

Ep #305: How to Drink Less During the Holidays (Part 1)



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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 305.

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, everyone, welcome back. This is going to be a two-part series on how to drink less during the holidays. Because I know a lot of you just want to be able to do that. The holidays can end up being this kind of period of just all this overindulgence. And, it doesn't need to be that way. In fact, we're going to be focusing on how to drink less during the holidays for the entire month of December inside the *Take a Break* membership.

So, if you're not a member, this is a fantastic time to join. We're going to have special workshops and classes; really helping everyone during this time. Because it can be so challenging to drink less at parties, drink less when you're dealing with all the holiday stress, when you're around all those family members who are triggers, when you have the holiday blues.

All of this can be difficult, but it doesn't need to be when you have the right skills. So, today's episode is really going to focus on why the holidays become a free-for-all. What's going on? Why does that happen with our drinking and our eating? And, why did those two go hand in hand?

And then part two, next week, I'm really going to talk about simple hacks that you can start to put in place to show up differently this December. Because what I see happen, and frankly, not just with my clients but in my own experience, is that the holidays end up being this period where we just

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find ourselves, year after year, going overboard; so, we eat too much, and we drink too much. And, it doesn't just happen once.

I'm not even talking about how it happens kind of every year around the holidays, but it will happen kind of once around the holidays. We'll have that one moment, that one party, that one event, where we just went overboard, and then it will start to snowball. And, that snowball will impact the rest of the whole holiday period.

We get caught in the cycle of like, "Well, I don't know. I overdid it last weekend. I'm already behind. I already gained some weight. So, I guess I'll just enjoy myself during the holidays. And then, I'm going to be good come January."

It's so funny also, to think of it that way. Because a number of times I've told myself, "I'm just going to enjoy myself during the holidays." And then, I would feel awful. I would feel awful because I ate too much, I drank too much. I wasn't actually enjoying myself. I was, for much of the holiday period, I was in a lot of suffering. Feeling like, I'm just bloated, and my stomach feels off. I wake up and I'm just exhausted.

But I want to help you get out of this cycle. Because what I have seen, is that you end up coming to January, coming to the new year, not only feeling like you've got to hit a reset button, but also feeling defeated. Right? Also feeling like, oh God, that last part of the year really set me back. It's so much more powerful to head into a new year without feeling like you have to make up for the last month or two months.

Without feeling like, oh God, I sent myself backwards. It's so much more powerful to feel like, you know what? I'm actually on really good footing. I'm on really good footing to start this brand-new year started off right. And, not focus on making up from everything that happened, but really like, what do

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I want to do this year? What do I want to accomplish? Who do I want to be? Who would I want my future-self to be in 12 months?

So, I will tell you this; I focus a lot on the power of taking a break from drinking. I think that there is really nothing more eye-opening than setting aside a period of time to say, "Okay, I'm gonna take a break." And then, using that period of time to really bring to the surface all your specific patterns, and all the specific challenges. Because, again, everyone's relationship with alcohol, everyone's unique habit patterns look different.

You can have two people and they both finish a bottle of wine. That doesn't mean they have the same relationship with alcohol. That doesn't mean they have the same thoughts and feelings that are motivating finishing that bottle. And so, taking a break is so powerful in that way.

Doing that, especially doing that towards the end of the year, it is amazing to really start to see, "I can do this, during this time of the year that everyone thinks is too hard." But you know, you don't have to take a break. It doesn't always have to be, all right, I have to take a break. And, that's the only way to learn. Sometimes what you can do is you can focus on just drinking less.

How do we focus on cutting back in a way that, again, helps reveal your specific relationship with alcohol? The thoughts and feelings that are driving the decision to drink? How do you reveal that, without it being all about rules? That's what we're going to be focusing on this December inside the membership.

Because I don't want the holidays to turn into a free-for-all for anyone; it's kind of miserable. It doesn't feel great when January rolls around. So, you listen to the podcast, you hear me talk about, all the time, why cutting back on your drinking isn't always easy.

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Now, a lot of times, what will happen, is people will say, “Yeah, I know, it's because alcohol is addictive. You know it's challenging for me because I have a family history of alcoholism. You know what? It's challenging just because I'm an all-or-nothing person; I always think more is better.”

My opinion. And you will know this if you listen, my opinion is that we give way too much credence to these explanations. And, we don't pay nearly enough attention to two things: Number one, no one really educates us about alcohol. Other than that; just say no, don't drink and drive. I mean, really, like those were the only two lessons that I got growing up.

No one educates us about how habits form in the brain, and how your brain responds to pleasure, and how your brain works, and how to change habits. So, that first piece of the puzzle, that I think most people are missing, is just the education, the knowledge, the understanding.

The second piece of the puzzle for why it can be hard to say no, it can be hard to cut back, is because we are living in a perfect storm. Everything around us has been set up to make it harder to say no. And then, when you take that perfect storm and you add the holidays to it, it really does become challenging. But it doesn't need to be.

So, I want you to think about this: You know, humans have a very long history of making and drinking intoxicating beverages. Beer and wine have been with us for 1,000s of years. Okay? But really, in the last 50 years or so, and in particular the last couple of decades, humans have made it harder for us to say no.

Now, people are aware. I think a lot of people are aware that this has happened with food. That in the last 50 years, the last couple of decades with food, food has become harder to resist, harder to say no to. But I really

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think there's less acknowledgement about how we've done that with alcohol.

I want you to understand these three pieces before I talk about the holiday component. Because this really sets the stage for why it's challenging. So, number one, alcohol is easier than ever to access. Now, think about it; your lower brain, that part of your brain that cares about finding pleasure, avoiding pain, and doing it as efficiently as possible, that lower brain loves anything that is low effort and high reward.

That is what drinking is for many of us now, it is low effort and high reward. Now, for most of human history, drinking was high effort and high reward. It took time, it took energy, it took more money than it does now to get the reward. It's so much easier now for us. It requires so little effort, right? For a lot of people growing up, you couldn't get wine in the grocery store. You couldn't just throw it in your grocery cart.

You couldn't just drive to a 24-hour liquor store. You certainly couldn't sit on your couch, swipe an app on your phone and have it delivered to your front door. Think about how little energy, how little effort you expend when you purchase alcohol that way. We have made it so much easier to access, and the lower brain loves things that are low effort, high reward.

It is the exact same reason why we buy more when we can just hit that one-click button; when we don't have to take out our wallet, we don't have to take out our credit card, we don't have to pay cash; the exact same reason. So, alcohol is easier to access.

Number two, servings have been supersized. Food is not the only thing that is served in larger portions; beer and wine and liquor, they have all been super-sized, right along with food. And I don't think that there's enough conversation or acknowledgement about this. So, not only are your portions

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bigger, because bottles are bigger, and cans are bigger, and glasses are bigger, and stemware is bigger; I did a whole episode on this.

So, not only are portions bigger, but the trend, in the last couple of decades, has been to make wine and beer stronger. So, you've got stronger drinks in bigger portions. Your servings have been supersized, and they have been made stronger.

Number three, drinking is now more common in more places. It is more socially acceptable, and has become more socially acceptable with each passing decade, each passing year, to drink in more places at more times. You can sip champagne while you're getting your nails done. You can cross the finish line of a 5K and head straight into a beer tent. A children's birthday party, or a lot of people at children's birthday party, isn't complete unless there are adult beverages for the parents.

I want you to think about this; when you put these three things together, you start to see, oh, my brain has been conditioned to drink larger and stronger amounts of alcohol, more often. So, no wonder saying no can be challenging. Because, here I am in this perfect storm.

I work with people all the time inside the membership, and one of the biggest things that I do is to really teach them how to stop shaming and blaming themselves, because it is not your fault. You are not the problem. For all of you thinking, by the way, all of you right now, listening to me, thinking, "Yeah, okay, but like, what about my sister? She's living in this perfect storm. What about my best friend? He's living in this perfect storm; they all know when to call it quits."

I want you to know this; your relationship with alcohol, and how you drink, and how much you drink, it is not who you are. It is not part of your identity. It is not built into your DNA. It is something that you develop and builds up

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over time. This is true if you're like me, and the very first time you drank, you went overboard.

I talk about this a lot; how patterns that we develop, with consuming pleasure, well before we even start drinking, will start to show up. So, your relationship with alcohol built up over time. It's also connected to your relationship with food, and your relationship with your emotions, and your relationship to stress. And like I said, your relationship to other pleasures.

It is so pointless to say, "Well, but what about them? Why is it so easy for them? They're living in this perfect storm, too." Just as it's pointless to say, "Well, how come so-and-so doesn't gain weight like I do?" Because again, while it might look like you're doing the same thing on the surface; they're drinking and I'm drinking, we're doing the same thing. Trust me, you're not.

That is what this podcast, and teaching all of you about the think-feel-act cycle, is really about; to really show you not only that your actions don't just happen, but also, the two actions that can look the same can be completely different. They can be driven by very different thoughts and very different feelings. And figuring out what that is for you matters, because you cannot change what you can't see.

The thoughts and feelings that have you reaching for a drink and reaching for another, and picking up a slice of pizza and picking up another, they can be totally and profoundly different from another person; even though it may look like the same behavior on the surface.

So, think about it: You've got this perfect storm; alcohol's easier to access, serving sizes have been supersized, the trend has been to make things more potent, more intoxicating. We're all drinking more often and in more places. And then, you add the holidays to this. All of this gets amped up around the holidays.

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I talk sometimes about the Rolodex of excuses. I have a podcast episode that talks all about that; how our brain kind of flips through, like, which excuse is she going to buy? Which one is the excuse that's going to lead me to get the reward? And sometimes, that excuse around the holidays, it's just, "Yeah, it's a party. It's the holidays, I'm supposed to enjoy myself. I'm supposed to have a good time. It's special. This is a big thing. It's special."

I remember when I was in my 20s, going with my dad around the holidays. I'd go home to Connecticut for the holidays, and before our Christmas eve party, we would go out to a special liquor store that carried this special craft beer that was only released around Christmas. And it was like, the trip to the special store. The craft beer itself was a limited edition and it was more expensive. So, all of these things were kind of building up the excitement and the anticipation.

Now, by the way, one thing I did not pay any attention to around this time, it had a much higher ABV, had much higher alcohol by volume. Essentially, the beer we were buying together, it was stronger. I didn't pay any attention to that piece. Of course, that piece is very relevant, right? If it's stronger, it's more intoxicating. So, I think about that.

Or, I think about my family's special eggnog recipe, passed down from my great-great-grandmother. And, it's so special. We only make it once a year, and it's spiked with brandy. Which, oh, by the way, has an ABV of, you know, usually around 40%, sometimes as high as 60%. And, oh yeah, by the way, that recipe includes a bunch of sugar. So, it's another high reward for the brain.

Or, I think about living in Vienna. I lived there for a year when I was in college; I lived for a year in Vienna. And, you know, during the holiday season they had all this mulled wine. Usually, it's like a mix of a dry red

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wine, and then some brandy or some triple sec, and some spices. Oh, and sweetener; honey, or maple syrup, or sugar. So, we've got that in the mix.

Think about it: A lot of times you are drinking things with a higher ABV, they are more intoxicating. Maybe because it's a special craft beer that only comes out once a year, maybe because you're having mulled wine. And so, all of the sudden, you've got wine and brandy mixed together. And you're often drinking a lot of things where sugar sweetener is added into the mix. Sugar, like alcohol, acts on your pleasure centers in your brain. So, it's like a double whammy.

Guess what? Drinks that are sweeter go down easier. I talked about this in a podcast, about why it is that young people often start out drinking very sweet drinks, because sugar masks the taste so it goes down easier. And, we tend to drink more of things that are sweet.

Then, I think on top of it, you can think of things like champagne and prosecco, which are often around kind of celebrations and holiday events. They're carbonated, and carbonation tends to get you drunk faster. Now, there are a lot of theories as to why, but basically, carbonation speeds up the rate at which alcohol is absorbed into your bloodstream.

And on top of that, think about it; think about when it comes to champagne, or prosecco, or sparkling wine. Many times, that might be your first drink of the night. Right? It's your first drink when you get to the party. Your first drink when you get to whatever Christmas Eve celebration, or your New Year's Eve celebration.

And lots of people start the night with an empty stomach. Maybe because you're nervous. Maybe because you don't want to spoil your appetite. Maybe because your outfit is too tight. Right? I remember doing this a lot.

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It's like, I really want to wear this dress, but I can kind of just only fit in it; if I zip it up when I'm, you know, have an empty stomach.

So, I want you to see, are you noticing the trends here? The holidays are like the perfect storm to consume more. You're attending more parties, more special dinners, more events. You're being offered more drinks that we deem to be special. Maybe because they're only available seasonally. Maybe because they're only served at the holidays, so it's eggnog, or mulled wine, or rum punch.

These special drinks kind of amp up our anticipation, our excitement. And then, we're getting tipsy faster, because a lot of times we don't realize that we're consuming things with a higher ABV. Well, we're mixing wine with liquor, or because of carbonation, or because we're drinking on an empty stomach. And often, what we're drinking is sweet, which packs more of a punch on your pleasure centers.

And, you end up drinking more, more. So, want you to think about that. That's just talking about setting the stage for the types of things we consume, and how we consume them around the holidays. I haven't even talked about holiday stress yet. Right?

So, I really think that this period of the end of the year, it's so powerful. Really thinking about; okay, I know that this is a challenging period. So, how do I learn how to drink less at home? How do I learn to drink less when I go out to parties, or when I go to restaurants? How do I learn how to drink less when I'm celebrating?

Often, what happens, is that, you know, we give people all these kinds of tips and tricks. And, you know, they can work, but they're not foolproof. What happens, I think, is that when it doesn't work, people then feel so defeated. No one shows you why it didn't work. No one explains to you the

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think-feel-act cycle that was working behind the scenes, that you were unconscious to. So, you don't have that knowledge. Then, no one tells you how to change it. Right?

The tips and tricks that you use, if they're not working, or if they work only sometimes, or if you don't feel confident that you can rely on them, it's not because you're broken or something is wrong with you, or because you're never going to figure this out. It's because no one has really laid the groundwork to understand, how to figure out how that habit is working. And then, how to change it in a realistic, sustainable way.

So, that's all on top; like, all of this is on top of holiday stress. You've got travel stress, you got family stress, sometimes you got end-of-the-year blues, right? The year is over, what do I have to show for it? The holidays can amplify when we feel lack of connection in our lives. Maybe you're single, maybe you're newly divorced, maybe you're navigating divorced parents or divorced in-laws, maybe you're missing loved ones who are no longer with you.

That lack of connection can really be amplified around this time. All of this, I want you to think about it. All of this is setting the stage for you to drink more unless you take action. It doesn't have to though; the end of the year does not have to be the period where, like everything goes out the window and we just overindulge. And then, we pick up the pieces in January.

You don't have to be on that cycle anymore. You don't have to come away from the holidays feeling like you need a reset button. You can actually use this time to fast track your work; to change your relationship with alcohol, change your relationship with food, change your relationship with stress, change your relationship with urges and with pleasure.

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And here's the other thing, you can also be with people who are doing the exact same thing. This is one of the pieces that kept me stuck for the longest time; it felt like it was me against the world. I felt like I was trying to figure out my drinking. I was trying to drink less; I was trying to have a healthier relationship with alcohol. And, it was like I was all alone.

Sometimes, really, just being around people, being around people and doing this work together, and knowing that you're not alone, that other people are trying to figure this out, too; other people are struggling. It's so important. That's why I have a membership. That's why, you know, I don't just do this podcast because I want to be able to support people and have my coaching team be able to support people.

So, I want you to think that, really the end of the year, this December, can be such a fruitful time for change. The holidays don't have to be a time of just overindulging and then feeling bad about yourself. I'm going to talk a lot about the stress piece and the things that that you can do, in the next episode.

But if you are interested in doing this work with me in December, using this last month of the year to really make this a period where you're changing the habit, and changing your relationship, and not going backwards. It's a perfect time to join the *Take a Break* membership.

I'm going to, in addition to the live coaching calls that I do every week where you can get coached by me, I'm going to do five special holiday workshops. And, I'm going to do them in the first half of the month of December. Because I know you guys really want this information; you want it sooner rather than later.

Now, you don't need to attend live, you can watch the replay; you can listen on our private podcast. But I'm really going to be showing you how to

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master the holidays; how to feel good about the holidays, how to set yourself up for success. I think that that's one of the most challenging things, is that we have this special time of year come and we just, we want it to feel good.

And we want to feel connection, and we want to feel joy, and we want to feel happiness and peace. And so often, the experience is the exact opposite, right? We put all this pressure on ourselves. I'm gonna have workshops on drinking less at holiday parties. Drinking less when dealing with this holiday stress, and the overwhelm of the holidays. Drinking less when you're around your family; those family members that trigger you. Drinking less when you have the holiday blues; you just feel kind of down.

So, you're going to have that in December. And you're also going to have a 20-page booklet that I've put together on hacks for drinking less. Now, again, I think hacks can be incredibly, incredibly powerful, if you just have simple tools that you can really easily apply. But the power is not just in the hacks, the power is having the support that you need as you're learning to implement them.

So often, we kind of think a hacker tip or a trick, it should just work immediately. And if it doesn't work immediately, then something is wrong with me. See? I can't figure it out. No, that's not how the brain works. That's not how your brain is going to develop a new neural pathway. We don't just do things once and become experts. It takes multiple attempts.

Often, people don't even give themselves the multiple attempts that are needed to create a new habit. Because they feel so terrible when it didn't work out. Or, if you do give yourself multiple attempts, it's not from the space of like, let me understand this. Let me see what's working and what's not. It's just like, okay, I've just got to be more disciplined this time.

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It doesn't work that way. So, here's the deal: If you're listening, and you want to use December to take a break from drinking, fantastic. If you want to use December to focus on drinking less, that's amazing, too. But I'll tell you this, don't use December to just go on autopilot, wake up in 2023, and think, "Oh God, why did I do that?" And feel like you've set yourself back.

The work that you do to change your relationship with alcohol, it's not about becoming a rule follower. It's not about telling yourself that, oh, alcohol is really bad for you. And, it's poisoning my body. It's not about making a promise to never drink again.

That's what really makes this work so unique, that I teach. Many people will say, you know, "I can't believe how different my relationship with alcohol is. I can't believe that I can have a drink, and then be done. And, I don't even want more. I can't believe that I can go to an open bar and say no, not have anything. And, it wasn't hard. And, I didn't feel like I was missing out."

I truly feel like my entire relationship with drinking has changed, something that felt like I couldn't trust myself. Like, I would always overdo it. I would always be this person who would think 'more is better.' To transform into like, I truly feel like I can take it or leave it. I feel good about my choices.

And, I don't feel like the decisions that I make around alcohol have any bearing on me, or who I am as a person. Most importantly, I'm not constantly afraid of this all slipping away. I don't feel like my success is a fluke. I don't worry that like, okay, it's like working now. But what's going to happen?"

The reason why people really learn how to trust themselves is not because they learn how to be perfect. I want to dispel that right now. It's not about learning how to be perfect. It's knowing that you have the exact strategy you need. So, that if you do break your commitment not to drink, if you do

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break your promise to only have a couple drinks, you know exactly what you need to do.

And, the answer is not, “I need to beat myself up.” The answer is not, “I need to slip into ‘I should know better.’ What’s wrong with me?” It’s not feeling hopeless, or telling yourself that you’re never gonna figure it out. It’s actually using the moment where you don’t follow through on your commitment to say, “Oh, what’s going on here? There must be something about the habit that I don’t yet understand.”

“There must be a skill that I need more practice with. There must be something that I couldn’t see before this moment. But now I can use it as a learning opportunity. I can use it to deepen my ability to feel in control. My ability to allow my urges, and not act on them, and my trust in myself.”

That’s what I want for each and every person who listens to this podcast. No matter what your end goal is, no matter the relationship that you want to have with alcohol, I just want you to feel like you can trust yourself, no matter what. I just want you to leave behind the shame, and the blame, and beating yourself up, and, you know, telling yourself you should have learned your lesson by now.

That skill is what will change everything for you. When you learn how to allow your urges. Teach your brain that they’re harmless. Use the stop-drop-and-breathe method. Use the work of looking at what happened and learning from it. This is not like anything you’ve done before. So. keep in mind; yeah, the holidays can be a perfect storm. But they don’t need to be.

Really, all you need are simple tools to have the holiday season be a time where you show up completely differently. A time where you actually can use what most people think is the most challenging time of the year, you can use it to really start practicing and mastering the skills of drinking less.

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So, here's the deal: If you're interested, if you want to join me for December, make sure you go to RachelHart.com/join to sign up. If you want to attend live... You don't need to because everything is going to be replays; it will all be available on our private podcast. But if you want to attend live, the first workshop will be on December 1st.

You're also going to get access to that 20+ page book on hacks to drink less. Again, all of this will be available inside the membership come December.

Alright, next week is part two. I'm going to be talking about, really, the top couple of things that you can do to drink less over the holidays. These are going to be very specific, very tactical things that you can put into place.

All right, everybody. That's it for today. I will see you next week in part two.

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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