

## Ep #3: Using a Drink to Unwind



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Rachel Hart**

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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 everybody, welcome to today's show. We are going to be talking about using a drink to unwind. This is such a common thing that I see with so many of the people that I work with. It was also something that I used to do all the time too, which is why I want to address it early on in the show. Today we are going to be talking about why we use alcohol to unwind, what we are teaching our brain when we drink to take the edge off, and how to start to change this habit.

Now, if you listen to the last episode on desire, and paying attention to how your thoughts create desire, you may have noticed that some of your thinking is connected to using alcohol to unwind at the end of the day. So, you might have had thoughts like, "I just need to relax", "I really deserve a break", "I want a treat", "I just cannot deal with this day", "I need to feel better," right? All of these thoughts are very connected to the sense of needing to take the edge off, needing to unwind.

Now, before you go any further, I want to be really clear that using alcohol is a way to relax or treat yourself. There is nothing wrong with that. I talked about this a lot in the very first episode where I went over my approach and what makes my approach different when talking about alcohol and talking about why it can be a struggle to take a break or cut back. But one of those pieces that I think is really, really important is the idea that alcohol is morally neutral. Drinking is not a vice, abstaining is not virtuous, we do not need to label our choices as good or bad, or right and wrong. And I think that is really important when we are talking about this issue of using alcohol to unwind, to be really clear that there is nothing wrong with that doing that.

The only reason why I bring this up and I wanted to talk about this today because for so many people it is part of the reason why it can be a struggle to cut back. Now, a glass of wine or beer or a cocktail, it definitely does relax you. Alcohol is a depressant, it acts as a depressant on your central nervous system and what that means is that it can slow down your brain

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activity. So, you can imagine how after a long day with a lot of thoughts rolling around and for a lot of people they will notice or they will find that many of those thoughts are quiet negative, that quieting your brain activity can be actually really appealing.

Now, what people do not like when it comes to using alcohol to unwind is when they find that they do not like how much they are relying on it. Maybe they do not like that they thought they would have one glass of wine and they end up having three. They do not like the empty calories that come along with it. They do not like the fact after a couple of drinks when they have a buzz going they might be more apt to pick a fight with their spouse. Some people will talk about how it makes them really sleepy, after a couple of glasses, and they find that they are falling asleep on the couch really early, and then they are waking up later in the night with just very disturbed sleep, and they might be waking up in the morning feeling groggy or just not clear headed.

So, there are pieces that people do not like about it. But what I hear most often from people is what they do not like is actually the waste of time. There is the sense of I could be doing something else. But I come home, and I just have this really strong need to take the edge off, and I start with a glass of wine, and it might lead to two, it might lead to three, and then I feel like my night is kind of wasted, right? And it is that waste of time that many people really do not like.

So, I am not here to say do not use alcohol to unwind, do not use alcohol to relax. I do not want to think that is useful and I do not think it is also realistic for people. Alcohol has always been used in this way. But I think a useful question to ask yourself is, "Do you like the results you are getting when you use a drink as your 'go to method' to deal with how you are feeling at the end of the day?" It's really paying attention to those results, and asking yourself whether or not you like them?

Now, for those of you who say that you do not like the results, and you do not like the consequences of using a drink as your way to unwind or to take the edge off, it can feel really easy to get stuck because you want to cut back or you want to take a break but then you come home, and you still really feel the need to take the edge off, and now what do you do?

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I am not here to tell you that you should take a walk or run a bath or meditate or take up a hobby. This podcast today is not about finding alternatives, and the truth is I do not think that any of those are really long term solutions when you have gotten in the habit of using a drink to take the edge off on a routine basis. Really, the long term solution is to finally understand what it is exactly that you are taking the edge off of, and the answer might not be entirely what you expect.

A lot of people will tell me, “I am taking the edge off the day”, “I am taking the edge off of work”, “I am taking the edge off of everything that has to get done and I do not have time to do it all.” But the answer really is when you are using a drink to take the edge off, what you are taking the edge off of is how you feel. You are taking the edge off of your emotions, mainly your negative emotions, you are taking the edge off of stress, anxiety, frustration, irritation, apathy, boredom, loneliness, the list goes on. You are using alcohol as a way to kind of dull or dampen how you are feeling.

So, the long term solution, once you understand that is teaching yourself that you can tolerate any feeling that comes up without covering it up and right now it may not feel that way because you have gotten into the habit of using an external substance, using a drink to try to cover up and change how you feel. I have previously talked about the think-feel-act cycle. It’s a cycle that explains how our thoughts create our feelings or emotions, and how our feelings and emotions drive our actions. So, it is a cycle that explains why we feel the way we do and why we do the things we do. If you want to go into much more depth on that I really go into great detail about the think-feel-act cycle in my book “Why Cannot I Drink Like Everyone Else?”

But for now just keep in mind that our thoughts create our feelings and our feelings drive our actions. So, I have talked about previously how our thoughts create our desire, that was the focus of the last episode. But our thoughts do not just create our desire, they create all of our emotions. They create stress, they create anxiety, frustration, irritation, boredom, all of the emotions both positive and negative are always created by our thoughts.

So, when we tell ourselves that we really need a break from this day, what we are really saying is, “I need a break from how I feel” or “I need a break from my emotions, which have been created by what I am thinking.” So let

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us back up and give a little bit of context first because I know that everyone listening, if I ask you what an emotion is, you would be able to tell me, right? You would start listing off feeling states, you would start listing off happy, angry, sad, jealous, lonely, excited, anxious, guilty, regretful, right? You would be able to definitely tell me what an emotion is. But what most people struggle to answer is the question, “How do you know when you are experiencing an emotion?” Right? How do you know when you are having that experience, you know what an emotion is but how can you tell, how can you tell and describe to another person that you are experiencing it?

The answer is that you always feel it in your body. All emotions positive and negative create physical sensations in your body and what I mean by this is that your breathing might change, right? Your breathing might become deeper or it might become shallow, your muscles might tense or relax, you might experience temperature changes, you might have sweating or feel flushed, your feet might get cold, there is all this different changes that happen to our body that most of us are really not used to paying attention to.

But now here is the thing, most people already have a sense of this body connection because we are always using metaphors to convey how an emotion feels, and the metaphors are trying to describe what is happening in our body. So, we will talk about butterflies in our stomach, when we feel nervous or sometimes people will say that they feel a storm brewing inside when they are angry. You might also hear someone talking about their heart melting when they are feeling compassion.

So, the question is why do we use all these metaphors and I think the reason is because many people find it very difficult to express what exactly they are experiencing when they feel an emotion. And I think that it is difficult to express what exactly we are feeling and why we need the help of metaphors is because we aren't ever taught to pay attention to the different physical sensations that happen in our body when we experience different emotions.

So, for example if I was to ask you what does it feel like in your body to be bored, you would probably say something like, “I do not know, but I do not like it” or sometimes when I ask people to describe what a particular emotion feels like, they will start reciting all the thoughts that are going through their head. They will start talking about “Well, I just had a really

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terrible day at work, and I am worried about this presentation, and I am sure that you know my boss is going to not be happy with what I have produced.” We start talking about all these thoughts that we are having because we have really conflated our thoughts and our emotions. We think that emotions are often something that is just happening in our mind. It is an experience in our mind because we so confuse that with our thoughts that we miss what is happening in our body.

Now, why does this matter? It matters because if you get into the habit of using alcohol to change how you feel, especially if you are trying to change any sort of negative emotion then what ends up happening is that you are using a drink, you are using alcohol to basically change a negative emotion that you don't particularly like experiencing and you start to find it kind of intolerable. You do not like feeling stressed and so you want to change that. You do not like feeling anxious and so you want to change that as quickly as possible.

But if you want to stop using alcohol to take the edge off of how you feel, you must get better at experiencing every emotion without covering it up. So, essentially you must learn to better tolerate your emotions and the way that you do this is by creating distance, right? And it is not something that we are taught to do, we are not taught to create distance with our emotions, we are not taught that, we can observe them, and we can observe what is happening in our body rather than being in the emotion, rather than just feeling like, “I'm experiencing it” or “The emotion is taking me over” or “It's something that I need to cover up.”

If we pay attention and observe to what are the changes that are happening in our body it gives us a little bit of distance and once you have that distance, once you start to pay attention to what is happening in your body, the next thing you can do is really ask yourself, “Ok, so what is it about these physical sensations?” So, physical sensations that accompany stress, or anxiety, or irritation, what is it about these sensations that I find so intolerable that I will do anything to avoid it? What exactly is so bad about the tension, the heart racing, the pace of my breathing, whatever it is? Whatever you are noticing? What is so bad about it that I will do anything to avoid it? And when you have this distance and you can ask yourself this question, and you can learn, you start to learn that you can really tolerate any emotion that really builds resilience and you stop feeling like you need something to take the edge off when you come home at the

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end of the day, and you are feeling stressed or anxious or frustrated, and you start feeling like you cannot handle it on your own.

Now, the question is how exactly do you do this, right? We are not taught to pay attention to these physical sensations. We are not taught to try to observe our emotions at a distance. So, how are we going to do this? And the answer is you could do it with something called a body scan. So, here is how it works, when you walk through the door at the end of the day and you have this desire or urge to pour a drink because you want to feel better, maybe you are feeling annoyed at something that happened at work. Maybe you are feeling really overwhelmed by everything that you have to do, whatever the feeling is when you want to pour a drink to feel better instead of immediately doing that what I want you to do is set a timer for two minutes. Sit down somewhere quiet and use those two minutes to really try to focus on what is happening in your body and I want you to focus on the body rather than what is running through your mind.

We actually are much better able sometimes to focus on what is going through our mind, and when I ask people to say you know instead of your mind paying attention to your body, that can feel kind of challenging. But that is what you are going to do, you are going to spend those two minutes really focusing on what is happening in your body.

Now, the first thing I want you to do is to try to name the emotion and I will tell you that this really might harder than it seems. In large part because so many of us are so used to covering up our emotions, resisting our emotions or simply just telling ourselves I do not have time to feel this way. I do not like how I am feeling but I do not have time for it. So, if it seems difficult, if you are not sure exactly what you are feeling just take a guess, right? You do not have to get it correct, the point is you have to just trying to name what you are feeling.

The next thing you want to do is bring your attention to the top of your head, and start very slowly scanning through your body. And what you are looking for are any kind of physical sensations or physical changes. You want to scan from head to toe, and look for areas of tension or tightness, constriction, you want to pay attention to the temperature of your body and the temperature of your extremities might be different. You want to pay attention to your breathing and your heart beat. You just want to see what

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you can discover by scanning from head to toe and trying to notice what is going on.

Again this might be more challenging than you think especially if you really practice at ignoring how you are feeling or constantly using something to take the edge off. When you hit on a particular sensation, maybe a sensation that you do not like, maybe it's tension, maybe it's tightness. What I want you to do is ask yourself, "Can I tolerate this?", "Is this sensation tolerable or do I need something to cover it up?" and just go through every sensation you find and start asking yourself that question.

Now, it is just a two-minute exercise but it really is so worthwhile to try to help get in tune with what is happening in your body when you are experiencing an emotion and learn that you can stay present with whatever is happening and not need to cover it up.

Now, I will tell you why this is challenging, and it is because we are very used to covering up how we feel with way more than just alcohol but it is also why learning this skill is so important. I know for myself that in the past when I started to feel bad and I was not exactly sure why exactly I was feeling bad but I just had this sensation that I did not like. I was really usually in a rush to distract myself. Now, sometimes that meant going out for drinks after work. Sometimes that meant drinking or picking up a bottle of wine when I got home. But it wasn't always using alcohol to cover it up because sometimes I would do it with food, sometimes I just really want to eat and I would find myself eating very quickly and a lot of food so that I would get to the point where I was just too full to feel anything else, right?

It is this idea that anything you put into your body, you are trying to use it to pull energy away from your nervous system. You can do that with alcohol but you can also do that with food, because when you put a lot of food into your digestive system it pulls energy away from your nervous system. Essentially your body only has so much energy at any given moment to deal with things and a lot of food is going to do the same thing in a very different way that drinking will, right? If you are trying to take the edge off.

Now, here is the thing, it is not just things that you consume, right? You can also cover up how you are feeling by distracting or filling up your brain with other things. I would find myself doing this work. So, just working late night after night and telling myself I have so much to do I just got to keep

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working but there is a part of me that knew that working was a way not to have to pay attention to what was really going on. And what was really going on is that I did not like how I felt inside.

People will also notice us with this desire to zone out or tune out in front of the TV or online. So, they will end up spending all this time on TV, all this time on the computer and just not paying attention there. Just filling up their brain with other stuffs so that they do not have to pay attention to how they feel. So, really no matter what you choose it is really the same result you are trying to numb what you are feeling. You are trying to turn down the volume on whatever negative emotion you are feeling but here is the problem, you never address the underlying problem. And the more you numb, the more you teach yourself that you are not very good at tolerating certain emotions, so you never resolve how you feel, you never resolve the underlying issue. What happens is that you just walk through the door with stress, anxiety, boredom, frustration. Whatever it is and you find different ways to cover it up.

In the end it really does not matter what activity you choose but how you feel afterwards, and that really is the point that I would make with using alcohol to unwind. It does not matter if you are doing it, it matters how you feel afterwards and do you like the results you are getting? Do you feel like you are in a better place? Or do you feel like you are just seeking more distraction? That is really the question that you want to ask yourself.

Ok, so here is a recap for today. If you are in the habit of unwinding with a glass of wine, the question to ask yourself is do you like the results that you are getting? If you do great but if you do not and you feel like you want to cut back or you want to take a break, you have to start to find another way to deal with the emotions that you want to take the edge off of. And remember whenever you say you want to take the edge off, what you are really talking about is taking the edge off a negative emotion.

Now, these negative emotions will become more tolerable when you realize you can observe them from a distance by paying attention to how you feel in your body and noticing the physical changes and you do that through a body scan. If you want to stop turning to a drink to feel better night after night, you have to learn that you can handle any emotion that comes your way.

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Ok, so that is it for this week's episode. Let me know how it goes. I love hearing from my listeners and as always if you want to e-mail me about this podcast or a topic that you would like me to cover in the future you can e-mail me at [podcast@rachelhart.com](mailto:podcast@rachelhart.com). And if you liked what you have heard today and you think it was useful, I would love it if you would rate me on iTunes, and leave some feedback.

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](http://RachelHart.com/join) and start your transformation today.