

First-date nerves. Why do we get them?

by Dr Victoria Lukats MBBS MRCPsych MSc

So, you've found someone you'd like to go out on a date with ...

How we feel as a first date approaches depends on so many factors. You might already have an idea about how well suited you could be to each other, and your tentative feelings about the other person can have a major impact. The prospect of the date could become really daunting – or you might adopt a 'take it or leave it' approach.

Great expectations?

If you think this person could really be relationship material there is obviously a lot more at stake. Other determining factors are your current circumstances and the stage you are at in your emotional life. If you've just come out of a long-term relationship and aren't insisting on something serious, you can perhaps afford to be more laid-back. If you've been single for a while and would be happy to meet the love of your life, then those first-date nerves might kick in.

The real you

The strongest influence on your feelings as a first date approaches probably come from your basic personality and your outlook on life. Each one of us has enduring personality traits, partly genetic and partly the result of our upbringing and environment. You might be a more extroverted type and therefore more energised by meeting new people. You might be more obsessive, worrying about the smallest details (this can actually be an advantage at times). These enduring personality traits play a role in determining how we think, feel and react in social situations and in times of stress. Some people might not even think of a first date as stressful at all!

Taking it easy

However we might feel, perhaps the healthiest way to approach a first date is to remain open-minded, yet optimistic. By remaining relaxed and keeping excessive expectations under control, you set the scene for an enjoyable date. The aim should be to have fun and enjoy the other person's company. If you are constantly worrying about the impression you are making or being hard on yourself, then you are missing the point of a first date: to enjoy yourself and maybe determine if you want to see the other person again.

But how do you avoid first-date nerves? A few tips ...

A first date in the daytime – lunch, or even just a coffee – may feel less formal and pressured. It's still worth taking some time to ensure you look your best, but there's no point in obsessing about aspects of your appearance that you can't change. This can only be counterproductive and anxiety-inducing as you get ready for your first date.

Relaxation techniques or a calming bath before the date will help calm you down, but ultimately it is anxious thoughts that cause us to behave nervously. If you desperately want this first date to blossom into a relationship, you should maybe temper your expectations – while still remaining

optimistic. You might need to go on several – hopefully enjoyable – first dates before you find someone who is *really* compatible with you.

Do you have any questions that you would like to see discussed in future editions of the PARSHIP newsletter? Then contact Dr Lukats at drlukats@parship.co.uk.*

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If you want to meet the love of your life, visit www.parship.co.uk and take PARSHIP's free compatibility profiling test.

*Any reader questions that appear in the PARSHIP.co.uk newsletter will do so anonymously. Unfortunately, PARSHIP.co.uk and Dr Victoria Lukats cannot enter into personal correspondence on relationship issues raised by readers.

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