

# Finding love online - A guide to safely searching for that dream date

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Online dating is on the up and it's easy to see why. It's a convenient alternative for the time poor and opens a whole different world of possibilities, making it a great option in the quest to find that dream date.

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Before Cupid prepares to shoot his arrows this February, take a few safety precautions to avoid a broken heart, a broken computer or a dwindling bank balance.

## Start with an open mind and a secure device

Before you begin looking for love, it's important to prep your computer or device so it's as secure as can be.

- Install anti-virus and firewall software on your computer or device and run regular updates and scans.
- If you're using a device that your whole family has access to, consider creating a separate login for your use only.
- Browsing at home? Make sure your wireless network is secure. If you're out and about, be cautious when using public WiFi or an Internet cafe as your risk of theft and fraud is increased. Our 'Staying private in public' factsheet will provide you with some useful tips.
- Remember to always log out of dating sites and never save your password when using a public terminal.

## Go for the popular types

Just as you'd carefully consider a new love interest, get picky about the online dating site you sign up to.

- Do your research and choose a well-known online dating site. A quick Google search or check of their database size will help you suss them out.
- Have a squiz at the website's privacy policy and check your details won't be passed on to third party organisations.
- Scan the website for the company's contact details as all trustworthy websites will make these details available.

## It all began with an... email

When dabbling with online dating, you'll need an email address to create your profile and to communicate with any potential love interests.

- It's worth creating a separate email account for your online dating profile. This way you can choose an email address and profile name that doesn't include personally identifiable information and isn't linked to your Facebook.

- Many online dating sites offer a safe mailing service that means you don't have to swap email details until you're ready. Look for a service that offers an extra level of protection.
- Trust your instincts. Use the web to get sleuthy and research potential candidates, like typing your match's name into a search engine.
- Don't reveal your surname, company name or phone number. A quick Google search on yourself will reveal how much traceable information is out there in cyberspace should someone discover your full name.

## Sealed with a kiss (and a scam)

Internet scams can easily turn a love story into a nightmare, so it pays to think with your head and not your heart.

- Ignore any junk mail that lands in your online dating inbox, simply hit delete without even opening it.
- If you've accidentally over shared information, start afresh with a new profile using a new email address.
- Online dating scams are designed to lure lovers into handing over large amounts of money. Never send money or offer financial assistance to someone you've met online and report anyone who has asked you to hand over cash or other valuable goods.

Pick up more hints and tips from **iinet's Online Safety Series** from [iinet.net.au/safety](http://iinet.net.au/safety).

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