

Ep #324: Preventing the Backslide



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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 324.

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, everybody. Welcome back. We are talking today about preventing the backslide. This is a topic that I have a lot of familiarity with, in my own personal life and the work that I did to change my relationship with alcohol. But I also work on this all the time inside *Take a Break*, inside the membership.

So, one of the things that everyone will work on at some point, once they join, is undertaking a 30-Day Challenge. Some people are going to start off in that first week; they want to get started. Some people are going to wait a month or more before they feel ready to do it. But the 30-Day Challenge is really about going all-in on the tools that I teach, all-in on using the think-feel-act cycle, all-in on starting to relate to your urges and excuses in a different way.

And also, all-in on the process we use inside *Take a Break* called the 1-2-3 Process. This idea that in order to change the habit you need to repeat the same three steps over and over and over. You've got to get curious; you've got to try out new tools. And you have to always assess and adjust what is working and what isn't.

It's that step number three where so many people get stuck. Where I watch people start the challenge, and it's going well and they're happy with their progress, and then all of a sudden, they give in to an urge. Maybe they had an unexpected event come up. Maybe they had a crappy day at work.

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Maybe their kids are driving them nuts. Maybe they're just tired of saying no and they give in to the urge.

So often, they then are faced with backsliding. Now, one of the pieces that is so important to understand is why that backslide happens. Because if you don't understand why it happens, it's very hard to intervene with it. It can look a lot of different ways.

It can look like; I'm not drinking this week. And then Thursday rolls around, and you break your commitment. You decide to drink, and then all of a sudden, it's I drank Friday, and I drank Saturday, and I drank Sunday. Then Monday comes around and you kind of decide, okay, now I've got to get back in the saddle. I've got to get back on track.

It can go on for longer, right? Sometimes people are doing this work and they're like, okay, well, it's the 23rd. I'm pretty close to the end of the month, and I blew it. So, let's just wait until we get to the new month.

I would have so many backslides in my life that sometimes would be a weekend, sometimes they would be multiple weeks, sometimes they would be many months. And I would be in this place where it felt like I just don't know how to get out of the slide. It really felt like I was so stuck in it. And part of the problem was that I didn't understand what actually kicked it off.

I didn't actually understand what started the slide. I thought I did, I thought it was breaking my commitment. Or I thought it was that one night where I said I was only going to have a couple and then I just got so drunk. I thought I knew what started the backslide. But I really had no idea.

I want to help all of you understand that today. Because if you can start to understand what's going on, understand why you keep kind of repeating the same patterns that things will be going along well for a while; maybe

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you're not drinking, maybe you're keeping yourself to a minimum. You feel like you have things under control, and then it's like bam, all of a sudden, things are off the rails and then it just feels as if it's so difficult to get back on track.

It doesn't need to be that difficult. And in fact, the more you learn what's really going on with the backslide, the more you learn how to intervene with it, the faster you will change the habit. I say this to people all the time when they're using that 1-2-3 Process. You're going to use it over and over and over again.

This is teaching your brain a new skill. Teaching your brain a new way of responding to your urges and your excuses. It really is something that requires repetition. And what slows us down is not, you don't think you have it in you or something's really wrong with you or you're never going to figure this out.

What slows people down, is simply not knowing how to recover properly from the moment that they wake up and think, "Oh, God, why did I drink that much? Why did I do that? Why did I break my promise? I said that I wouldn't."

The 30-Day Challenge is primarily... Most people use it around going alcohol free. But one of the things that I think is really important, and I mean, it's really one of my core beliefs that drives all of my work, is that you get to decide. You decide what's right for you. You decide the relationship that you want to have. You decide the tools that you want to use. You decide. You're in charge. And so, some people will use the challenge to just reduce how much they're drinking.

But either way, people will start out and their goal will be the same, don't mess up. We set out with this intention to be perfect, not to make a mistake, not to mess up. And that moment that it happens, the moment that

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we break our commitment, we give in, we drink too much, we are disappointed, and then all this old self-talk will appear. “I knew you couldn't do it. I knew you weren't really committed. I knew that this was the wrong time. I knew that this was going to be too hard.”

What I want you to start to consider, because I am sure that every single person listening, you have had this experience of backsliding. We have it, we have it in all areas of our life. What I want you to consider, is that the moment that you break your commitment is not the problem.

In fact, I was actually coaching on this today. The moment where you break your commitment can be so important for awareness. It can be the thing that unlocks a piece of the puzzle that you didn't even know was there. You didn't even have awareness around; the slip up isn't the problem. It's the self-talk afterwards, that's the problem. And that's what leads to backsliding.

This is such a monumental shift to make in your mind. Because what we tell ourselves is, “No, no, no. The reason why things have been off the rails for the last three weeks is because of that one night where I screwed up.” That is not what's going on. It's such a relief to know that that is not what's going on.

What's going on, is what you made it mean when you tell yourself, “Well, yeah, but I don't want to mess up. I want to do it right.” What you're basically saying is, “I don't want to have to assess and adjust. I don't want to have to look back and see what tools need modification. How I need to start applying them differently in my life. Because I want to do it perfectly right out of the gate.”

That is not how the brain works. You cannot create a new neural pathway, you cannot acquire a new skill, without going through a period of learning. It

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really is one thing to hear me say and intellectually understand that an urge is harmless, that it can't make you do anything.

It is a whole other ballgame when that urge bubbles up in the moment and you watch your brain freak out, and you notice all your thoughts and all your excuses. And then, to start to intervene in a new way. To start practicing new thoughts about your urges. "I can handle this urge. It's not a big deal. The urge is normal, nothing has gone wrong."

Doing that in the moment, teaching your brain that the urge is actually harmless, that it can't make you do anything, this is going to take more than one attempt to get right. If you want to make a new neural pathway, if you want to teach your brain how to respond differently, you've got to be prepared to fail.

Learning a new skill requires not doing it right. If you could do it perfectly right out of the gate, there would be nothing to learn. Your brain would have already acquired the skill, it would already know how to do this. You would already know how to allow the urge for more. You would already know how not to make deprivation into this big dramatic problem. You would already know how to feel at ease wherever you are.

You would already know how to access fun and pleasure and connection without a drink. And you would already know how to deal with boredom, anxiety, insecurity, sadness, and all the emotions that we want to escape from. You'd already know how to deal with them without trying to consume something, without drinking or eating or looking for some sort of distraction.

But we don't know how to do this, because no one has ever taught us how, right? All we get is this message of, "I don't know, some people just can't drink." That's a message that we get all the time. And so, what ends up happening is we slip into this place of, 'I should just know better, I should know better, I should have learned my lesson by now.'

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'I should know better' is code for 'how much I drink should just be instinctual.' Imagine really applying that to anything else in your life. Imagine applying that to any other skill, 'it should just be instinctual.'

No, things take practice. And when you fall into this pattern of, number one, 'I don't want to make a mistake.' And number two, 'if I do make a mistake, if I break my commitment, if I drink too much, then I'm going to make it mean that I can't do it, that something's wrong with me, that I have a problem, that I'm never going to figure this out,' you will backslide.

The backslide does not start because you broke your commitment. The backslide is not the result of how much you drank last night. The backslide is a result of what happens the next day, what you made it mean. Because when you have all of those thoughts about how you can't figure it out, and something's wrong with you, you know what they all are, all of those thoughts end up creating emotions, like shame, hopelessness, anxiety, and fear.

And those emotions, guess what? Not only do you probably not like having them around, you'd rather find some way to escape. But those emotions aren't going to help you take the actions that you need to take. And what you need to do in the moment is simply assess and adjust.

Simply look back on what happened and ask yourself: Hey, why didn't that work? What was going on when I tried to allow the urge? What was I telling myself? Why was that excuse so hard for me to say no to in the moment? How was I feeling? What was going on around me? What was I doing when I was at the restaurant, at the party, when I got home from work? What was I doing that made it difficult for me to say no?

You cannot change the habit without making mistakes along the way. That piece, when you start to embrace that and see any moment, any bumps in the road, not as a problem, not as a sign that you screwed up, but actually

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a moment for you to move towards. A moment that you don't need to feel any shame or embarrassment about. It's a moment for you to start to understand better and gain awareness about the habit, and how it works and what's really going on. That's how you start to prevent a backslide.

But this is a piece that I really want you to take away today. The backslide, however long it's going on for; if it's a couple of days, if it's a couple of weeks, if it's a couple of months. It didn't start because you broke your commitment. It didn't start because of how much you drank that one night. It started in the moment *after*, the next day when you woke up. It started right there in all that self-talk.

It's just such a relief, I think. When I approach anything in life, and when I started approaching my relationship with alcohol from this place of, 'I don't need to be perfect. I don't have to always do it right. I can still make progress. I can still learn and grow. I can still change.' This isn't a matter of crossing my fingers and hoping that I'm perfect and never screw up again for the rest of my life. This is a matter of knowing what I need to do the moment that I do hit a bump in the road.

So, remember that wherever you are in your journey; maybe you're in the middle of a backslide right now. Not only did it happen for a reason different from what you're telling yourself. But simply by getting curious at what happened, you can actually start to change the habit.

All right, 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.