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Sober — and looking for a date who understands ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I am an ex-hardcore drug user — speed and cocaine to heroin — with 25 months of sobriety from drugs and alcohol. Now that I do not go out to clubs or party, I am finding difficulty in relationships.

Women do not understand why I do not drink. When they ask, I tell them where drugs and alcohol have gotten me in the past. This always seems to scare them off.

I feel guilty not telling them that I used to be an intravenous drug user, but when they ask about the tattoo on my arm that symbolizes a promise to myself never to inject again. I am honest about what it stands for. I never shared needles, I have been tested for AIDS/Hep-C and all of the tests have returned negative.

I am having difficulty finding someone that understands.

Answer

Dear Reader,

What ever happened to not judging a book by its cover? You've made an incredible change in your life and stuck to it for 25 months and counting. And yet, some romantic interests decided to put the book back on the shelf without understanding what it's really about. Unfortunately, a history of drug use is often accompanied by stigma, sometimes resulting in assumptions about a person that may not be accurate. When you mention you've been tested for HIV and hepatitis C, it's clear that you are aware of both the health risks involved in intravenous drug use and the stigma placed on drug users both past and present. The good news is that not every person you're interested in will rely on assumptions when you disclose your past drug use. It may be that a few negative reactions early on in your recovery have made it seem like more women will be "scared off" than really will be. When it comes to finding that connection, the places you go to meet people and how disclose your past, and describe your present may ultimately help or hinder your romantic success.

First, let's start with location, location, location. To take some of the pressure off, first dates may be devised to be casual and easy to leave if things aren't going well, such as meeting for a coffee

or a lunch. Meeting over a coffee is a natural way for people to chat and get to know each other with only caffeine on hand. If you're looking for opportunities to meet potential partners — rather than meeting them at bars, for example — consider pursuing interests you have where substances aren't involved. Being around those with a shared interest could lead to meeting potential romantic matches. In settings like classes, teams, clubs, volunteering, all participants will be sober — not just you. You could also search for dating websites specifically for sober people seeking relationships, like [Recovery Dates](#) [2] or [Love in Recovery](#) [3]. If you use a dating site not specific to dating while in recovery, you might choose to indicate that you don't use alcohol or drugs on your profile.

While your story may have been previously met by with negative reaction, a few strategies might get the ball rolling in the right direction with a potential date. It may be helpful to acknowledge some of the negative associations with drug use and explain specifically how you do not fit the mold. Sharing the positive steps you've made in your life may also help to correct any misbeliefs held by those you're interested in dating. When it feels like the right time to share your story with a romantic interest, you may want to ask yourself:

- **How will I describe my past relationship with drugs in a way that is as honest as possible?** Getting comfortable with how you are going to share the information in advance may enable you to be more open about your experience. As difficult as it may be, being open and honest can build trust and intimacy with a person you are interested in dating.
- **How will I react to follow-up questions or an emotional reaction?** Consider how you will feel and how you will respond if a person you are potentially interested in reacts emotionally or asks questions relating to your drug use.
- **How will I incorporate my plans for remaining sober into the conversation?** Since your 25 months of sobriety are an important part of where you are in your journey, you may want to consider talking about your recovery plans to let your date know that your relationship with drugs is in the past and that your commitment to sober living is a positive and significant force in your life. Including your plan to stay sober — without minimizing any of your past experiences — gives your potential dating partners a fuller picture of who you really are.

Many experts recommend caution when beginning to date in recovery, but others consider it a milestone of being ready for a new relationship without substance use. You may find it helpful to talk to a mental health professional about dating and preparing your strategy for describing your story.

Dating can be stressful enough as it is without feeling obliged to combat negative stereotypes at the same time. By preparing an approach that is both honest about the past and confident about the future, you may find that there are people out there who are able to look beyond the book's cover and want to read every page.

Alice!

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