

## Ep #135: Why You're Not Having Fun When You're Not Drinking



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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 135.

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.

Well hello my friends. It is a beautiful sunny day in San Francisco and the foghorns are going off, which is always so confusing for my brain. It's very hard to wrap your brain around beautiful sunshine and foghorns at the same time but that is what it is like living in this city and I love it here. It is amazing.

Alright, so before we dive into today's episode, which is another listener Q&A, I just wanted to talk really quickly about the *Take A Break* program that I am launching at the end of the summer. It is going to be opening up in a couple weeks. I am so thrilled. It's going to be amazing. It is for every woman out there who wants to take a 30-day break from drinking and to do it differently.

To not do it as just gritting your teeth and using willpower and white-knuckling it, but using it as an opportunity to really learn how to take the think-feel-act cycle and learn how to apply it, learn how to use it as a tool in your life, learn how to start to allow your urges so they feel peaceful. And really understand what's getting in the way of commitment.

You can use the break period as a way to transform your entire life. I'm so excited about this. I cannot wait until I have more details to share with all of you. But if you are interested, please, please, please, keep your eyes and ears open for information from me. I am going to be sharing with you guys how you can take part, how you can join, it's going to be an amazing experience.

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So that said, it actually really brings me to the question that I got today from one of my listeners. And I think it's really apt because it is talking about some of the challenges that come up when you decide to take a break from drinking.

And if you don't have the tools to learn how to manage your mind, if you don't have the tools to learn how to unwind the habit, sometimes you're just kind of floating in this no man's land and not sure how to make progress, even though you're currently taking a break. So let me just the question that I got.

"I am 62 days alcohol-free and I noticed I sometimes don't look forward to special dinners. Birthdays and anniversaries. Things like that. Because I'm weary about dealing with not drinking or just believing it won't be as fun or as special. Sometimes I don't have as much fun when I go out as I did in the past. I've tried writing down thoughts and feelings that tell me it's not as fun and then weighing the option of one night of fun versus being hungover and feeling like crap the next day. I've pretty much eliminated drinking at home but the social thing is the last sticking point."

Okay, so I love this question so, so much because it really perfectly encapsulates the ups and downs of unwinding the habit. Because first, you make the commitment to take a break, which that in and of itself can be a pretty big mental obstacle. Then you actually follow through on your commitment and you take a break. And you're feeling good and it's going well, and then you start to uncover these little sticking points.

Things like socializing isn't as fun or you don't know what to do with yourself in the evenings, or maybe you find yourself less open to being intimate with your partner, or maybe you notice that you're turning to other numbing habits like overeating. And I will tell you that most people mistake what is happening at this point.

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Because what will happen is they will think, oh my god, I took a break to feel better. I wanted to take a break from drinking so that things would improve, and here I am in the middle of my break, I'm doing all this work, and it's still hard and I don't want it to be hard. The reason why I did this was because I wanted things to get better and to be easier.

And I will tell you, this is the fork in the road for so many people and I know this because it was the fork in the road for me so many times. I would get to this point where I was not drinking and I would be like listen, I'm not drinking, I cut out the alcohol, but I'm not enjoying myself. I'm not having fun.

And all I really wanted deep down was to enjoy my life, to feel good. And this is where I would get so frustrated and so many times I would just say well, it's not worth it and I would go back to drinking. But when you work with me and when you have the opportunity to work with a coach, this is the point where I get so excited for my clients because I'm like oh yes, now we're at the good stuff. This is the point where you have the opportunity to supercharge your results, but only if you keep going.

This is the point where most people get confused and they think that something has gone wrong and they quit. And they'll say listen, okay fine, I felt better when I wasn't drinking but I just wasn't enjoying my life as much. And this is where I quit so many times too but you don't need to quit here if you learn how to manage your mind.

The reason why I say that this is the point, this fork in the road is where you get to the good stuff is because when you first take a break from drinking, there is a pretty big adjustment period for a lot of people before you can really get to this deeper level work, and you have to go through this adjustment.

So first your body has to adjust to not drinking on a regular basis. So you might discover that you're feeling a little groggy or irritated or anxious, or

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maybe just not feeling like yourself. If you have ever had the experience of really changing your diet, maybe you cut out carbs or you took out sugar, those first couple days, sometimes even the first couple weeks do not feel good because your body is trying to adjust to a new normal, and this can happen with drinking as well.

A lot of people at this point, they'll say oh god, forget it, it's too hard, and go back. But if you make it through the adjustment, the physical adjustment, then you usually get to this point where you're having to adjust to allowing urges because whenever you're taking a break, you're going to notice that your urges are popping up with so much more frequency, especially in those beginning days.

It can feel sometimes like you're playing Whack-a-Mole with your desire. That's how it felt with me. Especially when you don't know how to allow an urge, you don't know how to feel peaceful about an urge but you're just using willpower, it can definitely feel like Whack-a-Mole, like you're just trying to get rid of it anywhere you see it.

So you have to adjust to learning how do you allow your urges? How do you not freak out and not distract yourself and not grit your teeth but just be peaceful with it because you know ultimately it will pass. And soon, your mind starts to adjust to this idea. Okay just because we feel an urge at 5pm doesn't mean we drink at 5pm. Doesn't mean that we're going to reward the brain even though the brain's expecting that.

And guess what? The more you allow those urges, the more you don't reward them, the more they start to quiet down. But then there's also the time adjustment. So if you're used to spending your evenings drinking, a lot of my clients will run into this obstacle because they'll spend their entire day with the thoughts, I don't have enough time, I'm running behind, I've got way too much to do.

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All of these thoughts which create anxiety and overwhelm, and so they get to the end of the day and they're desperate for relief, and that's where alcohol used to come in. But now what happens when you're on a break? What happens when you have done the adjustment with your body and the adjustment with the urges and you're still not drinking but you're still having all those thoughts all day long?

Well, what will happen is people will start to look for other kinds of relief. They'll start to say well, maybe I can eat something, maybe I can watch something, maybe I can buy something. And sometimes what happens to some of my clients, and this is always a little bit of a trip is they'll spend all this time saying I don't have enough time and I'm so behind, I've got so much to do, and then when they take a break from drinking, they get to the evening and they're like wait a minute, I kind of have too much time on my hands. I'm feeling a little bored. I don't really know what to do.

And so you have to get to this place where you can be okay with time. You can be okay with how you are feeling. Instead of all the judgment, instead of just turning to something to numb how you feel, you have to start to shift how you adjust to the time that you have and how you use it.

Because especially if you just turn to another way to numb, if you just take out overdrinking and you replace it with overeating, which let me tell you, I did that a million times, then all of a sudden, you're just wasting time in a different way and you're creating a different set of negative consequences that guess what, then take up more time.

But when you get past all three of these adjustments, when you feel like you're kind of settling into a good place, the adjusting of your body and your mind and time, you can get to a place where you're like hey, you know what, I'm feeling kind of good. I'm kind of enjoying not drinking. And that in and of itself can be mind-blowing.

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And you might be able to coast here for a little bit but then the same thing always happens. One of these sticking points will start to pop up and this, my friend, is where the next level of unwinding the habit comes in. This is where you start to do the deeper work.

Now, don't freak out. It's supposed to happen. You have just encountered another layer of the habit. You can think of the habit as like an onion. It has multiple layers that you can peel back. You can peel one away and you discover another one. That's okay. That just means there's a deeper level for you to learn and understand your mind and how the habit is working.

And this is really where I want to go back to the question because what the question really boils down to is I just don't have as much fun when I go out as I did in the past. I'm okay not drinking at home in the evenings, but socializing, it's not really working.

And this is so often the case for people. You have to learn a new way to socialize. You have to learn a new way to have fun and enjoy yourself. I definitely had to do this. Now, I love that the listener wrote in and said that she wasn't just sitting there complaining. She was like okay, let's get to work, how do I figure this out? Let's identify the thoughts and feelings that I'm having when I'm not having fun.

But here's where she got stuck and I don't want you to feel bad if you have gotten stuck in this place as well because I used to be stuck here too. You basically said my options are I can drink and have a night of fun or I can suffer the consequences of my drinking and feel hungover and feel like crap the next day.

And it seems really logical, these two options, that you're trying to balance having fun against being hungover. Because no one wants to willingly feel hungover and crappy from drinking so it seems like that should kind of tip the scale in favor of not drinking. But there's a problem with the options as you have set them up.

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Your options are assuming that it is a fact that not drinking is less fun. Basically, what's happening is that you are asking yourself, you're saying hey, please be willing to suffer tonight and not drink so that you won't have to feel bad in the morning. And a lot of people try to motivate themselves this way.

I used to try to motivate myself this way and it never works because a life of suffering, a life of not fun, of not enjoying yourself just in the name of being healthy, I mean, let's face it, it sounds pretty dull and uninspiring. Because the truth is humans are meant to be happy. We are meant to laugh and dance and be silly and joyful and just enjoy ourselves.

I think it's your birthright. You are meant to delight in being alive and if you think that that sounds a little woo-woo, listen, all you have to do is look at a little baby. I watch this with my little boy all the time. I have to say, now that he has turned one, I feel like I can't call him a baby anymore. He's starting to look like a little boy.

But he delights in balls and he delights in pushing his walker and he delights in using his voice even though he's not really making words right now. He delights in eating and drinking and looking closely at everything and looking at his father's face and my face and the face of the cashier at the grocery store.

Having fun and enjoyment is as natural as breathing is to him. It is built into our system. The problem is as we get older, we're given all these rules about fun. You have to earn fun, you can't have too much fun, be serious, settle down. I think about how often I heard that as a kid. You need to settle down, Rachel.

Society starts to tell you that you're only supposed to have certain kinds of fun. Boys have fun with trucks and girls have fun playing with dolls. And advertisers start selling you fun. Buy this, eat this, spend this, consume this. That way you'll have fun.

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I did a whole episode on the difference between creating fun and consuming fun. It's episode number 25 and it's still one of my most popular ones. So if you want to check that out, make sure you have a listen. But basically, fun goes from being this birthright, this thing that is so natural, it comes as naturally as breathing does, and suddenly it has all these conditions.

And then on top of all of those conditions, then we introduce alcohol and that's where things get really complicated because you can easily start to believe I can't have fun without a drink, or I'm not fun without a drink, or drinking is just more fun. This party is going to be no fun without alcohol.

I talked about this on the podcast before about going to a wedding in my 20s in Thailand and it happened to be a dry wedding. And I had never been to Asia before. I had never been to Thailand and you know what, my brain was just fixated on how it wasn't really going to be any fun if I wasn't drinking.

And there was a group of us at the wedding that were totally consumed with figuring out how do we sneak alcohol into the venue. And looking back on it now, it's like hello, you were in this amazing country that you had never been before. Everything was brand new. Everything was so exotic. But my brain was like, I'm pretty sure I can't enjoy myself unless I have something to drink.

Now, this happens for a reason. It happens because your lower brain thinks alcohol is important for survival when it is not important for survival in the least. Remember, your lower brain was designed to find pleasure out in the environment and avoid pain. That was part of the recipe to help humans stay alive and it worked perfectly.

The way the brain was designed worked perfectly in an environment where there were natural rewards, where we weren't getting huge amounts of concentrated reward in our brain. But humans figured out how to do that.

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They figured out how to create a natural reward like drugs and alcohol. Rewards that are way bigger and way stronger than the normal ones in the environment, and PS, have zero to do with survival.

The problem is your lower brain doesn't know this. Your lower brain doesn't know that humans manipulated the environment so it's still operating with its old programming. Find pleasure, avoid pain. That's the most important thing. But now it's operating with that old programming in a totally different environment.

Listen, if you think the choice is I get to drink and have fun, or I don't drink and I won't have fun, and then you're trying to motivate yourself not to drink by saying well, at least I won't have a hangover tomorrow, you are missing the fundamental fact that fun is always, always available to you and it always has been. It never went anywhere. It never left you. Your fun muscle just hasn't been exercised in a really long time and in fact, most of you have no idea how to exercise it because no one ever taught you how.

That's the beauty of learning how to use the think-feel-act cycle and learning the self-coaching model. Because then you can start to exercise it. Because the fact that your fun muscle has atrophied, this is not to blame you, of course it did. You live in an environment where you are constantly conditioned and taught and told that you just need to eat and drink and consume your way to fun instead of creating it.

I want you to just imagine going to a party with no food and no alcohol. Nothing to consume. Now listen, for a lot of you, that's going to make you feel a little panicky like, yikes, why would I do that? Why would I go? What's the point? That would be torture. I used to think this too because the brain is like, listen, the glass of rosé is fun and the plate of brownies is fun. But me, I don't know, I'm not that fun. And being there without being able to eat and drink, that definitely wouldn't be fun.

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We're so conditioned to think that we need to eat our fun and drink our fun, that we have to consume our fun and if we can't, well then what are we going to do? This is not how fun works. Seriously, just look at kids. Have you ever watched kids at a party? They are just having fun. They are not like hey, where are the appetizers? What am I going to drink next?

They're too busy enjoying themselves. They're too busy being silly and dancing and moving their body and moving around and laughing and talking to people. And it has absolutely nothing to do with food and alcohol. It's because they haven't yet learned that fun is to be consumed, or that they can only have so much of it, or that actually, in society, it's better to be respectable than to be silly. They haven't learned any of that yet.

So listen, if you aren't having fun when you socialize, when you're not drinking, you do not have to sign up for a life of well, I'm just going to pick the healthy route. I'll suffer in the name of health. No, please don't sign up for that. I don't want you to. I want you to enjoy yourself.

You have to recognize that the reason you're not having fun is because of your mind. It's because of your thinking. The thoughts that are running through your head when you are socializing, that is the problem and that is always the only problem. It has absolutely nothing to do with what you are drinking, and I will tell you, this is the best news ever.

Because if your ability to have fun has to do with what's in your glass, then unfortunately, we would all be screwed. The only option would be to drink. But when you recognize that your ability to have fun has to do with your thoughts, then you are in a position of power because guess what, we can look at our thoughts, we can observe them and question them and challenge them, and most importantly, we can change them.

If you're not having fun, it's always for the same reason. Your mind is at work judging. There are four areas you have to pay attention to. Your mind is judging you and that will sound like I have nothing to say. Everyone's

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smarter, everyone's prettier, everyone's more accomplished, everyone's more successful. I don't belong here.

Your mind might be busy judging other people. These people are so shallow or rude or stupid, their politics are crazy, we have nothing in common. You might be busy judging where you are. I don't want to be here. I'm so uncomfortable. It's too hot, it's too cold, I'm not interested in this place. Or you might be judging what you're doing. I'm no good at this, I look stupid, I feel stupid, everyone is better at it than me.

That's it. Those are the four roadblocks to fun. Thoughts that judge yourself, judge other people, judge the place, and judge what you're doing. That is always it. It has nothing to do with what you are drinking. When you drink as a way to have fun, your brain gets to be lazy. Instead of having to practice to do the work at creating fun, you can just settle in to trying to pretend that you're enjoying yourself.

But here's the thing; if we were to take the drink away and you weren't enjoying yourself, then you're just pretending. When you use a drink, when you consume - and you can do this with food too, guys - when you consume as a way to enjoy yourself, you get to settle into this life of tricking yourself into believing that you like who you are and you like who you're with and you like where you are, and you like what you're doing.

The more you trick yourself, guess what happens. The more you will need to trick yourself. I'm not saying that you need to like everything and enjoy everyone and everything that you do, but you have to take responsibility for the fun that you are having. And when you say to yourself well, when I'm not drinking and I'm socializing, I'm not having any fun but at least I won't be hungover tomorrow, you're not taking responsibility.

You're not doing anything to change the habit. You're not doing anything to exercise your brain so that you can have fun. You're just using willpower and white-knuckling it and gritting your teeth through an un-fun time, but

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the only reason something is an un-fun time is because of what you are thinking. So don't be surprised if you continue doing this, social situations don't get more fun.

And what will probably start happening, and let me tell you, I did this myself is that you will start to isolate and you will start to turn down invitations. And you will decide that it's just not fun to go to birthday parties or anniversaries or fancy dinners if you're the only one that's not drinking. So many people do this and it's why we have the trope of the dour sober person or the buzzkill.

Because people decide to stop drinking because they don't like the results that they're getting from alcohol, and they never learn that they became dependent on consuming things for fun. And then no one teaches us anything about our brain or how it works or the think-feel-act cycle, so they have no idea how to create fun. And so they get stuck in this place of suffering for their health.

But fun isn't a luxury and it's also not something you consume. It's your birthright. It came with your operating system. You knew how to have it. You just stopped using that muscle because no one taught you and everyone gave you all these conditions on your fun.

So here's the deal. If you are in this situation, what I want you to do is go to the party, go socialize with people, accept the invitation. Know that your brain is going to have a lot of judgments but treat it like you're lifting heavy weights. Because right now, if you're at the point where you're like listen, I'm not drinking every night, drinking at home is easy, think of that as okay, that's your kind of walk around the neighborhood. That's your gentle stroll.

And it's great but it maybe doesn't get your heart pumping. But going to a birthday party, going to a fancy dinner and being the only person who isn't drinking, that's like going to the gym and doing deadlifts. You've got to be onto your mind. You've got to be onto your thoughts. You've got to bring so

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much consciousness and so much awareness to all your judgments so you can see it, you can take responsibility for it, and you can decide if you want to change it.

Because your lower brain will just want you to believe the lie that you aren't having any fun because you're drinking that stupid seltzer and everybody else gets to have wine. And if you were only drinking, then you could enjoy yourself. And if you believe that lie, it will be so easy for you not to do the work, to not lift the heavy weight. It will be so easy for you to say yes to a drink, but you won't learn anything, and the more your fun muscle will atrophy and the more dependent you will become on pouring a drink to have a good time.

That is the beauty of this work. You start taking a break as a way to feel better, but then the break becomes how you learn how to create true wellbeing, how to learn how to be someone who can always access fun no matter what is happening. This is where you do the work. You start lifting the heavy weights, and you know what, your body adapts. Your muscles get stronger. You'll be able to lift more and more, and that fun muscle, which atrophied for so long, it starts coming back to life.

So take responsibility for your fun. Know that it's always available. You always had it. You were born with it. The only thing that ever got in the way was your mind. Find the thoughts that are blocking having a good time. Take responsibility for them. Start questioning them and challenging them. Notice all the areas where you're judging so that you can reclaim fun for yourself.

But never ever, ever tell yourself well my options are I can go out and I can drink and I can have a good time or I can not drink and just be happy I don't have a hangover the next day. Those are not your options. Your option is to learn how to manage your mind and step back into having fun be something that is always accessible.

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Alright, I love this question. I love taking the work of using a break from drinking to really up-level your brain and this is what I'm going to be teaching in my *Take A Break* program. So excited. That is it for today guys. I will see you next week.

Okay, listen up, changing your drinking is so much easier than you think. Whether you want to drink less or not at all, you don't need more rules or willpower. You need a logical framework that helps you understand and, more importantly, change the habit from the inside out. It starts with my 30-day challenge. Besides the obvious health benefits, taking a break from drinking is the fastest way to figure out what's really behind your desire. This radically different approach helps you succeed by dropping the perfectionism and judgment that blocks change. Decide what works best for you when it comes to drinking. Discover how to trust yourself and feel truly powered to take it or leave it. Head on over to [RachelHart.com/join](https://RachelHart.com/join) and start your transformation today.