

Ep #195: Can I Trust Myself to Drink?



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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 195.

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 everyone. How are you? We are talking about a question that comes up all of the time with the people that I work with. Can I trust myself around alcohol? Can I trust myself to drink? I watch people really struggle with these questions, and I think it is because we are so misled about both of them.

And so that's what I really want to unpack for you today because taking a break from drinking is about examining and changing the habit and the relationship that you have with alcohol. So you give yourself a break from drinking so that you can give yourself a clear sense of hey, how is drinking impacting me? How is alcohol affecting my body and my time and my health and my sleep and my relationships? How is it affecting my entire life?

Now, some people, when they do the break, they decide, you know what, I think I do want to go alcohol free. Some people decide that they want to reintroduce alcohol. Some people continue not to really be sure what they want to do. They want to spend more time considering the relationship that they have and the relationship that they want.

So there's all of these different outcomes that can result in taking a break from drinking. But no matter what path someone takes, invariably, these questions of trust come up time and time again. And it's really interesting to me that the question of trust is really almost universal.

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This desire to know that you can trust yourself, it applies across the board, outside of the realm of drinking. But it also comes up in this arena, what am I going to do about alcohol, what kind of relationship do I want, it comes up regardless of what path people decide to choose for themselves.

And I think that it comes up so frequently because so many people will say, “Oh, I don’t drink anymore because I don’t trust myself,” or, “I can’t be trusted around alcohol.” These are ideas and thoughts that we hear a lot, that we can’t be trusted around a substance. And the problem is that while these thoughts may feel very true, you might have a lot of evidence backing up these beliefs that you can’t be trusted, what most people don’t understand is that these thoughts are not a reflection of your past.

They are not a reflection of how much you’ve had to drink over the course of your lifetime. They’re not a reflection of how many times you got drunk. They’re actually self-fulfilling prophecies. I want you to think about how the think-feel-act cycle works. Your thoughts determine what you do or don’t do, which means the thought I can’t trust myself is never going to lead to the action of following your commitment.

You’re just going to prove that you can’t be trusted over and over again. Not only that, but for most people it really feels terrible to think this thought, to tell themselves I can’t be trusted. That thought creates so much shame. So not only do people not realize that this thought I can’t trust myself is actually a self-fulfilling prophecy, but it also feels really bad to boot. It feels awful to believe that you can’t be trusted around anything. Not just alcohol.

Now, here’s the weird thing. We are taught to believe that shame is helpful when it comes to change. We’re taught, well, if you just feel bad enough about yourself, then you’re finally going to change. But I’m going to tell you that is simply not the case. Shame is never ever ever going to serve you on your journey to change any habit. That is definitely not going to serve you on your journey to change your relationship with alcohol.

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And here's why; humans don't like feeling shame. It's an emotion that most people want to avoid because the brain has learned over the course of human history that shame was dangerous. Shame is connected to this idea that there's something wrong with you. And that idea that there's something wrong with you, it coincides with this fear that if people discover what is wrong with you, you are going to be found out and rejected by the tribe.

So think about it. Thousands of years ago when you were accepted by your family and your community or your tribe, your chance of survival increased. It was easier to find food and water and defend against predators and find shelter and stay safe if you were part of a group. A group is stronger together than the individual on his or her own.

Being cast out, being rejected, it impacted human survival. And the brain and body still react in a survival way when it comes to shame. We react as if we are somehow unsafe. And so what do we do? We try to hide the source of our shame. We strive for acceptance because our brain is interpreting acceptance as safety.

Even though right now, if you're listening to this podcast, I bet that you can get all of your basic survival needs met on your own, just by yourself. You don't even need to be part of a group. That doesn't mean that your brain has caught up with this information. When you shame yourself, when you make yourself the other, when you make yourself separate, what you do is basically look to you as being the source of the problem.

So instead of saying I did something bad, you tell yourself I am bad. Instead of saying I did something wrong, you believe I am wrong. Instead of making a mistake, you tell yourself I am a mistake. Do you see the difference there? Shame is about separating yourself as different. You reject yourself.

And the primitive brain doesn't want anyone to see us as different because it thinks, hey, they're going to see us as different, then I might be rejected,

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and then what's going to happen? My survival's going to be on the line. And that's what the primitive brain cares about. It cares about survival, which is why shame for so many people is buried deep and stays hidden for so long.

Because that primitive brain thinks that it's helping you survive. It thinks that it's helping you stay safe. But of course it's not. It's just preventing you from actually examining what's happening. It's preventing you from actually looking at the habit and understanding it and learning how it works so that you can change it.

Think about the connection between shame and the habit of drinking. Most people who struggle with alcohol, who drink more than they want to, they experience so much shame about it. So culturally, we have these thoughts, "Well, everyone drinks, it's normal to drink, only alcoholics don't drink and that's because they have a disease or something is really wrong with their brain."

All of these thoughts, which by the way, I truly believe are fundamentally incorrect and incredibly damaging, all of these thoughts add so much shame into the mix. Instead of just being able to look at the numbers of last nights, instead of just looking at the math, what happened, how much did I drink, we get all mixed up. We've got all this shame swirling around.

Instead of just being able to say, hey, what was I thinking? How was I feeling? What led to me reaching for a glass and reaching for another? What was happening in there? We don't even end up looking. We don't even know we can look. We just say I don't know, it just happens, I don't know, I'm just compulsive, I don't know, this is just who I am.

So you end up mired in shame, which is why so many people suffer in silence. I cannot tell you the number of women who have told me, "I've never talked about my drinking with anyone until you, Rachel. I've never even told my partner. I've never told my closest friend that I was worried

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about my drinking or worried that I might be compulsive or worried about the amount of desire that I feel at the end of the day.”

It really astounds me how much I have heard this. And you may think oh well, that person, they probably really have a problem. Obviously, the partner or the best friend or someone in their family knows, because if someone is worried about their drinking, they must be drinking a lot. And I want to tell you that is not the case. That is what we are led to believe but it's just not true.

There is this very incorrect assumption that if you struggle with drinking at all, if you worry about your drinking at all, then drinking must be interfering with all aspects of your life. And the truth is that people can and do experience shame about their drinking and they drink no more than the CDC guidelines recommend.

They drink very little. Because it's not about how much you drink that creates how you feel. It's what you think it means about you. How you feel about your drinking, how you feel about the habit, how you feel about your desire and your urges and any sense that you might be compulsive or any sense that you might not be fully in control.

Many people see any indication that they desire alcohol too much or any indication that they might at all be compulsive as a sign there is something deeply wrong with them, and that's just not the case. It's a sign that the reward system in your brain is unfolding as it does, and that the think-feel-act cycle is unfolding as it does.

The only problem is no one's ever explained either of these things to you. No one's explained, hey, how do I look under the hood? What happens when I feel compulsive towards something? What happens when I feel on autopilot? How do I actually start to reverse my habits? How do I bring consciousness to what is going on? No one teaches us that.

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So many people, so many people, way more than you might imagine experience shame about their drinking. When you're worried that something is wrong with you, what you'll do is you will hide. But here is the other thing that people do often, they try to prove that there's nothing wrong with them.

So when they're not busy burying what they believe is the source of their shame, they're running around trying to prove, hey, I'm fine, I'm fine, I'm fine, nothing is wrong with me, trying to prove that they can be trusted. And I will tell you this is where most people get very mixed up because how you solve for shame, how you change the habit, how you change your relationship with alcohol, and how you learn to trust yourself has nothing to do with trying to prove anything about who you are, especially, it has nothing to do with trying to prove anything with who you are in relation to alcohol.

I see people do this in two ways, trying to go about proving that they can trust themselves. So first, they either try to be perfect, so they say I'm never going to drink again, I'm going to swear off alcohol forever. Or they try to demonstrate that they can only drink a certain amount. I'll just have one, or I'll drink but I won't get drunk.

So these are the two ways that people try to prove that they can trust themselves. This is how they're trying to get out of shame. I will tell you, I myself went back and forth with these two methods. I didn't really totally understand what I was doing at the time, but I definitely would flip-flop between these two.

Like I'm never going to drink again, or I just have to drink but not get drunk. So many people will do this. But here's the thing; even when I went long periods without drinking, I still didn't trust myself. I still deep down was always waiting for the other shoe to drop.

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And on the flip side, when I was drinking and I had moments where I would stop and I did stop and I limited how much I drank and I didn't get drunk, guess what, I still didn't trust myself. I was still waiting for the other shoe to drop. I was so sure that whatever happened was an anomaly and it wasn't going to last.

And think about it. This happens outside the realm of alcohol. Think about the last time you didn't overeat or you stuck to your schedule or you didn't spend the money. Think about the times you did the thing you said you wanted to do. Did you see that as a reflection that hey, I can trust myself? Or did you say, I don't know, this is some sort of outlier, it's definitely not going to last?

Most people do the latter. Even when you do the thing that you want to do, we're still walking around not trusting ourselves. Why is that? Because we're trying to create trust the wrong way. I was trying to create trust in myself through my actions, and it is not surprising that we go about trying to trust ourselves this way because we are taught, hey, actions speak louder than words.

So obviously if you want to trust yourself, you have to focus on what you do because that's what matters. What you do. But if you're a listener, you know the problem with this approach. What's the problem? Whatever you do or don't do, it doesn't just happen. It's connected to what you're thinking and feeling, much of which for most people is often very unconscious until you start purposefully looking for it.

Really, I believe that that saying should be changed. Instead of actions speak louder than words, it should be actions are created by words. Actions are the result of the words in your mind, the words that you might right now not be fully conscious of. And if you're not conscious of the words leading to your actions, how could you ever possibly change what you're doing? How could you ever possibly change the habit or change your relationship with alcohol? You won't be able to. You'll just stay stuck.

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Now, the good news is that's what the think-feel-act cycle is for. That's what the prefrontal cortex in your higher brain is for. You're not just an animal acting on instinct. You have the ability to watch yourself and what you do and watch what you think and watch your feelings. You have the ability to really be a scientist and be curious and inquisitive about all of this.

You just really need to totally revamp. I mean totally revamp how you see trust and what creates it. Trust is not created by what you do. It's created by what you think. Trust is this feeling of safety and security created by your mind. Not created by what you did in the past. It's not created by what you think you're going to do in the future. It's created by what you're thinking about right now.

It's this confidence in the reliability of yourself. It's a firm belief that you have about who you are. And not drinking for the rest of your life is not going to create trust, nor will drinking but not getting drunk, or drinking and stopping at some predetermined amount. None of these things are going to create trust for you.

The only thing that's going to create trust for you is belief in yourself. You have to stop focusing on what you're doing and start paying attention to what you're thinking. What are your thoughts? What is your hypothesis for why you drank how much you did last night or last weekend or last week or last month or last year? What's your hypothesis?

Answer that question. That's what really matters. Most people really have this so backwards. I had this backwards for a very long time. I really believed that trust was a feeling created by what I did or didn't do. And so I thought okay, I'm going to finally feel safe and secure in myself if I can just prove that I follow all my commitments.

What I didn't understand at the time was that the only reason I didn't follow a commitment, and that's any commitment, not just the commitment about drinking or not drinking, or only drinking a certain amount. The only reason

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you don't follow a commitment in the moment is how you feel when it comes time to honor your commitment.

And honoring a commitment is always, always, always going to be uncomfortable at first because there's going to be a competing desire. That's okay. That's not a problem. That discomfort isn't a problem. That discomfort is the area where all of your growth is.

We always have competing desires. We can go to the gym or we can sleep in. We can stop eating or we can finish what's on your plate. You can say no to a drink or you can say yes and stop feeling restless or bored or judged or awkward or lonely or insecure or angry. Only temporarily of course.

Following your competing desires will always feel uncomfortable at first, and that's okay. Discomfort is the path. It's how you change your relationship with discomfort. That's how you change your relationship with desire and your relationship with yourself.

I really do think that this is the crazy thing, that so many people go long periods of time without drinking and they still believe I can't trust myself. They still experience all this shame, even though they aren't drinking. And that kind of sucks. It sucks to be like, okay, so I had all this shame when I was drinking and now I'm not drinking, and now I still feel shame and I still believe that I can't really trust myself.

Well, who wants that? I didn't want that. For them, people in those situations, not drinking is motivated by fear rather than empowerment. It's motivated by a restriction or a rule that must be followed, rather than a choice that they actually enjoy making.

I want you to think about that. Can you imagine saying no to a drink and fully feel like it was a choice that you enjoyed making? Not enjoyed tomorrow because of how you are going to feel the next day, enjoyed in the

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moment. That is possible. But it's no wonder that people feel resentful and powerless when they say no when not drinking is motivated by fear. Because they're walking around telling themselves, well, the only reason that I'm not drinking is because I can't be trusted.

So that's one end of the spectrum. But then on the other end of the spectrum, you have people who are walking around not trusting themselves and spending all their time and energy trying to prove that they can drink, they can drink in some sort of "normal" way. And they really believe that they have to spend all their time and energy there so that they can finally feel good about themselves.

Now, on this end of the spectrum, people aren't realizing that hey, even if you are successful, if you don't change your thoughts about yourself and why you developed this habit and why it is that you had more alcohol than you wanted to last night, guess what's going to happen? You're still going to be waiting for that other shoe to drop.

No matter what choice you make about alcohol, it has to feel good in the long run. I cannot stress this enough. And at first, when you're teaching your brain a new habit, it's going to feel a little uncomfortable. You're going to be outside of your comfort zone. But in the long run, it must feel good. And if it doesn't right now, that's okay. Don't beat yourself up. Just start asking yourself why.

Regardless of how much alcohol you're consuming. Maybe you're not drinking at all. Maybe you're still drinking. Doesn't matter. Don't pay attention to the amount of alcohol. Just ask yourself why doesn't the choice I'm making right now feel good. What's there for me to learn? What's there for me to discover?

Because if you don't address that, then no matter what decision you make, when it doesn't feel good, it will start to wear away at you. You will start to think this just sucks, I don't want to feel this, I just want to feel good. Oh,

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the lower brain thinks I know what to do, I know how we get immediate instant gratification. I know what's easy. Reach for a drink.

That's what makes saying no feel good. There are really only two things that make saying no feel good. And listen, saying no is important if you decide that you want a life that is alcohol free. You're going to have to say no. But saying no is also important if you decide that you want a life with just less alcohol. You're still going to have to say no.

So saying no is coming either way. But what makes it feel good is this; first, fully believing that saying no is a choice and not a restriction or a life sentence. And two, totally trusting yourself, totally having your back no matter what decision you make with regards to alcohol.

Now, a lot of people will say to me, well, how can I possibly trust myself around alcohol or trust myself to drink if I'm making the decision not to drink? I know that this can be confusing. But again, it's because you are focused on the wrong part of the equation. You're just focused on the action. You're focused on alcohol.

What I want you to do is focus on what is happening in your mind. The way that you can trust yourself no matter what decision you make with regards to alcohol is by really just asking yourself, hey, am I committed to being curious with whatever urges come up, rather than obeying them? Am I committed to dealing with my negative emotions and creating a new relationship with my negative emotions?

Am I able to show up the way that I want? To be outgoing or funny or uninhibited or at ease? Am I able to do that? Am I able to trust myself to examine all the excuses that are bound to come up and be curious with them and see, hey, what am I really after? What do I really need or want in this moment?

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If you're able to trust yourself in these areas, if you're able to trust yourself around urges and emotions and how you want to feel and what your excuses are really about, then of course you will be able to trust yourself around alcohol. And it won't have anything to do with what's in your glass because you'll start to see, oh, it's not about what's in my glass. It's about what's in my mind.

But this work has to happen first. Most people don't trust themselves on any of these fronts. They don't even think about trusting themselves when it comes to their urges or their emotions or how they want to feel or their excuses, or they're trying to fool themselves into believing that no, I do trust myself, I do totally, I trust myself, when really, they don't.

When really, what they're trying to do is just drink in order to prove that they can trust themselves. But how is drinking going to create trust if you're starting out from a place of not trusting yourself? It doesn't make any sense. When you do this work, this is what you start to see. The work to change your relationship with alcohol is the work of creating trust first.

It's not the byproduct of drinking a certain amount or not drinking. Trust is the byproduct of what you believe about yourself. And when you do that, when you focus on that work first, then the decisions that you make around alcohol, they just feel so much easier and cleaner because then it's just a decision that you can evaluate.

And you can ask yourself, hey, do I like my decision? Do I like my reason? Do I like the results that I'm getting? And if not, okay, let's evaluate what's going on. It's no longer this really big weighty decision about I just got to be able to trust myself and this is the way to do it.

You know that you can trust yourself to drink if you trust yourself not to go unconscious. And if you truly deeply believe that how much you or anyone drinks has nothing to do with your character or their character. It says nothing about who the person is.

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You have to get really clean in these two places. If you feel like I don't know, if I had one sip I would slip right back into the habit, then obviously you don't trust yourself. Then obviously you're saying that alcohol is what's running the show. Not you, not the think-feel-act cycle.

If you tell yourself, I don't know, how could I possibly trust myself? Look at all these times in the past where I overdid it, or if you tell yourself well, I'll trust myself when I follow my commitments 100%, then you are going to be running in circles. You are going to be chasing after your tail for a very long time.

Because trust isn't created by the past. It's not created by your past behaviors. Trust is not created by the future. It's not determined by something that you're going to do or not do tomorrow or next week or next month. Trust is only ever available to you in the present moment.

It's something that you create by knowing I'm committed to being conscious about what I'm doing and my desire. And if I slip into unconsciousness at any point, I will go back and I will bring consciousness to what happened. I won't bury my head in the sand, I won't pretend it didn't happen, I won't beat myself up, I won't try to forget it, I won't rely on old stories to explain what happened. I won't chalk it up to my personality or my brain or my genetics because I will know that it's just the think-feel-act cycle at work.

And I will know that it's just something that I couldn't see in that moment, and I will dig out the most powerful tool in my arsenal. I will dig out curiosity because I know that that will always help me to find what I can't yet see. Because there's always something to learn no matter what happens.

There's always something to understand about the habit that you couldn't see before. And then you will know that trusting yourself has nothing to do with alcohol. It's not about never drinking again, it's not about only drinking a certain amount. It's about confidently knowing how you will show up with yourself no matter what.

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And then honestly, there's so much freedom in that. You don't have to be perfect. You don't have to prove that you can drink a certain amount. These things won't and can't and don't prove anything about you. They don't demonstrate anything about you.

All you need to do is create this firm faith and reliability in yourself by returning to the one thing that you can always count on. The one thing that will always stay constant and the one thing that always explains the habit. Think, feel, act. 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.