



THE SPECTRUM OF HEALTH

— P O D C A S T —

Podcast Session #10

Pain Treatments That Work: How to Heal Your Pain When You've Tried Everything Else

With Phaedra Antioco

Have you been in pain for a long time and tried everything to find relief? On today's episode, Dr. Schaffner speaks with [Phaedra Antioco](#), the organizer of the [Pain Treatments That Work 3.0 Summit](#) (which runs April 21 through May 11). They talk about Phaedra's car accident and how her experience of seeking relief from pain led her to immerse herself in learning the technique of the John F. Barnes Myofascial Release Approach.

For more on Phaedra Antioco,
visit www.pain-treatments-that-work.com

00:06 Dr. Christine Schaffner: Welcome to the Spectrum of Health Podcast. I'm Dr. Christine Schaffner, and today I'm speaking with Phaedra Antioco. We talk about her upcoming summit "Pain Treatments That Work 3.0: How To Heal Your Pain When You've Tried Everything Else." I had my conversation with Phaedra on Facebook Live on my Facebook page, Dr. Christine Schaffner. So feel free to see the video of our interview on Facebook. Phaedra has a really unique story of personal experience, and she's really passionate about bringing together a group of experts to share some pain strategies that really work. I'm excited to introduce you to Phaedra, and please check out her summit.

02:12 Phaedra Antioco: Thanks for having me, Dr. Christine. I really appreciate it because I think you and I both treat people who are frustrated, they can't get answers, they've had all these tests done and they're trying to get better. So this is really great to be able to chat with you today.

02:26 Christine: Great! I'm sure everyone's really curious and interested about your background. How did you develop this niche for yourself, of working with patients who have chronic pain?

02:38 Phaedra: Well, let me tell you a little story. Life happens, and one day, almost 10 years ago, I was driving home from work. It was the perfect work day, like, wow. Life was good, but I didn't make it home. I woke up two weeks later from a coma. And just so you know, this is my credibility as I was an occupational therapist for 10 years. I worked in pediatrics, and then I woke up, full-body braced, brain injury, near spinal cord injury. I had trauma. It was high speed, the highway was 80 miles an hour. The seat belt strangled me toward the outer layer of the carotid artery. I was half ejected out, I was told. And that's where my journey began. So it was, first the initial trauma injury, then it's waking up to learn what happened to me, and finding that inner fight to overcome it. So, I am a professional patient, as well as a therapist.

03:38 Christine: Wow. What an impactful story, to have had that really traumatic first-hand experience, and look at you now, obviously, you're living a full life, you're beautiful, you're active and it shows you can overcome something as traumatic as that event. I think that gives people a lot of hope. I know you're coming from a really deep profound personal experience.

04:01 Phaedra: Yes. That's definitely true.

04:04 Christine: Phaedra, how did you go from that moment of being completely in a coma and being incapacitated to recovering your life? What did you learn along your journey?

04:17 Phaedra: Oh, where do we start with that one?

[laughter]

04:19 Phaedra: I really had to find the answers, really seek answers. But it all worked out as it should. So, I was the patient, I was the therapist who became a patient. I'm an occupational therapist by license, and I had to be treated by an occupational therapist, physical therapist, speech therapist, neuropsychologist. So, I literally got first-hand view of the medical system. And what I learned was, it's not just one treatment. It's many things that got me well again. I knew that not one doctor knows everything. So, I really had to be my own advocate, and really search for answers. And that's what I promote with my clients now. I tend to get the people who've tried everything, and they don't get better. So, that's why I called my new interview series, this is the third launch of it, "Pain Treatments That Work-- How To Heal Pain When You've Tried Everything Else."

05:15 Christine: I think that's so relevant. I see the same type of patient population, probably who are coming from different angles but, the average person who comes to Sophia, has seen 20, 30, even 50 doctors before coming to see us, and I think you made a really great point that we need a team approach. Not one physician or practitioner holds all the answers for our patients but, really, how do we educate patients to not settle for being in chronic pain, and what should they be continually looking for if they're stuck, or if they're feeling like they haven't made that breakthrough?

05:52 Phaedra: It is about empowering yourself as the patient. And that's where the biggest thing is, I had to reach deep down and find that resiliency. I was told I had a brain injury, and I was not going to accept that. And so, I just did whatever I could, and if that meant changing my diet, seeking out professionals, but most importantly, I had to keep on going and not give up. And that's when people come to me. And even my clients online, they can get better in literally one session. It's just about shining the awareness into them, onto what's not working in their lives, what's continuing the downward spiral, because with chronic pain like you've seen, chronic illness period, it's not just, "Oh, I have that Epstein Barr virus. Oh, I have Lyme disease." It's like, "Well, how is this disease impacting your life?" How is it impacting your relationships, your ability to be productive, to just get up and get dressed in the morning?

06:52 Phaedra: So I always ask people, "What's not working in your life?" That's the first step in my break-free from pain program. You need to look at, "Okay, am I suffering with Lyme disease? I can't even move during the day, and my husband is very upset with me." And so then there's these other dynamics to the pain puzzle. So it's not just the illness you're having, but it's like, how has your life has changed from it? I encourage people to continue to live life and even if you have to modify it, just don't stop, just keep on going. Because sometimes it's the thoughts that we think that are also causing the pain, the illness to be worse. It's like catastrophizing.

07:35 Christine: Dr. Klinghardt, who is my mentor, has trained me a lot. He has something called The Five Levels of Healing. And it's another kind of framework that sounds like something that you put together in your own work. It involves this idea that we have our physical body, our energetic, mental, intuitive and spiritual bodies. And I know that there's lots of different dialogues around this integration of mind, body, spirit. What have you found to be a successful approach, when approaching somebody with chronic pain? I know you do somatic work, but it's this whole idea that the body, the physical body, can hold pain, can hold the stored emotional trauma, or there can be a lot of emotion to un-layer in that experience. We need the tools to really listen and have guidance with a therapist like yourself to walk us through that path.

08:29 Phaedra: Right, absolutely. My first successful thing was to help me get in my body. I believe that when we're so traumatized, we don't want to be in our body. It's scary, it's painful, and we can't heal until we inhabit it. So for example, if I say you, "Hey, bring your awareness to both feet at the same time." And if that's a little glitchy like, "Wow, I don't feel into my body." Well, let's get out of our head, let's get out of the stress, the worry, the fear and pause. When I got treated with John Barnes' Myofascial Release Technique, which is my number one treatment for treating pain, I got in touch with the memory--I don't physically remember the car rolling or anything at all, but my body remembered it. I had a certain technique done and the fear came out. Like blood-curdling fear of this high speed accident. That's where it all started--the body's holding on to this stuff.

09:29 Phaedra: I help people get in touch and release and remove the layers and that usually looks like, "Yes, I can do manual therapy, I could teach you to do it on yourself but we've got to get you back in." That believing that you can get better. And this was me, guys. I had a broken leg. I still have a bone in my leg that's literally broken. But I've gotten back in there I've found treatments that work, and I can hike five to six miles without any problems. I just did a Zumba marathon recently, which I never thought I could do, again, but I keep on going, keep on going.

10:04 Christine: Yes. I know that's such a great point. And there's so many different types of body work. There's Somatic release, there's myofascial work, there's Craniosacral work, visceral manipulation, all these ways to communicate with the body. And you mentioned this specific type of myofascial work--can you share a little bit about that in case it's the first time that people are hearing about this technique?

10:28 Phaedra: Sure. Well, my mentor and my teacher is John Barnes. His technique is John Barnes Myofascial Release. That was the number one treatment that got me better. I said, "Okay, I've got to learn this." It's different than a massage. I am not a massage therapist, I almost see it as, my hands can go in and correct and break the scar tissue. It can help someone get in, it's not just a massage where you go on, off, on, off the muscle, we go, we stay, and it's almost like psychology, I get you to go in and get into your body. And

once I feel like, "Hey, feel where my hands are. Okay, they're on your belly, you've got a lot of scars on your belly, bring your awareness there." It starts to warm up, it starts to heat up and it starts to melt, and those scars and tightness melt and the breath can increase, and eventually the person starts to feel calmer--and when we're calm and we feel safe, and our nervous system feels safe, that's when we can heal.

11:28 Phaedra: And so, I integrated the manual therapy of myofascial release, and I work online with clients, and I can just really work on the mindset. You really can feel yourself, but you can't do it if you're scared out of your mind and you're in this fight-or-flight which shuts down your nervous system. It's like a traffic jam. Your brain tells your organs, "Hey, you've got to breathe now. You've got to pump that blood, you've got to digest the food." But if we're scared and we're stressed, it locks us down and we freeze and we can't heal. So I also take a journey with the person. It doesn't just start from that incident that happened. It's literally the past that comes up. So we look at releasing past injury and past trauma. For example, my seat belt strangulation, I feel it, I feel it every day. But I have to be mindful of it because I was on a ventilator. I had this machine pumping for me, so I just have to check in and be like, "Hey, this is okay." And I teach clients certain modalities that they can use to literally shift their pain on the spot. It's really, really cool.

12:33 Phaedra: So it was about really looking at and releasing past trauma because I want to know, and I'm sure you do too, why do some people get better and other people just don't. Often, as I'm starting to see patterns, I look at their childhood. What was your childhood like? Was there abuse? Was there trauma? Was your parent sick all the time? That's a big one. Because usually people with a lot of chronic illnesses saw parents who were bedridden, going to the hospital and to doctor after doctor. And it's almost like, that's the norm. That's how I should be because my parent modeled it. So we start to look at all kinds of things. The pain puzzle is very, very complex and I help people dig out what it is that's causing their pain or their chronic illness to just be holding them back, because they stop living life.

13:22 Phaedra: And we've got to start living life even if we are sick. It's like, are you just waiting to die? When is enough enough? There are strategies out there, and I put them into the pain treatments that work. How to heal pain when you've tried everything else. I feel like the answers to the pain puzzle are in there. They're in there, no doubt, if you just tune in--and it's a slow process. So, it's 21 days. We have a few more interviews on the weekend, but it's in-depth, and I think people who are struggling with chronic illness and pain are going to be able to feel like, "Wow, I'm home, she gets me. She really, really understands." Because unless you've been through it, it's like, you just don't quite understand it, and so with us, we might have the injuries inside, and if you see someone in a wheelchair, you know, "Hey, they're injured, they had some problems going on." But our scar tissue, our wounds, can be inside, down to a cellular level.

14:23 Christine: So many great points, Phaedra. From my perspective, regarding myofascial work--a lot of what we treat is not only the emotional trauma, but also what lives in the connective tissue. There's a lot of toxicity and infection that can also hang out in that tissue, so the more attention and support people can get to help to break those adhesions, the scars, and unwind that trauma on many levels, the better. I feel that we see a lot of breakthroughs for people, and then just from my perspective, it's also important to make sure that you're doing that work with proper tools for the physical body to address if you have detox reactions, or healing reactions after the myofascial work--you might see that just because of what's released in the body, and then you also mentioned that whole idea about the adverse childhood experiences.

15:14 Christine: They're even doing studies right now with the A score and everything, and I see that a lot in our intake process--we look at psychological trauma, or emotional trauma that can really start in the womb for people, and so it's just a really big opportunity to dive deep into your personal history. I think there's the trauma, of course, that led to being sick, and then the trauma of being sick, and so it's like, there's a lot to explore. I think that has to be part of the conversation, and I'm really interested. You live in this world, not from only a personal experience, but this is your professional work, as well--what are some of the things that really have stood out that you've learned doing the interviews in your summit? Any pearls or things that you're really excited to peak our curiosity with?

16:07 Phaedra: Oh, absolutely. So there's this common theme, and basically, I've been able to bring the mentors, the experts who helped me on my healing journey. I was a summit junkie, I was just listening and listening, and I followed through. I took notes with these summits because that's where the answers came from. So the first thing, first and foremost, and I'm sure you preach this, is eating the right diet, and so I got rid of inflammatory foods. I knew that my leg was broken, like it literally looks like that, and it's causing micro-tears all the time with every step I take. So why would I put food in that's throwing fuel on the fire of my inflammation? I don't want to tax my body from healing, I want to give it everything it needs to have a fresh start every day, so diet was key. I'm hearing that with a lot of experts, mindset is huge. To just feel safe in your body, and when we're not living on purpose and when we don't feel supported by the people around us, that makes us sink, too.

17:08 Phaedra: Then, we need to move our body, so I have some experts who are talking about exercise, and I'm not talking going to the gym and lifting heavy, heavy, heavy weights. I'm just saying, get up and move. Because when you're in chronic illness or pain, it's just so easy to sit there. So the sitting too much is killing us, it's causing so much pain. Right now, I'm standing, I'm in a stand-up desk, and I've got all these tools around me that I use, that I teach people, and it could be a ball to roll on and stretch on, it can be a half foam roller to stretch my calves while I'm standing--because you start to take the shape of who you are all day long.

17:47 Phaedra: So if you are secretary, and you sit at a desk and you're starting to get neck pain, well, you need to look at how you're sitting at the computer. So that's part of it--and then we need to rewire our brain, we need to change our thoughts. So I train people, and when you're in chronic pain, you're in fight-or-flight, it's hard, it's hard to find those good things every day, and I used to say, "Gratitude"--yeah, whatever, come on, no. But if it's like, "Okay, I have to pick up something." This is my little thing, and I can just look at it and it'll bring me into the present moment, and just know that I'm okay, just to feel safe in your body again.

18:26 Phaedra: So it's just taking an object or looking around the room, and seeing something that can ground you, that you're not being attacked--because it's almost like attacks coming from everywhere. So those are the principles. It's like, notice what's not working. If you're in a job you can't stand, if you're in a marriage that is just not serving you and your husband upsets you every time, start to pay attention to your body and what happens when you think of your job, when you think of your husband or wife, when they walk into the room and they stress you out. That's just tension. We get stuck in the sympathetic fight-or-flight, and then no matter how much massage you get, or treatment, you can't drop those muscles because it's like you're running for your life every day. So, the first step is to really start to feel safe and believe, and so with my clients, I hold the space, like I'll show you my picture, and if I can get better, hello, anyone can. And yes, sometimes you have to pay money out of pocket, but what is your life worth? You've only got one, so you've got to keep on going, and I help people, sometimes it can be so instant.

19:36 Phaedra: I had one client who wanted to go write her book, wanted to get back to school. She was living with her boyfriend, she felt like she couldn't live anymore, and she felt guilty, and they weren't intimate for over a year and a half. We had one session and got her in touch with who she is. We forget, we forget who we are, what our essence is. And sure enough, after that one session, she was able to be fully intimate with her boyfriend. Now talk about living your life. And clients who just want to exercise again--they just want to hire that personal trainer and go to the gym. Well, with one client, we got them better, I mean chronic back pain, numbness, tingling, running down her right hip and thigh--well, she had tons of scar tissue, she had three abdominal surgeries including hysterectomy. I taught her and her husband how to work together to free up those muscles, and she was going to the gym, and she upped it...I like to say, "Well, once you get to the gym, let's get a good flow of pain-free, let's at least be a month or two pain-free before you increase your intensity. Well, she increased her intensity before she was ready and the pain came up again. So we're just working together to get her to find that just-right movement.

20:45 Phaedra: And some people might be chronically ill, they have no energy. Well, if you can get up and just walk to the mailbox today. If you can get out and get sun on your face. If you can reach your arms up to the ceiling and just stretch a little bit, just start moving differently. So those are some of the things that are really important to get, and it is

possible. I'll hold that space for you, you get in touch with me, you follow this, you will hear over and over again. A lot of my experts as we get into this work are people who've overcome. And it is possible, but sometimes it takes a little more effort, it takes a little more time, but you need the love and the support and that's what I provide. My clients get access to me all the time. Because you know those moments where you're just on the floor and you're crying and you're scared and you don't know what to do, you don't know what route to take. Well, I can guide you through, but the first thing is, the answers are inside you. If you're in that fight or flight mode, you can't get there.

21:48 Christine: Yes. So many beautiful points Phaedra, and I think that we can't overemphasize the importance of these foundational pieces of our health, even though we might be in this really severe chronic state. Good food, good water, good air, and movement, all of these things are really foundational to setting the stage for our bodies to rebalance and get better. Out of curiosity, I'm not sure if you deal with patients like this...we see this huge crisis in our society with the whole over-use of opioids and all of these pharmaceutical agents. I mean, they obviously work, and can be a way to stop and mitigate pain, but unfortunately they set up this addictive cycle that can have a huge detrimental effect on our brains and our pain patterns. Do you have any thoughts or experiences that you want to share if someone who's listening is more coming from chronic pain, not only trying to figure out the underlying causes, but have really used these pharmaceutical tools to cope? That's obviously going to be a different journey for them to get better and recover.

23:06 Phaedra: Absolutely, I actually help people get off of them. Obviously, they're going to work with their doctors closely, but you've got to have support. It's like I'm a coach, I'm a pain relief coach. So when you're in the down and you're trying to withdraw or... First of all, you're in fight or flight. Your body's clenching, you're not even breathing, you're just popping these pills. Well, first we've got to get you awareness, to just to slow down and look at, "Well, what am I thinking about my pain? Am I dying?" There's so many thoughts. So my one client John, he's slow. I mean he was on, I can't even tell you all the names of the medications. And his goal was to get back to work. Once we got in touch with it, because he was depressed...he felt, "I want to go back to work, but I really can't, I'm on all these meds...and the car accident."

23:50 Phaedra: So we basically renegotiated the trauma of the car accident, which I wanted to mention, because we hold on to that trauma. It's like the car accident is still happening, that sexual abuse is still happening. So what I do with them is we re-negotiate. We go to the trauma itself and we create a new scenario where the brain and the body literally start to melt, and unravel that trauma. When we do all these little specific exercises, they start to feel safe, then we can start weaning off the medications. What I do is provide the coaching and the support as they're going through it, and there's a million things you can do, but it's so not in the general medical system. If you go to a physical therapist or even an occupational therapist, chances are they're not really going to tell you, "Hey, let's go in

and feel the pain" or "Let's feel kind of near the pain, where it's not so intense, or maybe feel this space between the pain and no pain"...and that's huge.

24:49 Phaedra: So we don't want to resist. "Oh, my shoulder's hurting, my back's hurting. It shouldn't be hurting. Let me take a pill. That's the only way." No, there are other ways. Again, I have a broken bone in my leg and I'm not on any pain pills, I don't take even ibuprofen. So we have to look at what you're telling yourself about your pain, we have to get you to be able to go into the pain because when we resist it, feeling "I shouldn't have it", what does that do? It just makes you tighten up and clench. So I teach them. "Okay, yes, notice that tingly sciatic pain going down, notice that tightness all over your body or that tingling or fatigue. Is there a place that's a little less fatigued?"

25:28 Phaedra: Is it there? And again, people say, "Oh, look at gratitude. Well, when you're in that constant fight or flight, you can't always find it. So just getting in touch, I help support, because we need that love and nurturing, we need someone there for us, that's what our doctors do. We have to have the right doctor. I know stories of doctors who said the wrong thing. One guy said something to me, a top Barrow's neurologist. (Barrow's neuro rehab is one of the top in the country.) He said, "Wow, your brain injury was bad. You should be on a ventilator." Well, you tell me that, now I'm going to think I'm broken. Something's really wrong and maybe I'm just going to keel over into a coma...but I didn't accept that. So you've got to have a good working relationship with your practitioner, you need to feel loved and supported. Your practitioner, your family, your friends and people in your community...you can't do it alone and isolate yourself, because what I have learned even from my own experience, is this brain of yours, it could literally become a prison, with our mindset. So we've got to rewire the brain.

26:27 Phaedra: I've had people who don't want to be themselves, so they get addicted to opiates because it's the only way to get out of the pain that they're in, mentally even. So what if we can just go in and feel the pain, and see where it's a little bit better, to feel safer. I've had clients who literally have tried to kill themselves several times because the pain is so bad, but it's like their relationship's off kilter, they're poor, they've spent all this money on treatments and they're not finding the right doctors, and they're giving up. Well, don't give up, there's a way.

27:07 Christine: I think that's such an inspiration because when people are, especially in that crisis state, they don't see the other end or they don't see their way out. It sounds like, through your personal experience and the experience that you have with patients, you've been really successful. I think it's important to really leave our audience with the story of hope, and that there's a way. I feel the same way with our patients, we definitely see people who've struggled for so long. And when you get into that pattern, you don't think, "Oh, my gosh. Is it possible to get better?" And again, we both have an approach where it's not to take a pill and you're done the next day. It's a very proactive, introspective approach,

but can offer profound healing if you are committed to it, and again, having the right support because a great doctor and team of practitioners can make all the difference--and you cannot do this alone. I don't think anyone should ever set that expectation for themselves. So, Phaedra, you have this amazing summit that's coming up. How can people learn more about your work and the summit?

28:22 Phaedra: Sure, it's www.paintreatmentsthatwork.com, and there'll be a video there, it will introduce me and you can put in your name and phone number and get access. And what you're going to do is you're going to get 21 days, and I will warn you that they're very in-depth. This is not your usual Summit. They are super-duper in-depth conversations. So you'll want to have a notebook, and then when you sign up for that after the 21 days, I'm going to do a five-day pain relief challenge. I'm going to teach you everything I have to help you move your body better and to start moving forward. This series is 21 days. I can't do a short interview, so they're an hour each. On the weekend we're going to have a couple extra. You might want to purchase it, because you don't wanna miss out as there's just so, so much. We'll have 48 hours you can watch also for free, it's literally, Dr. Christine, everything that you promote, everything that can help you get better is in this series.

29:24 Phaedra: We also have a Facebook group, it's called Pain Treatments That Work because when I was recovering there was no support group for pain or recovery from a car accident. I've created this whole movement to, "Hey, let's get together as a community. Let's work on being positive. Let's find an accountability buddy a partner in this group Pain Treatments That Work Facebook group." I wanted people to reach out, I want people to share what worked, and what didn't work, because I get people tired of spending all this money on things that don't work, but we're making a movement here, we're starting to take in looking at more than just the physical symptoms, the blood labs--it's community, it's mindset, it's just getting that "overcoming" mentality and knowing that there is a treatment out there for you. That's what the group is about.

30:15 Christine: I know that you're so passionate about this topic, and you have so much to offer. I'm so excited to share this with my community and to continue to learn from you and see patients get better through this work. I so appreciate your time and getting to know you more Phaedra. I'm excited to check out the Summit as well.

30:37 Phaedra: Another thing is the questions I'm asking, because I do get the people that have tried everything, and they're not getting better. So, the questions I'm asking are really in depth and they're the ones, they're the questions you want answered. So coming from myself as a therapist, and what all thousands of people come to me asking, we're going to address those in this series and it's absolutely incredible. This is the third time around, and it just keeps getting better and better. So it's paintreatmentsthatwork.com, and you can check out our Facebook group, and I hope that you can be super supported, and I

hope I get emails from you saying, "Yeah, Phaedra thank you. It really, really, really helped."

31:13 Christine: Me too. Thank you so much Phaedra for your time today.

31:15 Phaedra: Sure.