

Ep #122: What to Do After Drinking Too Much



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 122.

Welcome to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart. If you are an alcoholic or an addict, this is not the show for you, but if you are someone who has a highly functioning life, doing very well, but just drinking a bit too much and wants to take a break, then welcome to the show. Let's get started.

Well hello everybody. We are going to talk today about what to do after you've had too much to drink. I'm not talking about hangover cures. I'm talking about what you need to do in order to change the habit.

Now, I will tell you, I am so familiar with this. I cannot even tell you, I can't even count the number of times in my life where I woke up and the moment that my eyes opened, I just thought, "Oh Rachel, you have got to be kidding me. You have got to be kidding me that you did this again."

I will tell you now, it is so nice. It is so amazing to never have to worry about this, to never wake up in a puddle of shame about what happened last night. But that used to be my life all the time. Why did I drink so much? Did I really say that? Oh my god, I just want to die.

And I wanted to die, not just because physically I woke up feeling like crap. I wanted to die because of how I felt emotionally. In fact, that was really more painful for me. More than the hangover, it was the emotional pain, the embarrassment, the humiliation, the shame, the regret.

And I'll tell you, I did for a very long time what most people do. I just wanted to hide. I just wanted to crawl into a hole. And if I couldn't hide, let's say I had to go to work the next day, I would try to pretend like everything was normal, but of course, everything wasn't normal because I was in a pool of negative emotion, trying my best to hide that from the world.

I will tell you that neither of these options, hiding or pretending like everything is normal will help you change the habit of drinking. Neither of

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these options will help you avoid having a repeat. In fact, they will make a repeat of drinking too much all the more likely because instead of understanding why it is you drank too much the night before, you spend all your time the next day trying not to look.

And the question for all of you to consider because I know that you have been in this place too, why do you do this? Why don't you want to look? Why do we want to hide? I'll tell you that the reason is really simple. It's because your brain believes that it already has the answer.

It already knows the answer to the question, why did you do this. Its answers are pretty terrible. Because I'm a screw-up, because I have no discipline, because I don't have enough willpower, because I'm terrible at saying no, because something is just wrong with me.

And with thoughts like that, of course you don't want to look at what happened the night before. I didn't. Those were all my thoughts for a very long time. I didn't want to look because there was a very big part of me that believed I already had the answer to why I drank too much last night, and the answer was all of those terrible thoughts.

Looking at what happened, examining what happened the night before for me was just an exercise in finding evidence for all of those terrible thoughts that they were true, and this is what you guys are doing as well. I say this all the time, but I really, really cannot stress it enough. You cannot change what you can't see.

If something is not working in your life, you have got to look, and you've got to look closely. But here's the thing; you have to look with curiosity, and that is what I didn't know how to do for a very long time. And that's what I teach people how to do. Look with curiosity. It's like putting on your scientist hat.

And you know, I love this idea. This idea that I can just put on the hat of a scientist because you know the hat I used to wear all the time and the hat that you are probably wearing as well is the hat of being judge, jury, and

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executioner. And you know what? I was always ruling against myself. Always.

You're doing the same thing. If you're not sure, just ask your brain right now why it is that you drank too much the last night or the last time that you drank. Why is it? What is your hypothesis for why it is that you drank too much? I guarantee when you ask yourself that question and your brain answers it, it is ready to go with a ton of terrible reasons about you.

And all of those reasons boil down to there being something wrong with you or wrong with your brain, but you've got to take off that hat. You've got to take off the hat that is so sure that you are broken and put on the hat of being a scientist. Because when you are a scientist, you aren't setting out to hand down punishment.

That's what judge, jury, and executioner does. You're not setting out to hand down punishment. When you are a scientist and you are wearing that hat, you are curious because you are trying to solve a problem. Being curious, being open-minded, being open to different conclusions for why something happened the way it did, why it unfolded the way it did, why it is that you drank too much, this is what you can tap into if you can get into that space, if you can start gathering data so that you can look at it closely, so that you can understand why you got the result that you did.

Because here is the thing; drinking is a result. Overdrinking is a result. Not drinking is a result. If you want to understand why you get any result in life, including these three, drinking, overdrinking, and not drinking, all you have to do is find the think-feel-act cycle that is fueling that result.

Because here's what I know; results do not just happen. They are created by your actions, what you do or what you don't do in life. When it comes to the habit of drinking, it's the action of saying yes or the action of saying no. Your actions are driven by how you are feeling. Your emotions are directive.

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Desire is directive. Desire has you go out and get something. That's what desire directs you to do until you learn how to respond differently to it. And how you feel the emotion that is in your body is created by what you are thinking. This is how the think-feel-act cycle unfolds. But for so many of you, it's so fast, it's so unconscious you don't even realize it's there. It just seems like drinking just happens.

But it never just happens. You can always, always understand why you got the result that you did, and I promise, it has nothing to do with who you are as a person. I did not know this for a really long time. My hypothesis for why I drank too much looked like this; well, I just love to drink and I'm terrible at saying no, and the reason I'm terrible at saying no is because something doesn't work properly in my brain, because normal people can say no and I can't, so something's wrong with me.

That was my hypothesis for so many years, and it was one that caused so much shame. Guess what we do when we feel shame? Feel that feeling, your action is hiding. Your action is crawling under a rock, not looking.

If something is wrong with your brain, if that is your hypothesis, then what are you going to do? Exchange it? Return it? Get a new one? No, it's your brain. That's what I - for so many years I remember just thinking like, why me? Why was I cursed with this brain? Not understanding that I could actually use it to change the habit.

That my brain wasn't the problem. The problem was no one ever gave me the instruction manual for it. Because here's the thing; if you drank too much last night, it means that your brain is functioning just as it was designed to. You felt the emotion of desire and you sought out the answer with a drink.

When you did that, your brain was rewarded. You felt desire, you gave your brain a reward. You felt desire and you gave your brain a reward. This is how your brain, the human brain, every brain was designed. Now, the reason that you haven't yet learned how to respond to that desire differently is simple because no one has ever shown you how. No one ever sat you

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down and taught you how to press pause between a feeling and an action, but I promise, it is possible.

I want you to know this; you do it all the time. If you've ever had the urge to hit someone but you didn't, if you've ever had the urge to run a red light but you didn't, if you ever had the urge to steal something and you didn't, or to sleep with someone and you didn't, guess what happened? You felt desire in your body and you responded without saying yes. You didn't reward that desire.

So here's what I know; if you drank too much last night, last night you felt desire and you just rewarded that desire with a drink. You responded by saying yes. And in fact, your brain may be pretty good at doing just that. So good that sometimes it might feel like drinking just happens. That's what it felt like for me.

It didn't seem like there was a conscious decision at all because feeling the desire and saying yes, there was almost no pause in between it. So for now, let's just figure out how you can start to get curious about last night because if you can get curious about last night, if you can get curious about why you drank too much, you can start to find a way to develop the pause, to slow down the think-feel-act cycle, so that you can actually decide to do something differently.

So, if you're in this situation right now, if you're in this situation in the future, you wake up, you drank too much last night, you are used to doing one of two things, which is either hiding, not wanting to look, beating yourself up, or pretending that nothing has gone wrong, I want you to go through these questions instead.

Make sure you write this out. I always say this. Do not do it in your head. You have got to get in on paper. A scientist would not collect data in her head. She would get an Excel spreadsheet and collect it there. You got to see it on paper.

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Alright, so the first question is simple. What and how much did you drink? I really want you to be as specific as possible. Really get into the details. Now, I know that some of you are going to say, "I don't remember the entire night." That's fine. Be as specific as you can until that point.

Really go back. I want you to rewind the tape and really go back and remember how much and what did you drink because you got to look at that. You got to have the data points first, and if you don't remember the entire night, that's fine. Be as specific as possible until you get to that point.

The second question, what was your day like beforehand? Now, if you have been listening to the podcast before today's episode, you have heard me talk about how drinking doesn't just happen. Many times, we teach our brain to use a drink as a way to solve how we're feeling. And so it's really important that you are able to identify your emotions, identify how you're feeling.

So I want you to think about what was your day like beforehand. What were you doing? How were you feeling? What were you thinking about? Listen, I don't want you guys to write a sentence to this answer. I was stressed. No. I want you to really go into it. I want you to really think about it.

Listen, your brain is going to say I don't know, I can't remember. It's BS. Your brain doesn't want you to look. Your brain says hey listen, we've got a habit, it works really well, feel desire, answer that desire with a drink, it's great, I get my reward. You have got to challenge your brain to look at something that right now part of you doesn't want to.

The third question, when did you first notice the desire to drink and what did it feel like? Was it a little desire? Was it a big desire? Did it come out of nowhere? Did you have it for a long period? Really ask yourself, when did you first notice it and what did it feel like? We're so not used to thinking about our desire, describing it, so this is really important.

Question number four. What permissions, excuses, or justifications did you notice? Now, I did a whole episode on what I call permission-giving

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thoughts. It's episode number 78 called the Rolodex of Excuses if you want to go back and listen to it. But a permission-giving thought is exactly what it sounds like. It's a thought that gives you permission to do something, in this case, to drink.

And it's going to sound really familiar to you. They sound like I deserve it, who cares, I've been so good all week, it's the weekend, everyone else is, one won't hurt, it's free, I might as well finish the bottle. That's what they sound like. So what permissions, excuses, or justifications did you notice?

Right now, you're acting on that permission-giving thought because you believe it's true. You're not questioning it in the moment. And that is really important, not just because your brain automatically puts forward a permission-giving thought, but because you're automatically believing it as true when in fact, it's not.

This was a huge thing for me to learn and understand, and I've talked about this on the podcast before. How many permission-giving thoughts that once I tuned into what was going on, I didn't really even recognize they were there. They were always running in the background.

Question number five. How would you need to handle the same situation differently in order to get a different result? This is where you're putting on that scientist hat. Now, a lot of you are going to want to answer this question by saying, "Well, I shouldn't have accepted the invite, I should have stayed home, I shouldn't have stopped by the liquor store, I should be stronger, I should be more disciplined."

Listen, I don't want you to answer it this way because it's not so much about staying home or having more willpower or not stopping by the liquor store as much as it is about responding differently to your thoughts. So you have to picture how you would respond to a thought like, "I deserve it," or, "Who cares? I've been so good. It's the weekend."

How would you respond to a thought like that differently? With more than just yelling at your brain, no, no, no, no. I talk about this a lot but we can't

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just yell at our brain not to do something. This is really important. The urge is like a toddler. It wants what it wants when it wants it. This is your lower brain at work. The part of your brain - the primitive part of your brain that cares about pleasure and avoiding pain, and doing those things as efficiently as possible.

So if you think about the lower brain and you think about that desire, that urge as a toddler who is throwing a fit, yelling at the toddler to stop throwing a fit, it's not going to work. You have to let the toddler have her freak-out and you stay calm. And the reason why you can do this is because you are not just your lower brain. You also have a prefrontal cortex. You also have a human brain, a more higher evolved part of your brain, the part that makes you human.

So think about it. Right now, that toddler, she wants her candy. You say no. She throws a fit. So what do we do most times? Well, I did this forever. I just gave her what she wanted. I didn't want her to throw a fit. So what happens? The brain learns that throwing a tantrum works.

Now, you can also try yelling back at her. I did this for a long time too. The desire would appear, I would just yell back, "Why are you here? Why are you talking about this? I said no. You shouldn't even want candy. It's bad for you," as if a toddler cares about whether or not sugar is bad for her.

So these options don't really work so well. You can just give in, you can say yes, you can teach your brain that if it throws a fit it will be rewarded, or you can just start yelling back at your brain, which pretty much doesn't feel very good and doesn't actually teach you how to change anything or how the habit is working. That is what willpower and gritting your teeth looks like.

Or you can say to that desire, you can say to that urge, that toddler, "I totally understand that you want the candy. It makes perfect sense, but we're not doing that." She is going to give you all the permission-giving excuses. It's so unfair, I've been so good, everyone else can, just this once.

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And you get to listen to all those excuses and look her in the eye and say no, that's not what we're doing right now, but it's okay that you want it and I understand that you're upset that you can't have it, but you're not going to die. Just feels like that.

This is what you can do instead of hiding and beating yourself up and believing that there is something wrong with you. But you have to walk yourself through these five questions, and you cannot do it with one-sentence answers or I don't know, I'm not sure. You have got to really try to collect the data because once you start to see that, patterns are going to emerge.

You're going to start to notice patterns in how you were feeling beforehand. You're going to start to notice patterns in the excuses and the justifications that your brain likes to go back to over and over again. You're going to start to notice patterns in what your day was like. Patterns in the type of situations that you're in.

This is what you're going to start to uncover and understand. And the more you notice patterns, the more you can start to see that think-feel-act cycle unfolding. The less mysterious your drinking will become, and the less mysterious it becomes, the more data that you have, the more that you can start to intervene with it and change it.

Because the other option is to hide under the covers and to hope that one day you're going to magically wake up and you're going to not be the person who's drinking too much, and you're going to know magically how to deal with your desire and magically, your desire is going to be gone.

That's what I hoped for a very long time all the while that I was hiding under the covers. But here's what I can promise for all of you; that day isn't coming. It is not coming if you keep doing what you're doing. If you stay in the cycle of drinking too much and then hiding, pretending like nothing is wrong, or beating yourself up, going into a shame spiral, blaming yourself, believing that something is wrong with you, it just creates more and more

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negative emotion that guess what, builds up and builds up and you start looking for relief.

Be a scientist. Use these questions to help you do that. Stop assuming that you know why you drank too much last night, that you have the answer already. Oh, it's because I have no willpower, it's because I can't say no, it's because I love wine so much, and consider that perhaps you have no idea. Because then you might just discover the key that will unlock everything.

Alright, that's it for today. I will see you guys next week.

Hey guys, if you're finding this podcast helpful, and I really hope you are, I would love if you would head on over to iTunes and leave a review. And as a special thank you, I've updated and expanded my free urge meditation giveaway. I've created two audio meditations plus a brand-new workbook that will teach you a different way to respond to the urge to drink.

The meditations are super simple. All it takes is five minutes and a pair of headphones, and each one now comes with a follow up exercise in the workbook to help you dig deeper and really retrain your brain when it comes to the habit of drinking. So after you leave a review on iTunes, all you need to do is head on over to rachelhart.com/urge, input your information, and I'll make sure you get a copy of both meditations plus the workbook in your inbox.

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