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Examining the restorative effects of casual video games

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Individuals who work in highly stressful jobs (e.g. doctors, soldiers) struggle with the daily impact of stress-related cognitive fatigue. High-pressured job tasks and worry for job security can produce an unstable internal environment for the individual, where stress and cognitive workload can intensify. Stress-induced fatigue generates a multitude of overwhelming problems for the individual. Due to society's growing demand of productivity and efficiency, there is an essential need for finding a cost effective way to reduce cognitive fatigue and stress for everyone. This study analyzed and compared three relaxation methods (break, meditation, & game) to determine the effectiveness of brief casual video game exposure as a method to reduce stress increase mood, and restore cognitive resources. Taking a short break or engaging in guided relaxation exercises are well-known methods for reducing stress and improving mood, but can be impractical, less motivating, and time-consuming in a high stress related job, where time-efficiency and productivity are critical. Casual Video Games (CVGs) may present an optimum opportunity to be a preferred method to reduce stress and improve mood, due to their short time requirements, better mobility, and convenience. Three experiments were conducted to examine the hypothesis that CVGs could be an efficacious method of reducing stress, improving mood and restoring fatigue induced cognitive decrements. Across all three experiments, the guided medication technique was found to be another effective method to reduce stress and improve mood; however, this method was found to be less effective than the casual video game condition, the break was found to be the least effective method of reducing stress and improving mood. However, none of the methods were able to improve cognitive functioning. Overall, the results indicated that briefly playing a casual video game (< 6 minutes) can improve mood (increased positive affect & reduced negative affect), reduce stress with increased task engagement. Widespread use of Casual Video Games has the potential of improving employee productivity and efficiency and therefore improving a company's profitability. Future research is needed to determine which aspects of casual video games may increase or reduce these effects.