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Heart, Hope, Healing

I'm Not Feeling Better: Is it Failure? Or is There More to Do?

BY KARYN SHANKS MD | AUGUST 18, 2019



"This food plan isn't working for me."

"This treatment has done absolutely nothing."

"I thought I'd be feeling better by now. This is a failure."

Do these "failures" sound familiar?

Healing can be so hard. And can take so long.

What if you're working hard? To recover your energy and wellbeing? To get your life back?
And you still struggle?

Have you failed? Is your healing strategy a failure?

Redefine Failure

It's important not to mistake "failure" for something not working out.

You're going to find that many of the things you try in order to heal don't work for you. That may not mean they aren't good for you.

It may mean there's more to do.

One of my beloved Functional Medicine mentors, Dr. Sidney Baker, speaks of what he calls the "three tack rule."

The Three Tack Rule

If you sit on three tacks, they hurt like hell and no amount of symptomatic treatment will make you feel better.

If you take one tack away, or better yet two, you've successfully taken care of two-thirds of your problem. That's huge! But you still hurt like hell. You may not even recognize how much you've accomplished.

It's only when you remove that third remaining tack that the pain goes away.

Still, removal of each successive tack was critical to resolving the whole problem at a deep, root-cause level.

We're Not Failures, We're Complicated!

We often have to address many aspects of a complex problem before suffering is relieved. This doesn't mean each step isn't important. It doesn't mean we've failed. It just means we are complex. We have to tend to the whole of the problem to make real progress.

If you and your healthcare team believe what you are doing is important to your healing, hang on. There is more to do before there is enough recovery for you to *feel* substantially better. Keep the faith.

Your “Failure” is Showing You a Better Path

There will also be times when a treatment plan is wrong for you. It can be impossible to know this until you embark on the journey and commit to the path. But that still isn't failure. It's learning what you needed to know—from what *didn't* work—to lead you toward a better path for you.

How do we best manage our “failures?”

- Remain aware of your body and your feelings.
- Check in with your team.
- Work together toward meaningful change in direction and recommit.

As you keep the faith, ask yourself:

Is there something else I need to learn?

Is there something else I need to do first?

Am I on the right path?

Ponder these questions, then share with the rest of us what you came up with.

Resources

Sydney Baker MD. [Detoxification and Healing: The Key to Optimal Health](#). 2003.

Karyn Shanks MD. [Healing Our Lives Means Embracing Failure](#). 2016.

Karyn Shanks MD. [How to Heal: Identify the Competing Commitment Standing in Your Way](#). 2019.

Karyn Shanks MD. [How to Heal Chronic Fatigue: Your Beautiful Energy Roadmap.](#) 2019.

Karyn Shanks MD. [Optimism: The Key to Starting Over When We've Failed.](#) 2017.

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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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