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SEX & RELATIONSHIPS • 4 minutes read

Will dating after Freedom Day also be a walk in the park?

By [Kirsty Mason](#)



COVID-19 barged into the world of dating like the racist uncle who ruins Christmas. But as of Freedom Day, our pre-pandemic notion of meeting whoever we want, whenever we want is back. Will the familiar old dating habits return? Or will we see something totally different?

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sexual behaviours. Our sex lives have taken one of the biggest hits when it comes to adapting to life with a deadly virus.

With many people excited to launch back into a free world of mingling with strangers, some are predicting a summer of hedonistic lust. But with social distancing and a fear of strangers drilled into the psyche of the nation, the 'return to normal' is an anxiety-inducing prospect for some.

It's been termed 'FODA' (fear of dating again) and refers to feelings of unease about meeting new people since COVID-19 stomped into our lives. For those who were confident about dating before the pandemic, this sense of anxiety will be an incredibly uncomfortable shift. But fear not - there's a psychological explanation behind why you're feeling this way.

With a spooky sense of foreboding, dating with the threat of infectious disease was a concept studied by psychologists at McGill University in 2017. Evolutionary psychologists have long theorised that our innate behaviour drives us to avoid signs of infectious disease in social situations. This explains feelings of disgust or worry when someone sneezes without covering their mouth.

This natural human response is referred to as our 'behavioural immune system'. The psychologists tested this theory by showing a selection of participants a video about germs to trigger their behavioural immune system before going on a date. They found that participants unwittingly made a trade-off between the strength of their social connection and their innate desire to avoid disease. If participants had their behavioural immune system activated, they were less likely to find their date attractive.

What does this mean for dating in our COVID-hit society? Will there be a lack of connection or will we form deeper bonds where the social connection has trumped the risk of infection?

Although the pandemic has torn, kicked, stomped, and throttled the handbook of dating, some people have drawn positives from this new alien way of romance. This was the case for Owen, who, controversially, preferred dating over lockdown.

"I actually think dating over COVID has been a lot more fun," he says. "It's more relaxed and people are more up for a simple walk in the park and a coffee rather than a full-blown dinner and drinks. Before COVID, dates were so much pressure and you end up spending

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see if there's a connection first - without the alcohol-induced buzz - before going on a 'proper' date."

Owen has found dating in a new city is a totally different experience. "I've recently moved to Edinburgh which is a new city to me. I didn't know anyone there so dating was the only way to meet new people. The last thing I could do when I didn't have a job was wine and dine at expensive bars and restaurants. I've found that since COVID, people have been keener to meet in person rather than chat for weeks on apps - which I find a massive waste of time."

This new dating dynamic has left a lasting impact. "I'll probably carry on with suggesting first dates like beers in a park or coffee and a walk," says Owen. "I think first dates, in general, have been a lot more easy-going and natural throughout COVID. There's a lot less pressure than sitting in a crowded bar trying to get to know someone you've only ever chatted to online, knowing that other people are listening in on your conversations. I really hated those awkward first date moments when you're trying to work out if the girl stood in front of you is the same one that you've been chatting to. It's a lot easier when you don't meet in a bar packed with onlookers. You can even make it more special - grab some cans and go to a nice viewpoint."

So, dating without restrictions might be daunting but we've learned some important lessons over the pandemic. The restrictions have meant that daters have spent more time enjoying the [outdoors](#) - a huge mood booster, and have avoided the misleading feelings of affection that come with ordering three too many beers. If you're feeling anxious about returning to the old dating scene, remember that there's no rush - if you want to continue enjoying park dates or online video dates, you can.

Humans are incredibly adaptable. Just as we've adapted to life with restrictions, as time goes on, it will get easier to adapt to life without restrictions again. If you want to meet your date in a restaurant or bar, suggest a small one with an outdoor area, to maximise your safety.

When it comes to *post*-date activities, you might find things aren't working as well as they should be after some time off. Make sure you seek treatment if [erectile dysfunction](#) or [premature ejaculation](#) is affecting your love life. Both [conditions can be psychological](#), but if the problem persists, then you should take a [blood test](#) to help you understand what's causing the condition.

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As restrictions ease, dating can revert to its pre-pandemic pattern - but that doesn't mean it will be an easy transition. Many people are feeling anxious about dating again. It's no surprise considering physical distance and avoiding strangers has become the new cultural norm. Remember to take it step-by-step and only do what makes you feel comfortable. You might choose to carry on kicking off a first date with a video chat or a casual walk. If you feel anxious but you're determined to make it out, choose a pub that has an outdoor area and doesn't get too overcrowded. A year out could have made things a little rusty in the bedroom so make sure you seek [treatment](#) or speak to your GP if you encounter any issues.

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