

# CREATIVE DATES WITHOUT THE PLATES!

by Nina Crowley, PhD, RD (with Inspiration from Shawn Cochran)

Dating, no matter your age, can be an emotional rollercoaster from nervousness to excitement. For those following a specific lifestyle, the feeling of “butterflies in your stomach” may be all you desire on a date! Fortunately, focusing on a romantic date without food is possible. Merriam-Webster defines a date as “a social engagement between two persons that often has a romantic character.” This doesn’t necessarily involve food, restaurants, or tricky social situations that can be challenging to navigate for those aiming to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Dating is about spending time with someone in a romantic context to assess compatibility and explore the potential for a deeper relationship. It involves engaging in various activities, conversations and shared experiences to better understand each other. The goal is to discover mutual romantic interest and build a meaningful connection with the potential for a committed relationship. Dating customs and expectations vary across cultures and are highly personal.

Seeing someone in a way that reveals their interests goes beyond sitting across from a restaurant table. There are numerous connection and value-based reasons to get to know someone differently. Novel, new or mysterious experiences are good for your brain’s dopamine release, and let’s not forget the financial aspect – fancy dinners add up, especially if you’re footing the bill!

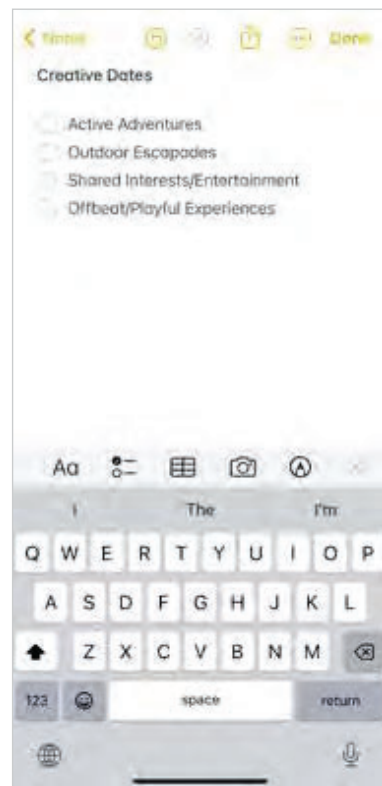


IMP 1

As someone who married my high-school sweetheart, I had ZERO clue what dating in my 40s would be like. It turned out to be a fun way to understand myself better and discover what I enjoy. Getting to know someone's romantic character has also been surprisingly enlightening.

Once you're dating more seriously, use the Notes section on your phone to create a list of things to do, from day trips and vacations to watching movies together. Share your notes for a fun way to flirt while apart. There's nothing worse than an "I don't know, what do you want to do?" game of ping-pong, so keep your thoughts collected in one place and suggest anything on your list.

I've categorized my suggested date ideas into Active Adventures, Outdoor Escapades, Shared Interests/Entertainment and Offbeat/Playful Experiences.



## ACTIVE ADVENTURES

- Try new physical activities like horseback riding, archery, dancing, obstacle or ropes courses, or ziplining for an adrenaline rush.
- Test your skills with games like pool, darts, bocce ball, bowling or arcade games.
- Check out specialty places with activities like laser tag, ax throwing, pickleball, mini golf, TopGolf™, roller skating or ice skating for friendly competition.
- Explore the outdoors by biking, hiking, kayaking or paddleboarding together.
- Make morning or evening walks or bike rides a routine, changing up the locations for variety. You can go to the beach to collect glass, walk your dog or visit different parks.
- If you have a favorite exercise class, bring your date and give them a glimpse of your social circle.

My date Shawn and I tried indoor pickleball for the first time, and we discovered that I have a secret talent! It was fun to impress him with my skills and get sweaty and active together.

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## OUTDOOR ESCAPADES

- Connect with nature by watching sunsets, enjoying early morning sunrises or taking leisurely nature walks.
- Embrace the beauty of the night sky or go stargazing. You might even witness a shuttle launch!
- Create cozy moments with backyard bonfires or engage in gardening and yard work.
- Pick your own fruits at orchards for a fun and rewarding outdoor experience.
- Go on a ferry or boat tour together for a romantic water experience.
- Rent electric bikes or scooters for an adventurous day of exploring.

Shawn and I had a great day visiting Cypress Gardens outside Charleston, SC (from the movie *The Notebook*), where we paddled a rowboat around cypress trees, even including my daughter in the fun. It checked the boxes for new outdoor places and added excitement for narrowly avoiding alligators in the water!

## SHARED INTERESTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

- Enjoy cultural and artistic venues like concerts, movies, comedy shows or art walks, which allow you to learn about each other's personalities and interests.
- Unleash your creativity by painting together, visiting bookstores to share your favorite books or singing karaoke.
- Dive into local experiences like exploring farmers' markets, attending sports games, or teaming up for trivia or bingo.
- Redecorate a space together or embark on unique shopping adventures, like checking out an IKEA store.
- Go thrifting or visit the dollar store with the goal of finding the silliest or most creative gift.
- Get a palm reading together or go on a ghost tour or historical tour in your city.
- Take a bus or train an hour away to explore a new town or be a 'tourist in your own town.'
- Volunteer together to discover each other's passions and purpose.





## OFFBEAT AND PLAYFUL EXPERIENCES

- Get a real camera and explore abandoned places, taking artsy photos.
- Challenge each other to a game of “Would You Rather?” or try a relationship card game.
- Get into character by role-playing with accents in public, or if you’ve been together awhile, pretend it’s your first date!
- Collaborate on creative projects like making videos or composing songs together. Or work on a shared playlist and add meaningful songs to each of you.
- Venture into the unknown with a spontaneous visit to an open house or timeshare sale opportunity as ‘prospective buyers.’
- Choose a random band neither has heard before and explore a new type of music.

Shawn and I challenged each other to see who could stay in character the longest while we were on a weekend trip in Savannah, GA. I don’t think I’ve ever laughed as hard as I did when we convinced people we had just met that day.

As cliché as it sounds, dating is what you make of it. You can either passively go on dates and feel awkward about eating or plan ahead and get creative in getting to know your date. The dates may not all be winners, but I can guarantee you’ll learn more about yourself during these experiences than in a dinnertime Q&A session.

### **About the Author:**

*Nina Crowley, PhD, RD, advocates for effective communication about weight and health, a patient-centered approach, and improved access to care for people with obesity. With 16 years at the Medical University of South Carolina’s Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery Program, she now serves as the Professional Affiliations and Education Manager for seca’s medical body composition division. Nina is a thought leader, public speaker and content producer in the obesity care community and holds several leadership positions in obesity care organizations, including the OAC’s Board of Directors.*

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