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Heart, Hope, Healing

Anxiety Reboot in Thirty Seconds

BY KARYN SHANKS MD | SEPTEMBER 25, 2016



Looking for a quick way to boost your confidence, relieve anxiety, and get yourself ready for the challenges ahead? Try powering up: use your body to reboot your emotions in thirty seconds.

I was feeling mopey and weepy. Summer was coming to an end and it was almost time to say goodbye to my youngest son as he went off to college. Not only that, I would soon be saying

goodbye to my oldest son as he ventured forth to his new job in another city. I was feeling weak and sad—my head down, my shoulders drooping—and I was having trouble holding my tears back. Then my husband said to me, knowing that I needed a reboot, “Go do your power poses!”

We were standing in a gazebo in a park in Westcliffe, Colorado, waiting for our son to finish his soccer practice. I walked to the edge of the enclosure, looked up into the blazing blue Colorado sky, raised my arms straight over my head, opened my heart, adjusted my legs to hip-distance apart, and waited. I still felt sad (I adore my sons and miss them when they are away), but the weak and wimpy in me began to shift instantly. I repeated a few affirmations to juice up my empowerment, kept my eyes on the sky, thanked the Universe for taking care of me, and let that moment deliver to my open arms the strength that was mine, already inside of me, needing my body to unfold and let it rise up. I could hear Wayne Dyer whisper, “I am, I am.”

As I stood there in my open-hearted pose, a flood of positive emotions quickly replaced what I had just been muddled in. Truths I hadn’t had access to just seconds before were now clear to me: It was good that my sons were heading out into the rest of their lives, both excited about the adventures that lie ahead, that they had prepared hard for. Their growth and evolution is a beautiful thing, and I’ve gotten to be a central part of all that. And it was clear to me that contracting my body and heart around the sadness of their impending departure had left no room for the positive emotions to touch and remind me of all that is true.

Power Pose Science

I learned about the science of power poses from Amy Cuddy, PhD, and I learned about their practical application from my yoga teachers. In her book, *Presence*, Amy Cuddy describes her scientific research showing how our posture literally changes our minds—it affects our confidence, power, self-perception, as well as how others perceive us. The open-posture poses she studied not only changed her subjects’ minds, but also caused important shifts in their physiologies by raising testosterone levels (the hormone associated with power and confidence), and lowering cortisol (the major stress hormone).

Yogis have taught for millennia that the body, when opened and balanced through yoga practice, is primed for the flow of energy, love, and power. Energy flows through the powerful body- and heart-opening postures involved in sun salutes and the warrior series. And we feel strong and empowered—and grateful—when we walk out of class.

Power Poses Open the Heart to Gratitude

I don’t think it’s an accident that open-hearted postures lead us to greater presence and personal power. Gratitude, a primary emotion of the heart center, opens our hearts to what is true and good, right now—to the grace that is all around us in this moment. It’s our bodies leading us to receive the power of the present.

Reduce Anxiety by Powering Up Your Presence

Any open posture will do to power up your presence. You can stay seated with shoulders engaged and pulled back, arms opened out to the sides, body unhindered, heart open. Perhaps your feet are up on the desk in front of you, or your arms are draped over the backs of some adjacent chairs. You can also stand with your body in an open, receptive pose and raise your arms and face to the sky, heart open, eyes facing up, like I was in the park in Colorado. It is equally effective to simply *imagine* yourself in an open posture. As Cuddy showed in her work, even people who can't move or are wheel-chair-bound can receive the benefits of this practice through visualization.

If you are new to this you may feel vulnerable in your openness, but try to stay with it. Trust yourself. Just thirty seconds will shift you into a completely new state of being. When I need a reboot, I hold the posture, breathe deeply, affirm my strength, and wait, listening for the shift. Repeat as necessary.

Try it and share your experience with us.

Further Reading: Amy Cuddy, Presence: Bringing Your Boldest Self to Your Biggest Challenges, 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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