

## Ep #216: When Your Brain Is the Enemy



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With Your Host

**Rachel Hart**

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## Ep #216: When Your Brain Is the Enemy

You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 216.

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're talking about the brain today, which I talk about a lot on the podcast, but this episode is going to have a little bit of a different focus. So of course, the habit of drinking was created by the brain and that habit resides in your unconscious brain.

So if you want to change your drinking, you have to understand how your brain works, which is why I spend so much time discussing this topic. Why I talk about the habit cycle and how the brain seeks out rewards and how your thoughts create your desire, and the difference between your lower brain and your higher brain.

All of this of how the brain works, it matters a ton. But today, I want to kind of step beyond the mechanics and really show you another aspect that you have to pay attention to if you want to change the habit, and that is the relationship that you have with your brain, which listen, I know that sounds a little weird.

I know thinking about I have a relationship with my brain, we don't think about that. Normal people don't walk around thinking about being in relationship with their brain, but you are. Even if you don't know it. And if your relationship with your brain stinks, it's going to be very hard to change the habit of drinking.

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Because you need your brain on your side in order to change the habit. You need to see your brain as an ally in the process. A tool that you can use. Not the enemy. Not the thing that's holding you back.

And I will tell you, in my own journey with my relationship with alcohol, I often thought of my brain as the enemy. So I'd wake up after a night of drinking too much and I'd think, "Oh my god, why does this keep happening? I have the best of intentions; I had a plan." And I would feel like my brain had let me down.

Sometimes I would even feel kind of betrayed by my brain. I talk about this a lot but I sometimes would think that I have lost the brain lottery. The day that they had been handing out brains, I was given a dud. I was so sure that other people, their brain just had this magical off switch when it came to drinking and mine was missing that off switch.

It was so frustrating. And so this is what I really want to delve in with you today, how to identify what kind of relationship you have with your brain, what to do if you find yourself in kind of an antagonistic relationship, and also how to change it so you can start feeling like, hey, this brain of mine, it's an asset, it's a tool, I can use it, it can help me.

Because if you have an antagonistic relationship, you've got to work on that first before change is going to be possible. Otherwise, I guarantee you're going to get stuck. So let's just start by understanding what a relationship is. It's really a simple question but most people have no idea.

A relationship is simply your emotional connection to someone or something. It's how you feel towards a person or an object, which of course is created by what you think because our thoughts create our feelings. So you can have a relationship with your partner, or your family, but you can also have a relationship with yourself and your body and with food, and of course, you can have a relationship with alcohol.

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But today, we're going to talk about your relationship with your brain. So you have a human brain. We all do. For most adults, it weighs about three pounds, which is a tiny, tiny fraction of your overall body weight. Yet, 20% of your body's energy is directed to your brain.

And by the way, that brain of yours, that prefrontal cortex, your higher brain doesn't reach full maturity until you're 25, which is well beyond when most people start drinking. It was well beyond the point for me. I started drinking when I was 17.

So your prefrontal cortex, that part of you that is responsible for impulse control, it hasn't even fully developed by the time that most people are introduced to alcohol. So you've got this concentrated reward that your lower brain is really going to like, and you've got this prefrontal cortex that hasn't even fully finished developing. The part of you that actually can really help you with impulse control and think about the costs and the benefits and your judgment and the pros and the cons. It's not even fully developed.

Now, inside your brain, you have approximately 100 billion neurons, which is a lot. Basically, these are just the cells that transmit information. But I want you to think about it this way. There are as many cells, as many neurons in your brain transmitting information as there are stars in the milky way galaxy.

It's so vast. And it's built this way because the brain is sending and receiving a huge amount of information all the time. There is a lot happening in there. And when we start to look at how powerful the brain is and how much information is in there and how many neurons are in there, it can start to feel overwhelming.

Like, oh my gosh, how am I even possibly going to do this? But that's why we use the framework of the think-feel-act cycle. That's why you need to start to apply a framework to your mind, to your thinking, to what's

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happening inside your brain. Because that framework, it gives you something that you can always go back to so you don't need to get overwhelmed.

Because unless you have the information in your brain that is connected to the habit of drinking and connected to your relationship with alcohol, that habit is always going to stay unconscious. You have to work it proactively starting to find it. That's what the think-feel-act cycle is about.

It's about giving you a framework that you can always come back to, but a framework that's going to help make known to you what has been invisible up until this point. So you've got this brain, it's pretty small but it uses a lot of energy, and it's got a vast amount of information in there.

But here's the thing; you aren't your brain. Which again, I know this seems strange to say, but too often we really over-identify with the brain as if it represents who we are. So when we look at a habit that we don't like, so maybe you find yourself drinking too much or drinking too often, or maybe you don't even want to be drinking at all, what happens is we look at the habit that we don't like and then we start to over-identify with the brain.

So we start to say, "Well, the reason that I'm doing this is because of my brain." And so we start to use the quantity and frequency with which we're consuming alcohol or food or spending money or whatever, we start to make that mean something about who we are.

So I used to think to myself, "I don't know, I think I'm an all or nothing person. Maybe I have an addictive personality. I think I'm missing an off switch because my brain always seems to think that more is better." All of these explanations blamed me. And by extension, my brain.

So often saw my brain as the problem. My brain was what made me an all or nothing person. My brain was programmed with this addictive personality that I didn't want to have. My brain was missing an off switch that I needed

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to say no. So I was really often blaming my brain and seeing my brain at fault for having this habit that wasn't serving me.

Now, the problem with blaming my brain was that it's totally demoralizing because well, what are you going to do? You can't get a brain transplant. You can't swap it out for a new one. If my brain was to blame for why I drank the way I did, how was I ever going to change the habit? That's why I felt so demoralized when I would look at my brain and I would blame it for what happened the night before.

And this is why I want you to think about the kind of relationship you have with your brain. Because just starting to put it in these terms will help you start to see it as separate. When you think, "Oh, I have a relationship with my brain," all of a sudden, it's separate from you.

There's me and then there's my brain. There's you and then there's your brain. These two things are not one and the same. It may even help you to think there's my brain, that part of me that fires neurons, that generates the thoughts, and that's the mechanical process, and then there's another part of me that can watch this mechanical process in action. It can watch the habit unfold.

You can watch yourself think. You can notice the thoughts and what they feel like in your body. You can notice how you respond. The actions that you take. You can use this part of you that is separate from your brain to actually start to change the habit.

I really spent a long time walking around feeling very helpless by this brain that I didn't like and this brain that wasn't working the way I wanted it to. Because no one had taught me that, hey, you're not your brain. There's a part of you that is separate. There's a part of you that can watch all of this unfolding.

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And it's a little bit like when people say, "I didn't even plan to drink, it just happened," or, "Before I knew it, I just had poured another glass or ordered another round." When you have a habit, it can feel like your drinking is just happening. It can feel like well, my brain is just running the show and it's happening so fast I don't even know what's going on.

But you are able to witness what's going on. You're able to actually slow it down by using that think-feel-act cycle, by starting to apply, hey listen, my actions don't just happen out of the blue. There's always a thought and a feeling connected to my decision to drink, so what is that thought? What is that feeling? That's how you start to slow it down.

So then really the question is okay, so what kind of relationship do you have right now with your brain? Do you like it? Do you think that it's a useful tool that you can rely on or do you think, "Ugh, I don't know, it's kind of broken, it needs to be fixed?" Do you wish that it was different? That it was smarter or not so forgetful? Do you feel like it's working against you? Do you say like, "I don't know, I'm just lazy, it's irrational, it's too foggy, it's never satisfied, it's always wanting more?"

I really encourage you to write this all down. Get your thoughts down on paper because all of these thoughts make up your relationship with your brain. And I will tell you, most of my clients find that the relationship that they have is not so good. It's not a great relationship and that's a big part of the problem. That's why they're struggling to change their drinking.

You've got to get these thoughts down on paper so that you can see this is the relationship that I have with my brain. Because if it isn't good, it's going to feel bad. You might feel demoralized, you might feel frustrated, you might feel held hostage by this brain that isn't functioning the way you want it to. You might feel kind of cheated by your brain. And then what?

Then people will feel so stuck. But when you're trying to change the habit and you're feeling demoralized or frustrated or held hostage or cheated, it's

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going to be that much harder. This is the problem when you're in an antagonistic relationship with your brain. Because it really is the most powerful tool at your disposal, and yet you're kind of giving it the side-eye. That's what I was doing. Kind of like, ugh, I don't really like you.

People will start from a place of I'm never going to be able to do this, I'm never going to be able to change my drinking because my brain is the problem. You end up feeling defeated ahead of time before you've even started the process of change.

And now, on the flip side, a lot of people will say, "Well listen, I'll like my brain when it starts behaving. When I stop having all this desire to drink, when I stop having all these urges, when I stop overindulging, then I will like my brain."

But that's like trying to hate yourself thin in order to be happy. It doesn't work. It does not work to say I'm going to dislike this thing until it changes. It doesn't work with your body, it doesn't work with your drinking, it doesn't work with your job, it doesn't work with anything in life.

Because what happens? I mean, take it out of the context of alcohol. You can lose weight and then you'll just turn around and find, hey, that didn't magically fix things. Or you can quit your job and turn around and be like, hey, I'm still kind of unsatisfied. And you can also stop drinking and feel unhappy and feel like you're missing out and still have all this desire.

You have to change what your brain thinks about first. You have to work first on what's happening in the brain, rather than saying no, I'll like it when it behaves. You have to change how it's judging you and judging your decisions and your life and how much you drank last night and your body and other people. That's where you have to focus.

All of those thoughts that you have unconsciously practiced over and over again, they don't just change because you stop drinking or you lost weight



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or you changed jobs. Those thoughts will still be there because your brain, it likes to practice and it likes to do what it's good at. And if you practice these negative thoughts over and over again, it doesn't matter if your circumstances change. Your brain's just going to say, well, I'm good at practicing this.

You have to actively start to do the work of learning how to practice new thoughts. Positive thinking doesn't work, but also telling yourself that alcohol is toxic or poison or bad for you, I think that doesn't work either. What works is changing your relationship with your brain. How you view it.

And you can't go from feeling demoralized by it or betrayed by it or held hostage by it to just loving it overnight and thinking that it's an amazing tool. I mean, that is the place where I want you to ultimately get to, but you're not going to be able to do that just by snapping your fingers. But you can start to learn how to change it.

And for me, once I really recognized, oh, I don't have such a great relationship with my brain, I don't like it so much, for me, how I started to shift that relationship was just acknowledging the lack of information that I had about this tool, that I had about my own brain.

I really was not taught anything about my brain in school. With maybe the exception of a chapter in my 10th grade biology textbook, I really didn't learn anything about it. I certainly didn't learn about habits or the think-feel-act cycle, or the different functions of the lower and higher brain and their different desires. I didn't learn about the reward system or how a highly concentrated pleasure like alcohol would interact with it.

I really had zero education about my brain. Yet I was quick to always think it's just not working the way that it should. And I would think this well before I started drinking, well before alcohol was introduced into my life. I would blame my brain for not being smart enough, for being too lazy, or never sticking with something, or being too weird or too awkward or too fearful.

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Just going back to this place of telling myself, hey you know what, I'm just learning about my brain right now, I'm just starting to understand this topic that no one has ever taught me about, I'm starting to understand how it works, and I'm starting to understand how to observe it in action. Again, something no one ever showed me how to do.

That helped me. Just shifting to those thoughts about what I was learning, what I was starting to understand, what I was practicing, that helped me get to a place of curiosity and exploration, instead of constantly feeling like it's just not working. It's working against me; it's holding me hostage.

And then I had to really learn to be compassionate when my brain had all this desire, when my brain had these urges. This is my brain wanting a drink, this is my brain wanting chocolate, this is my brain being fearful, this is my brain telling me I can't figure something out. Instead of looking at it as ugh, why is my brain like this? Why do I always go here? I started to look at it with compassion.

Just say, oh that's just a pattern. Of course, you want to drink right now because you taught your brain that pouring a drink was the quickest way to relax. Of course, you want chocolate right now because you taught your brain that food was how you feel better. Of course, you're fearful because your brain was designed to spot the negatives in the environment and no one ever taught you how to question that. Of course, you believe you can't figure it out because the moment you believe that it's impossible for you, you stop taking action. And that lower brain loves to save energy.

So instead of using these moments for judgment or another sign of how my brain was just too messed up, I started to use these moments to practice observation and compassion, and started to recognize all the things I hadn't been taught and all the things I was in the process of learning.

Because your brain is such a powerful asset to change your drinking, but only if you see it as one. Only if you see it as an asset and a tool that can

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help you and you can use. It's how you learn impulse control, it's how you learn to sit with urges, it's how you learn how to uncover the upside of the habit.

It's how you decide the relationship you want to have with alcohol and then start to practice that. But if you don't see your brain as an asset, if you feel like it's working against you, you're always going to be in this struggle. So that's what I really want to encourage everyone today to acknowledge you're in a relationship with your brain whether or not you knew it before today's episode.

So let's figure out what that relationship is. Is it serving you? And if it's not, part of what I talked about on this episode is what can start to help you shift, start to actually have a relationship that will benefit you and serve you so that you can use your brain to actually change the things in your life that you want to change, instead of what we are all really kind of taught to do, which is just let it run on autopilot.

Autopilot's not always that great, especially when it comes to habits that aren't serving you. Alright everyone, 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](https://RachelHart.com/join) and start your transformation today.

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