

## Ep #149: The Binge & Restrict Cycle



### 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 149.

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.

Hello friends. We are going to talk about something I call the binge and restrict cycle today, and I think it's kind of fitting to be talking about it now because if you are listening live, it is almost Thanksgiving here in the United States.

And at least for me, growing up, Thanksgiving meant that I was going to eat a lot. I was going to eat a lot of food. A lot of turkey, a lot of stuffing, a lot of mash potatoes, and most importantly, I was going to eat a lot of pie. My mom used to make a lot of them and I would have a slice of each.

I will tell you that Thanksgiving is in many ways for a lot of people, the start of a season of indulgence and that runs through December, right until the new year. And that season of indulgence is a time when we're always saying, "Come on, it's not a big deal, it's the holidays. Who cares? I'm going to rein myself in once the new year is here."

I want you to think about how many times during this period, maybe it's not Thanksgiving, maybe it's another holiday for you, but how many times during this kind of season of indulgence, you have finished a meal in a food coma. I did this all the time. Feeling like I could barely get up from the couch, except to eat more leftovers.

And I will tell you, I honestly did not think that it was possible to go through Thanksgiving, to have a Thanksgiving meal where I didn't end it feeling

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uncomfortably full. And I remember the first time that I did that and it really truly kind of blew my mind.

Because for so long, I believed that overeating and Thanksgiving, and overeating and frankly, this entire holiday season went hand in hand. I truly thought it was impossible until I did it. And I was like, wow, maybe I was wrong this entire time.

I mean, I also had this thought around alcohol as well. I remember once I started drinking and it started being acceptable for me to drink around my family, I remember sometimes thinking like, “Oh god, I mean, I definitely am going to need a drink to make it through the holidays. I’m going to be around my family, we’re going to have the same old family arguments, and let me tell you, if I can just open up that bottle of wine, that’s going to be what helps make me through this period.”

And I know a lot of you are in that same boat. You have these kind of twin indulgences of food and alcohol and they really rear their head together, especially in the holiday season. Now of course, shopping is not far behind. Because as soon as Thanksgiving is over here in the US, well, the Black Friday sales start.

This is the season, the holiday season is when the reward center of your brain can be in overdrive if you are saying yes to everything. That’s what I did for so long. Just saying yes and yes and more and more, and this period just always felt like a lost cause for me.

Like, well, the holidays are here so what are we going to do? Because you just have to overeat and you have to overdrink and you’re just going to spend a lot of money. That’s the way it goes. And I was able to give myself permission to do that over and over again because I was always telling myself, “Well, I’ll be better next year. New Years is right around the corner, I’ll be better then.”

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But at some point, I really had to stop and look and examine, you know Rachel, you've been telling yourself that you were going to be better next year for a lot of years. How many times have you repeated this pattern? How many seasons of over-indulgence are you going to go through, only to repeat it again the very next holiday season? How many times are you going to do this before you start to understand, hey, you know what, I don't think this is working?

And if it's not working, maybe there's something that I'm missing here. Maybe there is something that I need to understand or perceive in a different way. That's the point that I finally got to with myself. And that's what I want to help you understand on today's podcast, really understanding this cycle of bingeing and restriction and why it happens.

Because it doesn't just happen over the holidays, but I do think that this is a pretty useful time to take a close look at it. I'll tell you that right now, you have a fundamental misunderstanding of what's happening and why you keep swinging back and forth between bingeing and restricting, and indulgence and deprivation.

And the fundamental misunderstanding is that this cycle is all about what you are consuming. It is all about food or it is all about alcohol. So what we tell ourselves, what we believe is that the indulgence and the bingeing is created by the active eating and drinking, and then the deprivation and the restriction is caused by the act of not eating and not drinking.

That is what I believed for the longest time, and I have to tell you, it could not be further from the truth of what is actually happening. The cycle of indulgence and deprivation, and bingeing and restriction isn't created by what you do or don't put into your body. It's created by what you do or don't think in your mind.

That is the difference. You have to really shift your focus from the object of your desire to what is actually creating your desire, creating the deprivation.

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And that's always the same thing. It's always the thoughts that are running through your mind. This is where you have so much power to change the habit.

I'll tell you that I see this a lot with my clients, especially when people decide that they're going to take a break from drinking, maybe they sign up for my 30-day program, or they decide to take a break from sugar and flour, whatever it is, and they've never learned to do it in a different way.

And sometimes I will hear from brand new people, they will say to me, "I signed up and it was a little bit like I just found myself having a binge because I knew that the program was about to start. I knew that the break period was about to start." And they're often really confused by this but they also recognize that they're repeated this pattern in their life before.

And the reason why it happens is simple to understand because what happens is that simply imagining not being able to eat your favorite food or have your favorite drink kind of sends you into a frenzy. Because your thought is, "Oh my god, I got to get it while I can."

And so taking a break from something, if it's done incorrectly can become your reason for kind of last supper. Your excuse to go out with a bang because you're telling yourself, "Well I mean, I'm not going to have this thing in the future that I really want, so I might as well get it now."

And I want you to think about how many times you've done this. Maybe it's not first you indulge before restriction. Maybe it's the other way around. Maybe you find yourself restricting and then you follow it up with indulging. It doesn't matter the order that it happens in. It just matters for you to pay attention; how many times have you repeated this pattern over and over?

And maybe it doesn't happen with just food and alcohol in your life. It certainly for me happened with many other things. Maybe there's some other area or part of your life where you feel like you just right now overdo it

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and you don't know why, and you notice that kind of cycle of indulgence and then restriction.

How many times have you watched this pattern repeat itself? Five times? 10 times? 15? 20? 100? I will tell you that in my life, I can't even count, but it was many hundreds of times that I was stuck in indulging and restricting, and then restricting and indulging. And on this kind of see-saw between binging and my desire and deprivation and restriction, and it was kind of like how I lived my life.

And at some point, I just had to look up and look at what I was doing over and over again and just say, hey, this isn't working. Now, for a long time I realized it wasn't working but I would try to double down on being a better person. I would try to double down on being more disciplined and more determined and having more willpower.

And what I was really doing was just trying to become a perfect version of myself. That's what I thought the solution was. Of course, there is no perfect version of me, there's no perfect version of you. It doesn't exist. And so using that, trying to head down that path is never going to work for you.

But I did finally come to the conclusion that there was something that I needed to change, but the thing that I needed to change wasn't me. I didn't have to become a better person in order to get out of this cycle. I had to change my understanding of desire and what created desire. And especially, I had to change my understanding of desire being this thing that was outside of me and completely outside of my control.

Because as long as I held tightly to this belief that what I was eating and drinking was what was creating my happiness and what I wasn't eating and wasn't drinking was creating my unhappiness, then I was really in a position where I was kind of screwed because I was always at the mercy of the food. I was always at the mercy of the alcohol.

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And this is what I'm trying to teach you guys when I explain the think-feel-act cycle, that your thoughts create how you feel. And how you feel is what determines whether or not you say yes or no. Your action. Now, this includes the feeling of desire and the feeling of deprivation. It is not created by what you are currently putting in your body or not putting in your body. It's created by what you are thinking.

And I know some of you right now hear me say that and there's a part of you that's like, "How can that be, Rachel? Because you also tell us all about the brain and its reward system and dopamine." And so you hear me talk a lot about how alcohol, and especially certain kinds of food, processed food, foods that are high in added sugar, they create a large dopamine response in the brain.

Alcohol and certain kinds of food create a concentrated reward. And of course, dopamine is that chemical in the brain, it's the neurotransmitter that's responsible for pleasure. So if alcohol and food create the feeling of pleasure, that reward when we consume it, then how can you possibly say that desire and deprivation is created by your mind? It doesn't make any sense.

This is what I believed for a really long time, that it was alcohol and food creating pleasure, therefore, if I wasn't consuming it, then obviously that's why I was feeling deprived. This truly is the wrong way to understand what's happening.

Yes, there is a reward response taking place in your brain. And yes, that reward response is connected to dopamine. But is that reward response creating your anticipation of the reward or creating the deprivation when you don't go out and give yourself the reward? No, it is not.

And I want to explain to you how this happens. Think about an urge. Maybe it is an urge that you notice at 4pm, when you notice yourself thinking, "I can't wait to get home and have a glass of wine." Maybe it's an urge that

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you feel when you're headed to the movies and you are planning on eating Junior Mints during the film.

I've talked about this on the podcast before, that that for a very long time was my candy of choice when I went to the movies. So whatever the urge is, it doesn't really matter. But when the urge itself appears, it doesn't feel negative. In fact, you guys are probably experiencing it at least initially in a very positive way.

Because you are starting to anticipate getting the reward. You're starting to anticipate having the drink when you get home or having the Junior Mints at the movie. So you're starting to have a little bit of excitement. A little bit of that feeling of looking forward to your reward, looking forward to the drink or looking forward to the candy.

So that happens, but what if you don't answer that urge? What if you remember, oh god, I just signed up for this 30-day Take A Break program with Rachel, I'm not supposed to be drinking tonight. Or maybe you go to the movie theatre and they're all sold out of Junior Mints. What happens then?

Most of you are going to say, "Well, I start feeling deprived because the urge appeared and I felt all excited and I had this anticipation and now I'm not going to get it. So I feel all this deprivation." But that deprivation isn't the result of the urge and it's not the result of saying no to the urge. It's the result of your thinking about the fact that you're going to say no.

Thinking a thought like, "Ugh, I hate that I can't drink. Why did I sign up for this? What was I thinking?" Or a thought like, "I was really looking forward to the Junior Mints. This is so unfair. I hate this. So stupid. Who doesn't carry candy at a movie theatre?"

Your desire doesn't feel good, it doesn't feel exciting, it doesn't have anticipation connected to it, and it doesn't feel bad until you start thinking



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thoughts about the desire, thoughts about the urges. Because let's be really honest here. You have free will.

You can always decide to drink tonight if you want to. You can always decide to go run to the convenience store and buy Junior Mints and then bring them back into the theatre if you want to. You can make any decision that you want to when it comes to the urge. No one can stop you.

But here's the thing; you have to stop believing that the urge itself and that consuming something or not consuming something is what's causing you to feel a certain way. The urge doesn't feel exciting or depriving until you start thinking about it and thinking about what you're going to do with the urge.

And this distinction really is the key. It may sound so subtle, that is that really going to make a difference? But I promise, it's everything because once you start to understand this, you see that it's not the urge that is the problem. The problem is what you are thinking in the moment about the decision you are going to make about the fact that you are having an urge.

Whether or not you're going to say yes, or whether or not you're going to say no, and the thoughts connected to the decision to say yes or no. Now, most of us don't even know that there's a decision to be made about how we could think about the urge because we just let the brain go on autopilot. That's what I did for a long portion of my life.

Instead of telling yourself, "I can't drink tonight," you could choose to think something different. You could choose to think, "I'm choosing not to. I'm making the decision not to drink tonight." Instead of thinking to yourself, "I hate that they don't have the Junior Mints, I'm not going to be able to enjoy the movie," you could instead be thinking, "This really isn't a big deal."

Instead of freaking out about the presence of an urge, you could be thinking, "You know what, I can handle this. My urge is not an emergency."

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It's just a little bit of restlessness that I can feel. It's not a big deal. It will go away on its own." Because really, that is what happens.

When your brain expects a reward at a certain time, a certain place, around certain people, when you're doing certain activities, it's because you have trained your brain to expect the reward. You didn't know you were doing it, but you did.

So when the urge appears, that is just your brain's way of saying like, hey, we're going to do what we always do, right? I'm going to get my reward, right? You're going to open up the bottle of wine when we get home, we're going to get the Junior Mints at the movies, right? That's what the brain is expecting because that's what you've always taught it.

Now, as soon you start thinking thoughts anticipating how that's going to be so good, you're going to create a little excitement for yourself. You're going to feel excited and looking forward to fulfilling your desire. But as soon as you try to tell the brain no, and you start thinking thoughts like, "I can't. I need this. This is so unfair. I hate saying no," you're going to create deprivation.

But whether or not you create the excitement or the deprivation is still up to you. You don't have to just go on autopilot with your thinking. You have the opportunity in fact, to create curiosity in this moment. You have the opportunity to watch your brain and watch those automatic thoughts appear and watch how you feel and start to learn in a deeper way how the think-feel-act cycle is unfolding.

And yes, you will probably feel a little restless as you practice not obeying the urge, you practice not being on autopilot, but that feeling, that restlessness will go away on its own. It does not have to be wrapped in deprivation and wrapped in disappointment, and wrapped in feeling sorry for yourself or being angry at the world.

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Because all that you are feeling connected to the urge, whether it's anticipation or deprivation, it's created by your mind. Not by the object of your desire. This truly is key. This will start to shift everything for you because then you start to understand the cycle of bingeing and restricting in a totally different light.

Now, I know that some of you are probably thinking, "Okay, that makes sense Rachel, before you start consuming, but once I start eating, once I start drinking, then all bets are off. Then I really cannot control myself. I just have to have more and I always overdo it. I'm just that kind of person. I just have an addictive personality or I'm a compulsive person."

This is what I believed about myself for a very long time. And I will tell you that just like the other situation, there is really a fundamental misunderstanding of what's happening in those moments. And the way that I really start to understand this for myself is really understanding why it was that my drinking didn't always look the same.

Now, you may want to say, "Well, okay fine, not always the same, but a lot or most of the time I'm drinking too much." But I really do want you to push yourself with this. Why isn't your eating or your drinking always looking 100% the same?

If food and alcohol are truly running the show, if they are truly in charge of the fact that you can't control yourself and that you have to have more, then why aren't you always eating and drinking the same amount? How could it be that you could ever decide to eat or drink less? Because if food and alcohol are in charge of how much you consume, then you should be consuming the exact same amount every time.

So the way that I really started thinking about this, because I really wrestled with this for a long time, in large part because I was saying, "Yeah, but especially with alcohol, once you start drinking it, you feel intoxicated.

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You're intoxicated, you don't have full capacity over your brain," and it's true.

You can certainly drink enough to get to the point of being unconscious. You can certainly drink enough so that your decision making is not maybe the decisions you would be making when you're sober. But I started to understand how much I was underestimating how much there was still choice and free will, even when I was in the process of consuming.

And so I really honed in on one particular example, and it was going out to dinner with people. And I would think about all the times where I really wanted a dessert or I really wanted another round, I really wanted the table to get another bottle of wine, and you know what happens. You kind of poll the people at the table to see, hey, who wants dessert tonight, or who wants to get another bottle?

And sometimes, shockingly, people would say no. I was always confused by this. Because for a long time, I had this belief that more is better. And I was pretty good, probably also kind of annoying for the people that went out to dinner with me, but I was often pretty good at trying to talk people into it. Like, "Oh come on, just have another, it'll be fun. It's the holidays." Whatever I was saying to try to convince people.

And sometimes it would work, but you know what, sometimes it wouldn't. And often, even though I really wanted the dessert or really wanted the table to get another bottle of wine because I really wanted another drink myself, I also had this competing thought, "I don't want to be the only one," and so I would say no.

Now, I would not do this 100% of the time, but I would notice that there were times when even though I had all this desire for more, maybe more food or maybe more alcohol, that I would sometimes say no. Even though I was already in the process of consuming and that desire was definitely

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there, but I had this other competing thought. I don't want to be the only one.

And that alone would be enough for me to say no, which is why my drinking and my consumption of food didn't always look the same. Because if desire for food and desire for alcohol was purely running the show, then I would always say yes to it. But that's not what's purely running the show. Yes, you can have that desire there, but you also have what's happening in your mind. You also have your thoughts. You also have that think-feel-act cycle that still keeps running in the background, even once you start consuming.

Saying yes or no to a drink or saying yes or no to food was the domain of my mind. Not the domain of the urge or the desire. It depended on what I was thinking, and that distinction is everything. When you think it's the domain of your desire, well, you feel desire so what can you do? You can't help but say yes. You will always be in a place of feeling pretty disempowered.

But when you start to understand how your mind, your thoughts, the think-feel-act cycle is creating anticipation or deprivation, or leading to thoughts that have you saying yes or thoughts that have you saying no, that's how all of a sudden, you can get out of this cycle of indulgence and restriction.

Because this really is the fundamental misunderstanding of what is happening. When you're in that cycle of indulging and then depriving yourself, or binging and then restricting or whatever way that it works for you, you are believing that the cycle is fueled by food and is fueled by alcohol.

But the cycle has nothing to do with food and alcohol. It isn't created by what you're putting in your body or not putting in your body. It's created by what you're thinking about in your mind, which means that you have so much power to change it. That truly is the amazing ability of the think-feel-act cycle to help us change, that you start to see where your power truly is.

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You will stay in this never-ending binge and restrict cycle if you don't start to shift your mindset about what's creating your desire, what's creating your deprivation, what's creating your anticipation, and notice that it's not the food, it's not the alcohol. It's what you're thinking about it.

As long as you believe that eating or not eating or drinking or not drinking is what makes you happy or unhappy, deprived or restricted, then you will always be trying to binge before you go into a period where you're not consuming. Because you'll be thinking like, "I got to get it while it lasts. I got to get it while it's here."

But once you understand the central role of your mind, then you don't have to go into a frenzy. You don't have to be afraid of what taking a break means because you can see that you can use that period to understand your mind better.

You also don't have to say, "Oh god, well I blew it." How many times have you done that after a period of restriction? I blew it, and then you give yourself permission to just eat and drink whatever you want. The missing piece of the puzzle really is you and your thoughts and your ability to notice and question and change them.

Your ability to change your habits is because you are a human being with a human mind. You have free will. Yes, your brain will go on autopilot. It will make habits. It will do that naturally. But unlike animals, you have the ability to direct it to do otherwise. You have the ability to intervene with your habits and press pause on autopilot. That is the amazing skill that each and every one of you has.

You don't need to be in this kind of constant feast or famine mentality. I will tell you, that mentality of feast or famine, it really served our ancestors when they were nomadic and they had no idea when their next meal was coming from and they were living in a world with a lot of food insecurity.

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So of course, if that's the case, you want to consume as much as you can when you come across food because you don't know when the next opportunity is coming. But now that kind of feast and famine mentality is just keeping us all stuck in the cycle of bingeing and restricting.

And I want you to think about this as you head into Thanksgiving. And listen, even if you don't celebrate Thanksgiving, think about it when you head into your next meal where you would typically indulge. Are you making decisions on what you decide to consume and what you are putting into your body or not putting into your body because you're telling yourself that certain things are too tempting? Or that you can't resist them? You can't say no?

Think about it as you're heading into your next celebration where you know that alcohol usually plays a front and center role. Are you feeling deprived because you're not drinking? Are you consuming more than you want because you're telling yourself, well, I just can't control it?

This difference is everything. Truly, the work that you will do in the last part of the year during this holiday season is the most powerful. I talked about it in the last episode, 148, about how these really are the 30 most powerful days of the year. The last 30 days of the year, they can change everything because that is the time when your brain wants you to believe, you can't change. You can't take a break. You can't say no now.

Because we're so conditioned to believe that deprivation and bingeing is all created by the object of our desire. By the chocolate cake, or by the glass of wine, rather than what's happening in your mind. So if you have a period of the year where you're surrounded by a lot of chocolate cake and surrounded by a lot of wine, then you're just kind of screwed.

But that of course is never the case. You can harness these 30 most powerful days of the year and really understand the habit on such a deeper

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level because, precisely because your brain is trying to get you to believe that it's impossible.

So here's the thing; if you want to work with me during the last month of this year, those 30 most powerful days, then you have a chance to sign up for the Take A Break program of a start date of Monday, December 2nd. So when you go to [rachelhart.com/december](http://rachelhart.com/december), that's how you can sign up.

But either way, I really do want you to use this holiday period to your advantage. Don't tell yourself that it's too late and you'll start next year. Use this time to really examine how your thoughts are responsible for how you feel when the urge appears, how you respond to that urge, whether or not you're feeling anticipation or deprivation, whether or not you're believing that you're just compulsive and it's too tempting, pay attention to what's happening in your mind.

That is what will help you get out of this cycle. That is what will help you learn how to change your desire, and that is how you can actually use a period like this, the holiday season, to actually create and supercharge your results, instead of just believing, "I'll just wait until next year. I'll be better after the holidays."

I was just repeating this over and over and over again and it really took for me to understand I had to start thinking about this in a new way. I had to start seeing that it wasn't me who needed to change. I didn't have to become more disciplined or determined, or have more willpower or double down on being perfect. I had to change my understanding of desire and what desire is and what creates it, what creates restriction.

And that, once I did that, everything changed and that's what you can do too. Alright, that is it for today. For those of you celebrating Thanksgiving, I hope you have a wonderful, wonderful day. Use it to really learn about the habit. That's the amazing piece you can do. I will see you guys next week.



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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](https://RachelHart.com/join) and start your transformation today.