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## I have MS and my partner left as she didn't want to become my carer – now I worry I'll never meet someone

COUPLES THERAPY

In this week's Couples Therapy dilemma, counsellor and therapist Cate Mackenzie advises on finding love again



Working out what you want and need from a relationship first before you start dating is the advice from counsellor and therapist Cate Mackenzie (Photo: Yagi Studio/Getty Images)



By **i Team**

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She wanted to travel but it's not something I have the energy to do. She was a social animal and again, I am not able to do that a lot of the time. I was holding her back. But now I'm stuck.

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I am **lonely** but also I am having a hard time thinking about getting back on **dating apps**. Why would any woman want to be with me? I wonder if the easiest thing for me and the best thing for everyone is to accept that I will have to stay alone.

## Couples counsellor and psychosexual therapist **Cate Mackenzie** says:

First of all, I want to reassure you that you deserve love just as much as anyone and there are many people out there looking for someone to love, including people with health issues.

Secondly, I am sorry to hear about the end of your **relationship**. I wonder how much you have processed that, in a way that allowed you to feel the sadness, anger or frustration with what happened? It might be that you need to do that first before deciding whether to date again.

As well as feeling all the feelings that come with the end of a relationship, there is also an opportunity to look back and see what lessons you can learn. It could well be that you and this person were simply not a match, it happens. It could also be that there were ways that you misunderstood each other or didn't communicate well and in that case it can be helpful to consider what you might do differently next time.



You say that you were holding her back and she was sociable and wanted to travel and you wanted a quieter life. This is not an unusual situation. There is often one person in a relationship who likes to be at home more and one who wants to travel more. There are ways to navigate these differences, with good communication. **Intimacy** is really about navigating our differences, about being able to complain and be heard. Were you able to talk about the differences, to complain and be heard – as well as to hear her?

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I would be curious to know if your feelings of holding her back meant that you might have also talked yourself out of the relationship (as well as her comments about being your carer). If you are feeling low about the **MS**, it would make sense that you might be telling yourself that you are not a good partner – which I'm sure is not the case.

You say your partner gave a lot, which tells me that she did care for you and that you are lovable and that something happened to rupture the connection. It would be wonderful to understand more about what that might have been. Would you be open to seeking some

counselling to learn more?

I would recommend that before you date again you spend time getting clear on what you need in a relationship. Many of us don't know what our needs are and this causes a lot of confusion.

You might want to write down the kind of partner you want – for example, you might want someone who wants to be close and spend time together, while for others their priority is a relationship that allows them freedom.

Once you know these needs, it can be easier to ask for them to be met by the other but also by ourselves. When we learn how to meet our own needs we are not looking to our partner to meet everything. In order to have a good relationship with others, we must first have a good relationship with ourselves.

I would also suggest working on building your **self-esteem**. Now is the time to be kind to yourself,



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You might be focusing on what you are not able to bring to a relationship, while not seeing all the things that you can bring. Everybody comes to relationships with challenges and gifts – and while illness can put pressure on relationships, it can also open up new doorways of intimacy and experimentation.

*As told to Marianne Power*

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