

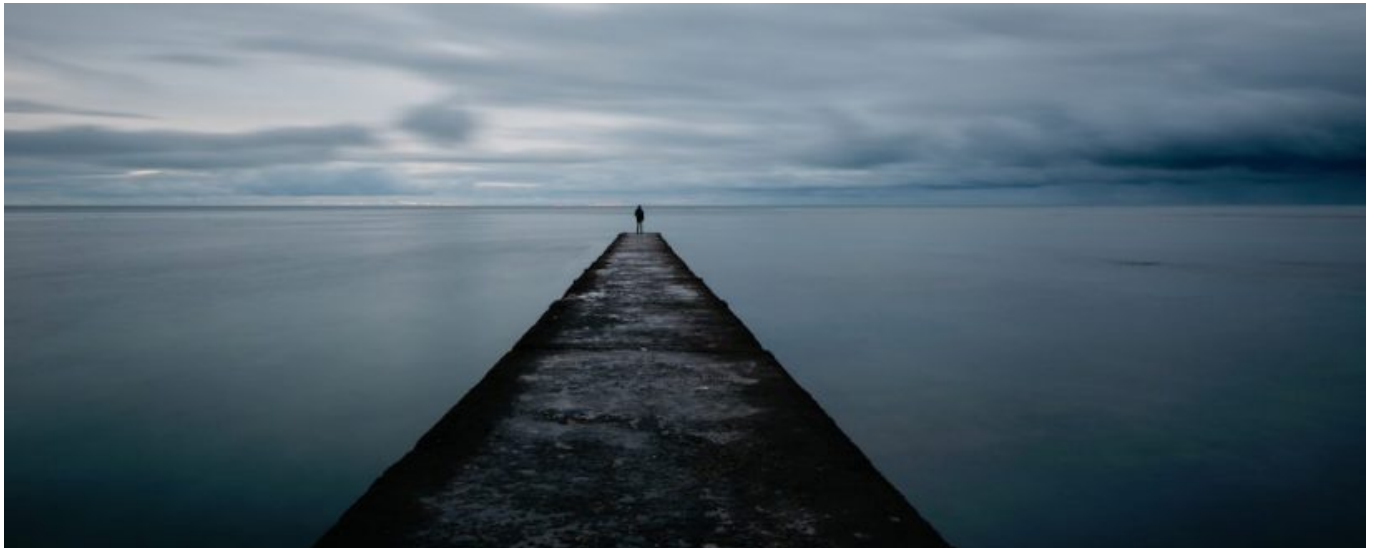


KARYN SHANKS MD

Heart, Hope, Healing

Self-Care: How to Cope With the Loneliness

BY KARYN SHANKS MD | APRIL 21, 2017



Our efforts at self-care can make us freaks! There may be a sea change of healthy lifestyle enthusiasm out there but our worlds are still filled with people who aren't there yet. How do we manage the awkward silences or overt criticism that can come from the people in our lives—including trusted family and friends—when we tell them about our meditation practices, healthy eating, or militant sleep schedule?

I took an especially deep dive into intensive self-care nearly two decades ago. It was necessary to address the exhaustion, overwhelm, migraine headaches, and brain fog I'd been experiencing since medical school, residency, and giving birth to my two sons. I took gluten, dairy, and sugar out of my diet, dedicated myself to my morning journaling and meditation practice, and made sure I protected my daily exercise and sleep time. These simple practices revolutionized my energy and wellbeing. They also set me apart from most people I knew.

At first I felt awkward and uncomfortable. How do I explain what I was doing in a way that was acceptable to others? That didn't invite judgment? I married into a strongly traditional

medical family. My new self-care practices didn't fit into that paradigm—or the one that I had trained in. But what I was learning about the body in more innovative and non-traditional terms through my training in Functional Medicine made sense, was backed by science, and approached people as whole beings—a concept that resonated strongly with me. And most importantly, my evolving self-care regimen worked for me and was helping my clients resolve their chronic problems.

My healing food plan was a curiosity to my family at first and not accepted for a very long time. We've since learned that we're an entire family of gluten sensitives—many of them have since embraced gluten-free diets and enjoy great improvements in their wellbeing. They came around eventually.

Over the years I've become even more of a freak as I take increasingly better care of myself. I've learned to be unapologetic about it. If people don't get it, they don't get it. I don't care. I've got to do what's best for me and everyone is responsible for their own health and wellbeing. I've embraced my self-care practices as essential. I live them and teach others. The foundation of my medical practice is how what we do for ourselves is the essence of sustainable healing.

I'd like to suggest these five simple steps for managing the backlash you may get as you create positive change in your life through self-care:

- Be clear and resolute about your intentions for healing. Gather your information, create your plan, and take full responsibility for it. Don't depend on others to validate what you are doing. This is your gig.
- Change makes people feel uncomfortable. People may initially bristle at you opting out of the pizza and beer or the late night out, but if they are your true friends, they'll come around.
- When we create positive changes in our lives we inspire those around us to do the same. We get to be a leader and a light for others. Let this knowledge energize your efforts.
- Clearly explain to your family and friends what you are doing and ask for their support. Don't expect them to read your mind. We all need help. Ask for it. You might be surprised.
- Often times people use bad habits to numb themselves from stressful or painful emotions. As you choose healthier habits you will become fundamentally different than

many of the people in your life. This can feel alienating and lonely at first. Seek out the company of like-minded souls.

Share your stories about how the people around you respond to your efforts at self-care and self-improvement. We're in this together!

[Reclaim Your Energy Using the Nine Domains of Healing](#) by Karyn Shanks, MD.

[Reclaim Your Energy and Vitality Through Self-Care](#) by Karyn Shanks, MD.

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Karyn Shanks, MD, is a physician who lives and practices in Iowa City. Her work is inspired by the science of Functional Medicine, body-mind principles, and wisdom gleaned from the transformational journeys of thousands of clients over her twenty-five-year career. Her work honors each individual and the power of their stories, their inner wisdom, and innate healing potential. She believes that the bones of healing are in what we do for ourselves. She is the author of *Liftoff*, a manual of energy recovery and healing through essential self-care practices.

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