

FASHION

What to wear on a first date

Whether you're still looking or back on the market, the politics of getting dressed for a date are complex. *Charlie Gowans-Eglinton* seeks advice

Generally, in my line of work, I'm never short of style advice. I'm surrounded by women happy to offer a second opinion on what to pack for that work trip, which shoes to wear to which restaurant, what to wear to a job interview. But ask what to wear on a date, and suddenly a tumbleweed rolls by.

For this piece, I polled a number of experts (some style, some dating) for advice. Two recommended clean knickers. Not a bad start, but personally, I think this is a rule for everyday, and not just first dates. The rest offered tactful-but-unhelpful suggestions that fell into two camps. One: it doesn't matter what you wear as long as you're comfortable, and two: just be yourself.

Neither adage is terrible advice, but nor are they helpful when you're standing on Oxford Street at 11am on a Saturday morning. The problem is, no one really wants to tell you what to wear on a date, for fear of sounding sexist or old-fashioned, so they stay quiet. But it's like shopping for a wedding without a dress code – nobody wants to be the woman sat on a hay bale in blush silk.

"First impressions matter," says Anna Berkeley, fashion stylist. "People make snap judgements in a few seconds." The number of seconds is up for debate and in psychological study, the most common theory seems to be seven. Seven seconds. Not exactly time for my sense of humour to shine, is it? I've been told by more than one (now close) friend that they weren't keen on me at first, but I won them over. Seven seconds isn't long enough for that – I'll need at least three dates.

Two experts suggested clean knickers. Not a bad start but I think this is an everyday rule, not just for a first date

Since you're unlikely to reach the sharing-of-souls bit if you're dressed like a ninny, your outfit needs to outshine your bad jokes, and get you to date number two.

So, on to the practical advice. As for age, this advice stands whether you're dating first, second, or third time around. Or fourth. I'm not here to judge, just recommend a frock. "I don't think dating wardrobes need to change depending on age," says Berkeley. "The older you are, the better you will be at it."

Ines da Silva, consulting editor of Debrett's and Bicester's *Guide to British Style*, says: "If it's an internet date, be consistent with how you present yourself in your profile too, rather than opting for a drastic last-minute makeover which might confuse your date." Ah. Well. As my profile includes photos of me wearing a PVC trench coat, a yellow leather skirt, a green leather jacket and silver ankle boots, that doesn't exactly narrow down my options.

The last first date Sophia Money-Coutts, features director at *Tatler*,

went on was in March, "and I knew he was a bit 'trendier' than me, so I bought a pair of Nike Air trainers to wear along with a pair of dark blue, skinny Paige jeans and a white silk shirt from Equipment. I have never owned 'trendy' trainers before and he not only complimented me on my trainer choice that night, he is now my boyfriend. Thanks, Nike."

Which brings me to the first outfit option: jeans and a "nice" top. If you're not the trendy trainer type (and I'm not), Berkeley always recommends a pair of heels. A silk shirt, rather than cotton one, will stop you from feeling too corporate. "It's boring, but dressing in a relatively conservative way is perceived as showing status and confidence. And remember, too, that men often judge something that's overly fashion forward unfavourably. So save your paper bag waists, furry shoes and oversized everything for the second date!"

Second on the list of date-safe outfits is the LBD. In my case, it's not so "little" – I prefer sleeves and below the knee hemlines, so pipped for Kitri's slinky wrap dress. Lisa Armstrong, fashion director of *The Telegraph*, notes that black gets harder to wear as you get older, and colour more flattering, so your version of a LBD might not actually be black, but navy, burgundy or even red. Whatever the colour or cut, this should be the dress that you put on for cocktail parties when nothing else in your wardrobe feels right.

So far, so safe. On to door number three, behind which waits the "loudest" of my recommended outfits. "I think it's nice to make an effort on a first date," says Frankie Graddon, fashion and beauty editor at *The Pool*, who met her boyfriend of two-plus years on Tinder. "I'd expect him to, and would be put off by a scruff bag. But nothing overly fancy." For me, she says, this translates to a printed dress and platform heels, dressed down with a leather jacket – since she also happens to be my best mate from uni, she knows my style better than most.

"I'd say whatever makes you feel fabulous, regardless of whether it's

Black dress, £145 (kitrudio.com)
Earrings, £9.99 (mango.com)
Finery sandals, Charlie's own

Leopard dress, £440, Ganni (net-a-porter.com)
Earrings, £27 (pilgrim.net)
Gucci belt, Charlie's own
Shoes, £210 (aeyde.com)



PHOTO: ANDREW CROWLEY, HAIR AND MAKE-UP: SANDRA RODRIGUES

WHERE TO START A DATING CAPSULE WARDROBE

A LBD Though it doesn't necessarily have to be black, or particularly little. Gestuz have a silk option with long sleeves that comes in navy or burgundy, or try Diane von Furstenberg's famously flattering wrap dresses.

A silk shirt Equipment's are great quality, and can be worn to the office, too. For great printed styles, consider silk pyjama brands like Yolke and Olivia von Halle.

Well-fitted jeans Stick to whichever brand makes your

current favourite pair, then look for a smarter option. Black or dark indigo is best for evening, and a bit of stretch will be most flattering – I love Frame and Mih for dressier denim.

XXL earrings If in doubt, add earrings. They'll

dress up most outfits, or distract from a bad blow-dry.

A bold option If, for you, that means print, try Ganni or Finery. If it means colour, & Other Stories and Uterque have lovely bright pieces at the moment.

A confidence-boosting pair of heels I love the comfort and height of platforms, but even the tiniest kitten heel will do. If flats are your preference, look to this season's jewelled styles to add a bit of glamour to your look.

ISABEL SPEARMAN WHY IT WORKS



The start of a new season calls for a few stylish new buys for the office

Q Now that my summer holiday is past, my workwear feels out of date. What should I be looking for?

A No matter your age, the start of September brings a back to school feeling. It's a great time to reconsider your work wardrobe and update it for the cooler days ahead. The shops are full of mustard, plum and all those delicious autumnal colours, plus velvet, corduroy and winter florals;

the trick is choosing a few additions to your workwear wardrobe to update what you have.

Start with the shoes. With the Seventies inspiring new season trends, there is a lot of burgundy (my favourite colour) around. These patent block heels from Zara are perfect for work. They also come in black; I may buy both colours as they are such a good price. I am not one for patience (ask my husband) but I have had to wait for Arket to launch to get my hands on this dress. I will wear it with black or burgundy heels, and come colder weather it will look great with boots. Arket is H&M's new sister brand and a good source for workwear. It's hard to find tops that look just as good under a jacket as on its own, as the neckline is usually too low or high, but The Fold has a lovely mustard silk blouse with a pleat detail at the front. Yellow can put people off, but mustard is the easiest shade to wear, and this is the ideal time to try it, when your skin tone will likely be warmer and more tanned – if not, add a touch of bronzer. I like my pencil skirts printed, as I find it's more



Floral dress, £145 (arket.com)



Checked coat, £450 (lkbennett.com) available Sept 13



Intarsia ribbed top, £59 (COStores.com)



Medium heeled shoes, £19.99 (zara.com)



Printed pencil skirt, £39.50 (marksandspencer.com)

It's a great time to reconsider your wardrobe and update it for cooler days

flattering than a block of colour. M&S have a great option.

I avoid trousers as they don't suit my figure, but if they're your go-to, then Jigsaw should be on your list. A flattering cut with a high waist, their check trousers will look great with a simple knit. For those, I rely on Cos and Uniqlo which produce well

fitting and good quality merino sweaters in mouth-watering colours.

And last but not least, a new coat. Checks and tweeds are everywhere thanks to the catwalks, and this LK Bennett coat is my favourite with its clean collar and nipped in waist. The problem is, I – and you – will have to wait two more weeks, as it's not available until Sept 13. Fingers at the ready...

To ask Isabel Spearman your workwear questions, email isabel.spearman@telegraph.co.uk or follow her on Instagram @isabelspearman

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Silk shirt, £275 part of set (libertylondon.com)
Black jeans, £232 (frame-store.com)
Prada sandals, Charlie's own

appropriate", is my mother's advice; "you need your clothes to be your friends in stressful situations." Hence the leopard print dress: definitely not a safe choice, but it's something I'd wear to dinner, or even the pub. If you love stripes, florals or bright colours, then why hide that on a first date?

"Specific outfit choices definitely send messages," says Berkeley, "so if you want to say you are fun and creative, choose print, or yellow."

As for what to avoid, Whitney Wolfe, founder and CEO of dating app Bumble, suggests that "if you're someone that has never worn heels, don't choose your first date to wear those stilettos for the first time."

Money-Coutts suggests avoiding "colours which show up sweat patches if you, like me, sweat an alarming amount when nervous. And probably just don't go along to a first date, or even a second or third date, in a wedding dress."

If all this seems like a lot of faff, bear in mind, the seven second rule applies to your date, too. Hopefully, in a bathroom not too far from your own, your prospective date is going to the same pains. And if not? I don't think you should rule someone out over a dodgy pair of trainers, but we each must draw a line. Mine is short-sleeved shirts. If you're dating men, the latest concern in the online sphere is "hatfishing" (a play on catfishing, or posing as someone else online) when men cover dodgy haircuts and bald patches under hats on their profiles.

According to Jonathan Heaf, features director at GQ, "there's only one cardinal sin for men on first dates. Or, forever, in fact. The square-toed shoe. If a woman (or man) sees this underneath the pub table on the person they may well be three pints away from sleeping with I can strongly advise they do one thing: run. Run and never look back. Delete his number, unfollow, repent and try to forget the whole sorry episode."

If you're dating women, that's a different kettle of fish altogether – and possibly one that calls for the aforementioned "paper bag waists, furry shoes and oversized everything." One of my housemates, dating a woman for the first time, admits she takes more care to dress stylishly now than when she's dated men. "With guys, you want to look good, obviously, but you can be relatively safe in the knowledge that they probably have a limited idea of what's fashionable or 'on trend' for women at the time – or that they don't care."

Since you're likely to go on more than one first date, you can try out a few options to see what you feel both sexy and comfortable in, and what makes the best first impression. And here's the best bit: once you've found that outfit, you can wear it time and again; your next date won't know the difference.

GETTING DRESSED (WITHOUT THE FUSS)

Krissy Turner
Girl on a budget

In between seasons, bright colours will give your wardrobe a lift

Until a friend questioned my all black outfit in last weekend's 24C heat, I hadn't realised I'd been wallowing in a sea of darks and neutrals all summer. Granted, this was semi-deliberate; I'd been going for a chic, grown-up approach to summer dressing, pairing floaty navy dresses with cream slingback flats and my black crossbody bag. I'd definitely been feeling more elegant, but it was a bit, well, boring, and I missed my once-signature bright colours.

September creeping up signals change, albeit a late one, and I'm more than making up for lost time, not just by pulling out my lighter summer pieces, but also by adding new colour-block tops to my wardrobe. Since a change in seasons isn't far away, a bright dress might soon look out of place, but a coloured blouse

could be worn with dark separates and a light polo neck underneath to get maximum wear when the weather cools down. My favourite so far is a lemon frilled number from Danish brand, Baum und Pfortgarten.

My yellow blouse appears considered. Its classic white counterpart would be simple and easy to wear, and go with everything, but a yellow one? That definitely took some thought and planning – or at least you'd think so. Because that's the great thing about a colourful blouse: such is their statement-making, scene-stealing prowess that everything else

Printed styles work too, so long as the print is bold rather than delicate

requires minimal effort. I wear my yellow number with navy trousers or dark denim, my trusty crossbody bag and those cream slingback flats. Apart from the blouse, not much has changed. A pop of colour slips right into your everyday uniform, because it's just that: a pop that brightens everything up.

Start with silkier fabrics; they drape nicely and tuck into trousers and skirts well. I

Pink print, £25.99 (zara.com)



Yellow, £69 (stories.com)



Blue, £35.99 (mango.com)



Pale pink, £29.99 (hm.com)



Red, £25 (laredoute.com)



Mint, £69 (kitrystudio.com)



love structured styles in crisp cottons, but being slightly busty means I often end up looking boxy. However, if these work for you, head to COS and Finery for the best ones. Printed styles work, too, so long as the print is bold rather than delicate – H&M's Trend section has great printed options. For 100 per cent silk without the luxury price tag, & Other Stories does a lovely straight fit shirt in nine different prints and block

colours for £69. Ignore the dry clean only label, too – I throw mine in on a hand-wash setting and it remains unharmed.

If you can spend a little more, a bright colour (like the catwalk trend for red) won't fall "out" of fashion as quickly as a print, so it's worth splurging a bit on a colour and fabric you love knowing that you can just pair it with something different next season.



ZAC FRACKELTON FOR THE TELEGRAPH

Is this the new skin saviour?

Probiotics could be the answer to solving problem skin. *Sonia Haria* looks at the growing popularity of a new kind of beauty product

Probiotics have long been known to have a positive impact on digestive health, but when it comes to skincare, there have been very few beauty products to harness that impact. But that's all changing. Of all the skincare labelled "probiotic" launched globally in the past three years, 27 per cent was introduced in 2014, 34.4 per cent in 2015 and 38.7 per cent in 2016.

It's an incline that data insight group Mintel predict will continue as part of the £1.13 billion facial skincare market in the UK.

When the skincare brand Aurelia launched in 2013, it was one of the first to hail probiotics as skin saviours. "Probiotics as a category is growing, which is testament to the efficacy of this innovative ingredient," says Claire Vero, the brand founder, whose label has become a pioneer "in harnessing

this new, natural technology". In developing the brand, Vero wanted to help the skin regain its natural balance in the same way that probiotics help to rebalance the gut; within two years of launch, Aurelia has won more than 20 beauty awards.

The idea is that by applying probiotics to the surface of the skin, or adding them to products that repair the skin at a cellular level, good bacteria will help to strengthen the skin's own immunity and calm any existing inflammations. This is especially exciting for people who suffer with acne or very sensitive skin.

It was because of her own "hyper-reactive, dry and blemished" skin that Dr Marie Drago, the French pharmacist, founded her brand Gallinée in April last year. She wanted a targeted alternative to strong disinfectants on the market that killed all the bacteria on the skin – including the good. "The use of probiotics is revolutionary for problem skin," she says. "They help to rebuild the skin barrier, which is hugely beneficial for skin conditions like eczema. Probiotics can also have a purifying effect, so the way we treat acne is going to change totally in the next few years. We are switching to a strategy where we help

the good bacteria to grow, naturally filling the space occupied by the P. acnes [the bacteria responsible for acne]." The appeal for skincare that works within the skin's own ecosystem can be seen as natural skincare 2.0.

Many of these new brands have robust clinical data to back up their results, which are achieved while still keeping the skin in a natural, calm state. Interestingly, the beauty giant Johnson & Johnson has recently expanded its Innovation portfolio to include two companies that focus on research in treating skin conditions with good bacteria.

The L'Oréal Group, which owns skincare heavyweight Lancôme, has also pushed research in this new field of skincare. Today, Lancôme launches its latest innovation, Advanced Genifique Sensitive. The brand describes this £59 serum as an "emergency response" product, to be used for one month when your skin is going through a bout of sensitivity. The mix of lactobacillus bacteria and the potent antioxidant ferulic acid aims to treat the skin and reduce sensitivity, and is designed to be used at night when the skin is in "repair mode".

Although big corporations are

'Bacteria is the ultimate natural beauty ingredient. It's a game-changer'

increasingly investing in probiotic research, it is still largely a market led by niche beauty brands. Last month saw the launch of new luxury vegan skincare brand Orveda, stocked in Harvey Nichols. It was founded by Sue Y Nabi, coincidentally the ex-president of Lancôme (a position she held for four years, as part of 20 years in total at the L'Oréal group). For the launch of her brand, Nabi wanted to create a version of renewal energy for the skin.

"By using bacteria, yeast and enzymes, we cause no harm to the natural environment – but crucially, the products have a proven efficacy in a way that is kind to skin, by considering it as an ecosystem." In developing the products, Nabi conducted more than 20 clinical tests on 330 participants globally, to prove the products work.

Nabi sees the future of beauty as about being kind to the skin and its natural form, and Dr Drago agrees. "I see the industry as moving from 'ingredient beauty', where you bring a foreign agent to your skin, such as retinol or alpha hydroxy acids, to 'ecosystem beauty', where you help to support a living and breathing ecosystem. Bacteria is the ultimate natural beauty ingredient. It's a game-changer."



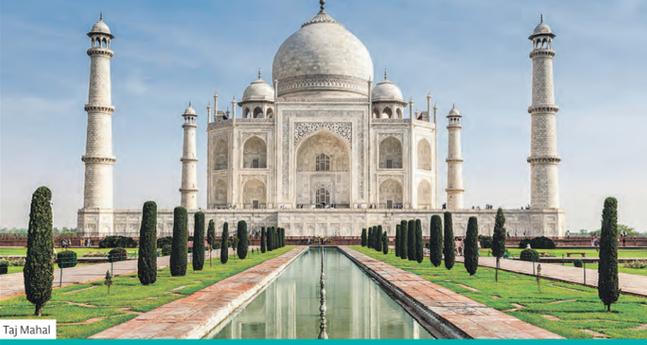
Face value: the popularity of probiotic beauty products is expected to increase further in the years to come

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