

## Ep #232: Strength is Easy



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With Your Host

**Susi Hately**

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

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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. With this episode, I am continuing the conversation around strength. It's such an important and also fun conversation to have because so many of the people that I work with are wanting to get out of pain and get back to activities they want to do. Many of the teachers that I'm training are wanting to help their clients get out of pain and then also help them move into the activities they want to do.

So I've had a really great experience over my career of being able to see what has worked, what doesn't work, refine it, refine how I explain it, what I've seen work during a rehabilitative phase of someone's process. And what I've seen when they've come out of that rehabilitative phase and to really help them move forward and out of it. Like truly out of that rehab phase and into something that is just that much more free and nimble and agile.

So today we continue this conversation. And where I want to focus today is this concept of strength is easy. And I first heard this said by my trainer, Brad, who's over at Absolute Performance, and I'll put his link in the show notes. He has an app as well that you can always follow him there too, and he's on Instagram.

And I remember coming, it was sometime during the pandemic and I had been working with him prior to the pandemic and, of course, things shut down during the pandemic and I didn't do a whole lot. I did some things, but not a lot. And so when I was able to return back, I didn't feel super strong. And he just said to me, don't worry, strength is easy. And it was like, yeah, you're right.

I'm like, that's everything I teach is like, yeah, this is a process. Not only is it simple, but when we follow the process, the gains can be quite easy. And so I want to share more of my take on that sentence and how that is

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applicable in the way that I teach my clientele through the rehabilitation process. And specifically when they're out of the rehabilitation process and moving into more strength and agility and nimbleness and back to really what they want to do.

But before I get there, I also want to make mention of the opposite and where strength can be hard. I also know lots of people who come out of a rehab cycle and are scared to get back into the strengthening world because every time they've done it, they've hurt themselves. And so they know that this can happen and they're nervous about doing it because they don't want that to happen again.

And part of this happens because sometimes during the rehabilitation process, depending on what kind of process you went through, you might not have been actually taught how to listen to your body. And so you were provided some really great techniques that were sort of done to you or you did them to your body and you got your body into a certain place.

But the relationship that was cultivated really was more like a power over. Like convincing or cajoling your body into a certain state, which really isn't that sustainable. So then when you start to add load, when you start to add complexity of movement to that, things can break down.

Whereas when you've been through a process or when you've taught a process, if you're the teacher, where you're helping someone move better, you're helping someone connect to their body, improving their awareness and really helping them feel their subjective reality while also tuning into their objective reality. When you have those things in combination, then when you're coming out of that rehab cycle and the pain is down, you've got so many more, if I call them assets, for understanding the way that you move.

For example, today I was speaking with one of my clients who was recognizing these symptoms that he has from a disc protrusion that he had many years ago and then a surgery that came out of that. And he can feel these signals that let him know that he needs to make sure he gets back

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into being more limber and more stable and all the things. And so as we were working, he's like, oh yeah, yeah, yeah, I'm remembering what this feels like. What this state is that comes before the whispers prior to the symptoms arising.

So what's important here is how you have moved through a rehab process. Or if you're a teacher and you're learning the stuff to become a better teacher, it's how are you helping your client through this process? Is it a process of cajoling or convincing a body, your body, the client's body into a space?

Or is it really this holistic, like listening, feeling into, noticing subjectively what's going on along with objectively and there is this friendliness, I'd like to say, with one's system and body, like body and mind. And the signals that it gives the person, or to us as human beings, are very valuable signals. And when you have that, then you can take that into the strengthening phase.

That's when strengthening becomes easy, because you're not just going in there and applying more load or more force to your body. You are, but you're tuning in subjectively to what you're noticing as you apply that. And that might sound complicated, but when you've done it through the rehabilitative process, it's very simple.

It's really easy and straightforward. You add a stimulus, you see what happens, you notice the shift, the change, what's working and what's not working. And then you adjust and modify. And if you've learned this early on, it's very, very, very straightforward.

So if you're listening to this and thinking, how do I learn this early on? Well, that's where this podcast really highlights a lot of those ideas. So you can binge listen to the podcast. You can also head over to YouTube or to Facebook. During the pandemic I recorded daily videos. I got up before my kids got up, and my kids at that point were between two, almost three, and five. And I would film yoga videos on Facebook Live and then we'd transfer those over to YouTube.

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So there's a lot of different ideas from back to basics to building strength on top of a foundation of ease is what I called it. And those can give you a really good idea of the way that I utilize the principles that I teach. And then you just experience the videos. They're all there. We do sometimes cycle them through and kind of post them on a somewhat regular basis so it comes up into your feed.

But if you just go to the video section of Facebook or over to my YouTube channel, Susi.Hately, there's lots there that you can explore and play along with me as I filmed these during that pandemic time. But they're very valuable. I still like them. They're still up there.

And again, they will give you ideas of how to tune in, how to use your movement patterns, playing around with both objectively and subjectively what's going on so that you build movement in a space where you have ease. Where you don't have inappropriate tension. Where you're really building this idea in yoga of *sthira-sukham asanam*, right?

So there's a state of being asana, when we translate it in the yoga world it often becomes like a posture or a pose. But the reality is, when it's truly translated in a better way, if I could put it that way, you're sitting comfortably and still. There's a sense of beingness to this, which is more of a verb than a thing or a shape to get into, right?

And so these are the things we're wanting to cultivate. And when you're in that space, you just have a greater awareness and a greater connection to what will work well for you. And your curiosity is so much more connected that even if you've done something that doesn't work, or you added too much load, or you added too many repetitions, or you compensated too much, or you didn't catch the compensation, it's not a game over situation. It's like an oops. All right, well, I learned from that one. I guess that sensation I felt was an indicator that I was going to go too far. All right.

This is not about being perfect. It's about recognizing and noticing, yeah? So that's what this and my last episode and the next episode really are helping to support you with, is to continue to help this process that I taught

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around the rehabilitation, which is tuning into your body, listening within, connecting subjective and objective.

And then as you're getting out of pain, because your movement patterns have improved, the way you're transferring load has improved, then you can take those concepts and just up-level them. And that's where some great gains are made. So that is how strength can become easy.

It comes back to this word, which I know is very gushy and mushy, but it's this word of feeling, this word of awareness. And like I've said many times, nobody really is walking around saying, oh, if I can only feel more, then I'm going to get stronger. And yet kind of the cosmic joke out there is it's exactly what is. When you're able to tune in subjectively and notice objectively what's going on, reduce those compensation patterns, move in a range that doesn't increase pain, yeah, you will make those gains.

And so that's where I want to play with you in this episode. I'm going to share a couple of stories of my clients, and then I want to take you through some examples that you can play with through an audio format. And then, like I said, then scoot over to my Facebook page or YouTube and you can find many, many, many, many more videos there that are anywhere between 10 and 40 minutes that you can explore.

So, as I mentioned in the last episode, the principles of movement really play into this. And I get more into it in that episode as it relates to strength, but just to highlight them here, the first one, and these aren't linear. It's not that you go through one, then two, then three. They really are a bundle that work together. But the idea of awareness, of nurturing and nourishing relaxation. Coming into a space that is connected to yourself, where it's safe and you're tuned in.

And then from there, you can connect to your spine and where your spine is in space, since that's the hub of our movement. And then connect that to the movement of your largest joints first, because those largest joints, especially in the practice of yoga and in fitness and in most movement practices are key movement drivers.

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So if we're compensating and not utilizing them as well as we could, that can then lead to utilizing other areas of the body that aren't intended. And then you end up borrowing from one area in order to make your body stronger. And in fact, because you're not honoring the infrastructure that's your body, then inadvertently or not, then you can really create some issues that are not going to help you go in the direction you want to do. They'll likely move you more towards tension, strain, and pain.

And then moving in a range that's really optimal for you on that given day, which can change, right? Depending on other workouts or other things or sleep patterns or any of that, that can impact what your optimal range is. And then connecting and recognizing, something I've seen over and over and over again, that when we move better, our core stability becomes better, that we don't need to hammer at our core stability to make core stability grow.

In fact, the more I've helped someone reduce compensatory patterns, the more connected and evoked or engaged their core becomes quite naturally. They don't have to work at this thing to make it turn on, it comes when these compensation patterns become reduced, at least that's what I've seen over almost 30 years.

Which then leads to this idea of where we can move in a range that doesn't increase pain, becomes so paramount, right? Our body becomes more responsive. Then that leads into this ability of relaxed resilience, right? There's less strain overall in our system, which is not dissimilar to this idea of effortless effort. I sometimes use those terms interchangeably.

Then sort of the grand poobah of it all is just work in a simple way first before complex. And when you've got those foundational patterns really sorted and you know them, then you can add whatever load and complexity that you want.

So to highlight this as a story, I had a client who worked with me for about two to three years. It started off, he'd been in a really tragic accident and he had whiplash and he had back issues and he had a whole bunch of

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orthopedic type chronicity of pain symptoms. And we did what I've just explained here and what I've explained through these podcast episodes and through my social channels, which is I helped him move better.

I helped him move in a way that honored whatever the symptoms he was experiencing. And when he moved in a range that didn't increase pain and really tuned into the areas that didn't need to be used in order to do a specific movement, his pain continued to drop, right?

Because when we move in a range that doesn't increase pain, that's sending a signal to our system, to our nervous system to say, hey, you know what? This is the new normal. And so then that is the response that we get. Whereas if we keep moving in pain, then we will continue to hone that habit, that groove of movement with pain.

So he kind of figured out how to get out of pain pretty quickly. Now, he also had a job which had a seasonal quality to it. So his make hay while the sun shines was between October and New Year's. So October, Thanksgiving, so in Canada we have Thanksgiving in mid-October. And so between then and January, New Year's, was really when he made the revenue for his year.

He had other things, but that was really the push. And because it was the push, he could overdo it. And so when we worked together, that became one of our barometers. So the first year it was very, very difficult for him and he had a lot of pain and he didn't have a lot of bandwidth.

The second year it was incredibly easier. He had a lot more mobility, a lot more agility, a lot more nimbleness, not just in his body, but in how he was doing the various job and jobs and contracts that he had. Then in the third year, it just became even, like even better. And that's a testament to the organicness of these principles, right?

When we are tuning in, when we're aware, when we are moving in a range that doesn't increase pain, we're thinking about the components of our

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body and working with them in the most efficient way, that translates over to other ways that we live our life. So there's an organic nature to it.

So what was interesting though with him is in a pretty short period of time he got to a place where he didn't have pain and he came into my space one day and he said, you know what? I'm ready to do cool yoga poses. That's what I want to do. And I was like, I was kind of taken aback by it, not thinking that he was going to say that to me. And I said, all right, so open up the book. Let's see what those cool yoga poses are that you want to do.

And by the way, I am all for teaching you cool yoga poses, so long as we do them in a functional way. So long as we do them in a way that honors the way of body movement, honors the way that your body moves and to work at continuing to reduce the compensation patterns. And he's like, I wouldn't have expected anything less.

And so we moved into things like pigeon pose and things like wheel pose. And he didn't have a whole lot of hip mobility and he didn't have a whole lot of movement capacity between his hips and shoulders. And so we worked at it step-by-step. And I broke down pigeon into small component parts and I broke down wheel into small component parts and we worked at improving the way that his body moved.

Now, these are complex movement patterns. They're not just singular joint patterns, but we could take the components and once I could see that he had the components, like the lowest sort of denominator of the component, then we put the components together. And that added some level of complexity and need for more stability and more strength and more mobility.

So I wasn't trying to increase mobility or increase stability or increase strength, but rather I was helping to improve the way that his joints were moving, and then connecting joints together and seeing how they were moving together. What was the relationship between those moving parts?

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So that then we could clearly notice objectively what was moving that should be and what was moving that shouldn't be, quiet what was moving that shouldn't be, and really nurture along what should be. And if there was something that wasn't moving, but should, then we could kind of cultivate that through.

And when we were focusing on those things, guess what? Mobility naturally improved, stability naturally improved, strength naturally improved. So rather than going after say, oh, I need to get the glutes engaged or I need to get the quads or hamstrings better balanced – And I'm not against doing either of those things because sometimes it is necessary to be able to distinguish if there's an imbalance between the quads and the hamstrings or there is a need to connect to the glutes.

And what I love to do though in those circumstances is to step back and say, okay, but what's the movement pattern? Because we'll often see a movement pattern associated with, say the glutes, not engaging properly, like all the time, right? So just by squeezing your glutes or doing glute exercises doesn't necessarily bring the glutes on board, right?

Because if you're compensating somewhere else and utilizing other muscle structures when the glutes ought to be firing, it doesn't matter how many of the glute exercises you do if you continue to compensate, right? It's so that you'll learn to be able to see and then also feel in your own body if you're moving in a way that naturally predisposes those muscles to come online.

And that might be a backward way of explaining it in terms of what's physiologically really happening. But when I'm working with a client, what they're doing is they're paying attention to the way that their skeleton moves. And they're paying attention to the various tissues that are responding and which ones are compensating.

And oftentimes the ones that have a tendency to compensate when the load gets too big are the ones that tend to have a tendency to compensate when the load gets too big. So it's not often a surprise when compensation

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arises because that's something that they know about themselves. It's a habitual pattern that they know.

And so when they realize that their system has chosen that as a way, it's like, ooh, that's a signal to let me know that I need some retraining here or some refining. Or they might say, oh, look, I probably ought to, but I'm not ready to, I still love doing this cool yoga move. Then maybe next week I'll play with it.

Because the reality is, and I saw this particularly with this client that I'm referring to, is when we started to put together multiple joints that were needed to do, say, pigeon or wheel, we often did see a compensation pattern initially because he's figuring it out. So his brain is finding the most optimum way to get there based off of what it knows on how to move.

The idea here is that we're working with, again, the smaller segments of movement, one joint, combining multiple joints, and then combining more joints and really seeing how the whole system interacts with that. And we're building at a rate where my client can be conscious and aware of what's going on. So there's a greater and greater capacity to feel, to connect, to tune into the inner feedback mechanisms. And then strength is easy.

Said another way, and this sort of summarizes all of it together, is that I like to think about movement, one of the many ways I like to think about it is we've got the nervous system, we have a muscular, we call it the myofascial system, and then we have the skeletal system. And I probably could add some more systems into there, but I'm just keeping this at a foundational level for our purpose.

A lot of times when we're looking at strengthening, we focus on the muscles and what muscle needs to be engaged. And then we focus on getting that muscle engaged, and then that's it. When I'm working with someone in a rehabilitative way, I'm not focused there. I'm focused on, well, how is the communication pattern happening between the nervous system and the muscular system, which then makes the skeletal system move.

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So there's a motor control aspect between the nervous system and the muscular system. But I'm not inside someone's body. I can't see a neuromuscular relationship in the way that I'm discussing. So what I use is I watch the skeleton, and I watch the skeleton do its movement pattern. And then as I watch the skeleton, the segments of the body do the movement pattern, then I see the tissue, muscular and fascial tissue respond, and I see what's compensating and not compensating.

So now as the skeleton moves, I can help guide how much or how far someone's moving by helping them tune into what's happening at a tissue level. Then as we improve that relationship, there's an inherent improved motor control and coordination, and that is the improvement of the neuromuscular patterning.

When we have that and we take that into a strengthening realm, like for real, and we add in lunges or squats or bicep curls or reformer work on the Pilates or planks, and we keep those things in mind and not fall out of the neuromuscular skeletal relationship and don't fall into just muscle conversation, we can make very quick gains in a very consistent way and in a way that continues to hone good patterns, which ultimately continue to keep the pain away because we are moving in such a way that builds and fosters coordination and control and ease and suppleness.

So to put this into practice, if you're someone who has been following this for a while and you're feeling good in your body, let's explore coming into a wall sit. And come into a wall sit that you could be in for 30 minutes. Not that you'll be there for 30 minutes, but that you're feeling enough ease in your body that 30 minutes would be straightforward.

And then once you're there, just notice what's happening in your jaw or your face or your torso, your feet. And then for a moment, come out of the position, just slide up the wall. And now notice what you feel now that you're out of the position, if there's any difference. And then slide back down into the position and notice if any of that changes from the start to the finish.

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So you're now watching for what's happening in the trajectory of your movement from the start and then into the wall sit. What you're feeling in terms of your movement. What you're feeling in terms of any extraneous sort of bracing, gripping, held breath, toes clenching, butt cheeks clenching, pelvic floor getting tighter versus say a tonality, those are two different things.

And then find the range where there's more ease. Like your legs will probably be working a little bit, but there's ease in your body. And then from here, if you're comfortable, we're going to do something I like to call deweighting. And all this is, is that you're taking more strength into one leg and you're taking weight out of the opposite leg.

So if we use the right leg, for example, you're taking more of your weight into the right leg and you'll notice your left foot becoming lighter. Now, here's the thing. You're not shifting your pelvis over top of that right leg. You're not shifting your rib cage over top of that right leg. And you're not shifting your head or your tongue or your eyes over to that right leg. You're keeping your upper body easy, peasy, squeezey.

So then only add more strength into that standing right leg as you can be easy, peasy, squeezey. And then move over to the left leg, do the same thing and watch what happens with your upper body. Easy, peasy, squeezey, easy breath, super straightforward. Feel the three points of the feet. The right foot comes a bit lighter. The right leg feels a bit lighter.

And then go back to the right leg and do this a few times between the right and left side. And just notice, right? So we've added load, we've added complexity, we've added more effort. So then coming out of wall sit, coming back to standing, now just notice what you're experiencing in your body.

And we only did this for a short period of time, so there might not be anything really big. However, if you're tuned into what your body feels like to have less pain, now notice what it feels like to have that and perhaps the feeling that comes from strengthening. And if pain increased, consider what

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might have contributed to it. Were there any signals or symptoms or breath holding or tension patterns? What can you be curious about?

If this resonates and if this makes real sense to you, you might be interested in my upcoming program on building strength and getting stronger where I am incorporating the principles of pure movement into a strengthening process so that it continues to nurture one's awareness of their body and then adds load and adds complexity. And we'll be working with all sorts of different areas of the body to support you in improving your strength and getting strong.

I will say that it is more appropriate for people who have already followed the principles that I've taught and have gained benefit. So if you have pain, I wouldn't recommend it. But if you have had pain and you've reduced it and you recognize your movement patterns and your breath patterns that were associated with the reduction of your pain, that would be ideal if you're looking for some support in improving your ability to get stronger, helping yourself create a program of consistency that you can follow to help you make those strength gains that you're seeking. And you can find more at [functionalsynergy.com/strength](http://functionalsynergy.com/strength). It would be an honor and a real pleasure to work with you.