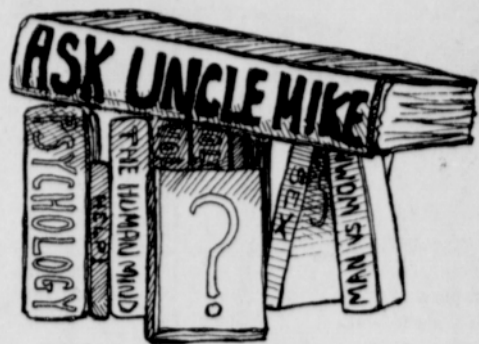


Dear Uncle Mike,

Do you have any dating advice for the over 40 independent woman? For example, how do we get the over 40 men off their butts to ask us out? I think I could figure out what to do after that.



Experienced and Waiting

Dear Experienced and Waiting,

The first step Uncle Mike would suggest is to be the sort of woman an experienced man would get off his butt to ask out. No offense, but many independent women come to believe that independence is the only personality trait they need to bother with; and many of these define independence as the ability to say to men in general, "Who needs you?" This is not the way to make new friends. One makes new friends by being interested and interesting. It also helps not to have an agenda, either personal or sociopolitical, to display consideration and good manners and to avoid being thin skinned, humorless, argumentative, suspicious and depressing. In short, one should set one's sights on being good company. People, to include over 40 men, tend to seek out the company of those with whom they enjoy themselves. Be that sort of woman, or that sort of man, and you'll have to carve time from your social schedule in order to eat.

Dear Uncle Mike,

I have a question for you. Me and my boyfriend went to see my uncle's boyfriend to get our hair done as he is a world famous hair designer. We were very thrilled with our new do's and on our way home we realized we forgot to tip him! We were so utterly embarrassed and I don't know what the proper thing to do now is. Can I send him a nice thank you card with some money or what the heck can I do to cover up this embarrassing situation and make it not look totally dumb? My mom is going to see him this week. Should I give her money to give to him and tell her to tell him that we totally forgot and we are sorry? That kinda sounds dumb. Can you please give me some advice? I don't know what to do!

Gina, e-mail

Dear Gina,

You're absolutely right. What you did was, if not totally dumb, at least close enough to qualify you as human. Uncle Mike's first suggestion is that the two of you slap yourselves on the forehead and laugh. If the man is a world famous hair designer, or even a journeyman barber, he's seen enough of life to know you and your boyfriend aren't the sort of people who'd stiff someone for a tip. Uncle Mike recommends you not involve your poor mother who has enough on her plate worrying where she went wrong with you. Send his tip along with a thank you card or send flowers for his shop. Then call and schedule a follow up do. And hope with all your heart he's not the sort to harbor grudges.

Dear Uncle Mike,

I am a single guy with herpes. I hear that a huge percentage of the population has it and yet I feel like a germ. If my friends have it they aren't copping to it and each time I break the news to a new woman she backs out. Maybe I should only be dating women from herpes support groups or something. I wish I knew how other guys are handling this. I hear you can be contagious for days before an outbreak and days after an outbreak, in fact just about any time. And condoms only help if the outbreak is in certain places. Is there a protocol as to when and how one should make the big announcement?

Call Me Ralph

Dear Ralph,

Repeat after Uncle Mike: I am not a germ, I only provide a home for one. You're very much not alone. According to the folks who keep track, 45 million Americans over the age of twelve have genital herpes, a number that breaks down to one out of every five citizens past puberty. Your situation is unpleasant but not uncommon and, given the popularity of mating and the fact that one can have herpes without noticeable symptoms, it will probably become more so. Since you can be contagious anytime, not only during an outbreak, you must assume you're always contagious. Anything less would be antisocial behavior. You must also assume that condoms won't work since the virus makes no promises about staying where you think it is. Any time you have sex, you must accept that your virus is emigrating to what it sees as the new world. This doesn't mean you should not, if you can afford them, take the antiviral drugs that can deter and lessen outbreaks.

And so, as a single and nonmonastic person, where does this leave you? While connecting with women who share your virus would probably be a good thing, joining a support group to do it would almost certainly be less fun than it sounds. Support groups of any sort seem to breed victims and Uncle Mike assumes you're looking for something more than a lab partner. Is there a protocol covering full disclosure? You bet. It involves treating others the way you'd like to be treated. Ask yourself this: if I didn't have herpes, when would I want to know if the other person did? Most people would answer, as soon as possible. No, you needn't introduce yourself with, "Hi, I'm Ralph and I have an incurable sexually transmitted virus," but you certainly should lay matters on the line at the first moment mutual interest rears its hormones. Be straightforward and honest; and, in this best of all possible worlds, prepared to be alone more often than not.

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