

Ep #292: How to Have a Normal Relationship with Alcohol



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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 292.

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 again, everyone. Today we are talking about how to have a normal relationship with alcohol. A lot of people I work with, a lot of people that join the membership, they start out with this desire; I just want to drink normally. I don't want it to be an issue anymore. I just want a normal relationship with alcohol.

And I will tell you, this was me for a long time, too. It's why I named my book, *Why Can't I Drink Like Everyone Else*, because that's how I really saw my problem, for the longest time. There was me, and I was this person who often went overboard, whose drinking was really unpredictable, I couldn't learn my lesson. And then, there was everyone else.

I just wanted to be like them. I just wanted to drink normally and be a normal drinker. Here's what you need to know: Having a normal relationship with alcohol has nothing to do with how much you drink. Or even if you drink, it's not about quantity. You can follow the CDC guidelines and have a messed-up relationship with alcohol.

You can be a teetotaler; you can not drink at all, and have an unhealthy relationship with alcohol. It's not about how much or whether you consume, it's about how you relate to the drink in front of you. That's what matters. It's

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how you feel about it. Listen, if this sounds touchy feely, I get it. But I want you to hang in here with me.

Because if you really want to create lasting change, then you have to stop focusing on rules, and avoidance, and willpower, and a number, a magic number. You have to start paying attention to how you relate to the drink in front of you, or what it's like to watch other people drink when you're not, or what it's like to be around alcohol.

I always remind people; if not drinking feels like you're missing out on having a good time or that you're suffering in the name of your health, it is not going to last, you cannot skip this piece of the puzzle. Change becomes permanent when the change makes you feel good.

Here's what I have found: You can cut out alcohol and you can notice; hey, I'm sleeping better, and I look better, and I have more energy, and I'm less anxious. But if your emotional experience is one of missing out, or not having as much fun, or not having as much pleasure, then I promise you the health benefits will start to feel less and less persuasive when faced with temptation.

That's why I focus so much on learning how to access more pleasure, and how to have more confidence, and how to relax, and how to feel good. Because when you can do that on your own, you have such a stronger foundation for change. So, I really do want you to consider that a normal relationship with alcohol is not about quantity. It's about how you relate to it.

I'm going to tell you the kind of four main pillars that I see, that contribute to a normal relationship. Number one, you don't have a lot of internal chatter. You're not endlessly debating what to do. There's not a lot of internal back and forth. Should I drink? Should I not drink? What am I going to do at this

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party? What am I going to do at this stage? Because the decision doesn't feel dramatic. It doesn't feel like you're making a big decision. You're not thinking about it a lot.

I will tell you, I had so much desire before, which meant I also had a lot of internal chatter. Am I going to drink tonight? Am I going to drink at this happy hour? Am I going to drink at this restaurant? I had a lot of chatter before I started drinking. I had a lot of chatter once I started drinking. I had a lot of chatter when I wasn't drinking.

So, I had chatter, you know, if I started drinking, I'd get impatient for the people at the table with me to hurry up and finish their drink, so we could all order another round. Then, if I made the decision not to, I was still fixated on what other people were doing.

For a long time, when I would say 'no', I was so hyper aware of what everyone else was doing. Either because I felt like I was missing out, or I thought they were having more fun, or I was sitting there kind of contemplating; What's wrong with me? Why is it so easy for them? How come they can drink, and I can't?

This was something that I realized was very important for me to bring my attention to. Having a lot of chatter is a sign you have a lot of unresolved feelings. Again, the chatter doesn't matter. If you're drinking or if you're not, it's just the chatter is there.

When you start doing the work, when you start understanding how to use the think-feel-act cycle, and how to pay attention to the thoughts and the feelings that are driving the decisions you make around drinking, all the sudden you start to have the path laid out in front of you for how to start to

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quiet the chatter. When you have started to quiet the chatter, that is a sign that you're starting to normalize your relationship with alcohol.

Then, the decisions that you make don't have a lot of drama behind them. And other people's choices barely register, they're not that important to you. Now listen, if you're hearing me say this, and it feels impossible, I want you to know, I get it. But it truly is possible to go from a place of having a lot of chatter, to like, a lot of just quiet around it. It's just not a big deal.

Number two, the second pillar: Drinking is no longer your brain's go-to problem solver. So much of the messaging that we get is counter to this idea, right? So much of the messaging is like; oh, you're stressed? Have a drink. Oh, you're overwhelmed? Have a drink. Bored? Have a drink. Insecure? Have a drink. Feeling sad? Have a drink. Right? We get all this messaging that if we have a drink will feel better.

Listen, I just want to say it is very, very normal, to turn to things outside of you in an attempt to feel better. That's not the problem. The problem is when you start turning to something over and over and over again. And at some point, your brain starts to feel handicapped without it.

So, the internal conversation becomes; well, okay, how am I supposed to relax? Or, how am I supposed to date? Or, how am I supposed to celebrate without a drink? What do you want me to do? I would just say it's normal to feel like this.

It's normal to feel kind of handicapped without it, when most of us are never taught how to navigate our negative emotions. We're taught how to avoid them, and how to push them away, and how to pretend that they're not there. We're not taught how to navigate them in a healthy way. One of the most important things that I teach people, when they're doing the work

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inside the membership, is really unlearning the idea that your negative emotions are a problem.

You and me and everyone, we're all supposed to have the full spectrum of human emotions. This really can be hard to get on board with at first, and I will tell you, it was for me. But the truth is, sometimes we'll feel confident. And, sometimes we will feel insecure. Sometimes we'll feel relaxed. Other times we'll be anxious. Sometimes we'll be really engaged, and other times we're going to be bored out of our mind. That is the human experience, my friends.

Our body was built to handle every human emotion. But so many of us have no idea how to approach these very normal emotions. We approach them as if something has gone wrong, or that we're not supposed to feel the way that we do. Or, we tell ourselves; oh, God, I hate feeling this way. It's too much. I can't handle it. I don't want to feel this way.

You know what? We have so many outs not to have to feel this way. Right? We start looking for like; Okay, what, outside of me, is going to be the quick fix? What is going to make me feel better? For all of you out there listening right now, thinking; you know, okay, I understand that some people reach for a drink when, you know, they're feeling bad. But that's not me.

If you don't like feeling deprived... If you don't like feeling deprived, this applies to you. Deprivation is also a negative emotion. So, we start looking for this way out. Humans do it with all sorts of things, not just alcohol and drugs. We do it with food, and we do it with sex, and we do it with work, and we do it with money. We do it with our phones, right? We're constantly looking for a way out.

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Here's the problem, after a while the brain starts to believe that you can't actually handle the emotion on your own. Or, you tell yourself; okay, yeah, sure, I can handle it. But I don't want to, and I shouldn't have to. And by the way, I don't have to, because I can just do this thing over here. I can just pour this drink and feel better.

Now of course, the lie with all of this, is that while we might get this kind of temporary, quick fix, not only are we atrophying our own ability to handle the human experience, but of course then, we have all the negative emotions the next day, and the regret, and the judgment about the choices that we made.

I remember, I will tell you this, I remember very vividly that this came up with me so strongly around dating. For so long, I was just like; Okay, are you kidding? You want me to go back into the dating pool and not drink? Like, are you insane? That just seemed insane to me. I will tell you, for a while, I truly was convinced it would be impossible.

So, I just gave up on trying to date. I was just like; sorry, this is too hard. I can't do it. But it wasn't dating, it was all the emotion. It was the emotional roller coaster that went along with it, that I had spent, for years, teaching my brain; hey, we don't really have to deal with this roller coaster. We don't have to feel uncomfortable, or insecure, or awkward, or unsure what to say, because we can always just have a drink.

Listen, maybe it's not dating for you, maybe it's something else. But this is what happens when we develop a habit, our brain starts to believe; oh, this is how I solve the problem. The problem is, of course, how we're feeling, whether it is deprived, or bored, or anxious, or stressed out, or lonely.

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But when you start to teach your brain; hey, listen, I actually have other tools at my disposal. This is what I teach people. Okay, let's actually fill a toolkit for you with other tools that you can use. Because, this one actually it doesn't work out so great in the long run.

Then, all the sudden, you start to see; oh, this doesn't need to be my go-to problem solver. When drinking no longer plays that role, guess what? You start to have a much more normal relationship with it.

Number three, you're not hating it, but you're also not glorifying it. I talked about this all the time on the podcast. Listen, alcohol is just a fact of living on this planet. It existed before humans figured out how to harness fermentation to make intoxicating beverages. Alcohol is just a fact of being alive. It's here, we're not getting rid of it.

What happens, so many people will start out glorifying it. Right? So, it's like; why on earth would I go to a dry wedding? Or, if you've ever had that experience of going to a new restaurant, and you realize, after sitting down, that they don't have their liquor license yet.

I remember thinking like; oh my God, why am I even here? Right? Or, you think to yourself; yeah, like having a beer and a hot dog, it's just what you do at a baseball game. So, you start to really believe that everything's just better with a drink in your hand. It's amazing. It makes me better. It makes other people better. It makes everything better. Things are more fun, everything's more enjoyable. Right?

So, you start from this place of glorification, and then where so many people get stuck, is we think often, that the only way to change is we have to go to a place of demonizing alcohol; oh, god, it's so bad for me. It's a poison on the body. It's really a toxin.

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What happens then, is you go from this glorification to demonization, and you start to feel like it's the enemy. Right? It's this like bad thing that you have to steel yourself against, you know, you need to go to battle. Now I've talked about this a lot before. The problem with that mindset of, 'I need to go to battle' or thinking that alcohol is the enemy, is now, all of the sudden, you have unconsciously made it powerful. Because now, it's something you have to fight against. It has power over you.

Alcohol has no power; it just sits there. I'm going to tell you this, it doesn't even have power once you start drinking. That is what really blows people's minds when they're doing this work. I cannot tell you the number of people, myself included, who start out with this belief; once I start, I can't stop. I had that belief for so long.

Here's the thing, when you believe that 'once I start, I can't stop', alcohol will truly feel powerful. But when you start really understanding... Listen, you don't make a move towards the drink, you don't reach for it without something unfolding in your mind first. And, what's unfolding is a thought.

When you start to understand this, and you start to see the think-feel-act cycle play out. When you start to practice mindfulness and paying attention, you start to understand. And, you start to see the thoughts that are fueling the decision.

So many people will say, "I can't believe it. I started doing this work. I did a 30-day Challenge. I got to the point where I decided I wanted to reintroduce alcohol. I sat down with my favorite drink, the one that I just love, and I can't wait to have, and I always finish the glass. And I was sitting there, and I didn't really even want it. Even when I started drinking, it just like didn't have the same pull. It didn't have the same enjoyment that I remember, and I cannot figure it out."

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Nothing about the alcohol changed. What changed was they started paying attention to what was happening in their mind. They started paying attention to the thoughts that were fueling the desire. So often, we do the opposite, right? We check out once we start drinking. Oftentimes, we start drinking because we want to check out. We go on autopilot without even realizing it, so we're letting our unconscious thought patterns run the show.

But when you start to listen, you start to notice thoughts like; oh, well, I already poured the glass, so I'm not going to waste it. Or, you take a sip, and you think; alright, well, I broke my promise that I wasn't going to have any. So, I might as well keep drinking. Or, you look at what's left in the bottle, and you think; oh, you know, it's expensive, and there's only a little bit left, so I might as well finish it off.

All the sudden, you start to see the thoughts, that were driving the decision to drink, are not even actually about how much you like it, or how enjoyable it is. So, here's the thing, you can put the glass down at any point. But the reason we don't isn't because of the drink, it's because of these thought patterns that most people are totally blind to.

Even if you can see them, most people don't yet know how to interrupt them in a believable way. The only thing they know is okay, I just need to tell myself 'no', and so, they try saying 'no' over and over again. You have to start learning a believable way, to start to have a different conversation with yourself.

But really, that's why people feel like they can't trust themselves around alcohol. Because so often, their drinking feels inexplicable, it feels like it doesn't make any sense. Like I wasn't even planning on having any, and then look at what happened. Or, sometimes I'm good and other times I go off the rails, and I can't make sense of why.

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But once you have the think-feel-act cycle and you understand it, and you see it unfolding, all of a sudden, you start to understand why your drinking looks the way it does. And, when it no longer is a mystery, all of a sudden, you start to have so much more power over it. It no longer feels like it has power over you.

Now the fourth thing that I really see, if you want to have a normal relationship with alcohol: You have to pay attention and notice whether or not your opinion of yourself is tied up in the decisions you make, or whether or not it's totally separate.

When it's totally separate, when your opinion of you has nothing to do with the decisions you make around alcohol, that is a sign that you have a normal relationship. So, you're not telling yourself that you're normal because you drink, or weird if you don't.

You're not trying to drink to prove that you're normal. You're also not telling yourself that you're a bad person when you drink too much. And also, not telling yourself you're a better person or a good person for not drinking.

Whether or not you consume, how much you consume, has no bearing on who you are as a person. You have to drop all of this conditioning that we get at such a young age, about what it means to drink, and what it means to drink too much, and what it means not to drink. We get so many messages about this. That's what keeps so many people stuck. That's what kept me stuck for a long time.

I didn't even realize it was all just made up. I didn't realize that my opinion of myself could be totally separate from any decisions that I made around drinking. I especially did not realize that, I will tell you this, I especially didn't realize it around the decisions I made when I drank way too much. I

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definitely thought; no, this means that I'm stupid, and that I'm bad, and that I, you know, have done something embarrassing, and something's wrong with me.

You've got to clear all of this up. Right? Just think about some of these messages. You know, if you've ever heard someone say, "I don't trust someone who doesn't drink." What? Right? Or, maybe you've heard people say with derision, "Oh my god, they're such a drunk." Right?

We have to start completely untangling this belief that the choices humans make around alcohol are a reflection of some deeper insight into who they are as a person. That is not the case. So, I really want you to think about this. I want you to think about these four pillars. Because a normal relationship is not about mastering some magic number. It's not about only ever having one in a sitting, or never getting drunk, or not drinking. It's about how you relate to alcohol. For a lot of you, this may seem like the fluff; it is not the fluff.

When you start to focus here and how you relate to alcohol, your emotional experience, your beliefs around it, you get so much more traction than trying to use rules, or willpower, or avoidance, or this just saying 'no' mentality. None of those things are going to create lasting change for you in the long run.

But when you start to focus here, then you start to create the foundation to just tap into what you truly want and what you truly desire, and how you want to show up in the moment. But you have to do this work. This piece is so key. I really encourage you, and this is a lot in this episode. Listen to this episode again. Really start to let these ideas sink in.

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Notice where your brain starts to want to fight these ideas, or contradict this; that's okay, that's good. Pay attention to those areas. Really, starting to understand your relationship with alcohol in this way, will do you a world of good.

Alright, 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.