



KARYN SHANKS MD

Heart, Hope, Healing

My Journey as a Functional Medicine Nutritionist

BY KARYN SHANKS MD | SEPTEMBER 22, 2016



Hi! I'm Lisa, a registered, licensed nutritionist (dietitian is the old-fashioned word!). I started working with Dr. Karyn Shanks at the Center for Medicine and Healing Arts in early 2016. My professional background is diverse-I've done everything from general hospital work to teaching college seminars to working for a high-risk pregnancy clinic. And I spent some years at home as CEO of a growing family! But it was my personal health journey that ultimately helped point me toward work in functional medicine.

In 2010 I "suddenly" developed debilitating gastrointestinal symptoms. (Looking back, I actually can see many warning signs as my health deteriorated over a period of several years.) I could barely eat anything, my weight plummeted, and I didn't have the energy to complete even routine tasks. I had already eliminated gluten from my diet the previous year when I had noticed it bothering me, so I was baffled by what was happening. Eventually, over the course of about a year, my insightful nurse-practitioner and I were able to sort out and address the complex mixture of problems I was experiencing, which included imbalances in gut bacteria, multiple food intolerances, nutrient deficiencies, inflammation and

autoimmunity. Even then, it took several years to adequately treat everything that was happening and help me feel really good again.

Because none of these problems could be seen by examining me, and almost none of them were showing up on standard blood tests, we were left with tools such as an elimination diet, stool testing, probiotics, carefully selected vitamin and herbal supplements, and lots and lots of deductive thinking with frequent references to basic biochemistry and microbiology. In other words, functional medicine. We had to find the root causes of what was occurring in order to fix it. This experience convinced me that the only real solutions to chronic, complex illness lie in the approach of functional medicine, which considers the whole person and their environment, genetics, stresses, and nutrient intake and seeks the biochemical and microbiological causes of disease.

My philosophy as a nutritionist is to consider each client as an individual with unique genetics, life experiences, stresses, and diet. I work with each person to uncover food intolerances, nutrient deficiencies, environmental triggers for inflammation and autoimmunity, microbiome imbalances, and metabolic issues. One of my biggest interests is gut health, including conditions such as IBS and IBD. We are learning more about the gut microbiome every day-it's complicated and amazing!

True restoration of health in complex illness is like putting together a puzzle-each piece connects to another piece, and they are all a necessary part of the whole picture. As a nutritionist, I believe passionately in the importance of food as a major piece of this health puzzle. Every bite of food we put in our mouths contributes to health or disease by its communication with our genes, by nutrient sufficiency or deficiency, by contaminants or toxins, by antioxidants and other healthful polyphenols. I love helping people rediscover health through the power of food!



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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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