

Ep #146: Alcohol & Emotions



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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

Ep #146: Alcohol & Emotions

You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 146.

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.

Well hello everybody. Today, I'm going to talk to you about the connection between the habit of drinking and your emotions. And I want to focus on this today because I will tell you, this is the area where I get the most pushback from people.

So I'll hear you guys say, "Everything that you teach us makes a lot of sense, but this piece about drinking to change your emotions or change how you feel, I just can't connect with that. That's just not my situation." And I really want to help you understand this connection because if you don't understand this piece, you cannot successfully change the habit. It really is everything.

Because the reason that you pick up a glass and drink is because you're trying to solve how you feel. This is always the case. It's not sometimes the case. It's always the case. If you are doubting me right now, if you are listening and shaking your head, I want you to just stay on, hang with me, and open your mind to what I'm going to share because I know a lot of you struggle with this piece of what I teach.

I think that people get confused because when you hear me say that, when you hear me say picking up a glass is about trying to solve how you feel, you immediately kind of conjure up this picture of someone who is super depressed and all alone and drinking by themselves in a darkened room and self-medicating.

And you're like, I don't want to be that person. That's not who I am. That doesn't look like what I'm doing. And so you immediately reject it. Now, that's one part of what I'm talking about. Sure, you could be feeling

Ep #146: Alcohol & Emotions

depressed and you could be alone and drinking by yourself in a darkened room, and you could be using alcohol to self-medicate.

But that's not the entire picture of what I'm talking about, especially when I'm talking about how habits work. So there are a couple scenarios that I hear from people over and over again when they come to me and say, listen, this piece of what you teach really doesn't make sense with what I experience.

The first scenario is I'm not bored, I'm not lonely, I'm not anxious. Drinking truly is just a habit and I have the urge to drink but that urge isn't connected to how I feel. It's not connected to my emotional state. That's scenario number one.

Scenario number two is okay, but what about when I just want to have fun or I want to celebrate or enjoy a bottle of wine on date night? I'm not drinking because I'm trying to solve a negative emotion. So I think this is where a lot of you guys get confused over these two scenarios and I want to really walk you through them.

Because in both of these cases, you are most definitely drinking to solve how you feel. That is how the habit is unfolding in the moment. It is always 100% the case of what is actually happening. We only ever take action in life because of how we hope we will feel as a result of that action.

So if you take it out of the realm of drinking, you might think, oh, I'm going to get my hair cut because I hope then I will feel better about how I look. Or I'm going to apply for this job because I hope I'll be happier in a different work environment. I'm going to buy this house because I hope that I'll feel less stressed if we have more room.

And of course, I'm going to pick up this glass and drink because I'll hope I'll feel differently than I feel in this current moment once I start drinking. Now, once you learn about the think-feel-act cycle, you know that doing these things, it doesn't matter if it's a haircut or a new job or a new house, or even a drink. None of these things actually changes how you feel in the long run. That's not how the think-feel-act cycle works.

Ep #146: Alcohol & Emotions

You still have the same thoughts running through your mind. So if you think every time you look in the mirror, “Ugh, god, I look like a mess,” you can go get your hair cut, but I guarantee that your brain is going to find some other part of you to tell you you look like a mess. If you think, “Work is making me miserable,” you can certainly go get a new job, but I guarantee your brain will just keep hunting for all the ways that your job is stressing you out.

If you tell yourself, “We really need more space at home so that we can be happy,” you can buy a new home but you’re going to fill up that space with stuff and you’re going to look around and you’re going to tell yourself that you need some place that is different or bigger or somehow that will solve the problem.

This is what happens when you don’t know how to use the think-feel-act cycle, or don’t even know that it exists. You keep looking to external fixes in your environment for internal problems, and the problem of course are your thoughts. What you are thinking. You can change your external circumstances as much as you want to, but it’s not going to change the thoughts that are running through your mind.

Especially not the thoughts that your brain has practiced over and over and over again. Your brain’s going to keep hanging onto these same thoughts because it’s so good at thinking them and it likes doing things that are efficient. And listen, the same is true of drinking.

I know some of you hear me say this, that your external circumstances can’t change how you feel and you think yeah, but when I drink and then I get the buzz or I’m intoxicated, then I feel differently. But here’s the thing; do you? Do you actually change how you feel in the long run?

Sure, you might momentarily convince your brain that you are relaxed or light-hearted or spontaneous, fun-loving person. But if you still have all your stressed-out thoughts and your overly serious thoughts and your rigid thinking, they’re not going to go anywhere. Once the intoxication or the buzz wears off, they’re still there. They were just temporarily quieted by intoxicating yourself.

Ep #146: Alcohol & Emotions

Now, saying yes to a drink so that you can feel differently doesn't mean that you're depressed or bored or anxious. It just means that you're currently experiencing one feeling state, and you hope that by drinking, you will be able to shift into a new, better feeling state.

Now, the problem is if you're always using this route as a way to get into a new, better feeling state, you're not actually doing anything to change your underlying thoughts, which are why you want to be in a new feeling state in the first place. So let me explain how this works with the two examples that I gave you.

The first reason that people give me a lot, I'm just drinking out of habit, it has nothing to do with my emotions. So that's fine, but how do you feel when you say no to the habit? How do you feel when you say no to the urge to drink?

You really have to think about the answer to that question because if you felt peaceful and at ease when you said no to the habit or no to the urge, then saying no wouldn't be a problem. It would be easy. But it doesn't feel that way, does it? It is a little bit of a problem. You feel a little restless, a little agitated, a little distracted, a little on edge, a little antsy.

Your mind and your body are having a hard time being at rest when you say no to the urge, which makes perfect sense because urges are the emotion driving you to take action. When you say no to the urge to drink, you are using the free will that all of us has to say no to the brain's autopilot. So of course, you feel a little restless.

Autopilot is your lower brain saying go, do this, it will feel good, we like feeling good, we like things that are easy. Drinking is easy. Now, that part of you that can say no, your free will, that part of you is making a decision about what you want in the future. It's making a decision about maybe I want a life that isn't just about immediate gratification because I don't like the results that I'm getting from this habit.

So in that moment, you're going to feel a little restless when you say no to the autopilot, when you say no to the part of your brain that's like, hey, this

Ep #146: Alcohol & Emotions

is what we do. We want a reward and then we go get the reward. And so every time you drink to solve the restlessness that comes from saying no to an urge, you are drinking to solve how you feel. That feeling that you're solving is simply the restlessness that is created by saying no.

Now, the more that you start to shift your relationship with restlessness, the more that you start to actually change the habit. But you can't do that if you say, "No, I'm not drinking to solve how I feel. It's just a habit. There's no emotion here."

When you tell yourself, "I'm just drinking out of habit, it has nothing to do with my emotions," not only are you ignoring how habits work, but you're just telling yourself a lie. And as long as you hang onto this belief, you will prevent yourself from changing the habit in a meaningful, sustained way.

Because if you don't acknowledge the restlessness you feel when you say no, you can't ever learn how to have a different relationship with it. That really is everything. Developing a different relationship with that sense of feeling a little agitated, a little distracted, a little antsy. That's what I had to learn. Not just for changing my habit of drinking but changing all of the habits that weren't serving me.

That's why learning the skill of how to apply the think-feel-act cycle in the realm of changing your drinking is so powerful because you're learning a meta-skill that you can apply to anything and everything you want to change in your life. And that's what I teach the people who work with me.

Now, the second reason that people give me is, "Well Rachel, what about when I just want to have fun or I want to celebrate, or I just want to enjoy a bottle of wine on date night? I'm not drinking because there's something wrong or I feel bad." When people tell me this, I always ask them the same question.

Okay, so how would you feel in the moment if everyone else was celebrating or it was date night and your partner was having the bottle of wine and you weren't drinking, or you were at a party and everyone was drinking but you? Or even if you were by yourself and it was just Friday and

Ep #146: Alcohol & Emotions

you just want to celebrate that the week is over? How would you feel in the moment if you weren't drinking?

And the answer that I always get from people is the same. "Oh, it would be fine. It would be fine." And so I ask them, would you have fun? And they tell me, "Yeah, sure, I would. I don't have to drink in these situations." Then I say, would you have as much fun? And that's where they pause and they say, "Well, maybe not as much fun."

Okay then, so then that's what we need to pay attention to. Even if you're saying it just wouldn't be as much fun, even if it's just a little bit of feeling like you're missing out or a little restricted, or a little bit like I could be having a better time, that's what you need to pay attention to. If that is the case, if you could not drink and you could tell yourself, yeah, I'd have an okay time, or I'd have fun but not as much fun, then what is happening is you are drinking to solve how you feel.

And that feeling is simply that little feeling like you're missing out or that little bit of restriction, or just not fully being able to truly enjoy yourself. I'm just drinking to have fun and enjoy myself, that belief is there precisely because there is a part of you that isn't fully enjoying yourself.

Now, I think that hearing this freaks some of you out. When you hear me say this, it's like, oh god, what does that mean? If I can't fully enjoy myself without a drink then do I have a problem? Is there something really wrong with me? And I think that's why so many of you pushback with me here.

But I want you to know that nothing is wrong with you. You're simply a human being. It's just that none of us are ever taught how to manage our minds, much less how to manage your emotions yourself. And then we live in this environment where we're surrounded by really concentrated easy rewards that help us distract from how we feel.

This is not just alcohol. We're surrounded by highly processed sugary food that's very abundant. We have limitless entertainment. We have one-click shopping, and we have the abundance of alcohol. We also learn these

Ep #146: Alcohol & Emotions

lessons at a really young age. We learn the lesson of oh, just find something in your environment to feel better.

From a really young age, we're given concentrated rewards to feel better and we're given concentrated rewards in order to celebrate. I just think about this in my own life. Oh, you're feeling down? Here's some comfort food. Oh, you got an A on your paper? Let's go out and celebrate with pizza and ice cream.

Now listen, these aren't bad things. This isn't to demonize humans using things in their external environment for comfort or to change how they feel or to augment a positive emotion. None of these things are bad or wrong or sinful. But you must understand that that is what is going on if you want to change the habit. You have to acknowledge the subtle ways that you have learned unconsciously and consciously to try to mitigate how you feel with an external substance.

And that can be drinking, it can be eating, it can be shopping, it can be watching, it can be a whole host of things. That feeling might be a tiny bit of restlessness. It might be a slight sense of missing out that you're trying to deal with. But there is still a feeling there that you're still trying to solve by picking up a drink.

And the bigger question that you really need to pay attention to is why don't you want to acknowledge this? Why is there all the pushback? What do you believe it would mean about you if you were to acknowledge that the habit of drinking is all about trying to solve how you feel?

I really do think this is where we get so hung up in the stereotypes that we have culturally about what it means to be someone who drinks too much or who doesn't like their drinking. There's so many stereotypes about how okay, it's like the sad drunk or the angry drunk, and believing that oh, then that's a sign that you really have a problem, that something is wrong with you if you need to drink because you're upset or depressed or angry.

And I just want you to know, that's not right. It's just a sign that you're human. Because all humans are constantly looking to solve how they feel

Ep #146: Alcohol & Emotions

using external things, which guess what, is never very successful. Until they learn about the think-feel-act cycle. Until they learn that how they feel is not something they can ever solve what's happening around you.

You have to solve it with your mind. You have to solve it with your thoughts. That is the only way. And that's why all your attempts up until this point haven't been successful.

So I know a lot of you out there might be thinking when you hear me talking about how the habit is always about trying to change and solve how you feel, you might be thinking, "Okay well then if that's the case, is there ever a good reason to drink?" And I really believe that there of course can be. It's always up to the individual. It's always up to you to decide.

But here's the thing; you have to know your reason, which means you have to really know the reason and not just what you've been telling yourself or what you tell me. Oh, it's just a habit, oh, I just want to have a good time. You have to like your real reason.

And you have to like the results that you're getting from drinking, and I don't just mean the results in the moment. I don't just mean the results when you're feeling the buzz. You have to like all of the results that you're getting. So that means how you feel maybe a couple hours later, maybe the next morning, maybe overall. You have to like all of those results.

And this can only happen through conscious awareness and thought. I will tell you this. I quit drinking so many times. So many times and it never ever worked. The only thing that ever worked for me, the only thing that ever helped me change the habit was when I decided that I wasn't going to quit drinking, I wasn't going to swear it off forever. I decided that I was going to take a break so that I could learn how to solve how I was feeling on my own.

Because I had outsourced that or I had attempted to outsource it to a drink. And I told myself, listen, you're just going to take a break until you have figured that out. And so I focused on how I was feeling. I focused on how

Ep #146: Alcohol & Emotions

drinking was solving a problem for me and that problem was my emotional state. I focused on that rather than just saying no.

That's what I was doing every time when I was just quitting. I was just saying no and gritting my teeth and crossing days off a calendar and it was never working. Focusing on how I felt, the problem that drinking was solving for me, even if it was just the problem of a little bit of restlessness, that was everything. That was the key.

Because here's the thing; when you can solve how you feel on your own, which PS, all of you have the ability to do because of the think-feel-act cycle, that is what finally will help you diminish your desire to drink.

Because what happens is you come to see that the very thing you thought you needed, pouring the drink, eating the food, buying the thing, getting the new job, getting the partner, changing how much you weigh, whatever it is, you come to see that the very thing that you thought that you needed to feel better, you were totally mistaken. It was an illusion. You didn't need it at all. You just thought that you did. That is why this work is so powerful.

So open yourself up to this. If you have been telling yourself, "Oh, it's just a habit, it doesn't have anything to do with my emotions," or if you have been telling yourself, "Yeah, I'm just drinking to celebrate or to have a good time," open yourself up to what is really going on. That's going to change it for you. Alright, that's it for today guys. I will 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.

[Take a Break From Drinking](https://RachelHart.com/join) with Rachel Hart