

Feeling stressed during the workday? Research says playing video games may help

July 25 2017



Credit: Cristie Guevara/public domain

More than half of Americans regularly experience cognitive fatigue related to stress, frustration, and anxiety while at work. Those in safety-

critical fields, such as air traffic control and health care, are at an even greater risk for cognitive fatigue, which could lead to errors. Given the amount of time that people spend playing games on their smartphones and tablets, a team of human factors/ergonomics researchers decided to evaluate whether casual video game play is an effective way to combat workplace stress during rest breaks.

In their *Human Factors* article, "Searching for Affective and Cognitive Restoration: Examining the Restorative Effects of Casual Video Game Play," Michael Rupp and coauthors used a computer-based task to induce cognitive fatigue in 66 participants, who were then given a five-minute rest break. During the break, participants either played a casual [video game](#) called Sushi Cat, participated in a guided relaxation activity, or sat quietly in the testing room without using a phone or computer. At various times throughout the experiment, the researchers measured participants' affect (e.g., stress level, mood) and [cognitive performance](#).

Those who took a silent rest break reported that they felt less engaged with work and experienced worry as a result, whereas those who participated in the guided relaxation activity saw reductions in negative affect and distress. Only the video game players reported that they felt better after taking the break.

Rupp, a doctoral student in human factors and [cognitive psychology](#) at the University of Central Florida, notes, "We often try to power through the day to get more work finished, which might not be as effective as taking some time to detach for a few minutes. People should plan short breaks to make time for an engaging and enjoyable activity, such as video games, that can help them recharge."

More information: Michael A. Rupp et al, Searching for Affective and Cognitive Restoration: Examining the Restorative Effects of Casual Video Game Play, *Human Factors* (2017). [DOI:](#)

[10.1177/0018720817715360](https://doi.org/10.1177/0018720817715360)

Provided by Human Factors and Ergonomics Society

Citation: Feeling stressed during the workday? Research says playing video games may help (2017, July 25) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-07-stressed-workday-video-games.html>

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