

## Ep #55: The Pitfalls of Isolating Yourself from Alcohol



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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 55.

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, welcome back. I want to tell you about a question I got in my Facebook group the other day. And by the way, if you're not in that Facebook group, why are you not in there? It is - the Facebook group, it's a closed group for the Five-Day Reset, and this is the Five-Day Challenge to take a break from drinking. There are videos that I've done, there's amazing conversations going on with everyone who's in there, and every Wednesday I'm in there live answering your questions.

Frankly, I think it's great to be around people that are going through the same thing that you are because I know so often it can feel really isolating. But anyway, I was in that Facebook group and I received this question that I really want to dig in with you guys today. And the question was, "If I'm taking a break from drinking, should I remove all alcohol from my house?"

And the reason why I wanted to discuss this is because it really is a deeper question than just yes or no, this is what you should do or not do. We have such a common belief that if you want to stop drinking, what you have to do is be really, really, really careful and avoid all situations with alcohol. Otherwise, you're playing with fire.

Now, my answer is the opposite. I think that if you try and set up your environment so that you avoid alcohol at all costs, that can actually put you at more risk, and this is what I want to talk with you guys about today. One, why people think having alcohol in your environment is playing with fire; two, why I think that avoiding alcohol at all costs is not only unrealistic but that it also sets you up for more risk down the line; and three, how to be

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smart about when you choose to avoid alcohol and when you choose to be around it.

So I will tell you that for a very long time in life, I held so tightly to this belief that I would be able to finally figure out all the problems in my life, including drinking, but trust me, there were many, many more, if I could just escape to a cabin in the woods. Basically, I wanted to recreate Walden. That is what I believed would be the cure.

So Walden, for those of you who don't know, is a pond in Concord, Mass, where Henry David Thoreau lived for two years and two months, starting in 1845. Now, Thoreau was an essayist, he was a poet, he was a philosopher, he was also interestingly, he was a really staunch abolitionist and a tax resister, and he was a proponent of civil disobedience, this idea that it is morally okay to refuse to comply with certain laws if those laws are unjust. So you could do that as a matter of political protest.

And he wrote a ton, and after his time living at Walden Pond by himself, he wrote about the ideas of self-reliance and living simply, and I will tell you that it really created and romanticized this idea, the idea that you know, it was in the woods, away from all the entanglements, all the responsibilities of the real world that you could find yourself. And I bought into this idea hook, line, and sinker.

I told myself over and over and over again in my 20s, "Oh my gosh, if I could just get away. If I could just escape my life, if I could just live in a cabin in the woods, then, then I could figure all this out." And I'll tell you, I remember actually telling a colleague of mine this. I remember we were - I think we were flying to Armenia. We were on like a 15-hour journey together, and so a lot of things come up when you're on a flight with someone for 15 hours. And I remember telling him like, "I just - I just feel like things would be so much better if I could just escape to the woods, you know? Like, in the middle of the woods, in the middle of nowhere, me in a cabin, I could just figure it all out."

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And he started asking all these questions. Like, "But Rachel, how would you get food? Are you going to hunt? Are you going to be so far away in the woods that you don't have any electricity? What if you need medical help? Are you going to have any communication with the outside world?" I mean, he was really, really poking a lot of holes in this fantasy of mine, and I remember at the time sitting next to him on the plane and just being like, "Ugh, what's wrong with you? You're ruining this fantasy of mine. I just know in my bones. I feel it in my bones that if I could get away from the world that everything would be better. I don't want to answer questions about logistics." Right?

But there was a reason that I held so tightly to this belief, and if you have ever thought something similar, "If I could only just get away, if I only just had a short period of time to myself, then I would be able to figure this out", and the reason that we hold tightly to this belief is because we believe, mistakenly, but we believe that how we feel, our emotions are created by the circumstances in our lives.

So obviously, if we can just escape all of the circumstances creating all of our problems, then we'll feel better. If we can escape our job, and our partner, and our kids, and where I live, and my debt, and my boss, right? If I can get away from all those things, ideally in the woods, where you're free from all the entanglements and responsibilities of the real world, then I'll finally feel better.

That's why so many of us have this belief that we just need to escape at all. This is why I held so tightly to this idea that I just needed to recreate Walden and then I would figure out my life. But remember, this is not how the think-feel-act cycle works. So just to review - and here's the thing. If you haven't listened to the podcast that I did about how the think-feel-act cycle works, I did a whole one just on that cycle. It's number 46, I want you to go back and listen.

But just to review, your feelings are not created by the circumstances of your life. Your job, the money in your bank account, your body, your partner, whatever it is, does not create how you feel. Your thoughts about

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the circumstances of your life, that's what creates how you feel. You don't feel an emotion until you think a thought. And let me tell you, this is good news, because if the circumstances of your life create how you feel, then by god, you're going to have to change all of those circumstances to feel better instead of just focusing on your thinking, instead of just focusing on the thoughts running through your mind.

So remember, circumstances are neutral. What I mean by that is that you don't feel anything about what is happening or what has happened in life until you think a thought about it. Circumstances are basically the facts of your life that can be thought of in different ways. They're not good or bad until you attach a thought to them.

So you have facts in the world, right? So you can have a fact, I have \$20,000 in credit card debt. That's a fact. Everyone would agree. We would all agree that that is a fact if we looked at your statement at the end of the month. But then you can have a whole host of subjective thoughts about the fact that you have \$20,000 in credit card debt. And those thoughts could be, "I'm never going to get out of this", "I'm doomed", "How will I ever pay this off?" Or it could be, "Well, you got to spend money to make money. I'm investing in my business." Right? "I'm definitely not going to spend any more money now."

You can have a whole host of different thoughts about a single fact. So circumstances are neutral. And that's why, you know, a lot of times you'll hear people talk about experiences. I mean, what most people would say, "Oh my god, these are really terrible experiences" and they'll say, "You know what, actually, it was a blessing in disguise." "Actually, the fact that I got sick", "Actually, the fact that I got into that accident", "Actually, the fact that I lost that job, it turned out to be a blessing."

Now, that can never be the case if it was inherently bad. If it was inherently bad, the fact that you got sick, or you lost a job, that would always be a bad thing. But because your thoughts can change, your opinions can change, it can turn into a blessing. That's how that happens.

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Now, most of us have no awareness around this process. The think-feel-act cycle happens automatically and unconsciously. So we're having opinions of everything happening around us all day long, and we're labeling things as good or bad, fair or unfair, just or unjust, all day long. But we're not aware of it. We just think the things that are happening in our life is creating how we feel, instead of understanding it's our thinking about what is happening.

So the think-feel-act cycle shows you how your thoughts create how you feel, and how you can choose to think differently about your circumstances if you want to. So listen, this is why we want to escape our lives, this is why I wanted to escape into the woods and recreate Walden, because I had this belief that the only way to feel better was to get away from the circumstances of my life. I had to get as far away from them as possible because I believed that was what was causing all my negative emotions.

And this is why happens with drinking. So people will say, "Well, it wouldn't be so hard if I wasn't around it all the time", "It wouldn't be so hard if everyone in my life didn't drink", "It wouldn't be so hard if my husband wasn't so into it." Whatever it is, that's what people say, that's what people cite as a difficulty. But what is so difficult is not the physical act of being around alcohol, but the unconscious thoughts you have about alcohol, and about drinking or not drinking, and those thoughts, that's what's creating deprivation, restriction, shame, longing, desire.

It's not alcohol itself, because if alcohol was a thing that just created for everyone deprivation, restriction, shame, longing, desire, then we'd all feel the same way about drinking. But of course, we don't. And of course, one of the things that I talk to you about is how you can actually change your desire. You can change how you feel about alcohol, and the only reason that is possible is because you can change your thoughts about it.

Now, the reason why people believe that having alcohol in your environment is like playing with fire is because they don't understand the think-feel-act cycle. They believe that alcohol creates desire, they believe that this circumstance, the existence of alcohol creates desire. So if you're

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around it, you're always going to feel desire. But alcohol is just a circumstance. It doesn't create anything until you think about it.

So I want you to do this. I want you to think back before you ever had a drink, before alcohol ever entered your life. Were you going to birthday parties being like, "This is so boring without a drink"? Were you going to restaurants having meals, sitting there, pining after a glass of wine? No, because you didn't yet have the thoughts about alcohol that were creating your desire. You hadn't tried it yet.

But your thoughts that you have about drinking aren't set in stone. You can change them. And certainly, I have gone from seeing alcohol as the best thing in the world and the only way to have fun, and the only way to be myself, to something that covers up my true nature. I couldn't change that, I couldn't have had this kind of shift unless alcohol itself was neutral.

Now, I know that some of you are thinking right now, "Wait a minute Rachel, but alcohol does change how I feel. When I consume it, it is a substance that can release dopamine in my brain. So how can alcohol really be neutral?" But even though alcohol can change how you feel, what you think of that change is still up to you, right? You can think that that is the best thing in the world, you can think that it is the thing that covers up who you really are. You can think that it is the only way to have a good time, or you can think that it's actually decreasing your ability to have a good time on your own because you become reliant on this substance to alter how you feel.

So really pay attention to that. Pay attention to how your thinking about alcohol then creates how you feel. Yes, alcohol as a substance can produce a change, an emotional change, but how you think about that depends on your thoughts. I mean, I think sometimes a good example of this is you know, for me, I liked the fact that alcohol made me a little bit out of control. I was so wound up in other parts of my life, I was so uptight that the fact that alcohol removed all these barriers, I saw as a good thing. I had all these thoughts about how it was a good thing.

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Now, I know people who hate that about alcohol. So it's producing the same thing. It's lowering our inhibitions, and there's the ability to have the thought like, "Yes, it's great, I love it" and there's the thought of like, "Oh god, no, I don't want to be out of control. I don't want to lose my inhibitions, I don't want to not have full authority over what I do and what I say and how I act."

So here's the thing for all of you to consider. You can try and remove alcohol from your life. But I'm going to promise you this. You are still going to encounter it. Alcohol has been with humans for thousands of years, it is not going anywhere any time soon. And I think about this actually because I used to travel all the time for my job, and I still travel a fair amount now with my husband, and we were in Japan a couple months ago and we stayed at this amazing hotel on a little tiny island in southern Japan. And when we got to our room, we opened the door and in the middle of the room on a table, the hotel had put out a bottle of champagne sitting in an ice bucket.

So you know, maybe you're thinking, "Well, you know, maybe you could have called ahead and made sure that they didn't have any alcohol in the room or made sure that the mini bar is going to be emptied", but the fact of the matter is that sometimes you are going to encounter alcohol. Now, I wasn't about to drink any of that champagne, and I could have done a lot of things. I could have opened it up, I could have poured it out to "get rid of temptation", but the thing was, there wasn't any temptation there because that bottle of champagne was totally neutral to me.

It was like someone had put a gallon of milk in an ice bucket in my room. In my mind, there was no difference. The milk would just sit there untouched, the champagne sat there untouched. I wouldn't be like, "Oh my god, remove the milk immediately, please get it away." And I think that this is a really important thing for you to remember, because if you're telling yourself that alcohol is what creates your desire, then if ever that were to happen, what would happen in that moment? You walk into a room and there's a bottle of champagne chilling for you, it's just waiting for somebody to drink it.

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Are you going to sit there and freak out that it's there? Are you going to immediately have to get it out of the room? Or will you be like, "Okay, no biggie, it's like as if it were a gallon of milk. I'm not really into milk, so you know, I don't have to immediately remove it." And this is the reason why I really do believe that you can set yourself up for more risk when your goal is to remove alcohol entirely. Because what happens is one, you're going to encounter it sometimes. And then two, when you remove it entirely, you don't get the chance to look at your thoughts about the alcohol. And if you can't look at your thoughts about the alcohol then you can't change them.

So when people say, "You know, if you have a problem with drinking, then you can't be around alcohol", what it does is it denies how the think-feel-act cycle works. Not only that, but it denies your free will. Alcohol can't make you pick it up; it just sits there. But if you tell yourself it's so powerful that it can make you drink, then you're in a world of trouble. Because what happens when you spend all your time trying to remove alcohol from your environment and then you encounter it by accident, or unexpectedly, what happens then?

So I think a really interesting way to think about this is to actually remove it entirely from the realm of alcohol and think about weighing yourself on a scale. So I know this is going to blow a lot of people's minds out there, but you know how I talk about things being neutral? The number on the scale, your weight, that's also neutral. No matter what it says, no matter the number, it is just a fact. You don't feel anything about that number until you think a thought, until you make it mean something.

Now, I will tell you, I went through a long period in my life not understanding that and not believing that the number on the scale was neutral, but believing that the number on the scale signified my self-worth. So the lower the number the more worthy I was. And I remember in high school, I would get out and I would weigh myself every day to see if my weight had changed, and to essentially see how worthy I was that day. And the result that I would see, the data point that I would get, it would either make my day or it would ruin my day.

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I missed the fact - no one explained to me that the number didn't mean squat about me. It was what I was thinking, and what I was thinking were versions of, "I'm so fat" or "I'm kind of skinny today." Whatever the number was didn't make me feel anything until I had a thought about it. So at some point in high school, you know, I didn't understand that the number was neutral, but I did understand that I was making myself crazy. I did understand that my life was starting to be dictated by a scale, and so I decided, "I know, I'll just stop weighing myself. If I never weigh myself, then I'll never get that information", and I believe that data point, that weight was what made me feel bad, so if I never get the information then I'll never feel bad.

And you know what, I succeeded at doing this for years. I mean, I probably went - I don't even know, maybe six years of my life, maybe even longer, of purposely not weighing myself. But now here's the thing. Scales don't magically go away, right? And so I remember the one time it would always come up is when I went in for a physical, and you have to step on a scale. And I would go through this crazy rigmarole of being in the doctor's office and always having this big to do. Like, "Listen, I don't weigh myself, it's really important, don't tell me what the number on the scale is, I don't want to know", and for the most part that worked.

I remember once I was getting a physical and I told the nurse, and so the nurse weighed me and she wrote down the number but she didn't tell me what it was, and then a couple minutes later the doctor came in the office and was like, "Hey, looking through your chart, I see you're 160", and my head about exploded because here's the reason, I hadn't dealt with any of my thinking about what this data point meant.

I had just been hiding from data. I'd been hiding from these data points, the number on the scale because I was so convinced that's what made me feel good or bad. So I thought I had to hide from them. But in the process of hiding for all those years, I never actually looked at my thoughts because I didn't have to see them because I was hiding. So all these negative thoughts about what the number meant and how it was connected to my

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self-worth and how it was connected to whether or not I was attractive, all of them were left unchanged. They just were sitting there lying in wait until that moment that that doctor walked in and read that number. And my brain exploded.

So the thing is, I realized, you know, okay, well I can either structure my entire life to avoid the scale and never ever get to the root cause, which is my thinking about what that number means, or I could look at the root cause of my thoughts about that number. And I remember actually when I started this coaching journey and I encountered a coach who suggested that you weigh yourself every day as a tool to bring up awareness around your thinking, and I was just like, "What is she talking about? This is nuts. There is no way I am going to do this, I will obviously feel terrible every day."

But, right? This scale just provides data. It's just a number and numbers are neutral. The thing that really you have to understand is what are you making that number, what are you making that data point mean about you. And you know, one of the things she said was, "Your weight is the numerical value of your gravitational pull on Earth." I love that so much, right? It's just so factual. It can't tell you anything about who you are as a person, it can't tell you anything about your abilities, or your talents, or your contributions, or your self-worth. It's just a numerical value of your gravitational pull on Earth. It's all your weight is.

And so, I started stepping on the scale on purpose, but not to see that data point, but to bring up all the thoughts I had, to bring up all my thinking, because if I could see all those thoughts, then I could start to question them and change them, and I didn't have to be in hiding from a number. And I want you to consider that you can use this exact same premise with alcohol.

You don't have to be in hiding. You don't have to isolate yourself. In fact, not being in hiding, being around alcohol sometimes is a fantastic way to look at all your thinking. All your thoughts saying, "This isn't fair, life is so boring, I'm no fun without it", whatever it is, if you want to change feeling

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deprived, feeling like you're missing out, feeling like you - there's something wrong with you, feeling like you have all this unchecked desire, then you have to look at your thoughts.

So the question then is, how do you make a smart decision about when to choose to be around alcohol and when to choose to avoid it. And this is really important for those of you who are just starting out on your journey. I will tell you this. Just because alcohol is neutral and just because it's going to - being around it is going to bring up all your thoughts about alcohol, that doesn't mean that you should or that you need to pour yourself a glass of wine every day and stare at it and see what thoughts come up. Especially at the beginning, you don't have to put yourself in that situation.

Especially when you're starting out, I think it's perfectly okay to remove alcohol from your home if that's possible. It's not always possible for everyone, if you're trying not to drink and your partner drinks. But if it is possible and you want to do that, I think it's perfectly okay. I also think it's perfectly okay when you're starting out to take a little step back from social events. Especially ones where you know the focus is really going to be on drinking.

Sometimes there are those events where you know like, everybody's there to get drunk. But here's the thing, I do not recommend that you do this forever. I really do not because there is such a benefit in being in situations where you are around alcohol. So that you can see your thoughts appear, you can see the thinking that's creating desire, restriction, missing out, longing. Because if you can see it, you can question it and change it. If you can't see it, you're going to be like me at the doctor's office. Like, six years in, hiding from the number on the scale, and then all of a sudden, it's told to me and my head exploded.

Now, listen, this is going to vary for everyone. There's no right time to do this, but do ask yourself, "Do I feel like I'm hiding? Do I feel like I'm isolating?" And if this has been going on for an extended period of time, then you're going to have to start to challenge that. You're going to have to start to step out and put yourself in more challenging situations.

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And if you don't feel ready, that's okay. You can still look at your thoughts. You don't actually have to be in the environment. You can just start with a piece of paper and a pen and ask yourself, "What do I think it would feel like to be at the party or the restaurant or the wedding, and be the only one drinking club soda? What would I be thinking about the event? What would I be thinking about other people, myself, about my future?" Just imagine this scenario and you can bring up all your thoughts about it.

But here's the thing, guys. If you're hiding from your thoughts about drinking, you cannot change them. And if you can't change them, then guess what? You're stuck with these thoughts. You're stuck feeling all the negative emotions that you're trying to avoid. If you try and control your environment, if that's where you put your focus, one day, I promise you, you're going to run into a situation that you can't control. It's going to be you in the hotel room by yourself with the mini fridge, and then what?

Being around alcohol on purpose can show you the thoughts that are getting in the way of your change. It can show you all your beliefs. "It's not fair", "Why me?", "I hate restrictions", "People will think I have a problem", "I'm no fun", "Life is boring", "It won't be exciting anymore". You do not need to escape your life. You do not need to hide out from everyone and everything to make headway on the habit of drinking. You just need to be willing to look at your thoughts. If you can look at them, you can challenge them. If you challenge them, you can change them. And that's how the think-feel-act cycle works.

If you can change what you're thinking, you can change what you're feeling and how you're acting. Alright everybody, I'm always here if you have questions, if you want to hear me cover a certain topic on the podcast, shoot me an email at [podcast@rachelhart.com](mailto:podcast@rachelhart.com). Otherwise, I will 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

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