

MICHELLE ARINGTON

Carving a Path to Business Owner and Yoga Therapist



Michelle Arington, C-IAYT, owns Elevate Online Studio in Athens, Georgia. She offers classes, experiential anatomy workshops, teacher trainings, and private health and fitness coaching—plus yoga therapy and mindfulness for empowerment, balance, and well-being. She has completed numerous trainings in mind and body health.

Michelle is an Integrative Nutrition health coach, MedFit drug and alcohol recovery fitness specialist, Yamuna Body Rolling practitioner and teacher trainer, Nia Technique and Moving to Heal instructor, and Ageless Grace educator. She can be found at www.ElevateOnlineStudio.com.

From an early age, I was fascinated by the human body in motion—all the shapes, feelings, and emotions that could be explored and expressed without words and the muscle memory that came with practice and repetition. My yoga path began unfolding in the ballet studio, where we did stretches that had a lot in common with classic yoga postures. They released tension in my body and calmed my mind after a hard class or long rehearsal.

At 19, I joined a modern dance company, where my relationship with yoga was nurtured by the director, who became one of my greatest teachers and friends. She introduced me to *The Sivananda Companion to Yoga*, and the book became my constant friend. In my late 20s, I stepped out of the dance studio and into the new dance of motherhood. I practiced in my living room, guided through the TV by Seane Corn, Alan Finger, and Steve Ross, and relied on my *Sivananda Companion* to keep me grounded.

By 31, I was a stressed-out single mother of two young children, traumatized from an emotionally abusive marriage and going through a divorce. A recent car accident had caused chronic neck and back pain that prevented me from doing any kind of physical exercise or yoga practice. I lived with daily anxiety and depression. Two years later, I returned to a public “beginner” yoga class and found it nearly impossible. The class left me in tears, feeling hopeless over my loss of strength and mobility. This experience compelled me to begin searching for a more compassionate and adaptable yoga practice that would help me heal.

During this time, Jon Kabat-Zinn’s *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness* and the study and practice of mindfulness taught me how to step back and observe my thoughts and feelings, physical sensations, and fear of the unknown. These supports allowed me to cultivate a new relationship of acceptance with my body, mind, and emotions. The Yamuna Body Rolling method helped release tension and pain and gave me new tools to help me move more freely when I once again returned to my asana practice. The Nia Technique invited me to step into the dance studio and embrace my “now body” without judgment. As my body and mind began to recover, I regained my confidence and became determined to offer hope to others by empowering them to do the same.

My search for training in evidence-based hatha yoga to prevent and alleviate post-traumatic stress, depression, anxiety, and chronic pain led me to yoga for depression with Amy Weintraub, MFA, E-RYT 500, C-IAYT; yoga for anxiety and self-regulation with Hala Khouri, E-RYT 500; and yoga for veterans, military personnel, and first responders with Yoga Warriors International. These various teachers, methods, and trainings were pivotal in my personal growth and education.

My first job as a yoga therapist was at a nonprofit counseling center that was open to offering complementary holistic therapies to their patients. Through them, I partnered with the Drug and Alcohol Veterans Accountability Court, teaching yoga and meditation to eligible veterans who participated in the program as an alternative to incarceration for drug- and alcohol-related crimes. I also developed a yoga and mindfulness program for incarcerated women at the local jail, where I continued to volunteer for 7 years.

When I first began my journey, I had no idea where it would lead me or if I could even carve a path for myself as a yoga therapist. In times of doubt, remembering to come back to my “why” helped me keep moving forward with clarity. I stay passionate and inspired through ongoing personal practice, education, and training. Building confidence, resources, skills, and community trust through maintaining relationships has been valuable in growing my career.

Now, I have an online studio where I offer yoga therapy and movement classes. I create yoga- and mindfulness-based coaching programs for those in recovery from drug and alcohol addiction who want to improve their lifestyle habits to support their sobriety. After more than 25 years of study and practice, I have learned many valuable lessons along the way. Students have been my greatest teachers. They have taught me to not plan ahead too much, to be prepared to go with the flow, and to not become attached to my expectations or their outcomes. I have recognized that affirming the divine light in others who haven’t seen it in themselves changes lives and that something as simple as breath can be a powerful tool of hope, restoration, and transformation. **YTT**