

Ep #143: Health Shame



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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 143.

Whether you want to drink less or stop drinking, this podcast will help you change the habit from the inside out. We're challenging conventional wisdom about why people drink and why it can be hard to resist temptation. No labels, no judgment, just practical tools to take control of your desire and stop worrying about your drinking. Now, here's your host Rachel Hart.

Hey guys, welcome back. Look, we are going to be doing the final episode on health today. I've done a whole series this past couple weeks about optimal health and health avoidance and how to protect your most valuable asset, which is your brain.

But today I want to end on something that I know is coming up for a lot of you as you have been listening to this series, and it is shame that you feel about your health and shame that you feel about the choices that you have made with the things you have put in your body and either the actual health outcomes and ramifications that they've had, or what you fear might be the outcomes or ramifications.

This is so important. If you have been listening to this series on health and also kind of in the back of your mind like, beating yourself up over your drinking and thinking, god I'm so embarrassed, why was I so reckless? Why did I make such bad choices? Why was I so weak? If that has been going on, we have got to look at it. You have got to clean that up because those thoughts are going to create so much shame for you.

And I will promise you this; shame is not going to get you where you want to go in terms of your health and your wellbeing. The problem with shame is that it leads to one of two actions. A lot of people will flip-flop between these two.

Either you will go into hiding and denial and carry around this kind of sense of dread with you all the time, like oh god, I think this is really bad for me, this is really harming me, but you don't really want to look at it. So what do

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you do? It just leads to more numbing. It leads to more choices about trying to escape how you feel so it actually kicks a habit like drinking into overdrive for many people.

Now, sometimes it will result in going into this place of super restriction and super willpower, super discipline. And maybe so you do quit smoking or you do quit drinking, or you go onto a really restrictive diet. That is also a problem and I'm going to explain why.

Because I know some of you are listening and you're like, oh yeah, just tell me how to do option two. How do I get to the place where I'm super restrictive with myself? How much shame do I need to feel until I'm really, really disciplined? That's what I want.

It's not what you want, I promise. I know some of you out there. I've had clients say to me, I just hope weirdly that something bad enough will happen, something serious enough will happen with my health and then I'll finally change my drinking. It doesn't work like that.

I'm going to explain today why both of these actions, both the hiding and the denial, and more numbing, more beating yourself up is a problem and it works against you and it works against your health, but also why going super restrictive and super disciplined and all the willpower and even quitting drinking or quitting smoking or going on a super restrictive diet can also work against you.

Shaming yourself is never going to create the change that you want when it comes to your health. I know you guys are not quite with me, so come along. Have an open mind. Let's talk about it today. The first thing that you need to understand is why it is that as a society, we are so committed to this belief that shame works. Why are we so indoctrinated with this idea that if you feel badly enough about yourself, then you will work to be better?

I think that this comes in large part from religion and some of the ideas connected to some of our major religions. Now, that's not to say that religion is bad. A lot of religion is about teaching people to love and to

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accept one another and to bring more compassion and kindness into the world.

But sometimes religion is also used to shame people. To shame people who are perceived as wrong or immoral or wicked. To me, it actually makes a ton of sense why for thousands of years people have tried to use shame, often through religion, as a way to change people's behavior. This idea that we can just shame another person into being a better person.

It actually makes a lot of sense because we didn't understand why people did certain things. So why did a person steal or lie or cheat or murder or get addicted to a substance? We had no clue what was going on. And in the face of not knowing, came to the conclusion, oh, they must be bad. They must be bad and so the solution is to try to make them good.

And that solution came in the form of well, maybe I can scare them straight. Maybe if we tell you you'll no longer be part of the tribe, you're going to be cast out, maybe that will work. And maybe if you're not literally casting them out of the tribe in the here and now, maybe it's the threat of being cast out of the tribe in the afterlife.

Remember how strong the instinct to survive is. I've talked about this so many times before on the podcast. When you are part of a tribe, when humans were part of a tribe, it really increased your chances of survival. It was easier to find food and shelter and clean water, and that instinct to survive is so strong.

So the threat of being cast out was a really powerful threat. And here's the thing; for thousands of years, humans have tried to use shame as a way to make bad people become good people. And I think that we've been very committed to it because we could see that maybe kind of sometimes, it sort of worked a little bit.

Yeah, sometimes some people would just get worse and they would just go deeper into self-loathing and they would go deeper into the negative

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activity. But sometimes people would stop doing the thing because they were afraid of being cast out of the tribe.

And so I think kind of collectively, humanity said, okay well, we don't know what else to do so let's just keep working with shame. Let's just keep using that as a tool to try to improve people. We don't understand why it is people are doing the things that they're doing, we don't understand how the brain works, we don't understand the think-feel-act cycle, so let's just keep on doing it with shame.

But now here's the thing; now we have some information and now we know about the think-feel-act cycle. I really want you to consider that every so-called sin that I mentioned, lying, cheating, stealing, murder, addiction, they're all what? What are they? They're actions. They are actions in the think-feel-act cycle, which means that if someone is taking one of these actions, it is because of a thought and a feeling that they are having.

That's it. It's not about there being some sort of distinction between the bad people and the good people, the moral people and immoral people, the sinners and the saved. People are taking an action regardless of what that action is because they are thinking a thought. They just have a sentence running through their mind that they believed.

The person is not problematic or flawed or weak or immoral. And listen, this is the best news because it means you are not problematic, flawed, weak, or immoral because you took an action that you did not like the result of. If you were drinking more than you wanted to. or smoking, or overeating, or overspending, or lying, or having sex with someone, doesn't make you a bad person. It means that you took that action as a result of a thought and a feeling.

Now listen, if this sounds radical to you, it should because it is not what you have been conditioned to believe. It is not what I was conditioned to believe. I was conditioned to believe that there were good people and bad people, and you need to make sure that you're in the good camp.

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But here's the crazy thing that I have realized. It seems that no matter how much good you do, no matter how much you put other needs before your own, no matter how much you accomplish, no matter how much you achieve, no matter how much you love your kids or how kind and compassionate you are towards other people, it seems because I've heard this with myself and I hear this with my clients over and over and over again, that they still kind of feel like a bad person.

They still kind of feel like they're kind of terrible. That something is wrong with them. They're not good enough still. They're still not measuring up. And it's simply because what you do, your actions do not create how you feel about yourself. It is the other way around. It's the thoughts that you have about yourself and your actions that create how you feel. So you cannot act your way into believing you're a good person.

This is what people have been trying to do. Just make people good and then they'll be good people. I know a lot of you have tried that. I tried that. It is weird. Even when you're doing all the good things, you still are kind of believing that you're not good because simply your thoughts about yourself haven't changed.

This is the thing that you need to understand. If you are taking an action that you don't like, including drinking too much, it's just because of a sentence in your mind. It's not some sort of barometer about you as a person and how good or bad you are. It has nothing to do with that.

So let's talk about the two options that kind of result when you feel a lot of shame about your health. When you're telling yourself, ugh, this is my fault, I did this to myself, what was I thinking? Why was I so stupid? All of those thoughts that are creating a lot of shame about any kind of health either result that you're currently having or that you anticipate you could have.

So the first is you hide and you go into denial and you don't want to look. You don't want to make the doctor's appointment, but you're still carrying around this sense of dread. And eventually it leads to more numbing. It leads to maybe more drinking or more eating or more smoking, or more of

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the activity that you actually feel a lot of shame around because you're trying to get relief from how you feel.

There is this pervasive belief that if you just tell yourself that you're bad enough, that you'll magically want to start to take care of yourself. But no, it doesn't work that way. Those thoughts just breed contempt for yourself and that contempt just leads to you trying to escape how you feel through eating and drinking and spending and withdrawing and going into denial.

And guess what? All of those activities, all of those actions just create more evidence for that original thought that there was something wrong with you. That only someone who had something wrong with them would have done this to themselves, would have chosen to drink too much or eat too much or smoke too much.

It becomes this cycle that just perpetuates itself. So that's what happens for a lot of people. It's what happened to me for a very long time. I would really beat myself up about the choices that I made, the actions that I took. I couldn't believe how "irresponsible" I was with my health.

And then when you plug that into the think-feel-act cycle, you see immediately why it is. Well, I just kept doing more of it because now I had a lot of negative emotion, I didn't know how to cope with it, so I was looking for any relief I could find.

Now, there is also the option of you kind of shame yourself about your health and you go into super disciplined mode. And so maybe you quit smoking or you quit drinking or you get onto a super restrictive diet. And I will tell you that you will see a lot of times that there's a flip-flop between the two of being super, super restrictive, and then no holds bars.

But you will also know, you will encounter people like this in your life. People who aren't drinking anymore but they're kind of miserable. They don't seem very happy. Or people who are really thin but they also seem really obsessed with food, and you just want to say like, go eat something.

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You just want to say like, relax about the food. Or maybe someone who stopped smoking, but they're still a ball of anxiety. On the surface, they stopped this so-called bad activity so it seems like yeah, they're preserving their health, but then you see, yeah, they don't seem so happy. They don't seem like they're really enjoying life.

And in fact, what you will find with these people is that their self-worth is often hanging by a thread because they're constantly in this tension of like, oh god, if I have a drink or if I eat too much or if I light a cigarette, then it's all going to go down the tubes. Everything that I have tried to build up to prove that I'm a good person, it could just be taken away immediately.

Because they're trying to derive their self-worth through being someone who doesn't drink or doesn't smoke or isn't overweight. That's how they're trying to gain their self-worth and it's so fragile. It's always at risk of falling apart or slipping away at any second.

I used to be this way. I was so trying to piece my self-worth together by what I put in my body. And you know what happens? It never works. You will end up in this flip-flop. And even if you can hold out for a really long time, which some people are able to do, you're not going to be happy. You aren't going to feel like a good person.

You're going to say yes, I'm not doing the so-called bad thing anymore but I'm protecting my health, right? Well, I've got some bad news for you. You're not. You're not protecting your health when you are dripping in negative emotion because negative emotions aren't just these kinds of curious things to pay attention to if you want to understand how the think-feel-act cycle works.

They directly impact your health. There is a powerful, powerful link between your emotional outlook and your physical health. This is no secret. It has been proved by science. How you feel your emotional state can influence everything from your immunity, the rate at which you heal from injuries and illness.

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Because things like chronic stress, they upset your body's hormonal balance and they can impact hypertension, cardiovascular disease, digestive disorders, infection. How you feel can actually decrease your lifespan.

I want you to see this. I want you to understand the backward logic that you have about how it's useful to shame yourself about your health and to shame yourself about the choices you have made, about the things you have consumed or put in your body.

You are telling yourself, if I feel bad enough, I'm going to stop doing the thing and then I'll be healthier. But even if you do stop doing the thing, you're not ever spending any time changing your thoughts about yourself and whether or not you think you're a good person.

In fact, you are probably still just carrying around all this shame about your past and how you shouldn't have done those things and how it's going to come back to bite you. You're not changing your thoughts about the substance itself and your desire for it, so you're always feeling restricted or deprived or like you're missing out, or not having as much fun or enjoying life as other people.

And you're never changing your thoughts about hey, how am I going to cope with these emotions? Because you are a human. You're going to have the full spectrum of light and dark, good and bad. All you're doing is practicing the thought, just say no, just say no, just say no over and over again. But it's not actually making you more capable at handling your own emotional life.

So here's the thing; even if you do shame yourself into stopping, you're still stressed. You're still anxious. You still have this underlying feeling that you're not good enough, you're not measuring up. You still don't know how to cope with your negative emotions. But you're saying to yourself, well, at least I'm healthy.

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But you're not healthy because your negative emotions impact your physical health. Really, I want you to think about how backwards we all are with this. If you want to be healthy, why is that? So that you can live longer. And why do you want to live longer? So that you can feel good.

But guys, if you're stopping the activity and you're not enjoying life, you're not enjoying being alive, you don't know how to cope with negative emotions, you're still just going through the grind, you still have a lot of chronic stress or anxiety, you still have a lot of blame for yourself and blame for your past, and you still kind of feel like I'm not really measuring up, I still don't really feel good enough, you will not be healthy.

You cannot shame yourself into good health. You cannot shame yourself into happiness. Period. That is simply not how the think-feel-act cycle works. Shaming yourself will always make it worse for you. It does not motivate anything except self-loathing, self-destruction, more numbing, and simply beating yourself up.

Not feeling like a good person, even if you stop drinking, even if you stop overeating or stop smoking. Shame will never get you what you're actually after when you say that your health is a priority, which is a life that you can enjoy. Because having more life and not enjoying it is not the point.

And this is why this health component is so important. It's so crucial. And why I have devoted an entire bonus course in the Take A Break program on this very topic. Because health is something that so many of you have misunderstood what really creates it, how to preserve it, how to have more of it, and how to break out of this cycle of constantly beating yourself up over it and constantly beating yourself up over past choices that you have made about how you have consumed certain things and the things you have put in your body.

This really is the key. So if you have felt stuck around health, if you know that you have been using a drink as a way to cope with how you feel, cope with insomnia, chronic stress, old injuries, whatever it is, chronic pain, this

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bonus course is so important. But this is the thing that I really cannot stress enough.

Learning about all of this, everything that I have been teaching over the past couple weeks, do not use it as a way to beat yourself up. Do not just create more shame because that will not get you the outcome that you want. I promise. It will not work.

Even if you think, oh, well I can just discipline myself, I can just shame myself into being a more disciplined person, you're not going to get the result that you want. Period. If there's one thing that I could help you guys see, it's that shame never works. It is never truly the path to the life that you want.

So listen guys, if you want to go through this bonus course with me live this month in the Take A Break program, just make sure you go to rachelhart.com/join and sign up in October so that you don't miss any of it. Whenever you sign up, at any point in October, you will have access to the entire bonus course on how to create optimal health.

Alright, I can't wait to see you guys inside. See you next week.

Okay, listen up, changing your drinking is so much easier than you think. Whether you want to drink less or not at all, you don't need more rules or willpower. You need a logical framework that helps you understand and, more importantly, change the habit from the inside out. It starts with my 30-day challenge. Besides the obvious health benefits, taking a break from drinking is the fastest way to figure out what's really behind your desire. This radically different approach helps you succeed by dropping the perfectionism and judgment that blocks change. Decide what works best for you when it comes to drinking. Discover how to trust yourself and feel truly powered to take it or leave it. Head on over to RachelHart.com/join and start your transformation today.