

Ep #306: How To Drink Less During The Holidays (Part 2)



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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 306.

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 to part two. This is the second part in a two-part series on how to drink less during the holidays. Part one was all about why the holidays can become a free for all, why they become the perfect storm that sets us up to drink more. And this episode, part two, is all about simple things you can do to set yourself up for success.

Now, we're going to be doing this work inside the Take A Break membership throughout the entire month of December. So if you want to work with me on everything that I'm teaching today, this is the perfect time. By the way, also, when you join for December you're going to get a 20 page eBook on hacks to drink less. I'm going to go through four hacks, but there's like 25 more of them in this eBook.

And you're going to be able to take part in five workshops we're doing in December. I'm going to be leading workshops on mastering the holidays, drinking less at holiday parties, drinking less when dealing with holiday stress, drinking less around family, we know that's a big trigger. And drinking less when you have the holiday blues.

Okay, so today though, what I'm going to cover are four simple things that you can start practicing right now. You can practice them through the entire month of December and they're going to help you drink less. Again, these hacks work best when they aren't done in isolation.

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What do I mean by that? So often when people try out a hack, they do it kind of with blinders on. So outside of the context of drinking, you've probably heard of a hack like, "Hey, if you want to work out more, put your workout clothes next to your bed and you'll be more likely to go to the gym." Okay, that's all fine and well. But remember, your actions don't just happen.

That's what I'm always teaching you on the podcast, your actions are created by your thoughts and your feelings, not by hacks. Because what are hacks? They're just actions. So if when you put your workout clothes next to your bed and go to the gym, do you understand why it worked? Do you understand the thoughts that lead to success?

Because more important than filling your life with a bunch of hacks is knowing the thoughts that creates success for you. On the flip side, what if a hack doesn't work, right? Or what if it works for a while and then it stops? Do you understand why that happened?

Again, it's not the hack. It's the thought and the feeling which, of course, can change over time. Hacks are great, they're simple, they're easy. But relying on hacks alone to change anything in your life, whether that is going to the gym or changing your relationship with alcohol, it's like playing a game of Roulette, right? Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes it works for a while and then it stops, but I have no idea why.

The answer is always found in the think, feel, act cycle. So I do want you to consider this piece, hacks are incredibly helpful, but they are most helpful when you don't do them in isolation. When you really understand, oh, what was the thought and feeling that led to that working? Or why didn't it work? There's so much to be learned when you incorporate the think, feel, act cycle into this work.

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Okay, hack number one to drink less over the holidays, drink less in general, it has to do with water. Now hear me out, stay with me. This is not the typical drink a glass of water before you start drinking or alternate with water between every drink. No, that's not what this is about. This hack is about solving thirst first. This is something you need to do throughout the day, not just in the lead-up to drinking.

Now, before I go into this, I'm going to tell you why I hated this hack, because I know a lot of you out there are like, "Oh God, water." I was right there with you. I hated drinking water, I didn't like the taste. But more importantly, I actually found it really annoying that when I drank a lot of water I had to pee all the time.

So it just seemed very inefficient to me and just annoying to have to get up all the time. I will tell you when I drove cross country with my husband when I was moving out to California, and this was our first road trip together. We started in Brooklyn, we were taking kind of a leisurely route, three weeks to drive through the country and see the sights and then eventually end up in San Francisco.

And so we started the trip, we drove from Brooklyn to Niagara Falls and then through Canada, and through Detroit, and through Indiana and Chicago. And we're taking our time, right? And we got to Wisconsin, and I remember my husband turning to me, well, he wasn't my husband at the time. But I remember him turning to me and he was like, "Are you ever going to ask to stop the car for a bathroom break?"

He'd never been on a road trip with me, didn't know what I was like. And I was like, "No, why would I do that? That's so inefficient." Literally, that was my thought about peeing. It's annoying, it wastes time, it's inefficient, and it's more important to be productive than listen to your body.

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Now, I share all of this to let you know that increasing my water intake, focusing on solving thirst first was not easy for me because notice all those thoughts I had about water and drinking water. But solving thirst first is one of the most important things you can do. And by the way, it takes practice.

So for all of you out there who are like, "Oh, I don't like water." Yeah, it takes practice. Again, this is not alternating drinks with water. It's focusing on being hydrated all day long because when you are dehydrated, you will end up drinking more of everything. You'll have more coffee, you'll have more soda, you'll have more juice, and you will have more wine and more beer and more cocktails, okay?

This hack is not about drinking water to slow you down, it's about being hydrated so that you're not reaching for a drink, not reaching for alcohol to try to solve thirst. So many of the people that I work with in the membership, this is what they do, right, they get home, they've had nothing but coffee to drink all day. Their blood sugar is low, they haven't eaten since lunchtime, and they immediately open up a bottle of wine or they immediately go to the fridge and grab a beer.

They are trying to solve thirst, and often trying to solve low blood sugar with alcohol. It doesn't make sense. Now listen, I'm not saying that you're not craving a drink at the end of the day. What I'm saying is when you are dehydrated, your cravings are all jumbled up and it's really difficult to tell what is what. You are very likely thirsty on top of craving a drink. So guess what? Now you have two cravings that you're dealing with, your cravings feel stronger.

Now, here's the other piece. And this is what started to help kind of shift some of my thinking when I learned this, is that dehydration negatively affects your mood. And it really doesn't take that much to make a big difference. So when your body loses just one and a half percent of its

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normal water volume, one and a half percent, that's it, it starts to deplete your levels of amino acids in your brain.

And then guess what happens? You feel more anxious, you're more irritable, you're tired. One and a half percent is nothing, right? But when you start to understand what it does to your body and see, oh, it's actually increasing stress on my body, it's impacting my mood negatively. And a huge reason that we drink is because of stress and our mood. We want to feel better, we had a long day, we are exhausted.

So when I started to reframe it that way for me to really be like, oh, right, this isn't just like, oh, I should be hydrated for hydrated sake. This is, oh, I can feel better, I can have less stress on my body, I can improve my mood just by drinking water. And here's another thing that I learned, dehydration decreases your cognitive ability.

So basically when you're dehydrated you don't think as clearly. Your reasoning decreases. So think about it, you want to make smart choices around alcohol, but you're not hydrated. It is actually working against you. Not only do you start trying to solve thirst with a drink, but you don't have the cognitive ability that you need.

And here's the thing, when you're drinking you need all the cognitive ability that you can get. You don't want to start out with a deficiency, that is not going to help matters. So solving thirst first means focusing on drinking water all day long.

I know a lot of you are like, "Okay, so how much?" I don't want you to focus on ounces, right? It's like is it 64 ounces? Is it two liters? All I want you to do is just look at your pee, right? It's there to tell you. If it's dark yellow, you're dehydrated. If it's pale yellow, you're doing good. That's how you know that you're getting enough.

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So you can focus on that and also focus on, okay, how am I setting myself up to make sure that I'm getting water? So here's what I do, I keep a bottle by my bed so I can drink right when I wake up in the morning. And I keep a glass next to my bathroom sink and next to my kitchen sink. And whenever I'm in the bathroom or whenever I'm in the kitchen, I fill up the glass and I drink it in there.

So think about it, for me that means I'm waking up and I'm drinking a bottle of water that's next to my bed. I don't finish it, but I have like a good amount. And then I go upstairs to take a shower, I drink a glass of water before I shower. And then I drink another after my shower. So I've had three chances to drink water before coffee even comes into the picture. And then I keep a bottle at my desk. And most importantly, I look at my pee and I adjust accordingly.

I want you to think about this, if all you did during the holiday season was focus on being hydrated, that's it, just focus on drinking water, solving your thirst first, not only would you feel better emotionally, not only would you have less stress in your body, you know what? You would eat less too, and you would drink less. It's just a win win all around. So that is Hack number one, solve thirst first. It's something that you have to focus on all day long. And it will improve so many areas of your life.

Hack number two, take 10 seconds, 10 seconds, that's it, to tune into yourself before you start drinking. 10 seconds is not a lot of time. You really have no excuse not to do this. You can put these questions in your phone, so you always have them with you. All you have to do is ask yourself these three questions before you start drinking to tune into yourself.

Now these questions are not to try to convince you not to drink. It's literally just trying to build awareness with yourself, awareness of the habit. Question number one, what has my day been like? Question number two,

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how am I feeling right now? And question number three, how do I want to feel?

Listen, there's no right answer. You don't have to change a single thing about your drinking after you answer these questions. The goal is simply to better understand the habit, to better understand your cravings and your desire. Because here's the deal, you are always more likely to go overboard when you've had a crappy day, when you're stressed out, when your negative emotions are high. Three things that tend to happen a lot around the holidays.

So if your stress and your anxiety levels are off the charts, a glass of wine is probably not going to make you feel better. And knowing that is important, right? You start to see, oh right, I'm more likely to overdo it right now because when I answered those questions, I could see, yeah, I've had a really crappy day and I feel super stressed out and I don't want to feel this way.

Answering these questions gives you awareness. And awareness is an essential part of habit change. I say this all the time, I'm like a broken record with this, you cannot change what you can't see. And for so many of you, all you see is the action of drinking, right? Because that's what's happening on the outside.

You see, like, oh, I'm coming home, and I want a drink. Or, oh, I just polished off that bottle and I didn't want to. You're seeing the action, you need to start to see the thoughts and the feelings connected to it. When you can't see that part, you can't change it.

Now, I do want to just say for all of you out there who want to answer these questions by saying, "I don't know, my day was fine. I feel fine." Or, "I don't

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know, I don't know how I feel right now." That is not going to work, that is not going to build awareness.

So I'm going to challenge you to do this, when it comes to that question, right, that first question of what has my day been like, if you notice that your knee jerk response is, "It's been fine." Just ask yourself instead, was it good or was it bad? That's it, just pick one. That gives you so much more information than like, "I don't know, fine."

Now for that second question about how am I feeling right now? For all of you out there who want to answer that question with like, "I don't know." I don't know is not a good answer. I don't know, doesn't give you any awareness.

I tell people all the time when I'm working with them inside the membership and they want to kind of just say, "I don't know. I don't know how I feel." It's just like just take a guess. Even if you're wrong a guess has the opportunity to possibly give you more awareness and insight than I don't know.

And 99% of the time when people take a guess, when I'm like, "All right, just choose something, just choose a one word emotion. And by that I mean happy, sad, mad, anxious, overwhelmed, bored, just choose it." As soon as they choose something, they're either like, "Oh yeah, that's what it is," or, "No, that doesn't sound quite right." And they take another guess.

I will tell you this, being able to say how you feel emotionally, it is a skill. And it's a skill that most people don't have. It's a skill that you need to have if you want to change your drinking if you want to change your relationship with alcohol. It's a skill that I didn't have because we're so avoidant of our feelings and we have so much judgment about how we feel.

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So just remember, “I don't know” is not a good answer. It's not an answer that's going to help build any awareness. And also, okay, and fine are not emotions, stick to emotions. Happy, sad, mad, anxious, overwhelmed, bored, angry, whatever.

Now, just answering these questions, “What has my day been like? How am I feeling right now? And how do I want to feel?” Before you start drinking, just doing that, spending 10 seconds to do that, that will change your drinking. Why? Because you would stop going into it mindlessly.

You would stop going into it with a lack of awareness. You would stop saying, “Oh, it's just because it's five o'clock. It's just because it's Friday. It's just because I love wine.” You would start actually tuning into the thoughts and the feelings that are connected to the habit. You would start having awareness about that think, feel, act cycle, which is what you need to see in order to start to drink less or to say no and not feel like you're missing out.

Hack number three, pair alcohol with food always. Drink with food, not on its own. Now, there's a couple of reasons to do this. Number one, when you drink on an empty stomach, I'm sure you know this, you get tipsy faster. Which, guess what? When you get tipsy faster, you're more likely to go overboard. It also screws with your blood sugar when you drink on an empty stomach, which makes you more likely to drink more.

The other reason to pair alcohol with food is because a lot of you, if you're not drinking on an empty stomach, maybe you're drinking after dinner, you're probably drinking with a wine glass in one hand and a phone in the other. Or a bottle of beer in one hand, or a cocktail in one hand, sitting in front of a TV, right?

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A lot of times what happens is we start the habit of drinking in front of screens. And guess what? When we're drinking in front of screens, we're drinking mindlessly. And when we drink mindlessly we're going to drink more. So just the simple act of, okay, can I pair my alcohol with food? So that way it's not like, "Oh, I'm grabbing this because I'm thirsty." It becomes an accompaniment, it's there to complement what you're eating.

It also slows the rate at which alcohol enters your bloodstream. Again, if all you did was stop drinking on an empty stomach or stop drinking in front of screens, that would be huge. You would drink less because you would be setting yourself up to make better decisions. You would be setting yourself up to slow down the rate of absorption, to not be screwing with your blood sugar, to not be consuming mindlessly. I mean, you could do one or the other and that would make a huge difference.

And then the final hack, number four, this is something that I never knew to pay attention to. And I think it's something that every single person who consumes alcohol needs to know. It is paying attention to the ABV, the alcohol by volume, which essentially means the strength of a drink.

So that final hack is just sticking with drinks that have a lower ABV. Avoid the hard stuff, it's called the hard stuff for a reason, you get drunk faster. So you can simply stick with beer and wine. But there's still a catch, you still should pay attention to ABV because if you listen to part one of this series, you know how ABV has been trending upwards in beer and wine.

Okay, so first, most people, I didn't know, most people don't know like, what's the typical ABV? When doctors talk about a standard serving, what are they talking about? Well for beer that's 5% ABV, 5% alcohol by volume, and for wine that's 12%. So you can start factoring ABV into your decision making.

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Imagine like you're at the liquor store and you're choosing between two different wine bottles. Choose the one with the lower ABV. Listen, I did not get this, I didn't understand this for the longest time. And I remember being in my 20s living in New York City and going to this bar. I don't remember where it was, maybe the lower east side that had all these beers, like all these beers from around the world. The biggest selection I had ever seen.

And I remember going and looking at the menu. And how was I choosing? I wish choosing because like the name seemed fun, or the description of what it tasted like seemed good, right? And I remember I had a bunch of fancy Belgian beers and I got wasted. Why? Because a lot of time Belgian beer has a much higher ABV. But in my mind, I was like, "Yeah, I just had three beers. What's going on here?"

But the alcohol by volume was so much higher, and so it was a much stronger drink. But I wasn't paying attention to any of that. I was just counting how many drinks I had had. I didn't know squat about ABV. Choose the lower ABV, okay? It's such a small thing and can make such a big difference, so pay attention.

Listen, if you're going to consciously decide to get something that has a higher ABV, well then you need to adjust accordingly. You can't expect, oh, like a drink is a drink is a drink. No, that's what we do. That's why counting drinks is often so problematic because a drink is not a drink is not a drink, right? The strength of the drink can be very different.

So pay attention to ABV and, you know what? You can seek out low ABV options, it is so much easier to find low ABV wine and beer. So when I'm talking about low, for beer that would mean an ABV of 2.5% or lower. For wine it's an ABV that's in the single digits, right? So instead of 12%, maybe it's 9%.

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A lot of menus at restaurants and bars often now list ABV, pay attention to that, factor that into your decision making. And you know what? You've all got smartphones, it's pretty easy to look up. Paying attention to ABV, just factoring that into your decision making, it can make such a big difference.

So here's what I want you to take away, these four hacks, these are simple, small changes that you can make that can have a huge difference in how much you're drinking. But remember, the most powerful thing to do is to use these hacks in conjunction with the think, feel, act cycle, right? It's not very helpful if you're like, "Okay, I tried it, but it didn't work. I guess it doesn't work for me." It's like no, why didn't it work? Let's look at the thought. Let's look at the feeling that led to you not using it.

Or if you're like, "Well, it worked for a while, but then it stopped working." Okay, let's understand that. Paying attention, not just to the hack, but why did this work? Oh, that thought, that feeling, let's build on that. Let's have more of those thoughts, more of those feelings. Why didn't it work? Oh, when I tell myself this, right, I'm not going to have a good outcome.

Paying attention to this is so important. And it's not just for drinking, it really is for everything in life that you want to change because people are always giving us hacks, right? Hacks to go to the gym more, hacks to spend less, hacks to eat less. When you understand the think, feel, act component, then it's no longer such a mystery for why it sometimes works and sometimes doesn't.

And so if you want to do this work with me inside the membership, we're going to spend the whole month of December focusing on drinking less. Make sure you join before December. You're going to get the Hacks To Drink Less eBook, this is something that you can use throughout the entire year. I gave you four of these hacks, like I said, there's probably 25 more of them in the book.

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We're also going to be focusing on special workshops to really make sure that the holidays and this holiday season is different for you. It doesn't need to be a time of the year when everything falls apart and then you have to pick up the pieces in January.

So we're going to have five additional workshops, in addition to my coaching calls. So I'll be leading them, they're on mastering the holidays, drinking less at holiday parties, drinking less when dealing with holiday stress, drinking less around family, which you know is a big thing. And drinking less when you have the holiday blues.

You don't have to attend it live, there's going to be replays of all of these. I want you to think about this, you really can use this holiday season to supercharge the work that you're trying to do to change your relationship with alcohol. You can use this season, this time of year to learn how to drink less, learn how to say no without missing out because the holidays offer so many opportunities to practice.

All right, so if you want to join me in December, and I hope you do, head on over to rachelhart.com/join and you can sign up there. All right everyone, use these hacks, it will make such a difference. I'll 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.

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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.