

BUILDING RESILIENCE: The American Institute of Stress

It is the vision of AIS to continue its mission of serving as a clearinghouse for innovative stress research as it becomes available and to continue to confer its Fellowship and Diplomate credentials to stress management physicians, psychologists and other health care professionals.

The American Institute of Stress (AIS) is a non-profit organization, headquartered in Fort Worth, Texas which imparts factual information on stress reduction, stress in the workplace, stress related to military service and the health consequences of chronic, unmanaged stress. AIS was founded in New York in 1978, at the request of Dr. Hans Selye, the “father” of the stress concept, to serve as a clearinghouse of all stress related information.

The Institute is dedicated to advancing our understanding of the role of stress in health and illness, the nature and importance of mind/body relationships and how to use our vast innate potential for self-healing. The paramount goal at AIS is to provide a clearinghouse of stress related information to the general public, physicians and other health professionals interested in exploring the multitudinous and varied effects of stress on our health and quality of life.

Today, AIS serves the global community through online programs, classes and a suite of publications, each carefully developed to serve the various interests and needs of AIS members and the general public. The three publications are: *Health and Stress*, edited by legendary stress expert Paul J. Rosch, MD and now in its 25th year. This is the AIS flagship publication and it is distributed to AIS members only, covering high level stress concepts utilized by health care practitioners. Second is *Contentment*, edited by Heidi Hanna, author of the New York Times bestseller *The Sharp Solution*, covering stress topics relating to daily life such as workplace, family and financial stressors. The third publication is *Combat*

Stress, written with service members, veterans and their families in mind and edited by our esteemed Combat Stress Board chaired by Colonel Kathy T. Platoni. It addresses the epidemic of post traumatic stress, as well as other stress topics specific to military service. *Contentment* and *Combat Stress* are available by free subscription through www.stress.org.

Stress has become such an ingrained part of our daily vocabulary and existence that it is difficult to believe that the current use of the term originated only a little more than 50 years ago, when it was coined by Dr. Hans Selye. As a medical student, Selye observed that patients suffering from different diseases often exhibited identical signs and symptoms. They just “looked sick.” This observation may have been the first step in his recognition of “stress.” He researched and described the General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS), defined as the non-specific response of the body to any demands placed upon it. The syndrome details how stress induces hormonal and autonomic responses and, over time, how these hormonal changes can lead to ulcers, high blood pressure, arteriosclerosis,

arthritis, kidney disease, and allergic reactions, to name a few of the diseases stress either causes or contributes to. Selye’s multi-faceted work and concepts have been utilized in medicine and in almost all biological disciplines from endocrinology to animal breeding and social-psychology. It is from this deeply rooted scientific platform that the Institute bases its operations today.

AIS Executive Director Kellie Marksberry defines the Institute’s mission: “It is our vision to continue in our originating mission of serving as a clearinghouse for innovative stress research as it becomes available and also to continue to confer our Fellowship and Diplomate credentials to stress management physicians, psychologists and other health care professionals.” Marksberry went on

to say, “It is vital that we carefully guard our foundation in science and continue to serve as an ombudsman in this rapidly expanding field where a plethora of extravagant claims for worthless devices, nutritional products and various other approaches threatened to drown out legitimate research efforts and advances in stress management.”



The mission of the American Institute of Stress is to improve the health of the community and the world by setting the standard of excellence of stress management in education, research, clinical care and the workplace. Diverse and inclusive, The American Institute of Stress educates medical practitioners, scientists, health care professionals and the public; conducts research; and provides information, training and techniques to prevent human illness related to stress.

Today AIS works to serve their mission with a focus on four key areas:

- **The Military.** AIS provides resources, solutions and techniques to reduce the negative repercussions of military service under wartime conditions.
- **Daily Life Stress.** AIS serves the needs of the general population through its website and educational programs in stress management. Many stress management techniques are available free at www.stress.org that can help people cope with difficult times in their lives and make them more resilient to the stressors of daily life. Simple breathing exercises can vastly improve the quality of life of those who practice them, and AIS can show you how.
- **Workplace Stress.** Numerous studies show that job stress is far and away the major source of stress for American adults. AIS addresses this need with programs that address various corporate/job stress issues and offers consulting services and a speakers bureau of AIS Fellows and Diplomates for corporations to reduce stress and improve productivity of employees.
- **Horizons Program.** The Horizons Program supports discovery and dialog in the areas of expanding human potential, unlocking the secrets of the universe, understanding dimensionality and focused intentionality as well as various concepts of reality. AIS serves as an information exchange and support system for the world's most progressive scientists to explore the universe and biophysics to expand our understanding of reality.

Ms. Marksberry says, "The key to the success of our programs are our outstanding Fellows, Diplomates and Members. We could not move ahead with any projects or programming without their energy and expertise propelling us forward."

The American Institute of Stress focuses tremendous efforts on fulfilling the needs of members and visitors. AIS offers many services to help people access the information they need, quickly and easily. AIS houses an extensive archive and research section on their website to enable visitors to search for the information they require with keywords and cross references. AIS provides unbiased book reviews of stress related publications, maintains an active Speakers Bureau comprised of AIS Fellows and Diplomates with expertise in a wide range of stress management related specialties. Many are available for lectures, consultation or to serve as Expert Witnesses in workers' compensation and other litigation. AIS also provides "AIS Certification" of products and programs that meet their standards of excellence through rigorous scientific evaluation. The AIS seal indicates that the branded entity delivers on its claims as a stress management training resource or tool.

AIS President Daniel Kirsch, PhD, DAAPM, FAIS commented, "Our services are in increasing demand as many Americans are

struggling with the global financial slowdown, and our service members come home from war suffering with both physical and emotional wounds, our children are put under increasing pressure to perform and a myriad of other stressors face us in our daily lives. Stress is designed to make us stupid. After all, you can't be thinking about what you might have for dinner when you are being chased by a tiger that would like to have you for dinner right now. However you also can't live in that 'fight or flight' state or you will experience stress related symptoms and diseases. Under the unwavering

leadership of our boards and committees we are poised to be there for those who need us most. We are particularly proud to assist members of our military and their families with the best information, tools and techniques to ease their unique suffering from combat operational stress (COS) and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)."

As mentioned above, there are three membership categories at AIS: **Fellow:** Conferring the credential of FAIS, for those who hold a doctorate degree and have been a pro-

fessional in practice for at least five years.

Diplomate: Conferring the credential of DAIS, for those who hold an advanced degree and/or healthcare licenses (e.g., nurse, social worker, etc.) and who have worked in the field of stress management for at least three years.

Member: Anyone can join as a member to support the AIS mission and enjoy access to the latest stress information and research as it becomes available.

Members at all levels at AIS propel the mission forward and are encouraged to not only access the substantial cache of stress research and statistics, but to also contribute their expertise and knowledge to continue to build upon and improve the science behind stress management. AIS maintains a Learning Center with multimedia educational programs covering all aspects of stress management.

According to Dr. Kirsch, "The AIS mission seems significant, and it is, but with the dedication and generosity of the members and volunteers the American Institute of Stress will continue to be there, making a difference in the lives of those who need us most." He continued, "These are certainly extraordinary-

ly stressful times for our nation's military, families and businesses. While we cannot hope to avoid the stresses that await us tomorrow, we can learn to be more mindful of our thoughts and actions to better manage stress before it interferes with our innate pursuit of a long happy life."•

To learn more about AIS, and to subscribe to their informative free publications visit www.stress.org. To join, click on "Join" on the top navigational bar and then "Memberships" on the left side navigational list and complete the online application to the appropriate membership level.



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