

# Ep #163: When People Feel Sorry You're Not Drinking



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Rachel Hart**

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## Ep #163: When People Feel Sorry You're Not Drinking

You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 163.

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 everyone. We are talking about something today that I know a lot of you have experienced or worry this might happen. We're talking about what happens when people feel sorry for you because you're not drinking. So it's all about pity on the podcast today.

Now, I previously did a podcast episode on self-pity. It's number 62 if you want to go back and listen to that, and that's all about what happens when you're feeling sorry for yourself. But this episode is about what happens when other people feel sorry for you.

And listen, this can happen around lots of things, but it often crops up around the things that we choose either to put or not put into our bodies. So mostly food and alcohol. So it can happen when you're taking a break from drinking, when you're on a diet, if you have certain food restrictions. Sometimes there will be people in your life that will be like, "That sucks, poor you."

I know that I certainly used to encounter this quite a bit, and it's really important that you guys understand what exactly is happening here because if you don't, you can so easily use a moment like this against yourself and it will get in the way of changing your relationship with alcohol and changing the habit.

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I'll tell you it actually came up recently in the Take A Break program. There was a woman who was talking about how her friends feel sorry for her since she decided to take a break. And she was talking about the looks of pity she gets when she turns down a drink and heading on a weekend trip and getting all these questions about whether or not she was going to allow herself to have fun.

And some of her friends were even questioning whether she wanted to even go on this trip if she wasn't drinking. And so this woman was feeling hurt, she was feeling frustrated, and she was trying to rise above the situation but she felt really stuck. And I really want to go into this with you guys because it's something that so many of you experience when you stop drinking or when you take a break.

I know that I experienced this a lot at first, and occasionally, it will crop up once in a while, especially if I meet someone new. And you know what it's like. You get that kind of grimacing face on another person. And they're like, "Oh, you don't drink?"

But you have got to understand what's actually happening here, and that's why it's so beneficial to have the think-feel-act cycle. Because let me tell you, and I say this from experience, otherwise it is so easy to fall into the trap of feeling angry or resentful, and neither of those emotions are going to help you on your journey.

So let's just review what pity is. Pity is a strong feeling of sorrow for the misfortune of others. Now, what's really important to understand about pity is that it involves distance. We often reserve pity for situations where the brain believes there is distance between you and the object of your pity.

For example, someone with limited use of their limbs or someone displaced by war, or natural disaster. Now, here's the thing to remember; most people do not like being the object of your pity. And it makes a lot of sense when

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you think about it because when we pity another person, we're assuming that we know what their life is like. And what we're actually doing is reducing another person inadvertently into a label.

Oh, they're homeless, they're disabled, they're an addict, they're a refugee. That's what happens with pity. With one label, the brain assumes that we have all the information we need about the other person, about the object of our pity.

I recently saw such a beautiful example of this in the show called Little America. It's a show on Apple+ and it's inspired by real life stories of immigrants in the US. So each episode focuses on a new person and a new story and my husband and I were watching it.

And one of the episodes is about an immigrant from Iran, and he's looking at houses and he's making small talk with the real estate agent, and it comes up that he's originally from Iran. And of course, you kind of see this little telltale look of pity on the real estate agent's face. And the main character says something so powerful that I actually went back and looked it up later so I could get the exact words for this podcast.

And he says, "People think I escaped Iran. I had a great life in Iran. I came to America to provide my family new and excellent opportunities. That was my choice, so please, don't feel sorry for me." I love this because in that moment, he wanted this real estate agent to know that he was a full, capable human being with agency and power over his life.

He didn't need her sorrow; he didn't want her sorrow. And in fact, the misfortune that the real estate agent was assuming he had encountered, he was really quick to point out, "Hey listen, it didn't go down that way. I had a great life there and then I chose to come to the United States, so there's no pity needed."

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And I think it's so powerful because it's really such a great example that we don't pity other people to be mean. Most people have never even considered what the brain is doing. But listen, people don't like it. They don't like it because of the distance that pity creates. When we pity people, we inadvertently compare ourselves to them and we compare their life as worse than our life.

So it creates this superior/inferior ranking and people don't want that. And when we do that, the person stops being fully human. They become a label, a problem, a sad story. So what pity does is it unintentionally reduces a complex, multifaceted human being, which all of us are, into the sum total of a single behavior or a single attribute or a single fact about their life.

And so the brain is just reducing into like, they can't drink, they have to use a wheelchair, they had to escape their home country. In that moment, when you compare yourself to the object of your pity, you actually feel slightly better off. Because you're able to say, "Well that's not me, that's not my life, that's not my situation," and it's why people often follow up feeling pity with this kind of silent thought to themselves, "I should be grateful for what I have."

Now listen, there is one exception to this rule. When I say that most people don't like being pitied, and I think it's important to talk about because by and large, I believe it's really true that people don't like feeling your pity. We don't want to be seen as powerless or a victim of our life or a victim of fate. But sometimes, it is possible that people get in the habit of kind of cultivating for others in their life to feel bad for them.

And I say this because it kind of used to be me. Before I really understood the think-feel-act cycle and before I understood what was creating my feelings and my actions in the world, I would tell and retell and retell stories about all sorts of things in my life with a slight edge towards the negative.

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I wasn't lying, I wasn't making things up, but I had a little awareness in the back of my mind that I was telling the story in a way that made it a little worse, a little bit more unfair, a little bit more outrageous, whatever the story was.

And now trust me, this was a really uncomfortable thing to admit to myself, that I was doing it. And it was only through doing this coaching work that I finally saw that I was doing it. It was only through really learning how to manage my mind.

But the more that I explored the think-feel-act cycle, I realized that I did have a little bit of a habit of giving my stories a little bit of extra color in favor of how bad things were. And it took me a while but I realized that I did this because I was so insecure about how people felt about me.

And so unconsciously, I had devised this tactic of telling things so that they were a little bit worse, a little bit sadder, a little bit more outrageous, in the hopes of kind of extracting kind words and care and love from other people. And so what I was looking for unknowingly was the response from another person.

"Oh my god, that's terrible. I can't believe that happened to you. Are you okay? You poor thing." It was a way of trying to get love and care from other people in my life because I felt so insecure about how people felt about me and I had no idea how to give those things to myself.

So it was a way, I thought, to kind of prove that somebody cared if they kind of felt sorry for me. But I want you to know that for the most part, this really is the only exception to the rule that people do not like being pitied. They don't like being seen as powerless, they don't like being seen as unfortunate or the victim of fate.

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Because you know what? It's not true and it doesn't square with their own perception of who they are in their life. They know, we all know that we are multifaceted and complex and we have the full range of human emotions. And you know what? Sure, maybe sometimes we feel sad. But we also feel all the other emotions as well.

And so it's really important to understand this piece. Pity is a strong feeling of sorrow for the misfortune of others, and when we pity other people, we are labeling our circumstances as being somehow better than another person's. Now of course, now that you understand and hear me talk about the think-feel-act cycle day in and day out, you know that circumstances are not good or bad, right or wrong, until we have a thought about it.

But when we pity someone, we're making someone else a little bit inferior to ourselves, even when that's not our intent. And you really have to understand this so you can understand what is happening when it comes to someone feeling sorry for you because you're not drinking tonight or you're on a break or you're doing Whole 30 or whatever it is.

When I got this question about this woman whose friends were feeling sorry for her, I was like, "Listen, this may totally be happening. They may completely be feeling sorry for you, but it's not for the reason you think it is." She assumed, "They're pitying me because they feel sorry for me because there's something to be sorry about because I'm not drinking."

But if someone ever pities the fact that you aren't drinking, or don't eat gluten, or can't afford something, whatever it is, it's only because that person cannot fathom how it would be possible for them to enjoy themselves in your shoes.

They pity you because they have no idea how to manage their own mind, their own thoughts, their own feelings, their own actions. They don't understand the think-feel-act cycle. They don't understand that their

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experience of whatever is happening is created by what's happening in their mind, what they're thinking about.

I want you to think about it this way. Of course, some people are going to feel sorry for you if you decide to take a break from drinking because these are the exact same people who cannot imagine how it would be possible to enjoy the moment or frankly, their life, without alcohol. They are certain, they have decided for themselves that removing alcohol from an experience automatically means that it's going to be bad. They won't have a good time.

And in many ways that truly is their experience. It is true for them because they don't know how to manage their mind so they have no option to feel better on their own because they simply don't know how. What they know is I can have another glass of wine. That's how I will enjoy myself right now.

And when this happens, they end up completely dependent on alcohol to make them believe that they're having fun. And I say this knowing that this is not to blame other people or point them out as doing something wrong. I say this because this was me. This is everyone until you figure out how to manage your mind and create your own enjoyment in life, rather than being tied to consuming enjoyment.

I didn't know how to relax after a long day. I opened up a bottle of wine. I didn't know how to stop feeling awkward at a networking event where I was meeting new people, so I headed to the bar. I didn't know how to strike up a conversation with someone I had never met, so I relied on a buzz for liquid courage.

And I definitely did not know how to be in my body and not feel shame about it, so of course, I wanted my date nights and being intimate with my partners to include alcohol. But here's the thing; it really is kind of funny



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that we talk about people being dependent on alcohol as the people who are physically addicted.

Like, those are the people who are dependent on alcohol. It's the people who get the shakes and the tremors when they go without alcohol for a day. So we cite these people as the problem. Oh, they have a dependence, they're addicted. When, listen, in reality, anyone who feels sorry for you when you're not drinking, they have a dependence on alcohol.

They are the people who don't know how to manage their mind. They are dependent on alcohol to create the false enjoyment, the false pleasure, the false connection. And listen, their experience is false because when you have true enjoyment or true pleasure or true connection, you never wake up hungover. You never wake up regretting what you did or what you said.

I used to remember this. I would drink at a party and I would meet someone new and I would have a grand old time talking to them and laughing with them and connecting with them, and sometimes, the next time I would see them, it would be like we didn't know each other. Like they didn't know me.

And I was like, wait, didn't we have fun at that party where we were drinking together? But either they didn't remember it or they were embarrassed about their behavior. But listen, either way, it's not true enjoyment. It's not true pleasure, it's not true connection when you can only create it when you're drinking.

If someone thinks that not drinking means you aren't allowing yourself to have fun, you know it's because they don't have any idea how to have fun on their own without a drink. They're assuming that not drinking means you won't have a good time, when the truth is, not drinking, you can have equally, if not more fun. That's what's so hard for you and for everyone really to wrap your brain around. That's what was so hard for me.

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But now listen, this is not the time to start pitying these people, pitying the people who are feeling sorry for you. You don't need to turn around and pity them. And you certainly don't need to turn around and explain to them, "Oh listen, you have it backwards. Let me explain to you what is going on. You actually have the problem."

It's not about that. It's not about pointing fingers. It's about understanding what's really behind that person's emotion. It's the assumption of oh, I'm better off because I get to drink at this event. Pitying others who feel sorry for you, trying to explain to them the think-feel-act cycle, I'm going to promise you, it's pretty pointless and it's not going to help your own work.

I don't feel sorry when people feel sorry for me. I don't feel sorry for them because listen, I also don't walk around and claim there's all this virtue in not drinking. That is the other place where you guys can really get into a bind here. When you're treating alcohol and the decision to drink or not drink as if there's some sort of moral component.

There's no moral component. There's just like, hey, do you like the results that you're getting? It's not about being a good person or a better person or a more virtuous person because you're not drinking. That is really missing the point.

So if I ever encounter this, and I'll tell you now, it's pretty rare, and I'm going to explain why it is pretty rare, but if I encounter it, I just think like, "Oh, they're just confused. They just don't know what's possible when it comes to their mind. They just don't know what's possible when it comes to not drinking," and that's it. I just know that they're confused and I move on.

I go back to me. Because I know that if someone feels sorry for me if I'm not drinking, it's only because they would be feeling sorry for themselves if they weren't. They would be like, "Well, how am I supposed to have a good time? How am I supposed to have fun without this drink? How am I

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supposed to loosen up and relax and open up to people?" That's what's really going on.

In the moment, you don't need to focus on the other person, and in fact, I really encourage you not to. What I want you to do is to pay close attention to yourself because this is the reason why I so rarely encounter people feeling sorry for me because I'm not drinking anymore. It used to happen with more frequency, but there's a reason now why it doesn't.

In the moment, what you need to focus on is how am I showing up when I'm not drinking? How am I showing up when I'm not having dessert? It's not just alcohol. How am I show up when everybody's talking about a ski trip that I'm not going to go on?

Am I having fun in that moment? Am I enjoying myself? Am I present in the moment and present with other people or am I preoccupied with feeling sorry for myself and wondering what other people think and being totally lost in my thoughts? You have to pay attention to how you are showing up when you're saying no to a drink.

That's where you want to focus your energy because that's where you can make the most of your energy. That's where you actually have the power to change. Because here's what I will tell you; for me at first, when I started doing this work, I wasn't having a ton of fun when I wasn't drinking because I didn't know how to manage my mind yet.

So I was often going to the party and hanging back, or going out for drinks with other people and sitting quietly with my club soda. I wasn't being outgoing or laughing a lot or getting up and dancing or introducing myself to strangers, so yeah, you know what, I wasn't drinking and I also gave off the impression that I wasn't having a very good time.

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So no wonder people were feeling sorry for me because I was sitting there kind of like a sad sack. I had to learn how to enjoy myself, but here's the thing; you can't learn how to do it if you are committed to this belief that oh, I would be having more fun if I was drinking. Oh, the reason I'm not enjoying myself is because I'm having seltzer. Oh really, alcohol is what makes things more fun and me more fun and me more confident and me more relaxed.

Whatever it is, you have to be willing to let go of that entire belief system. Because if you're going to hang on to it, I promise you, it will always get in the way of changing your desire. But listen, the more that I learned how to manage my mind and question my belief system and show up differently in these moments and not be afraid of my emotions, the more I started to have fun all on my own.

The more I started to relax into just being myself. So I feel like I don't get that, "Sucks for you," because I'm not having a bad time. I'm not not enjoying myself. So you just actually see something that a lot of times confuses people. Like, that girl is not drinking and having a lot of fun. That's weird. I wonder what that is about?

In the moment, when this happens, if this happens, if someone feels sorry for you that you're not drinking, know the reason why. Because they would be feeling sorry for themselves. And then bring your attention right back to yourself. How are you showing up in that moment? What are you feeling? What are you thinking about? And do you want to start to change it? Do you want to have more fun? Alright, well let's figure out what's getting in the way of it.

So listen, are people going to feel sorry for you when you decide to take a break from drinking or you say no at the wine bar tonight? Of course, sure, that's not a problem. They're just confused. No one teaches us what creates our emotions or the think-feel-act cycle.

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We all should have learned it in school, especially in middle school and high school when a lot of us started experimenting with alcohol. But instead, we're not taught anything about our brain or how the mind works, how habits work, what creates our feelings, the think-feel-act cycle, and instead, we're just plonked down into this environment with so many rewards that are so concentrated.

And PS, we know nothing about how the reward system works in the brain. So what happens for most people? We just learn how to consume enjoyment and we don't know how to create it on our own. So of course, of course if that's the case, if you're used to eating and drinking and spending as a way to enjoy yourself, of course you're going to feel sorry for other people if they're not doing the same thing because you can't fathom how it could be possible for you to enjoy yourself.

This, I promise you, is the superpower that is available for all of you guys who are here. Learning how to create enjoyment and pleasure and fun and connection and confidence for yourself. And all of these things aren't false. They don't only appear when you have a buzz. They don't leave your body needing a break. They don't leave you feeling crappy the next day.

You can create all of these things for yourself. Doing this work to change the habit of drinking, it is how you learn how to have the ultimate power in your life because it's how you learn how to manage your mind. And when you know how to do that, that's what makes your life unstoppable.

So let people feel sorry for you. Understand they would just be feeling sorry for themselves because they don't have the skill set. But then just know that you have the most amazing tool in the world, the think-feel-act cycle, to start to learn how to manage your mind, and then go create a life that is so amazing that no one would ever look at it and think, "Sucks to be her."

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