on the toilet. I had a really, really tough time even having a bowel movement. That might be too much information, but I'm giving you a sense of where things were at. I couldn't sit into a chair, nevermind a doughnut. I was in a bad state. I couldn't even walk part of a block.

So from there I needed some help. I was in that early stage of recuperation and I worked with both a chiropractor and a physical therapist to support me in those early stages. I remember about seven weeks into the process, so we're looking at around the end of January 2011 or into the early part of February, talking to my chiro and I had been feeling really, like really good.

It was more like this kind of euphoric feeling that I then began to understand that a lot of people feel when they get to a certain point in their rehabilitation and it can be like a siren song. And I could feel it. And I had to ask her to get clarity because I'm thinking I can't follow this feeling of euphoria, because even though I feel stronger and I feel so much better, I knew in my bones that I wasn't 100%.

And her response to me was, yes, exactly. You aren't because think about it, your parts are back in place. You've got more stability and stamina around your parts being back into place. That's why you feel so good,

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everything is kind of ticking along in a much more fluid, connected way. But remember, this has been seven weeks. You are a lot weaker than you were the day before you fell, right? I was still atrophied from the day before I fell.

So of course, of course, I'm not ready to get back to all the things, which I innately knew. But I needed somebody to tell me for sure because the inner feeling that we can experience when we're getting better can be quite the seduction. Quite the seduction and I needed that confirmation of staying the line.

I want to highlight a few other points. My pieces were back in place. My parts were now back in place. My SI was no longer in that stuck space, the coccyx had settled back out. My pelvic floor was not nearly as spasming, but it still had the tendency to, but it wasn't nearly what it was. So I had more stability, I had more strength, I had a better ability to be connected, cohesive, and I had better coordination. And I had more bandwidth for the fundamentals of my life.

However, I wasn't skiing yet. It was winter after all, we were in the early part of February. I also wasn't running. And I wasn't back to my full yoga practice yet. I didn't have the stability and strength for those activities, but I had the basics and I was ready to progress, to build out those neuromuscular patterns for skiing, running and yoga.

I wasn't ready to tackle the hill for skiing, or a treadmill and definitely not ready to run on the icy roads. I didn't have those patterns yet. And I'm making this specific point here because a lot of people, I find, make this mistake. They make the mistake, but they feel so good in those early phases of recovery and they think they're good to go, but they're not, right?

I still had seven weeks of not doing any of that stuff. So there's still a strengthening and stabilizing process occurring that I've already chatted about on the previous episodes. I'll go through the bullet points of it here that are really necessary to consider when you can integrate that, that is when you're going to be ready to strengthen for real.

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And as I've mentioned, so many people miss this piece. And I believe it's a key, key reason why people cycle around and around and around in these pain cycles where they get out of pain and go back into pain, get out of pain, get back into pain. And they can't quite get back to the movement patterns and the activities they really, really want to do.

It's also why I've got such agreement with the idea that building strength is easy. And if you're finding that strengthening is difficult, meaning you're hurting yourself regularly or you're not making the strength gains that you want, there's often a relationship to how you're compensating, how you're blowing through some whispers or yellow lights. And you likely don't have the fundamental bandwidth built from these earlier stages of recovery.

So said another way, you could very well be loading more, or too much maybe, on an infrastructure that's unable to absorb or transfer it through your system. So I'll get into what I then did next for the progression part of this as I was moving more towards being able to strengthen.

But first, if this is starting to resonate with you, if you're going, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, I get this," then I'm getting more into all of these details at the therapeutic yoga intensive from October 28th to November 2nd. So if you're someone who wants to help your client through this and out of the recovery phase and into strengthening for real, come to the intensive. It's happening all online, it's a small group.

I'm maxing it out to 16 people because I find that is really the secret sauce number for enough bodies for all of us to take a look at. If you want me to work with you during that series, I can, you don't have to. But there's a nice interaction between group work and me lecturing and me teaching and you experiencing. It's a really, really amazing six days if you want to take it to that next level. If you want to read more, go to [learn.functionalsynergy.com/intensive](http://learn.functionalsynergy.com/intensive).

All right, so then we get into the progression phase and I'll share my story again here. So I actually had really great movement. I mean, it made sense

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because I was feeling so darn good. I still remember, and I think I've referred to this in other episodes where I had parked my car, I was going to the chiro. It's winter again and we're in Calgary, there's snow banks. And I'd always found previously when I would walk to the chiro's office after parking my car that I would need to find where the snow had been shoveled and where the curb was, typically at the corner of a block.

And then this one day I remember walking along and jumping over the snowbank and landing and walking a couple more steps. And then taking a pause and saying, "Holy crapola, what just happened there? I just jumped over the freaking snowbank." I did it so unconsciously. I was no longer thinking consciously of every single movement I was doing. It was starting to kind of come online.

And so that was a key, key, key moment. I had some great movement, like I could get into warrior two and triangle. I had the movement pattern and I wasn't going into crazy pain. However, I had whispers of pelvic floor strain. And I decided, you know what? Even though I can do the movement, I don't want to have pelvic floor strain. I don't want to train myself into these bigger movements with pelvic floor strain, so I'm only going to move in the range where there is no pelvic floor strain.

So that brought my movement pattern way, way, way back. And this is something that for a lot of people can be very frustrating because they see their actual pattern. I had the movement, but I didn't have the range of movement in a range that didn't have strain. So even though I knew my potential, I decided to train in the range without that strain.

And this is what I did, I found a yoga class that I could go to on a regular basis. And I went to it, it happened to be at six in the morning, and I went to it every week for a whole bunch of weeks. I don't remember exactly, but I definitely went past through winter and into spring. And it was in an old Bikram studio, so there was a mirror in front. And it was a small group of us, because after all, it was 6am. And I just did what I could.



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So there was a lot of flow happening. So from Tadasana down to forward bend, into plank, Chaturanga, upper dog, back to downward dog, and up we go. So I clearly wasn't going to do that. So I would start with going from Tadasana and then I think I moved to the side instead of going into a forward bend. And then I think I stepped one step backwards into warrior one, like literally one step, like hardly a step back.

And then I believe for warrior two, I took my feet like maybe a step wide, like super, super small. And then as the weeks went on, I was able to go from Tadasana into a kneeling position. And then using a chair beside me getting back up into Tadasana position. And then I only ever moved my legs as far as I didn't have pelvic floor strain.

And it was interesting because the people in the room all could see me. And at one point, you could tell when we were getting our shoes on after the practice was over and we're all heading out for the rest of our day, I could tell that they were curious. And I just said, hey, I fell down my stairs recently and I'm just getting back into it.

And so they actually were witnesses to the process too, which was quite fun because they got to see and the instructor got to see me make all these shifts. And they didn't know at that time who I was or my background, so I was just another human being doing my thing, my yoga, and could focus there. That was quite a remarkable journey.

And bit by bit, piece by piece, week after week I was able to do more and more and more and more and more. And it literally was that. I didn't have to strain. I didn't have to push. I simply stayed in the range where there wasn't any strain. And I was able to build in greater and greater complexity, meaning stepping my leg further back into a high lunge, going down into a standing forward bend with a bunch of blocks to raise the floor so I wasn't going all the way to the floor.

My yellow light, or my barometer so to speak, was what was going on in my pelvic floor. It let me know the distance that I could move. And then I got

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better and better at my movement, my neurodynamics became better, I became more coordinated and more contained. My core stability naturally came on board in a very responsive and resilient kind of way.

So I didn't have to do core work, but rather, because I was moving in a less compensated way, as my movement patterns grew, I was able to do more and move my body in a variety of different ways. The core just started to work more effectively. My breath could work more effectively. And I started to build in the notion of effortless effort.

Again, I raised up the ability to do movements without needing to be so conscious, much like jumping over that snowbank. I didn't have to think about where my leg was going every single time because it just started to come on board. And what had been very conscious could become more unconscious or subconscious, whichever is the proper wording for that. But I didn't have to keep it in the forefront of my mind the entire time. I could let my body and let my brain just guide me where I was going, still staying tuned in.

So that is where we're playing when we're in that progression phase. We get better and better at moving in a more unconscious way because I've naturally moved in a range where that barometer was an indicator for me. So in my case, it was what my pelvic floor was doing. And then I kept improving, right? I knew that I could do all the movement, like I could step back, and again, I didn't want to train for that. I wanted to train to do the range without my pelvic floor being in strain. That's the way I wanted to live my life.

So then I got to a place where I was much more buoyant, much freer, much lighter and much more tuned into my system. And that is when I found myself ready to get back into the gym, to start to play around with doing some more walking and then adding a little bit more running. Throughout that yoga phase I also got back to the hill, except here's what I did.

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I found a small hill close to home, because we've got a lot of ski hills close to Calgary. So it was about a 40 minute drive out and I could just find some really easy runs to go down and start to remember how it was to ski again, because it was a little bit like that. I remember getting off the chair and saying to my legs, okay, do we have it? And my legs were feeling a little bit wobbly and a little bit wonky. But then I got in and I got rolling. And then I could start to build that out bit by bit, run by run, onward I would go.

So again, I want you to think about that for yourself, right? If you think about this notion of your actual range, which you probably have, but if you shorten that range into one where you're not in strain, or you're not holding your breath, or you're not in a place of concern or worry, any of those things, maybe all of those things, can you be in that range which is just a whole lot easier? Because then that's what you will grow. That's what you will train.

You will train the easier range of motion. You will train better coordinated patterns. You will train less compensation. So you'll be training your capacity to use your body the way it's been designed. As opposed to borrowing or stealing from one other area in order to try and make the said area you're trying to work stronger, but you're actually kind of making everything weaker because you're utilizing your jaw, you're tensing your jaw in order to move your leg bone.

Or you're gripping your toes in order to push a pedal if you're on your bike. You don't need to clench your toes to push your pedal, really that's not your toes job. That's a lot of effort. And if you think about it, clenching your toes long enough, what's going to happen with your foot and your ankle and your calf? And on and up the chain we can go. Do you see where I'm going here?

So I'm going to take a deviation here because it's a great place to deviate. How do I know when my client is ready for strengthening for real? So we're beyond rehabilitation. We're beyond the kind of, we've been through the progression phase and they're coming along really, really well.

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So here's the first, what I see in my clientele is that they're quite aware of what I call a critical mass of yellow lights or whispers. Their awareness of how their body functions is so, so much clearer. They have subjectively grown their internal awareness and the object of awareness. So what I mean by that is introspectively, which is their ability to tune into the sensations inside, they can feel those so much clearer. And they can feel where their body parts are in space.

So as they move their arm bone over their head, do their ribs move or not? When they move their leg bone in their hip socket, are they clenching their toes? Are they gripping their jaw? Are they holding in their eyes? Like any of those things, can they tune into those movement patterns and can they tune into what they're feeling inside?

Are they more clear on what's working and not working in their body? Do they have a sense of calmness around that clarity? Like they're okay with, all right, yeah, this is what's working, this is what's not working. This is where I get to work. This is where things are online or offline. And there's just this candidness about what's actually happening.

There's less of what I might call an identification with a bad hip or a bum shoulder, like that language is basically gone because they recognize that all sensation is great sensation. It's all an indicator, it's all up for interpretation that they can then utilize in improving their mechanical patterns.

They're more connected and they can better assess when a movement isn't working. They know when they need to rest or when they can push. They recognize if they need more stability or basic strength. And here's also what I start to notice as well with them, is that they're no longer looking to me for evaluation and feedback necessarily.

Our role has transitioned because they have become their own best teacher. They've tuned into what their body really needs and they've come to me to say, hey, this is all that I've noticed. Can you kind of help bring it

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together? And then what's my next step? So there's less of me teaching the fundamentals, but now we've raised the bar, we've raised the game because of where they've come to.

What I'm also noticing and paying attention to is what's happening to their compelling reason. All of my clients who come to see me have a really good solid reason about why they want to enroll in a one on one three month series. They know what they want to get out of having their physical pain reduced or eradicated. It's clear for them, which is why they're ready for it.

But what happens though partway through, especially as they're getting into this strengthening for real, is that compelling reason, it starts to shift a little bit. Like there's some nuances to it. Something new arises because they've got such a greater clarity on what their capacity is. And oftentimes, their capacity has changed for the better.

So they've realized so much about what they thought before was their actual range of motion and now they're living into that without the strain or pain. And that's just opened up the doors for what now is possible. And then the way they talk about what they are now doing or what they're considering, there's a fluency and a freedom and you can hear it in my voice. It's just like, yeah, la, la, la, la, la. It's not like and but. There's not this concern underneath it that they then might hurt themselves.

There's just a greater understanding and ease with how everything is functioning. And it's something you can't fake. You can't make this up. There's just a resonance that's occurring because they're operating in a different state and at a different level. There's less fear about something maybe happening. I mean, after all, we are human, they recognize their body as their friend and that even if the symptoms were to come back, they know exactly what they need to do.

They just need to listen, tune in, and then act upon it. And if something were to happen, it's not like, ah, F bomb my body. It's, oh, did I miss

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something? That's what I notice over and over and over again when people get to this place, the way they view their relationship with their body has so shifted to one that is just so caring and quiet and compassionate, right?

There's just a greater sense of resiliency, a greater sense of responsivity as opposed to reactivity. And there's just a greater ability to adapt and be variable in how they move and what they're doing. That's a really really, really distinguishing factor.

And again, it's much different than being in the rehabilitative phase of strengthening because a lot of times in the rehabilitation stage of strengthening, there's still this underlying worry and concern that's kind of there.

Even though there's confidence that they are going to get out of this, there might be this lingering concern and worry. And it's now gone, for the most part, when a person is at this strengthening phase. And now they can really get at it because they understand and recognize what their capacity currently is and what's actually possible.

So whether it's doing more complex yoga movements, whether it is getting back into the gym and lifting some heavier weights, whether it's skiing for a longer duration or going into more of the advanced runs, so maybe they've been doing blue groomers, and they're ready to go into some black diamonds or even beyond the Black Diamond, because they now just know what their capability is. And then they can go.

So this is what's really possible, is that you can build out this undercurrent of calm and clarity, of an innate relaxation that's not just happening on the physical level. And the process that tells me has been a very clarifying process, where you've just tuned into more about how your body functions, what works, what doesn't, where things can be refined, and really that there's so much potential no matter what. No matter what.

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So whether you've had a fusion in your spine, for example, or whether you have an SI joint issue, or whether you have a condition like rheumatoid arthritis or osteoarthritis, you might have certain beliefs about the way you can and can't move. But when you get through that initial rehabilitative phase, if you move through that progression phase, you're going to see yourself and your body much, much differently and distinctly.

And that is when the strengthening for real in this space of calmness and quietness and pain-freeness can actually happen. And then what you want to do with it is up to you. I've had people who want to be able to water ski. I've had people come in to me in the fall and say, I want to be able to water ski next summer.

It's up to you what you want to do. I've had people who have gotten out of that initial phase of pain and said I want to do cool yoga moves. I'm like, okay, let's open the book and we'll help you. Through solid functional patterning, we'll help you with getting into those cool yoga moves.

It's no longer about pain, it's about expression of whatever and whoever you want to be. So if that's resonating for you, if that's dotting the some I's and crossing some T's for you in terms of how you work with your clientele, maybe how you work with your own self, what's possible for you, then come and consider it, the therapeutic yoga intensive online October the 28th to November 2nd. I'd love to have you there.

16 people is our maximum number and you can read more at [learn.functionalsynergy.com/intensive](http://learn.functionalsynergy.com/intensive), all the details are there. You can also send me an email to [health@functionalsynergy.com](mailto:health@functionalsynergy.com). It would be such a joy to work with you. Take good care, and we'll see you next time.