

# Ep #231: What You Don't Know About Hangovers



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Rachel Hart**

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## Ep #231: What You Don't Know About Hangovers

You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 231.

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 people, we are talking about hangovers today. And I just want to say before we begin, for all of you listening who think, "I don't get hangovers, let's just skip this episode," I want you to consider two things.

Number one, if you're someone who you think, "I don't really experience hangovers," I want to encourage you to listen to episode 49. It's called *Settling When It Comes to Your Health*. And it talks a lot about how we can often be blind to very subtle impacts that alcohol has on your body.

So I watch this happen all the time in the 30-day challenge. People will come into the challenge reporting zero hangovers, zero physical side effects from drinking. And they'll want to do the challenge because they'll say, "I just don't really like that I have a habit, I don't like that it's become a nightly thing, I don't like all those extra calories and what it's doing for my waistline."

And then they take a break, and they start doing this work, and maybe a couple days in or a week or two weeks in they say, "Oh my gosh, I can't believe how much better I feel. I had no idea how a couple glasses of wine was affecting me. I just thought that feeling groggy and rundown was all part of getting older."

So for all of you thinking I don't get hangovers, I just want you to keep the possibility in your mind that alcohol may be affecting your physical health, even if it's only a single glass of wine every night. You may not be aware

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right now of the side effects because we're so used to thinking of hangovers as like, oh my god, I feel retched. When really, it might be something very subtle that's just flying under the radar.

Number two, I want you to consider that understanding the think-feel-act cycle, which is what I am teaching all the time on the podcast, understanding how that applies with the aftereffects of drinking is going to help you so much when it comes to changing the habit.

So even if you rarely get hangovers, today's episode is really going to show you how powerful your mind can be. So that's what we're going to talk about today. We're going to talk about hangovers, we're going to talk about why they happen, we're going to talk about how morality and hangovers have become intertwined, and they should not be.

And we're also going to talk about what a hangover is trying to tell you, and surprise, the answer is not that you should stop drinking. So hangovers, they are the aftereffects caused by drinking and drugs. That's how most people understand them.

And these aftereffects, they can be pretty painful. They can be sometimes more mild, maybe so mild you don't notice, but a lot of people when they think of a hangover, they think of really painful side effects. So throbbing headaches and waking up feeling just tired and weak and fatigued. Maybe you're thirsty or nauseous or you have a sour stomach.

Oh my gosh, that used to happen to me all the time, the sour stomach. Sensitivity to light and sound, feeling irritable and sad and anxious, and I do want to just add in here that this mood piece really is huge. So I remember so often how down and depressed I used to feel after a night of drinking.

I would wake up and I would have no idea like, why am I so blue? It was like I was just down for no reason. And I do hear this again all the time in the Take a Break challenge. People will say, "I'm no longer waking up just

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feeling anxious for no reason. My mood is so much better. I'm not waking up in a funk."

And that emotional piece, it really does matter so much. Now, for the longest time, I didn't understand why that was happening. But it makes a lot of sense once you start to really study the impact that alcohol has on neurotransmitters in your brain.

So we have all these neurotransmitters in our brain - not just in our brain by the way. But the neurotransmitters are really chemicals that impact our mood. And in a normal day, we're not getting a flood of them. We're kind of used to a steady drip at a low rate. And maybe if you go for a run, it will give you a boost, or if you watch a funny movie, it will give you a boost, or if you have a pint of Ben & Jerry's it will give you a boost.

But for most people, the drip is pretty steady. Now, the reason why alcohol and drugs can have such a stark and profound impact on your mood is because in part, the impact that they can have on your neurotransmitters.

So instead of that kind of regular steady drip, alcohol and drugs will flood the system. Now here's the problem; what goes up must come down. So when you go way, way, way up, then the drop down is going to feel even more extreme because your brain just can't magically come back into equilibrium the next day. That doesn't happen in an instant. You can't flip a switch and come back into balance.

Your body needs to take time. Your body and brain need to take time to actually rebuild and replace those chemicals. There's no magical way to speed up that process.

Now, I just want to add in here and I think that this will help start to shift your understanding of what a hangover is because most people usually just associate it with alcohol and drugs is that they don't just happen when you drink a lot.

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So this super high, followed by an intense drop, it can happen without you consuming anything. Without consuming any alcohol or any drugs. So one example that I use a lot is the experience I had at my wedding.

So I was not drinking when I got married. But I was having so much fun. And I will tell you, I remember by the time we got to the reception, I just could not wait to get on the dance floor, and I kept saying to my husband, "Why is it taking so long to clear the food? I want to dance. I want to dance."

He was like, we're going to be dancing soon, don't worry, the DJ's going to start playing. But I was so charged up and I wouldn't let it go. And finally he turned to me, my husband, I love him. He said, "Rachel, you were the bride. You were served first out of the 125 people that are here and you barely ate any of the food on your plate because all you're talking about is how excited you are to dance. So maybe just let our guests eat their food."

And he was right. I really was just so pumped. I was having so much fun, I laughed so hard that day, I felt such intense love and joy and just being with this man who is amazing, and also, I think really part of what is so beautiful is just seeing all these people from different walks of your life come together.

And you know what? The next day, I had not had a drop of alcohol, I had the worst hangover. I woke up feeling terrible. And it was really the first time that I experienced such an intense comedown when I wasn't drinking. And I was so blown away by it.

Because I truly thought it was impossible to feel hungover without getting drunk the night before. Now, here is the other fascinating part. The day after my wedding, I had no judgement about the fact that I felt awful and just wanted to crawl under the covers and eat a bunch of greasy food.

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In fact, I was kind of astounded by what I was actually witnessing. I didn't think it was possible to feel hungover without drinking. I didn't think that sober fun, I don't even like saying that term. You all know if you hear me on the podcast because that already sounds not that fun.

But I didn't think that just naturally produced fun could create these kinds of physical repercussions. But there I was, the next day, feeling totally hungover. But the important part and this is what I want you all to pay attention to, there was no guilt, there was no shame, there was no blame for how I felt.

In fact, it was almost kind of weirdly satisfying like hey, I went all out last night. That's amazing. I'm so proud of myself for just being all in on having an amazing time.

Now, all of the times in my life when I was hungover because I drank so much, very different story. Because then, so often what I was feeling, which was in this shame spiral, all this guilt, all the self-loathing, all this anxiety, so I had the physical repercussions but then I heaped a big dose of judgment on to the pile. And you know what? All of that judgment made me feel even worse.

And this is where I think we've gotten so confused. Hangovers are not bad. They are not a sign that you're foolish or a bad person. They're not punishment being handed down for your foolish, bad, wrong behavior. Hangovers are a part of human life.

Sometimes we will have super highs, which necessitates having a super drop. What goes up must come down. And this can happen without alcohol and drugs. So hangovers are normal. They are a normal part of how the brain functions.

And you might be hearing me say this and think, "Okay, fine, that's fine, it's fine for the hangover to happen when I wasn't drinking, it's fine because I

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was so happy and I was dancing so much, but it's not fine if I drink a bottle of wine or it's not fine because I drank five cocktails.”

And this is where I think people are wrong. Because the hangover itself has no moral value. They are not a sign that you're bad or wrong or that you did something bad or wrong.

Now, I talk about this a lot on the podcast. I talk about how alcohol is morally neutral. It has no moral value. It's not good or bad, it's not right or wrong. Neither is drinking. Well guess what? The same is true my friends of hangovers.

I really do want you to sit with this idea for a second and see if your brain will accept it, that hangovers are not bad. They're not a sign that you have a problem or that you're stupid or that you should feel really bad about your behavior last night. They just are.

I was coaching someone I remember once who was feeling guilty about waking up the next day and feeling hungover. And she kept saying, “I just feel all this shame because I feel so terrible the next day.” So we were working on trying to separate out her physical symptoms from what she was making them mean.

And suddenly, I remember watching this lightbulb go off in her head and she was like, wait, what about Purim? Which by the way, I did not know what this is but it's a Jewish holiday where you're actually supposed to drink. And not just drink a little bit. You're supposed to drink to excess. You're supposed to get drunk.

And she was like - because she was familiar with this holiday, she was like, wait, you don't wake up after Purim steeped in shame for getting wasted, which is so interesting to think about that, right? She didn't feel shame after one of those hangovers because she was making it mean something totally different.

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Part of understanding how to change the habit is understanding that the think-feel-act cycle, your thoughts and your feelings and your actions, they are always at work. Not just when you reach for the glass, not just when you reach for another, not just when you think about drinking. They're at work the next day. They're at work when you wake up with a hangover.

Your thoughts and your feelings and your actions, that cycle is still happening. So really understanding this, this is what I really want all of you to commit yourselves to doing. So we spend so much time in the 30-day challenge on really just practicing separating out the facts of what is happening or has happened from your judgments of it.

So we talk about it as separating out circumstances and thoughts. And really seeing, oh, I don't have a feeling. I don't feel shame or guilt or embarrassment until I think a thought about how I'm feeling, or a thought about what happened last night, or how much I drank.

This piece is so important because it shows you where you have the ability to start to shift. So often we feel kind of stuck because we're like, oh god, well, I can't take back last night. Last night has happened, I can't go back in time. So we think we have to feel terrible.

And the same is true when we have these physical aftereffects. Well, of course I'm going to feel awful, I'm sitting here with a throbbing headache, and I just got sick. That's not the way the think-feel-act cycle works.

The problem with a hangover, the real problem with a hangover is that we make it so much worse for ourselves with all of our thinking. We make it worse with our mind. So the agony really should just be the physical impact that alcohol has on the body.

And yes of course, your brain is recalibrating, so you might feel a little bit more down or blue or anxious the next day, but for most people, on top of all of this, on top of this time that really should be for rest and repair, they

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heap all of this unnecessary emotional suffering. Shame and guilt and embarrassment and self-loathing and none of it is necessary.

In fact, none of it is doing you any good. It's just making you feel worse. And it is preventing you from having any curiosity about why last night happened. Probably because you already think you know the answer, which I guarantee that you don't.

If you think the answer to why you drank too much last night is, "Well, that's just what I always do, or I have an addictive personality, or I'm just an all or nothing person," I can guarantee you don't actually know the real answer. The pain you feel from a hangover is made so much worse by all of these emotions. Shame and guilt and embarrassment and self-loathing vibrating through your body.

Imagine if you could just have the headache and feel nauseous and feel fatigued and not make it mean that you're an idiot and that you should be suffering and you should feel bad, and that you're never going to learn your lesson.

I think so many people even have the experience sometimes, especially at an early age, so maybe when you started experimenting with alcohol of not making hangovers mean something terrible. I had this experience when I started drinking in college when I was 17.

I thought a hangover was a badge of honor. So did a lot of my friends. And you'll see this, it's just like, oh no, it's just a sign that I went all out last night. But then slowly the shame starts to creep in as people get older and we start to tell ourselves, "I deserve to feel terrible because I haven't learned my lesson."

And it's this really flawed idea that somehow torturing ourselves is going to lead to change. And listen, maybe you have the experience of waking up and feeling so bad after a night of drinking that you said, you know what,

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never again. And maybe that worked for a little bit. But that's the real question. How long?

How long did telling yourself never again work for? I know that for me, I said that over and over and over again to myself. I said never again after so many hangovers, only to, a week later or a month later or six months later find myself in the same position.

And the reason is because we cannot shame ourselves into changing a habit. Your brain does not magically rewire itself because you think that you're an idiot for drinking so much last night.

Feeling guilt does not magically change the thoughts that led to overdrinking, that led to reaching for that glass. It just creates a lot of unnecessary and unhelpful suffering that I promise is not going to get you closer to your goal, which is by the way, the exact opposite of what we are led to believe.

We are led to believe if you feel bad enough, you'll change. But it's just not in my experience how it works, and you know what, it doesn't line up with how the think-feel-act cycle works. If you want to start to create real change, you're going to have to do that from a place of curiosity and compassion. Not shame and guilt and self-loathing.

Because no matter how deep in shame you are, you might swear off drinking for a while. I'm not saying that that doesn't happen. But here's what I have seen. I have seen so many people who have months if not years of not drinking under their belt and you know what, the habit is still there.

Because if you don't do the work to unwind the infrastructure of the habit, and by that, I mean the thoughts and feelings that are driving it, even if you're saying no to the drink, I guarantee that the habit is going to come out in some other way.

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And it's why people will say to me, "Okay, so I'm not drinking Rachel, but now I can't put down the food." Or, "I'm not drinking but now I'm buying all this crap that I don't need." Or, "I'm not drinking but now I find myself unable to just sit down or sit still or stop working at night."

And I will tell you that that to me is not a success. That is not what I want for you. I don't want anyone to be like, oh well, success is just not drinking but all of these other things in my life are going sideways.

So often, the worst part of a hangover is really trying to behave the next day like you don't have one. You don't let yourself rest, you don't take it easy, you don't take that sick day, you push yourself as punishment.

And I think it's really interesting because this so often mimics how most people actually treat the body, hangover or not. This is what I was doing. I was just ignoring my body. I was ignoring all of the signs for everything that it needed.

Thirsty, that can wait. Hungry, that can wait. I need to pee, I'm in the middle of something. Need to move, that was nothing thing. Nope, I don't have time to move, I just got to sit here and do my work. We're so used to just being busy, busy, busy, and not paying attention to the body at all.

And then of course we do the same thing when the hangover is saying like, hey, could we stay in bed? Could we rest? Could we spend some time repairing? It's like, nope, you've been bad, you've been bad, this is punishment, we just got to push through.

But it's not just that. I think this is what I teach so much when it comes to changing the habit. It's not just that you're ignoring how you feel the next day. You're ignoring how you feel before you start drinking and once you start drinking. You're ignoring the signs from your body that you know what, hey, you've had enough.

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You're ignoring the signs that like, you know what, that appreciation of the taste that I had on sips one, two, and three, it's really started to decline on four, five, and six. Or glass number one, glass number two is not really comparing. We're just not even paying attention to that.

We're not paying attention to our body's signs that we've had enough. And I will tell you this; ignoring the body is a deeper problem. If you think that you can just change a habit from the level of the mind and totally ignore the body, I've got news for you. I've tried to do it. Doesn't work.

You have to pay attention to both. And so what I want to offer to you is what if you treated the hangover as judgment-free time to pay attention to what your body needs in the moment? No guilt, no shame, no self-loathing. Just tending to and tuning into your body's needs.

Now, I know that some of you might be listening to this and thinking like, "This sounds insane. If I just allow myself to be hungover and not feel guilty and not feel bad, aren't I going to let myself off the hook? Won't that be the thing that prevents me from changing?"

And I know how hard it is to imagine for some of you that you could wake up after a night of drinking more than you wanted to and then be nice to yourself and not call yourself an idiot and not tell yourself, "Oh my god, when am I ever going to learn my lesson?"

But I just want you to consider this; if being mean to yourself worked to change habits and when I say habits, I mean your drinking, your eating, your spending, your procrastinating, whatever it is, if being mean to yourself worked, then most people would be amazing at changing habits.

Because most people have black belts in being mean to themselves. Hangovers are not punishment. They are time for you to actually learn what you've been ignoring, what you haven't been paying attention to. They're time for you to notice, hey, how do I talk to myself the next day?

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They're a time for you to actually show up with compassion and curiosity. And I will tell you this, if you can learn how to be kind to yourself after a day of overeating, when you have all of these physical symptoms that don't feel great, if you can learn how to do that, you'll have such an easier time changing the habit. And it really is possible.

Alright everybody, 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.