



KARYN SHANKS MD

Heart, Hope, Healing

iPosture: a Pain in the Neck as Well as the Heart

BY KARYN SHANKS MD | MARCH 26, 2016



***ihunch* is the stereotypical iposture that we see all around us.**

The term was coined by New Zealand physiotherapist, Steve August, to describe what we all look like hunched over our electronic devices.

You know what I'm talking about. It's how everyone looks these days whether seated or walking along, phone out, head and upper torso leaning into the screen. Hooked!

ihunch is responsible for an epidemic of neck pain. Millions of us are using iPhones, iPads and laptop computers for hours on end and you can see us—we all look the same—seated, hunched over (hence “ihunch”), shoulders collapsed, neck bent forward, head yanking on our necks-ouch! And...hearts closed.

Our heads weigh 10 pounds on average. Flexing forward just 40-60 degrees (I've even seen people hold their necks *horizontally* while looking at their phones!) increases the weight experienced by our necks and upper backs to 50-60 pounds. This is a highly compromising position for our necks: the load is excessive and it makes our necks weak, compounding the problem. Further, the closed posture diminishes our inhalations, decreasing the flow of oxygen to our hard working muscles. No wonder we hurt!

Neck pain is only part of the story.

We are closing off our hearts! A closed heart leads to less power, presence and confidence. Just ask Amy Cuddy, Harvard social psychologist who studies the influence of posture on our emotions and self-perception. Her work shows that the more open body postures (heart open) increase our power and confidence. She has observed that *ihunch* subjects are less assertive and report more depression and less optimism.

Powerlessness and depression effect our posture, causing us to collapse our bodies forward in self-protection. It seems to work both ways: the closed forward posture likewise *begets* powerlessness and depression.

How we carry our bodies powerfully influences how we think and feel, as well as how others respond to us. The implications of this are scary. An epidemic of neck pain and global depression, pessimism and loss of hope?

Life is tough enough. It's good to be aware of the things *we can control* that can lighten our load.

I love my electronic devices. But I am concerned about the impact of too much leaning in, not just on our necks, but on our sense of self and our relationships with others.

The answer?

Use those peripheral brains with relish! But be mindful and self-aware.

Keep an open posture: sit up, put shoulders back, lift head, open heart. Our open hearts keep us expansive, magnetic and in our power.

And pause, take breaks and change position frequently. Working at a standing station for part of our day can help us to maintain an open-hearted posture for longer periods of time.

Oh, and breathe deeply. We need all the breath we can get!

Amy Cuddy, Presence, Bringing your Boldest Self to your Biggest Challenges, Little Brown, 2015.

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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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