

**Ep #211: Reducing & Getting Out of Pain
at the Therapeutic Yoga Intensive
with Claire MacEachen and Michelle Deschenes**



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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.

Susi Hately: Welcome and welcome back. I'm delighted that you are here today because I've got two super special guests with me today. And I've got Claire and Michelle, and both of them recently completed the therapeutic yoga intensive that I ran in October. And the program that I ran this October was perhaps the most, the word that consistently comes to me when I think about is sacred.

Like it was one of the most beautiful experiences that I've had. I've run the therapeutic yoga intensive for 20 years now, that's a long time. And this was by far one of my top programs. And it was so moving for me that I reached out to a few of the trainees and I said, hey, would you come on and speak about your experience? Because this whole notion of reducing compensation patterns and downregulating physiology and how this plays into reducing and eradicating pain is such an important concept. And these two people really, really lived it.

And so I want them to share from their own experience what this was like. And then if you find that this is something that really resonates with you and you want to get in on the next program that's happening in April, then you can and I'll talk more about that at the end of the episode.

Okay, so welcome, welcome. Claire MacEachen, and Michelle Deschenes. Thank you for being here. I'm so glad that you're here for us to have a chat. So what we'll get into first off is, how did you find me in the first place? Like, what's that part of the story?

For people to get context, how did you find me? But also you can weave into it like, what were you looking for when you said I think the intensive

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has it? I think this Therapeutic Yoga Intensive has something for me. What were you looking for? Michelle, do you want to give that a go?

Michelle Deschenes: Sure. For me, it was I guess I've been looking for a little bit for something that is going to help improve my yoga teacher training of the students that I have. I've done some side courses, things that I've taken through offerings at like the yoga conference in Toronto.

But it wasn't as much, like I was specifically looking for something around anatomy, something that was going to help with the age range of students that I have and noticing the different challenges that people exhibit in their movement. Like you can just see it in the variety of the way people are just holding one same pose. And that's what I've been looking for, is something that is going to give me a deeper understanding of all of that.

Susi: Awesome. How about you, Claire?

Claire MacEachen: Well, I have known you, Susi, for quite some time. And I know when I first did my first 200 hour yoga training, we actually used your book, *Anatomy of Asana*. And so it's been many years since that happened and just of late, I've taught yoga now since 2008, and I kind of started to feel a little bit stagnant in my teaching.

And then, coupled with that I've started to have a little bit of my own pain in my hip and sciatica, as well as then I did end up getting some diagnosis of some advanced arthritis in my spine. And I started to think to myself – They want to do cortisone shots, so then I started to think to myself, well, I can't do that. And who do I go to for this?

And, of course, ding, you sprang to mind. And that was even a year ago and then I kind of hemmed and hawed. And then, of course, then this year I'm nowhere closer to being pain-free. So I decided to look up what was going on with you again and, of course, I was right in line for this program that you've just spoken on.

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Susi: So when you took it, what were some of the biggest takeaways, Michelle, that you got from taking the program?

Michelle: For me, there were the tangible tools, the relatable things that I can use now and I can speak with clarity on when I'm talking about them. So I feel a lot more confident in just knowing that information and then being able to relay it in more of a knowledgeable way instead of grasping at things that I don't totally understand and probably should have no business talking about.

So that's what I was looking for, was those kinds of things to help me with that.

Susi: Nice. How about you, Claire?

Claire: You know, I really feel the community of the student body in this program. And I think what I really love about it, one of my big takeaways is that you are your first client, yourself. And that you, Susi, are able to teach us a skill set that we then can apply to our students that we have or teach.

And so that, for me, was a really, really big takeaway. And the fact that being able to sort of bring down some of your own pain, and knowing that that's available to other people. And that you're able to teach us the skills not only to eradicate our own pain, or eliminate some of it, but also be able to then be able to branch out and give that as a gift to others.

Susi: Yeah, because this is a professional training, and I have in the past had people take it because they just wanted to get out of pain and they weren't specifically training as professionals. And it's partly why I accept people like that into the program.

And that happens very, very rarely. Over the 20 years I've probably had five people take it for that purpose only, and they weren't even yoga teachers.

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One person had never even done yoga before, so she knew what some of the things were but had been referred by somebody else.

And yet, most of the teachers who come to take the program do have pain too. And, for me, it seems a bit mind boggling really to just simply give intellectual-based information to somebody who is in pain and expect them to then apply that intellectual information with their students when they haven't actually experienced it themselves.

And, Claire, you actually had quite a few moments of realization as your pain was going down in those six days, right?

Claire: Oh yeah, 100%.

Susi: Can you speak more to that? Like what that experience was.

Claire: Well, you know my word is soft and I think that would be what it was. And it was quite quickly that this happened, within probably the first day or so. And it was almost like an ease and just a softness. But that softness is not just physical, it's sort of in me completely. Like I feel a little bit softer in myself, if that makes sense.

Susi: Yeah. And to bring context to that, you actually had a word – And this is something I've spoken about on this podcast and shared quite a bit inside of the program because I think it's such a foundational concept. When someone decreases or experiences a decrease in pain, they often will say, yeah, the pain is not there or there's less of something.

But there's sort of this waiting, kind of like, yeah, but it's going to come back. And one of the things I like to do is say, okay, hold on a second here. So clearly your system has reduced or maybe the pain has gone away in this moment of time so far, because I remember for you it happened quite early into the days, what would you name it now? Like what's the state actually named?

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And a lot of people struggle with this initially because they simply want to say, well, it's not there. It's like, okay, but then what is there? And that's when you realized it was soft. So then I could say to you, hey, you know what? When soft starts to fade and moves into whatever that other word was, which I can't remember, it may have been tension or tightness or something, then you know that your bandwidth is getting smaller. And now you can do something about it, right?

Do you remember when you had that experience?

Claire: Oh yeah, I could even tell you, I remember the actual pose that we were doing, and it was sunrise sunset. But it's freedom. I mean, I walk every day with my dog. Sometimes if I poke and prod around a little bit, I can still feel the pain, but I know how to work with that now, right? But when I'm walking, I'm moving better. It is a hard thing to explain. But it is, it's a freedom that I'm feeling and I just feel freer and I feel more upright and I feel happier.

As I say, it's a little hard to explain. And then you realize that – Oh, I'll tell you another thing that came to my mind is that because I've had this hip pain for quite some time, I'd get up out of a chair or I'd get out of my car and I'd be grunting. And what I realized one day, maybe one or two days after we'd been in the program, is I got out of my car, got out of the seat and I went to grunt because I was just used to grunting, you know? And then all of a sudden I was like, oh, I don't need to grunt.

Susi: That's awesome.

Claire: Yeah, it was very strange. I was like, oh. And that's happened to me so many times, I've just got up and I'm just like, oh, the pain isn't there anymore. But I've had it for so long, I was going to grunt and I didn't need to and it was great. And this has continued.

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Susi: That's so awesome. I remember a similar story of a fellow in the training many years ago. And for him, what happened is he dropped his keys, he was out walking towards the coffee shop, this is when we used to run them in person. And he dropped his keys and then picked them up again, walked a few more steps and went, wait a second, that didn't hurt. But it took him a moment to actually realize what had happened there.

So it's like you were about to grunt because you always grunt, and you're like wait a second, I don't need to grunt.

Claire: Yeah.

Susi: That's awesome. That's awesome. And, Michelle, you had something similar happen for you, too.

Michelle: I love how we went through a lot of those movements and realizations of the relationships of our body parts to one another, like pelvis to rib cage and all of that. But it was more of an opening, it just felt like all of a sudden it was like, whoa, whatever that was is gone. And it feels open now. It feels so much better. And that's something that I've been incorporating in my class.

So it's that figure four one that we did where the pelvis tilts and the rest does not. And then the same with the sunrise sunset, like Claire said, where the ribcage is moving. And that's where a lot of students that I've tried it in class with, they're like, this is hard. And I'm like, yeah, you should have seen us. We had to do it 15 times until we got it right. And so that's what you try to do. We're just like, oh, this is really hard. That part, that relationship part, that was really neat.

Susi: So, Michelle, have you noticed a change in your ability to see your students move?

Michelle: You mean since then?

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Susi: Yeah.

Michelle: Yeah, I would say with much more clarity and isolated movements, too, so that I'm really looking at them in a way, instead of looking at them with the same old cues for yoga. It's not just that, it's way more than that. And that's exactly the kind of stuff I was looking for.

Susi: Right, because the cues can help people, like when you're coming out of 200 or even 500 hour teacher training and you're getting rolling, the cues can be helpful in directing people and instructing them through a series or a sequence or something. But they don't really teach movement per se, right?

How would you distinguish that further? Can you go there a little bit? Because you've got the baseline of cueing, of guiding someone through, but now you're actually teaching them about their movement.

Michelle: The big part, I would say, is I think especially even for the student who is listening, especially the fact that they're listening and they're willing to try this new approach, that they're looking at it in a way of introspectively they're looking at exactly how they move, they feel, they're doing it themselves.

As opposed to doing it in the whole motion of the rest of the class and they're not really in here. Like you try to get them to get into their breath and notice how they're feeling. But by doing it this way, it definitely takes the focus off of what's going on around them and brings it right back inside. I think it's one of the most amazing tools that really gets people to do that.

Susi: Really cool. It really brings their ability to be introspective and just to really feel on the inside how their body is moving and really what's moving. Yeah, so interesting.

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Michelle: Yeah, it really makes them slow down. It really makes them stop and think of themselves, stop and think of that muscle or that specific movement of that joint or even zeroing in on that point that, okay, that's where the pain starts is when I do this. Instead of skimming right through it when they're just going through the poses, like one to the next to the next and they're not really stopping to pay attention to those little whispers.

Susi: Interesting. So, Claire, how would you describe what is different about this training compared to others you've taken?

Claire: Well, I think I would go back to just we are our own client first. I don't think I've ever really kind of looked at it that way, and you just become your own healer. And so that is, I would say, very different. Well, a lot of my other courses have been in-person. So that's another difference. But I love that this is online.

But the one thing that I really, really love about this is that even though it is online, you almost feel in-person. It's got that sort of body about it. And I think the group of people that we have and the students that are on, just I really feel very supported by our community of students in this course.

I say hats off to you for that because you have a way of kind of pulling people together and working effectively together. So that's quite fascinating, actually. That's quite a good skill to have to be able to – And sometimes I was coupled with people, I was like, oh yeah, this is great. I want to be coupled with that person in our breakout rooms and that. So yeah, so those are a couple of the things.

The other thing that I would say is that I just feel like it's a great balance of the lectures, the breakout rooms, the Q&A sessions, which I have to be honest with you. In any other course I've taken I'm always that little shy person that would never say anything. And yet, I just feel very safe here to be able to talk and ask my questions. And so yeah.

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Susi: Very cool. Very cool. How about you, Michelle? What was different for you compared to other programs you've taken?

Michelle: I have done some courses online before and I've done in-person. So I agree with Claire, the group that we had, there was just this magical kind of synergy between everybody that it felt like we all seemed to connect quite well, although everyone had all these varying background degrees and things like that. It seemed like we still all connected very well.

But yeah, the breakout rooms, they were interesting and fun. And it gave you that opportunity to kind of get a little closer and connected with that one or two people where you couldn't in the whole class setting, it wasn't the same thing. So that part was personal. But it was also fun. You had a quick little kind of chat and stuff and did our work and came back. But each time was another connection, another connection. And it just made everything tighter within the whole group, which was good.

Susi: So if someone was considering taking it, what would be something you might say to them?

Michelle: It's a different kind of training, but it's the kind of training that gives your mind a shift away from the standard. I guess the standard kind of things that you're taught and gets you a little more deeply involved with yourself, for sure, and how you're walking the walk, talking the talk, that's important. And that's important for me too, like that you're aware of what you're talking about, it's important.

So yeah, I would definitely tell someone that the benefits of this are not only the anatomy, not only the takeaways of the different kinds of movements that you can incorporate right away to help with healing and pass on to your students, too.

Susi: How about you, Claire, what would you say?

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Claire: Well, I would probably have to really hone in on the fact that you're really working with this pure movement. And I've been working with a gal now that I wanted to get right into it after we got out of course, and she's a good friend of mine. We are now all of a sudden working with the biomechanics of the body, but in a very kind of pure sort of way. And I just feel like you can kind of pull that in and get people moving in yoga, or just in everyday, whatever you do every day and what you like to do, running, skiing, at the gym.

This can help people to move to pain free, but then be able to graduate and get back to things that they've not been able to do for a period of time. You're going to be able to do that for yourself, but you're also going to be able to give that as a gift, as I said before, to others.

And just working with this one lady that I've just worked with the other day and just sort of seeing how quickly you can go into your kind of like red zone where you shouldn't really be working. Because she even said to me, I said, is that kind of a red zone for you? Like a red light? And she was like, oh yeah, but it's okay. I'm like, well, no, it's not. Let's bring you back out and let's just go more into sort of that yellow area so that you're not in the discomfort.

You're really learning these skills to be able to help yourself, but be able to give these skills to other people so that they can get back at what it is they love to do.

Susi: And what Claire was referring to there is that I sometimes use the traffic light analogy of red, yellow and green. And the idea is that the pain that someone experiences is more of the red zone. And then the aim is to listen for like, what's the yellow? Like feel for what are the yellows? What are the whispers? Can you find yourself in those places?

Because if you can work in a range that doesn't increase pain or work in a range that's pain-free, you start to be able to see some of the other

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compensatory strategies you might use. And so if you just kind of blow through that and then you just continue to be in pain, as you were talking about initially that your friend was saying is this is okay.

So many people walk around in pain and say it's okay. I mean, they're living their life. And it is okay and there is another way that if you want to get out of pain and you start to learn how to move in a pain-free or a reduced pain range, then you start to recognize some of the contributing factors to why that pain can be around so inconsistently.

And so that's what Claire is referring to, of being able to really tune in and listen. It's a big reason why you started to get that experience of softness and that experience of freedom just out of a few movements initially. And then that just snowballed for you through these six days, yeah?

Claire: Yeah, 100%.

Susi: Anything that you want to add, Michelle?

Michelle: No, I don't think so. I think we've pretty much said most of it. The course, for sure, is something I highly recommend for people to do. I think it's something that is just going to enhance any of the teaching that they're doing now. It's going to give them a whole new perspective. It's going to maybe flip some things on its ear. But definitely, it's something that people should take the time to at least explore it to see what comes up for them. Because I'm sure there's going to be something for most people. Like I can't see there not being.

Susi: Thank you. Thank you, you two, so much. If people want to get in touch with you, whether they are clients or whether they're other teachers want to connect with you, Claire, what's the best way for people to reach you?

Claire: They could probably email me, yogawithclaire.om@gmail.com.

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Susi: Okay. And, Michelle, how can people find you?

Michelle: Same, they can just send me an email to moftheoaks@gmail.com.

Susi: And, Claire, you're based in Calgary?

Claire: Pretty much. I'm in Okotoks, but yeah.

Susi: And so Okotoks is just outside of Calgary. And, Michelle, you are based in Ontario. Where in Ontario, are you?

Michelle: So I am in a small town called Blind River, it's between Sudbury and Sault Ste. Marie on the north shore of Lake Huron. And I'll be in Calgary at the end of the month.

Susi: Even better. All right, well thank you, you two, that's super helpful. And those of you listening, if this is something that is of interest to you, we've just opened up registration for the April training program. There are payment plans for you if that is something that you're interested in. And you can read all about it at functionalsynergy.com/intensive. All right, you two, thank you again, so much.

Michelle: Thank you.

Claire: You're welcome, thank you for having us.

If this episode has resonated and you're looking to deepen this idea of getting your body back on board, of listening deeply to your symptoms, of listening to the whispers so you don't have to hear the screams, and you're looking for one-to-one support or professional training, then reach out to us at health@functionalsynergy.com where we can customize your learning path. That's health@functionalsynergy.com. Looking forward to hearing from you.