

STEER CLEAR
of the *spag
bol* and you
are off to a
FLYING start...

Do you want some bad (yet well-meaning) advice? Tell your friends/family/work mates that tonight is your first date with a new guy. Wear this!

Say that! Definitely don't say *that!* It's a lot of pressure to follow a set of "rules" rather than just being yourself with a guy you're not even sure you like – yet.

If you're facing the prospect of sharing popcorn with the hot guy you met last Saturday night – don't worry, you *can* have fun. Here, some (good) advice on how to relax and put both of you at ease...

REALLY NEED
A STRATEGY?

OK, if you can't live without a first date flight plan (complete with an emergency

exit strategy), how's this: tell yourself it won't suck. "The best strategy for a great first date is to go into it with the goal of simply enjoying yourself, instead of harbouring an agenda to win him over," says Lionel Tiger, anthropologist and author of *The Decline of Males*. "That way, you'll also come across as tenacious and carefree, which are intrinsically attractive qualities."

DON'T RATE
YOURSELF

Was that funny? Did he just look at me weird!? Is this going OK? I bet I have lettuce stuck in my teeth... Stop right there and rein in your compulsion to dissect how the date is going – or you won't have fun.

"If you place too much importance on the encounter, you will spend the whole evening evaluating how it's going and stressing about whether you'll see him again," explains Sheenah Hankin, psychotherapist and author of *Complete Confidence*. "This prevents you from fully experiencing what's happening in the present moment."

That also means you're not as engaged – or as engaging – as you could be. Remind yourself that it's only one night out, not your wedding rehearsal dinner, and then relax and let go of your anxiety. "A first date is an experiment," says Tiger. "Adopt the attitude that it might work out or it might not."

"Few men
can resist my
spag-bol
brooch."

HOW TO HAVE AN
AWKWARD-
FREE *first date*
(no tumbleweed on your table!)



Oh, if you must flirt! *Don't let us stop you...*

Lose the eye contact and stop randomly touching his arm — here's how to do it the casual way, says flirt coach and body language expert Katia Loisel-Furey (top-flirting-tips.com).

*** Act normal:** Start the date off with a kiss hello — as you would with any close friend. “This immediately takes down the physical barrier and tells him it’s OK to touch you back.”

*** Be nice:** “If he’s wearing a nice shirt, touch it and say, ‘Wow, I really like this.’ Extend the compliments to his personality, too. If he’s a great listener or makes you feel comfortable, tell him. That’s the first thing that’ll set you apart from every other girl on a first date.”

*** Take a comfy seat:** If the date is going well, don’t be discouraged if he’s not stroking your face yet! Guys often feel funny about public displays of affection, so if you see some comfy couches, take a seat and do the “whisper and lean” — it’s a great excuse to get closer if you’re in a noisy bar.

BE DISARMINGLY HONEST

It goes without saying that this does *not* mean telling him about the heart-to-heart you had with your ex last week, or divulging the heinous act of IBS you discovered in your work loo. But if you talk to a guy with the same unguarded ease you show around your friends, you’ll loosen up and things will flow better. “It ensures the date won’t seem like a job interview,” adds Hankin.

Recount a funny moment that happened that day or describe some of the crazy things you saw on a recent holiday. We naturally trust and feel closer to people who are open, according to Hankin. She suggests trying a technique called negative revelation: research has shown disclosing a minor weakness (that you have a fear of heights, for example) makes others feel comfortable around you, because they see you as more human. You could even admit, off-handedly, to feeling a little nervous. Putting it out there helps him identify with you and — strangely enough — makes you seem more confident because you’re not afraid to call it like it is. **COSMO**