

Ep #274: Is Drinking Less Possible?



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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 274.

Whether you want to drink less or stop drinking, this podcast will help you change the habit from the inside out. We're challenging conventional wisdom about why people drink and why it can be hard to resist temptation. No labels, no judgment, just practical tools to take control of your desire and stop worrying about your drinking. Now, here's your host Rachel Hart.

Welcome back everyone. I'm going to talk about a question today that I hear a lot from people. Is it actually possible to drink less? "I don't want to stop forever. I just want to stop overdoing it." "I want to be able to enjoy a drink from time to time." But is that actually possible if I'm someone who's had trouble saying "No." Who's gotten into the pattern of overdoing it. This is what we're going to talk about today.

Now, I'm just going to preface this by saying that a lot of the people out in the world will say, "No, no. It is not possible. If you, in the past, have struggled to rein yourself in. Drinking less is not something that you can do. You just need to accept that it's not going to work. You need to say "No" for the rest of your life. That's what you should do." I'm going to tell you something, I don't agree. I do think it's possible to learn how to drink less. I do think that people's drinking can change and evolve, over time.

I will tell you this, most of the time we see this happen very unconsciously. I saw this happen very unconsciously with a lot of my friends. Some of them were really big partiers in college and in their twenties.' And then, as they got older, they got into more serious relationships, and they moved into a different stage of their life. Maybe they were getting married and having kids. I noticed their drinking would start to change. But it felt like a very unconscious progression.

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No one was saying, “Hey, I’m setting out to do this.” It just appeared to me like it was happening. I think this can happen unconsciously. I think the problem is that we don’t know how to teach people to have this happen consciously. Because people need to be able to do the work on purpose to change their relationship with alcohol. The response to urges, and all of the thoughts that are fueling their desire and giving you permission to say “Yes.” When you do that work on purpose, then yes, you can learn how to drink less in a sitting. You can learn how to drink rarely. You can also learn how to be like, “You know what? I don’t really want to drink at all. It’s possible for you.

There are a couple of reasons why I think people struggle to do this. Why I think people struggle to actually learn how to drink less. Learn how to say no when they’ve had the habit of saying yes. Of saying, “More is better.” “Sure, I’ll have another.” That’s what I really want to dive into with you today.

Number one. What I see happen all too often, is that people will fixate on changing how much they are drinking. So, they’ll say, “I just want to drink less. I just do not want to overdo it,” They will fixate on how much without understanding why. Why they are overdoing it? Why they are saying “Yes” to another round? Why they are pouring another glass. A lot of times people will want to by-pass the why. They don’t want to spend a lot of time there. I understand that. I didn’t either, I just thought, “No, no. Let’s just change the how much.”

But listen, you cannot by-pass understanding why you have been saying “Yes” to more. Why you have been overdoing it. Without that information, you’re never going to be able to change the how much. The reason for this, is what I’m teaching you all the time on this podcast. How much you drink doesn’t just happen. Your body doesn’t make a move towards the drink until you have thought and a feeling, first. How much you drink is the action

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part of the think-feel-act cycle. It all goes together. You can't change one piece without looking at the entire cycle.

How much you drink is connected to the sentences running through your mind, and the emotional state that you are in. You cannot ignore this. This is what people want to do, they say, "I just want to change how much I'm drinking. I don't want to deal with any of the why. I don't want to pay attention to what I'm thinking or what I'm feeling. Just tell me how to drink less." It doesn't work like that; you've got to look at the entire picture.

Putting all of your attention on trying to change your behavior, trying to change the action of how much you're drinking. How much you're pouring. How much you're consuming; while at the same time, ignoring the thoughts and feelings that are actually behind and driving the action, simply will not work. When people try to do this, when they try to change the how much, without understanding the why, this is willpower.

This is just trying to be disciplined. I will tell you, from my own experience, it may work for a little while. You might find that you are able to exert willpower, discipline, and follow rules for a little while. But it's not going to work forever. It's not going to create lasting change. The problem with willpower and discipline, not only does it fail to actually show you how the habit is working, it's exhausting. You get tired of it. Because you are at odds with yourself. You're fighting against yourself. That's why willpower and discipline doesn't last.

The solution is not to figure out how to get more willpower, or how to become more disciplined. The solution is to understand the why. That is really the number one thing that you have to be willing to do. If you're coming to this work and saying, "Listen, I don't want to stop forever. I don't want to swear off alcohol for the rest of my life," which is fine, it's okay for you to make that decision. If you're coming to this work and saying, "I just want to learn how to drink less." "I want to drink less in a sitting." "I want to drink

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less often.” “I want to have it on a special occasion and not have it be a nightly thing.”

You have to be willing to look, not just at the how much, but at the why. You have to be willing to look at the thoughts and the feelings. If you're just going to focus on willpower, if you're just going to focus on a number and pretend like that number just happens, it's never going to work for you. This really is the value of taking a thirty-day break, which is what I teach inside my membership. It really is about... Okay, taking that break is about making your thoughts and feelings, connected to the habit of drinking, crystal clear.

Listen, as soon as you remove alcohol, you get immediate access to all the thoughts and all the feelings that have you reaching for a drink. Reaching for another and saying, “One more won't hurt.” “Why not? Who cares? I deserve it, it's been a crappy week.” You get immediate access. That is the fastest way to really dive into how the habit is working.

Yes, when you take a break from drinking, you're going to get a lot of data, a lot of information about the impact of removing alcohol; how you feel, how you sleep, your mood, your energy. You're going to get a lot of that information. That information can be incredibly beneficial. What is actually more important is to see what happens in your brain. To see the thoughts and feelings that come up for you. That gives you the map for how to change the habit.

Taking a break from drinking, even for as little as thirty days, is a tool that shows you how the habit works, so that you can change it at its deepest level. Not so you can be in this place of willpower and discipline and gritting your teeth, forever. It doesn't work and it kind of sucks when you're in that place.

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Now again, if you notice yourself not wanting to take a break. Not wanting to step away from alcohol, for even for a short period of time, even just thirty days. You're like, "No, no, no. But, like, why would I do that? I just want to drink less." It's important for you to be curious. It's okay. A lot of people that I work with, have that initial knee-jerk reaction. It's like, "Why would I take a break if I just want to learn how to drink less? Just show me how to drink less."

I get it. But really be curious, what is your resistance really about? Thirty days is not a big deal. Thirty days is really not a long period of time. I know it can feel that way. It can feel like it's forever. It can feel like, "No, actually this is kind of a huge deal, because I look at my calendar and I think, 'What is that, four or five weekends? What about all the plans I have to see people? What about the parties that are scheduled? What about coming home from work and needing a break from the grind? You want me to say no to a drink for thirty days?'"

When you are really in the habit, when you have really taught your brain, "Hey, this is the way I feel better. This is the way I have fun. This is the way I relax." Thirty days can feel like, "Whoa, that's huge!" You just have to be curious because even your resistance to taking a break is going to reveal so much for you. That really is the genius of "the break." It reveals how the habit is working for you. because guess what, it works differently for everyone. This is the big misconception; that everyone's habit looks the same. It doesn't. It's going to reveal, specifically, how it's working in you, in your brain.

What have you, specifically, unconsciously taught your brain that pouring a drink makes it easier? Or better. Or, more fun. Or more enjoyable. Or helps you not have to feel something or face something. What is it? Those answers are going to be unique to you. It's going to reveal all the thoughts you have about what not drinking means. It's like, "Why would I even bother going to this party?" "Why would I even bother going to this

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restaurant?” “What if I have to answer people’s questions?” It’s going to bring all of that up.

It’s going to bring up all the emotions where you’re like, “Oh God, really? So, I’m just going to come home from work and feel stressed? I’m going to have to get dinner on the table and help with homework and get the kids to bed, then there’s no reward?” “I’m just going to have to sit around on Friday night, when I don’t have a lot going around, being bored?” It’s going to show you all the emotions that you have trained your brain to see like, “Meh, maybe we don’t deal with that. Maybe we just have a drink.” That is the beauty of this work.

Now, here’s the thing, a lot of people will look at “the break” and they’ll be like, “Listen, it’s not a big deal for me. I can do thirty days. I’ve done it before. I know I can do it. It’s just not what I want to do. I know that I can say “No.” The problem is that when I say “Yes,” Oh my gosh! I’m off to the races. Once I start, I can’t stop.” So, then, here’s the thing, if you’re in that place, if that sounds more like you... You know what? Thirty days really doesn’t sound like that big of a deal... For some people, that would be a really big deal, that’s okay. For other people, they’re like, “Yeah. No biggie. It’s just once I start, I can’t stop. How do I do that? Why would I take a break?”

My question for you is, if that’s what you feel like you’re struggling with; that when you say “Yes” you’re off to the races, when you say “Yes” all your plans, all your commitments just go out the window... My question for you is, if you want to learn how to drink less, are you willing to be uncomfortable? Because up until this point the habit has operated as follows.

Have an urge to drink? Then say, “Yes, have more.” Obey that urge. Have an urge to have another? Then say, “Yes” to that urge. Obey, have more. Are you willing to sit with the temporary discomfort of not obeying the urge?

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Are you willing to sit with the temporary discomfort of saying, “No.” Now listen, your urges don’t come out of nowhere They’re fueled by a thought. Thoughts like, “More is better.” “More will be fun.” “Everyone else is.” “There’s only a little bit left in the glass (or left in the bottle).”

If you’ve never practiced noticing and allowing those thoughts, and the feeling that bubbles up, the urge that follows... If you’ve never actually practiced creating space in this moment, in your life... You’ve just been really quick to obey; you’ve been really quick to say, “Yes.” Then, guess what? You’re going to be a little uncomfortable.

I’ve got news for you; it truly is a mild discomfort. I describe it, a lot, as a restlessness. That restlessness is not a big deal. Your body was built to handle it. You can get through it. In fact, it’s not going to last forever. This is a big thing that I really teach people inside “the break.” When they say, “Oh my God But when I say “No” I can’t stop thinking about it. My urges go on all night.” You know what? Your urges do not go on all night. You’re not restless all night. What’s happening is that you’re recreating them, and you don’t even see it.

That’s what I show people a lot. Once they can see how they’re actually recreating the urge and recreating all this resistance, they immediately... it’s like they get a knob or a dial that they can turn down. Then, they’re like, “Oh, it really does pass on its own. This really is not that big of a deal. It really does go away.” The problem is, most people don’t have a lot of practice watching their urges go away, watching that discomfort go away.

We have a lot of practice resisting. We have a lot of practice trying to distract ourselves. We have a lot of practice listening to all the self-talk of, “I hate this. This sucks. It’s unfair. Why me? Why is it so hard? I shouldn’t have to do this.” That is what we have a lot of practice with. Not just with saying “Yes” to the urge. When we try to say “No” we have a lot of practice

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fighting and distracting and making it worse for ourselves, and not even realizing that we're doing it.

Which, by the way, all of that: all of the resisting, all of the distracting, all of the internal unconscious self-talk, just make the urge way more powerful than it really is. It really is not a big deal. That is the second question you have to contend with. After asking yourself, "Hey, listen, are you willing to ask yourself why?" Are you willing to be curious about that piece, and not just fixate on how much you drink? The next thing is, "Are you willing to be a little uncomfortable?" Are you willing to practice that so that you can teach your brain? You know what? The temporary discomfort of saying no to another drink, it's not a big deal.

The truth is, most people aren't... I wasn't, I didn't want to. I was like, "No! This is unfair. I just want it to be easy. This is too hard." "You know what? It's not hard for my boyfriend and it's not hard for my sister and it's not hard for my best friend. So why does it have to be hard for me?." I just wanted saying no to feel easy. I wanted to bypass the difficult part. I wanted to bypass the discomfort. But that's not how the brain learns.

It really is like wanting to be strong, physically strong, without being willing to go through the discomfort of lifting weights. Yeah, sure, we can all look at friends in our lives who put on muscles really easily. I have this one friend, Hillary, and I always think, "How did you do that? What, did you go to the gym all the time?" She doesn't appear to. But she's so strong. She seems to be strong without even trying.

Maybe that's true, maybe it's not. The point is, if you want to be strong, and it doesn't naturally come to you, are you willing to lift the weights? Are you willing to feel a little uncomfortable? I will tell you; I was not. I really had a desire to be strong and the first time I started lifting... The first time I went to a weight-lifting gym, they were giving me baby weights, little weights. My

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brain was saying, “Oh. This is so hard. I hate this. This is so uncomfortable. Why am I doing it?”

I didn't have a lot of practice being with discomfort. I had a lot of practice avoiding discomfort. It showed up in my drinking. It showed up in my eating. It showed up, frankly, in everything that I tended to overdo and over-consume. I remember trying to learn how to do push-ups. Push-ups did not come easily for me. I was kind of sure, for a long time, I was someone who could never do them.

There was a lot of struggle. You know what? That struggle was made harder because it wasn't just a struggle of my muscles learning how to work differently, learning how to hold up my body weight. It was made harder by everything that was happening in my brain: all of my thoughts, all of the emotional resistance that I was creating. I was just like, “Ugh, this is so annoying! I just want to be like my best friend from college, who seems to be able to do push-ups with no problem.” She never even had to learn. Which, of course, is a lie. No one comes out of the womb doing push-ups, right?

That's what my mind would tell me, “It's so easy for her and it's so hard for me.” Discomfort is part of the process of change. A lot of times, when we have habits where we obey the urge, or we go to war with it, or we try to distract ourselves, we don't actually have a lot of practice being with discomfort and teaching our brain, “It's no big deal.” Discomfort is how we learn new things. Now, when I'm in that mental discomfort, “Oh, right, Rachel. This is just you creating a new neural pathway in your brain. That's all you're feeling, right now.” It's like building a muscle.

You can teach your brain that the discomfort is not a problem, it's not a big deal. That's what blows people's mind when they do take a break. When they've spent so long being like, “Ugh, I hate my urges!” It feels terrible to say “No.” When they come, I see them. They come to the other side and

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they're like, "Oh my gosh, it's really not a big deal." It's so mind-blowing. It's because they learn not only to be with discomfort, they learn to understand how they were making discomfort worse.

Here's the thing, after you do the work of taking a break, one of the tools we have for people, inside the membership, for people who want to reintroduce alcohol, there's something called *The Mindful Drink*. There are a lot of people who go through the thirty-day break who say, "You know what? I want to keep going." "I feel amazing." "I can't believe how great I feel." "Let's keep this ball rolling."

There are other people who are like, "You know, that break didn't really go the way that I'd planned." "I really struggled stringing days together." That's okay too. That actually gives a lot of information. We always use those moments to see what's going on. People think, "Oh no, I'm doing it wrong." Really, you're just getting all the data and insight you need to truly change the habit. They may say, "I want to keep going with the break (or start the break again)."

Then there's some people, who do the thirty-day break, and they're like, "You know what? I really feel like I'm ready. I want to reintroduce alcohol." I always say, "Okay, great. Amazing. But let's do it mindfully. Let's really be present. Let's not slip unconsciously back into the habit." It's funny to watch people be like, "Oh, I thought I was just going out to dinner with my friend." "What? I'm going to do it mindfully? I just want to go back."

They want to skip over the practice of being present. They want to skip over the practice of going slow, and observing their mind. Seeing how an urge is different when they have zero alcohol in their system and when they have five ounces of alcohol in their system. They're like, "No, I just want to go back to the way things were. We're just going to do the whole drinking less part, right now."

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Again, okay, but are you willing to look at the thoughts? Are you willing to look at the feelings? Are you just focusing on an amount? Doing the practice reveals so much. My question for all you listening today who are like, "Listen, I don't want to stop forever. I just want to drink less." My question is, are you willing, number one: To understand the why and to be curious about the thoughts and the feelings? Or do you just want to focus on a number? Do you just want to focus on the amount? Do you want to skip over the part of your thoughts and your feelings?

The fact of the matter is that you can't. The only way to do that is through willpower and discipline. It just doesn't work. Question number two: Are you willing for it to be uncomfortable, at first, when you say "No." Are you willing to be with that restlessness of, "Hey, this is not what we do. What we do is we feel the urge for more, then we obey the urge, and we have another glass. We go get another round." Are you willing to go through that discomfort? Or do you want it to be easy right from the get-go?

I want you to really answer these questions. Please don't use your answers to beat yourself up. I want you to answer these questions, honestly, to reveal a deeper layer of how this habit works. Maybe you uncover, "I don't want this to be hard because everything in my life is hard." "I don't want to have to examine why. I just want to drink normally and not have to think about it. When I think about it, I make it mean that something's wrong with me."

Whatever your answer is, it's going to reveal so much about the habit and what's actually blocking you. The obstacles that are actually in the way. Your relationship with alcohol is everything that your brain has been taught to believe about drinking. What it means about someone who does. What it means about someone who doesn't. What it means if you do it normally or what it means if you drink too much. That is what is going to be revealed to you.

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It's also going to reveal your relationship to your urges. Your relationship to discomfort, which is so impactful when it comes to changing the habit. These answers really are here to help you. But you got to be willing to ask the questions first. You got to be willing to answer them honestly. That's the only way to transform your relationship to alcohol into the one that you want. You can have the relationship you want. You can have the relationship of drinking less, or drinking rarely, or not drinking at all. That's possible.

But not if you put blinders on and insist that you're only going to focus on the number. That it should be easy from the get-go. You've got to go to the mind gym, people. You've got to be willing to do the work. I promise you, it's so worth it. It really is. To know that you can create the change that you want. Nobody can tell you what is and what is not possible for you. That's up to you to decide if you're willing to really answer these questions honestly.

All right, that's it for today. 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 empowered to take it or leave it. Head on over to www.RachelHart.com/join and start your transformation today.

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