

BBC - Love Later in Life Week



Relate key messages on finding love in later life

- Relationships are important no matter what age you are. There's also an abundance of evidence highlighted in Relate's [The Best Medicine](#) campaign indicating that good quality relationships benefit people and are good for your health.
- Many people in their 50s and 60s are finding themselves single again after bereavement and increasingly, divorce. This may seem daunting but age should be no barrier to love and companionship.
- Online dating is just one of many routes to finding love. Retirement presents plenty of opportunities to take up new hobbies and meet new people.
- Visit www.relate.org.uk or [insert local contact details] to find out more.

Useful stats

- Official [Divorce statistics](#) show that the number of people getting divorced each year has been falling steadily since the mid-1990s. This is in contrast to the divorce rate among the over 60s which has increased significantly (58%) in recent years compared to all other age groups.
- Data from the Health Protection Agency (HPA) shows that the number of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) continues to rise among those aged 45 to 64, while HIV diagnoses have doubled in the over-50s over the past decade.

Some interesting questions, with answers:

Why are more people getting divorced in later life?

The UK Office for National Statistics singled out the fact that people are living longer as the most likely cause for increased divorces amongst the over 60s. Another reason they cited is more relaxed attitudes towards divorce among the “baby boomer” generation and as well as greater financial independence among women.

Is online dating becoming more popular amongst older generations?

Relate's recent [The Way We Are Now 2015](#) study found that 16% of 16–34 year olds who are in a relationship report having met their current partner online, falling to just 3% for those aged over 64. However the research for BBC Local Radio out today shows that 23% of adults in the 55 to 65 age group have met at least one partner through a dating website or app. It is likely that the number of older people online will continue to rise though, particularly as more become single in later life and more and more people have access to the internet.

Is online dating a good way of finding a new partner in later life?

Internet dating can be a great way of meeting somebody new so if it appeals to you why not give it a try? It's important to exercise caution though – as although most people are genuine there are also fraudsters who will target vulnerable daters. Also bear in mind that in the 50 plus age group, there tend to be more women looking for partners than men. Don't discount more traditional avenues such as lonely hearts columns, dating agencies and of course meeting through friends and hobbies. More older people than ever are working for longer and so work is still a good way of meeting a partner.

How can I ensure I stay safe when online dating?

Avoid giving out personal and traceable information such as your landline number, always meet in a public place, let someone know where you're going and send them a text to let them know you're OK later. Know your sexual limits and state them early on.

Do you have any advice for people who may be beginning dating again after bereavement?

Don't feel pressured to rush into anything while you are still grieving. It can help to focus on other relationships such as those with family, friends and the community.

Can love/ marriages/ relationships be better the second time around?

Yes, this is certainly possible, especially if you are willing to learn from past relationships rather than copy old patterns. Second marriages can benefit from the experience you gained in your first and chances are you probably know yourself better by now too. It really depends on your individual circumstances though and which spouse you are most compatible with. One thing which can affect second marriages is when you have any issues lingering from your past relationships. In this instance, it may help to see a relationship counsellor to talk about any issues which are lingering from your so that you don't repeat past mistakes.

Can sex in later life be as good?

Yes – it can be just as good but often different. As people get older, sex can become less about performance and more about pleasure and closeness.

Why is it we are seeing a rise in STIs amongst older people?

Rising divorce rates amongst the over 40s mean that more older people are finding themselves dating again and as a result- having sex with new partners. Perhaps they haven't had to think about condoms for years. After the menopause, many women don't use condoms because they can't get pregnant but may not consider that they are still at risk of STIs. Similarly men who have had a vasectomy may not consider using condoms.

Why are more men than women getting married in their 60s and finding younger partners?

One reason why there are many more women over 50 looking for a partner is that males tend to look for younger partners. On the other hand women tend to be more flexible. Another factor is that younger women are often attracted to older men because they feel they know themselves better. In terms of getting married again we can't say for sure but women are perhaps more independent and have wider social networks meaning they don't rely as heavily on marriage. One thing we know that both sexes don't like is when people lie about their age. This can make them wonder what else in the relationship they are hiding so it's best to be honest.

Tips for dating:

Be positive - Make sure you're in a good place and feeling fulfilled first before you try and get into a new relationship. Looking to another person to make you happy will not last and is likely to create unwanted pressures and resentments down the line.

Keep your friends close - Develop and maintain a strong network of friends and family support around you. These people are your counsellors, cheerleaders and your safety net to catch you if you fall. They can also be good for introducing you to new people.

Be real - When you're getting to know someone be honest about who you are and what you think, don't say things just to make the other person like you. In order to find a real lasting connection you have to be your most authentic self.

Take your time - Listen to your head as well as your heart and your hormones! Really get to know the person before rushing into a relationship, a premature commitment, or bed.

Make a list of your 'deal-breakers' - Think about what you absolutely cannot put up with in a relationship and stick to it.

Be curious - On your date, as much as you talk, also ask questions, listen, be curious about what makes the other person tick. People like people who are interested in them.

Make eye contact and smile - [In a study](#) pairs of strangers were asked to reveal intimate details of their lives and then to look into each other's eyes for 4 minutes. Many of these couples reported feeling deeply attracted to each other and two of the couples in the study actually married afterwards!

Be safe - In our modern culture of online and virtual dating, people can present themselves however they want, so always make sure you keep yourself safe. Let someone know where you're going and send them a text to let them know you're OK later.

Find support - If you've had bad relationship experiences in the past or are worried that your 'picker' is off,

you might find it useful to [talk this through with a Relate counsellor](#) either before you start dating again or during the process so they can help support you to become more aware of your patterns and make better choices.

'Rejection is protection' - Finally, when you open yourself up to love you also open yourself up to the possibility of heartbreak. If you are rejected, try not to take it too personally. There's no point dwelling on what happened, what you did wrong, why they didn't call back etc. It could be any number of reasons, none of which are about you at all. Don't lose heart, keep going and don't give up on your search. It will all be worth it in the end.

Relate can provide impartial and non-judgmental support for people of all ages including individual counselling for people looking for love. For further information about our work, call us on 01223 357424 or visit www.relatecambridge.org.uk .