

Ep #234: The Hidden Drawbacks of Drinking the “Good Stuff”



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With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 234.

Welcome to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart. If you're 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 my friends. We are back for another episode and talking today about drinking the good stuff. So when I say the good stuff, maybe it is that really fancy bottle of wine, or the rare, limited edition scotch, whatever the good stuff means for you, we're going to be talking about how it impacts the habit and impacts your ability to change your relationship with alcohol and change your desire because I think this is a very under discussed part of why it can be hard to change.

Now, I will tell you this; I did not start out drinking the good stuff. I started out drinking when I was in college, I was 17, I was going to frat parties, and I was drinking Hawaiian Punch and grain alcohol in red plastic cups. I was drinking things like Mike's Hard Lemonade.

But in my late 20s, I started drinking what I thought was the good stuff. So my taste matured, so I became picky about the gin that I would drink, or picky about what exactly went into one of my fancy cocktails. I remember that I started spending money on buying real maraschino cherries.

So not like the bright red one that you get on top of a sundae but the deep maroon cherries that are soaked in maraschino liquor and a bottle's like, \$25 a pop. So alcohol became this thing that I was starting to spend real money on.

Ep #234: The Hidden Drawbacks of Drinking the “Good Stuff”

And I will tell you this; drinking what we call the good stuff, whatever that means for you, it didn't just impact my wallet. It had a tremendous impact on the thoughts, feelings, and actions connected to the habit. And this is what I see with so many of my clients inside the 30-day challenge and doing the work inside of Take a Break.

So listen, what is good stuff means different things to different people. So it might be really expensive, like a bottle of Chateau Margaux, it might be really rare, like a limited edition beer like Sam Adams Utopia. It might be something made without pesticides or added sulfates, like some organic or natural or biodynamic wines.

The good stuff means different things to different people but it's really useful for you to consider what the good stuff means to you and how it impacts the habit. Now, what most people fail to consider is how our different categories of alcohol actually dictates not only how much you decide to drink but how much desire you have for the drink in front of you, and that's what we're really going to explore today.

And you have to understand this if you want to start to change the habit. Now, I'm going to back up a little bit and give you all a little bit of a historical perspective on this. We're talking all the time on this podcast that alcohol is neutral, it's not good or bad, but although we talk about it here on the podcast, we live in a world where we love to classify alcohol and we love to create different kinds of hierarchies between things that are the “good stuff” and things that are less good.

So we have drinks that we kind of label as elite and we have others that we say, well, these are more for the masses. This is nothing new. When we look at the fact that humans love to label things, including we love to label people and we love to label the things that we consume, labeling alcohol as the “good stuff” has been around for almost as long as humans have actually been fermenting drinks.

Ep #234: The Hidden Drawbacks of Drinking the “Good Stuff”

And it really was the ancient Greeks. They were the ones who were the first real snobs when it came to drinking. And I think it's important that you understand this historical perspective just to understand hey, where do these kinds of thought patterns come from? Where do these labels that we assign to different drinks come from?

So beer was really the first widely available fermented drink. Yes, before that there was honey that you could ferment and turn into mead and there were fruits that could be fermented into wine, but ancient beer in particular, ancient beer in the Fertile Crescent, which was an area running from what is now modern day Egypt up through Iraq and Iran into Turkey, this area was called the Fertile Crescent in part because of the environment and the typography and the climate. It was really ideal for wild wheat and barley to grow.

And grains aren't just a reliable source of food for humans. They actually are what allowed humans to settle. So instead of constantly being on the move, we could leave behind our nomadic ways and hunter gatherers could settle down and build cities.

We had an abundant store of grain that we could consume later. We could avoid food scarcity. But now here's the thing; with all these wild grains, it wasn't just that you had a reliable source of food, but you could actually now start to ferment drinks and you could start to do it on a much wider scale.

And that's what humans discovered. As they were trying to make their grains more edible, that wild wheat and that wild barley and they were pounding them and soaking them to make it into a porridge, guess what happens when you leave it sitting around? It gets a little fizzy, it becomes slightly intoxicating.

Ep #234: The Hidden Drawbacks of Drinking the “Good Stuff”

Those ancestors of ours, they had on their hands a very primitive beer. And that beer was consumed by everyone. It didn't matter if you were rich or you were poor, if you were a man or a woman or a child. Pretty much everyone in Mesopotamia was drinking this fermented beverage.

And they were drinking it for lots of reasons, but a big part of that was just because beer was safe. Humans need water to survive. It makes up two thirds of the human body. So you can go weeks without eating, but you cannot go more than a couple days without water.

And there are all these benefits to humans actually leaving behind our hunter gatherer ways and settling down in one place. But clean water is not one of those benefits because when you put humans together and you settle them in one place, guess what happens. Clean water becomes an issue.

So as soon as humans start to settle in one particular area, they also start to contaminate the water supply. And beer helped solve this problem because beer is made using boiled water, which makes it safer to drink. So there's a reason why everyone back in the Fertile Crescent, Mesopotamia, there's a reason why they were drinking beer.

And they weren't just drinking it, they were often using it as a form of currency. They were using it to pay wages. It was safe, it was plentiful, it was easy to share. But remember, the human brain loves to label things. We love to label things as good and bad and right and wrong and sophisticated and low class.

That's exactly what happened with beer. So the ancient Greeks come along, and they gave us many things. They gave us democracy and the Olympic games, and they gave us an early form of trial by jury. But they also gave us wine snobs.

Ep #234: The Hidden Drawbacks of Drinking the “Good Stuff”

So it wasn't just that they were, or they considered themselves to be connoisseurs and they appreciated the terrain and the vintage of wine. They used wine as a marker of how they were different. How they were more sophisticated than people who drank beer.

So the ancient Greeks believed that they were better than other people and they looked for ways to show that they were better, in particular, to show that they were better than their neighbors living to the east of them in the Fertile Crescent that they thought were uncivilized.

So here you go, you've got the people in Mesopotamia, in that area in the Fertile Crescent who have started to learn how to ferment wild wheat and wild barley and making beer and it's very widespread. And largely in part just because they have access to these wild grains.

And then you have the ancient Greeks who decide, you know what, beer is really not the thing, beer is kind of unsophisticated and it's low class. The real thing is wine. It's making a fermented drink from grapes. Now, it also helps by the way that the Greeks, they were living in a terrain, particularly on the Greek islands that were much better suited to growing grapes and making wine.

So it kind of gives you a little perspective on the wine snob thing, right? It's like, hey, I'm going to be a snob about this drink that it just happens that I have more access to. You people over there drinking your beer, it's very barbaric, it's very uncivilized. But here I am, drinking my wine as just kind of proof that I am different from you. I am more sophisticated.

This drink is more for the elites. Now, I just want you to consider that historical perspective when you start to think about how it is we decide what constitutes as the good stuff. There's a reason why I want you to understand this history because I think it's good to remember that what the

Ep #234: The Hidden Drawbacks of Drinking the “Good Stuff”

brain deems as good or rare or expensive or sophisticated, it's all just made up.

It's not the truth. Much of it is based in stories created thousands of years ago by people who were trying to prove that they were superior than others. Now here's the thing; most people don't have this knowledge for why it is they think that some drinks are better than others. I certainly didn't have this knowledge when I started to upgrade my selections for what I was drinking when I moved into my late 20s.

I didn't have any of this knowledge. It was just what I was conditioned to believe. I was just conditioned to believe that certain drinks were better. Certain drinks were a marker of sophistication. Certain drinks were something that only a connoisseur would have and other ones, that was just kind of crappy.

But I just want you to know that most people don't ever question this. And it really doesn't matter what alcohol you're talking about. It doesn't matter if we're talking about White Claw or Chateau Margaux. Yes, they're made from different ingredients, yes, the way they're fermented or distilled, that's different. Yes, they taste different, but when you really boil it down, alcohol is alcohol.

It's one oxygen, two carbon, and six hydrogen atoms that come together to make ethanol. It's the waste product of yeast trying to burn glucose in an oxygen-starved environment. Everything else, all of it, it's all story that's made up by the human mind. And if you don't understand that it's all story, you're not going to understand how that story is then impacting the habits that you develop around drinking.

So I really started thinking about this a lot, especially because I work with a lot of people who really do recognize themselves as kind of connoisseurs. They take a lot of pride in the selections that they make about what they

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #234: The Hidden Drawbacks of Drinking the “Good Stuff”

drink and what they have on hand, and the fact that their friends and family may turn to them and say I don't know anything, you're the expert here, you tell us what we should drink, you pick the bottle of wine from the wine list.

A lot of people who come to my work are in that place of believing that they drink the good stuff, and they don't consider how it impacts the habit. Now, I will tell you that I see a lot of ways that our beliefs about what we're drinking and whether or not it's good, whether or not it's sophisticated, whether or not it's rare or expensive will then impact how much of it you drink.

I see this a lot especially around some teachings that I do around this idea of the clean plate club. So this idea that many of us have been taught from a young age that it's good to finish all the food on our plate. And so we don't necessarily listen to our bodies when it comes to when am I going to stop eating. We listen to or we look at, I should say, how much food is left on my plate.

Because we believe, this is a moral thing, this is a good thing not to waste food, which whether or not you agree with that, it is not a good way to listen to your body. It is not a good way to become an expert in actually how much you desire.

But I will tell you this; I watch people do the exact same thing with how much wine is left in the wine glass or how much beer is left in the bottle, or how much of their cocktail is left in the tumbler. Many people end up not listening to their body, not listening to what they actually want, when enough is enough, but using stemware or a bottle to dictate when they're done.

So they look at the glass and they think, “There's some left so I'll keep drinking,” or they look at the bottle and they say, “There's some still in there so I'll keep drinking.” And what I have people really work on, especially

Ep #234: The Hidden Drawbacks of Drinking the “Good Stuff”

when people are doing the work not just to say no, because anyone can do the work to say no.

What I want you all to learn is how do I say no and actually change the habit. How do I start being able to listen intuitively to what my body actually wants? How do I figure out what enough takes like and feels like and smells like and looks like for me?

And I will tell you, most people have absolutely no idea how to do this. Most people don't know how to do this with food, much less alcohol. It really is something that takes practice, but you can learn how to do this. And I will tell you, learning how to set down a glass of wine that still has a lot of wine in it and say I've had all I want, that's a pretty mind-blowing experience and you can learn how to do this.

But now here's the thing; there is a very significant complication when you're trying to learn how to do this, when you're trying to learn, okay, how do I actually just stop when I've had enough if you're also drinking what your brain deems to be the good stuff.

So I was talking once with a guy friend of mine who is really into craft beer, and we were talking about how a lot of times, some of the specialty beers that he will buy, they actually only come in these 22 ounce bottles. I think they're called Bombers.

And so we were talking about like okay, well, what do you do? Do you always finish it? And he looked at me - it's funny, he looked at me like, yeah, of course I finish it Rachel, you can't re-cork it, it doesn't keep. And we were talking about like, okay, but what if you've had enough to drink?

And I remember he said to me, he said, “Rachel, you can't leave a wounded soldier behind,” which I will tell you at that time I did not

Ep #234: The Hidden Drawbacks of Drinking the “Good Stuff”

understand at all what he was talking about. But apparently, that is what he and his buddies said in college.

They said that an unfinished beer at a party was a wounded soldier, and you couldn't leave it behind. Except that he brought that exact same mentality, which he learned back in his - when he was a teenager and in his early 20s, when he was drinking 12 ounces of probably crappy PBR. He was bringing that exact same mentality to 22 ounces of a double IPA, which probably had a much higher alcohol content.

And so these ideas of how we have to treat what our brain deems to be the good stuff, they really do impact our drinking. I remember I was working with a client who was struggling with wasting wine. And it's such a funny thing, the idea like, can you actually even waste wine?

As if not drinking more wine, even though you've had enough is wasteful. But it really was. It was hard for her not to finish the glass. It was hard for her to dump out her wine even if she knew she actually really didn't want any more.

And she would practice saying to herself, she would say, “I'm going to waste it down the drain or I'm going to waste it on my brain,” which to her I thought was such a clever reminder that drinking past the point of enough, even if it meant that you were pouring out the fancy stuff or the good stuff or the expensive stuff, it wasn't going to serve her.

Not just because she didn't like the results that it gave her, but because she would get to a point where when she had had enough to drink, she couldn't even really taste it anymore. It was like her sense were dulled. Yet that story was so strong for her, and she recognized a lot that there were a lot of similarities in her kind of desire to finish all the food on her plate and also finish all the wine in her wine glass.

Ep #234: The Hidden Drawbacks of Drinking the “Good Stuff”

And so that really is one way that when you label something as good, the good stuff, that it will impact how much you drink. But it's not just about not wanting to waste it. I see this happen a lot, not just around things that are special or rare or expensive, but when I work with people who are used to purchasing or spending money on that alcohol that is organic or natural or biodynamic, I see this a lot in the wine space.

Now, I will tell you, for me, I was never into this. I don't think this part of the wine market was as big as it is today back when that was something where I was purchasing a lot of wine in my life. But I see how popular it's become, and I see how a lot of my clients will use telling themselves that they're drinking the good stuff, and by that they don't mean that it's special or rare or expensive. They mean that it's healthy.

And just as a side note, I see this happen with organic food all the time. People often inside of Take a Break, we're dealing with food issues as well because so often the desire to drink and the desire to food, even though they can look very different on the surface, they'll find that they actually mirror each other.

But people will end up drinking more or eating more because they have thoughts like, “Oh, well this is really good for me. It's wrong to waste the good stuff. Waste a Bud Lite, who cares, but I shouldn't waste this beautiful biodynamic organic Pinot Noir.”

I see this happen a lot, also sometimes just with the distinction between red wine and white wine. The idea that red wine is healthier, the French drink red wine and it's good for them, and if it's good for them it might as well be good for me too.

I will tell you, it sounds logical on the surface this idea of like, more care has gone into what I'm drinking. But what most people don't then follow out is what happens then with how much you're drinking when you have these

Ep #234: The Hidden Drawbacks of Drinking the “Good Stuff”

thoughts that either it's expensive or it's special or it's rare or it's healthier, most people don't consider, okay, so then what does that mean for how much I'm drinking and what does that mean for the desire that I have to drink it or to keep drinking it?

Why is it all so okay to waste one drink and not okay to waste another? Why is it okay to waste maybe White Claw but it's not okay to waste a 60-year-old scotch? I just want you to be curious about that.

Because if you are finding that you drink more than you want, you drink more than what feels good the next day, then you are wasting it. You're wasting it on you. Because you aren't getting better results the more you drink, you're not getting your money's worth if you don't like your relationship with alcohol, yet you are continuing to perpetuate it.

You can't appreciate the taste the more that you drink. In fact, your ability to really smell and taste, that all goes downhill the more that you drink. You can't savor something more the more you drink it. And you're not going to save money by finishing off that glass or polishing off the bottle because that money has already been spent.

In fact, you're probably likely going to spend more money in the long run because now you have to clean up from last night. So I just want you to consider that the good stuff, although we are so quick to label drinks as good stuff, or bad stuff, I want you to consider the good stuff, maybe it isn't actually good.

Now, just be really careful here. That doesn't mean it's bad. I'm not saying that we've all convinced ourselves that this special biodynamic wine is actually good for me. I'm not saying that the real truth is that it's bad for you. No, not at all.

Ep #234: The Hidden Drawbacks of Drinking the “Good Stuff”

I’m just saying the real truth is that it has no meaning until your brain decides to apply a label to it. And we are socialized to do this. We are taught to do this, to think oh, this is fancy, this is rare, this is special, this is healthier, this is better for me.

None of these things actually exist without the human mind. And many of these thoughts, once you start to understand how the think-feel-act cycle works, many of these thoughts will actually get in the way of you changing the habit.

Now, you don’t have to go to the extreme and you don’t have to start saying well, it’s all bad and it’s all poison. That’s not what I’m talking about. You can just go to the place of like, it just is. It’s just wine, it’s just beer, it’s just scotch, it’s just gin, whatever your drink is.

And just taking away all the kind of superlatives that we give to it that then lead to oftentimes more drinking. You get to decide what you want to believe and whether or not these thoughts are helping you. I will tell you this; advertisers spend billions of dollars, billions of dollars each year to convince you to buy the good stuff.

The alcohol industry is spending billions. And you’re getting these messages all the time. But just because you’re being inundated with these messages, just because for thousands of years we’ve had the idea that some drinks like beer, that’s for the masses, that’s unsophisticated, but wine, that’s for the elite, that’s high class, just because we’ve had these messages with humanity for a very long time doesn’t mean you have to continue believing them, especially one you see how they can actually impact your drinking and lead to drinking more and lead to you having more desire.

I just want you to imagine for a second what your drinking would be like, what your desire would be like if alcohol was all just the same. There was

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #234: The Hidden Drawbacks of Drinking the “Good Stuff”

no good stuff, it was just a fermented drink in front of you that people have conditioned you to think a set of thoughts about. If that’s all it was, then what would you decide to think and why?

Just be curious today. Be curious about what you label as the good stuff, whatever that means for you, be curious about how your drinking looks differently when you drink the good stuff, how it may be contributing to you drinking more and not wanting to waste it and having more desire, and then just be curious about the idea like, maybe it’s just a fermented drink. That’s it. And we don’t have to attach these labels, especially if you find that it’s not helping you.

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

Hey, if you're a woman who enjoys this podcast and wants to have me as your coach, you have to join the *Take A Break* program. It's a 30-day break from drinking that will teach you how to say no to your urges without deprivation, the secret to not needing a drink in any situation, including not needing a drink to take the edge off, and never again feeling like you can't trust yourself around alcohol. Join me over at RachelHart.com/join. Together, we're going to blow your mind.