

Therapeutic Toys

for the health and the fun of it!

Toys have the image of being "just for kids." Recently play, along with laughter has begun to emerge as a popular tool for over-worked, stressed-out adults who are juggling multiple demands and generally trying to DO IT ALL.

The unspoken secret is that adults have always loved toys. Last year the second most popular toy in America (second behind Nintendo) was the Koosh Ball, that colorful rubber band ball that has been appearing on desks and in nursing homes at least as frequently as in the toy chest.

Time magazine recently did a cover article called "The Simple Life". In the introduction, the author confessed to having a Slinky on her desk that she uses for stress management.

Toys have a way of making us drop out of time; to arrive in a place where we can't be worrying about what we could have, should have, or ought to have done. When we are totally absorbed in an activity we can put aside worries and concern, and go back at a later date renewed and refreshed.

The top five fads of all time had that ability to absorb. They are:

- Slinky
- Hula-Hoop
- Frisbee
- Barbie Doll
- Rubik's Cube

Nintendo and other similar programs should be making the list soon. Computer games like Tetris are used by some adults to relax and distance themselves from the day's stresses.

Among the top ten toys last year (along with baseball cards) were bubbles, Silly Putty, Squish Balls, and Play-doh.

Other cultures have a more positive view of stress

management aids. The Greek worry beads are a good example. It's common to see adults in southern Europe and the Middle East playing with these addictive strings of beads.

There are few alternatives to thumb sucking or nail biting in this country. Eating and smoking have been popular substitutes, but the compulsive public consumption is no longer considered anymore politically correct than twirling your hair during board meetings.

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Things are changing. That's where the Koosh Ball, a Slinky on the desk or bubbles in the glove box for

use during traffic jams come in.

Recently, marketers have begun to tap into the adult market with stress management toys. Chinese Chime Balls appear in catalogs advertising their relaxation/meditative properties and their ability to prevent and treat arthritis and hypertension (not to mention their ability to "balance the brain, improve memory, and tone internal organs").

Along with the popular Koosh ball, there is the Flo Motion Stress Tube, filled with a quart of water that you swish rhythmically back and forth, the Stress Yo-yo, Executive Stress Bubbles with the likeness of Freud printed on the bottle, and the Stressball which is a foam-covered ball that makes the sound of shattering glass when you throw it against a wall. There are numerous kinds of stress-reducing squeeze balls sold in health stores and many up-scale catalogs. It's clear that toys aren't just for kids anymore.

©Laurie Young, M.A., N.C.C. and Kay Caskey, A.C.S.W. are Holistic Health Specialists who give programs on the therapeutic benefits of laughter, play, and the art of using toys to manage stress, have fun, and leap tall buildings in a single bound.