

# Stuffed animals soothe elderly owners' hearts

By Hiromi Tanaka  
Yomiuri Shimbun Staff Writer

An increasing number of elderly people are finding solace in interactive stuffed animals, and have made them a part of their lives like a pet or family member.

Sophisticated sound functions allow the calls and speech of stuffed animals to be therapeutic for seniors. Some companies have even taken advantage of communications technologies to develop products that help people watch over the elderly.

## Respond like real animals

Nadenade Nekochan DX2 (Petted kitty DX2) meows with joy when its user pats its head and growls with anger if the user keeps stroking its tail.

The product (suggested retail price ¥6,458 including tax) sounds like a real cat, and makes 48 different sounds depending on how and where it is patted. Trendmaster, a start-up company in Kawasaki, released the product in September.

Four years ago, the company

launched a similar product for children, but a survey showed 10 percent of buyers were elderly. The company received many requests to make more realistic stuffed animals, which led to it developing the product.

"Many elderly people are unable to keep cats, even though they like the animal," said Trendmaster President Atsushi Nakada.

The Kawasaki city government has certified the stuffed animal as a good welfare item for its effectiveness in soothing people with dementia and encouraging them to communicate. The company plans to add an interactive stuffed dog to its product line in December.

Interactive stuffed animals are usually equipped with devices such as sensors that respond to sounds and touch so they speak and cry.

Senior citizens who live alone tend to have fewer opportunities to talk with people.

"Being spoken to by stuffed animals has a healing effect, because it activates [users'] brains and improves their concentration," said Yoshio Oro, a professor emeritus of Toyohashi University of Technology

who specializes in social gerontology.

"If the elderly go out with the stuffed animals, it will give them something to talk about with their peers and grandchildren," he added.





## Warn of heatstroke

Developed by toy maker Partners Inc., Oshaberi Mi-chan (Chatty Mi-chan) talks in the voice of a 4-year-old girl when it is patted on the back. With a suggested retail price of ¥13,500, the product can have simple conversations and recognize dates and times.

It says things like "Be careful of strange phone calls" and "It's hot. You should drink a lot of water," helping raise awareness of the need to guard against bank transfer fraud and the possibility of heatstroke.

In April, Tomy Co. released Nande Shitteruno!?! Shabekuri Happy & Lucky (Interactive stuffed animals Happy and Lucky), each of which has a suggested retail price of ¥9,720. The stuffed bear and dog say different things based on a user's personal information, which is registered via smartphones and other

## High-tech stuffed toys for the elderly

Product name	Nadenade Nekochan DX2	Oshaberi Mi-chan	Nande Shitteruno!?! Shabekuri Happy & Lucky	cocokuma
				
Maker	Trendmaster	Partners	Tomy	NTT Docomo, Iwaya, others
Width, height, depth (cm)	43 x 14 x 11	25 x 30 x 20	28 x 30 x 27 (Bear)	21 x 28 x 20
Features	Makes different sounds depending on how it is petted. Maker offers a service to make its voice resemble user's pet cat	Can have simple conversations, speaks to itself about timely matters according to season, time	If user's name, preferences and other personal information is registered, product chats based on that information	Allows family member living separately to exchange voice messages with user
Power source	Cell batteries			Rechargeable batteries
Suggested retail price (including tax)	¥6,458	¥13,500	¥9,720 each	¥37,584, monthly service fee ¥2,139
How to purchase	Via internet, other means	By phone, internet, other means	Toy stores, internet, other means	Department stores, other means

devices. Based on that information, the product says phrases such as "Kiyos-san likes steamed bean-jam buns."

Users aged 60 or above account for 10 percent of its users. In many cases, children or grandchildren appear to configure the settings for their elderly family members.

"My grandmother has gotten cheerful, as she has something to keep her company," a teenage boy said.

## Watching over elderly

The stuffed bear cocokuma (suggested retail price ¥37,584), which was jointly developed by NTT Docomo, Inc., toy maker Iwaya Corp. and other firms, can watch over elderly users. For a monthly service fee of ¥2,139, people can check how the stuffed animal is used through smartphones and other devices.

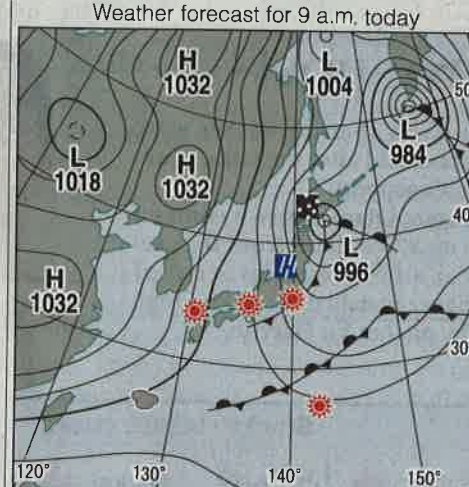
After a button on the hand is pushed, the bear's mouth opens to

play voice messages sent from user's children and grandchildren. The users also can exchange messages with the senders. Pre-orders have already ended, and orders for the next round are expected to be shipped next year and later.

According to a 2015 population census, 5.92 million senior citizens live alone, up 20 percent from five years earlier. High-tech stuffed animals likely to become more important in healing the graying population.

## WEATHER

	TODAY'S FORECAST			Possibility of Rain (%)			Temperature		Yesterday's Temperature	TOMORROW'S FORECAST		Temperature		TODAY'S FORECAST	TOMORROW'S FORECAST		Temperature
	6 a.m.-noon	noon-6 p.m.	6 p.m.-midnight	6 a.m.-noon	noon-6 p.m.	6 p.m.-midnight	low	high		low	high	low	high		low	high	
Tokyo				10	0	0	9	17	8.1	18.3		5	10		26	30	25
Sapporo				80	70	50	-1	2	7.2	8.8		-6	-2		-3	4	-2
Sendai				20	10	10	8	11	6.9	16.2		2	7		17	22	14
Niigata				90	50	50	8	10	8.9	16.3		3	7		23	26	23
Nagoya				10	0	0	7	14	10.5	17.9		3	12		0	9	5
Osaka				20	20	0	12	14	12.1	18.0		4	12		10	15	9
Hiroshima				20	20	0	8	14	9.3	17.0		4	13		26	29	26
Takamatsu				10	10	10	11	14	11.0	17.5		4	14		-16	2	-18
Fukuoka				0	0	0	9	12	8.7	15.9		6	13		10	20	11
Kagoshima				0	0	0	11	16	11.5	20.4		8	16		3	8	3
Naha				20	20	10	20	24	22.0	25.5		18	22		-1	7	1



Weather forecast for 9 a.m. today

	Temperature low	Temperature high	TOMORROW'S FORECAST	Temperature low	Temperature high
Bangkok	26	30		25	
Beijing	-3	4		-2	
Hong Kong	17	22		14	
Honolulu	23	26		23	
London	0	9		5	
Los Angeles	10	15		9	
Manila	26	29		26	
Moscow	-16	2		-18	
New Delhi	10	20		11	
New York	3	8		3	
Paris	-1	7		1	
Rio de Janeiro	19	24		17	
Rome	7	16		7	
Seoul	0	3		0	
Sydney	17	23		18	