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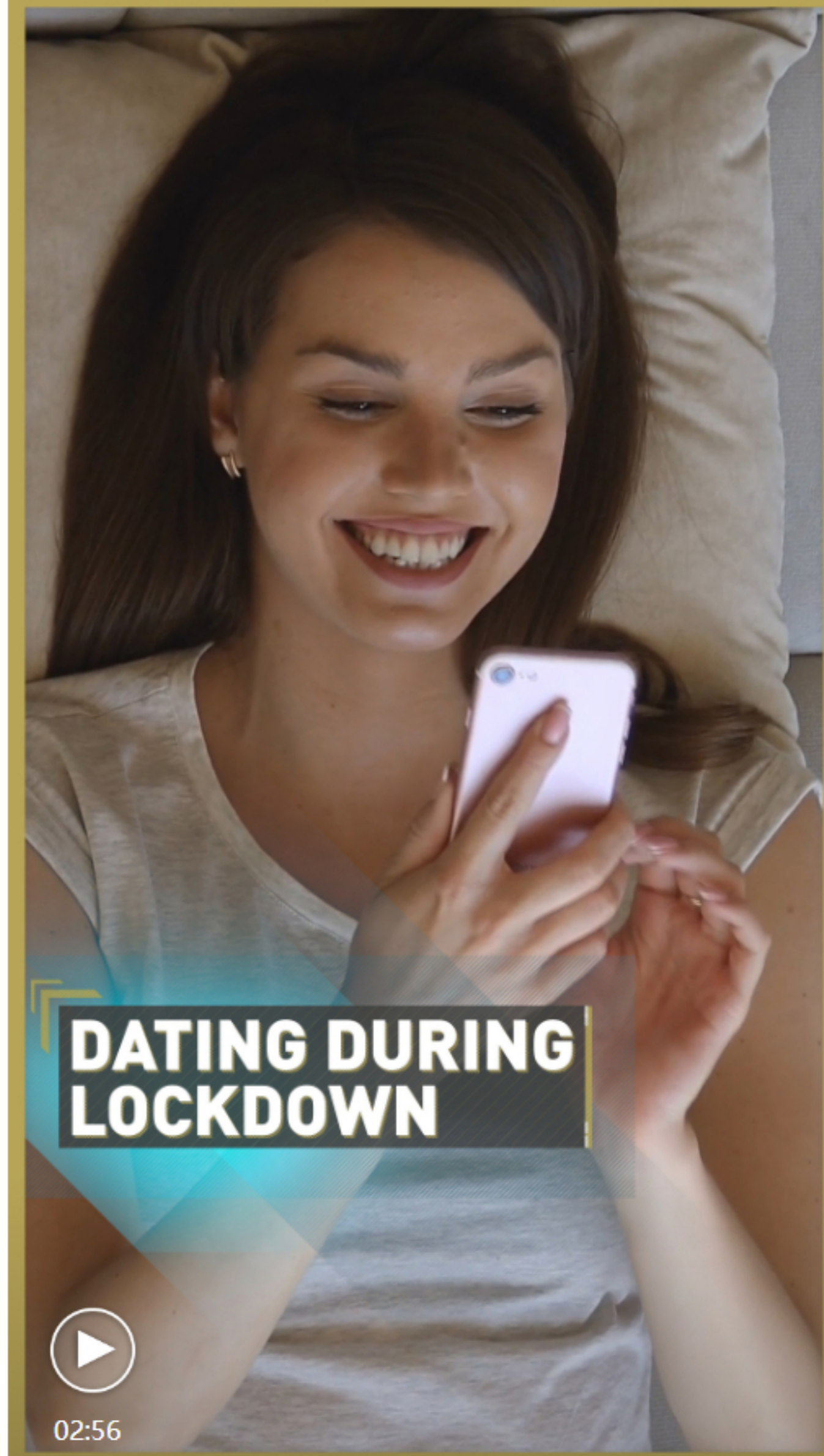
# Dating in lockdown: How social distancing is changing the way we look for love

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"We don't know who needs to hear this, but now is NOT the time to go out with your date to a bar," online dating giant OkCupid wrote to its users on social media. "FaceTime, Skype, call, text, message on our app... all very romantic right now."

Social distancing and self-isolation have forced many to keep away from family, friends, and loved ones, with in-person meetings being strongly discouraged – unless a two-meter safety distance is strictly respected. Under these conditions, meeting and starting to date someone new would seem to be completely off the table until the end of lockdown.



"Why did I need to start chatting to probably the most decent guy I have ever chatted to just before lockdown?! Just my luck," shared AM (@\_glitteratti\_) on Twitter, pessimistic at the prospect of not being able to meet her match in person for weeks, maybe months.

But surprisingly, social distancing hasn't stopped single people around the world from looking for romance. Online dating apps have recorded an increase in engagement globally since the worsening of the COVID-19 pandemic across the world, showing that people are reaching out for connection and companionship more than ever in these dramatic times.

"It's an opportunity to get to know each other and build a friendship, build an authentic connection," says [Kate Mansfield](#), a dating and relationship coach in London. As an expert in online and offline dating techniques, Mansfield believes in teaching people to learn how to love themselves first before setting out to find a partner, knowing exactly what they're looking for.

"And you can find out a lot about someone on a video call, right?" she says. "You know, when you're on a date and there's a lot of physical chemistry, often people end up kissing and getting physical, go back to the house. And that can often mask a lot of other issues, red flags and so on that you may not see if you don't slow down and that you see, for example, in a video chat."



In Spain, Elena Gonzalez, 31, and her boyfriend Juan Manuel Zamorano, 32, got engaged and celebrated with their neighbors in Ronda. /Jorge Guerrero/ AFP

## Self-isolating, but still looking for a connection

"Isolated doesn't have to mean alone," shared Grindr with its users, offering guidelines on how to use its platform safely during the pandemic. And people have been reaching out to find love (or just a fling) during these very uncertain times.

Let's start with an extraordinary piece of data: on Sunday 29 March, Tinder recorded more than 3 billion swipes globally, more than on any other single day in the history of the dating app.

Data shared by the company have revealed that people in Italy, now seven weeks under lockdown, have increased the length of their conversations on the app by as much as 29 percent. Britons, now in their fifth week of lockdown, are having 12 percent more daily conversations on Tinder since the beginning of the restrictive measures, and these chats are 8 percent longer than usual.

According to Tinder, conversations on the app are now 10 to 20 percent longer worldwide than they were in February, and the chats have become kinder and more caring, with people often asking their matches "How are you?" and "How are you feeling?"

Hinge, which markets itself as a relationship-oriented app, says up to 70 percent of its users are up for a virtual date on Zoom, FaceTime, or other video platforms.

Bumble, has also noted an increase of 35 percent in messages sent through its app and a 21 percent increase in the number of video calls on its own video chat feature, with the average call lasting 14 minutes. HER, a dating app for single lesbians, queer, bisexual women and non-binary people, has seen a significant rise in the number of people using the in-app communities where users can share posts and create discussion threads.

U.S.-based company OkCupid also recently shared data revealing that matches on its platforms have increased by 10 percent and conversations by more than 20 percent all over the world. Globally, the app has recorded a 30 percent increase in messages sent on its platform each day since 11 March.

The most important thing at the moment is to stay at home and matches suggesting to meet up in person can be a real deal-breaker. Helen Towers (@helentowersface), based in Nottingham, UK, shared on Twitter: "On the positive, this is a marvellous way to find out if someone is an idiot. One said I needed to be more positive, the other said I sound like someone from the government when I explained why we shouldn't meet up."

**ON VIRTUAL DATES PEOPLE ARE:**

- COOKING THE SAME MEAL
- SHIPPING EACH OTHER WINE
- OR deliveroo
- ONLINE GAMING
- SHARING Spotify PLAYLISTS
- WATCHING MOVIES OR TV SHOWS ON NETFLIX PARTY

Graphics: James Sandifer/CGTN

## What's your ideal virtual date?

"So I went on a lockdown date yesterday," shares @Kimmo\_88, based in London, on Twitter. "He made food (a roast), brought it over, I was standing on my balcony waiting for him so we could at least see each other from a distance. He dropped the food in front of the door so I could get it.

"He went back home and then we had lunch together over FaceTime! He even put a candle with the food!! My flatmates tell me I should marry him."

Social distancing is getting people to be more creative with their dating life, inspiring funny and romantic gestures that come as a refreshing novelty in the online dating world. Take the case of [Jeremy Cohen](#), the Brooklyn, U.S.-based freelance photographer who became viral on social media with his rooftop romance with his "quarantine cutie" of a neighbor, whom he asked out on a date by sending an invite to the two. The two even went on a walk together, [zorb](#)ing (in separate transparent plastic orbs). You can hardly top that.

And people are doing all sort of things on their virtual dates: cooking the same recipe, shipping each other wine bottles or entire meals on Deliveroo, playing online games, creating shared Spotify playlists, watching movies or bingeing on TV shows together on Netflix.

"Come prepared as if you're going on a date, so make a bit of an effort," suggests Mansfield. "My number one advice to all of my clients is really to raise your standards and lower your expectations, because I think often we are the other way around, right? We have really high expectations and sometimes low standards. And what I mean by that is: have a clear vision of what you want and have also a clear idea of your non-negotiables and find out those things as quickly as possible."

OkCupid conducted a survey on more than 75,000 people on what they'd like to do on their ideal virtual dates: 31 percent said they prefer shared activities, such as online games; 29 percent would opt for a virtual dinner or drinks; 25 percent would just have a good old chat; and 15 percent would be happy watching a movie together.

According to the same survey, people are really enjoying the freedom and comfort that come from going on a date without having to leave your house. 38 percent said the best part of virtual dating is that "it's less pressure," a close 37 percent said they appreciate that "it gives them the possibility of getting to know the other person better," and 25 percent are happy that they "can wear whatever they want."

A similar survey conducted by Bumble in the UK found that of the 83 percent of its users who are up for virtual dating, 64 percent said their favorite activity on a video date is to have a chat over a drink and 58 percent would get dressed up for a virtual date just the same way they would for a regular meet-up face to face.

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