

Ep #164: Worry



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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 164.

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 worry today. What have you been worrying about today? I bet there's something that you can pinpoint. And I want to talk to you guys about it, not only because the brain likes to do it all the time, especially if it's unmanaged, but because worrying is often so connected to the habit of drinking.

Because we get into a routine of pouring a drink so that we can stop worrying, so that we can feel better. But let me tell you, it does not work. And unless you actually start to change the worry, even if you say no to a drink, I guarantee you're going to be searching out some distraction. That's why if you want to make sustainable change, you actually have to do the work of learning how to manage your mind.

But also, just think about it. Wouldn't it be amazing to just worry less in life? It would be great. I know that for a long time I just would look at people and think, "Those people that don't have to worry about anything, who just never seem to catastrophize or go to worst-case scenario, I wish I was one of them," because I thought it was a personality trait, but it's not.

It's just a habit that you can learn how to change. And let me tell you, when you do, when you learn how to worry less, it becomes so much easier to say no to a drink. Your desire actually goes down. Because if you have less worry, you have less reason to try to escape the worry. That's how you can use this to actually change your desire.

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I think it's really important to understand that we've actually been taught, all of us have been taught to use a drink to deal with worry. So think about it. You're feeling stressed out, or you're anxious, or you just can't turn your brain off, and someone says, "Oh, just have a drink you'll feel better." I remember I had a boyfriend that used to say that to me a lot. "Oh, just have a drink Rachel. You'll feel better when you have a drink."

Many of us not only have people in our lives who say this, we're saying it to ourselves as well, but many of us watched our parents or adults in our life model this behavior. So we learned at a very young age that pouring a drink was the solution to worry, or at least that's what we believed. Because there's a problem with this fix of pouring a drink to stop worrying.

It's not actually a solution. Pouring a drink can never solve the cause of your worry. This is really important. Because the cause of your worry is not created by the looking deadline or next month's credit card bill. It's not created by the upcoming meeting with your boss, or waiting to get the test results back from your doctor.

The cause of your worry is always found in your mind, specifically what you are thinking about the deadline or the credit card bill or the meeting or the test results. That's what is generating your worry. It's not what is happening. It's what you're thinking about it.

And here's what I can promise. Pouring yourself a drink, it will temporarily distract you because that's what alcohol does. It depresses your brain, your prefrontal cortex where a lot of that worrying is happening, but guess what? You're going to wake up tomorrow with the exact same worry because you didn't change the cause of it.

And here's the other thing that a lot of people don't realize. I know I definitely did not because I used to have so much worry in my life and I was so often using a drink to feel better. I was then waking up with even more

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worry because now my brain was trying to recalibrate and rebalance all of the damage I did to the neurotransmitters the night before.

And that's why so many of you wake up feeling anxious after a night of drinking, or why you wake up feeling kind of sad after a night of polishing off a bottle of wine. And this is also why so many of the women that I work with watch a ton of their anxiety disappear just from taking a break. Because their brain is no longer going through these crazy ups and downs that happens to our neurotransmitters every time we drink.

That alone can resolve so much of your anxiety. When you worry, what you're doing is simply allowing your mind to dwell on what it perceives to be a problem. Now, it's important to reinforce this word allow because you are letting this happen. This doesn't mean you have to blame yourself. But it means that you can change it.

Because when you're worrying, you're not spending a lot of time thinking about how you're going to figure something out or how you're going to get through whatever is coming up or that everything is going to be okay in the end. You're spending a lot of time thinking about how everything is going to go wrong. You're dwelling in the negative and you're allowing your brain to do this simply because you don't know another way.

Simply because this is what your brain has always done. Because worrying has become a habit. And for many of you, it's often the habit underneath a lot of your drinking. So that's what I really want to talk about today is why humans worry, why so many of you use a drink to stop worrying, the reason that this fix is not really a fix, it always backfires, and what you should be doing instead to actually deal with your worry.

Because when you can actually get to the root cause of why you're worrying, that really is true freedom. That is the best. To wake up and move through the world and realize, I haven't worried about anything today. And

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this comes from my own experience, knowing that I had so much worry in my life. I was filled to the brim. I was always worrying about something.

And so to alleviate that has been amazing for me and it's what you can have as well. Letting go of worry is one of the biggest areas of relief I find so many of the women that I work with experience. Because when they learn how to cope with worry on their own, it, not only is such freedom, but it removes an entire category of reasons for why you should have a drink.

"Ugh, what are people going to think of me? Am I going to make a good impression? How am I going to handle tomorrow? How am I going to handle this event?" It removes an entire category of reasons. And when you get rid of those excuses, let me tell you, it's so much easier to say no because you have less desire, almost without even trying. Because instead of worrying, you're believing in yourself.

So let's start by talking about why humans worry. Now, you've heard me talk about this before on the podcast. The human mind and body evolved to help us survive in the world. Your body and your mind work together to protect you against threats. And one of the ways that this happens is through a mechanism called fight or flight.

When danger appears, you'll either stay and fight or run and flee. Most people don't know that fight or flight is actually fight, flight, or freeze. Freeze is a big component, and actually a lot of the women that I work with, myself included, have experienced this freeze component but never really understood what was going on.

When you freeze, you assess that you're not going to be able to fight, that there's no escape route for you, so your best thing is just to stay put. And either you try to hide from the threat or you just freeze and wait for it to be over. It's important to understand that all three of these mechanisms help you react quickly to life-threatening situations so that you can stay alive.

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So how does this happen? First, your brain has to interpret a situation as dangerous. Then, once it's made that assessment that you're in danger, it releases hormones to prepare your body to stay alive. So these hormones, adrenaline and cortisol, they raise your heart rate, they speed up your breathing, they tense your muscles. Basically, all these physiological changes are happening in the body to prepare you to spring into action, regardless of whether you turn and fight, you run and flee, or you stay and hide or freeze.

All of these changes in the body are meant to be temporary. This part is really important. Because the idea is once you survive the situation, your body can return to its normal state. But listen, when you're in a chronic state of worry, you can get stuck in a chronic state of high alert. So your brain keeps interpreting harmless situations as dangerous for survival.

So your body keeps preparing you, but there's nothing to worry about. You're not actually in danger. You're perfectly safe. But you don't know this so you just keep worrying. You just stay in this chronic state of worry. And I'll tell you this; in the modern world, most humans are very rarely in actual danger from a life-threatening situation or a predator.

But that doesn't mean that the mind and the body understand that. Because most people are still stuck in a state of high alert. And it happens because unless you know how to manage your mind, your most primitive part of your brain is going to run the show. It's going to be the part that's in charge of assessing danger.

And if you just listen to that primitive part of your brain and you don't question it, it's always going to think that everything is dangerous because that's its job. Finding danger to help keep you alive was what the primitive brain was charged with doing, and it's really good at it. So your primitive brain evolved this way, always being on the lookout for danger.

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And that made sense in an environment thousands of years ago where at any moment you could encounter a predator or weather could suddenly shift, or you could fall and seriously injure yourself, and there weren't hospitals or antibiotics to help you. It made sense in an environment where access to food and clean, drinkable water, it was scarce.

So in that environment, it made sense for your primitive brain to run the show, and for you to be in this state of constant worry because it kept you on your toes, it helped you survive. Worry made you more alert to danger and danger was a real part of everyday life.

But listen, now your brain is interpreting situations as dangerous that aren't actually dangerous. You end up worrying way too much and the fight, flight, or freeze response is overactive in your body. And when you don't know how to get out of worrying too much and how to get out of this overactive response, that is when it can be so easy to fall into the trap of pouring a drink to take the edge off of your worry.

And you know what, society really encourages this. Think about how often friends or family members or a partner has said, "Oh, have a drink. You'll feel better." Now, this is not to blame them. Because they don't know how to help you feel better. They don't know how to manage their own mind, so they're certainly not going to know how to manage yours.

Alcohol has become this kind of Band-Aid solution in our society. And people mean well but it doesn't deal with the real source, the real problem. You aren't questioning your primitive brain's assessment of danger. That's the real problem. You aren't stepping back and assessing the situation with your higher brain. You're just believing everything that the primitive brain is churning out and then numbing yourself, distracting yourself in the hopes that you'll feel better.

But what happens? You wake up tomorrow and you got the same worry and you might have even more of it. More anxiety because now all your

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neurotransmitters were messed up from the night before. So what does this look like?

Think about what you worry about on a regular basis. Here's what I used to worry about a lot. Am I going to be on time? Am I going to get this all done? Are my family members going to be okay? Am I going to make the right decision? Am I going to be able to solve this problem? I worried about these things all the time.

And some of them, am I going to be on time? Am I going to be late? It sounds silly in retrospect, but it created a lot of anxiety, a lot of stress for me. In the moment, what I was doing, I was worrying about these situations that were totally harmless. But my primitive brain has this interpretation that it was representing a real pressing danger.

So I remember thinking about this at one point in my life, looking at a credit card statement and thinking, "Oh my god, am I going to be able to pay this off? I'm never going to get out from under this debt. I can't do it. This is hopeless."

And of course, when your language is so dire, when you're telling yourself I can't do it, it's hopeless, and you just worry about how you won't be able to figure it out, well yeah, why not head to the bar and drown your sorrows? Why not at least feel temporarily better?

That's so often what I was telling myself. Well, at least I can feel temporarily better. Of course it never worked. I had that temporary moment of numbing my brain, only to feel worse the next day and only to have all the same worry. Now here's the thing; I would argue that regardless of what happens in any situation, you are actually always safe.

Because you have the one tool that can solve any problem. You have your mind. The human brain. Yes, I talk a lot about how the primitive part of it can cause a lot of problems for you, but your human brain is also the tool

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that you can use to change any and every habit. But when you're worrying, your brain is interpreting what's happening to you as a threat to your safety when that's not what is actually happening.

And most people have no idea this is going on, not to mention, no idea how to harness their brain for good. So they aren't questioning or challenging their interpretation of the credit card or the deadline or the meeting or the test results because they don't even know that the think-feel-act cycle is unfolding. They just think, well, I worry a lot because I have a lot of worrisome things in my life.

That's never the case. It's never the case to say, "Oh, well who wouldn't worry in this situation? It's the reasonable thing to do." No. You have to understand that your mind is the creator of all of your worry. And you can create something else. I'm going to tell you this. When I explain this concept to a lot of people, at first, they really dig their heels in.

So I'm explaining, you know what, you're the creator of your own worry, it's happening because of a thought in your mind, and a lot of people, even though they say they don't like worrying, they will start arguing with me to keep it. They don't want to let go of their worry.

And I understand why. Because in that moment when you're worrying, it feels kind of productive and it feels protective. It feels like you're doing something, you're taking action because of course, your mind is doing something. It's thinking and thinking and thinking about worst-case scenario and how everything might go wrong.

But all that worry only ever pretends to be useful. It never actually helps you. It's not actually productive or protective. Because you know what ends up happening? You spend a lot of time stuck in your head. You spend a lot of time wasting time because you're imagining worst-case scenario rather than actually taking action.

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I know that some of you are thinking, “Rachel, when I worry, I make a plan. So it is actually productive and protective. I start figuring out how to solve the problem.” But I’m going to offer you this; nine times of out 10, it’s actually not helpful. I really resisted believing this myself because I love making plans.

But this is where I see so many people getting stuck. For the most part, people who are planners, their ratio of making plans to taking action is totally skewed in the wrong direction. You should be taking much more action because action is where you learn everything, rather than creating way more plans.

And you will know if this is you because you won’t like going into a situation without a plan. You will make plans to the high heavens before stepping into the unknown. And that always tells me that your ratio of plan-making to taking action is skewed in the wrong direction.

I’ll tell you, my husband and I always joke about this because I really have had a habit for a very long time in my life of making plans and loving making plans and writing it all down, and my husband has never met a plan he likes. I mean, never. He is always just thinking like, why do we need a plan? We’ll figure it out. We don’t need a plan. Let’s just go.

It was and has been a very interesting thing for the two of us to navigate in our relationship together because I believed that making plans was responsible. And making a plan can be useful, but not if you’re doing it at the expense of yourself. Not if you’re doing it so that you can delay taking action. And not if you’re making way more plans in life than you are taking action because that’s what I was doing for the longest time.

Something I have learned from my husband is how capable I am without any plan at all. I can figure it out. I don’t need a checklist. I have the most powerful tool at my disposal. I have my brain. And guess what? This is not

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like I have some sort of unique special brain. You have one too. You also have an amazingly powerful tool at your disposal. No plan required.

But this is the problem with worry. You're either stuck catastrophizing, or you end up making plans at the expense of yourself, and it undermines your own capability, your own belief in yourself. Because unless you learn how to start questioning the primitive brain's automatic interpretation, you are going to stay stuck in worry, your body will stay on high alert, but there's no bear to run from. It's just an email inbox or a to-do list that your primitive brain has assessed as a threat.

And you'll never be able to return to baseline because you're going to keep having an email inbox and you're going to keep having things on your to-do list. So if you can't return to baseline because the threat is always there, what are you going to do? Think about it in the wild.

When you're running from a bear in the wild, it's pretty clear if you succeed or not. Either you die or you find safety. And if you find safety, your body has a chance to return to normal because it can finally assess that the threat is gone.

But in the modern world, if your primitive brain is interpreting all these things as threats that aren't actually threats, so it's looking at what's on your to-do list or your email inbox or your credit card bills or meetings or deadlines and being like, oh god, this is really bad, I don't think I can figure this out, if your primitive brain is interpreting it as a threat, you're never going to have a chance to get to safety because they're always going to be with you.

That's why you keep worrying. Because you're not understanding that it's possible to question your brain's interpretation of what is happening. Instead, you're just believing it. That's what I did. I just believed all my worry as if it was gospel, as if it was the truth. And then what did I want to

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do? I wanted to stop worrying but I didn't know how because I thought it was all true.

So I would go get a drink. And then I would have another. And then I'd wake up the next day and while I had that momentary relief, it was always false because my body hadn't actually returned to baseline. It wasn't actually believing it was safe now. It had just been numbed. I still had all that worry because I never changed my thinking.

That's what drinking often is. It often shows up as an attempt to create relief. And it is reinforced by our culture of, "Oh, have a drink, you'll feel better." But you won't feel better. You will feel worse in the long run. Tomorrow the worry is still there and now, you've also taxed your body by drinking.

So you started out with this emotional stress and now you've compounded it with actual physical stress. Your body needs to repair and recover every single night. That is part of the purpose of sleep. But every evening if you're drinking, guess what's happening while you're asleep? Your body can't repair and recover everything that's been happening in your body. It has to now focus exclusively on processing the alcohol out of your system.

So when you wake up in the morning, you actually have physical stress in your body that you have to deal with on top of the emotional stress, which is the reason why you started drinking in the first place. So the first problem is always that you're allowing your primitive brain to interpret the circumstance of your life, whatever is happening, as a threat when it truly isn't.

And when those circumstances don't change and your interpretation doesn't change, then you're kind of screwed. Because then we feel like, I don't know, I'm always going to have a job, I'm always going to have a family, I'm always going to have bills, there's always going to be traffic, I'm

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always going to have a to-do list, and phone calls to return and an email inbox and lines to wait in.

These things aren't going away, so the stress and the overwhelm and the worry are never dissipating and you stay in this elevated state of high alert that then you try to deal with by having a drink, and the process just keeps compounding. It's like a snowball effect.

And that's why having a drink to feel better to deal with your worry is always going to backfire on you. It is a lie. Just like the idea that worrying is protective is also a lie. If you want to actually change your worry, which who doesn't? Who doesn't want to worry less? If you want to actually do that, the only way out is to find the sentence in your mind creating it. This is when you take the think-feel-act cycle and put it into action.

You have to get the content of your brain out onto paper so you can look at it, you can examine it, you can see what's really causing the worry. You can write out the model, which PS guys, I know you hear me talk about this all the time. It's easier said than done. This is what I work with women day in and day out in the Take A Break program. Practicing models, writing them out.

Because that is a skill in and of itself, to start to put your world into this really simplified model. But then the next skill is to actually practice shifting it in a believable way. This isn't about positive affirmations. It's about shifting your mindset in a way that feels true. Because if it doesn't actually create a new better feeling emotion, it's not going to work. And it's going to take more than one try.

But when you learn how to do this, you learn how to get rid of so much of the worry in your life. And when you free yourself of worry, you have so much less desire on a regular basis because you're not trying to escape your life by pouring a drink. You're not trying to stop worrying by heading to the bar.

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And this is why it's so possible to change your desire, but also when you do, to just feel better overall. Letting go of worry is an amazing, beautiful thing, and it's available for you. But you have to drop the belief that society has told you and you may have seen modeled, and we pick up from so many places of, "Oh, have a drink, you'll feel better." It's never true. That's always, always the lie. Alright, that's it for today. 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.