



Aparting GIFT

It may have an odd name but don't be put off by this new type of decluttering that can bring joy as you take a trip down memory lane with loved ones

Words Bianca Carmona

Have you heard about Swedish death cleaning? Don't let the strange name fool you — it's more about tidying up your life than anything morbid.

While the term may raise some eyebrows, Swedish death cleaning is not as grim as it sounds.

What it's all about

Dostadning, as it's called in Sweden, involves removing unnecessary items from your home so loved ones won't be

burdened with the task after you pass away. Margareta Magnusson coined the term in her 2017 book *The Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning*.

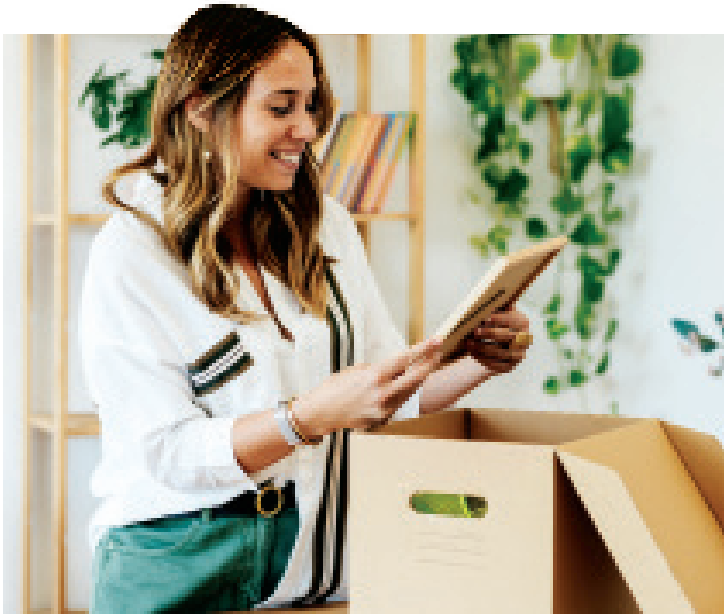
Interest in the concept has grown thanks to a popular new reality TV show based on the book.

Bond University assistant professor and clinical psychologist Dr Cher McGillivray says it can be a profound way to declutter your life and leave a legacy.

"It's a chance to share your stories and memories with

those you love, long after you're gone," Dr McGillivray says. "Do you want them just going through all of your things? Or do you want to have the opportunity to tell them those stories and make this a really special experience? It's a really beautiful way for us to celebrate life."

The Art of Decluttering founder Amy Revell says to consider decluttering while you are still physically able to. "The reality is we can't take anything with us when we pass away," Amy says. →



The benefits

The main aim of Swedish death cleaning is to not leave behind a mountain of stuff for our loved ones to sift through while they're grieving.

But the benefits go beyond organising our physical spaces to lightening our loved ones' physical and emotional load.

"It's an opportunity for people to look at their life story," Dr McGillivray says. "How do you want people to remember you?"

Decluttering your space can also be good for you mentally.

Dr McGillivray says clutter is associated with higher stress and often diminished productivity.

"It makes it hard for the brain to focus on specific tasks, because the visual cortex gets distracted by the irrelevant information you take in."

She says clean, organised spaces are correlated with lower stress levels and improved cognitive function.

The Decluttering Co founder Julie Whiting lists even more decluttering perks: a more aesthetically pleasing environment, less allergens and better sleep.

"For older people it can be freeing," the professional organiser says. "They can take

up a hobby like painting or go 'grey nomading' and rent out the house."

Amy agrees, saying it can actually help people experience life to the fullest.

"You get freedom to do the things you want, like have friends or the grandkids come over and not have to spend an hour tidying up before," she says.

Enjoy the process

Dr McGillivray suggests turning the process into a celebration of life and legacy.

That antique brooch you treasure will not hold the same importance to the recipient unless you share how it has been passed down for generations or was handmade by someone special.

Dr McGillivray suggests throwing an official dinner or party where you can share special items with your loved ones or put keepsakes in little boxes for each guest.

"My mother has put boxes together for each of our family members so that we don't have to do that when she's gone," she says.

Writing in a scrapbook is another way to preserve the stories behind your cherished possessions, she says.

The challenges

Dr McGillivray, who has worked with hoarders and people dealing with grief, says some people can have trouble parting with items.

"Some people hold on to things because they have a lot of significance and meaning. It can be a great loss," she notes.

Julie says the task can also be overwhelming.

"Once clutter reaches a certain point, decision fatigue sets in. People don't know where to start or what to do with it all," she says.

Practical tips

To start, Julie advises blocking out some time, putting on your favourite tunes and diving in.

Amy suggests a "keep the best, get rid of the rest" mentality.

"Ask yourself, 'What is the point of having your good linens or glassware or having extras in the cupboard where they never get used?'"

Dr McGillivray says it is important to consider not just physical clutter, but digital files, computer passwords and legal documents, too.

Margareta's book suggests removing larger items in the home first and leaving smaller sentimental items, such as photos or letters, until later.

If you're struggling to declutter, consider calling in a friend or the experts. Or perhaps you can see if you can try and shift your mindset.

"The next time you see a cluttered cupboard, remember to no longer fear but be curious about what treasures might be found in those dust-covered boxes that could hold the legacy of your life to pass on to your loved ones,"

Dr McGillivray says. ●



Author and academic Dr Davina Woods has embraced the Swedish death cleaning method.

Following the loss of her husband Ron and her father in 2014, then her mother in 2019, Dr Woods was tasked with the daunting challenge of sorting through three lifetimes' worth of possessions.

"There was loads of stuff to go through, like my husband's collection of British comics and tech gadgets," she says.

Despite the sometimes overwhelming process, Dr Woods found treasure in the chaos — a love letter from her father to her mother.

"It was something positive to come out of doing this horrible declutter."

Now in her mid-60s and battling multiple health conditions, Dr Woods has been sorting out her own belongings.

"I'm at the stage where I've told my kids, 'No more gifts for me, please, unless it's an experience,'" she says.