Time Out

ARE YOU ADDICTED TO STRESS?
The mission of AIS 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.

AIS provides a diverse and inclusive environment that fosters intellectual discovery, creates and transmits innovative knowledge, improves human health, and provides leadership to the world on stress related topics.
Contentment is a quarterly newsletter with news and advertising designed with the general public in mind. It appeals to all those interested in the myriad and complex interrelationships between stress and health because technical jargon is avoided and it is easy to understand. Contentment is archived online at stress.org. Information in this publication is carefully compiled to ensure accuracy.

Copyright © 2014 the American Institute of Stress (AIS). All rights reserved. All materials on AIS’ website and in AIS’ newsletters are the property of AIS and may not be copied, reproduced, sold, or distributed without permission. For permission, contact editor@stress.org. Liberal use of AIS fact sheets and news releases is allowable with attribution. Please use the following: "Reproduced from the American Institute of Stress website [or newsletter], © AIS [year]."

AIS Daily Life Stress Board

Chaired by Dr. Michel Woodbury–Farina, the role of this board is to develop initiatives and communications to serve the stress management needs of all people.

Michel Woodbury-Farina, MD, FAIS
Cynthia Ackrill, MD, FAIS
Heidi Hanna, PhD, FAIS
Sandra Thebaud, PhD, FAIS
David Sollars, MAc, LAc, HMC, DAIS
We recognize that the brain is hardwired to crave new information, and that with each email, text or phone call we solidify neural pathways in the brain that strengthen habits of thought and behavior. Obtaining information is certainly important, especially in a society that is constantly reminding us that we are not enough, and do not have enough, to feel safe. Might it be possible that our constant longing for more information, fear of missing out and a neurochemical cascade provides the perfect storm for an addiction to stress and stimulation?

Once I realized I was addicted to stress I did what anyone would needing a jolt of stress hormones and committed to write a book about it. Since the release of *Stressaholic: 5 Steps to Transform Your Relationship With Stress* I’ve had the opportunity to discuss the notion of stress addiction at length with clients, participants in workshops, and members of the media. Through these discussions and my own reflection on the challenges of building a healthy relationship with stress I’ve recognized three primary reasons we become dependent on stress in our lives – stimulation (energy), distraction (avoidance) and validation (status).

When we feel run down, it’s easy to keep plugging along despite warning signals that we are exhausted, burnt out or overly stressed. As we will discuss, stress is not the enemy here but rather our lack of recovery. In fact, stress can be quite beneficial, leading us to experience significant growth in our life, but only when we are able to find balance and also engage in periods of rest and relaxation. We must not wait to incorporate this critical recovery time, for we all know that without energy we can’t sustain life. We must recharge on a consistent basis to make sure we have the energy we need to serve those we care about.
On a final note, we lost a dear friend earlier this year way too soon. Judy Martin was an AIS member and contributor to Contentment Magazine. In one of our last conversations together, Judy interviewed me about my new book, *Stressaholic*, which you can see here:
Tools, Tips and Techniques to help you live better!

National Geographic: The Science of Stress

In this 55 minute video learn about workplace hierarchy, control and stress chemistry
GET INSIDE OUR HEAD

It’s Not Our Credentials That Make AIS So Impressive, It’s the Fellows That Go with Them.

The American Institute of Stress is a non-profit organization established in 1978 at the request of Dr. Hans Selye (the Founder of the Stress Concept) to serve as a clearinghouse for information on all stress related subjects. AIS Founding Fellows include:

Paul Rosch Linus Pauling Alvin Toffler Bob Hope Michael DeBakey Herbert Benson Charles Spielberger

Join our prominent psychologists, physicians, other health care practitioners and health conscious individuals who are interested in exploring the multitudinous and varied effects of stress on our health and quality of life.

The American Institute of Stress invites YOU to enhance your credentials with FAIS and add your name to our Gallery of Distinguished Fellows.

Over the last 35 years, we’ve expanded our services and broadened our reach, but our dedication to science hasn’t changed a bit.

Our four focus areas include:
1. Combat Stress
2. Daily Life Stress
3. Workplace Stress
4. Expanding Human Potential

We produce three e-magazines focused on different stress related topics...

Visit stress.org to download your FAIS or DAIS application

Join us in our mission to Engage, Educate and Empower the global community with science based stress management information, tools and techniques so people can live happier, healthier and longer lives!

We are always looking for new contributors to our magazines. If you would like to submit an article, email your idea to editor@stress.org

American Institute of Stress
9112 Camp Bowie West Blvd. #228
Fort Worth, TX 76116

www.stress.org

USA Main: (682) 239-6823
Fax: (817) 394-0593
Email: info@stress.org
First we got your brain...

Now we need your heart.

The American Institute of Stress helps people learn to manage their stress every single day. We help veterans returning from war find a sense of normalcy again. We help students who are stressed about exams, busy schedules and bullies reach their fullest potential. And we help people like you deal with whatever life throws at you! With your ongoing support, we will continue to be there providing people with relief for today and hope for tomorrow.

Coming Soon: An Easy Way to Support AIS. Check our new Marketplace in the coming weeks to see books and products that can help you understand and manage your stress, and for an easy way to show your support for our mission.
No two days, weeks or years are the same at AIS because so much of what we do depends on the needs of the people we serve.

Here are some examples of what the generosity of our donors allowed us to achieve in our 2013 fiscal year.

An estimated 500,000 Veterans and Service Members were helped to find their way back to normalcy after the trauma of war.

An estimated 1,180,000 People gained access to information on therapeutic breathing, meditation, the Quieting Response and other stress management skills.

More than 4,450 People read our free e-magazines, blogs and articles everyday.

Nearly 1,000 People attended stress management education presentations in person and online.

More than 400 Teachers learned how to recognize stress in their students and stop it in its tracks.

Also, more than 1,500 Executives were shown the damaging effects of workplace stress and how to avoid it.
Stress Addiction: Causes, Consequences, and Cures

Excerpts from “Stress ‘Addiction’: Causes, Consequences, and Cures” by Paul J. Rosch, MD, FACP
From an evolutionary or teleologic viewpoint, stimulation of the sympathetic nervous system and a jolt of epinephrine made a lot of sense for primitive man. As a consequence, the pupils dilated so that he could see better and glycogen stores in the body were quickly broken down to elevate the blood sugar and provide additional energy. Blood was directed away from the gut, where it was no longer needed for digestive processes, and shunted to the muscles of the arms and legs so that he could fight better or run faster. The blood pressure rose, and there was an increased flow of blood to the brain to improve cerebral function – in short, a whole host of adaptive changes occurred to prepare our ancestors for life-preserving “fight or flight.”

However, the nature of stress for modern man is quite different. It is not an occasional confrontation with a saber tooth tiger or pack of wolves but, rather, problems at work or at home, financial difficulties, or simply getting stuck in a traffic jam on the way to a vital appointment. Furthermore, such challenges and provocations occur not once a fortnight but many times during our daily life. The tragedy is that our bodies still respond in the same old archaic fashion. Unfortunately, that release of epinephrine is now not only purposeless and inappropriate but actually harmful, with lethal potential for causing a heart attack, sudden death, stroke, hypertension, peptic ulcer, diabetes, and a variety of other disorders that might appropriately be labeled “disease of civilization.”
Stress Habituation

It seem plausible that the Type A coronary-prone person may have become habituated to stress, a learned, fixed response with obviously damaging consequences; there is even a remote chance that physiological changes may establish an actual addiction to epinephrine or other central nervous system substances. Support for this comes from Solomon’s “opponent-process theory of motivation” 1,2, which basically asserts that man is by nature susceptible to various habits and addiction that provide a sense of pleasure. However when man is deprived of the thing that is craved, an opposing emotional state often results. The exhilarating feeling of being in love can change to melancholy if you can no longer be with the object of your affection. People who are hooked on skydiving may become severely depressed if the weather interferes with their activities for a day. Similarly, withdrawal from cigarettes, alcohol, narcotics, tranquilizers, or recreational drugs often produces emotional states that are opposite from the sensations those substances induce.

The Learned Response

Because of his or her psychological condition, the Type A individual may unconsciously seek ways to get those repeated surges or highs. That could come in the form of constructing little contests, like getting to the airport a few minutes before takeoff, turning a car trip into a race by establishing certain times at which check points must be reached, or purposely leaving a desk untidy or delaying an assignment to the last minute – just so there will be some sort of contest or last-minute challenge. Deprived of that epinephrine stimulus, the Type A individual is apt to be irritable and depressed. Thus, recuperating from a heart attack by spending three weeks on a deserted beach might be a perfect prescription for one person but deadly for some Type A’s, who could be in a state of agitation in a matter of hours.

The Role of Addictive Mechanisms

If one can become pathologically dependent on stress or epinephrine, it is possible that research on addiction or habituation to other substances, such as cocaine or marijuana, would provide useful information. Like stress, drug habituation and addiction are difficult to define, but an important characteristic common to both appears to be lack of self-control. Addictive behavior appears to be mediated by changes in neurotransmitter activity in the brain. The rate at which neurons fire is determined by the concentration of neurotransmitters at the synapse. The higher the concentration, the more rapid the transmission and the more intense is the resultant feeling or sensation. It is possible that addiction occurs because people either repeat some behavioral pattern or ingest various addictive substances that elicit a desired mood.

Obviously, any form of habituation or addiction represents a two-edged sword. While initially providing gratification, it can ultimately prove harmful or lethal. Prime examples of this are the jogger who persists in running despite any number of orthopedic problems that have resulted, which would normally preclude such activity because of pain. The confirmed alcoholic with cirrhosis, the cigarette smoker with emphysema or Buerger’s disease, and the compulsive gambler already in debt are other instances. Some people may be unaware of the harmful aspects of their addictions or,
tively, persist in attempting to satisfy their cravings despite a knowledge of the dire consequences.

**Stress Transmitting Mechanisms**

Many persons with apparently flagrante Type A behavior appear to thrive on stress and lead long, healthy, productive lives. Certain symphony conductors, performing artist, and entertainers represent good examples. Analysis of such stress-resistant personalities suggests that in general such persons are in control of their activities, have a strong commitment to what they are doing, and enjoy or respond to challenges rather than being overwhelmed by them. Recent research has challenged the conventional concept that autonomic responses to positive and negative emotions are the same. A recent study reported not only that autonomic activity could be differentiated between such states but also that even negative emotions (such as sadness, fear, and disgust) could be further differentiated by simply contracting facial muscles into the expressive forms associated with the affective states.

Similarly, persons who are productive, who have pride of accomplishment, and who derive pleasure from doing something they enjoy that benefits others appear to have health patterns different from those of Type A counterparts who are constantly frustrated by self-imposed unrealistic standards and goals. Such behavior, which Selye termed altruistic egotism, makes sense from an evolutionary or teleologic viewpoint. When primitive man was faced with a natural disaster, such as flood or attack by a pack of wolves, banding together with others to combat such life-threatening situations had survival value. Consequently, nature tended to perpetuate the survival of a species so motivated. From another viewpoint, the craving for an epinephrine-induced high may no longer be required for people whose self-esteem has been significantly raised by activities that are productive and fulfilling.

While stress is a complex phenomenon, it is apparent that many of its disastrous consequences are mediated by the release of neurohumoral chemicals related to epinephrine as well as various small brain peptides, either as a response to external stimuli or as unappreciated consequences of self-induced secretion. Such agencies have now been demonstrated to have a profound effect on the cardiovascular system as well as on immune competency, and play a significant role in the development of hypertension, coronary heart disease, cancer, and a variety of infectious disorders. Further insight into behavioral and pharmacologic methods of interrupting this vicious cycle of stress dependency offers great promise for the treatment and cure of many common “Diseases of Civilization.”

**References**


Could You Be a Stressaholic?

Excerpt from Dr. Heidi Hanna’s newest book: *Stressaholic*

Click to buy it now!
Stress, like love or beauty, lies in the eyes of the beholder. In perhaps it’s most simple definition, stress is simply a stimulus for change. Positive opportunities such as a family vacation, getting married or even winning the lottery all come with their share of stress and stimulation. And while it’s easy to blame stress on what’s going on around us, a significant part of our relationship with stress is based on the hidden internal stress we deal with each day --- eating too much of the wrong foods or too few of the right ones, living a sedentary lifestyle or overtraining at the gym, being a perfectionist or lacking motivation to get up in the morning.

So how do you know if you have an unhealthy dependence on stress?

The following few questions may help you figure it out:

Do you thrive on tight deadlines?
Do you often leave things until the last minute?
Do you have a difficult time doing nothing at all?
Does it take you a few days off to feel like you’re on vacation?
Do you spend much of your vacation time thinking about work?
Do you constantly worry about what you might be missing?
Do you feel stressed when you’re disconnected from your cell phone or computer?
Do you find it difficult to turn your brain off at night to sleep?
Do you feel as though there is never enough time to get things done?
Do you ever feel as though the work you put in for the day is not enough?
Do you lack time to see your friends or participate in hobbies you used to enjoy?
Do you feel as though you’re constantly running from one thing to the next?
Do you find yourself finishing, or wanting to finish, other peoples’ statements?
Do you wish I’d stop asking questions so you can get on with the book already?
Chances are, you answered “yes” to a good amount of these questions. But, who cares? We all have stress, and it’s not going anywhere -- so we might as well accept it, right? I even had a client tell me once, “I love my stress and I don’t want to manage it.” She spoke aloud the truth so many of us are living, whether we accept it or not: we thrive on stress. It makes us feel driven to succeed, brings energy, and gives meaning to our life. Our conversations often seem to involve a competition of who’s more stressed. “How are you?” “Stressed.” “Me too.” And then each party goes on to explain why they’re so stressed, with the person who’s worse off winning in our backwards way of thinking. This twisted social story tells us that the busier you are, the more stressed you are, the more important you are. Just take Seinfeld’s George Costanza, who made it a point to look annoyed so that his boss would assume he was doing something important.

The problem is not that you can’t handle your stress. You’re likely doing a fabulous job getting the things done that need to get done, meeting deadlines, and even attending a social event every once in a while (especially if it’s work related). But what is your experience of your life? Are you taking time to appreciate what you’re working so hard to accomplish -- or are you just speeding through in order to tackle the next item on your to-do list?

Perhaps more importantly, are you aware of the long-term impact that this stress-filled life has on you? Probably not. Or maybe like most addicts, you know the consequences of your behavior but you’re so hooked on it that coming down from stress feels uncomfortable -- and with such a busy schedule it’s just easier to stay amped up than deal with the detox of letting go. Remember the advertisement “this is your brain on drugs?” It certainly made a lasting impression. Unfortunately, it’s not just drugs that can cause our brains to feel scrambled. Unmanaged stress might be just as dangerous.

Stress (and drugs) have been shown to have the following side effects: increased heart rate and blood pressure, an increase in blood sugar, breakdown of muscle tissue, decreased digestive functioning, ulcers, blood clotting, migraines, skin problems, premature aging, loss of brain cells, social isolation and loneliness, anxiety, panic attacks, depression, substance abuse, relationship problems, lack of focus, multitasking and disengagement. In fact, a 20-year study by the University of London completed in the early 1990s found that unmanaged reactions to stress were a more dangerous risk factor for cancer and heart disease than either cigarette smoking or high-cholesterol foods. And stress may even be as addictive as drugs. In addition to the hormones adrenaline and noradrenaline, stress also releases the “feel good” chemical dopamine, which encourages repeat behaviors by activating the reward center in our brains. This may be at the heart of many addictive behaviors and substance abuse issues.

While it may seem a bit extreme to consider stress an addictive substance, it turns out the just about anything can become addictive depending on the individual who is responding. Addiction expert Stanton Peele has suggested that there is no habit that cannot become excessive, compulsive, or life endangering.
According to Peele, "Addiction... is not a label to be applied to specific things but to an involvement a person creates in time or space." It's all about the relationship that we build with our habits of behavior.

When we lose sight of our natural pulse, or worse -- intentionally disrupt it in order to accomplish something -- we trigger an adaptive response that becomes addictive. At its core, addiction is a dependence on some external or internal stimulus that causes either a feeling of pleasure or avoidance of pain. Early-stage stress addiction usually attracts us to sources of stress to get something positive --- a neurochemical satisfaction such as dopamine release, an intrinsic (internal) reward such as feeling needed, or an extrinsic (external) benefit such as money, power, or success.

As our addiction progresses, however, it becomes less about what we might get and more about avoiding loss, which brings with it an even stronger tie to our basic survival mechanisms. Instead of intentionally turning to stress-providing stimulation for positive reinforcements we now require them to avoid the pain of its absence. We shift from triggering positive dopamine to avoiding negative cortisol,
from seeking importance to avoiding insignificance, and from accomplishing success to merely remaining employed. This fear-based shift moves us from what appeared to be healthy striving to merely surviving. We can reverse this process by neurochemically rebalancing our brain, nourishing our mind and body with love and support, and establishing training behaviors or habits that strengthen our ability to resist stress’s addictive nature. As we’ve already discovered, stress itself is not the problem. Depending on or accepting stress without recovery despite hazardous consequences—such as fatigue, dissatisfaction in life, loss of joy, anxiety, etc— is what destroys our health, energy, and engagement.

Stress in and of itself is neither good nor bad; it just is. Therefore it is not the existence of stress that causes an addictive dependence; rather, it’s our individual response to the stress in our lives over time. Each person has unique experiences with stress throughout the lifespan; certain situations cause severe disability, while others enhance learning and facilitate growth.

In fact, a life without stress would be stressful. It would push us out of our comfort zone in the opposite direction, with a lack of stimulation for growth. Research shows that one of the highest spikes in human mortality occurs within six months of retirement. It is quite dangerous to go from being always “on” to a screeching halt. The human system is not designed to function in a state of all or nothing; yet because of our hectic environment and constant connection, people tend to be pulled back to the extremes. To operate most effectively, we need to find the balance between stress and recovery that enables us to experience challenge and growth without constantly breaking down.

**The Stressaholic Recovery Process - Recharge Your Energy and then Reprogram Your Life**

Stress can be good for us: facilitating important learning and stimulating personal growth. However, like an old rubber band we crack and break down when force is applied to our weakened system because we lack flexibility. Our world today is filled with outside stimulation and stress-inducing factors, with unrelenting demands on our time. But when we have the energy to be pliable and resilient, we are not only able to bounce back from challenges; we also become stronger as a result of the exercise.

Therefore, successful and sustainable stress management must start with a core foundation of energy to keep your brain and body functioning in a more optimal state. This allows the brain to facilitate opportunity-based processes for focus and attention, creativity and flexibility, and endurance over time. The messages that the body’s various hormones send the brain to regulate energy flow -- and maintain things like glucose and oxygen supply -- will provide us the stability we need for optimal functioning.

Consider your stress management strategies as building blocks of a pyramid. The foundational techniques will be those we continue to go back to when we feel overwhelmed or out of balance. This rest process will serve as the supporting structure we need to continue moving up to the pinnacle of health, happiness, and per-
formance. Key strategies to creating adequate rest go beyond just getting enough sleep. It’s critical that we also build in rest periods at least once every 90 minutes during the day to recharge our battery. Rituals such as listening to inspirational music, practicing deep breathing, doing some gentle stretching or going for a walk outside should be scheduled throughout the day and made a priority. Eliminating stimulating foods and other substances (caffeine, alcohol, nicotine) also helps the body reduce inflammation.

Once we have adequate rest and recovery built into our routine, we can then look to nourishing nutrients that will strengthen our core practice and provide even more resilience and stability. We add nourishment through the foods we eat (such as healthy fats, lean proteins, and fresh fruits and vegetables, just to name a few), incorporating moderate physical activity throughout the day and boosting positive endorphins in the brain through positive thinking, meditation, and gratitude. By utilizing our repair techniques, we will create healthier cells and stronger neural pathways in the brain to keep our body and mind performing at their best.

We then rebuild these chemical and cellular processes in our final recharge step by incorporating strategic training challenges that temporarily break us down, a little bit at a time, in order to stimulate just enough stress to cause our system to adapt and become even stronger. We can strengthen both the body and mind by utilizing exercises such as interval training, balance and coordination activities, and mental stimulation through brain games, visualization, and neurofeedback. It's important to always be cognizant of the rest and repair techniques we need to maintain so that the challenges we now seek out provide an opportunity for growth – rather than chronic break down.

In the final two steps of our stress management process, we will build upon our foundation of strategic energy management to create a more positive mindset – one that will allow us to perceive the stress in our life as healthy and beneficial. As we rethink stress we'll be able to use it to our advantage. Mindfulness, journaling and visualization are just a few ways we can walk through the steps of changing our mind for the better. We’ll then continue to create support for our habits of thought and behavior as we redesign our daily routine to support our optimal performance pulse; periods of stress balanced with periods of recovery.

Two key shifts must happen in order to break free from stress addiction. First, we need to recalibrate our operating system by replenishing necessary energy at the most basic levels, chemical and cellular. We must then reprogram our lifestyle by rewiring our habits of thought and behavior.
At AIS we know that many of the issues you face in your daily life have two sides. Here we explore both sides of an issue that impacts your Daily Life balance.

Many of us have experienced an increase in stressors in the past few years. With the job market becoming more competitive, housing prices high, and vacation time going unused, stressors are common for most people. A recent Stress In America report by the American Psychological Association finds that adults’ average reported stress levels—5.1 on a 10-point scale—is now surpassed by teen stress—a reported 5.8 on the same scale. Many respondents report feeling overwhelmed and question whether their stress levels are unhealthy. And yet, in some cases, chronic stress may be at least partially inside our control, and we may be unwittingly welcoming it into our lives.

To be sure, some of what we experience as ‘stressful’ has to do with circumstances beyond our control: we may have few job prospects outside of a currently stressful employment situation, school demands are high and the atmosphere is competitive, relationships may bring drama when we are least expecting it. However, there are times—perhaps more times than we’re willing to admit—that a little proactive planning and some regularly-used and fast-acting stress management techniques could greatly diminish our stress levels. So why do some of us choose to simmer in stress rather than drawing boundaries or sitting in meditation for a few minutes?

As Dr. Heidi Hanna suggests in her new book Stressaholic, the answer could be that some of us, on some level, are addicted to the stress in our lives. Or rather, we are addicted to the chemical reactions in our bodies that result from this stress, whether we are aware of it or not. The rush of adrenaline that comes from a rapidly-approaching deadline can move us into action, and it can also give us an emotional rush that can feel better than we may admit. The constant drama of a conflicted friendship can be challenging to navigate, but cutting off that relationship can leave us feeling that something is missing. The question is, if we could cut our stress levels by a significant degree with the snap of a finger, would we? When someone experiences chronic stress in their lives and fails to take adequate steps to manage this stress, how can we know if it’s due to a lack of un-
derstanding of how stress can be better managed, a lack of energy to put stress management plans into action, or an unrecognized dependence or addiction to the physiological state that accompanies stress?

It’s been suggested that one way to identify a stress addiction is to try a few minutes of relaxation. If someone who is chronically stressed sits and tries to relax for a few minutes, do they melt into it and feel calmer in minutes with relative ease, or do they feel more agitated the longer they sit? If they become more agitated, is this because their pressing demands, or because they need to keep themselves at a certain level of stress arousal in order to feel comfortable? And would they be aware of a stress addiction if they didn’t understand the process already?

There are many opinions out there, but people are increasingly becoming aware of the possibility that they have more of a role in keeping stress alive in their lives than they realized. Where do you stand on the issue? Do you think stress addiction may play a role in your life?

We posed the question to a sample of people and put it to our readers on social media and found some interesting responses. Here are some thoughts on the topic:

“I hadn’t considered that I may be creating some of my own stress by failing to address it with strategies I know could work. It’s possible that I may rely on the rush of a crazy deadline to get myself moving, and maybe I like that feeling a little too much. I have some self-examination to do.”

“I try to eliminate stress in my life, but I have too many people counting on me; I can’t let them down. I’m just too busy, but I don’t know what to drop. I wish it were a stress addiction, because that would imply that I have control.”

“I know I love the adrenaline rush of thrill rides, adventures, and falling in love. Looking at my life, I do tend to have a Type A personality, and maybe some of that is due to stress addiction.”

“I find myself fidgeting when I attempt meditation. I know this is a common experience, but sometimes it feels truly uncomfortable, like I want to jump out of my skin. I used to find it relaxing. Stress addiction? Perhaps.”
Not a subscriber?

Have “Contentment” delivered to your inbox each quarter!

The American Institute of Stress
9112 Camp Bowie West Blvd. #228
Fort Worth, Texas 76116 USA
Phone 682.239.6823
Fax 817.394.0593
info@stress.org
www.stress.org

ISSN # 108-148X