

*d*oes titanium tremble?" Yes, it was an unusual start to an online dating profile. I went on to explain that a meeting of the minds was my ultimate knee trembler. Perhaps we could explore whether my new titanium knee demonstrates these interesting properties, I suggested provocatively.

My profile proved a great hit, ultimately prompting my retirement from the dating scene after meeting my wonderful partner. I'd like to think the many men who contacted me were responding to its amusing tone; they certainly enjoyed my comment that for exercise I preferred "the dancing doona to yoga's downward dog".

Yet, in reality, the strong response was probably due to finally plucking up the courage to show my photos. As a former sex therapist, I'd been nervous that this would attract the wrong sort of attention, but going public led to no problems whatsoever and gave a huge boost to my chances of meeting the right person.

That's one of the lessons I've learnt through nearly seven years, on and off, of online dating – with time out in relationships with some lovely men I met that way. I discovered the fears we all have about openly using this way of meeting people are vastly overblown. Over that time, I had hundreds of coffee dates, went out with dozens of men, met very few sleazes and had no problems with con guys or rip-off merchants.

The same is true for most of my clients; for the past three years I've been working as an online dating coach, helping men and women improve their chances. Using reputable websites, which work hard to cull undesirables, most people find online dating is a safe, effective way of getting to know new people.

But that doesn't mean it's easy. Many people tell me they have tried online dating but that it didn't work for them. It usually turns out they dated a few people, were knocked back a few times, and gave up. It's madness to think you'll stumble on some perfect match after a



IGNORE THE SCARY STORIES AND DIVE IN TO ONLINE DATING, SAYS BETTINA ARNDT. IT'S STILL YOUR BEST BET FOR FINDING LOVE.

few weeks of online dating. If I think about all the men I know, including partners of my many friends, there's very few who really rock my boat. So I've always thought it unlikely that the stars would align without a lot of effort. Hence I was happy to keep on meeting men online, even after the numbers of them I went through became a running joke for many of my married friends.

That's another thing I learnt – to ignore advice from people safely locked away in the world of couples. They haven't a clue about the online dating world and their comments are rarely helpful. A newly single woman in her 50s told me

her married friends had suggested inviting a date in for coffee after they'd been out to dinner. That's fine if you want to send a message that you're up for anything, but simply confusing for a man dealing with a woman who was nowhere near ready to leap into the cot.

It turns out that most men really value clear messages. My female clients are often being told they should keep men guessing and never contact a man. I've never believed this advice serves women well. Sure, there may still be some men out there who like to do the hunting and keep the upper hand, but why would we want that type of man?

I've always found most men appreciate it when you play it straight and make it clear you're keen on them (or not). My partner jokes about the "OMG" expression on my face when we met for our first date. He had a dreadful profile photo and I immediately blurted out my delight that he was so much better in person. Luckily, my enthusiasm proved contagious.

For a woman, playing it straight means sharing the risk with men and dealing with more rejection. Well, it's not really rejection. When someone decides you aren't right for them, it's important not to take it personally. It doesn't mean there's anything wrong with you, but simply that the two of you didn't quite click. Just as often, you end up being the one making the decision to move on, so it works both ways.

It would help if more people remembered their manners, choosing to gently explain what is going on rather than just dropping off the radar. I have had my share of disappearing men who haven't had the courage to admit it was not working for them and who simply stopped responding to emails or calls. That's also the toughest thing about being a dating coach: helping people pick themselves up after being kicked to the kerb and persuading them to keep going.

You meet an amazing range of people if you do keep at online dating. It's a fascinating business, provided you see it as an interesting process rather than allowing yourself to get emotionally involved, wondering if every date will lead to something wonderful. Online dating can do wonders for your social life. It's fun getting dressed up, great to have someone to go with you to see that new movie or to just walk in the park.

Yes, it's a roller coaster, but the alternative is sitting on the sidelines of life. Most single people don't have a choice between real-life dating and online dating. They never meet anyone to date in their normal lives. Online dating is the main game: the best possible chance of a heart-stopping, knee-trembling romance. And boy, when it happens, does that feel good. ●