

Etiquette for the Clueless

There's nothing like a first date! The excitement of potential love ... followed by that often cold dose of reality when your frog in prince attire leans across the table, plucks a hair from your head, and starts flossing with it. Yes, that actually happened to one Westchester woman, which made us wonder, how can one avoid making such faux pas? We asked Harrison resident and etiquette expert Melissa Leonard for some general first-date guidelines for the socially unsure.

The Importance of Appearance: As the saying goes, you never get a second chance to make a first impression. Though attire will vary depending on time and location, "It's



Don't call me! I'm on a date.

always best to set the bar higher and be slightly overdressed," says Leonard. And guys, don't lead your dates astray! Kathleen N. from Larchmont remembers the time she was told to prepare for a casual burger date, only to be surprised by her well-intentioned companion when he led her into a fancy Italian restaurant. "I was dressed in jeans and a T-shirt and felt awkward the entire night," she says.

You Are What You Eat: We all love our hot wings, barbecue ribs, and burritos, but a first date may not be the best time to order something sloppy. "Stick with easy-to-eat food," says Leonard, and mind your manners!

IM Busy: "Never use your cell phone on a date!" Leonard says. "Keep it out of sight and earshot, unless you have small kids and are the emergency contact. There's nothing ruder."

Who Pays? Gentlemen, though in this day and age you may fear it's chauvinistic not to split the cost of a meal, most women won't argue if you simply reach for the check. "It's generous for a woman to offer to contribute but I'm old-fashioned," says Leonard. "I believe a man should pay for dinner—at least on the first date." —F.M.

What Your Drink Says About You

Booze may not be the window to your soul, but it does say something about your level of sophistication, so choose wisely. Ordering domestic beer is fine for a night out with your buddies, but no girl's gonna be impressed with your ability to crush a can against your skull, John Belushi-style. And girls, knocking back 17 shots of tequila may attract attention, but not of the Dr. McDreamy variety.

What are smart ways to imbibe? Kimberly Williams, author of *The Basics: Tantalizing Tips and Techniques for Attracting Good Men*, recommends that women order something popular, fun, and flirty—and the drink that best fits that bill is still the cosmo. "It's pretty, tasty, and hip by association," she says. For guys, she recommends an imported beer like Heineken or Corona. "They're not necessarily the norm, and they look kind of cool."

Williams cautions that more important than what you drink is how you behave. Always tip the bartender ("The way you treat the service people gives a general idea of what kind of person you are") and—of course—be sure to pronounce the name of the drink correctly. —R.Z.



dating after 40

Is dating at midlife as awful as some make it seem? It doesn't have to be. In fact, over-40s' wisdom and experience can actually help them play the dating game. No longer idealistic and starry-eyed, "Things that make a difference in the long run—such as love, companionship, and compatibility—become more important," says Nan Wise, CSW, a life coach in New York.

That said, dating challenges remain. According to a 2003 AARP survey, men and women in their 40s and 50s said their biggest complaint about the opposite sex was their "baggage." That point definitely resonates with some over-40 singles. "I don't want an ex-husband in the picture," says Dennis, 57, who recently attended an over-40s' mixer in White Plains. "A widow would be best for me. And in a perfect world, she'd have no kids."

What can middle-agers do to improve their chance of taking a trip on the love train? Wise offers some advice.

- Don't cling to impossible criteria. "I won't travel more than 25 miles from White Plains," says Darien, 51. Fine, but this will limit his dating pool.
- Sidestep the age issue. "Guys have no qualms about—and some make a rule of—dating much-younger women," complains Krista, 54. But some foxy ladies are more than happy to leave the old coots behind. According to the AARP survey, 34 percent of women over 40 date younger men.
- Be realistic. Know the difference between what you desire (a soul mate) and what's attainable (a great companion). —J.H.