

Ep #203: Allowing Urges



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With Your Host

Rachel Hart

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #203: Allowing Urges

You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 203.

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 my friends. We are talking about allowing urges today. This is a favorite topic of mine on the podcast, talking about urges. And we will never stop talking about urges because there is so much for you to learn. Really getting curious about your urges is how you start to shift the habit.

They have so much information for you. Most times we don't want to look, we don't want to pay attention. We just want the urges to go away, and you miss this opportunity to understand how is the habit of drinking showing up in your unique situation?

When it comes to allowing the urge to drink, letting it be there without acting on it, what I want you to know is that this is a skill, once you master it, that you can apply to every area of your life. That's why doing this work is so powerful.

You're not just learning how to change the habit of drinking. You're learning how to manage your mind. You're learning how to manage all of your urges. And you know what? When you do this with alcohol, all of the other urges kind of pale in comparison. The urges you have to eat or to spend or to procrastinate, they're a lot less of a big deal because those urges don't have as strong a reward.

They still have a reward associated with them, but it's not as strong. So that's why I think when you start this work with alcohol, it's like lifting heavy weights. It makes you so strong. Now, I've been talking about the pillars of

Ep #203: Allowing Urges

habit change because when you sign up for the 30-day challenge with me, these pillars are something that I walk you through. They're so essential.

They really are the key to changing your desire to drink and your relationship with alcohol because again, it's not just about saying no for a set period of time. You can say no and your desire can completely be intact. It's about using that time to learn, hey, how is this habit working? What's actually fueling my desire and how do I start to change it?

There's a huge difference there. And so the four pillars that I focus on for habit change are commitment, urges, habits, really understanding how habits work in the brain, and the self-coaching model. So this is how we take the think-feel-act cycle that I'm always talking to you about on the podcast and actually put it to work, actually use it as a tool.

So the last episode I talked about commitment and the biggest misunderstanding about commitment. And if you haven't gone and listened to that, I want you to make sure you do. Because understanding the commitment piece, it really does help you with understanding why it is you keep saying yes to your urge to drink, which PS, has nothing to do with who you are as a person. It has to do with your willingness to experience what is happening.

Now, I do want to also remind you that these four pillars to habit change, no one masters them in 30 days. This is a lifelong process. This is like going to the gym and lifting weights. These are muscles that need to be worked out regularly. Now, this does not mean when I say that it's a lifelong process that it's like, you have to be thinking about drinking for the rest of your life. No, not at all. Or that you're going to be dealing with your desire for the rest of your life. No, not at all.

What I mean is that you're always going to learn new levels to this. So you can take this work and learn it and master it around changing the habit of drinking, and then you're going to find new ways and new things that you

Ep #203: Allowing Urges

didn't see before, or new ways that commitment or urges or how your brain works or the model shows up differently if you apply it to food or you apply it to your goals or you apply it to losing weight.

So just that there's always something for you to work on. And that's why I actually give people the opportunity to do more than just the 30-day challenge with me, so that they can do the advanced work and keep coming back to these pillars over and over again. I still come back to these pillars all the time in my own life because they really are the foundation for managing your mind.

So in this episode, we're going to talk about the second pillar, which is all about urges. Now, I go into much more depth inside the challenge, but I want to talk to you today about really what it means to allow an urge and why we don't want to allow urges, why we want our urges to go away.

When I say allow, what I mean is to let the urge be there without acting on it. So imagine that this desire bubbles up inside of you and you just let it be. Just look at it. You watch it, you get curious about it, you don't go to war with it. You don't try to wrestle it into submission because that's exhausting. When I talk about how willpower is not a long-term solution, this is why.

Because when you think that the solution is to go to war with your urges, it just is not going to last. There are going to be days when you're too tired, you're too upset, you're running on fumes, and going to war with your urges is just not going to be appealing. But you also don't need to. You can save all that energy. You can save all of the energy that you're using to go to battle and just start being curious.

Now, the other reason why you don't want to go to war with your urges, not just because willpower is not a long-term solution, but because when you do that, you give the urge all of your power. I want you to think about that. It's like you hand all of your power over to the urge and you're like, oh, you're the one running the show.

Ep #203: Allowing Urges

Suddenly, the urge becomes the bad guy. It becomes the villain and you're the victim, and you have to make it go away or else. I know when people are stuck in that kind of dynamic, when I hear them talking a lot about how they just want the urges to go away and when are the urges going to go away and when are they going to leave, because then you know, oh, you're giving the urge a lot of power.

The urge is not a villain. It's not a bad guy. It's a harmless sensation in your body. And when you go to war with it, when you're trying to wrestle it into submission, you're giving away so much of your power because you know what, the urge cannot make you drink. There is the urge and then there is the decision that you make, and those two things are not one and the same.

But when you go to war with it, when you decide that it has all this power, what you're essentially doing is saying no, the urge makes the decision, and that's just not how it works. The urge cannot make you do anything without your consent. This is true for alcohol, it's true for food, it's true for every urge that you have.

And I think it's useful sometimes to take this out of the realm of alcohol and think about other urges that you have in your life. Maybe the urge to scream or the urge to hit someone. I know that I have certainly had these urges in my life.

We have these urges and we don't act on them, and they can feel quite strong sometimes when you have the urge to scream or the urge to hit someone. But you don't do it. Now listen, I'm going to be honest, I have acted on both of those before. But for the majority of people and the majority of my life, I do not act on them.

We're just like oh, no, I'm not going to scream right now, I'm not going to punch this person, I'm not going to punch this wall. We're not like, oh my god, go away, go away, go away, go away urge, this is terrible. Because

Ep #203: Allowing Urges

imagine what would happen if you were so freaked out about it as opposed to like, oh, I can just decide not to scream, I can just decide not to hit a person.

If you were so freaked out about it, it would have all this power over you. You'd be nervous about like, oh god, is it going to appear? Is it going to come back tonight or this evening or when I talk to this person?

Listen, I know it's kind of funny to think about it this way, but I think it's really powerful to understand we're not going around being like, gosh, I hope that the urge to scream doesn't appear. I hope that the urge to hit someone doesn't appear.

Because we know we can handle it. We know we've got it covered. I'm not moving through life, I don't think most people are moving through life like, okay, I don't know if this urge is going to happen and I'm definitely just going to scream and start hitting people. We learn how to manage that.

But this is not what we're taught around the urge to drink. We're taught like, oh god, it's here, I got to say yes. So we end up treating the urge to drink like it's the big bad wolf and it becomes this thing, they're like, oh gosh, don't appear, don't appear, I don't want you to be here.

But when you never want the urge to appear, when you're afraid of it coming, when you're thinking about five o'clock tonight like, I hope it's not there, then it has so much power over you, instead of, hey, why is it there? What's going on? What am I really desiring? What do I really want right now? What does the urge have to tell me?

We miss out on all that information when we're just afraid of it appearing. You really can think of it this way. Urges aren't a problem until you decide to say no. It's not uncomfortable to want a drink and then go drink. That time in between wanting the drink, where the urge appears, and then drinking, it's not uncomfortable. In fact, it's pretty enjoyable.

Ep #203: Allowing Urges

Think about it. If you've already decided that you're going to say yes to the urge and you're all in with saying yes, you're not hemming and hawing, but you're all in, you're like yes, I'm doing this, then from the moment the urge appears to the moment you say yes to it, that experience is pretty enjoyable. A lot of times pretty excited and kind of giddy.

The urge doesn't become uncomfortable until you decide to say no. And especially the way in which you say no, which means when you start to think about it, I know this is a little mind-bending, the urge is not really the problem. It's your thought about the urge that's the problem.

Because if the urge is enjoyable when you have the thought yeah, I'm going to go do that, then it's not the urge. It's what you are thinking about it. The urge is just an emotion. It's just driving you to go do something. That's what desire is. Go drink, go eat, go do this. That's not uncomfortable.

What's uncomfortable is what happens next in your brain and how you handle it. This is the part of the process that is usually so unconscious for people. We have it so mixed up that we don't see that these two parts are separate.

We don't understand that the urge itself is separate from then our experience of the urge. I think it's really important to remind yourself that urges are normal. I did not know this for a long time. I thought that urges were totally abnormal and that I had an abnormal amount of them. There were too many and too strong and too powerful.

And they had too much power over me. I believed that for a long time, that my urges just had so much power over me. What I didn't understand was that not only were urges normal, but that I was creating my experience of the urge. And that experience was then dictating what was happening next.

Because all humans have urges. All of them. It is hardwired into our DNA to go seek out pleasure, and for the brain to go remember where pleasure is,

Ep #203: Allowing Urges

and for us to create habits around seeking out pleasure. That is hardwired into all of our DNA. It's how humans learned how to survive.

So an emotion intensely driving you to go do something, to go get pleasure, that's not a problem. That's how the brain works. The problem is what happens next, the problem is the experience of the urge once it appears, and the experience of the urge once we decide that we want to change the habit.

That's where we start getting into trouble. That's where things actually start feeling difficult. Because if you think oh, great, I'm going to go get that, I'm going to go have that glass of wine, I'm going to go eat that chocolate bar, you feel excited. But if you think oh god, no, no, no, no, what's going to happen? You're going to feel restricted.

If you think, oh my god, go away, I hate this, this is too much, you're going to feel powerless. But if you think, I wonder why that urge is here, I wonder what's really going on, I wonder how I'm actually feeling, I wonder what I actually want, then you create curiosity for yourself.

The experience is created by what happens after the urge appears. That's what most people are entirely unconscious to before they start doing this work. And here's the second piece. An urge that you don't answer, that you don't say yes to, it's still not a big deal.

Even if your brain was expecting a reward, even if you always drink when it's five o'clock or every time you go to your favorite restaurant or every time you see this person, even if your brain is expecting the reward and the urge appears and you decide that you don't want to obey it, it's not a big deal at all.

And the reason is because you don't need alcohol. No human needs it. You can go your entire life and never have a drink and be totally fine. Now, this is just to say that alcohol is entirely optional. You can choose whether or

Ep #203: Allowing Urges

not you drink. It's not like water, it's not like food, that you have to have it. This is really the difference between wants and needs, but again, often this just gets so kind of enmeshed together that we don't see any difference. It's like I need it all.

We often treat the urge to drink like a need when it's not a need in the least. I know that I did. I definitely treated it like it was a need. I had to have it. It was really important. My language around it was so urgent. It was so intense.

But really, there is no need with alcohol. There is no need for you to have alcohol unless you are severely addicted and your body goes into withdrawal without it. There is no need there. So you have to start to dial down the experience that is just automatically happening in your brain.

And part of that dialing down is just labeling what is happening. And you can start to label what is happening by paying attention to your body. And this is where I introduce people to the idea of feeling restless. When I say no to an urge, I know I'm going to feel a little restless and that makes sense.

Because think about it. When you feel restless, you don't want to be still. You want to get up and move. You want to go do something. And remember, the urge is all about you doing something. So of course, when you say no to the urge, a little restlessness is going to appear and that's okay.

What's going to happen is you're going to get better at handling restlessness. You're going to go to the restlessness gym. That was a tongue twister. I can't help but think every time I say restless of a soap opera I used to watch when I was young called The Young and The Restless.

Ep #203: Allowing Urges

But it's like yes, when we're young, we're more restless. We have to learn the skill, which is a skill we learn as we grow up of how to manage our restlessness. And the fact of the matter is I think a lot of us just really aren't taught how to do it. I really wasn't.

But once you start to acknowledge, you know what, yeah, we're restless sometimes, and that's okay, that's just very human, all of a sudden, you start to label what is happening that dials down the experience of what is unfolding inside of you.

Now, your restlessness will intensify and it will get worse, depending on what you are thinking about the urge. This is where we really need to separate out the urge itself from what you are making it mean. Your experience of the urge is separate. So if you think, oh god, oh no, I hate this, I can't do it, make it go away, guess what? It's going to increase your restlessness.

I call this pancaking emotions. I think of it like stacking one emotion on top of another, like a stack of pancakes. So first there is your urge, first there is your desire to drink or your desire to eat. That's the first one. And then you have a little bit of restlessness in your body because you're deciding, okay, I'm not going to obey it, I'm not going to say yes.

Okay, no big deal. But what happens is then we start adding, we start pancaking - is that a verb? Not really, but we'll use it as one. We start pancaking on all these additional emotions. So we have that desire and we're feeling a little restless, but now we're also kind of angry, or annoyed, we're feeling some pity for ourselves.

Maybe we feel overwhelmed or defeated or hopeless or ashamed or embarrassed. All of a sudden, you have a stack of pancakes that is much, much taller. The ability to feel restless and not drink is how you change the habit. You have to go through this.

Ep #203: Allowing Urges

A lot of people want to skip this. They just want to make the decision not to drink and feel nothing. You have to go through the restlessness to teach your brain it's not a big deal. Because the more that your brain learns, oh, sometimes I feel restless when I say no to my urges, but that doesn't mean then I go have a drink, it doesn't mean then I go eat something, it just means I deal with the restlessness, that's how your brain learns to settle itself.

That's how you start to extinguish your desire. You choose the restlessness on purpose but you choose it with curiosity. Because if you're going to choose the opposite, which is I can never deal with restlessness, I must say yes to the urge, guess what's going to happen? Your brain's going to be like, oh, every time we have an urge she says yes and I like that reward, let's have more urges, let's make the experience of it worse when she says no.

That's why you start to have more and more desire. Because you haven't learned how to handle the restlessness. But if you can choose it and choose it with curiosity and understand, hey, my experience of this moment is not just because I had an urge and I'm saying no to it, it's because of everything that's happening in my mind, all those thoughts that previously were unconscious, all of a sudden, you just have this amazing wealth of information that you get to work with to start changing the habit.

Because saying no, it really is only a small piece of the puzzle. The real work when it comes to dismantling a habit, the real work is finding all of the thoughts that have been underneath it. All of the thoughts that have been kind of holding the structure of the habit in place.

So you can start to notice if you're making your own experience of it worse, and when you see that you're making your own experience of it worse, you realize, oh gosh, it's not the urge. It's me. I've been adding on these unnecessary emotions and then guess what? All of a sudden you have so much power because you see, oh, I'm creating a lot of my discomfort.

Ep #203: Allowing Urges

And listen, when you can handle an urge, when you can handle restlessness, all your other negative emotions become so much easier. This is why this work can so radically transform your life. Allowing urges means not obeying the urge, so you aren't reacting, you aren't jumping up and saying yes and rushing to the fridge, getting yourself a drink.

But you also aren't fighting it. You're not using willpower or distraction or going to war trying to occupy yourself or believing that you just need to distract your way out of it. It means that you're being curious with what is happening while still saying no.

You're opening up to the experience. You're allowing it to unfold. And you know what, this is what freaks people out at first. Why would I want to open up to the experience of discomfort or restlessness? Why would I want to open to my urges? But the answer is because then you become better at handling them. And when you're better at handling your urges, that's when you become unstoppable.

Because then all of the urges you have suddenly aren't such a big deal. Changing the habit requires feeling restless. You cannot skip this step. And so this is what we do inside the 30-day challenge. We start collecting data on the urges that we allow. What were we doing? Who were we with? What time was it? What were we thinking? What were we feeling?

It's like putting on your lab coat and starting to say hey, how does my brain work? Because how the habit unfolded in my life, how it's unfolding in your life, how it's unfolding in another person's life can look completely different. So you can't just approach it with this one-size-fits-all solution.

I will tell you, it is always so profound when someone joins the 30-day challenge and they get on a coaching call with me and they say, "I'm not having any urges." It's such a powerful moment because they expected that they were going to have so many.

Ep #203: Allowing Urges

And so we always just get curious and start asking questions. Okay, so what is your thought about taking a break? What is your thought about doing this challenge? And invariably, someone will say, oh yeah, I'm just all in, I'm doing it no matter what, and suddenly they start to see how powerful their thoughts are.

They see that when they make a firm decision, when they have a thought that creates determination that's unwavering, then their urges are not really a big deal. They're not spending all this time going back and forth and flip-flopping and wavering. They're not pancaking on all these additional emotions.

But it's so fascinating because people often come in this moment and they think, oh my gosh, I'm doing something wrong, I'm supposed to have a million urges. Except in that moment, they've seen something so powerful, which is wow, when I make a decision that creates an emotion that is really strong inside of me, my urges really aren't a big deal.

You start to notice patterns. That's what allowing urges is all about. Because some people will have that experience, other people will come in and they're just having urges left and right. One experience isn't good and the other experience isn't bad. It's just starting to show you patterns. It's starting to reveal to you what the habit looks like.

So your urges can be loud, they can be intense, they can be quiet, they can be fleeting. Allowing an urge is just being present with whatever is happening in your mind and your body. It's opening up to the experience. Not adding to the experience, not pancaking negative emotions on top of it. Just opening up to what is unfolding.

And the reason to do this, the reason to invite the urges in and to invite in the restlessness is because they have the information you need to change the habit. And so that's what you do when you allow an urge. You just say tell me everything. I'm here to listen, urge. Everything you have to tell me,

Ep #203: Allowing Urges

everything that's going on, every excuse, every emotion, every everything, tell me all of it.

That intense interest in the urge, it creates intimacy with yourself and that intimacy with yourself is what you use to change the habit. Allowing urges. If you can start to practice this, you'll start to change everything. 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.