

Hugging a 'breathing' cushion can ease anxiety before exams: study

Luke Andrews Health Reporter For Mailonline 4 days ago

Like 1 Comment

A huggable 'breathing' cushion could ease anxiety in students about to sit their exams, researchers say.

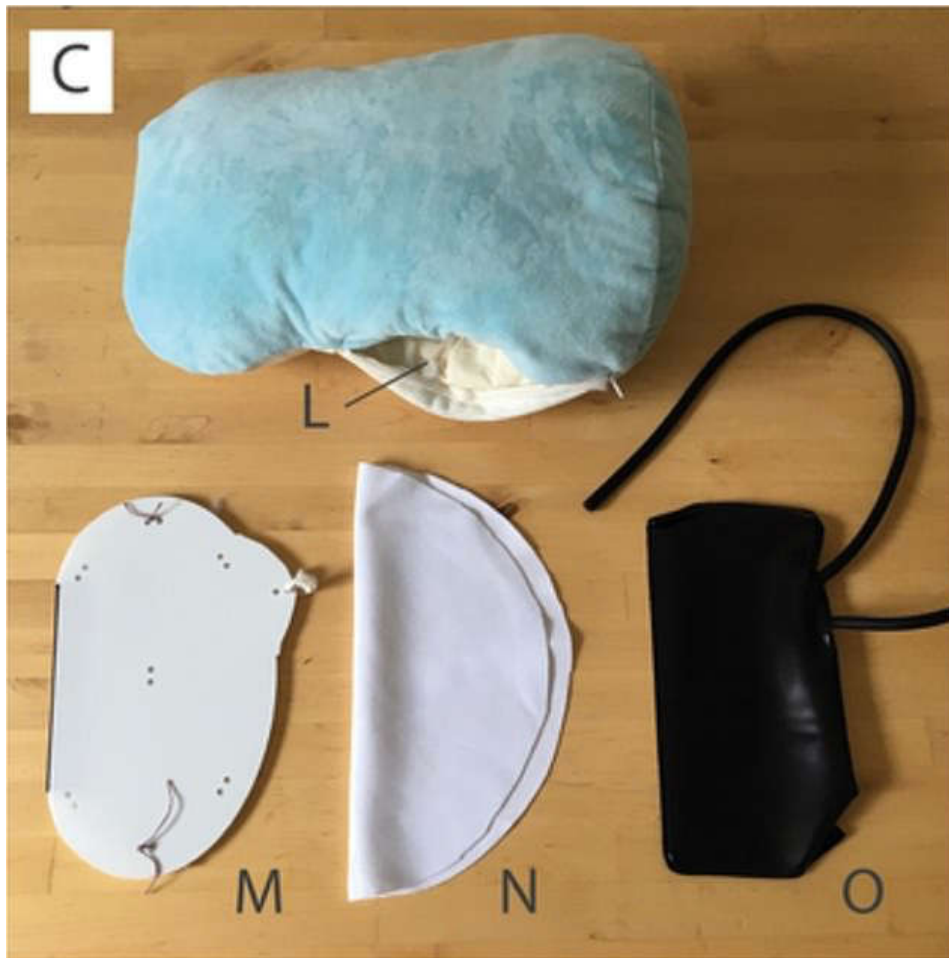
Tests of the pillow, which deflates and inflates itself to simulate breathing, revealed that it was just as effective as meditation.

Anxiety rates among volunteers allowed to cuddle the cushion before a maths test were significantly lower than those asked to do nothing. 1

Researchers from the University of Bristol say the gadget could provide some relief for stress-induced anxiety. >

They believe the hot water bottle-sized cushion is comforting because it can help slow someone's breathing and feels like getting a cuddle from a 'living being'.





© Provided by Daily Mail University of Bristol scientists asked participants to hug a 'breathing' cushion before taking a verbal maths test. They found that hugging the cushion had lower anxiety levels going into the test than a separate group that did nothing

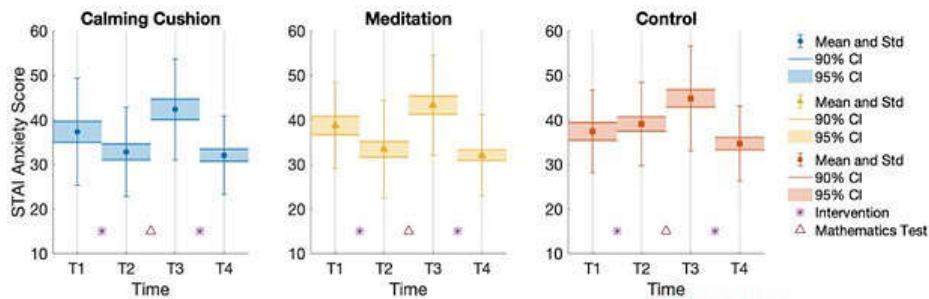


Fig 5. STAI anxiety scores for within-subjects factor. Comparison of within-subjects factor (time) for mean STAI Anxiety measures at each time T1 (baseline), T2 (post intervention 1, anticipating test), T3 (post test, pre intervention 2) and T4 (post intervention 2), including standard deviation (Std) errorbars, as well as the 90% and 95% confidence intervals (CI). Confidence intervals are calculated using the Cousinead-Morey correction [79] and therefore provide visual reference as to statistically significant changes over the within-subjects factor of time.

© Provided by Daily Mail Pictured above are the anxiety levels in the group that hugged the cushion (blue), meditated (yellow) and did nothing (red) from when they arrived at the centre (T1), eight minutes after hugging the cushion and before the test (T2), after the test (T3), and eight minutes after completing the test (T4)

Early prototypes of the gadget simulated other sensations, like purring and a heartbeat.

But participants felt the biggest benefits from the 'breathing' cushion and its soft socket.

What is anxiety? Who is most likely to suffer from it?

Anxiety is the most common mental health problem in the world, and it's often triggered by stress.

It is triggered in response to a perceived stress or danger, causing an increased heart rate and rapid shallow breathing.

These triggers are most likely to include financial concerns, conflicts or even exams.



Studies suggest that women are almost twice as likely to be affected by anxiety than men.

It is also thought to be more prevalent among younger adults, with one paper finding half of students surveyed had moderate stress-related health concerns including conditions like anxiety.

Alice Haynes, a robotics researcher at Bristol University, and colleagues tested the device on 129 volunteers aged between 18 and 36.

Participants were told they had a verbal maths test, and given just eight minutes to prepare.

They were divided into three equal groups and asked to either sit in a room and either do nothing, meditate, or hug the breathing cushion.

A questionnaire was carried out before the test to check their anxiety levels.

Video: New Study Shows Link Between COVID and Brain Damage (Cover Video)



It found they actually went down in the calming cushion (from an anxiety score of 38 to 32) and meditation groups (from 38 to 33), but rose in the control group (from 38 to 39).

The control group had the highest stress levels, significantly above the others.

But people who practiced meditation and hugged the cushion had the lowest anxiety levels.

Ms Haynes told MailOnline: 'We think that by encouraging a slower breathing rate, the cushion eases anxiety through its primary mechanism by which the cushion eases anxiety.'

'Research has shown that slower breathing rates affect our nervous system, which can help to reduce anxiety.'

'This is often used in meditation, but the cushion offers a similar effect in a format that is intuitive and effortless to engage with.'



In the paper, the scientists add that the cushion was likely comforting because its breathing rate could be varied, making it more like another person.

They added that its mechanics ensured it 'more accurately replicates the mechanics of real breathing', compared to other motorised devices that make a purring sound.

Scientists say they are still in the 'early stages' of designing the cushion, and that it won't be available in shops anytime soon.

In separate research, they looked at using the cushion to help couples spending long periods of time apart to feel closer together.

Both couple members were asked to hug the cushions simultaneously, which then synchronised to allow them to feel each other's breathing.

Anxiety is the most common mental health issue globally, studies show, affecting 8million people in the UK and 40million in the US.

Women and young adults are most likely to be diagnosed with the condition.

It is often triggered in response to a perceived stress or danger, causing an increased heart rate and rapid shallow breathing. These triggers can include financial concerns, conflict or even exams.

But in some people there is no known cause and they are plagued with a constant and irrational sense of dread.

Treatments, however, tend to be costly with at least six therapy sessions needed and waiting lists stretching into months.

The study was published in the journal PLoS ONE.

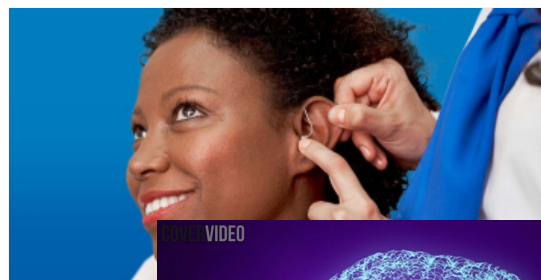
[Read more](#)

TOPICS FOR YOU



Warning to British Homeowners With No Will

Ad Experts In Money



Born before

Ad Compare H

VIDEO

ACCORDING TO A NEW BRITISH STUDY, EVEN MILD CASES OF COVID-19 ARE ASSOCIATED WITH SUBTLE TISSUE DAMAGE AND INCREASED LOSSES IN BRAIN REGIONS TIED TO THE SENSE OF SMELL

YOU MAY LIKE

Ad taboola ▶