

Survey reveals male gamers have a softer side

by Bend Weekly New Sources

Downtime and stress reduction among reasons men engage in 'casual' gameplay

According to a recent survey* commissioned by Microsoft Corp.'s MSN Games, one of the world's leading casual gaming sites, Americans are feeling more stressed out and starved for time than ever, with 56 percent of men (age 18 to 34) and 71 percent of women (age 18 to 34) spending less than an hour on themselves a day engaged in activities that provide downtime or alone time and are pampering or relaxing to them.

Once considered a simple leisure pursuit, playing casual games -- including action and arcade, puzzle, word and trivia, and card and board games -- is among the activities men and women said they like to engage in when they have just 20 minutes to "recharge" during the day.

Although stress reduction and mental dexterity are often cited as reasons people of all ages play casual online games, males in the 18 to 34 age bracket are most likely to list playing games as a daily escape -- a chance to indulge in some "me time." Men are also more likely than their female counterparts to play a game at work, with males age 18 to 34 most likely to sneak in a quick game during their day.

With many people indicating they have a mere 60 minutes a day to spend on relaxing activities, it is no wonder U.S. men and women are seeking easy, quick stress-reduction techniques. As a result, MSN Games has teamed up with Dr. Kathleen Hall, world-renowned expert in stress and work-life balance and founder of the Stress Institute, to urge Americans to resolve to "Take Back Your Time" this year and engage in activities that help reduce stress and give the brain a boost.

"Reclaiming just 10 minutes of 'me time' each day can greatly improve your sense of well-being," Dr. Hall said. "Stress can have a catastrophic effect on our mental, physical and spiritual health. In today's harried and hectic world, taking time out for stress-reducing activities is no longer a luxury, but a 21st-century necessity."

More than 13 million people each month play "brain food" games on MSN Games, such as the numeric logic game "Sudoku," virtual aquarium "Fish Tycoon," gem-swapper "Bejeweled 2" and the family favorite card game "UNO."

"There is a growing body of medical research that shows stress can cause the memory to become impaired," Dr. Hall said. "But playing online casual games, such as brainteasers, crossword puzzles, trivia titles, and any variety of mentally challenging and fun games, can actually stimulate the brain and stimulate new connections between cells."

The MSN Games survey found that nearly two-thirds of U.S. adults who have played a quick, fun online game in the past 12 months say they feel less stressed afterward, indicating that arcade-style games are an excellent destination on the road to wellness.

"We know that 'play' de-stresses the body and actually lowers our blood pressure and heart rate. Taking a break to solve a brain-teasing puzzle or take on a fun vocabulary challenge on MSN Games is a perfect way to clear your mind of the clutter and stress that can pile up during the day," Dr. Hall said.

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