Make A Date!

From disclosing your status to choosing the right shoes, dating is a drama. These 10 tips will help keep it light.

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Chill out

As gay relationship guru and author Betty Berzon points out, “People think of dates as auditions for life relationships.” That’s way too much pressure. HIVer and LA therapist Ken Howard advises a new mind-set. “Think of dating as an opportunity to get to know someone, broaden your horizons and foster community.”

Feel sexy

“Sexy can be anything: heels, perfume, looking nice,” says Lisa Diane White, who helps HIVer women at Atlanta’s SisterLove Inc. eroticize safe sex. “It’s about your attitude.” Worried you’re too sexy? Ask a friend.

Skip the movie

On a first date, it’s better to “go somewhere where you can sit, talk and reveal what you feel comfortable with,” says “Artwork Pup,” one of our POZ Personals HIVers (check him out below—and on www.poz.com!). Meet for coffee or drinks. If you’re having a ball, you can segue into dinner. If not, you can end the date, civilly, in an hour (or less).

Disclose (early)

When it comes to dating and disclosing, sooner is better. “The more excited you get about spending time with someone,” White says, “the harder it is to risk scaring them off.” She suggests using the power of good information. “I like women to say to dates, ‘You’re always at risk, but you’re less at risk with me, because I know how to stay safe.’”

Enough about you

Many daters dominate conversation, either trying (too hard) to sell themselves or spilling (too much) emotional baggage. Practice listening—you want to learn about your date, red flags and all, right?

Check for signs

According to Jesse Pasackow, who moderates LA Shanti’s POZ Express Dating evenings, “when things aren’t going great, guys slouch and look distracted. When they hit it off, they’re smiling,

there’s lots of eye contact.” Look for these clues—but don’t be too literal: distracted behavior can be a sign of nerves.

Don’t play games
If you don’t want date No. 2, politely say so. The same is true if you do want a follow-up rendezvous. “You don’t have to follow any rules—if it’s natural to call, call,” says Howard.

Expect some rejection
“You gotta kiss a few frogs to find a prince,” says White. Accepting that fact can be tough, especially for HIVers, who already bear more than their share of rejection. Shernoff advises people to put it in perspective: “It’s a failed date, not treatment failure.”

Reality check!
If you find that all your dates are stinkers, Howard advises a self-assessment with friends. “They can help you figure out what’s wrong: ‘Am I talking too much? Am I coming on too strong?’” Also consider a new dating scene—people from different settings can help break a vicious cycle.

Keep an open mind
After a few dates, you may be having second thoughts. (“He’s charming…but he’s short!”) Tolerating ambivalence is the name of the game: Take time to think about what you’re really looking for and what you’re likely to find—and when in doubt, venture one more outing.

My Dream Date Is

Artwork Pup
Tampa, FL | 42 | MSM
Dinner at my place, then drinks on the patio watching the sun set. I’m into gourmet cooking with a Southern touch.

Art Lover
Miami, FL | 40 | WSM
Dinner in a beachside restaurant, a long talk over drinks and maybe some salsa dancing. Outgoing lover of art and travel seeks tall, dark (Latino or black) mister in late 30s/early 40s, perhaps for open and honest LTR.

Pompona Diva
Pompano Beach, FL | 49 | WSM
An entire day, from breakfast and the beach to a romantic dinner, dancing and snuggling. Talented, intelligent, well-read woman seeks possible LTR with single white/Hispanic man who still has a spark for romance.

Papa Teddybear
Bronx, NY | 50 | MSW
A show featuring the Stylistics, the Whispers and the Manhattans, then dinner and a walk in

Central Park topped off with champagne.

Free Spirit
Los Angeles, CA | 41 | WSM
A morning drive up the coast with nowhere particular in mind, an array of CDs and stimulating conversation. We park, go for a stroll on the beach and watch the sun set.

Leather Cowboy
SanFrancisco, CA | 35 | MSM
Dinner followed by drinks at a cozy bar, then a romantic beachside stroll. My ideal man loves red wine, movies, TV, Kylie, steak, Christmas, nature and fitness. Show me a man of color in leather, and I explode on sight.

When do they disclose?

BEFORE THE FIRST DATE: "I always find a way to bring up my status. It's not my whole existence, but it's a part of who I am. I want to know if he can deal with it or not."

—TIGER THOM, 42
Washington, DC; diagnosed '86 | MSM

AFTER A FEW DATES:
"This allows time for both of us to see if there is an interest in each other—to get to know each other's values and personality."

—PRETTY EYES, 31
Glendora, CA; diagnosed '97 | WSM

SPARE ME THE HASSLE:
"Negative women are accommodating of my HIV, but I'd rather find the right positive lady so we can
compare notes."

—SCUBA JUNKIE, 42
Long Beach, CA; diagnosed '01 | MSW

ALL THE RIGHT PLACES

Romance is everywhere! Review the options:

BARS AND CLUBS While many seeking "dating material" avoid these joints, "if I'm there looking for a long-term relationship," Arkansas' Stuart Brown says, "surely someone else is." Frisco's Greg Daniels also likes to court at "dimly lit and sleazy bars."

CULTURE SPOTS What better place to cruise than museums, bookstores or the theater, which offer infinite opportunities to flirt—or at least risk a conversation with come-ons, like "Can you get

that hardbound?”

IN THE COMMUNITY “A sports league or volunteering” can put you in Cupid’s way, says DC’s Thom Kirk. “When you least expect it—bam!” Add ASOs and houses of worship to Kirk’s list.

12-STEP GROUPS “I’ve urged my single friends to ‘find’ something to quit as an excuse to meet people in a recovery group,” says Sean, 35, of New York City. “The people are clear-minded, into ‘relating’ to each other—and usually bored silly from reading the Big Book all day.”

WALKING A DOG Furry friends give passersby who otherwise wouldn’t speak a chance to coo, chat, compare pet-owner notes—and even make puppy love.

OUT AND ABOUT Love is all around, even, say, at the grocery store. Says Alabama’s Alan Lancaster: “Everyone has to eat.” There’s also the ATM, the bus—anywhere beyond your house…if you’re open to the possibilities.

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