Abstract

Fidgeting is something most humans naturally do to self-stimulate and soothe, and is known to release neurotransmitters that stimulate attention and sharpen focus while decreasing cognitive load. Accordingly, it is an important part of sensory-motor self-regulation and has been hypothesized to play a key role in regulating attention. Fidgeting may also have the added potential of reducing anxiety and stress. Fidget tools are mass-produced and highly popularized for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The research on fidget impacts is limited, particularly in sub-clinical adult populations. In this study, a non-clinical sample of 51 healthy adults were randomly assigned to receive a fidget ring or a placebo non-fidget ring. Participants were instructed to wear their assigned ring for one week and answer daily surveys measuring self-reported anxiety, stress, attention, and engagement with the assigned ring. At post-test the experimental group demonstrated a decrease in anxiety levels with a moderate effect size ($\eta_p^2 = 0.93$), while the control group experienced no change in anxiety levels. This finding is consistent with the idea that having access to fidgets allows individuals to self-regulate their anxiety levels by self-soothing and may calm the nervous system, serving as an outlet for expelling nervous energy that may be associated with somatic symptoms of anxiety. Further research is necessary to elucidate the mechanisms behind how fidgets reduce anxiety. Future research should examine longer-term use of fidgets and impacts on individuals with anxiety disorders.

Keywords: fidgets, fidgeting, anxiety, stress, attention, focus, fidget rings, CONQUERing