



KATHERINE WATT

# Deal with it the DANISH WAY

It's all too easy to shrug an annoyance away – but did you actually shake it off, or is it still lingering in some form or another? Transform your way of thinking by uttering 'pyt'

Ever felt irked or upset by something beyond your control? Minor inconveniences, especially if they happen consecutively (spilling tea down your top then losing a matching shoe, for example), can build a domino effect in your subconscious. Due to your brain's negativity bias, you're likely to focus more acutely on other negatives as the day goes on, even if you can't remember the initial issue. This could mean that you spend the next few hours stomping and huffing about, worrying, and even being rude to others – keeping you in an unhealthy and steady state of stress. If molehills regularly start turning into mountains, you'll feel drained, unmotivated and foggy-headed, and you'll even risk autoimmune disorders caused by stress and its intrinsic link with healthy gut bacteria. However, there is a word that the Danes use to stop the snowball effect of a bad day and, as our experts reveal, this way of thinking could be key to reshaping your health.

## What's in a word?

It didn't seem long ago that we waved hello to 'hygge' – a Scandinavian word synonymous with comfort and self-care – but you might have missed *pyt* (pronounced *pid*), so here's a prime example from Professor Marie Helweg-Larsen of Dickinson College, Pennsylvania: "If you experience a frustrating situation like a parking ticket or a rude person, instead of



becoming angry and frustrated, you say 'pyt' and thereby remind yourself to let go and reset." The simple uttering *pyt* could be mistaken for a whisper or other short exclamation to hush, which makes it satisfyingly onomatopoeic! It may be such a tiny word, but it has huge neurolinguistic powers – after all, the Danish are such fans that *pyt* was voted the nation's favourite word in 2018.

"Words such as 'sun' and 'mum' have calming sounds in them, whereas 'virus' can arouse negative emotions, according to the acoustic models we used in our research," says Professor Morten Christensen, whose study *Affective Arousal Links to Sound Meaning* was published in *Psychological Science*. "Such words might help calm you down and, if we learn to associate a word with something pleasant, it can overwrite troubling thoughts."

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## The *pyt* process

"The word *pyt* triggers a process to let go of one's own (or another's) mistakes, bad decisions or behaviour. Let's call it the *pyt*-effect!" says Danish science journalist Berit Viuf. There's no direct English translation – the closest would be 'don't worry about it' or 'oh well' – it's more of a thought concept to promote wellbeing. "It's instilled from early childhood," continues Berit. "For instance, when mediating children in arguments you'll often hear: 'Honey, *pyt* med det (*pyt* to that); let's go do something else.' If you are able to say 'pyt' to a problem, you'll no longer be preoccupied with the negative." As with all mindful processes, it takes practice and different approaches to quell your personal bugbears. "You need to make it a daily habit to let go of minor frustrations," says Professor Helweg-Larsen. "One good strategy is to think about alternate explanations. Maybe the person acting rudely was ill or had just suffered a great loss – this makes it easier to let go of. Or, if it's something you've done, think about whether

the frustration will be an issue in two hours, two days or two weeks from now."

## Pyt in practice

With *pyt* being somewhat of a national slogan, Danes often use this simple but compelling word to comfort friends or family when they feel overwhelmed and frustrated. "It's said both to remind oneself and others that it's OK to let small things go," says Berit. However, it's important not to get too pally with *pyt*. It's not there to deal with larger problems – and it must be remembered that everyone has their own reality of whether an incident constitutes as small or large (within reason). Try to focus on your personal level of *pyt* to keep your wellbeing balanced. "Don't use it as an excuse for inaction," says Professor Helweg-Larsen, "or, if someone or something has violated your core values." Keeping a dedicated *pyt* journal would be a good start – ranking things on a scale of 1-10. Mark how you felt in the initial moment, then busy yourself with something else. Or, if it's something you need to calm down from, try a relaxing walk, yoga, meditation or breathing exercise, then score yourself on that specific thing half an hour later – unless you've forgotten all about it. "Of course, *pyt* is not a magical word that can release you, but everyone in Denmark will know the process behind it off by heart, so it helps to repeat that little reminder to yourself," says Berit.

## WHEN TO SAY PYT

Former sociologist Berit Viuf has some examples of times when *pyt* is the only word that can help you mediate your emotions.

- You've been working hard, so you expect to be given the team leader position for the next big project. Instead, it's given to your colleague. Try this helicopter perspective: Does this one thing really influence your life? Will it ruin your chance to get promoted later? Will this have any negative impact on your present role? If you can say no to all three, maybe just say 'pyt'. Then, stop using your energy on being annoyed about your boss's decision, and focus on keeping up your hard work.
- Somebody you are animatedly talking to at a party spills wine on your dress. As money is tight, your first reaction is to be frustrated or upset, but they apologise and try to help. Use *pyt* to turn it around. You didn't invest in the dress to sit at home alone in it! Rejoice in the fact that people respect and enjoy your company.



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