



End-of-life doula Estella Hutchinson is hosting Death Over Dinner on Tuesday 8 August (Dying to Know Day) at Siren Bar & Restaurant in Gungahlin. Photo: Kerrie Brewer

Death Over Dinner no laughing matter for Canberra comedian

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Comedy and death don't generally go hand-in-hand (except perhaps the Darwin awards) but for part-time comedian and end-of-life doula, Estella Hutchinson, it's a combo that works.

Most people have heard of 'birth doulas', who help expectant mums to choose their ideal birthing experience, but not many people know about a 'death doula', or as Estella prefers, an end-of-life doula.

Estella helps people work out how to approach the one certainty in life other than taxes – death. She's hosting Death Over Dinner in Gungahlin on Tuesday 8 August ([Dying to Know Day](#)), which may not sound appetising but there will be a cocktail on hand to break the ice.

So when Estella isn't doing open-mic comedy spots at the Pot Belly, she's helping people to tackle the tough questions.

"Just the word 'death' will shut people down," Estella says. "That's why I prefer to use 'end of life' as a terminology. Otherwise, people when they hear the 'D word' they don't want to have any further conversation. Whereas with an end-of-life doula, they'll get to the word doula and ask "what's a doula?."

Estella is a fully-qualified end-of-life doula and is a trainer for the Certificate IV End-of-Life online course. She's also volunteered in palliative care for seven years. She says end-of-life doulas are an emerging industry which has been around for about 10 years.

"We don't talk about it [in Western society], we're horrified when it happens," she says. "But it is the only thing we're definitely going to see. Essentially, it is just a moment in time. More people spend more time being scared of death and have more anxiety and distress than it's actually going to be when they do die."

Despite the enticing menu of sourdough pizza, Estella acknowledges that Death Over Dinner is a hard sell. To help dinner guests start the difficult conversation, there will be cards with questions to ponder.

"There might be questions about where would you like to die," Estella says. "There's a lot of new emerging body disposal options; would you want to be composted? Body composting is where your body goes off and there's a composting treatment and your family gets a bag of compost at the end. The other is a process called alkaline hydrolysis, or water cremation, a more environmentally-friendly way of breaking the body down to its original components. All the water used in that process can be returned to the normal waterways."

If that puts you off your dessert, you can also discuss having your ashes shot off to the moon, or turned into a pottery glaze, or even transformed into diamonds.

"The unique thing about the pottery glaze and the gemstones is that the final colour is dependent on the mineral matrix of the remains, so you can't fully pick it," Estella says. "It's the last gift your loved ones can give you – the final colour of the gemstone."

Clarification: Death Over Dinner is not a murder mystery and will not result in death by poison.

Bookings: www.trybooking.com/CJWVD