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Rapid Romance

Wednesday, November 19
By Deena Waisberg



At 6:45 p.m., nine single women arrive at a Toronto coffee shop and seat themselves at tables around the room. They exchange nervous smiles. Fifteen minutes later, nine single guys saunter in and tentatively join the women at their tables. These strangers have bravely come together for a night of speed dating, the newest way for time-strapped would-be lovebirds to meet and greet in hopes of hooking up.

The even coordinator gives the 25- to 35-year-old crew the scoop. Participants will have nine dates lasting nine minutes each. A bell dings to signal it's time to move on to the next person. (The men rotate, and the women stay where they are.) At the end of the session, participants indicate on a confidential response card whether they would like to exchange phone numbers with anyone they met.

Daters ready? OK, begin. But how much can you learn about someone in such a short sliver of time? "You'd be surprised," says 31-year-old Meghan Buck, who has attended four speed dating events hosted by 9 Minute Dates. "You can find out if you want to spend more than nine minutes with the person. Sometimes it's like, 'Will this never end?'"

Speed dating was developed in 1999 by Rabbi Yaacov Deyo, educational director of Aish Ha Torah in Los Angeles, as a way to unite Jewish singles. He and his wife, Sue Deyo, wrote a book called Speed Dating. It quickly turned into a phenomenon, spreading to 25 U.S. cities and other countries, including Canada, England, Australia and France.

The need for speed has made this method of connecting popular. "Unlike a traditional blind date, you're not wasting the entire evening if the person isn't right for you," says Tanya Whyte, operations manager of 9 Minute Dates, which runs weekly events for singles 25 to 55 (divided by age range) in the greater Toronto area. Face-to-face contact means you reduce the risk of being misled, which is all too common with internet dating.

Critics slag speed dating because of the costs: Initially \$49 at 9 Minute Dates and between \$2 and \$40 at The Dating Field, an Ottawa-based company. The slam goes: only desperate, ugly losers need to pay for a date. However, the attractive men and women dressed in upscale casual clothes at this event disprove the freak-show theory. Not everyone will strike your fancy, but one will be clinging to your skirt. Catharine Veenstra, chief dating officer (seriously) of The Dating Field, reports the same of her clients. "We get lots of great-looking men and women who genuinely want a relationship. It's just an efficient process."

By 8 p.m., the couples are on their fifth date and still chatting away. Perhaps they've read Deyo's book in which he recommends asking questions that will draw out a person's values rather than just their interests. An example: "How often do you keep in touch with your family?" At one table, a man dominates the conversation; the woman listens silently and looks bored. At another it's better news. A couple is laughing and joking. "You can tell how the date is going by how the conversation flows and how quickly the guy gets up from the table," offers Buck. After a short break, the daters round-robin four more times.

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By the end, everyone has relaxed into a groove.

The next day the matches are tallied and the coordinator contacts everyone with the news. For this event, 66 percent got matches (i.e. requests for a phone number). “The first time I was walking on eggshells to hear,” says Buck. “But now I look forward to it. I’ve met so many great people.” Will any of these speed daters find their elusive love match? Maybe, maybe not. But getting out there and meeting new people is still better than sitting at home alone watching yet another rerun of Everybody Loves Raymond with a tub of ice cream.

The Rules

To ensure everyone’s safety and comfort, a few guidelines must be followed:

- First names only.
- You can’t ask where people work, but asking about the type of job they do is fine.
- You can’t ask if people want to see you again. (Guaranteed to help avoid those awkward moments.)
- You can’t skip date even if you know on sight that he or she doesn’t have a snowball’s chance in hell of getting your number.

Love on the Run

Got a few minutes? Check out these picks on where to go for virtually pain-free dates:

Toronto

Swift Dates

416-778-6274

9 Minute Dates

(416) 979-3117

[Hurrydate](#)

(also runs in Montreal, Calgary and Vancouver)

1-888-603-4467

Montreal

[Montreal Style 7 Minute Dating](#)

(514) 592-3130

Ottawa

[The Dating Field](#)

(613) 745-1522

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[Six Minute Dates](#)

(403) 243-1456

Vancouver


[Rotateadate](#)

(604) 726-9762

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