

Ep #224: Why You Shouldn't Focus on Counting Days



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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

Ep #224: Why You Shouldn't Focus on Counting Days

You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 224.

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.

Alright, well welcome back, everyone. So, last week we talked about the fact that you don't need to decide that you're never going to drink for the rest of your life even right now, if you're drinking more than you want to, even right now if you're struggling to say no, you don't have to make a decision for the rest of your life.

You can if you want to, if it feels exciting and empowering. But by no means do you have to make that decision. And in fact, being told that you have to make a decision for the rest of your life, it can actually get in the way of progress.

And today, we're actually going to tackle another really deep-seated belief. We're going to tackle the idea that progress in changing the habit is reflected in how many days you've gone without drinking. So, this idea that you need to count your days of not drinking and that's what matters most. And, by the way, if you do drink after a period of not drinking, you need to start over. You need to go back to counting from day one.

Now, I really do believe that this message causes so much harm than help for people. And not only that. It doesn't actually reflect how habit change works in the brain. So, everything that I'm talking about today, the problems with counting days, the problems of fixating on a streak, it applies for changing your relationship with alcohol, but it really applies for everything in your life.

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

Ep #224: Why You Shouldn't Focus on Counting Days

It's true when it comes to sticking to your diet. It's true when it comes to adopting a new workout routine, when you want to start meditating regularly, any habit that you are trying to cultivate or trying to break, what I'm teaching you today about the streak and why you don't need to count days, it's true for all of it. Focusing on the streak is often more harmful than helpful.

And I know that some of you listening right now are like, "Wait a minute. I like it when I have a streak. It feels good when I cross days off a calendar. It's good to know that I've done something for a month or two months or three months or a year. It's motivation. I feel determined to keep going because I don't want to break the streak."

And I really get it because I used to be this way too. I used to be really motivated by the streak, by how many days I had done something. But I will tell you this; I was also very upset when I broke a streak. And not just for drinking, but for lots of things in my life.

When I broke a streak – and let me tell you, the chances of doing this are very high for all of you. It's going to happen at some point in your life because we're humans. We're not robots. When I broke a streak, I would feel like, "Well, there goes all my hard work out the window."

I would use it as evidence that I never stuck to things, that I would never follow through. I would throw myself a little pity party. And because of this, when I broke a streak, I was really slow to get back on the horse. I usually slid into days or weeks or months of saying, "Well, I don't know, that didn't work. I failed again so I might as well pour a drink. I might as well give myself permission to eat as much as I want, even if I feel sick afterwards."

I would decide, "There's no point in going to the gym because look at what I did last week." I would often fall right back into the very habit that I was trying to change. And I think part of this has to do with how we define the word streak.

Ep #224: Why You Shouldn't Focus on Counting Days

And there are lots of definitions if you go to look this up online. You will find a lot. But I found one definition that I think really sums up why we feel so attached to having a streak, why we love to count consecutive days that we have done something.

So, the definition I found for a streak was, "A continuous period of specified success... A continuous period of specified success." We have been sold this idea that the streak is a reflection of our success. So, of course we feel attached to it.

We want to keep feeling successful. And it's no wonder then that we feel bad when we break a streak because if the streak is a reflection of our success, then breaking the streak is a reflection of our failure. When in reality, that isn't true.

A consecutive number of days that you have done something has no meaning. It is meaningless until the human brain attaches a story to it, until we make it mean something. That's how the think-feel-act cycle works. The streak has no meaning until your brain gives it meaning.

And because we have been conditioned to believe that a streak is a reflection of our success, most people incorrectly attach that meaning to both the streak and breaking the streak.

So, this is how it really works. We end up counting up how many days in a row that we've said no to a drink or laced up our shoes and gone for a run, or sat on the mat and meditated or avoided eating sugar.

So, we count up how many days we've done this in a row. And we make the number of consecutive days mean something about our progress. We're not doing this consciously, but this is happening in your brain. When in reality, the consecutive number of days that you have done something in a row is not a reflection of your progress. It's a reflection of a period of time. And time alone is not powerful enough to change the habit.

Ep #224: Why You Shouldn't Focus on Counting Days

This is why in my early 20s – and I talk about this a lot on the podcast – in my early 20s, I stopped drinking for almost a full year. And then you know what I did? I immediately picked up right where I left off, right back where I left off.

Now, did taking a year off from drinking give my mind and body a break from alcohol? Sure. But you know what? I was also smoking a lot more and I was eating a lot more.

Did taking a year off help me kind of have a clean slate to really observe the habit? Yeah, it did. But I still had no idea why I had so much desire. I didn't understand how habits form. I didn't understand how the brain works. And I certainly didn't know anything about the think-feel-act cycle or how to challenge my thoughts.

I thought that I was saying no to a drink back then because I had to. And all the while, I was feeling like I would never be normal, I would never fit in, I would always feel like I was missing out. That was not a great place to be in.

Time alone cannot change a habit. Time helps. Time can be extremely helpful, but it's not a magic pill. That's why you can't just cross days off a calendar and expect that you've retrained your brain. You need time plus awareness. That is what most people are missing; the awareness piece.

You can cross all the days off your calendar that you want and you can remain completely unaware of how the habit works, how the think-feel-act cycle works, and how to actually create change.

The streak means nothing about your progress because progress is just your forward momentum towards a goal. And that forward movement, it doesn't have to happen continuously. It doesn't have to happen in a straight line. That line doesn't have to be unbroken in order for you to make progress. You just have to keep heading in the right direction.

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

Ep #224: Why You Shouldn't Focus on Counting Days

And I will tell you this. I stole this from my husband because he says it all the time. He'll say, "I think this is trending in the right direction." And I remember when I met him, I was like, "Who talks like this? Trending in the right direction. What are you talking about?" But he says it all the time because it's normal for him because he spends his days for work looking at numbers and looking at charts and looking at graphs and paying attention to trends.

But I don't do that. I don't speak in terms of graphs and charts and trends. And so, when he would say to me, "I think we're trending in the right direction," it sounded really funny. It sounded kind of weird.

But I think the point is that looking at an overall trend can be so useful, to just ask yourself, am I headed in the right direction? Because when you're looking at the trend, it doesn't have anything to do with the consecutive number of days.

Now, when I used to break a streak, I would stop heading in the right direction in that moment. But not because I broke the streak. I stopped heading in the right direction because I believed, with every ounce of me, I believed that breaking a streak meant I had failed. And because I believed that story, then of course, the think-feel-act cycle just started to unfold. I would feel a lot of shame and a lot of guilt and then I would engage in a lot of self-sabotage and telling myself, "Who cares? Screw it."

And I would spend so much time trending in the wrong direction, not because I broke the streak, but because of what I made breaking the streak mean about me and my ability to succeed. And this is why, in the 30-day challenge, we don't focus on counting consecutive days. We're not celebrating streaks because we know the streak is meaningless.

Time alone doesn't create change. You need time plus awareness. The streak is not an indication of your success. And what matters way more

Ep #224: Why You Shouldn't Focus on Counting Days

than the streak itself is how do you show up if you break it? That's what matters.

I will tell you, I have so many people in the challenge who will come to me and they will say, "Oh my god, it's day two and I drank, or it's day six and I had a bottle of wine last night, or I made it all the way to day 19 and then I screw it up." And they're so defeated.

I see how they want to throw in the towel and quit. They can only see failure. And my work is helping them and helping you see, "No, no, no, this is such a rich opportunity for growth." This is a real moment that is not a setback. It's a steppingstone.

I tell people all the time who do the 30-day challenge, if we can just transform how you respond to failure, that won't just change the habit of drinking. That will change everything in your life.

And that's the question for you. How do you respond to those moments of failure? How do you respond to those moments where, all of a sudden, you broke the streak?

Because the moment that you don't do the thing that you set out to do, that really is the fork in the road. It's the moment that you're presented with a choice. We just usually have no idea that that's what's happening. We don't realize there's a choice.

We just think, "Oh, well see, I knew this wasn't going to work. I knew I couldn't figure it out. I knew I wasn't going to be strong enough or disciplined enough, I knew that I never follow through."

We think that that's the only direction we could head in. And then of course, when we have all those thoughts and we feel defeated and we feel shame and we feel embarrassment, what do we do? We give up. We start trending in the wrong direction.

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

Ep #224: Why You Shouldn't Focus on Counting Days

But there's a fork in the road. You don't have to head down that path. You can head in a different direction. You can say, "Wait a minute, there's something here for me to learn. There's some part of the habit that I don't quite yet understand but I'm starting to get a glimpse of. Maybe it's that excuse that I just believed, or the justification to drink that I took at face value, or the thought that I didn't question. But there's a moment here for me to actually start trending in the right direction. Even though I drank last night."

Just because things didn't go the way that you wanted, the way that you anticipated, does not mean that you need to throw in the towel. It can be a moment that is calling for you to evolve and grow and to learn about the habit at a deeper level, to gain awareness and insight that you didn't have before.

And so, that's really the question for you today. Every time you said you weren't going to drink, or you weren't going to drink as much as you did last night, what happened next? What happened the next day? Did you pick yourself up? Did you look at the decision you made last night with curiosity or were you just full on in self-judgment.

Did you start beating yourself up because you believed this story, "See, I always do this. I never follow through. Something's wrong with me." Or did you try to understand, "Hey, what was actually happening. How was I feeling? What was I thinking? Why did I believe that thought or excuse or justification?"

That's what matters. The number of consecutive days isn't a sign of your progress. Because you can get a whole bunch of consecutive days of doing something through sheer willpower, or hiding out and avoiding your life. And you can be totally unaware while you're doing that. And you are never going to be able to change a habit if you're unaware.

Ep #224: Why You Shouldn't Focus on Counting Days

It may be good for your body to get a streak of not drinking. But it's not sustainable for most people because they're not actually changing the habit. Only awareness can do that.

And I really do think that this all comes back to my belief that only you can decide the relationship you want to have with alcohol. Taking a break is so powerful. It will really give you a clean slate so that you can truly examine the habit from a little distance.

You can really have the awareness that you haven't had before. But you still have to do the work to understand your desire. You still have to do the work to understand what you make drinking mean about you and not drinking mean about you. You still have to do the work of bringing awareness to your thoughts and your feelings and your actions and realizing, "Hey, I never reach for a glass without thinking a thought first."

So, what's happening in there? So, you don't have to make a decision that you're never going to drink again. You don't have to convince yourself that alcohol is poison. You just have to decide, "Hey what is right for me? What would feel good for me? What's the relationship that I want?"

And when you answer those questions, you will see that no streak is ever going to get you there. and it's never going to tell the answer to these questions. Because for most people, it's not the streak that matters. It's what you learn when you break it. That's where all of the transformation can happen. But only if you're willing to redefine what progress and success and failure mean.

Because I guarantee you right now, if you're focusing on counting days, if you always feel defeated the moment that you break a streak, your focused on the wrong thing. You're making the streak mean something that it doesn't mean at all. It's not a reflection of success or progress. It's a moment for you to learn and grow and transform. Alright, that's it for today, I will see you next week.

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

Ep #224: Why You Shouldn't Focus on Counting Days

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.