

Ep #301: Is Moderation 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 301.

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.

All right, today we are talking about whether or not moderation is possible. This is a question I get a lot of the time. And so, I'm just gonna get this out of the way, right at the top. Yes, I believe it is possible. I truly do. I believe it is possible.

However, you are not going to get there by counting drinks. You are not going to get there by becoming a master at making rules and following rules. You're going to get there in a totally different way. A way that really helps you understand, not only how the habit works and gives you different tools that you can rely on, but a way that has you as the ultimate authority. Because you're always paying attention and listening to yourself, and what you need, and why you're seeking a drink.

What I teach is so counterintuitive for a lot of people, but I will tell you this, it works. It is so transformative. Now, I have a whole podcast, Episode 182, on abstinence versus moderation, and the problem that I see with these concepts. Because when you want to learn how to drink less or to stop drinking, but not feel deprived, not feel like you're missing out, then these concepts, of abstinence versus moderation, they can really keep you stuck.

And so, what I'm actually talking to you today, is about really changing your whole view on what it means to moderate. If you want to dive into that episode, by all means do, it's number 182. But we're going to be talking

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about moderation today, because I see it come up so often inside the membership.

So often, I will be on a coaching call talking with someone who's struggling, they're struggling with their overdrinking, and they can't figure it out. And, why do I keep doing this? I'm making progress and then I'm going backwards, it seems. What's going on? And so, I always say, "Okay, let's just back up. What's your goal? Let's just get really clear on what you want your goal to be."

Nine times out of 10, I will hear; I want to be able to moderate. And so, I will dig a little deeper. Okay, what does that mean? And the next thing that I will hear, is always a number. No more than two, no more than three. Okay, so people want to be able to moderate, when I ask them what that means, they give me a number. And then, I always ask; why?

Now, listen, I'm not asking these questions from a place of judgment, or you should know better, it's actually really better not to drink at all. I'm asking these questions from a place of really trying to give you awareness and understanding, about how your relationship with alcohol works.

So, when I say; okay, why? Why do you want to be able to moderate? That is going to give such important insight. You might think; so I can relax, or I can connect. So, I can just enjoy myself, so I can have fun. I mean, there's all sorts of different answers about why we want to be able to do this.

And, it sounds so good; okay, I've got a number that I'm going after. And I've got this reason that I like, I'm good. However, the problem is the focus on quantity and the disconnection from the reason. And that's what we're really going to unpack today. Because moderation is all about quantity. It's all about a number; how much.

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When you're trying to moderate, you're paying attention to an amount, which seems so sensible. It really does. It's like we're constantly being told, you know, this is the right amount to drink. These are the guidelines; this is what the CDC says is right for your health. This is what Weight Watchers says is the number of points that you can spend on a glass of wine or a bottle of beer, without going over your limit.

We're constantly bombarded with these guidelines. But I'm going to tell you that the fixation on numbers is what is keeping you stuck. Because when you believe that there is this magic number out there, if only I could have a glass and be done. If only I could have three, but not finished the bottle. When you believe that that magic numbers out there, what you're doing is you're putting all your focus on the number. And, that's not how the habit works.

Okay, so the first problem, is that one glass of wine tonight is going to feel different tomorrow, and the next day, and the next week. It will feel different based on how much you've had to eat, and what your sleep was like the night before, and what your mood is like, and your level of stress and anxiety, and how your immune system is doing, and where you are in your cycle.

A whole host of factors will contribute to how it feels, in any given moment of your life. So, one glass, is not one glass. That piece is really important. But moderation doesn't care about that. Right? Moderation doesn't care that it will feel differently from night to night, or week to week. Moderation is like; no, no, we decided on the number, and this is the correct number. And, we're just focused on the number.

Moderation isn't paying attention to how you feel, or how your system is responding. Moderation disconnects you; you're following a rule. You're counting instead of observing. And, the learning how to listen to your

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body's response in the present moment. Listen, and this is not unique to alcohol.

We see this all the time with food. Think about this, you go to a nice restaurant, and you order an entree, and they put it down in front of you, and you start eating. When do you stop? For a lot of people, the answer is well, I just eat what they give me. Right? Or, I'm finishing it because this was a really expensive meal, I want to get my money's worth. Or, the other people at the table are still eating.

So many of us do not have a lot of practice stopping because we're satisfied. No, we're stopping, looking at the portion size, or what's on the plate, or how much the meal cost. Or, we're looking at what our companions are doing. So, we're using all of these cues to dictate how much we're consuming.

We do that with food. And, you better believe that we do the same thing with alcohol. Most people try to take cues for how much to drink from everyone and everything, except their own body. How much is my partner drinking? How much is my friend having? Are these people ordering another round? Has this person finished their glass, yet? What does this person say, and this organization say, for what the right amount is?

Or, we will take our cues, instead of what's around us, we'll take our cues from the past. Right? So, we'll tell ourselves; okay, well, I've been so good this week, I didn't have anything to drink yesterday. I haven't had anything to drink the entire week. So now, I should be able to drink this amount. I'm going to tell you this, it's bad news for a lot of you who are used to using this.

And by the way, I did the same thing. The bad news is that none of this matters. It's all irrelevant; all of it. Yesterday doesn't matter. What other

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people are doing, how much they're drinking, is not relevant. What's relevant is you, and how you feel in the present moment.

And, that requires tuning in. I have people do an exercise inside the membership. A lot of people who come and they say, "You know what? I just want to drink less. I'm not in a place where I want to give it up forever. Or, say never again. I just want to learn how to drink less."

And so, after they do their 30-day break, one of the things they can work on is an exercise called The Mindful Drink. And, it's so fascinating. A lot of people find it very tedious, because it requires so much slowing down, and paying attention to how you feel, and paying attention to every step, and paying attention to what's happening in your body.

And it's so fascinating though, it gives people so much insight. You do that exercise one time, and it just explodes the level of insight that you have. From looking at, oh, this is what an actual serving looks like in a glass. That's fascinating. This is my perception of sip number one versus sip number 10. Oh, that's fascinating.

Now listen, I don't think this is an exercise that you do just once. But I just want to share that, because really, so many of us just have no experience connecting and tuning in with ourselves. Not when we're eating, and especially not when we're drinking.

Most people don't want to tune in, right? We want to tune out. That's what it was for me, a lot. I wanted to tune out. I wanted to not feel the way I was feeling. I wanted to move away and turn away from those emotions, and try to access and turn towards feeling better. That's what drinking, so often, is about.

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Yes, there is all this ritual. Yes, there is truly the enjoyment, right, you can truly enjoy drinking. But there is also, often, if you're willing to be honest with yourself, there is often that kind; of let me take the edge off of how I'm feeling. Let me not feel this way. I want to feel differently. Let me stop feeling deprived. We can go on and on and on with all of the emotions that it's connected to.

And that really does take me to the second piece that you have to understand, which is why do you want to moderate? Maybe you think; well, I want to be able to relax. I want to be able to connect with my partner. I want to be able to have fun on vacation. I want to enjoy the finer things in life. None of these reasons are wrong or bad.

But if a drink has become your go-to way to access these things, to unwind, to connect, to have fun, you better believe that it's going to impact how much you're drinking, and your ability to moderate. So, let's just take relaxing, for example. Humans have been using alcohol as a way to relax for millennia. This is not a bad thing.

But let's just say that your focus, your goal, is okay, I want to moderate no more than two drinks, because I want to be able to relax. It's a nice way to unwind at the end of the day. Okay, maybe two drinks is great, when your stress level's like a four, right? It's just your average everyday kind of stress.

But your stress level isn't always a four. What happens when your stress level is a six or a nine or a 15? Is two glasses going to do the trick? I will tell you, they will not. And so, then what's going to happen, if drinking has become your go to way to relax, but your stress level isn't at four, it's at a nine, it's at a 15. Well, then you're going to quickly think; okay, I need more. This is not doing the trick. This is not making me feel the way I want to.

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And the same is true with all sorts of emotions. It's true, if you think, yeah, I want it in my life because I, you know, I like to be able to connect with people. And when I just, you know, have a couple of drinks, that helps me loosen up. Again, there's nothing wrong with that. It's very normal.

But I want you to think that, about sometimes, that the level of discomfort that you might feel, maybe in a new situation, again, maybe it's a four, not a big deal. But if there's a little discomfort and a drink would help. Sometimes it's going to be a six. Sometimes it's going to be a nine. Sometimes it's going to feel off the charts, right?

Then, focusing on the quantity, it's just not going to work. And in fact, of course you will be craving more, because you're like; this is how I deal with feeling this way. The same is true, if you're thinking; well, you know, I like to have a drink because I like its ability to quiet my mind, and stop thinking about my day.

Or, I like to have it, because I like the kind of fun and enjoyment that I experience. Or, you know what? I just don't like feeling deprived. Our experience of the emotions, that are so often connected to our desire to drink, is not static. Right? We're using a drink, unconsciously, as a way to solve a problem.

And, the problem is how we are feeling; I don't want to feel stressed out. I don't want to feel uncomfortable. I don't want to feel deprived. I don't want to feel disconnected. But then, if your goal is moderation, if your goal is just this magic number, you see that these things aren't going to work.

Because sometimes you are kind of stressed out. And, sometimes you are really stressed out. Sometimes you feel a little out of your element. And, sometimes you feel super awkward. Sometimes your level of deprivation is like a two, and sometimes it's a 10. Your emotional state is not static, it is always changing.

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And that emotional state is connected to your desire. Which means, if you're trying to focus on just hitting some sort of magic number, it's just not there, it doesn't exist. Because you always feel differently. Changing your relationship with alcohol means being willing to listen to your body. Being willing to tune in to how you feel before, and recognize; hey, I'm having a lot of stress, or a lot of anxiety right now. Or, I didn't sleep very well the night before. Or, I haven't been feeling, you know, tip-top shape.

And then, really understanding; oh, if part of my desire is about changing how I feel, which it always is, and that's not a bad thing, then a moderate number or that magic number that I have in mind, might not do the trick. Now, that doesn't mean that you're stuck, right? It's not like; okay, wah-wah. Now, we just have to deal with the fact that I'm always going to be stressed out, or I'm always gonna have this deprivation.

No, what I teach so much, is about; alright, let's create the tools in your toolbox that you need, so that you have multiple ways to start to feel better. Without saying, "Oh, if only I could have a drink. That would be the thing, that would help me relax. That would be the thing, that would take the edge off of how I feel."

I will tell you this, most people, they just want the magic number. They don't want the other tools. They don't want to tune into their body. They're just like; just tell me how to have two drinks in a sitting. And I'm going to tell you, I can't tell you how to do that. I don't teach that.

Not because two drinks is bad or wrong, because it really is straight-up diet culture, it really is this idea of, you just need to listen to this outside authority. This outside rule, that's where you need to focus. I don't think that ever works in the long run. It doesn't work with food, and it doesn't work with alcohol.

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You're not going to have a normal relationship with food if you're always counting calories or points. And you're not gonna have a normal relationship with alcohol, if you're focused on the magic number. Really, what I want you to consider, is that the fixation on quantity is part of the problem.

It's telling yourself, it's teaching your brain, that a number is somehow more important than your own inner wisdom, your own inner knowing. That quantity is more important than your own well-being, which by the way, is very fluid and changes. And it's never going to be governed by a fixed rule that you make.

And that's okay, it's okay for it to be fluid, if you have the tools. If you know how to turn down the volume yourself, when you feel really stressed or you feel really deprived, or you're not having fun when you're out with people. If you know how to do that, then your desire is not going to be as strong. And your fixation on a number, that's something that you can actually leave behind.

What I'm really teaching, and what I want you all to consider, is that changing your relationship with alcohol means that you have to stop creating this binary of; either I abstain for the rest of my life, or I have to moderate to this magic number. Changing your relationship with alcohol is about understanding why you have this desire, why you want to drink. Why you don't always want to say no. Why you, sometimes think that more is better? Why...

Also, this is a big one, why you feel like life with alcohol would kind of suck? And not because you're supposed to get to a place where you convince yourself that; No, no, no, it's really amazing not drinking. That's not what I'm talking about. I love for people to ponder that question. Not because they're supposed to land in this place of like; oh, yes, everything's so much more

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amazing. And the sky is bluer, right? It's like, everything's better now that I don't drink.

No, I want people to explore that question because as soon as you answer it, it gives you insight into what you feel like you would be missing out on. And that answer, is the key to telling you; oh, these are the skills that I need to be working on. If I feel like, without a drink, I would be missing out on XY and Z. Whatever it is that you think; oh God. You know, that doesn't sound very fun. That just sounds like a life of deprivation.

That just sounds kind of boring. Why would I even bother going to a wedding? That would be hard to date. That would be hard to connect with people. How would I relax? Why would I even go to a fancy dinner? Whatever reasons come up for you, your answers are really giving you the exact path that you need to follow, to develop the skills that you need to change your relationship with alcohol.

And when you are armed with that knowledge, you can start to decide what's right for you. You have to have these tools, though. Tools that go beyond; well, I just want to be able to moderate. I just want to make sure that I never have more than three.

You need more than that. But when you have the tools that I'm talking about, when you learn how to actually tune into yourself, and understand what your desire is about. And learn how to turn down the volume on how you're feeling without a drink, that is really the knowledge that you need, to decide; hey, what is right for me, today? What is right for me, today? It might change tomorrow, it might change next week, but what is right for me, right now?

Only you can answer that question. I do not know the answer. Your best friend does not know the answer. Your doctor does not know the answer. You do. Now, I'm going to just end on this. This, what I'm talking about, is a

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level of empowerment that can kind of freak you out. It kind of freaked me out. It's like, what are you talking about, I'm in charge? I shouldn't be in charge. Because I'm the one that's always going overboard. Why on earth would we put me in charge?

But that is part of the problem. Because when you have this belief of; I definitely shouldn't be in charge because I'm always making a bad decision. Or, I always think more is better. Or, I'm always overdoing it. You're telling yourself that that's kind of inherent, that's just kind of baked into the DNA of who you are.

And what I want you to consider is, that is not true. The reason why you're going overboard, the reason why you're drinking more than you want, is not baked into just who you are as a person. It's because no one ever taught you how to listen to yourself. No one teaches us how to be our own authority. And it really is the most important thing, the most important skill, that we can learn.

Because I can't be your own authority. No one else can be your own authority. You're always going to be looking outside of yourself. And guess what? If you're looking outside of yourself, you're not paying attention to what is happening inside of you. And so, I just want to end on that, like, think about that.

When I'm saying that you're in charge, you are your own best authority, notice if that kind of freaks you out. Notice, if you think that maybe, you know, you're not up to it, or you don't have the track record to take on that kind of responsibility. I promise you this, a magic number does not have the track record to take on that kind of responsibility for you.

It's not about landing on some perfect rule, some perfect amount, some perfect quantity. It really is a commitment to focusing on the 'why' behind your decision. And learning these tools, so that, yeah, if you want alcohol in

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your life, you can have it in your life. But it's not essential. It's not necessary to relax, or connect, or enjoy yourself. It can be a nice add on, but you don't need it. That really, is the essence of being able to take it or leave it. Okay, it's here. But if it's not here, no big deal either.

These are the tools that you need. And it requires staying connected to your body and your emotions. Because, again, what feels good, how you are feeling on any given day, what's right for you, that is an answer that is always going to change and fluctuate.

So, that's what I want to offer for all of you, today. Really think about this. This is a lot here, that is very counterintuitive to what we are taught, but it truly will make all the difference.

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.

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