

YOU may have spent years defining your idea of the perfect life partner. Perhaps one or two failed marriages have helped finesse your future list of dos and don'ts. Hold on to those thoughts, they are valuable and hard-learned.

But if you're looking for love over 50, everything else you thought you knew about dating, you can forget. The landscape has drastically changed and you need to rethink your approach — everything from what you say about yourself, to how you judge his looks — and when to say nothing at all. But crack the code to the brave new world of online dating and you will succeed.

And the good news is, you're not alone. The number of over-50s using dating sites has doubled in the last ten years, according to research, with one in six midlifers now actively looking for love online. Further studies reveal

43-58 year olds to be the most successful age group, with 72 per cent finding a romantic relationship as a result. Think about that for a second — it means that in midlife you're far more likely to succeed than fail.

But, whether you like it or not, dating is now a numbers game and signing up to an app or a website really is the most effective way to meet the greatest number of men.

The more you're exposed, the better your chances of finding a perfect match. So far, so logical. How you navigate these sites is the tricky bit, and preparation is key if you don't want the only thing you gain to be a lot of wasted time. Unlikely as it sounds, science is your friend.

As a behavioural scientist who was lucky enough to find the man of my dreams when I was 50 (after making many mistakes along the way), I've gathered a wealth of knowledge and insight. I understand how the mind of a midlife singleton works, the mental baggage and habitual behaviour you may unwittingly log on with. I've been there, come out the

other side, and have the relationship to prove the process is worth the prize.

This knowledge is what my successful online business, Dating Evolved, was born from. It allows me to help other midlife women use science to find the perfect long-term partner, via an online program, with a great record of happy matches.

Here's how to crack the online dating code.

BOSS THE ALGORITHMS

FIRST lesson? Don't be gullible and just accept what you are given. Even younger women find the process of deconstructing online dating hard, in spite of growing up on a diet of digital dating speak. We midlife women need to take the lead and question what dating sites are serving up to us as 'suitable men'.

Their selections are too often based on superficial physical characteristics or personality traits that don't really matter in the long run and could be fabricated.

Swipe-based dating apps sound easy enough — swipe right if you like him and want to connect, left if you don't, but they are essentially encouraging us to objectify others on the basis of how they look and a few superficial traits predicated on the appeal of good looks rather than compatibility. And if, as a midlife woman, you're looking for real love, not just a good-looking hunk as you might have done in the past, then this might not be the right route.

Then there are more traditional dating sites, which use a lengthy series of questions to match users by feeding your data into an algorithm. The more active and popular you are (identified by the number of 'likes' you give and get and the number of messages you send and respond to) the more people get to see your profile and the greater will be your potential chance of success.

But these sites also want to make money, and the best way to do that is to keep you online, playing the game, potentially keeping other users busy and active too.

Your compatibility will be rated in terms of information that can be easily captured — height, hair colour, age, hobbies, job, self-rated attractiveness, salary, education, musical tastes, film and book preferences.

But none of these give you any idea of someone's potential for being a good partner. Kindness, warmth, humour, honesty, loyalty or emotional stability can't be measured by an algorithm. Factor into this that people aren't always honest when answering these questions and it's obvious that when it comes to matching you with someone who'll make you happy, algorithms don't work.

But you can get around them.

TO FIB OR NOT TO FIB?

I DON'T want to encourage anyone to lie on their profile. For the matching process to work, you need to engender trust, and even small fibs can hamper that.

That said, people do, and I confess that back in the days when I was online dating, I said I was divorced when I was only separated.

We'd been apart for years and the word 'divorced' felt closer to the reality of the situation. I wasn't trying to dupe anyone.

I'm also aware that when you're a midlife woman, age can be a thorny subject. So often men will set ridiculously low ceilings on age which can put you out of contention for being slightly the wrong side of a watershed (whether that's 50, 60 or 70).

This means that if you're 51, the computer will say no and simply won't introduce you to each other, while if you'd been sitting next to each other at a dinner party in real life, your potential date wouldn't even notice those extra few months.

But if you're youthful and worldly and adventurous, shouldn't you have the opportunity to put those attributes in front of the men who might be right for you? And would fibbing increase the chances of a genuine match that could be good for both parties?

If you do decide to bend the truth a



by Dr Mairi Macleod

bit, then accept that the men you're interacting with might be doing the same. Just ensure you use up to date photos and reveal your true age as soon as you meet.

In return, you should expand your own criteria to give the good guys a chance. Yes, you must be non-negotiable about the factors that matter but there's no need to be unreasonably inflexible on the superficial stuff like height and age.

FORGET PHOTO FILTERING

THERE'S no point trying to deceive with out-dated, touched-up or filtered images. You're not aiming for social media 'likes' — the goal here is real-life love — and this is where midlife women can happily depart from the online habits of younger women, who use apps like TikTok that automatically filter their faces.

I suspect the man you're hoping to meet knows a woman in her mid-50s is unlikely to have a washboard stomach or an entirely wrinkle-free face. The joy should come from embracing the fact — not having to pretend to be something you're not.

Research shows you are more likely to get a response from a man who is right for you if you show your unique qualities rather than aim to portray a generic all-round attractiveness.

You'll be more successful if a few men think you're intriguing than if lots of men simply think you look great. Use professional photos or ask a friend to take natural shots rather than relying on selfies, and if you mention a hobby, include photo evidence to engender trust.

A group picture with friends will provide proof of social acumen, just ensure you are easily identifiable.

PASS ON THE PLAYERS

THE algorithm will prioritise sending you pictures and profiles of popular men. But don't be seduced and contact the first men you see.

They will have been chosen because they are active online, which means there's every chance they're more interested in casual hook ups than long-term commitment.

There's stiff competition for these guys too, because the site will be showing their profiles to all the newcomers like you. Ruthlessly flick past the chatty charmers and keep your options open for the quiet men that could be genuinely interested in you.

Your mission is to find the more suitable guys which the algorithm might not be launching into your orbit.

IGNORE THE PHOTOS

TRY covering up the photo and first read his profile instead. If your chosen guy has made the effort to write a proper introduction it means he is likely to be serious about a relationship and you will glean far more useful information from reading this than just looking at a picture.

Face it, in real life, people look nothing like their photos anyway. And isn't this the perfect opportunity to reassess what you think you find physically attractive? In your 20s, a balding man may have been a long way down your list, but now?

Keep the common sense from real life front of mind. If you met a lovely man in the pub who seemed kind and funny, but who didn't tick all your 'tall dark and handsome'

Ignore the first men you see online. Cover up his photo then read his profile. Be the one to send the first message. From a midlife dating expert...



Pictures: MORSA/GETTY

The scientific way to find love after 50 (and I should know, I did it!)

on the site with an optimistic and generic cut-and-pasted 'Hi, what are you up to?'

Middle-aged women are gold star experts when it comes to apologising and over-explaining when there is no need. Well, the rules of engagement have changed, the landscape is very different and in the world of online dating, you can put your own thoughts and feelings above all else.

Embrace the power of silence, and give yourself permission to say absolutely nothing to those men who have not put the effort in. And if you've been exchanging messages for weeks but things are not progressing, cut things off with 'It's been great chatting with you but I don't feel we're a good fit, I wish you all the best.' Next!

It might seem brutal, but that's how online dating works. I would, however, warn against rejecting someone for a small irritant, such as poor grammar (he might be dyslexic!) or a strong dialect.

MORE THAN ONE MAN

ALTHOUGH midlife women often tend to prefer to focus on one man at a time (because that's how we did things in real life) it is perfectly acceptable to keep your options open and to be chatting online to two or three simultaneously. You can be pretty sure those men are doing the same, and this flexibility can cushion disappointment if one of them fizzles out.

For the best chance of success, your first message needs to show you have read his profile and are now responding to him specifically. Pick up on one aspect of his profile and entice him to look at yours.

Declaring your liking for another person increases your chance of generating reciprocal liking. Be on the alert for time-wasting men. On every site there are men who love to 'chat' but never take things further. So once you've exchanged four or five messages it's time to meet (in person or on a video call) so you can decide if he has potential.

Good luck!

AS TOLD TO Louise Atkinson

FOR more of Dr Mairi's dating advice, visit datingevolved.com and sign up for her free online masterclass *How To Find Your Man In Midlife With Online Dating*, exclusive for Inspire readers at datingevolved.com/InspireMasterclass

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TRACK LIST

● Disc one – Chuck Berry

- 1 No Particular Place To Go
- 2 Johnny B Goode
- 3 Sweet Little Sixteen
- 4 Maybellene
- 5 Roll Over Beethoven
- 6 Rock And Roll Music
- 7 School Day (Ring Ring Goes The Bell)
- 8 Memphis, Tennessee
- 9 Let It Rock
- 10 Go Go Go
- 11 Thirty Days
- 12 Too Much Monkey Business
- 13 Brown Eyed Handsome Man
- 14 Run Rudolph Run
- 15 Nadine
- 16 Sweet Little Rock 'n' Roller
- 17 You Never Can Tell
- 18 Jaguar and Thunderbird
- 19 Oh Baby Doll
- 20 Reelin' and Rockin'
- 21 Around and Around
- 22 Carol
- 23 Promised Land

● Disc two – Fats Domino

- 1 Blueberry Hill
- 2 Ain't That A Shame
- 3 Be My Guest
- 4 Walking To New Orleans
- 5 I Want To Walk You Home
- 6 Margie
- 7 My Girl Josephine
- 8 Country Boy
- 9 The Big Beat
- 10 I'm Walkin'
- 11 Valley of Tears
- 12 It Keeps Raining
- 13 I'm In Love Again
- 14 Blue Monday
- 15 Sick and Tired
- 16 Three Nights a Week
- 17 What a Party

● Disc three – Gene Vincent

- 1 Be-Bop-A-Lula
- 2 Race With The Devil
- 3 Bluejean Bop
- 4 She Sle Little Sheila
- 5 Pistol Packin' Mama
- 6 My Heart
- 7 Unchained Melody
- 8 Baby Blue
- 9 Dance To The Top
- 10 Who Slapped John?
- 11 Jambalaya (On The Bayou)
- 12 Honey Chile
- 13 My Blue Heaven
- 14 When My Dreamboat Comes Home
- 15 Crazy Legs
- 16 Lotta Lovin'
- 17 Over the Rainbow
- 18 Teenage Partner
- 19 Sop Street
- 20 Well, I Knocked, Bim Bam Someday
- 21 Red Blue Jeans and a Pony Tail
- 22 Important Words
- 23 Rocky Road Blues
- 24 Jump Back, Honey, Jump Back
- 25 Ain't She Sweet
- 26 Dance in the Street
- 27 Git It
- 28 Wear My Ring
- 29 Jumps, Giggles And Shouts
- 30 Hold Me, Hug Me, Rock Me
- 31 The Night Is So Lonely
- 32 Five Feet Of Lovin'
- 33 B-I-Bickey-Bi, Bo-Bo-Go
- 34 Who's Pushin' Your Swing

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boxes, you'd probably compromise. Sign up to a site which offers plenty of space for profile information. You need to take responsibility for tracking down promising men, by scrutinising individual profiles. This won't tell you everything you need to know, but you'll find out a lot more than if you're just swiping through pictures.

MAKE THE FIRST MOVE

FORGET every notion of sitting politely and waiting to be asked — other, younger, women won't be. Consider yourself equally in the driving seat. Nobel prize-winning research into the science of 'matching theory' supports the idea that if you take the lead,

you're more likely to get a better quality match.

It is perfectly OK (if not applauded) for a woman to send the first message.

Take charge of your future and choose who you want to talk to, and accept that some rejection is part of the process.

It's also very flattering for men

to be approached. Some will appreciate you taking the lead.

NO NEED TO BE NICE

IF YOU'RE going to the effort to read a man's profile and craft a clever personalised message in response, there's no reason you should acknowledge the men who typically target all the new women

HOW TO STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD

INSTEAD of trying to appeal to all men, I recommend creating a personalised profile which highlights — and definitely doesn't hide — all your points of difference.

Some men might run for the hills when they find out you're an opera fanatic, a physics nerd or 'mum' to 15 guinea pigs, but the men who balk at the real you are

precisely the men you *don't* want. Instead, own your idiosyncrasies and be confident that something about your carefully crafted profile will attract the man who's right for you.

To filter out the players, include a line in your profile which describes something you'd really like to do (drink Merlot in a jazz club, see the sunrise on

Kilimanjaro, watch all the Harry Potter films back-to-back).

Then ignore any generic 'Hi!' messages and focus on the men who respond to the specifics you have mentioned.

These are the ones who have paid attention — they have actually read your profile — and are more likely to be looking for a serious relationship.

