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## Reinventing Romance: Middle-Aged Men Aren't Hot Enough

Where are all the attractive, available, over-40 men? MORE.com's dating expert offers some perspective.

By Sherry Amatenstein, LMSW

**Q. Am I the shallowest woman on earth? My ex looked like Brad Pitt when we met 24 years ago, and he still looks like a movie star — muscles, six-pack abs, the whole delicious package. I've also kept myself in great shape. Now, at 44 and reentering the dating world, I am shocked at how poorly most guys in my age range look. Many of them are really nice people, but when I envision myself in a clinch with someone whose midsection is as soft as the Pillsbury Dough Boy's, I am repulsed. Suggestions? — Terry**

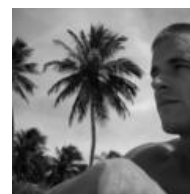
**A.** There once was a 40ish woman who prided herself both on keeping fit and selecting lovers who, while not Brad Pitt (alas!), clearly were not candidates for the circus sideshow role of Fattest Man on Earth. Shortly after a painful breakup she became friendly with Jed, a rotund professional comic. Her feelings were totally platonic...until he left New York for a three-week road trip. The two fell into a routine of nightly, increasingly intimate phone conversations. The woman found herself falling in lust with his voice and wondering what it would be like to touch — well, his jelly belly. When he returned the two began dating, soon moving in together. The relationship eventually ended for reasons that had nothing to do with an unacceptable muscle-to-fat ratio.

Yes, Virginia, the woman was me. Being able to appreciate Jed's inner beauty without being distracted by the few extra outer layers I'd initially found, as you put it, repulsive, opened my eyes to the



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prejudices and preferences I automatically retreated to as a matter of course in my dating life. Snap Judgments Were Us.

And what if that snap judgment about Jed was, down deep, really a reflection of my own shaky post-breakup self-image? The thought of showing my body to a

new man was terrifying. How much easier to sniff, "He's not hot enough for the fabulous me." Online dating columnist April Masini explains, "A newly separated woman's rejection of men who don't look a certain way" may be driven by "her own fears that she doesn't look like the kind of woman she thinks men want to bed."

[Ask April](#)

Being thrust into the dating scene at midlife can leave a woman especially vulnerable to doubts about her viability on the market. New York psychologist Sharon Brennan, PhD, helps women reconnect with themselves after divorce. She explains, "Emotions centered on loss, loneliness, abandonment, depression, anger, and resentment may surge, leaving someone feeling insecure at a time when she wants to feel confident and whole." So, Terry, it's unsurprising that you are idealizing your ex's six-pack abs, using them as a baseline for comparing new men. If no one meets your exacting standards, you'll never have to test how you measure up to a potential lover. But all this rejection is really accomplishing is to shield you from any possibility of intimacy. You're protected, but also very lonely.

Dare to show yourself to another. It's risky, but not in a jumping-out-of-a-plane-without-a-parachute way. Even if you don't manage a soft landing, you will survive to love another day.

Don't misunderstand: I'm not writing a paean to paunch. Post-Jed, I still initially gravitate to relatively fit men. But it's important not to obsess over the superficial shell. And if you meet an intelligent, witty, caring man with a bit of a belly, well, why not exercise together?

**Do you have a tough question about dating or relationships?**

E-mail Sherry at [DatingExpert@More.com](mailto:DatingExpert@More.com) and your question might be featured in an upcoming column.

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