

# Toys — the perfect cure for STRESS?

By MELISSA PRICE  
 THE BATTALION

With the ease of a pin prick, a person can fall in love, win the lotto, get a raise or even get lucky — at least the Stress Doll claims so. The Stress Doll, a small cushion-like figure with a striking resemblance to aoodoo doll, is a toy marketed to help reduce stress. The doll comes with 10 pins struck in the fabric and various dots on the body where pins can be inserted in hopes of getting promoted — or fired.

Although some students relieve stress by exercising, sleeping or watching TV, others are discovering stress relief toys and aroma therapy as ways to reduce stress levels and get more energy.

Irma Silva, an employee of Spencer Gifts and a junior Spanish major, said stress toys have grown in popularity over the past 20 years. Although most stress toys are relatively new, Silva said one well-known stress toy dates back to the 1300s — Chinese "health balls."

The small metal spheres, which some people say increase physical strength and prevent some diseases, date back to 1368 during China's Ming Dynasty.

Silva said everyone deals with stress in different ways. She said some of her methods of relieving stress are somewhat unusual.

"Sometimes I will color or doodle while I am stressed out — it takes my mind off anything stressful that is going on in my life," Silva said. "Also, wrestling with my boyfriend relieves stress, or sometimes I will build stuff with my brother's Legos."

Although she does not use stress relief toys herself, Silva said many toys stimulate the muscles and get the blood flowing, allowing a person to relax. She said a person's expectations for a stress toy strongly influence whether the toy will help.

"It depends on the person and how they feel about it," Silva said. "What works for one might not work for another — if you think it is going to work, it will work for you." Dr. Debbie Rabinowitz, a psychologist at Student Counseling Services, said there are more effective ways of dealing with stress than stress-relief toys. She said students need to remember to take time out of their busy

schedules to clear their mind of things that may be bothering them. "Stress toys such as a stress ball are related to progressive muscle relaxation, where you squeeze your fist and then let go," Rabinowitz said. "If it helps you to become more aware of what you are doing, I suppose stress toys can relieve some of your stress."

Douglas Robinson, manager of Spencer Gifts and a stand-up comedian, said he uses humor to alleviate the stress of others. He tries to provide a relaxed environment in the store and everywhere he goes.

"I joke around with my employees and customers," Robinson said. "If their atmosphere is less stressful, the existing stress doesn't seem so bad."

Robinson said the Stress Reliever, a squishy head-shaped toy that claims to rid people of frustration in a fun manner, is the best-selling stress relief toy in the store.

But others have found that aroma therapy truly calms a person while revitalizing his or her spirits. With its resurgence over the last few years, sales of aroma therapeutic candles, body lotion and bath salts have skyrocketed.

Lori Saldivar, an employee at Bath & Body Works and a junior nutrition major, said she has used stress relief toys but prefers aroma-therapeutic products. Saldivar said she has reservations about some of the stress relief toys on the market today.

"I think some of the toys work, but some of them are overdone and made just to make money," Saldivar said. "I know I sound like a commercial, but at first I did not believe in the aroma therapy products. I thought it was a hoax, but it's not."

Saldivar's favorite stress reliever is Bath & Body Works Pulse Point Cream. She said the cream is unique because applying the cream to a person's pulse points (temples, wrists and nape of the neck) provides instant relief. Saldivar said eucalyptus and spearmint, two aromas strongly associated with relaxation, enable a person to clear his or her mind and relax.

Silva said although stress toys are a fun alternative to such typical stress relievers as listening to music or working out, anyone can relax without the use of a stress relief toy.

"Using a stress ball relieves stress somewhat," Silva said. "By putting pressure on the ball, it takes the pressure off your head. But anything can serve as a stress reliever for you. Even if you have an old stuffed animal, you can use it as a punching bag."

Although activities such as punching a bag can relieve stress, Rabinowitz said they are not the most effective solutions. She said stress relief toys may offer temporary relief from life's daily demands, but they will not completely get rid of tension.

"I think everyone has had the experience of being so frustrated they needed to just scream, where playing with one of your stress toys might be helpful," Rabinowitz said. "But in the long run, they are not going to solve your issues."



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