

Successful Psychology

Stress Relief From An Unlikely Source

(NAPSA)—Throughout the year, millions of people struggle with stress. But many of them have found a surprising way to tackle the problem: video games. It may seem unlikely, but it can happen, as long as you keep it casual.

These are not your children's games, which are more likely to increase adrenaline levels due to their frenetic, competitive nature and "in-your-face" imagery. These are "casual" games: family-friendly word, puzzle and simple action games, such as "Bejeweled" and "Talismania." An August 2006 survey of casual game players conducted by Information Solutions Group found that fully 88 percent of players derive stress relief from playing such games.

Available for personal computers, cell phones, video iPods and video game consoles, casual games are now played regularly by over 150 million consumers—more than 65 percent of whom are women and more than two-thirds are 35 or older. These games are suitable for all ages, are inexpensive (usually \$20 or less) and can be loaded directly onto a computer or mobile device in a couple of minutes.

Some games, such as "Bejeweled 2" and "Chuzzle," actually include a "Zen Mode" in which the player simply relaxes and finds a meditative state of mind, with no demands for achieving a certain score or level, no time limit and no sense of competition. Casual games are further distinguished from traditional "hardcore" video games by the relaxed, stress-free mental state in which they often place the player.

"Casual word and puzzle com-



Casual computer games like "Bejeweled" pictured above have been shown to provide therapeutic stress relief.

puter games can help people develop new cellular brain connections, thereby helping to keep the brain active and vital," says Dr. Carl Arinoldo, a New York-based psychologist and author who specializes in stress management. "And by seriously attending to the word and puzzle games, people can control stress by cognitively 'blocking out' the negative stresses of the day."

Take Gail Nichols, a 40-something full-time mother and part-time service dog trainer from St. Marys, Kan., who suffers from early onset Alzheimer's and occasional bouts of severe depression. "For me, playing games like 'Bejeweled' is very relaxing, since there's no competition or worry about points. It just continues serenely on its way," she says.

PopCap Games (www.POPCAP.com), makers of "Bejeweled" and "Chuzzle" and the leader in casual games, has recently added a printable/e-mail-able gift certificate to its Web site. The recipients can try out as many of the games as they like online for free, then use the certificate to purchase the one(s) they enjoy most.