

6 STEPS

to Finding Bliss through

HYGGE

Born of dark, cold Scandinavian winters, this lifestyle promotes comfort anywhere—even in sunny Southwest Florida

BY MICHELE MEYER

HYGGE-SPEAK

- Hyggebukser:* The sweatpants you don't want your neighbors to see
- Hygekrog:* A book nook
- Hyggespreder:* Someone who spreads hygge
- Familiehygge:* When you hunker down with kin
- Hyggesokker:* Woolen socks
- Hyggesnak:* Charming small talk



Cozy contentment. It's that feeling when you bond with a book, cuddle with your kids, or stroll barefoot on a beach. Those with lingering effects from the pandemic may need it now more than ever.

If that includes you, try a Danish philosophy that wraps all soul-healing and heart-warming succor into one word: *hygge* (pronounced hoo-gah).

Like croissants and Christmas trees, it originated in Europe—in this case, Scandinavia.

Danes, who claim to be the happiest

folk on earth, are sometimes credited with coining the term in the 1800s to signify coziness, comfort, and camaraderie. But it comes from sixteenth-century Norway's *hugga*, a word meaning "to comfort" that's linked to "hug."

During long, bleak winters, Scandinavians always needed hygge. Now we, with our own long, bleak isolation also may need to be hygge huggers to vanquish pandemic blues.

Yes, the time for an antidote to gloom has come, even among Florida's palm trees and sun.

It's not new on our radar. *The New Yorker* declared 2016 "The Year of Hygge," after the Oxford Languages' short list for "Word of the Year" included it. As the trend spread across the pond, Pinterest and *The New York Times* also signed on. Broadway's 2018 musical *Frozen* even opened its second act with the song "Hygge" (which is not in the animated original). Hygge-themed books became a cottage industry, with more than 50 to date.

Still unsure what all the fuss is about? Here are six ways to be consciously comfy in the pursuit of pleasure:

1 SAVOR SMALL MOMENTS

Let's start by hitting the pause button on hygge hype. Its true meaning revolves around feelings—and they're free. When *The New Yorker* labeled hygge as "unabashedly bourgeois," it missed the point.

Serenity cannot be bought via hand-knit mug cozies on Etsy, wallpaper on Hygge & West, toy carrot cars on Hygge Life, board games on Hygge Games, hygge curtains on Lush Decor, or black tea and mint hygge-scented candles on Skandinavisk. Nor do you need a subscription service such as Hygge Box to deliver it monthly. Instead, DIY and leap into the well of well-being. Laugh. Love. Linger.

2 FEATHER YOUR NEST

Create a hygge haven by focusing on how decor feels rather than looks. Think soft throw pillows and plush rugs. "Just hugging your purring cat or a soft pillow will lift your spirits," says Cynthia Ochoa Yzaguirre, a Naples-based mental health counselor and yoga teacher at Focused Healing. Your happy space can be a nook where you curl up with a cozy mystery (not a gruesome Nordic thriller) or a nest made of soft throw pillows where you snuggle.



3 BRING THE GREAT OUTDOORS INSIDE

We're not suggesting you drag your rustic picnic table indoors. But wooden furniture and floors and snugly natural fabrics are homier than artificial materials. You also can hang pictures of nature, grow fragrant herbs, decorate with bonsai trees and other plants, and open windows. Yzaguirre suggests placing water fountains inside your home, not just outside. "Water is so calming," she says. "That's one reason we gravitate to waterfalls and rivers."

4 WARM UP

In the Sunshine State, crackling fires aren't all they're cracked up to be, given the climate.

However, you can add hygge-style warmth with the glow of candles. Yzaguirre suggests pine-scented varieties. Painting your walls with hot hues such as tomato red, peach, sienna, and amber can lift your spirits, too, as can the delicious aroma and taste of freshly baked cookies or whipped-cream-topped hot cocoa.



5 TAKE A HIKE

"Being outside is spiritual," says Karen P. Forman, a psychotherapist at Naples' Butterfly Counseling. "There's nothing more powerful than opening yourself to nature."

For Forman, a state of mindfulness seems to be key. "Even sitting on your patio and being attentive can restore your well-being," she explains. "I love to look at the clouds. Like snowflakes, no two are alike—but they're all gorgeous."

Yzaguirre adds that the outdoors also have the power to wash away the blues by engaging multiple senses: "If you walk among trees, you can hear birds chirp and leaves rustle while shadows dance on the ground. On the beach, you can taste, smell, and feel the salty air. You can listen to seagulls and crashing waves while your face is warmed by the sun and your feet cooled by the water."

6 PLAY WITH YOUR PREFERRED PEOPLE

Keep it old-school and Wi-Fi-free with puzzles and board games, not computer contests.

"Have a weekend with the girls or your family. Or go for an endorphin-spiking run—whatever brings you joy," Yzaguirre says. "Those experiences last in your heart and mind. And when you remember them, you'll smile again." ◀◀



Lost in Translation

Maybe because it's a foreign concept, hygge can be misconstrued by non-Danes. That's why tips from some online hygge advocates often sound clueless. Among suggestions we found that miss the mark:

- Wear black—or as Elle UK says, "A happy Dane is an appropriately dressed Dane." Leave that to the folks in Denmark. Instead, don sweatpants and cheerful, bright colors—not what could resemble the trappings of mourning.
- Make traditional tebirkes—poppy seed rolls from an uber-complicated recipe. Go with something simpler, like wienerbrød, aka danishes. Or better yet, chocolate chip cookies.
- Eat porridge for dinner. Ordering tasty takeout from Baleen is far more "hygge."
- Hang fluorescent lights. Leave those in the office and light up your life with scented candles and small lamps.