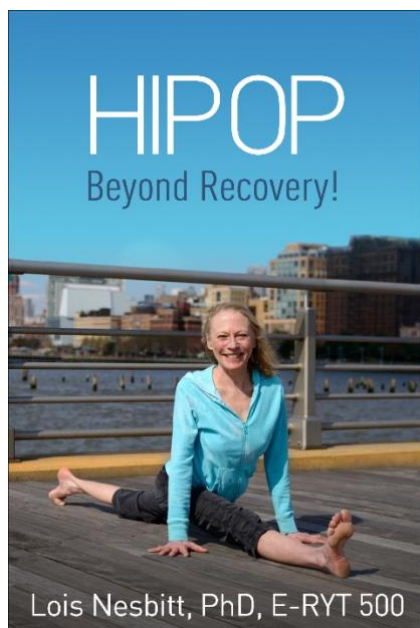




My hip problem, like most big problems, started small. A twinge, sometimes a prolonged ache, in my right buttock. Occasional, then gradual, then gradually worse, then really bad. Heard the parable about frogs? If you toss them into a pot of boiling water, they will immediately sense danger and jump out. If you leave them in a pot of gradually warming water, they will stay there till they die. They just don't notice gradual discomfort becoming dangerous.

I was a frog who stayed in the pot. Let it be said that I don't love complications. I find life often more than I can handle on a good day. I always seem to be slipping behind on something, neglecting something else entirely—procrastinating. I even had an idea for an autobiography called *I'm Behind . . . I'm So Behind!* To which one of my witty housemates replied, "Sounds like a book that will never get written." Point taken, as this hip book is now 3.5 years behind schedule.

So, as hard as it is to ignore physical pain, my first and most enduring response was, "I don't have time for this." It's a coping mechanism that I must have developed years ago to enable me to leapfrog (what's with the frogs today?) over things that probably deserve attention. Like the ankle

I mangled falling off a curb in India, or the kneecap I pounded on a marble staircase during grad school at Princeton. Or unresolved tensions with housemates, professors, employers, or family members—simmerings that boiled over later and required a *lot* of time to patch up. A friend of mine used to say she had two feelings, "fine" and "busy." Worked for me—until it didn't.

Whereas a better adjusted person would probably have booked a doctor's appointment, I just kept hoping the pain would go away. Being an active person, I've "worked through" a host of other pains and come out the other end intact, through some combination of backing off certain activities, getting lots of high-quality bodywork, downing bottles of Aleve, and summoning large doses of hope.

I also know enough about the body to know that while joint pain commonly ends in surgery, there's not a lot doctors can do about most muscle pain. And since my pain was in the muscles of my butt, nowhere near the hip joint itself, I figured I had just overworked something that needed a rest. I've since learned about "referred pain," which happens when you feel discomfort in one place when the cause is ground zero.

So there I was, gradually warming frog in a pot, preferring, however unconsciously, slow death, prolonged discomfort beyond all reason, thinking the whole thing would just go away. Well, it didn't, and after about a year and a half of "warm" water, things got really hot. I found myself in excruciating, debilitating, 24/7 pain.

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Alarm bells were going off. At some level I knew my ship was sinking. Mortality had yet to rear its monstrous head in my life to such a degree that I often forgot how old I was—and I mean by *decades*. When well into my thirties someone once asked me how old I was, and without thinking I replied, "19." Sounded weird even to me, but I had no intention to deceive. That's honestly how old I thought I was at that moment. Even today, without having kids and having sidestepped the standard markers of adult life—job, marriage, house, family—and having been blessed with two relatively spry parents pushing 90, I glide through life with the fresh idealism of a young child. Time is irrelevant. So, any signs that I might be infirm, wearing down, or *mortal* cause a logjam in my mind, what they call "cognitive dissonance." But here I was, trying to assimilate debilitating sensations that seemed to have colonized my youthful body.

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In the long run, my way didn't work. By December 2013, I was having pain just walking. Getting around New York City to teach my classes, buy groceries, run errands, visit doctors, whatever was increasingly problematic. Often I just stopped moving altogether, pausing mid-block as though expecting I would somehow be magically airlifted to my destination. Subways were evil because climbing stairs hurt way more than just walking. People were stopping to ask if I needed help.



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That was February 2014. By April I was having pain walking more than about 15 minutes—not great in a pedestrian city like New York, where my prime means of travel to/from clients and classes is walking. By late spring I also had a pronounced limp, which was alarming my yoga students, who look to me for sound and safe practices to keep their own bodies well. I feared I'd soon be unemployed. Turning to me for guidance might seem like asking a chain smoker to help them quit cigarettes. I felt like a fraud espousing the life-enhancing gifts of yoga while feeling my own body disintegrate from the inside out.

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So far I've focused on how scary all of this was. I was afraid for my physical wellbeing. Afraid to lose my status as a self-sufficient person who could navigate the world on two good legs. Afraid my career as a yoga teacher would come to an abrupt end, that all the years I'd put into studying, practicing, and perfecting my teaching skills would go to waste. And that I'd end up homeless. In a wheelchair.

What I haven't mentioned is how angry I was about this turn of events. I cursed God. I cursed my body for betraying me. I cursed the evil genes I'd inherited from my father's side of the family (where I traced arthritis and other forms of joint disease). Most of all I cursed myself for poor diet and lifestyle habits stretching back to my tween years, which probably exacerbated my condition. I woke up many nights to the pain and quickly transitioned to a rage that made any further sleep impossible. I'd visualize blowing up my body, my room, the house. I wanted *out*. Out of a situation that I didn't deserve and couldn't control. My best solutions always involved violence, aimed at the world, at myself, or both. I got why mass murderers shoot everyone in sight and then finish themselves off.

But under the anger was deep, deep grief. Rage inevitably sputtered out and landed me in tears. I love to move. I love to walk, run, swim, and dance. Most of all I love yoga, which has released tension, eased anxiety, lifted dark moods, boosted my self-confidence, and taught me the value of patience, perseverance, and humility. Yoga has returned me to the person I once was as a little, little kid: full of curiosity and enthusiasm, of laughter and wit. I grieved the loss of this powerful tool. I pictured returning to the high-strung, stressed-out, joyless person I was 20 years before and wondered if I'd have the will to go on. Waves of deep sadness washed over me from the beginning of my pain until my full recovery. I doubt whether more than a day or two went by between bouts of tears or morbid reflection. The helium balloon of my spirit was being dragged under water by the relentless tug of an unseen anchor. I didn't want to lose who I had become but saw no way to avoid the downward spiral.

For more information on Lois, check out her [website](#).

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