

# 10 apps that distract

Reduce the ouch factor from needle pokes and distract kids with smartphone and tablet apps.

By Stefan Friedrichsdorf, M.D.

**S**tate-of-the-art pain management demands that pharmacological management must be combined with supportive and non-pharmacological therapies to manage a child's pain. In our department, we're using physical methods as well as acupressure and aromatherapy. For vaccinations or blood draws, we expect that kids are sitting upright, we numb their skin with topical anesthesia and use a distraction, such as bubble blowing or blowing a pinwheel. Alternatives however, can include applications on your smartphone or tablet, something I'm using increasingly. Here are 10 of my favorite road-tested apps.

**1. Balloonimals.** This is my favorite app to distract a child in pain or discomfort. Illustrated balloon animals will spring to life when you blow into the microphone on an iPhone or swipe an iPod Touch. Kids can watch the balloon inflate and then give the phone a shake to start constructing the balloon animal. With each shake, the animal takes form and then the balloon animal is ready to play. Kids can pet the Balloonimals and see what tricks they can do.

**2. Healing Buddies Comfort Kit.** This app provides an interactive way for kids and teens to engage with the latest in integrative medicine techniques and activities to assist in the management of symptoms they may be experiencing. It combines kid-friendly activities and pre-recorded audio exercises and instructions that teach self-care skills. The techniques included were designed by leaders in the field of pediatric integrative medicine and have been tested in several children's hospitals.

**3. Easy-bake Treats.** For calorie-free and creative fun, kids can make, bake, decorate, eat and share virtual cakes, cupcakes, cookies, cake pops and pizza. They pick their baking mix, fill the pan with batter and water, mix it all together, and slide the pan into a virtual oven. Once they've baked and decorated their treats, kids can show off and share their delicious virtual creations with family and friends via email or Facebook. It's highly addictive—kids spend a long time perfecting their creations.

**4. Koi Pond.** Gaze into a pond of crystal clear water with fish, turtles and more. Kids can run their fingers across the surface of the pond and watch water ripple away from their touch. The koi will dart away only to quickly swim close once more.



**5. Fruit Ninja.** This is a juicy action game where every slash results in squishes, splats and satisfying fruit carnage.

**6. Tesla Toy.** When fingers touch the screen they generate what looks like a powerful electrical field that makes thousands of particles react beautifully. This app holds kids' (and adults') attention for a long time.

**7. Drums!** A drum kit that's great for kids with too much—or too little—energy.

**8. Simply Being.** Relaxation and stress relief are major benefits of meditation. With this app, users can choose from four meditation times and the option to listen to the guided meditation with music or nature sounds. This app is great for older kids and teens.

**9. Talking Tom Cat 2.** The app is a cat that repeats everything you say in a funny voice. Kids can pour him a glass of milk or pet him to make him purr.

**10. Real Chalkboard.** Kids can draw on a realistic chalkboard and use different colors of chalk. It's more fun than it sounds.

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