

Ep #282: Why Changing Your Drinking Isn't a Numbers Game



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Rachel Hart

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #282: Why Changing Your Drinking Isn't a Numbers Game

You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, Episode 282.

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.

Alright, everyone, what I want to talk to you about today is how to know if taking a break from drinking will actually work for you. Because a lot of people have questions about this. And, I understand why so many people have questions, because when they hear me talk about the idea of taking a break, what they hear me talk about, is just say, "No." They hear me say, "Okay, so then I don't get to drink for 30 days? Like I just have to say no, for 30 days?"

Taking a break, is the foundational skill that I teach. It is a foundational skill, no matter what goal you have, when it comes to changing your relationship with alcohol. But *not* because it's about, "Just say no," but because the break... I think of it like a window, this short window of time that just opens up so much access, so much clarity, so much insight into how the habit works, if you do it the right way.

If you, do it in a way... Which is what I used to do... I will tell you how I used to take breaks from drinking. I would wake up after a night of having way too much. Maybe I didn't really remember what happened. Maybe I was kind of frantically texting friends to find out, "What went down last night? I don't even remember getting home." And maybe pieces of the night before it'd be floating back into my brain. I would just cringe. Right? It was like, "Oh, God, push that away. I don't want to think about that."

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #282: Why Changing Your Drinking Isn't a Numbers Game

I would have so much regret, and so much shame, and so much embarrassment. There would be times where I would be like, "Oh my God, I'm never going to do this again. Like, never again. I'm not drinking." That's what I thought taking a break was. It was like, "I just gotta cut alcohol out for a while."

But all I knew how to do in those moments, was to use willpower to say no, and avoid seeing certain people, and turn down invitations, and take a different route home when I would get off the subway, when I was living in New York City, so that I wouldn't walk by the wine store. I would take the long way home.

That's what I knew how to do. I knew how to grit my teeth. I knew how to distract myself. And, I knew how to isolate. I knew how to say no to a lot of plans. And, you know, I would feel physically better. But I wasn't actually getting a window into my mind, what I was doing. It's so funny, it was the exact opposite, right?

I was almost shutting the blinds, because I thought the key is "resist," the key is "a void," the key is "isolate." And, somehow that would help me change. Of course, it didn't. Of course, that didn't help me change because all my desire was still there. The feeling that I was missing out was still there. The feeling that I was not connected to people. All of that was happening and was still there. And, that's why I flip-flopped so much.

So, when people come to me and they say, "Well, yeah, I don't know. Will this really work for me? Because I've taken breaks before, or because my goal isn't to quit completely." What's happening is a fundamental misunderstanding of what the break is all about. It's about creating a window into your mind, not about hunkering down and crawling into the gaze, and just avoiding everything.

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #282: Why Changing Your Drinking Isn't a Numbers Game

That's the exact opposite of what we want to do. But the beauty of what I see, and what I think makes the work that I do, and the work that I teach so unique, is that we're not segregating people based on their ultimate end goal. This is what happens a lot in the world of trying to stop drinking or change your drinking. It's like the people over here who want to give it up forever; you stand in this corner. And, the people over here who want to learn how to moderate; you go over into this other corner. And, obviously we can't intermingle, we can't intermix because that would be very confusing.

I actually believe the exact opposite. I think it is very, very important to be around different people who have different goals, and to be around different people whose drinking looks very different from yours. Yes, there can be benefit in having similarity and finding connection. But there's also a lot of benefit to see that someone polishing off a bottle of wine, can look completely different from this other person. Even though, you look and you're like, "Well, they just drank the same quantity."

But when you start doing the work, you start to see, "Oh, but how the habit worked was totally different, their think-feel-act cycle is totally different." Also, I think that there's a lot of benefit to see that someone polishing off a bottle of wine, and someone drinking every night, but just drinking a glass, can often have the same level of worry and anxiety. Again, the brain is kind of like, "Wait, but how could that be? Obviously, the person drinking more should have more worry and more anxiety." But again, that's not how the brain works.

Understand that it's really not a numbers game. Understand what you have to focus on is what's happening underneath the surface. That's why I talk about this work that I do, inside the *Take a Break* membership, is changing the habit from the inside out. It's not a numbers game. It's not everybody, you know, fall lockstep, and we all have the same goal.

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #282: Why Changing Your Drinking Isn't a Numbers Game

It's not about that. It's about figuring out how the habit works for you, and then figuring out how to change it. So, I want to talk about three different types of people who I work with. And, I think that it will actually kind of blow your mind a little bit, because we would normally segment these people in to be like, "Oh, they have to be in different groups. This is not the same thing at all," when in fact, that's not the case.

So, there are people who come to the membership... There are those of you who just flat-out know that you're drinking more than you want, and you feel like you can't rein yourself in. You, maybe, wake up in the morning, and you're totally committed. You're totally committed to, "Okay, I'm not going to do it today. I'm gonna be good."

And then, evening rolls around and you're right back where you started. It feels like you're on autopilot and you're opening up the bottle. And, once you start, you really believe that you can't stop. You really believe that you can't figure out how to drink normally. You feel a lot of physical and emotional effects from drinking. So, you've got the weight gain, and the disturbed sleep, and maybe you feel sluggish. And then, you have all of the emotional kind of regret, and shame and anxiety.

That's what most people kind of think of, when they think of people who need to work on their drinking. So fascinating, right? Because again, we think it's a numbers game, we think it's all about quantity.

But I have a whole second group of people inside the membership, whose drinking, a lot of people might say, looks really normal... looks really normal. They don't seem to be drinking that much in a sitting. Yeah, maybe they have a glass of wine every night. But you know, glass of wine, good for the health, right? So, their drinking can look "normal" from the outside,

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #282: Why Changing Your Drinking Isn't a Numbers Game

but for these people, they just can't shake that kind of knowing, or that little niggling feeling that like something just feels off.

They don't necessarily have a ton of negative physical consequences from their drinking, maybe some of them can't even remember the last time they had a hangover, or that they really went overboard. But alcohol is a fixture in their lives in a way that doesn't feel good for them. So, they're thinking about that glass of wine at the end of the day, they're thinking about it a lot. And, they find that they're always looking forward to drinking. They find that they're in a slightly better mood when they know, "I'm going to drink tonight."

Or, they are more willing to go to an event if they know, "Yeah, I'm going to be able to drink." And so, it takes up a lot of mental space, even though outwardly, people might look at their drinking and be like, "Yeah, it's totally normal." Again, because we're just focused on quantity. But they know, "I just feel better with a glass of wine in my hand. I don't really like that. I wish that wasn't the case. I wish I wasn't thinking about it so much."

So, we have those people who are doing the work inside *Take a Break*. And then, we have people who, maybe, aren't even drinking at all. They come to *Take a Break*, they come to this work, and maybe they're actually in a place right now where they're abstaining, or they are people who have stopped a bunch of times before.

This was me. I was someone who had just... I had so many times of deciding, "Oh kill me, God; never again!" I had stopped a bunch of times before, so I had proved to myself over and over again, "Okay, yeah. I don't need to drink. Look at all these 'successes' that I've had, not drinking. The problem is that I then immediately go right back.

Ep #282: Why Changing Your Drinking Isn't a Numbers Game

You can have people in there who are like, “No, I know that I can do this. And by the way, I feel proud of myself when I say no. And, I know how good it feels for my body.” But the problem was, these people recognize, as did I, that cutting alcohol out of your life doesn't magically solve all your problems. And, when it doesn't magically solve all your problems...

And, when you actually feel like there are negative consequences from cutting alcohol out of your life, what do you do? You find yourself flip-flopping between drinking and not drinking. So, even if you're not drinking, these people will come in and they'll have a lot of drama around alcohol. There's a lot of fear of like, “Oh, my God. Okay, I feel proud of myself right now because I'm abstaining. But if I slip up, I'm sure I'm gonna go right back to where I started.”

Or, they're finding themselves saying, “Okay, gold star, gold star! I'm saying no. But I am also kind of avoiding these social situations, and maybe I'm isolating myself, and I'm avoiding certain friendships, and I'm turning down invites. And maybe, I'm not dipping my toe into the dating pool, because I can't even imagine having this conversation with a future partner about the fact that I'm not drinking right now.”

What I want you to consider is how different, from the outside, these three groups appear to be, they look totally different. Because again, we are taught to focus on quantity, and that quantity is what matters. But I want you to notice, I don't think quantity matters at all. What I think matters is how you feel.

If you are drinking a glass of wine a night, if you're in your “doctor recommended” limits, but you have a lot of internal struggles, or you have that niggling or that knowing that something just feels off. Or, you don't like how much you look forward to it, or you don't like that you feel better with a

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #282: Why Changing Your Drinking Isn't a Numbers Game

glass of wine in your hand... To me, that's much more important to focus on than just saying, "Oh, we're only going to pay attention to whether or not we fall within these prescribed guidelines." That's what people ignore.

From the outside, these three groups of people look totally different. So how can it be that *Take a Break* works in all these situations? The reason is, because we're not focused on quantity, it's not about how much, it's not about being a rule follower. It's about understanding and unwinding your current thoughts about alcohol, and everything you have been led to believe about what it means to drink, or not to drink. And, everything you have been led to believe about what it means to drink "normally," or what it means to drink too much, or what it means not to drink at all.

All of those lessons, that you have been taught, have really messed with your head. You have to understand that they're there. Understand how they're impacting your own relationship with alcohol, and then, figure out how to start unwinding them. That's what we're doing.

That's the beauty of starting out with a 30-Day Break, it gives you access to all of it. The 30-Day Break is not 30 days of saying no to a drink, it's 30 days of having an intense window into your mind. Because when you think, "Yeah, a drink makes things better, it makes things more fun. I'm going feel less stressed, or less bored, or less anxious if I have a glass of wine." Or, when you believe, deep down, that how much someone does or doesn't drink is a sign of whether or not they are normal, or weird, or something is wrong with them... These thoughts are the real problem.

These thoughts are the driving force behind whether or not you reach for that first glass, and then reach for another. That is very confusing for a lot of people, at first, because again, we are taught to focus on quantity. And, if you're taught to focus on quantity, it's like, "Well, what do these thoughts

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #282: Why Changing Your Drinking Isn't a Numbers Game

even matter? Why are we even paying attention? Let's just focus on the number.”

But the truth is, it really doesn't matter how much you are or aren't drinking right now, it doesn't matter whether you drink every day, or not at all. If you are worried, or anxious, or stressed about your relationship with alcohol, that's what matters. Because when you are, it will feel like the weight of the world is on your shoulders. I know. I know how awful it is. And, that worry, that anxiety, and that stress can be there, regardless of quantity. Regardless if you're not drinking at all, or you're polishing off a bottle; it doesn't matter.

We have all been so convinced that the solution is a numbers game, which sets us up to make a lot of rules. So, either we have to promise that we're going to stop drinking for the rest of our lives, which by the way, was so intimidating for me. Right? I was like, “I don't know what I'm gonna be doing when I'm 80. I don't want to make this promise.” And you know what, I still don't want to make that promise. I'm still like, “Eww, no, thank you. That doesn't sound good for me.”

It's either we have to make a rule for the rest of our lives, or we have to just set these limits and be disciplined, and be a good rule follower. What everyone ignores, is that rules are not the answer. Rules can't change a habit because a habit is not based on rules. A habit is based on what you're thinking and how you're feeling. That determines whether or not your body actually makes a move towards the drink. Your body doesn't make a move until you have a thought and a feeling; it has nothing to do with the rule.

If you're not following the rule, it's because of a thought and a feeling. So, if you want to stop worrying about your drinking, and change your

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #282: Why Changing Your Drinking Isn't a Numbers Game

relationship with alcohol, then the fundamental thing that needs to change has nothing to do with quantity, it has to do with your mind. It has to do with your thoughts. It has to do with your thinking. You have to learn how to think in a new way if you want to change. This is what most people miss.

And, this is what that first break is all about. It's about learning how to think in a new way. Guess what? We can't learn how to think in a new way until we uncover all of the old ways we've been thinking. That's why we need a window into your mind, to see what's there. To see what it's like when it's, "Okay, I signed up. But then, I had a friend coming from out of town and I didn't know." Or, "Okay, you know, I committed to this 30-day break. But then, this crazy thing happened at work." Or, "All of a sudden, my partner is in the hospital."

That's actually an amazing time to get insight into the deepest level of how the habit works. Every time you think it's the wrong time to take a break, you're just hiding from the thoughts that you really need to see, you really need awareness about, so that you can change them.

You have to learn how to think differently. You have to learn how to think differently about the glass of wine in front of you. You have to learn how to think differently about the sale sign that you see, on your favorite bottle, when you're walking down the aisle of the grocery store. You have to learn how to think differently when you wake up regretting last night, and you want to just fall into beating yourself up.

The problem is that society has failed us when it comes to learning how to think differently. They're not teaching us how to think, they're teaching us what to believe. So, you've got the alcohol industry, on one hand, and you've got the recovery industry on the other, and everyone is trying to tell us what to think. And everyone, P.S., is focusing on quantity.

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #282: Why Changing Your Drinking Isn't a Numbers Game

And, guess who hasn't been teaching you what to think? Your own self; you haven't stopped to consider what you want to believe, free of all of these messages that you've been getting. Instead of focusing on rules, and instead of focusing on quantity, maybe what you really need to consider is, what do you want that drink in front of you to represent?

What kind of life do you want to live? What kind of person do you want to be? And, how does alcohol fit into that picture? What's the relationship that you want to have with yourself? How do you want to think about yourself, not just when you're doing everything right, but when you make mistakes?

Let me tell you, that relationship matters. If you think that you can ignore the relationship that you have with yourself, and how you talk to yourself when you make mistakes, *and* change your drinking, you are sorely mistaken.

What's the relationship that you want to have with your friends and your family and your romantic partners? And, how does alcohol fit into that? How do you want to celebrate? How do you want to handle feeling stressed, and anxious, and bored by life? What's the relationship you want to have with your body?

These are the questions that everyone ignores because we think it's a numbers game. But if you want to change the habit from the inside out, if you want to make lasting change, this is where your focus needs to be. Not on being a rule follower.

Really, the point is changing your relationship with alcohol, changing the habit of drinking, it means so many different things, for so many people. It can mean something different for you than it meant for me. It means so

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #282: Why Changing Your Drinking Isn't a Numbers Game

many different things for everyone doing the work inside the *Take a Break* membership.

Some people want to drink less in a sitting, they want to drink less during the week. Some people want to drink only on rare occasions; they want it for special occasions. Other people are just like, "You know what? I don't think I really want it in my life. I don't think it has added value. But I also don't need to hate it. I also don't want to be afraid of it. I also don't want to feel like, 'Oh god, if I ever slip up, I'm just gonna go right back to square one.'"

The point is you get to decide what your goal is. But you can't make that goal a reality if you're focusing on following rules and ignoring your mindset. That is the goal of this work. It's about letting go of the worry and the struggle, and stepping into your own power and your own authority to determine what is right for you.

It is about feeling in control and totally at ease with your choices. Feeling in control and totally at ease with your urges. Changing your drinking and changing your relationship with alcohol, it really can unlock your potential. It really can have you step into a new version of yourself. But not if you think it's a numbers game.

I just want you to consider that society has really misled us on this front. That they want us to focus on quantity and numbers, and that is never going to change the habit in a lasting way. That's what we do inside *Take a Break*.

Alright, everyone. That was my rant for today. I will see you next week.

Ep #282: Why Changing Your Drinking Isn't a Numbers Game

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.