

Ep #244: Responsible Drinking



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With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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Ep #244: Responsible Drinking

You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 244.

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.

Welcome back everyone. Listen, I'm going to give you fair warning. Today is just going to be a little bit of a rant from me because I have been thinking a lot about the fine print that I see on alcohol ads or in TV commercials or in my Instagram feed from companies selling alcohol that say in tiny little letters, "Please drink responsibly" or, "Enjoy in moderation."

And it's kind of been infuriating me the more that I have been paying attention to this. Because you know, these messages are all well and good but whenever I see an alcohol company or an advertisement say drink responsibly, I just think, yeah, it's one thing to say that, it's another thing to teach people how.

And I really want you to think about this. Do you even know what responsible drinking is? Has anyone ever told you or shown you? Do you know what it looks like? Has anyone ever given you the steps for how to do it?

My guess, if you're anything like me, is no. The messages that I got really from a young age can be boiled down to don't drink before you're 21 and don't drink and drive. That was pretty much it. And I want you to think about these messages. Wait until you're of age, which is so fascinating because the more you learn about the brain, the more that you understand your brain, that prefrontal cortex, the part of your brain that helps with judgment and weighing the pros and cons and actually starting to manage the rest of your brain, that's not even fully developed by the age of 21.

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

Ep #244: Responsible Drinking

You got to wait until you're at least 25 for that to be fully developed. And then the message of yeah, don't get behind the wheel of a car once you've been drinking, these messages, they don't teach anyone anything. They're not showing you how to drink responsibly. It's just giving you rules. How exactly are you supposed to drink responsibly?

I'm not saying it's not possible. I'm just like, asking you to consider this for yourself. What are you supposed to be doing? How much? How often? How quickly? What are you supposed to do when you feel the urge for more? What does responsible look like then? Is it just say no?

This to me really is I think the biggest contradiction and I think one of the things that frustrates me so much is that kind of collectively as a society, we just all walk around and act as if everyone should just know how to do this and everyone should just know how to drink responsibly, as if all the humans should be able to figure it out.

But I want you to think about how often you have gotten that message with pretty much zero instruction on what to do. And then I want you to think about how many people believe that they actually know how to eat responsibly. Really think about this.

Eating is something that is innate to humans, unlike drinking alcohol. We need to do it. It's important for our survival. We have internal cues for hunger and fullness and thirst. It's part of our wiring. And yet many people feel like they have no idea how to eat responsibly.

They find themselves in this kind of constant cycle of binging and restricting and overeating and then going on a diet and then going off the diet and then trying a new diet. How many people do you feel like have an unhealthy relationship with food? I would venture to guess that this is not a small number.

Ep #244: Responsible Drinking

Many people find themselves eating more than they want, eating things even when they know it doesn't work for their system. They're lactose intolerant but they still eat ice cream. They know they have a sensitivity to gluten, but they just can't say no to the bread or the pasta. Think about how pervasive of a problem this is, and eating is necessary for life.

And then think about how we apply this standard with alcohol that's like, yeah, you should just be able not to overdo it, you should just be able to rein yourself in, that's what normal people do. You should just be able to drink responsibly. That's what the ads say, don't they?

How should you be able to do this? Why should you just be able to do this? Seriously, no one is giving us the how and the why. No one is giving us any directions. In fact, when you think about it, the directions that I was given when I started drinking, they were directions not how to be responsible, they were directions about how to get drunk faster and how to cure a hangover. I got way more directions when it came to those two things than how to be responsible.

And I bet for many of you, what you were "taught" around alcohol were more along those lines than they were on how to be responsible. Did anyone ever sit you down and explain serving sizes to you? Did anyone ever sit you down and talk about ABV and what alcohol by volume means and how to understand how differently a wine with an alcohol of 5% ABV versus 12% or 13% or 15% ABV will impact how quickly you will begin to feel intoxicated?

Oh, and by the way, you shouldn't really treat a standard serving of five ounces as the same when the ABV level is so dramatically different. Has anyone ever sat you down and talked about, hey, what should you do if you notice yourself drinking really fast or faster than other people, or when you keep having these urges for more?

Ep #244: Responsible Drinking

So we get these messages all the time, yeah, drink responsibly, enjoy in moderation, and it's so infuriating for me because it's just this empty message. No one is showing people how to do it. And then when people do struggle, collectively, society's response is, "I don't know, there must be something wrong with that person. Your brain is different. They just can't handle it. They have a problem."

Instead of acknowledging how society has actually caused and created this problem. If you want to drink differently, you have to relearn how to drink. I want you to really understand that. You have to relearn this. You have taught your brain how to drink and it may have been practicing that now for a year, or five years, or 10 years, or several decades.

Your brain has been practicing drinking in a certain way. And drinking for certain reasons. And when you have certain situations in life, or when you make certain excuses, like I had a bad day, or it's been a long week, or it's a party, it's a celebration. So you have taught your brain how to drink a certain way totally unconsciously and if you want to change this, you have to relearn how to drink.

It's one of the reasons why I teach exercises in mindful drinking as part of the 30-day challenge. So not everybody wants to do it. That's one of the things that I think makes my approach and my work really unique is I'm not here to tell you how much you should drink or what the solution is for you. I'm here to say if you want to have a different relationship with alcohol, let's figure out how to do it for you.

Some of the people I work with are like, I just don't want to do it anymore. I'm just like, no thanks, I've done it enough, I've had enough, I'm over it. But there are others who are in a different place and they're just like, you know what, I just don't want to drink so much or so frequently, or so much in a sitting, or every night.

Ep #244: Responsible Drinking

So if that's where you are, how exactly are you going to learn to do that by just being responsible without any instruction? This to me is what is so crazy about the messaging that we accept around alcohol and that so many of us just accept that alcohol companies can have ads and commercials where they just slap on this empty messaging with nothing behind it.

If the vast majority of people can't figure out how not to have drama about food and eating and we need to eat to survive, and we have built-in guidance that helps to actually tell us when we are hungry and when we're thirsty and when we're sated and when we've had enough and when we're full, if we have all of that and we struggle with food, how on earth would most people not have a lot of drama around figuring out drinking?

Something that the human brain was not designed to do. And we have no built-in guidance on. In fact, most people have a lot of adults when they're growing up that they see who are not setting the best example or watching a lot of TV and movies that's not setting a great example about how to be responsible.

We have a lot of examples of people bingeing and then restricting. We have a lot of examples of seeing people drink as a way to deal with stress or a bad day or boredom or to fit in. We also have a lot of examples, and I'm sorry, I love Scandal, but I'm looking at you, Olivia Pope. This character who seems only really to consume red wine and popcorn, and she never has a hangover, and she always looks beautiful and she's amazing at her job.

What do you think is happening when the brain is getting all of these messages? If you think that they're not impacting the habit and the thoughts and the beliefs that you have around alcohol, you are dead wrong. If you want to drink differently, you have to learn how. You have to learn how to respond to your urges differently, and guess what? Just telling yourself to be responsible is not enough.

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

Ep #244: Responsible Drinking

Learning how to do this is a skill. You're going to mess it up. This is what I tell people all the time. Just because you want to change this doesn't mean that you can just snap your fingers and do it perfectly. You're not going to do it perfectly right out of the gate.

This is what most people miss. They're like, no, I decided that this time was going to be different, I decided that I was going to be more responsible, therefore I should be able to do it. It's like, really? Why? Do we just become more responsible when we decide to change our eating, or do we have to learn how to eat differently with a lot of trial and error?

I think this is really what was so tricky for me for a long time is I would be like, okay Rachel, you're not going to overdo it. Be responsible. Don't be stupid. In fact, that's actually what I was usually saying to myself was don't be so stupid instead of be responsible.

But I had no idea how to actually put that in practice because no one had ever shown me or taught me anything about urges or why I had urges, or how to respond to them without trying to hide. I thought my solution was okay, I got willpower and I just got to grit my teeth, or I should just not go. I should just not go to the party, I should just not see my friends, I should just run off and find a cabin in the woods where I can be completely on my own, and then I will figure it out. It does not work like that.

I had no idea every time that I would try to drink differently or be more responsible and it didn't work, I had no idea how to actually learn from what wasn't working. I just went into a shame spiral. I just went right into this whole societal belief of like, normal people should be able to do this, why can't you do this? You're such a screw up.

I had to figure out how to start to have a different relationship not just with alcohol but with my urges. Because for the longest time, the urge for more would come and I was like, oh okay, I want more so I guess I should have more, right? Otherwise I'm just going to be an exercise in gritting my teeth

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

Ep #244: Responsible Drinking

and that is no fun. No one ever taught me how to be present with an urge and have that be peaceful and not have all this drama around it.

That was the only way for me to start to learn that saying no didn't mean that I was missing out. Saying no didn't mean automatically that I wasn't having a good time, that I couldn't be myself, that I couldn't have as much fun. That's what I believed for the longest time.

Drinking responsibly isn't a decision that you just make one day, and you start doing. It's a skill, it's a practice. It requires a lot of trial and error, especially if your habit has been I have an urge, so I say yes, I have an urge, so I say yes.

Now, not everyone wants to learn how to do this. Not everyone wants to have alcohol in their life. Some of you listening are like, this is not what I want. But I just think that we need to acknowledge that plastering these empty messages everywhere is not helpful.

We have these advertisers putting out an empty slogan with no guidance and we have this very backwards belief that it seems most people have accepted that you should just be able to drink responsibly. And that if you struggle, something is wrong with you, something is wrong with your brain, and you just can't handle alcohol.

Seems to me like so many people have just accepted this instead of acknowledging like, hey, yeah, no one ever really teaches us anything. No one really gives us instruction beyond don't drink until you're 21, just say no, don't drink and drive.

No one teaches us how alcohol impacts the brain, or how it impacts men and women differently, or differently when you're younger or older, or different times of your life, or in different times of your cycle, or how alcohol impacts the reward system in the brain, or how all the messaging that we

Ep #244: Responsible Drinking

receive impacts our desire and our reluctance to acknowledge that yeah, I'm having a hard time figuring this out.

We don't get any information about how habits form. And how when you learn something, you can actually unlearn it. But doing so will not be a perfectly smooth process and that's not a problem.

I had someone say to be recently who was starting out the 30-day challenge, she said, "I just hate failing. I just can't fail again." And I said to her, the problem isn't how much you drank last night. The problem, the real problem here is that your knee-jerk response to it, your thought about what you drank is I failed again. And when you think that thought and feel defeated, the problem is that emotion, that feeling of defeat is not going to give you the result that you want.

Most people will just kind of bury their heads and hide, or go into this place of screw it, I failed again, I might as well just say yes. That thought, interpreting the fact that you drank when you said that you wouldn't or you drank more than you wanted to, or you promised yourself that you would, making it mean that you failed or you failed again, that's the real problem. That's the real habit that we need to change.

Because that thought, that interpretation of what happened is a failure, that's what's actually fueling more drinking. That's the real problem. You can change your relationship with alcohol. You can stop and not feel like you're missing out. You can learn to drink less in a sitting. You can learn how to drink less during the week.

You can take a break for an indefinite period of time just because you want to, just because you want to explore how it will feel for your mind and your body, and you want to actually just understand your desire and not just be at the mercy of your urges.

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

Ep #244: Responsible Drinking

You can stop using a drink as a reward for getting through bedtime or a stressful week. You can decide what relationship you want to have and what's right for you. But you will not be able to do that just by telling yourself to be responsible or to enjoy in moderation. That is not enough. You need skills.

And I want you all to think about today what you have been telling yourself up until this point that you should just know better, that how much you drank last night was stupid, why did you make such a stupid mistake. Notice how you label it; notice how you talk about the habit right now.

And just maybe start to crack the door open a little bit to what I'm offering here today, that these messages, no matter that so much of society seems to accept them, they're totally empty. There's no substance behind it. If you want to learn how to drink differently, you need to learn how to think differently. You need to learn how to respond to your urges differently.

You should not just be able to do this and when you actually start to embrace that idea that you shouldn't just be able to do this responsibly, that it is something that you're going to have to learn how to do, you just open up the avenues for you to start making progress instead of going through the shame spiral all the time, going into this place of binge and restrict all the time, and that's what I want for you.

Alright, I just had to get this rant off my chest, it was really bothering me. That is 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

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

Ep #244: Responsible Drinking

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.