

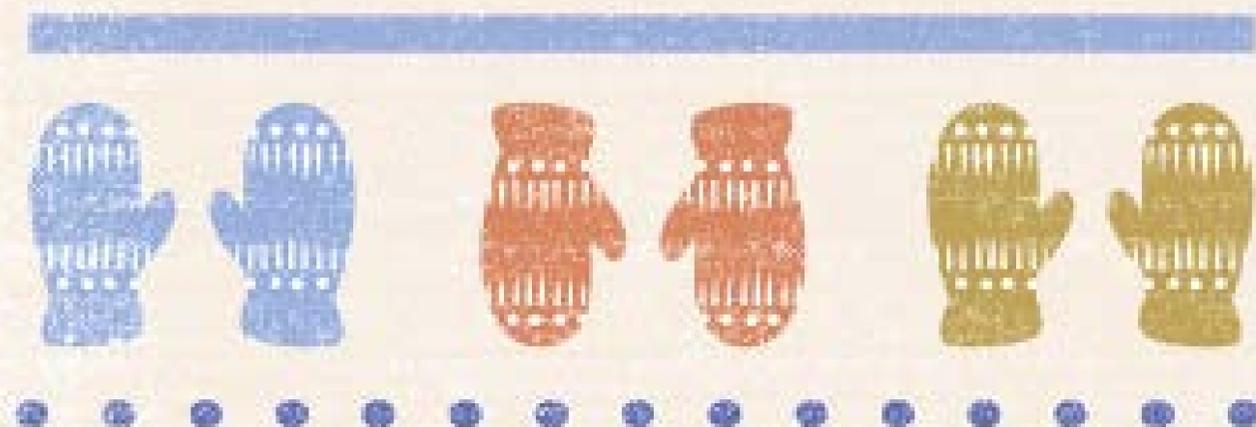


Say it like this:
"HOO-ga."

WHAT'S HYGGE?

A DANISH IDEA THAT WILL KEEP YOU HAPPY ALL WINTER.

BY KATE ROCKWOOD



Sitting by a fire and sipping your favorite tea? **That's hygge.**

Watching TV snuggled under a blanket with your sweetie?

Totally hygge. Playing board games after a home-cooked family dinner? **Hygge to the max.** Derived from the Norwegian word for "well-being," *hygge* is all about kicking back in a supercozy atmosphere and finding joy in simplicity. Danes treasure the concept, and experts say it's one reason Denmark has been ranked the world's happiest country nearly every year since the United Nations started keeping track. There's no need to google real estate in Copenhagen, though. "Danes have built hygge into their culture, but you can find the ingredients for it anywhere," says Meik Wiking, CEO of the Happiness Research Institute in Copenhagen and author of *The Little Book of Hygge: Danish Secrets to Happy Living*, a bestseller in Europe to be released shortly in the U.S. He offers this step-by-step plan for bringing hygge home with you.



SOFTEN UP YOUR LIGHTING

When Danes were asked what they most associate with hygge, 85% said *ja* to candles. In fact, in their country the word *candles* translates literally as "living lights." A flickering flame may be the quickest way to get comfy (unscented, please—artificial fragrance is a hygge no-no and could give off unhealthy chemicals), but it's not the only option. The goal, explains Wiking, is to "create warm, soothing pools of light" around your house. He adds, "Think of the hour after sunrise or before sunset, when the sun is low in the sky and produces a warm, soft, diffused light. That's what you want to aim for indoors." To get there, turn off harsh overheads in favor of smaller lamps scattered around the room. There's some science behind this point: In one study, researchers found that workers' moods plummeted when the lighting was too dark or too bright but improved when it seemed *just right*.

BRING SOME NATURE INSIDE

Birch bark picture frames, pinecone centerpieces, and potted plants galore: For Danes, anything that makes you feel closer to the earth is welcome indoors. You'll get Zen vibes just looking at little bits of nature, and the tactile pleasure of feeling them contributes too, says Wiking. Running your fingers across a wooden table or over a soft bamboo rug is more soothing than touching steel, glass, or plastic. Vary the textures in your decor to love it that much more.



SCHEDULE A LOW-KEY GET-TOGETHER

Though you can always hygge out on your own, Danes place extra value on connectedness and shared experiences—bona fide happy-makers from a research perspective—which is why their hygge-est moments often happen in the company of others. (When surveyed, most Danes said a cozy crowd of three or four is ideal.) Aim for a low-key and come-as-you-are atmosphere—nothing stressed, stuffy, or formal. And because equality and thoughtfulness are such a huge part of hygge, everyone helps with the cooking and cleaning. “The key is to feel relaxed, not like you have to present a perfect meal to guests,” Wiking says.

Be a hygge host

Wiking's no-fuss ideas for getting social will be as relaxing for you as they are for your guests.

BOARD GAME NIGHT

Board games are everything Candy Crush isn't: slow, social, and nostalgia inducing. Scrabble, anyone?

TV + TOGETHERNESS

Watching a show with friends is exponentially more fun than TV bingeing by your lonesome. Add in a few small rituals, like making popcorn, for off-the-charts hygge.

SOUP COOK-OFF

Ask each pal to bring over a favorite recipe (you can trade later on) and enough ingredients to make a small pot. Take turns whipping them up, and chat while you slurp.

BOOK SHARE

Book clubs are hygge on their own, but a swap takes even less planning: Tell your buddies to bring over a book they love, to talk about and hand off to a new owner. Exchanging memories and stories can fuel our social connections just as well as talking about a shared reading experience.



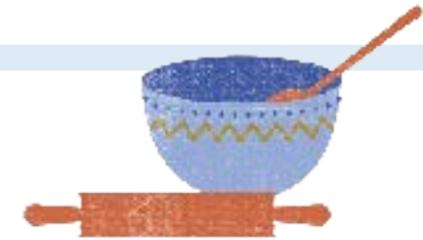
CREATE A COMFY NOOK

Danes call it a *hygge-krog*: a spot in, say, a bay window or a corner of the room where you can cuddle up with blankets and a pile of books. Ideally, you'll find a bit of natural light and complete the picture with a mug of tea. “Hygge is about relaxing and giving your stressed-out, overachiever self a break,” Wiking explains. The Danes are so invested in these hideaways that real estate agents in Denmark even include them in listings.



STASH YOUR TECH

Hygge is rooted in savoring the moment—and that's hard to do when your phone is blowing up with emails and texts. Of course, resisting the urge to check your device is hard (impossible?) if it follows you from room to room. Make phone breaks a habit by clearing out a basket or drawer in the foyer and then committing to dropping your phone there for an hour each night. You'll find that the feel-good emotions coming from being fully present will eventually crowd out the weirdness of going unplugged.



FEAST ON SLOW FOOD

The longer a dish takes to cook, the more hygge it is, says Wiking. And rustic cooking beats fancy. “It's about getting your hands dirty, about the joy of preparing the fresh-baked bread or bubbling stew,” he says. If weekdays demand a mad dash to the dinner table, try approaching just a Sunday supper as an exercise in mindfulness: Flip through a cookbook, linger at the farmers market, and listen to some music. Meals taste better and feel special when you put time and care into them.

VALUE MEANING OVER MATERIALISM

Forget pricey labels. Hygge enthusiasts would rather that their possessions tell a story, like a locket passed down for three generations or a painting bought on a fantastic family trip to the beach. That way, your stuff isn't just stuff—it's a cue for warm-and-fuzzy memories and the happy mood shift that comes with them. You can connect purchases to positive feelings by timing them right: When Wiking wanted to buy a new chair, he dawdled until he could do it to mark the publication of his book. Now “every time I look at that chair, I'm reminded of something that was an important accomplishment for me,” he says.



Your Hygge Emergency Kit

Think of it as first aid for a crappy mood. Wiking suggests corralling these in a box and pulling them out whenever you feel grouchy.

The fixings for a warm drink. Doesn't matter if it's tea or cocoa—the hygge comes from the ritual of sipping something warm.

Cozy socks. “There doesn't have to be anything fancy or luxurious about them,” says Wiking. And that's the point: Hygge is humble and down-to-earth. It's about toasty toes, not fashion.

Nostalgia triggers. Maybe it's a stack of old love letters your spouse wrote when you were dating, or a photo

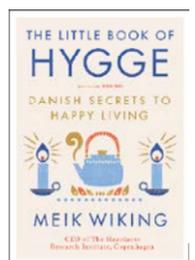
album from your college days. Moseying down memory lane makes you feel more connected to your favorite folks—even when you're all by yourself.

Chocolate. Or whatever bite-size treat makes you smile. The goal is to savor the moment along with the snack.

Paper and pen. When's the last time you handwrote something that wasn't a to-do list? Let's change that! Pen a funny note to a friend,

sketch your sleeping cat, or start a hygge bucket list you can look forward to.

A book you love. “You know that dog-eared novel on your shelf that makes you forget the world and disappear between the pages?” Wiking asks. Grab it for your hygge stash. Then, when you pull it out, read the way you rarely get to on your most hectic days—slowly, picturing the story as it unfolds.



Illustrations from the forthcoming book *The Little Book of Hygge: Danish Secrets to Happy Living*, by Meik Wiking. Copyright © 2017 by Meik Wiking. To be published on January 17, 2017, by William Morrow, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.