

## Ep #264: What to Do When You Have Competing Desires



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Rachel Hart**

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## Ep #264: What to Do When You Have Competing Desires

You are listening to the Take A Break podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 264.

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, welcome back, everyone. We're going to talk about something that is so important today. I was actually just talking about it inside Take A Break on one of our coaching calls, but I want to talk about it on the public podcast as well because I see it as a stumbling block for so many people, and that's what do I do when I have these competing desires that feel like they're kind of at war with each other?

So, I want to drink, but I don't want to drink, or I want to go to the gym, but I want to stay in bed, or I want to eat this, but I want to lose weight, or I want to be in a relationship, but I don't want to put myself out there. I want to change things up in my life, but I really crave feeling secure and feeling safe, and to me, that means keeping things the same. What do we do with our competing desires?

Now, I will tell you it doesn't matter if you have competing desires with alcohol, food, exercise, relationships, really anything or any goal in your life, they're going to show up. But especially when you want to change your relationship with alcohol. When you want to drink less, when you want to stop, it's so important that you really start to understand what your competing desires are, why you have them, and how to deal with them in a productive way?

I will tell you, I find that most people come to this work, they start the 30-day challenge, they start the work inside Take A Break, and they feel

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incredibly torn. So, they deeply want a different relationship with alcohol. They don't want to keep things the same. They know it's not working for them, and part of them also doesn't want to change. Part of them doesn't want to say no to the urge. Part of them doesn't want to sip sparkling water while everyone else is having champagne. They don't want to lose their go-to way to relax, have fun, or connect.

And the presence of these competing desires, the desire to have that drink, and the desire to say no. The desire to change your relationship with alcohol. The presence of these competing desires can be so frustrating. I will tell you I know from my own experience I really felt like this kind of quiet intuition that I had that my relationship with alcohol it just wasn't good. It wasn't healthy; it wasn't working.

So, I had that quiet intuition, and then I just had all of this desire to have fun, and give myself a treat after a long day or a long week, and to just be able to be silly and carefree, and it felt like I was constantly at war with myself. I felt like having all these competing desires was a sign that I just couldn't learn my lesson.

That I really should know better. I should know what's good for me, but somehow I couldn't figure out how to do that. And I was really frustrated to be in this tug of war with myself. I truly did feel like my competing desires were a sign that something was wrong with me; something was broken. And I know so many people can relate to this, which is why I want to give you three steps today to really help you change not only how you understand your competing desires but also, more importantly, how you respond to them.

So, we're going to go through these three steps, and then I'm also going to talk to you a little bit of some really common pitfalls that I see people encounter as soon as they start doing this work. Okay, step number one, you have to understand that your competing desires are normal.

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Now, listen, I talk about this a lot on the podcast, you have a higher brain and a lower brain everyone does, and that higher brain, that prefrontal cortex it cares about tomorrow how you're going to feel tomorrow. It cares about the future and goals and plans and ideas. It is such an amazing part of your brain.

Now, listen, you also have a lower brain, and that lower brain is also amazing in that it has a whole different set of things it cares about. It cares about staying safe right now. It cares about finding pleasure and avoiding pain because doing that really was the recipe for survival for humans for hundreds of thousands of years. That's what you needed to do.

Find pleasure, avoid pain, and do it as quickly, easily, and efficiently as possible. So, listen, you have different parts of your brain that have different priorities and care about different things. You're never going to change this. I have not eradicated my lower brain. I still have one. You don't need to change it. That's probably the most important piece.

What you need to do is not get rid of that lower brain. So, you get rid of that part of you that cares and focuses on pleasure over pain. What you actually need to do is change your response to the fact that you have this dichotomy inside of you. So, when that habitual desire comes up, and you think you want a drink, I deserve it, everyone else is, one more won't hurt, and you have that desire to change.

So, maybe you're thinking, listen, maybe I want to take it easy tonight, I want to be good, I want to feel good tomorrow. I want to be in control. When all of that appears, those competing desires, that kind of knee-jerk response that you can have to the contrast is just like, oh, God, this is so annoying. I hate this internal battle. Why can't my stupid desire go away? Why can't I just be on the same page with myself?

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That's what happens to so many people is they are frustrated, they are annoyed, they feel like something has really gone wrong, but now, here's the problem, when you respond to your competing desires as if they are abnormal, when indeed they are not, but when you respond to them as if they are abnormal. A sign that something has gone wrong. The problem is that you create resistance and that resistance is actually going to block change. Because instead of learning how to work with your brain and work with what's there, you end up spending all of this time and energy and focus on trying to make this very normal part of you go away.

And it's just an impossible task because we can't just delete our lower brain, but that's what I find what frustrates so many people, and what frustrated me starting on this work was feeling like how do I make this part of me, this part of me that says, one won't hurt. Have another. You deserve it. How do I make it go away? That's always the wrong question to be asking yourself.

As soon as you slip into resistance, what is also happening is that you're also slipping into judgment. I shouldn't want this. I should know better. That's what the judgment sounds like, and all that does is not only make your urges a problem, which so much of what I'm trying to teach people and want people to really understand, and practice is that the urge is never a problem. It's totally harmless. It's actually not a big deal at all.

The problem is if we respond to it as if it has to be immediately satisfying. That's the real problem. It's not the presence of the urge. It's how we have unconsciously learned to respond to it. So, you make your urge and your desire a problem instead of your response being the thing you need to shift. And listen, that distinction is everything, and that's what most people are so kind of surprised when they start working with me is to see the goal truly is not to just never have an urge again. The goal is to make them not a big deal.

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Someone was saying this to me on our call. They were saying to me, you know, I can't believe how my urges just seem to be so much less of a problem for me. They just kind of come and they go, and there's not a lot of mind drama about it. That's what's possible, but it's not possible if you think your competing desires are abnormal, and it's not possible if you start to respond to it with resistance and judgment.

So, really understanding that your desire is not a problem even when you have two desires that are in conflict with one another. It's a sign that you have a complex human brain. So, we don't need to judge or resist the fact that the competing desires are there. We actually need to tell ourselves, hey, this is normal. Because as soon as you tell yourself your competing desires are normal and nothing has gone wrong and it's not a sign that you're broken, and it's not a sign that you just can't learn your lesson.

As soon as you do that, then guess what happens? Then, you get to start to be curious about how the habit works. And really getting curious about, okay, so what are the thoughts and feelings that have me reaching for a drink and then reaching for another? But that can only happen when you do that first step, really understanding that your competing desires are normal and not seeing it as a sign that anything has gone wrong.

Now, the second thing is once you have done that, once you have practiced creating space, room, and acceptance for these competing desires because you have different parts in your brain that have different cares then, part of it is to end this quest to resolve your competing desires. Now, by resolve, what I mean is people think that they're going to make them go away. That they're going to clear it up. That they're going to stop having all these competing desires, and then you're going to eradicate this dichotomy once and for all.

Now, the problem with that is listen, if you need to eradicate the desire to drink, if you need to eradicate their urges in order to be successful, then

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what you are teaching your brain is that your urge and your desire have power over you. They don't. It has no power. You don't need to eradicate your desire. You don't need to eradicate the urge to drink because it's powerless. Once you really start to understand how the habit works, once you start to see it's not the presence of desire, it's how you respond to it.

It's those sentences in your mind that right now you may not even be realizing are there. That's what you actually need to focus on. You don't need to eradicate your desires even if they're competing because I will tell you this, life is just a series of competing desires forever and ever. Really, for everyone and not just around alcohol with everything. Because life really is the experience of having a complex brain. A brain that doesn't just care about survival, a brain that cares about the future and tomorrow.

So, if that's what life is, then instead of trying to eradicate the competing desire, you start to really understand, hey, how do I work with this? Now, that really shifted everything for me. To really understand, you know what, life is just a series of competing desires, whether it's alcohol or food or your goals or working out or being in a relationship or making money, like, whatever it is, I'm always going to be faced with these competing desires, nothing's gone wrong, now what?

The point isn't to figure out how to wipe it out. It's to figure out how do I navigate this with grace? I will tell you that one of the coaches that I'm working with currently in my advanced certification. So, I'm doing an advanced certification for coaches who specialize in numbing and buffering. And we were talking about negative emotions, and she said something so genius.

She said, you know, I realized that instead of teaching my brain that I need to try to be safe from my emotions, she said I realize I need to give myself a chance to be safe with them, instead of safe from my emotions, safe with my emotions. And it was so brilliant, and I was saying to her this describes

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so much. It's not just about emotions, but it's about our urges as well. That distinction, the difference between safe from versus safe with is everything.

When you start really understanding that your competing desires are not only normal, but you don't need to resolve them. You don't need to make them go away. You don't need to eradicate them to be successful. You need to learn how to navigate and be safe with them. That will immediately change your mindset because it will immediately put you to work to think about how can I be safe with this? How can I be safe with my urges instead of trying to delete them?

That puts you in such a place of power because just by recognizing, I don't need to delete them. They're supposed to be here that has you stepping into a place of control. So, in step one, you have to understand that competing desires are normal. Step two, you have to stop this quest to dissolve, eradicate, or delete competing desires from your life. When I teach people this, I think it's so freeing for them because they have spent so much energy amongst to them and just saying to themselves believing the lie, well, only if I was on the same page with myself right and wanting to be in perfect alignment all the time. But that's just not what the human experience is.

The human experience is sometimes I want a drink, and sometimes I don't, and sometimes I want to exercise, and sometimes I want to sit on the couch, right? So, how do I navigate that? The third step in this process is really to make a choice with curiosity. So, you've got these competing desires. So, step three is now. You have to choose and choose what you're going to do with an open mind.

Now, notice I didn't say choose to say no. I just said choose with curiosity, and that's really important. So often, what we're told over and over again is that the only way to change a habit is just to say no. Just say no, just say

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no, I don't think that's right. I think actually the more powerful thing is just to make the choice, own the choice, and be curious.

That gives you so much more power than telling yourself that the only way to change the habit is to be a perfect rule follower for the rest of your life. So many people what they end up doing, when they believe, no I can only choose no, I can only follow this one desire, what that actually end up doing, is they end up abdicating freewill. So, they tell themselves, well, I didn't even want that drink.

People will say this to me all the time inside Take A Break, and I didn't even want to drink. Okay, well, then, why did you? Why did you then? Well, it just happened. I wasn't planning it, but you then, you know, whatever, fill in the blank happened. The problem with this is that it just strips you of not only all of your power, it strips you of the ability to understand what happened in the moment because if you're telling yourself, I don't know, I didn't even want to, it just happened.

What you're essentially saying is, listen, this just doesn't make sense, but the truth is your drinking always makes sense because anytime we reach for a drink, anytime we reach for another, that action didn't just happen. It's part of the think, feel act cycle. There was a thought and a feeling that proceeded it. It always makes sense.

I think what ends up happening is that so many people don't actually want to acknowledge that they made a choice because they're so used to then rushing in and beating themselves up and harshly judging themselves if they feel like that choice was the wrong one. So, it's easier than just staying in the land of like, I don't know it just happened. I didn't even want to do it; it just happened.

Not only does it take your power away, it blocks your ability to actually understand how the habit works and if you can't see how that think, feel,

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and act cycle is unfolding, guess what, you can't change it. And I will tell you, this is something that I struggled with, okay? I often would be like, I don't even want to. I don't know how it happened. I wasn't even planning on it.

That was often coming out of my mouth because I didn't know how to be in this space of like, yes, I chose this, and I don't have to immediately go to I chose it; therefore, I'm an idiot. Therefore, I deserve feeling like crap today. Therefore, I'm stupid. Therefore, I can't learn my lesson.

I didn't know how to go to the place of I chose this, and I can be curious why. And it doesn't mean anything about who I am as a person; it's not some sort of character defect. It's not some sort of mental flaw. Choosing doesn't have to mean blaming. I really want you to understand that. Choosing doesn't have to mean blaming.

Is the thing was, I don't want to blame myself. I often already felt terrible, right, like, physically terrible. I didn't want to add emotional suffering on top of it. I didn't want to add blame, and so unconsciously, what I did was I abdicated responsibility. I would say, I don't know. I don't know what happened. But all that did was leave me in this place where I just had no way out. It's like if I don't know why it happened, well, then where do I even go from there?

So, really that most important thing that you can do is just to make a choice and own the choice so that you can bring curiosity to it. A choice doesn't have to be no. So, in step one, you have to understand that competing desires are totally normal. They're not a sign that anything's gone wrong. Step two is you have to end the quest to eradicate them forever. What you're actually trying to do is learn how to navigate, learn how to respond to them differently.

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Then, step three, with these competing desires present, make a choice, own the choice, so that you can bring in curiosity afterward. That's why you do it. Now, I will tell you there are a couple of things to be on the lookout for. Number one, this is a big kind of pitfall that I see a lot of people run into when they start this work; what I see happen over and over again is that people will tell themselves, yeah, yeah, okay, I get it.

I have a higher brain, lower brain, competing desires are totally normal, but you know what, I mean wouldn't I be better off without it? Wouldn't I be better off without this competing desire? Listen, the truth is, you wouldn't. You wouldn't.

If you were all lower brain, listen, that would be a problem, right? You wouldn't be able to plan for tomorrow, dream, set goals, right? You need that prefrontal cortex, but if you were all higher brain, that would be a problem too. Because in moments when you really needed to react quickly, and you really needed to keep yourself safe, you'd be like weighing the pros and cons about what to do.

So, really I want you to see that it's a lie. This idea that you'd be better off without the competing desire. The problem is not your brain. It's not the structure of your brain. It's that no one has ever taught you how it works or how to manage it. Because I will tell you this, your competing desires are trying to tell you something. They're trying to tell you something not only how the habit works, they're also trying to tell you something about what you're truly desiring in the moment.

And this is what I always challenge people to ask themselves and to push past beyond that knee-jerk of like I just really like the taste. I just really wanted it. Your competing desire is trying to give you greater intimacy with yourself. Now, you may perceive it on the surface. Even on the surface, it's a battle between like, I don't know I want another round, or I want to be

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good tonight, or I want to enjoy the taste versus I want to wake up tomorrow feeling good.

You may perceive it at that level, but I promise you if you're willing to dig a little deeper, you will start to see what you are actually desiring in the moment. And if you stop trying to wish your competing desires away, you can actually figure out what is that deeper desire that I'm really after? Is it a connection? Is it feeling carefree? Is it a way to stop thinking about work? Is it a way to deal with my chronic pain? What is it?

Truly understanding that the habit is always motivated by a feeling. A feeling that you're after, and not just, it just tastes good. That really will shift everything for you, but you have to stop telling yourself, you know I'd be better off without the competing desire. You wouldn't. You wouldn't be better off without a lower brain, and you wouldn't be better off if you only had a higher brain. That's just the truth.

Now, the second thing to keep an eye out for is comparing yourself to others. This is a big thing. Where people are like, okay, fine, it's normal, but like my competing desires, they're obviously stronger than this other person in my life. Right? Like, I have more of it. It's more of a problem for me. Other people can seem to learn their lesson when it comes to alcohol or food, or other people are better at following their goals or going to the gym, but I'm not great at it.

I will just tell you this, there's no upside to this line of thinking, and not only is there no upside for you because it has you focused. It has your attention focused on the wrong place, but the fact is, it's also a lie because every single human struggles with competing desires because we all have a higher brain and a lower brain.

Now, it may not manifest exactly how it appears in your life, in your situation. Maybe it's not alcohol, maybe it's food, maybe it's not alcohol,

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maybe it's approval, maybe it's sex, shopping, screentime, whatever, but I promise you it's there. And the thing that we so often do is we paint this very rosy picture of how we believe another person is experiencing life and experiencing their own competing desires. But the fact of the matter is every human being struggles with their goals. Everyone.

It's not just, you know, smooth sailing for anyone. So, if people are struggling with their goals, it's because they have competing desires. So, unless you know a person who doesn't ever struggle with a goal and trust me, they don't exist, everyone struggles, then all of us are dealing with our competing desires. And comparing yourself to others, it really is pointless because your journey is not to learn how to work with someone else's competing desires. Your journey is to learn how to accept, navigate, and respond differently to your own.

This really is the key is to stop focusing so much on other people. Right? Bring that attention back to you. Once you can acknowledge, yeah, these competing desires, they're normal. They're a sign that my brain is functioning properly. They're supposed to be here. They aren't a problem. I don't need to delete them. I don't need to eradicate them from my life. I don't even need to be perfect. I don't need to be perfect.

I just need to keep forward momentum, and the only way to do that is to keep showing up not only in a position of yes I made this choice, but also I can be curious why. I can choose, and I can choose with curiosity. Right? I can look at my action line. I can look at what I chose to drink. I chose to sit on the couch. I chose to eat past the point of feeling full. I chose to procrastinate, whatever it is, and none of that has to be a reason to blame, shame, and belittle myself.

It can all instead be a reason for me to actually have greater intimacy and learn something about myself and learn something about my relationship with discomfort. And I will tell you, you will never be able to learn from

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something if you're always trying to wish it away. If you're always trying to wish that what happened hadn't happened. That will be the death of learning.

So, your competing desires are here for you to learn how to work with them and learn how to feel in control with them, rather than to learn how to run from them and believe that you can eradicate them. So, really starting to practice these three steps, paying attention to where you might be falling into one of these pitfalls. That will start to shift everything for you. So, start practicing that today. See what you discover, and that's it for today, my friends. 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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