

Ep #74: Losing the Desire to Drink



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast, episode 74.

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. So we are talking about the topic that I love. It is about losing your desire to drink. And the reason why I love this topic is because it is so hard to imagine what it is like not to desire drinking, not to desire alcohol, when you really, really love it. When you really, really want it.

And let me tell you, for me, this was just something for the longest time I truly believed was impossible. It would be impossible not to desire it. I could stop drinking, I could take a break, but I would always want it, I would always feel like I was missing out.

I believed that for so long and the idea that that doesn't have to be your reality, it is where you get all your freedom. So here's what I first want to talk about. Part of the reason why I think this is a hard concept to envision is because most of society labels the act of no longer drinking for someone who previously drank, as abstaining, right?

You've probably said this yourself. Now, I don't ever use the word abstaining to describe myself, to describe not drinking alcohol, and I really want you to understand why because it really connects with this concept of losing your desire.

If you look at the word abstain, it's defined this way: the fact or practice of restraining oneself from indulging in something. I want you to really hear that. The fact or practice of restraining oneself from indulging in something. Do you see the problem?

Now, I'm talking about how to lose your desire to drink, but abstaining is focused on restraining yourself from something that you currently want. The

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word abstaining suggests the desire is still there but you are resisting this, and that my friend, is not the same as losing your desire. That is willpower, right? That is summoning up your will, this internal resource that you have to say no to something that you want.

Now, if you've been listening to this podcast, you know that I truly believe that willpower is really not a long-term sustainable solution because willpower is a limited resource. It's exhausting to keep fighting off the desire inside of you, which is why it's so much more sustainable to learn how to change your desire to drink, and that's what so many people this is impossible.

I can say no but I'm always going to want it, I'm always going to feel like I'm missing out. And that's why so many people say no for a period and then go back to saying yes. It just feels like, well, that desire never went away.

But here's the thing, you can do this. You can learn how to change your desire to drink because your desire is created by your thoughts. That's where the think-feel-act cycle comes in. What you think about drinking creates how you feel about picking up a glass or not picking up a glass.

That's a really important piece. Alcohol does not make you pick up the glass. It's the thinking that you have that creates the desire and the desire that then you act upon. And this is why I say that I don't abstain from alcohol because it suggests that there's a need to restrain myself from this internal desire. But I have to tell you, my desire to drink is no longer there. It's gone because I have done the work, I have looked at the thoughts that were creating my desire to drink and I have actively worked to change them.

You know, if you're struggling with this concept and if you are, don't worry. When I was first introduced to it, I kind of struggled with this as well. But I want you to think of a food or some sort of substance that you don't like. So for me, that would be milk. I think I've talked about this on the podcast before. I have zero appeal in drinking a glass of milk. That never ever sounds good to me.

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If someone offered me milk, I would not say, "Oh sorry, I abstain from milk," because I don't want to drink the milk. I'm not restraining myself from indulging in milk. There's no desire there.

Remember what it means to desire something. It's the emotion of wanting something, to hanker for it, to wish you had it, to long for it, to yearn for it. I don't have any longing for milk. I don't yearn for milk, I don't wish I could have it, I don't want it. I don't have desire for it.

And so I think that that is a helpful idea for you to consider when you think about this fact that you really can learn how to change your desire. Now, I usually hear two objections when I introduce this idea, and the first is this: okay fine, you don't want to drink a glass of milk, Rachel, I get it. But what if you really like the taste of something? How would you possibly lose your desire for something when you really enjoy the taste?

Well, your desire to consume something is created by what you are thinking about the taste of something, not the taste itself. This is such an important distinction. Your desire is not created by the taste itself, but what you are thinking about the taste of something.

You know, when I was preparing this podcast episode, I was thinking, what's a great way to explain this, and I immediately remembered this Seinfeld episode. I love Seinfeld, by the way. This Seinfeld episode where Jerry visits a restaurant called Papi's. So if you've seen this episode, it's great. He happens to be dating the owner's daughter at the time. So he goes to the restaurant with her and he runs into her father, Papi, who owns the place.

And he meets him and then he happens to run into him again in the bathroom. And he watched as Papi doesn't wash his hands after using the bathroom. And you can imagine what ensues next. So he's disgusted and he goes back to this table and he sees Papi kneading the pizza dough for the pizza that they're going to eat with his unwashed hands, and then when the food comes to the table, well, guess what happens, Jerry refuses to eat any of the pizza because he's so disgusted.

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Now, listen, I want you to think about this. The taste of the food did not change. And you might say, yeah, but that's disgusting. It's disgusting when you think that somebody had unwashed hands and then they were, you know, making pizza for me.

But I really want you to consider this. The actual taste of that pizza was the same. The only thing that changed was his desire to have that taste. And the reason that happened is because of the thoughts that he was thinking about the fact that Papi hadn't washed his hands. Those thoughts were what changed his desire.

So now, here's the thing. You don't have to go around thinking that every wine glass or pint glass or cocktail glass is contaminated with germs. But you can start to question and evaluate the thoughts that are creating your desire. And so many of you don't ever do that because you just say, "Well I just love the taste. I love the taste so it's impossible to change my desire."

But it's not the taste that is creating your desire. It's the thoughts that you have about the taste. So you can stop telling yourself, "Oh, if I love the taste, then I'll always desire it. It's impossible for it to change."

You know, I think about this with my kind of favorite drink, or used to be my favorite drink, which was a gin and tonic. So I had all these thoughts about how I just love gin and tonics, but my desire, that desire that motivated me to pick up the glass and to drink it was created not by the taste itself but why I wanted to drink it.

And not only that, what it meant about me if I didn't, right? What it meant about me if I was just drinking seltzer and lime. So here's what I want you to ask yourself. What are you telling yourself life would be like without the taste of your favorite drink? Why is that taste so important to you?

This is the kind of thing that most people just say, "I just love it." But really ask yourself, what are you telling yourself life would be like without the taste of your favorite drink, and why is that taste so important to you?

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You know, when I dig into this idea with people, one of the things I talk about is alright, let's say I could wave a magic wand and remove all the intoxicating properties from your favorite drink. Would you really love the taste as much as you say you do right now? Is it really the taste that you're after or - I want you to be honest with yourself - is it more the feeling that you're after from the drink?

This is a really important question for you to consider and not just take at face value, the idea that if you love the taste of something that that's what you're really after and that's what's creating all your desire. Listen, I was sure that I loved gin and tonics, but you know what I discovered? I like tonic and I like lime, but gin on its own, not so much.

I liked what gin did for me, I liked how it felt when I had gin in my system. I liked the fact that I felt more relaxed, I felt more confident, it seemed that my internal self-critic started to quiet a little bit. And I know some of you out there are saying, yeah, okay, I get it, you don't really actually like the taste of gin on its own, but I really love the bitterness of beer or the acidity of whatever my favorite wine is. It's not about the mixers.

But I want you to really consider. I want you to challenge yourself. Whatever your favorite drink is, if it created no feeling for you, no physical change, no buzz, no sense of relaxation, no quieting of the chatter in your mind, no loosening up, if none of those changes were the result of drinking it, what specifically do you love so much about it that you cannot imagine not having it in your life?

So consider that, consider that taste is neutral, your desire for that taste is created by your thoughts, not the taste itself, and so start really understanding, what are those thoughts that you're having?

Now, the second objection I get when I talk to people about the idea that you can lose your desire to drink is, well, okay fine, you don't desire drinking milk, Rachel, but milk doesn't create a huge dopamine reward in your brain, and how can you stop desiring something that creates that

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reward, that creates all the feelings that alcohol produces for us once you've had it?

And the answer is actually surprisingly simple. Because here's the thing: you are blessed with a human brain. You have a prefrontal cortex, and what that means is that you are able to consider and weigh the benefits of the reward and decide if getting drunk is actually what you really want, if it is actually worth it, and if it actually getting you closer to a future and an outcome, and a version of yourself that you really like. That's what you get to do. You get to supervise your own brain.

Now, a lot of people are going to say, well, how else am I supposed to relax? How else am I supposed to loosen up? How else am I supposed to enjoy myself if everybody at the party is drinking and I'm not?

What happens is we get so committed to the idea that the only - the reward of alcohol can create the feelings that we're after and so it seems like, well, there's no other option available. Either I drink and I have a way to relax, a way to loosen up, a way to enjoy myself, or I suffer. And I have these thoughts too. If you are in this place right now, I get it.

But here's the good news. That's not how it works. This is the beauty of the think-feel-act cycle. Your thoughts create your feelings. And so if you're feeling stressed or insecure, or bored, you don't need to find an external substance to mitigate those feelings - oh, and by the way, leave you with a bunch of negative consequences the next day. You just need to find the thoughts creating those feelings and practice thinking different things. Practice learning how to shift them.

What are you thinking that is creating stress for you? Is it thoughts like, "There's too much to do, I'll never get this done?" What are you thinking that's creating your insecurity? "I'm terrible at small talk, I don't fit in here." What are you thinking that is leaving you feeling unentertained and deprived? "Ugh, he's such a blowhard to listen to, this is no fun without alcohol."

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Your thoughts create how you feel. Most people never have this understanding. And so when it comes to changing a habit like drinking, you may think, well, either I can drink and I can have a way to relax, loosen up, enjoy myself, or I can suffer. And I want you to see that there is another way, and that is by understanding how your thoughts create your feelings.

You can change your desire if you're willing to stop telling yourself that only a drink can make you feel better. You can change your desire if you are willing to start using the think-feel-act cycle and take responsibility for how you feel at any given moment. And look inside your head and see what thoughts are in there instead of outsourcing how you feel and the responsibility for how you feel to a drink.

Now, here's the thing. I want you to really be careful when you start embarking on this idea that you can lose your desire to drink because the opposite of not wanting or not desiring something is not hating it. And this is really important because I see people get stuck here all the time.

I watch people flip from thoughts like, "Alcohol's amazing, I love it," to when they start to embark on changing the habit and interrupting how the habit is unfolding, and they start to embark on changing their desire, what they do is they start to really notice the negative effects that drinking is having in their life. They start to really examine how alcohol is impacting how they feel in their relationships.

And what do they do? Their thoughts switch from, "Alcohol is amazing, I love it," to, "I hate it. It's evil, it's poison, it's sneaky, it's bad." Now, here's what you need to pay attention to. If you notice yourself flip from loving to hating alcohol, then alcohol is at least in your mind, something that is still holding power over you.

You don't need to go to hate in order to lose your desire. In fact, I actually think that that is a mistake. Because you are the only person who feels your emotions. Alcohol doesn't feel them. It doesn't feel anything if you love it, and it certainly doesn't feel anything if you hate it.

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But guess what? You do. You know what it's like to hate someone or something. It takes energy away from you. It's exhausting to be around someone or something that you hate. It doesn't feel good.

And what I find is that when people end up switching from I love alcohol, I love drinking to I hate alcohol, why that has happened is because they are stuck looking backwards. Their brain gets caught up in the negative past and they feel a lot of regret. So what you might find yourself doing is looking at all these things that you think alcohol took away from you, all these opportunities that I missed out on, or things I wished that I hadn't said or done. And I know I certainly did this too.

Now, the problem is when your brain is stuck in the negative past, what that means is that you are having a lot of negative thoughts, and those negative thoughts are creating negative emotion for you. And guess what you've trained your brain to do when you feel negative emotion? Find relief from something in your external world.

So we look to drink something or eat something or spend money or tune out. So then to lose desire is not to go from wanting something, from loving something to hating it, but from wanting to nothing. To feel totally neutral about it. Alcohol just is.

This is how you can get to a place of losing your desire. One of the ways that I really like to think about this concept is to think about a past relationship. Now, there are maybe some past relationships that you have had that maybe you still have desire for, the one that got away, and there are others where you may have past relationships where you have a lot of resentment or regret.

But either way, if you still have desire or you still have resentment or regret, you're expending emotional energy in either the longing or the hating. But I want you to consider this. I want you to consider that there can be past relationships out there, someone that you once loved a lot or you had a crush on, or maybe it wasn't even a romantic relationship. Maybe it was a friendship that now you truly feel nothing towards. You don't feel dislike,

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you don't feel distaste, you don't feel longing, you just don't really feel anything for this person.

I actually think about this with a relationship that I had after college. And it's funny because if you were to pick up my diaries from the time, I was so obsessed with this guy. I spent so much mental energy thinking about him and wondering what he thought about me, and picturing our future and worrying, does he like me as much as I like him? I mean, I just had like, pages and pages of journal entries.

And I remember when that relationship ended, I was devastated. I was so heartbroken. How could he have done this? And I left his apartment that night that he ended it, just sobbing and sobbing on the way home. I felt kind of dead inside.

And I really longed after him for months. And then something happened. Time passed. I moved on. I had other relationships, other boyfriends. And you know, I remember about a decade after we broke up, he happened to be in town and he had a meeting near my office, and he sent me a note and we agreed to meet up.

And you know, it had been 10 years after all and so I was curious to see him. And when we met up, we probably chatted for about 20 minutes and it was a really pleasant conversation, but I remember it was the strangest sensation. Because here was this person sitting across the table from me and we knew all this stuff about each other, right? He had been in my life and he knew about my family and we had spent time being incredibly intimate but I just felt nothing.

I just felt totally neutral. And it was hard to even remember how or why I desired him so much, or how I was so devastated when he broke up with me. I remember that I was devastated, but it was hard to connect back to those feelings.

But I also wasn't feeling anything negative towards him. I mean, he's not a bad guy, he's not a jerk, there's nothing wrong with him. He's really smart,

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he's well educated, he's kind, I'm not carrying any resentment that he broke up with me because you know, honestly, at this point, I was like, yeah, that was not the right relationship.

But I also didn't feel a lot of longing or warmth from our past memories together. I just felt totally neutral. And I think about that and I think, god yeah, of course, it is possible to have someone or something in your life that you feel so intensely about, so much longing, so much desire, so much love, and then one day you don't.

And of course the reason that I don't is because of all my thoughts about him really changed, it just happened in this very natural way that I wasn't even aware of. And I wasn't really aware of it until I saw him a decade later and I just thought, "Huh, that was weird. I used to really be into this dude." Now I feel kind of nothing.

So I want you to think about that. I want you to think about if you have any examples in your life about someone or something that you used to love so much and now you don't hate, you don't resent, you don't feel regret, you just feel kind of neutral. Because it is possible for you to lose your desire for alcohol, to be in a place where you think like, I love it, I can't imagine my life without it, right?

That's where I was. I thought my life would be incomplete without alcohol. And not only that. Not only would it be incomplete, but I thought life would be boring, dull, and tedious if I wasn't drinking.

And now I watch people drink and I just don't feel anything. I don't have nostalgia, I don't look back with longing, I'm just like, oh, okay, that is so not where I am anymore. I just don't have that desire.

Because I'm not telling myself anymore that I need a drink to feel a certain way or that life without alcohol will mean that I'll always be missing out or that I'll somehow be abnormal. And the only reason that I'm able to do that is because I use the think-feel-act cycle to identify why I had so much

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desire, what were all the thoughts creating that desire and then learned how to change that thinking, right?

I looked at those thoughts, I examined them, I challenged them, and slowly I developed a whole new way of thinking about drinking. And if you want, you can do this too.

Alright, you know where to reach me. If you have questions, you want to hear me talk about particular topics on the podcast, send me a note at 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 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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