

Ep #314: Should I Get Rid of Alcohol in My House When I'm Trying Not to Drink?



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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 314.

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.

Hey, everybody, I'm going to answer a question today that I get all the time. I'm actually getting it a lot right now inside the membership, because so many people are doing the January reset. And that question is, if I'm taking a break from drinking, should I get rid of the alcohol in my house?

Now, I want to really explain my position on this and explain what I recommend for people to do, because my position is very different from conventional wisdom. I will tell you, on the face of it, it seems like a really good idea, right?

Like, okay, you want to take a break from drinking; you want to be successful. So let's just remove all the temptation, right? Let's not come home every day and have all this temptation in the liquor cabinet or in the fridge; it's just going to make saying no that much harder. Let's just pour it down the drain.

It makes sense on the surface. That's what conventional wisdom really tells us, you know, don't play with fire. Don't tempt yourself. You know, if you want to succeed and you feel compulsive, not just around alcohol but around anything, it could be sugar, right? It could be your phone. Then the solution is, you know, just move it away from you and get as far away from you as possible.

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I think that there are a couple of landmines that are actually hidden in this advice. And I want to help you understand what they are so that you can make a decision that's right for you. The most important thing, and you will hear me talk about this all the time on the podcast, is that alcohol just sits there. It doesn't tempt you; it doesn't say anything.

That is the entire premise of what I am teaching. Your body does not make a move toward a drink without something unfolding in your mind first; this is how the think-feel-act cycle works. The action of drinking isn't a reflex; it doesn't just happen. It's connected to what's unfolding in your mind. And listen, this is a good thing.

Because if your drinking just happens, then you're kind of screwed. Right? If it's just a reflex that you can't stop, well, how are you ever going to change? How are you ever going to be successful? How will you ever learn how to say no? If you can't stop your body from moving toward it, how will you ever learn how to stop, right?

For all of you out there who are like, you know, I don't want to stop drinking; I just want to drink less. Well, how are you going to learn how to do that if saying more to another drink and another drink just happens? This is really why I think that the think-feel-act cycle is both a blessing and a curse. It is a blessing. Because suddenly, when you start to realize that your habits don't just happen, I don't care what the habit is, it doesn't just happen.

There is a logical explanation. There's a reason behind what is going on. You can start to see, and you can start to bring awareness to something that felt so unconscious in your mind. So you know, think about it. This is what would confuse me for the longest time. It was like, okay, well, I had two glasses the other night at dinner, and everything was fine. And you know, I saw my friend and then I went home.

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And then I just polished off a bottle over the weekend. Like, what was going on? I couldn't understand why my drinking was so unpredictable because I didn't understand the think-feel-act cycle at work. I didn't understand that it looked different because of the different thoughts and different feelings that I was having at the moment.

And when I first learned about think-feel-act, oh my God, it was such a relief for me. It was such a relief to know, oh, it doesn't just happen. There's actually a process or something that I can understand that's unfolding inside of me that, right now, I'm unaware of. But I can start to build awareness about it. And if I have awareness, I can change it. I can intervene with these thoughts and these feelings and learn how to respond differently.

Now listen, I know that there are some of you who are hearing me describe situations where your drinking looks different, and you're thinking, "That is not me. My drinking is not unpredictable. I always drink too much. I always overdo it. I'm never able to rein myself in." For all of you out there, I just want you to ask yourself, really? Is that true 100% of the time that you drink the exact same amount?

Now I know that your knee-jerk response might be, "Yes, Rachel, I always overdo it." But I want to challenge you to just be really, really curious. Have you ever had a night where you polished off a bottle of wine, and then you went to bed? Versus another night, where you polished off that first bottle of wine and then opened a second? How did that happen?

Or have you ever gotten to almost the end of a bottle, which you would normally finish, and you decided, "You know what? I'm just gonna pour this little bit down the drain instead of drinking it." How did that happen? What I'm asking you is just to be really, really curious, and honest with yourself.

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Does your drinking look exactly the same 100% of the time? Of course, the answer is no.

And, of course, you will want to write off that exception and say, "Okay, well, this one time, it didn't. This one time, I stopped myself." You want to write that off as the exception; the 1% that doesn't count. And listen, I get it. This is why I say the think-feel-act cycle is both a blessing and a curse. It's a blessing because if our drinking doesn't just happen, well, then guess what? You can intervene. You can start figuring out what's going on. You can bring awareness to what's actually driving the habit.

You can get to the root cause and see that it's not really alcohol. It's what you're thinking and feeling in the moment, and you can learn how to change it. That's the blessing.

But then there's the curse. The curse is the moment that we acknowledge that our drinking doesn't just happen. That there is a thought. That our brain doesn't immediately stop working. We don't immediately stop making decisions the moment after our first sip. Well, this part is the curse because this is the part where we immediately make it mean oh, it must be my fault. I must be to blame for drinking too much. It's my fault that I haven't learned my lesson.

So I want you to think about that. I want you to notice if when I talk about the think-feel-act cycle, when I talk about the fact that you don't just stop making decisions, there's always the thought that alcohol isn't tempting you. If you have a tendency to be like, oh, okay, then I'm to blame. Right? If there is the thought, "If I have more control than I think and I'm not exercising that control, then the problem is me. I'm the problem."

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You are not the problem. You are not to blame. This is not true either. You cannot control something that no one ever taught you about, no one ever explained to you, no one ever gave you instructions for. Right? It's like sitting down in a cockpit of a plane and being expected to fly without any instruction; there are a billion knobs, and indicator lights, and gauges, and how on earth are you going to know what any of that means without someone explaining something to you?

Now, again, I hear the voice of some of you that are like, okay, Rachel. But what about so and so in my life? No one gave them instructions, and they drink normally; they drink just fine. They know when to stop themselves. How come they get to go into the cockpit of the plane and fly away just fine?

Well, my friend, that's because their think-feel-act cycle does not look like yours. I remember being in college. I started drinking when I was 17, the first week that I got to college. And I remember a friend of mine who just really didn't drink as much as me. And I was really confused by her. Because to me, I was like, "Drinking is the best. This is so much fun. This is a guaranteed good time. How could you not want to get drunk?"

I remember having this conversation with her. And her response was something like, "I don't like feeling like I'm not myself." And I laugh now because I remember thinking at the time, "Like, isn't that the point? I don't want to be myself. I want to be the version of me who doesn't have a care in the world. Who isn't stuck in my head. Who isn't worried about what everyone thinks."

We had very different thoughts about the same feeling that alcohol produces. For me, it was freedom. For her, it might have even been a little

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bit scary, but it wasn't something that she liked. This is just one example. Our drinking looks different because our thoughts are different.

We can apply this to anything, too. Right? You can take this example to food. Here's just a little aside. I love that this work, everything that I teach everyone inside of my membership, it's like a meta-skill. You're not just learning skills that only apply to alcohol; you can apply it to anything in your life. A lot of the people I work with take what I teach, and they start applying that to food and how much they eat; they're overeating.

And I think food is another great example. It's like, well, why does our eating look different? You know, I remember early on when I was getting to know my future sister-in-law. I don't remember where we were, but we were together for a couple of days. One morning we woke up, and we were in the kitchen, and I asked if she wanted breakfast. And she was like, "Oh, not really. I mean, we ate so much last night. I'm still full."

Again, I'm laughing because hearing that broke my brain. I was thinking like, "What on earth is she talking about? How does how much you ate last night have any bearing on whether or not you're going to eat breakfast the next day?"

Now, this was a time when I was not so in tune with my body. I did not really pay attention so much to signals that I was getting about fullness or hunger. I was eating based on the time. I was eating based on expectation, like, this is what you do. You wake up, and you have breakfast.

I wasn't assessing what was happening in my body; I was just on autopilot. And this, again, is my point. Why does it look different? Why did our relationship with food and our decisions about whether or not we were

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going to eat breakfast at that moment, and how much we were going to eat, look different? Because we had different think feel act cycles.

That's my point. We're staring at the same cockpit, but we've got different thoughts. We've learned different things. We've absorbed different messages from people, our parents, TV, and our social circle. Who've adopted different messages from all these different places around us.

So listen, do I think that brains are different? Yes, of course; I think humans are different. I think that, you know, no two bodies are alike. No two brains are alike. But I think, for the most part, we're operating with the same equipment. And some people may be able to more intuitively use the equipment and intuitively excel at different things. Other people may need more practice than others. But it doesn't mean that it's impossible to learn.

You know, I think we don't realize, when we start drinking, how much we are learning, how much we are teaching our brain. And so we chalk it up to, like, I guess this is just who I am. I've always been this way. That's surely what I thought. I drank too much the very first time that I drank, so I guess I'm just someone who always overdoes it.

Okay, that was a little bit of a diversion from the question. But I, you know, I always want to try to answer what I think some of you are thinking when I offer these concepts. Because, you know, I had to wrestle with this myself; I had a lot of these same thoughts.

The point is, just because the think-feel-act cycle is at work... Just because your drinking doesn't happen, doesn't mean that drinking too much is your fault or you should know better. You need information. You need to understand how the brain works. You need to understand how to bring a

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habit into your awareness when you don't have an awareness of it. You have to learn how to change your response to your cravings.

And also, your thoughts. How to shift your thoughts in believable ways. You have to learn how to change your response to your emotions. So often, we kind of skip over that part, the emotional connection to drinking. So alcohol doesn't tempt you; it just sits there. It doesn't say anything.

But your brain has learned to associate it with certain feelings; oh, this will help me decompress. This will help me open up. This will help me connect with people. This will make things more fun. I won't be bored if I drink this, I'll have a better time.

Those connections are made by your thoughts and your feelings before you have a drink. And then, the thoughts and the feelings once you start. Most of us have zero awareness that this is going on. But we repeat it over and over and over again until it really does start to feel like, yeah, my drinking just happens. I don't know why I drink this much. Right?

It's why my friend in college was like, "I don't like how it feels to be drunk." And I was like, "What are you talking about? This is amazing. It is amazing to not feel like myself." So, alcohol just sits there.

Why does this matter? Because let's say you remove it from where you live. And you have success, right? You decide you want to take a break. You want to give your mind and your body a rest. You've been drinking too much. You, maybe, even can't even remember the last time... Alcohol has been so ingrained in your life that you can't remember like, "Yeah, when have I had even a 30-day period without it?"

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So you decide that you want to do this, and you get some success, and you removed it from your home. And what happens is a lot of people will say, "Well, the reason I was successful was because it wasn't around. It wasn't in the house. I turned down all the invites. I didn't go to the events where I knew alcohol would be. I was able to say no. But I was able to do that because I wasn't tempted. I wasn't around it."

Do you see the problem? You are inadvertently giving alcohol power it doesn't have. You are disempowering yourself and giving alcohol the upper hand. And then what happens? What I find is that people will then not feel confident in their success because they're like, "Okay, yes, I said no, but I did it because of my proximity to alcohol."

What's going to happen when that proximity changes? That is really part of the problem. I think it reinforces this idea that alcohol is tempting you, and you can only be successful if you don't face temptation.

Now, the other kind of piece of this is that a lot of people that I work with actually don't feel like they can remove alcohol from their surroundings, even temporarily. Maybe they say, you know, "My partner drinks; that's not changing. I live with a bunch of roommates; they all drink. My job involves wining-and-dining clients. I have all these events on my calendar coming up, and the drinks are just going to be flowing."

And so for those people who are like, okay, well, then what? Because the conventional wisdom is you have to remove temptation, and they feel very stuck. They start telling themselves, "Well, I can't succeed because I'm going to be surrounded by too much temptation." They're essentially doing the same thing, giving alcohol power that it doesn't have.

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What happens in that scenario is that these people will just put off change and put off doing anything because they are blaming their circumstances. It's like, the problem is who I live with. It's my friends. It's my social calendar. It's my job. It's just that alcohol is everywhere. There's just too much temptation. How will I ever succeed?

Again, all of this is based on the underlying premise that alcohol tempts you when it doesn't. This idea that people feel so strongly about, right? Many people will say, "Listen, just remove temptation; get it away from you, as far away as possible." What they don't acknowledge is how it disempowers people and makes them feel that if they have success, they can't depend on it.

Now, listen, does this mean I think you shouldn't remove alcohol from your house if you can? Not necessarily. I think, and I've watched it happen many times, people go to the extreme. They hear what I am teaching, and then they say, "Okay, so I have to prove... I need to prove that I don't need to get rid of it." And listen, that can be just as problematic.

So they're in a situation where it's like, "I want to take a break. And I don't want to empty out my wine cabinet because then it means I'm weak." Which is also not what I'm saying. But this is, kind of, the logic. It's like, "Then it means I'm weak."

But then the problem is they find themselves coming home, some of them every night, and then they're drinking, and they're failing. And then they're drinking, and they're failing. And they're making it mean that they can't change.

Sometimes, I think it makes sense, depending on your situation. Especially if you know that you've tried many times and you're running into a lot of

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challenges, it may make sense for you to say, "You know what? The best thing for me right now is just to do whatever I can to get some success under my belt."

"And if that means getting rid of the alcohol in my house or not seeing certain friends, or turning down some invitations, that is a temporary thing that I am choosing to do in order to give myself a little breathing room. To give my mind and body a break. That's what I need more than anything. That's the most important thing right now. But I'm doing it. I'm making that decision, knowing full well that my desire is not created by the drink in front of me. That think-feel-act cycle is still at work."

"But you know what? Right now, I just, whatever. I don't have enough practice with urges or deprivation, or stress. I'm failing too much, and then I'm making that mean that I can't change. So I just want to give myself a little breathing room."

I really think that this can be true with any habit that we want to work on. So I know that for me, yeah, of course, it's easier for me not to look at my phone first thing in the morning when it's not on my bedside table. Of course, I have the urge to start reading the news and look at my phone when I wake up. But when the phone isn't right next to me, I often have the thought, "I don't want to go upstairs and get it."

So, yes, I'm saying no. But I'm saying no, because of what I'm thinking. I'm not telling myself, "Well, the only way I can stop looking at my phone is if it's not around me, it's just too tempting. I have to lock it away, or I have to get a dumb phone, so I can just stop procrastinating." All of that language disempowers me. The same thing is true here.

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Listen, whether or not you want to get rid of the alcohol in your house, the answer is totally up to you. And I think the best answer depends on your situation; if you think it's going to help. If you think that it's going to give you some breathing room, go ahead. If your situation doesn't allow for that, don't worry, you're not doomed.

But make the decision, knowing that it's not the bottle of wine, it's not what's in the liquor cabinet, that it's tempting you. Your thoughts are tempting you; it's not the drink that is too hard to resist. What's too hard to resist is that you don't have a lot of practice allowing whatever feeling bubbles up when you say no.

This is really what I want for everyone doing this work. To not only learn the think-feel-act cycle but learn it as a way to empower yourself to feel more in control. And never use it as a way to blame yourself or beat yourself up, or make your habits mean that somehow you're at fault. If right now you find yourself struggling, you know that you want to change, but you're finding change difficult; nothing is wrong with you.

You're not at fault. It just means that there's a skill out there that you need a little bit more practice with; that's it. There's nothing wrong with you. So again, make the decision, but don't rely on conventional wisdom. Make it, understanding everything that I explained here.

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.

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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.