

Ep #276: When Drinking Helps Your Anxiety



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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 276.

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.

Hello, everyone. We are talking about anxiety, today. This is such an important topic.

This is going to be a powerful episode for all of you out there who are feeling like, "I want to change my relationship with alcohol. I want to drink less, maybe I want to stop drinking entirely, but I've so much anxiety. When I have a drink, it helps me feel better. It helps me cope. It is the thing I can look forward to have a little break from my anxiety.'

For all of you out there that are thinking, "As long as this anxiety is here, and as long as drinking helps me cope with it, I'm never going to be able to figure this out. I'm never going to be able to either cut back, or drink less, or drink occasionally, or not drink at all." This episode really is for you.

I will tell you this; I get this. I really do understand this in a very deep level. I talk a lot about how when I first started drinking it was, unconsciously, a way for me to deal with social anxiety. It was a way for me to stop feeling like I wanted to crawl out of my skin, run out of the room, and just go home from wherever I was and actually interact with people.

This doesn't have to be about social anxiety. You could be having anxiety about your job. Or, anxiety about a family member, or the state of the world. Anytime you are feeling like, "I can't handle this. This is too much. I

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just want to escape. I just want to feel better. I just want to stop worrying, or stop being stuck in my head.” It really doesn’t matter what kind anxiety you’re suffering from. So many people unconsciously teach themselves that a drink is the way out.

Here's the thing, when pouring a drink is your go-to way to give yourself relief from anxiety, the idea of giving up this coping mechanism, even for a short period of time, even for the 30-Day Challenge which is what everyone starts off with when they join the *Take A Break* membership, everybody starts with that thirty-day break from drinking. Even that can feel really scary. It can feel incredibly intimidating.

So, it’s like, “No, no, no. This is how I feel better. This is what I have to look forward to. This is how I get a little respite, a little relief from that constant anxiety. And, now you want me to give it up? I don’t think so.” I remember how intimidating it was for me. I remember just the thought of even a month was like, “I don’t know. That doesn’t seem like it’s a good idea.” What I want you to consider is this; if you’re feeling like, “Oh my gosh, I don’t want to give up this coping mechanism.”

I want you to consider that taking a break from drinking isn’t actually giving up a coping mechanism. Hear me out. It’s not giving up a coping mechanism because drinking doesn’t actually help you cope with anxiety. If I was listening to this podcast ten or fifteen years ago, I would’ve been like, “What is she talking about? She doesn’t know me. It definitely helps me cope with my anxiety.”

Again, I want you to pause and consider that taking a break from drinking isn’t giving up a coping mechanism because drinking doesn’t actually help you cope with anxiety. A real coping mechanism perpetuates well-being. A real coping mechanism helps you learn how to overcome how you’re feeling.

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Drinking doesn't help you overcome anxiety. You know this already. Maybe you get this temporary relief but then the anxiety is there the next day, or the next social event, or the next time something happens in life. Drinking is not helping you overcome anything. In fact, it creates more anxiety. This is what I didn't understand for the longest time.

What I thought was a coping mechanism was actually creating more anxiety for me. I know this is counter to everything you've been taught. Right? How many times have you heard, "Just have a drink; you'll feel better." We hear that all the time. What no one explains is, drinking to feel better in the short-term makes you feel worse in the long run.

That relief you give yourself in the short-term is actually causing many more problems in the long run. The more you try to drink over your anxiety, the more anxiety you're going to create for yourself.

I see it happening in three ways: First, you have that original anxiety that you tried to solve with a drink; that initial anxiety that was there.

Then, you have your anxiety about drinking. So, you have the anxiety about like, "I don't like how much I'm drinking. I don't like feeling like I'm not totally in control. I don't like the empty calories. I don't like how I show up when I'm drinking. I don't like how it affects my health, or my sleep, or my relationships." You've got all that anxiety about your drinking.

Then, the anxiety about possibly *not* drinking and losing what your brain believes is a coping mechanism which truly is not. And then, you have the additional anxiety created because alcohol changes the levels of serotonin and dopamine in your brain. Which makes anxiety worse.

I talk about this a lot. I talk about this in my book, *Why Can't I Drink Like Everyone Else?* I talk about this a lot on the podcast... The idea that I would

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often wake-up from a night of drinking. I would feel kind of down. Or, I would feel kind of anxious. It wasn't even because anything had particularly happened the night before. It wasn't because I was regretting my decisions, or embarrassed about something that I did. I just felt kind of blue.

What I didn't realize was what was happening in my brain. I didn't realize that, "What goes up, must come down." And so I was waking up. I was inflicting a lot more negative emotion, and anxiety, and depression on myself, just by drinking. Just because I was screwing with the neurotransmitters in my brain.

I will tell you, there's a reason why so many people inside of *Take a Break*... So many people who joined the membership and they do that first, initial 30-Day Challenge... They report a huge decrease in how anxious they feel overall in life. Because, by taking a break they give their brain a chance to heal. They give their brain some time to regulate their neurotransmitters. Lots of times, these people aren't even trying to do this work, or change their relationship with alcohol, to deal with the anxiety; they just notice it. It's like, "Oh, this is like an amazing side-effect. That I feel less anxious overall."

More importantly, what I think is really key, is that taking a break is the secret to learn how to manage your anxiety in a way that actually creates well-being. Hear me out on this. You can not do this just like any old break. You can't do this just because, you know, it was "dry January" and you gritted your teeth, and you turned down invitations, and crossed days off your calendar.

When I'm talking about "taking a break," I'm talking about the work we do to study our mind. I'm talking about the work to really understand the think-feel-act cycle. And, to learn to allow your urges rather than using willpower, and distraction, and avoidance.

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When you do that, it will show you how to manage your anxiety in a way that creates overall well-being. So, instead of pouring a drink, or grabbing something to eat, or trying to distract yourself you start teaching your brain that the solution to anxiety is already inside of you.

I want you to consider that; the solution to anxiety is already inside of you. You already have the solution. The problem is no one has ever shown you how access that power. That power is choosing how you respond to it. Choosing what “story” you tell yourself about the anxiety. Choosing what you make the anxiety mean.

When you feel like, “Yeah, I want to change my drinking. But listen, it really helps me with my anxiety. I can’t imagine not having that relief.” The solution that you need, is really the willingness to feel uncomfortable, at first, so that you can learn to access this power that’s already inside of you. So that you can learn how to separate the sensation in your body from the “story” in your mind that is making your anxiety so much worse.

I had no idea how to do this. None. I was just like, “Ugh, I feel anxious. I feel terrible. How do I feel better? What do I do? What can I drink? What can I eat? How can I distract myself?” I had no idea that I had this power inside of me, that was going completely untapped. That’s what I want you to consider.

You really are teaching your brain that the solution to anxiety already exists inside of you. It’s how you respond to it. It’s how you relate to it. It’s how you talk about it. It’s what you make it mean. It’s how you observe it. All of those things are so powerful to learn how to turn down the volume on anxiety yourself. Without needing anything external. Certainly nothing external that’s going to make it worse in the long run.

You already have the solution to anxiety inside of yourself, it’s just no one has ever shown you how to access that power. I’m not talking about

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deleting anxiety from your life. We all wish we could do that, right? We're all like, "What if I could just get rid of it forever?" But that's impossible because anxiety is normal. It's a normal human emotion. We're all going to feel anxious sometimes.

You don't need to delete it from your life if you can change your knee-jerk response. If you can change the responses that are actually making your anxiety worse; that has you reaching for food, that has you reaching for a drink, that has you trying to distract yourself, that has you making it mean that something terrible has gone wrong and it feels horrible and you're never going to feel better.

You have to start to separate that "story." We have so much "story" about anxiety. That really is the power of this work. So often, I talk about what we do inside of Take a Break. I talk about it in terms of the change you'll have with your relationship with alcohol. That is true.

You will learn how to be someone that can say, "No," without all the drama. You will learn how to be someone, if you want to say, "Yes," to say, "Yes," and know that you will be control. You will learn how to stop how to drink over your anxiety, or drink over any other emotion. You will do so many incredible things. You will feel more confident. You will feel more proud.

More so than all of that, you will really change your relationship with yourself. You will change your relationship, not just with the alcohol, but with your emotions. Because, changing a habit is the process of changing how you respond to your emotions.

We don't think about habit-change that way. We think about habit-change solely in, "Oh, here's this action, here's this behavior and I want to change that. I want to stop that." Or, "I want to do more of something." So, we think about it in terms of just the behavior but, of course, if you listen to this podcast, we know our behaviors, our actions, they don't just happen. They

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don't just spontaneously appear. They're driven by what we're thinking and what we're feeling.

Habit-change really is the process of changing how you respond to your emotions. Whether it is desire, or anxiety, or boredom, or annoyance, or depression... whatever. That's really the meta-skill you're learning.

That's what I want you to think about. This work is not just about learning how to drink less, or learning how to say, "No." This work is about learning how to *be*, differently with yourself. Learning how to find coping mechanisms that actually help you cope. That actually help you create well-being in the long run, instead of more problems. That's what's possible for you.

All right everyone, 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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