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IS ONLINE DATING RIGHT FOR YOU?

Relationships: Is Online Dating Right for You?

Who scores best online

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For every happy ending you hear about online dating, there are dozens of horror stories. Sometimes, having hundreds – or thousands – of available single men isn't enough. There are some personality and physical types who do better online than others.

Before you spend your money on an online dating membership, or put your heart on the line to try to meet a guy, here are tips on whether online dating is right for you. And if you've been struggling, what you can do to improve your odds.

Beauty or the beast?

It's not all about who looks the best, according to Stef Safran, founder of Stef and the City dating service in Chicago.

Safran said, "Dating online can be tough in general because whether you were the prom queen or the nerd, everyone is on the same playing field. Online dating takes a very thick skin. Many people have never dealt with the amount of rejection and are surprised that they can be rejected as much as they are. The average person only receives one response for every 10 they write."

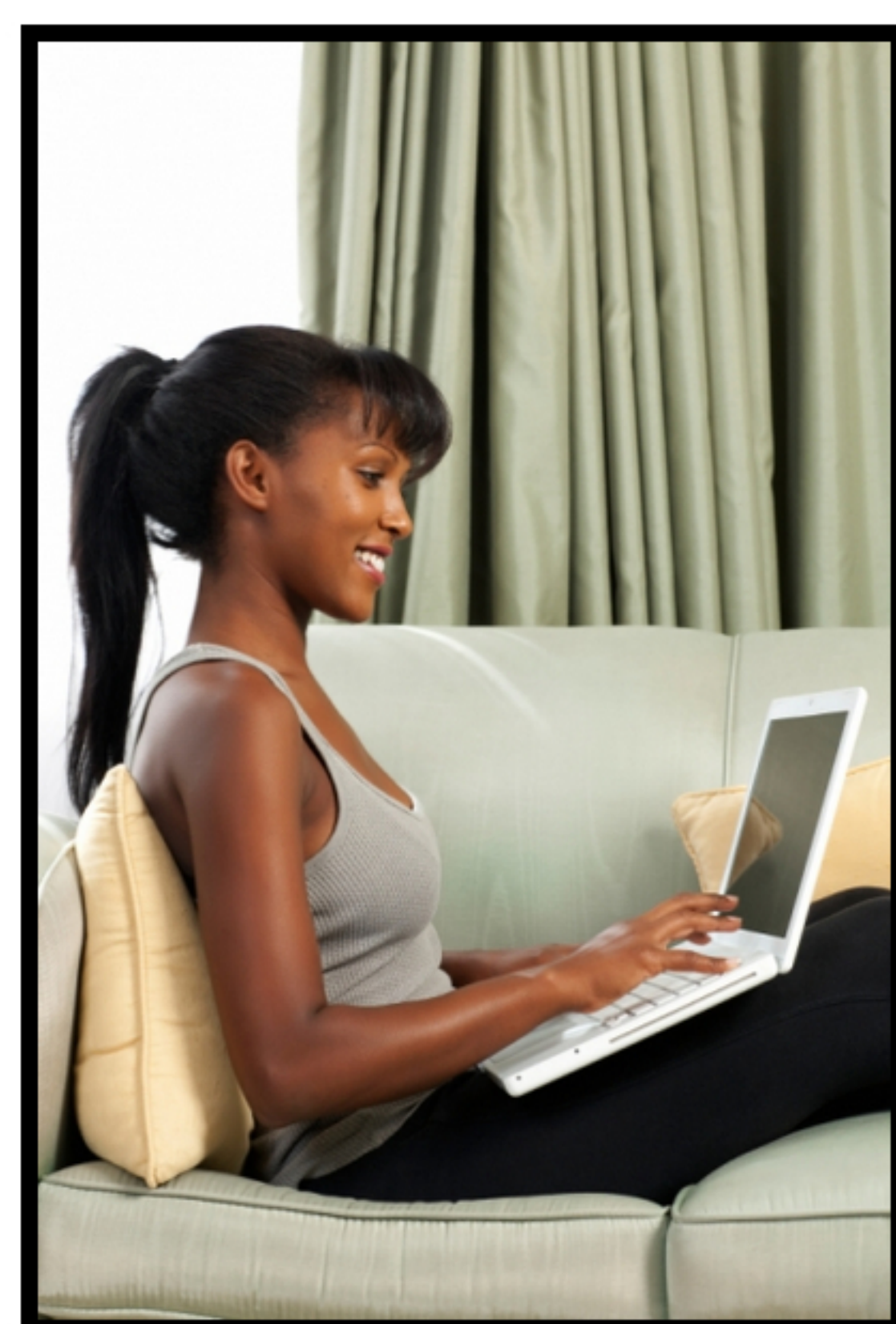
The people who do the best are those with self-esteem. "No matter if they are shorter, heavier, bald, etc., it comes down to the personality types that are willing to be rejected. I've seen men who are 5'6" have more dates than men who are 6'0" and I've seen overweight people meet more people than those who have model bodies. I've seen my female neighbor, a widow, go back into dating online and be successful. She met many, many men at age 58 even though she could have lost 15 lbs. and was of an age that many assume means that there are more women than there are available men. She currently has a great boyfriend," Safran said.

"As an expert in the dating field, one thing I notice is those who have follow through and understand what putting yourself out there is, whether this is about online dating or dating by going out to events and fix ups, have the best luck. I often come across people who say, 'I've tried online dating and HATE it,' only to find out that they never wrote people, they waited for people to write them or didn't like who contacted them," Safran said.

Marcia King-Gamble, a dating columnist, said what can help someone without stellar looks who has had bad luck on one dating website, is to be selective in the type of website they choose next.

"People are naturally attracted to pictures and then they skim or read profiles. If you are not one of the beautiful people, I would stay away from the more popular mainstream sites where there is more competition and a hook up mentality. A smaller specialty site might serve you better, especially if you are looking for something serious. By specialty, I mean a site where you share an interest with other online daters. It could be books, pets, cooking, travel. There is something for everyone.

Tina Tessina, Ph.D., a therapist and author of Money, Sex and Kids: Stop Fighting about the Three Things That Can Ruin Your Marriage, said that looks do matter. "Online dating is an advertising process – you have to attract enough people with your profile that you get some good choices. If you're older, or like most of us, don't meet the media ideal of what a date should look like, then it's going to be tougher. If you're not very tech savvy, you may not understand how to produce a good bio for the online site. You need very good pictures that present you as an attractive person, but not too formal. You may need help with the photo, either professional or help from a more photography-wise friend."



Geography matters

Where you live does have an impact, King-Gamble said. "Certain geographical regions are definitely better for singles. It's a supply and demand thing. The Sunbelt, for example, seems to attract a more laid back, casual type. If you are a professional seeking another professional, you may want to cast a wider net. Urban areas where people commute and live hours apart attract diversity and a wider online demographic. Cities with military bases also do well with online daters. Rural cities where it is tough to meet eligible singles have a fair share of online daters, but you are going to have to spend money and travel time to meet, because the odds of finding a compatible mate in a small town aren't that great."

Personality types

No matter your personality, you can still have luck dating online, King-Gamble said. "While online dating is notorious for attracting introverts who come to life behind a computer, it provides a diverse pool of eligibles. One man who admits to being an introvert said that online dating allows him to connect and establish common ground before meeting. Anonymously he can weed out the wheat from the chaff."

Lisa Bahar, a marriage and family therapist, said, "Certain personality types attract other types of personalities. Some may perceive a person as intimidating, and another may see them as vulnerable and sensitive. Personality is an individual gift and is meant to be a part of the person that they accept. If the person knows their personality has potential draw backs in relationships and they want to change that, it would be up to explore that, but not for the purposes of being more attractive to dating, more for themselves."

Tips to success

To succeed in online dating, King-Gamble said many people need to change their mindset. "I believe the biggest obstacle online daters face are themselves. Singles need to get out of the mindset that they can't make the first move. Don't take the timid way out. Grab the mouse by the hand, click on a profile and write a friendly, encouraging message. Keep it brief. Messages get better responses than winks," she said.

"Regardless of weight, age, ethnicity or personality there is someone for everyone. The key is picking the right dating site and dedicating time to searching and reading the profiles that interest you. Next be selective as to whom you reach out to. Most will reveal who they are by the kinds of photos they post and their bare bones profile that says nothing. Captions that read 'looking for fun,' or, 'I'm a giver not a receiver' and such should make you run," she said.

Once you do decide to date online, it's important to log onto your chosen website daily. "Set a goal as to the number of people you reach out to. And never play it cool. When someone writes to you, write back within 24 hours. Attention spans are limited and people quickly move on. Keep the correspondence light and upbeat. Too much information in the initial e-mails can send an interested prospect running. Don't share your financial situation or your latest health scare. Don't zero in on one person. Keep the ball rolling and connect with more than a few," King-Gamble said.

Remember, "everyone's right for online dating. Come with an open mind and a short laundry list of must haves. If you cast your net wide, you will find more than a few compatible souls. Don't limit your options by having rigid geographic boundaries, age/color restrictions and a host of other things. Don't take a lack of response personally. There are a myriad of agendas online and choosing not to respond may have nothing to do with you," King-Gamble said.

Do's and Don'ts

Tessina shared her tips on dating online successfully:

- Do know what you want. If you want a relationship, don't set yourself up for sex and nothing more.
- Do be careful. Meet your date in a public place until you're sure what he or she told you is real.
- Do shop around. Don't focus on one person until you've given yourself a choice.
- Do listen. Don't monopolize the conversation. You'll learn even more about your date, and be more relaxed, if you are interested.
- Do focus on friendship. This early, you can't know where it might go, so concentrate on developing the friendship. You can have as many friends as you want, and the relationship could grow.
- Do get feedback. Offer your comments on the event or the restaurant, and ask your date what he or she thought of it, to create conversation.
- Do let your date know if you enjoyed his/her company. A complement is always welcome. If you'd like to do it again, say so.
- Do call. If you promise to call, mean it. If you've decided not to continue the relationship but feel you can't say so, don't make empty promises.
- Do tell the truth. Don't lie, but also don't share too much too soon. You don't need to tell your date about other dates if you two have no agreement about exclusivity.
- Do pay attention to the clues about your date. You need to learn about this person's character, not just looks and charm.

"Keep your fantasies and your heart in check until you actually know who this person is. Approach him with a healthy dose of skepticism, until you have all the facts," Tessina said.



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