

Critical Review of
The American Institute of Stress Website
<http://www.stress.org>
Site is hosted by: ReadyHosting.com

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Key Terms

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URL

I have been searching for a truly integrative crossover mind-body health or stress related website; and, frankly, good ones are not easy to find. Although thousands of websites exist in many different sub-disciplines of either holistic medicine or traditional medicine, I often wonder how many actually integrate both sides of the alternative and conventional health paradigms, and truly take into account the aspects of mind-body-spirit medicine, particularly spirituality. Certainly, one great example that does come to mind is Dr. Andrew Weil's website, *Drweil.com*, an extremely popular and acclaimed website. Andrew Weil is well-known for his influential work in integrative medicine at the University of Arizona - he is a Harvard educated medical doctor and botanist who takes *both* alternative/indigenous spirit-based medicine, and research-driven western medicine really seriously.

My particular interests are in the area of holistic stress management, though, so my goal was to review a site on stress, and I found *www.stress.org*. (*Drweil.com*, though stress-related, is more of a generalist wellness site.) I cannot say, however, if *www.stress.org* is as integrative as, say, *Drweil.com*'s is, and is in fact more conventional.

Stress.org is nonetheless an interesting and stimulating website with lots of fabulous information, and, for individuals, students and professionals learning about stress and stress-related topics the site is more than adequate and at the very least an important site to add to a favorites list for research and reference. The site's URL* is *http://www.stress.org* which makes it notable and easy to remember. It is the website for the American Institute of Stress (AIS), located in Yonkers, New York. The American Institute of Stress is a non-profit organization, founded in 1978. AIS disseminates information about stress to professionals, students, and to the general population.

AIS is a credible and influential organization, which can be ascertained by the list of highly distinguished individuals associated with it. It is a veritable who's who of doctor's, researchers, scientists, and writers who have made contributions to the field of stress research and practice, and mind-body medicine. For example, a student of mind-body health will undoubtedly recognize the names of people who are either current or past officers or trustees (either living or deceased) like Hans Selye, Herbert Benson, Kenneth R. Pelletier, Richard Rahe, Norman Shealy, Norman Cousins, Linus Pauling, Charles F. Stroebel, among others. Additional noteworthy persons on the list of trustees

* URL is the abbreviation for uniform resource locator, or, world wide web address.

are futurist writer Alvin Toffler, whose social commentary writings have been influential on the topics of social stress, particularly modern technology (or, techno stress); also, deceased world-famous actor Bob Hope, who prior to his death was the founder of an organization in the stress-related field of heart research. Concerning credibility, it is also noted on the site's main page that AIS is in partnership with the American Psychological Association, certainly a respected organization.

Regarding the website's design, in terms of current trends in web design *Stress.org* is almost prehistoric in simplicity with no real navigational menu bars, merely links in a vertical column on the main page separated by text. In fact, *Stress.org* is plain, simple, and bland and displays virtually no graphics except the AIS logo top and center and an outdated background pattern reminiscent of early days of HTML site design, circa early 1990's. Regarding reader comments and correspondence, fortunately an email address is included on the main page for ideas or questions directed to the site host, which is Readyhosting.com. A lot can be said for simplicity, however – and, *Stress.org*'s site design is not about streamlined or glitzy intros or exotic graphic design patterns. Rather, the focal point of the site is clearly about teaching stress-reduction solutions for people who live in an overly chaotic world, (which is the large majority of us!) and the site's simplistic design actually makes navigation fairly easy.

Style is a critical consideration, as good design makes a website enjoyable, clear, and efficient to navigate; but, to my mind content is what matters most. *Stress.org* is focused on stress-related content, though a huge amount of information is not on the site. What

there is, however, is quality and research-backed facts. On the site's 'about' page, regarding the organization and website's purpose, it states it is a "non-profit organization established in 1978 at the request of Hans Selye to serve as a clearinghouse for information on all stress related subjects...interested in exploring the multitudinous and varied effects of stress on our health and quality of life."¹

The site is filled with many excellent articles. One particularly interesting article is titled *Reminiscences of Hans Selye and the birth of "Stress,"* essentially a collage-tribute to *Stress.org's* founder, Hans Selye.² On this page are lots of Selye photographs with excerpts and photos of writings and works; it is a nicely done, wonderful page of memorabilia and stress-related factoids. Other articles include, *Why has the Treatment of Hypertension become such a deplorable Fiasco? An Interview With Dr. John Laragh,* about the failure of our medical system to effectively treat hypertension. This article, unlike *Reminiscences*, is a highly technical one using in-depth medical and pharmaceutical terminology most appropriate for physicians or related professionals, rather than for the general public. A third article, however, titled *Type A and Coronary Disease: Separating Fact From Fiction, An Interview with Ray H. Rosenman M.D.* is stimulating on the topic of health psychology, type-A behavior, and stress.³ Though quite in-depth, it is more readable than the Laragh interview, and more appropriate for lay-people.

For students or professionals interested in getting involved with AIS or with AIS's stress-research, various membership options and site resources are available. The different

levels of membership include ‘fellowship’ for qualified professionals and for highly advanced students, and ‘associate’ and ‘sustaining’ memberships each for under \$100.00 annually. For non-members, fifteen to twenty page information packets of articles are available to assist with in-depth research, or for self-care. The choices available include a basic stress packet as well as additional packets on eighteen different stress-related topics such as job-stress, stress and cancer, stress assessments, stress and obesity, and so on. AIS also offers consultation and referral services for sufferers of stress-associated conditions and provides a telephone number and email address on the website for this purpose, but does not display rates for this.

Stress.org appears to be a high quality stress resource site with straight-forward reliable and credible information on stress and mind-body health. It is mind-body oriented, though fairly conventional, based upon a biopsychosocial model of health, not necessarily upon a mind-body-spirit model. (Though, I would add, it does not disregard, or completely neglect a mind-body-spirit model either.) The site does touch upon exciting important and perhaps even radical areas of stress-management and health such as meditation, relaxation, subtle energies, and bioelectric medicine. To my mind it largely holds to the biological and mental paradigms, and does not stretch very far into areas of spirituality. I compare this to the styles and disciplines of other organizations and practitioners in integrative stress-related fields like the mentioned Andrew Weil, or people like Dr. Bernie Siegel at Yale and Exceptional Cancer Patients (ECAP), or Joan Borysenko at Harvard University, or new-age physician Deepak Chopra. Although

surely certain people connected with AIS, such as Kenneth Pelletier or Herbert Benson involve spirituality in their work, overall *Stress.org*'s theme is more conservative.

Notes

¹ (n.a.) "The American Institute of Stress" Retrieved April 17, 2006 from the American Institute of Stress website <http://www.stress.org/about.htm> .

² Rosch, P.J. "Reminiscences of Hans Selye And The Birth Of Stress" Retrieved April 18, 2006 from the American Institute of Stress website <http://www.stress.org/Mementos.htm> .

³ Rosch, P.J. "Type A and Coronary Disease: Separating Fact From Fiction, An Interview with Ray H. Rosenman M.D." Retrieved April 18, 2006 from the American Institute of Stress website <http://www.stress.org/TypeA.htm> .