

Opinion

## **GUEST COLUMN: Finding love in your golden years**

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As we age, the need for intimacy, closeness and romantic relationships doesn't diminish – in fact, it often becomes stronger and more important. Having a partner to share your life with can improve your happiness and well-being, and it can also mitigate common challenges for seniors such as isolation, loneliness and depression. Unfortunately, many of today's seniors are without a partner.

According to AARP, almost half of seniors age 65 and older are widowed, divorced or separated.

For these seniors, finding love in their golden years can prove challenging. Not only is dating a rather taboo topic for seniors, but older adults don't often have the same opportunities to meet new people that younger adults do. This is especially true for seniors who live alone. Luckily, there are a surprising number of services designed to help seniors find love in their golden years:

**Dating websites:** Dating websites are a great option for seniors with limited mobility because they can find a companion from the comfort on their own home. AARP Dating, eHarmony Senior Dating, Our Time and Senior FriendFinder help seniors find companions who live nearby and have similar likes and interests. Many of these sites are free or can be used for a low monthly fee.

**Community or senior centers:** Local community or senior centers host gatherings throughout the year to bring seniors together for socializing and activities. These events are an excellent way to get to know your neighbors and start making connections with people who live nearby.

Senior living communities: Much like community or senior centers, senior living communities host public events throughout the year where seniors can meet and interact with peers.

Matchmakers: You don't need to be cast in "Fiddler on the Roof" to ask a matchmaker to find you a match. Professional matchmakers help seniors find partners that will truly be the right fit and oftentimes lead to more successful matches than online dating will. The one caveat – they can be quite pricey.

Finding a partner isn't the only challenge for single seniors. Growing close to a new partner can prove difficult as well. Health conditions can make intimacy problematic for seniors, as can a lack of confidence when it comes to appearance or physical abilities. Rather than trying to live up to pre-convinced notions of intimacy, senior couples should work together to develop intimacy in ways that are right for them. Touch — like hand-holding, hugs or massages — and affectionate acts — like cooking your partner dinner or planning a unique outing with them — are other ways to express intimacy.

More often than not, switching medications can help seniors overcome physical barriers to intimacy. Talk with your doctor about any issues you may have with intimacy so you can develop an appropriate plan. It may be wise to include your partner in these discussions since communication and openness are key to a successful relationship.

Intimacy and dating don't have to be taboo topics for seniors. More and more seniors today are single and seeking companionship, and there are a number of resources available to help them find a partner. While romantic relationships may not be quite the same for seniors as they are for younger adults, finding a partner to share a life with will help older and younger adults alike live longer, happier and healthier lives.

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