The Rules

Time-tested seropositive secrets for capturing the heart of Mr. Right

March 1, 1998 By Dominic Hamilton-Little

You've read about them in *Cosmo* and seen them on *Oprah. The Rules* -- the revolutionary retro dating manual that instructs girls to play hard to get -- hit No. 1 on every major best-seller list across the country. A runaway success, *The Rules* has spawned a hotline, website, newsletter, support groups, sequel and an upcoming motion picture. And don't think the book simply offers tips on how to catch a husband. According to co-author Ellen Fein, "We're saving people's lives here." Well, so is *POZ.* To hell with your serostatus, what's your marital status?

RULE 1

Don't blurt out the news of your seropositivity right after the first kiss, unless this is a revenge date, in which case you might want to add that you also have thrush. If you haven't told him before the first date -- and remember, your diagnosis should be disclosed amid light and casual chit-chat, since *Rules* PWAs are always entertaining and never maudlin -- then wait until predinner drinks on the second date and, extending your pills in his direction, say: "I *always* take my HIV cocktail with a cocktail. Have an AZT, darling?"

RULE 2

Don't expect HIV to self-actualize you. If you couldn't get a date before you tested positive, don't expect that to change. Change must come aside and apart from your health status as you develop that fabulous *Rules* creature deep inside each and every one of us.

RULE 3

Do accept a date for Friday, as long as he calls before Wednesday, even if your diarrhea is keeping you on the pot 45 minutes out of every hour. Before you say "I could *never* ...," consider this: If the Imodium hasn't kicked in by Friday at noon and you still feel convinced that you're walking around with Ebola, sweetly say you just don't feel up to it tonight. Remember that when you cancel plans he made, you are back in the position of being desired and, thus, in power.

RULE 4

Don't talk about your health more than twice a week. *Rules* PWAs are not dull. Remember, your date is not a friend -- he's a potential beau -- and discussing aches and pains is tiresome, unless it's an opportunity for you to display your intellectual prowess regarding recent treatment options or your political savvy. (DON'T say, "My tummy hurts." DO say, "Can you *believe* that Shalala woman?")

RULE 5
Resist the temptation to date a member of your support group, as it not only destroys the integrity of the initial relationship but guarantees major weirdness in the affair. *Rules* PWAs always maintain mystery in the dating arena as this keeps him coming back for more, and if you have already shared information on damage sustained in your youth, you might as well be dating your therapist. It might have worked for Nick Nolte in *The Prince of Tides*, but then again, he's no PWA.

RULE 6
Do accentuate the positive in personal ads. If you take the plunge via the classifieds or cyberspace, be candid about your status and endowment. If you must reduce yourself to a 35-word count in newsprint, including the attractive graphic "HIV+" separates the men from the boys among your respondents.

RULE 7
Don't expect a man to change. If you're HIV positive, you know that some things last forever, and this is particularly true of ingrained behavior in the male of the species. If he is chronically neat, habitually tardy, hates French food (your favorite) and disco (you cha-cha every night), but loves you to death, consider yourself lucky. He may be unusual, but view that as a bonus in this age of cookie-cutter nipple-ponies. On the other hand, if he flirts with others in front of you, exhibits violent behavior and is even a bigger slut than you are, then you're obviously embroiled with a typical alpha male who will only bring tears and destruction to your life, and unless you are seriously codependent you will dump him *pronto.*

RULE 8
Don't get sloppy about your looks -- activist chic is so '87. Sure, you might feel that there are more important things in life than a weekly manicure, but don't forget how pretty it makes you feel. And remember, KS is such a good excuse for finally trying that heavier foundation. But the reverse can be tiresome too: Don't go berserk at the gym with steroids and all. Not only do they give you horrendous back acne and interact wretchedly in your liver with all your other pills, but the gym bunny is so ubiquitous that any *Rules* PWA with charm will seek out other avenues of attractiveness.

RULE 9
When he asks you out, silently count to 10 before saying yes. It has the potential to make him worry that dementia might have set in, but *Rules* PWAs are never desperate, even if we feel like death warmed over.

RULE 10
Remember that No. 1 in your life is you. You will always be attractive and the most desirable PWA in the room if you love yourself and take pride in who you are. So no matter where you are on this road, be *fabulously positive* about everything (including your bitchy side) and the men will come crawling to you.

Last but not least, one more hint ...

When in doubt, break all rules, take a real risk and love living the single life.

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