

Ep #49: Settling When It Comes to Your Health



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With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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You are listening to the *Take a Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, episode 49.

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.

Hey everybody. How are you? It's almost the end of the year. It's almost 2018, I'm so excited. Alright, so today I'm going to tell you a story that I cannot get out of my mind. I read it a couple months ago, and I just keep thinking about it, and I've debated sharing it with you guys because it has a tiny bit of an ick factor, and I'm really sensitive to anything gross.

But the fact that I can't stop thinking about this story I think is reason enough to share it and I really do believe that it is the perfect illustration of what I see so many of you doing. So I promise I'm going to share just the basic details so you can get the gist of what happened. I'm going to make this as not gross as possible.

So here's the story. There was a woman in the UK who went in for routine cataract surgery. Now, cataract surgery is pretty common. We all have a natural lens in our eye and that lens is clear, but over time the lens of the eye can become cloudy, which is called a cataract. So obviously if the lens is cloudy, you're not going to be able to see very clearly, and the condition can worsen over time. So a doctor may suggest that you have surgery to replace the natural lens on your eye with an artificial one. It's pretty straightforward.

So this woman in the UK goes in for routine cataract surgery, and other than experiencing cloudy vision, she does not complain to her doctors about any other symptoms in her eye. She doesn't mention any irritation or discomfort or dry eye, nothing. Just cloudy vision. So the doctors start the surgery, but before they can begin, under the top eyelid they find this mass

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of disposable contacts. It's such a crazy story. They find 27 disposable contacts in her eye. 27.

Now, listen. I wear contacts. I have worn them since the 7th grade, I have a very distinct memory when my parents finally gave me permission to wear contacts, and only once, once in 25 years have I put a contact in my eye when another one was already in there. And let me tell you, I knew it right away. But this woman, she had 27 disposable contacts in one of her eyes. I still cannot get over this. It's so crazy to me.

But here's the part I think is so fascinating. Obviously, the doctors postponed the surgery once they find this mass of contacts in her eye, they didn't want to operate when they've found this thing that's not supposed to be in there. And so they were bringing her out of surgery that didn't happen, and they were like, "So we found 27 disposable contacts in your eye. Did you notice anything funny? Any irritation? Anything at all?", like, how did she not notice this, right?

And this is where it gets so good. So first she's totally shocked that she has 27 contacts in her eye, as you should be. But she tells her doctors that for years she has noticed a kind of strange sensation in her right eye and that eye was a little uncomfortable and a little gritty. It was kind of like she had a dry eye but she chocked it up to old age. She decided this sensation that she was feeling was just a part of getting older, it was just a part of a changing body, it was nothing to worry about, nothing to trouble anyone about. And so right, the mass of contacts is removed, and they reschedule the surgery so she comes back to the hospital two weeks later for her cataract surgery. And when she comes back, she reports that she feels so much better and her eye is so much more comfortable.

Okay, now, I understand if you think this is a crazy story, and I don't think that there are lots of you out there walking around with extra contacts in your eye that you don't know about. But I do think that it illustrates such an important point, which is why I wanted to share it with you. And that point is the ways in which we settle into discomfort, how we unknowingly and

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unconsciously decide that feeling bad, feeling physical discomfort is just how life is.

I cannot tell you the number of clients that I have who come to me and when we first start working together, they'll say, "Yes, I mean sometimes if I drink way too much then I'll feel terrible and be hungover, but for the most part, my regular drinking doesn't affect me. You know, I have a couple glasses of wine at night and I don't feel any physical effects. I just don't like the fact that it's become so habitual, I don't like the fact that I'm looking forward to it so much every day and that I feel like I'm missing out if I don't have it, but I'm not really having any physical effects." And they'll say, you know, "I'm sure it's not helping with my weight, but I really don't feel bad in the morning."

Now, here's the thing. I have everyone when they start working with me, I ask them to basically fill out a form that gives me an indication of how much they're drinking on a regular basis. So I have some data points from them already to see what their drinking looks like. And you know, I never say anything. I never push people, I never say, you know, "Are you sure? Are you sure you don't feel good in the morning?" Because I think it's really important to actually discover this on your own, and that's exactly what happens. Once I start working with people, gradually these clients start to become much more conscious of their drinking, much more aware, they're doing really great work to either drink less and many of them start taking breaks from drinking, and suddenly the same thing always happens. They come back to me and they're like, "Holy cow. I cannot believe how much better I feel, like I had no idea at all that I was even feeling bad. I didn't even understand how alcohol was affecting me. I was just waking up in the morning and feeling kind of groggy and not great, but I just thought that was part of getting older. I thought it was part of aging, but now I see it's the glass of wine, it's the beer, it's the cocktail."

So many of us just accept physical discomfort as the norm, as part of aging, as part of growing older, and it's so constant, and also so kind of low level. I mean, think of this woman in the UK. She wasn't having terrible

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pain. She was having this kind of weird sensation in her eye that sometimes felt a little gritty, right? It wasn't like a huge problem to her, but she just accepted it as hey, that's part of getting older. And that's what I see my clients doing all the time with drinking. They just accept it as like, "Yes, you know, this is just how I feel." And they don't attribute it to what they're putting in their body.

And I'll tell you this. It's really interesting because sometimes once my clients have this awareness, they get a little annoyed because what will happen is that they'll come back and they'll say, "Rachel, I had one glass of wine last night. One glass, and I notice such a difference. I notice so tremendously how I just do not feel as good in the morning." But you know what, I always point out to them that they have to remember how unconscious and unaware they were for years, if not decades, to the toll that alcohol was taking on their body. And it was you know, in many ways it was kind of small and subtle. You know, we're not talking about people that were waking up throwing up every day or having huge hangovers, but it was these subtle effects that people just chocked up to I guess is what it's like to get older.

So listen, I know that for some of you listening, it might seem like, "Well, how could you possibly miss the physical symptoms? If these physical symptoms make such a big difference when you clear them up that you feel so much better, you feel tremendously better, how could you miss that?" But you know, I think that the story with the woman in the UK is so illustrative of this, right? She did feel something, she felt it every day and she just told herself it wasn't a big deal, it wasn't worth mentioning to anyone. This low-level discomfort in her eye just became her norm. And so the fact is that when she went in for eye surgery, she didn't even think it was important enough to mention to the doctors.

And I want you guys to consider this. I want you to think about how many of you are settling when it comes to your physical health, and you don't even know it. You're just thinking that how you feel is the result of getting older. You're accepting something as your new norm that actually doesn't have to

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be your norm. Listen, your body and your organs are running all the time. We don't spend a lot of our day thinking about what our stomach and what our small intestines and our liver and kidneys and lungs and heart and brain and skin are doing for us. We don't really think about how they're keeping us alive, until one of those organs stops functioning, or we have a major problem. And then it's like, "I guess my kidneys were kind of important. Didn't really realized it. Never really spent much of my life thinking about my kidneys."

And what I want you to realize is that for those of you right now who are in this kind of regular habit of drinking, you know, you're not spending a lot of time really thinking about how it's impacting your body and how it's impacting all of these physical processes. As soon as you start drinking, all of those physical processes that day to day are running in the background, just keeping you alive, most of them, many of them are put on hold because alcohol is something that your body recognizes as a problem. Your body is like, "We got something that we got to deal with right away. We got to all work together to get rid of this ethanol. We got to get it out of the body", and so all those organs jointly start getting to work. The stomach, the small intestines, your liver, your kidneys, your lungs, your heart, your brain, your skin, all of them, they start working together to rid your body of what you're consuming.

Now, imagine if you do this every day. Imagine if every evening part of your routine is consuming something that your body then goes into fire drill mode on. Imagine if you do it every weekend, and every weekend, every Friday night, every Saturday night, it's time for a fire drill. Your body's got to stop what it's doing and get rid of the alcohol. That becomes your new norm. So you know, my husband likes to joke that when I wake up in the morning it's like somebody flipped a switch on. Like I wake up, and I'm awake. I'm not groggy. I'm not lethargic. I don't have that kind of in between period or that waking up period. I'm just ready to go. And I will tell you, this was not always the case for me, and especially it was not the case when I was drinking.

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You know, nowadays I rarely use an alarm clock, but back then, the alarm would go off and I always wanted more sleep. My body was like, "Rachel, stay in bed. Rest. Stay still, we're trying to work to take care of what you did to us last night." Getting ready in the morning was a slog, I wasn't filled with energy about the day ahead, I wasn't feeling inspired. I often just was kind of blah. Like, that was my norm so often. I was just waking up and feeling kind of blah about everything, and I thought, "This is just what happens when you get older. This is what it's like to be an adult."

And I think that one of the big problems is that so often we only hear about the ways in which alcohol creates really serious health issues, like fatty liver, that we aren't thinking, or we aren't cognizant of all the ways that it creates more mild consequences and side effects in our body. Side effects and consequences that many of us just aren't attuned to, and many of us start to assume, "Yes, it's just part of what it's like to get older. Part of what it's like to age."

So that's what I want to just talk about briefly, is take a look at some of the more subtle ways that drinking may impact how you feel the next day. So you probably know that alcohol can lead to a fitful night's sleep, and it happens in a couple different ways. So it blocks REM sleep, and that sleep, REM sleep, is the most restorative type of sleep, and so when you're having less REM sleep, you're likely to wake up feeling groggy and unfocused. And alcohol is also a diuretic, which means that you need to go to the bathroom more. So when you're going to the bathroom more, that is also interrupting your normal sleep pattern. And because it's a diuretic, it encourages your body to lose extra fluid through sweat, making you dehydrated, which guess what, when you're dehydrated, you may wake up during the night wanting water. Alcohol is also a depressant, so it causes your entire body to relax, including the muscles of your throat, and that can make you more prone to snoring, which guess what, can wake you up and disturb your sleep.

And finally, it generally just disrupts your circadian rhythm, and that's your body's sleep wake cycle, and it does that by affecting the normal

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production of your body's sleep and wake hormones. So you see, there's all these kind of small ways that alcohol is really leading to disturbing your sleep, possibly, at night, and when you're having sleep that isn't restful, when you're waking up multiple times, that's going to affect how you're feeling in the morning.

Now, alcohol can also affect your mood, and I remember feeling this quite a bit, that I would wake up after a night of drinking and I would just feel kind of down. And really down for no reason. I really often could not put my finger on it, I just felt like a cloud had descended. So you know, if you are regularly drinking, one of the things that can happen is that it can lower the level of serotonin in your brain, and serotonin is a chemical that helps to regulate your mood. And you may also feel more anxious the day after drinking, and there are a lot of reasons for this, especially maybe if you've had more than you intended, you might be worried about what you did or said the night before.

But there is also a physical component at play. As your body is removing alcohol from your system, your blood sugar is dropping. So your body is so busy diverting energy so it can get rid of the alcohol that while it's doing that, its work to maintain normal glucose levels actually takes a backseat. It becomes less of a priority, and so then you can end up with low blood sugar, and low blood sugar can often lead to feeling more anxious or nervous.

Alcohol can affect your digestion. It may increase acid in your stomach, which is why it's so common to wake up with a sour stomach the next day, and you know how important digestion is. You know how when your digestion is off it really tremendously affects how you feel.

Alcohol and drinking can also affect the makeup of your gut bacteria, so it can actually allow, it can create this environment where it's possible for the overgrowth of unwelcome microbes, and when you have that happen, you get an imbalance in your gut flora, and you probably - all of you listening, know how important it is to have a healthy balance of bacteria in your stomach to really help with digestion.

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And finally, when it comes to your stomach, and it comes to your GI tract, alcohol can really impair your ability to absorb nutrients and vitamins from the food you eat. And I think that this is a really interesting thing to think about, so I know for one, for a long time, I was very concerned about the food that I put in my body. I still am. I still make healthy choices around food, but I was doing that at the same time that drinking was a regular habit for me. And so, it's like I was doing all this work to put really healthy things in my body and then I was hindering my body's ability to actually absorb nutrients and vitamins from the food that I was so carefully selecting to eat. So those are some of the ways it can affect your digestion.

It also affects your skin. Your skin is your body's biggest organ. Alcohol as I mentioned, dehydrates you, and when you're dehydrated, that makes you puffier because your body is being robbed of fluids and electrolytes, and so what it starts to do in an effort to compensate is to hold on to more water weight, and that fluid retention can create the next day puffiness that you might see in your face, you might see in your stomach, you might just see in other parts of your body. But when your skin is dehydrated, it also has another effect that it makes it more likely to show age. It's more likely when your skin is dry from the inside out that it's going to age and wrinkle more quickly. Something that is also exacerbated by the fact that alcohol robs the body of vitamin A, and that antioxidant is really critical for cell renewal and turnover.

And so, I know especially for a lot of the women that I talk to and work with, you know, how they feel in the morning in large part often has to do with their appearance. And so, I talk a lot about how it's not your appearance that creates how you feel, it's what you're thinking, the thoughts that you have about your appearance, but you can see if you're creating an environment that is kind of robbing your outer self of being able to look its best, that you're going to have to do more thought work to feel better about how you're looking.

And then the final thing and this I know is one that a lot of people think about, is how alcohol affects your weight. So you all know that alcohol is

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just empty calories, right? There's no nutritional value there, and your body can't store alcohol, so it has to metabolize it right away. And your body what it does is it prioritizes metabolizing alcohol over the processes of breaking down fat and breaking down sugar, and so when you're drinking you're more likely to store the fat and sugar from what you're eating. And it also temporarily inhibits something called lipid oxidation. So in other words, when alcohol is in your system, it's harder for your body to burn fat that's already there.

Now, listen, that was a lot of information. But I want you to be aware of these kind of more subtle side effects. I want you to really pay attention to the ways in which drinking and having a regular habit of drinking can totally affect your physical wellbeing, how you feel physically. And most of what I mentioned here, you know, it's not going to send you to the doctor, but it still is going to have an impact on how you feel every day.

So I want you to consider this. I want you to consider if you might be settling when it comes to your physical health. How would you describe your sleep? How do you feel when you wake up in the morning? How often are you complaining about low level fatigue? How common is it that you have problematic digestion? How frequently do you look in the mirror or step on the scale and not like what you see? And how much of this are you chocking up to getting older? How much are you saying, "Well, that's just what happens when you're my age"? What are you settling for when it comes to your physical health, and are you accepting a norm that isn't actually normal?

I really think that this is such a powerful place for all of you to pay attention to and to focus. And the truth is, many of you will not be able to really answer these questions for yourself unless you change your drinking, unless you really change the habit. And taking a break, there is no better way to really get a sense for the true impact that regularly drinking is having on your physical health. So that's all for this week. I hope you weren't too grossed out by that story. I tried to keep it as ick free as possible, but I really do think it's such a powerful thing, the ways in which we tell

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ourselves and make excuses for something that actually isn't right, for something that actually doesn't feel good. The ways in which we tell ourselves, "It's just a part of getting older." I know I did this myself and I did this, telling myself that, "It's just a part of what it's like to get older, I just can't handle my alcohol as well, you just have worse hangovers the older that you get." And I think it's important for you to really sit down and examine how this might be applying to you.

So that's all for this week. Thanks for listening. If you have any questions you can always reach out to me at podcast@rachelhart.com. Otherwise, I'll see you next week.

Hey guys, if you want to go over to iTunes and leave a review about the podcast if you're enjoying it, I would love it. But not only that; I am giving everyone who does a free urge meditation. I will tell you, this meditation, it is super simple. All it takes is five minutes and a pair of headphones. If you are having an urge and you want a different way to handle it, just pop those headphones in, find a place where you can sit down undisturbed and teach your brain, retrain your brain a very simple method to make urges more tolerable. All you need to do is head on over to rachelhart.com/urge and input your information there.

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.

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