

## Ep #181: Purposeful Discomfort



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With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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## Ep #181: Purposeful Discomfort

You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 181.

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 friends. We are talking about something today that I'm calling purposeful discomfort, and it is exactly what it sounds like. It is discomfort that serves a purpose. And we're going to look at that in comparison to discomfort that has no purpose.

Because one of the things that I have found, not only in my own life, but in the work that I do with so many people is that we don't understand the difference between these two things. Our brain encounters discomfort and freaks out.

So the brain's like, oh my god, this is terrible, I hate this, this is so uncomfortable, make it stop. I know that my brain did that for such a long time. I didn't want to feel uncomfortable ever. But here's the problem; the key to growth and evolution and changing your habits and changing your relationship with alcohol is discomfort.

You need to learn how to embrace discomfort because if you're always resisting it, you're going to stay stuck. So you need discomfort but you need the right kind of it. You need the kind that serves a purpose.

Now, I will tell you, for a very long time, I was plenty uncomfortable when I was stuck in the habit of drinking. So the idea that I needed to embrace discomfort was like, I don't even know. It was like someone would be telling me the worst news ever because I was sitting there being like, I'm very uncomfortable.

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I'm uncomfortable worrying about whether or not I'm actually going to take it easy tonight, I'm uncomfortable waiting for everyone to finish their drink so I can order another, and wondering if people are noticing how fast I'm drinking. I'm uncomfortable the next day, I'm uncomfortable when I open up my eyes and think, "Ugh, why did you do that again, Rachel?"

I'm uncomfortable when I feel hungover, I'm uncomfortable when my sleep is disturbed, I'm uncomfortable when the memories of last night come flooding back. I'm uncomfortable when I grit my teeth and when I say no and when I feel like I have to isolate and hide out and lying about what I'm drinking, trying to pretend that I'm having a drink when really, I wasn't.

So I was in a place where I was like, I feel uncomfortable all of the time, and you're telling me that I have to embrace discomfort? This is terrible. But the problem was I didn't understand the difference between discomfort that has a purpose and discomfort that doesn't. I was just kind of lumping it all together and I just didn't want to feel uncomfortable at all.

And I think that this also is kind of hard to wrap your brain around at first because the idea that you need purposeful discomfort, but that some discomfort has no purpose and does not actually help you change the habit is the opposite from what we're taught. Because many of us learn at a very young age that people will take action if things get uncomfortable enough.

So this is the myth of hitting rock bottom that pretty much everyone knows. It's this myth that if things get bad enough, then you will change. And I remember there being a point in my life, in my 20s, living in New York, where I would think to myself, "Maybe I haven't figured out my drinking because things haven't gotten bad enough yet."

That's how pervasive this myth is. I was telling myself that the reason I hadn't been successful at changing my relationship with alcohol was because things hadn't gotten bad enough yet. That's a crazy thing to think.

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But that is what we are fed. This is the belief that we are given, that oh yeah, you just need to get to rock bottom and then you'll be able to change.

Listen, you need discomfort in order to create change, but discomfort is not what sends you on the path of learning how to change a habit. Because you know what does that? Hope and motivation. You are not going to do something different, you're not going to step outside of your comfort zone, you're not going to believe that something is possible for you that you've previously told yourself I can't do that, unless you feel hope and unless you feel motivation.

It's not a matter of how uncomfortable you feel. It's the presence of these positive emotions. It's the presence of a belief in a new possibility. And that is not created by discomfort. It's created by your mind. The reason why it's so important for you to really embrace this idea is because we don't understand that we have the power to create hope and motivation and belief in ourselves and belief in a new possibility.

We are just kind of sitting around waiting for it to appear. That's what I was doing for a very long time because I didn't understand the think-feel-act cycle. I didn't understand that my thoughts created it. So I was just kind of sitting around waiting for all that hope and motivation to appear. And then also telling myself, "Well, maybe if I just feel worse, then it will appear."

No, that's not how it works. Listen, discomfort is a part of the process of change always. When your brain is learning something new, when it's trying to make new neural connections, there's going to be struggle. But that process of struggle doesn't have to be coupled with negative emotion.

This is a huge piece. I talk about this a lot. I've talked about this watching my son, my toddler learn how to use his scooter. He's pretty good at it now. But he struggled a ton at first, but he didn't have the accompanying negative emotion.

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He would fall down and he would bounce right back up. He was always excited to scoot, even though he was terrible at it, even though he was scooting into walls and toppling over. He was in the process of having the struggle, but he just didn't attach any negative emotion to it.

And I think as adults, the way that we can learn how to do this, because most of us have that period as children where we're very open to learning new things and then at some point, we learn, oh, struggle is bad, discomfort is bad, I shouldn't feel this way.

So we lose what we all innately have inside of us, which is, hey yeah, struggle is no big deal, just jump right back on the scooter. So as adults, I think what we need to do is start to understand the difference between purposeful discomfort and purposeless discomfort.

When you start to really see discomfort in one of those two areas, that will help you so much. Because purposeful discomfort, it helps you grow. It is part of your brain learning new things. It is getting you closer to your goal. Purposeless discomfort isn't helping you grow. It's not about growth at all. It has no upside.

It's about stagnating, it's about repeating the same thing over and over and over again that is not getting you closer to your goal. It's actually getting you further from it. And I will tell you, I think about this a lot with the habit of drinking, but I see how it happens in all areas of my life, and it's actually happening for me right now because I finally got a new office set up.

I'm going to tell you, I spent almost five years working at an office desk, that first of all, is not even an office desk. It is just totally wrong. It is the wrong height, it is not adjustable, there are many problems with it, but I'm very devoted to this table because it was made by my great great grandfather.

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A man who I never knew in person. He died in 1935, but I have heard so many stories about him. I grew up listening to stories about the blizzard of 1888 and how it lasted for three days and it dropped a tremendous amount of snow in the Northeast and in Connecticut. And there were gusts of winds that were like a hurricane.

But you know, someone had to milk the cow, so my great great grandfather had his sons tie a rope around his waist and he crawled out the second floor window and made his way to the barn, keeping that rope tied tightly around his waist so he could make his way back to the house.

And so I think about that story every time I sit at this table. I will tell you, I remember when my husband first heard this story, I'm sure he's now heard it many times. My family loves to repeat stories. When he first heard it, he was like, "That blizzard sounds crazy. When was it?" And my dad was like, "Oh, it was 130 years ago," as if it's this normal thing to be talking about a blizzard from 130 years ago.

But anyway, I digress. I was very attached to this table for that story and many, many other stories that I have about this man. But after years of shoulder pain and jaw pain and neck pain and seeing a chiropractor, it finally became very clear that how I was sitting every single day was really the cause of my problem.

And so I had a woman come who is an ergonomic consultant. She came to my home to assess this entire set up and she took one look at my desk and she said, "So I hope you're willing to invest in new furniture." Because she looked at it and knew there's no way that we can make this work for her.

So I got a completely new desk, a new chair, a new keyboard, a new mouse, a new computer stand, a new footrest. I did the works. It fits my body to a T. And you know what, I've been finding it really uncomfortable. As soon as I started using it, my body was like, no thank you, this is not

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what we're used to, this is not how we're used to having our arms and our legs and our position. It's not comfortable.

Which is kind of wild when you think about it, right? Because the set-up is totally right for my body. It is right for what my body needs, but my brain keeps trying to have me avoid using it. Even though the previous set up that I used for five years caused a lot of pain, especially after a day of working at that table.

But here's the thing; while I was sitting at the table, it was comfortable because my body was familiar to being in that position. So sitting at the old desk felt easy and natural, even though it was having all these terrible repercussions on my body.

And now I'm moving to this new set up, which I can already see is helping me at the end of the day feel better, it has this long-term benefit. But in the moment, sometimes when I'm using it, it doesn't feel so comfortable. I was on a coaching call the other day and I was fumbling with my mouse.

And my brain was like, "This mouse is garbage, I hate it. It's stupid, let's go back to the old one." My knee-jerk was to go back to what wasn't working because it feels comfortable right now for me. So this is what I want you to think about. What I am doing right now, which is every time my body resists and wants to throw away the mouse and get rid of the table and get rid of the chair, I remind myself, no, this is purposeful discomfort.

It's helping my brain and my body learn a new normal. It has long-term position results that I can already see at the end of the day. But that doesn't mean that it feels comfortable in the moment. In the moment, I'm like, this is awkward, this is weird, I want to go back to how things were. This is what happens when you change any habit, including drinking.

So you take a break from drinking and you know, hands down, there are a ton of long-term positive results. You're going to wake up feeling better,

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you're going to have more energy, you're going to have better sleep, better mornings, better digestion, you're going to lose weight, your skin is going to look great.

But in the moment when you turn down the drink, when your brain is used to saying yes, you are going to feel like, "Ugh, this is so uncomfortable, I don't like it." I always say to people, we know there's discomfort coming either way. Discomfort is part of the human experience. So you're better off choosing the discomfort that serves you rather than the long-term discomfort that actually has you stuck, actually keeps you stagnant.

But I really believe that you can refine this concept even more by bringing the idea of purposeful discomfort and purposeless discomfort into your life. So purposeful discomfort is simply answering the question, is this discomfort helping me grow? Is it serving my larger goal? Versus purposeless discomfort, which is, is this discomfort keeping me stuck and leading to more long-term discomfort in my life?

When you can start to take the entire world of discomfort and start to separate it out into these two different buckets, that's when you start to see, hey, this is serving me and this isn't. Because the willingness to embrace purposeful discomfort means you start to teach your brain to zoom out beyond the immediate moment.

The habit is all about the immediate moment, immediate gratification. Teaching your brain to zoom out beyond is what is so powerful. Because listen, it's easy to say, "Well, I just feel more comfortable working at my old desk in the moment," or, "I feel more comfortable having a drink in the moment when I feel an urge."

Of course, because that's the habit. But the fixation on the short-term is what got you into the problem in the first place. The fixation on the immediate moment, that is the real problem. It's not alcohol. It's not



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whatever habit you're working on. It's the fixation on I need to feel good right now.

When your life revolves around instant gratification, what do you do? You start avoiding any and all discomfort. You don't want any part of it. I certainly didn't want any part of it. But discomfort's coming either way, so we might as well embrace the kind that's going to help us.

And not only that, you need discomfort. You just need the right kind of it. So you can start to really say, is it purposeful discomfort to come home after a long day at work, feel the urge and say no, and then experience restlessness and a lot of permission-giving excuses? Is that serving a purpose? I would say you bet.

Is it purposeful discomfort to go out to a fancy dinner or a party or meet new people and not drinking and worry what people think? I would say yeah, it is. Because there's a purpose behind feeling uncomfortable in these moments. It's teaching your brain, "You know what, restlessness, worry, not a big deal, I can handle it, I don't need a drink."

It's teaching your brain something new. Because really, there's no benefit to the discomfort of shame, or regret, or hangovers, or headaches, or poor sleep, or any of the negative consequences that come from drinking. That discomfort isn't going to help you change. I don't care what people say. I do not buy this idea of rock bottom being what helps you change. It doesn't.

Certainly didn't for me. Certainly hasn't for the thousands of women that I've worked with. That discomfort isn't about change. It's about feeling terrible. It's about this belief if you feel bad enough, you're finally going to be motivated, as if motivation is this thing that just one day lands in your head, as opposed to something that you created.

Listen, when you realize that you create your own motivation, you become so powerful. Because then you realize, if I'm not feeling motivated, it's just

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because of a thought. It's not because I need to make my situation worse. Rock bottom fuels this belief that motivation and hope are created outside of us when they're not. They're created by the think-feel-act cycle. We're just unconscious to what's happening.

In truth, they're created inside of us and they can be created at any time. This is how it works with purposeful discomfort. If you want a life where you learn how to change your relationship with alcohol, you have sustained emotional and physical wellbeing where you go after your goals, you're not sitting on the sidelines, then you have to learn how to embrace discomfort in the moment.

But here's the key. Once you start doing that, it gets so much easier because you start to see that the discomfort in the moment, it's always just fleeting. It never lasts. It always goes away. And then when you get on the other side of it, the upside is feeling so proud of yourself that you stuck with it.

And I don't care if that is embracing the discomfort that comes with saying no to a drink, or lacing up your shoes to go out for a run, or sitting at a desk that is ergonomically correct for you. There's always an upside there because the long-term result is that you are teaching your brain that short-term discomfort is no big deal. Because you know that it serves a purpose. That's the real reward.

You end up having less long-term discomfort in your life. You end up having less purposeless discomfort, the discomfort of waking up and feeling like, "Ugh god, why did I do that again? Why did I do this to myself? Why do I feel this way?" You have less of that because you've traded all that in for embracing the discomfort, the short-term, the purposeful discomfort in the moment.

I really want you, not only to start separating your discomfort into these two buckets, but you know what, go out and find some purposeful discomfort.

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Embrace it. Show your brain, you know what, it's not a big deal, it's just how we learn, it's just how we teach ourselves a new way of being. It's how we unwind the habit.

If you start doing that, if you start embracing purposeful discomfort, instead of always feeling like I just got to feel good at every moment, that is going to create so much change. It's going to blow your mind. Alright, that's it for today. I will see you guys 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](https://RachelHart.com/join) and start your transformation today.