your wellbeing

Switch off and go to your comfort zone

This month:

Switching off

Seeking that 'feel-good' factor after work? In this issue we embrace hygge – the popular Danish concept of switching off – and explore how it can do wonders for your wellbeing and happiness.

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Ever wondered why the Danes frequently top the polls for being among the happiest people in the world? This is where the concept hygge comes in.

Tricky to explain and hard to pronounce, the Danish word hygge (pronounced hoo-ga) represents living well, togetherness and cosiness, and is often credited for the Scandinavian country's happiness. Now, in an ever-demanding and stressful world, hygge is spreading a sprinkle of positive warmth as other countries pick up on the idea.

What does hygge mean?

Hygge has existed in Danish writing since the 18th Century, and comes from a Norwegian word meaning 'well-being'. Several books have recently been published about it, promoting a philosophy in life that's linked to the principles of positive psychology. It's a philosophy that focuses on simplicity, unwinding and slowing down the pace of life. Most importantly, it's about enjoying the simple pleasures in life, and connecting with others. Going back to nature with a nice country walk, before returning home for a hot cuppa is definitely hygge. Or there's nothing more hygge than sharing a meal indoors with others, in a cosy room filled with the warm glow of candles and good food.

Switching off the hygge way

As summer approaches, and the season of cosy weather disappears, the Danish ritual of enjoying the simple things in life can take on a whole new meaning. Here's some ways to get your hygge on in the sunshine.

Host a meal with family or friends. Filling your home with friends and family is the ultimate hygge way! This could be something as simple as relaxing around a dinner table or playing a board game, and discussing the little and big things in life in a positive way.

Light a candle. According to research, the Danes are among Europe's biggest consumers of candles. Adding candles to your home can make you feel calmer, and there's nothing like the flicker of a candle flame to do the job.

Make your home cosy. Having a cosy retreat to come home to after a long day at work, can make your troubles instantly melt away. Get hygge by creating a spot in your home like a quiet snug, and give it a fresh cosy injection of blankets for you to bed down with a summer novel.

Go for a drink after work. Who doesn't love that Friday feeling when the sun is shining and we've logged out of our computers for the weekend? Going for drinks with friends after work is a great way of switching off and getting that 'feel-good' factor, especially if there's a beer garden in sight!

Buy fresh flowers for your home. We all know from personal experience that receiving and buying flowers can make us feel better. But, now there's research to back this up, showing that flowers have a positive effect on our happiness and mood.

Indulge in some self-reward. Hygge is about being kind to yourself and giving yourself a treat. So if indulging in your favourite box set or pouring yourself a glass of wine at home after works feels like a good way to unwind, go for it.

So if you want to embrace the hygge way, remember that it's something that you can create by focusing on your happiness and togetherness, and investing in your emotional well-being. Tiny additions can transform any moment. Soaking in a long hot bath, treating yourself to your favourite coffee, or simply making that time to display your favourite picture could be that instant mood lifter. It's all about slowing down and taking the time to enjoy the moment.

Why switching off after work is important

In an internet-obsessed world of mobile phones, iPads and laptops, switching off and shutting down after work can feel like a huge mountain to climb!

Studies in the UK have suggested that many people find it difficult to unwind after work, and think about work-related issues in their leisure time. In one study, 34 percent of workers reported difficulty in sleeping because of feeling stressed.

Failing to unwind after work, and bringing your problems home, can have a negative impact on you, and those around you. So, if you're seeking ways to switch off and our hygge tips don't rock your boat, these tips might help.

- **Get a hobby** – Finding the right hobby outside work that combines exercise with switching off can be a great way of dispelling the worries of the day.

- **Talk to your boss** – If your stress levels are work-related, pull your boss aside for a chat rather than bottling it up. Your manager will want you to be feeling happy and productive at work.

- **Sleep is king** – Sleep is a very important part of switching off and feeling happy. Getting the right amount of sleep also enables us to be as productive as possible during the day.