

Ep #343: When It's Easier 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 343.

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.

Alright, everybody, welcome back. we're going to be talking today about when drinking is easy. When drinking is easy. I know a lot of you can relate to this idea. I was coaching someone on this very topic recently, and they were talking about everything that was going on in their life, all of their stress, and they had a lot, they had a lot of things going on.

They said to me, "You know what? In a perfect world, I would get more rest. I would get some help. But that's not possible right now. And when I'm dealing with everything that's going on in my life, it's just easier to pour a drink." I heard them say this, and I was like, yep, I have had that thought before, I can relate. I know a lot of you can relate, as well.

For so many of us pouring a glass of wine, fixing a drink, cracking open a beer at the end of the day, this is how we unwind from all the stress. That's not bad. This is not about telling you that you're doing something bad. This is not about shaming you, and like a smack on the hand, you're doing something wrong.

This is about helping you if you have noticed yourself at this thought, it's just easier to have a drink. If you've noticed yourself reaching for a drink more often when you feel stressed. If you've noticed an uptick in your drinking that maybe you don't feel totally comfortable with, I want to help you explore this thought.

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #343: When It's Easier To Drink

I want to help you really understand what happens, because what we're always trying to do here is not just examine how much you're drinking, but examine why it is happening. That is the basis of the think-feel-act cycle. Our actions don't happen. Our body doesn't make a move towards the drink without something unfolding in our brain first.

And when you have a thought like having a drink is just easy, it takes very little time, it requires very little energy, you can get stuck. Because so often I think what happens is when people want to change their relationship with alcohol, they're given a lot of alternatives, especially if it's around stress relief, that just aren't as appealing. Right?

It's like, "Okay, well, instead of pouring that drink, go for a walk or journal or meditate." Listen, when I've had a stressful day, it takes a lot of energy just to convince myself to go for a walk. I'm like, "No, thank you. I just want to plop down on the couch. I want to veg out. I don't want to think." And so, here's the thing, this episode is not about giving you the kind of magical antidote that's going to remove your stress faster than a drink.

No, what this is about, is about helping you start to question the thought. Question the thought that it's easier to drink when you're stressed out. Because by questioning is how you create change, just by starting to kind of chip away at some of the beliefs fueling the habit.

I want you to start looking at the thought and not try to convince yourself that it's not true. I want you to understand what happens next. So, I know that you guys have lots of evidence that it is true, that it's just easier to have a drink when you're stressed out.

What I am wanting to help you understand is can we understand the ramifications of what our brain is learning? What message are we reinforcing in the brain? And how does that impact us after the fact? Because it's so normal to end your day really stressed out and know that

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #343: When It's Easier To Drink

you woke up this morning thinking maybe you're going to take tonight off from drinking.

But there you are, you're stressed out, you're tired, and you've had a long day. Maybe your work day is over, but you still have a million things to do. You've got to get dinner on the table. You've got to deal with kids. It's like, "Now I got to deal with everybody else's needs." And in that moment, your brain is going to default to the thought, "Just have a drink. It's easier." Right?

What I want, by questioning this thought, is in that moment to have a pause. A pause where you consider, "Wait. I have this thought all the time, but I listened to this episode I listened to what Rachel was saying. And I now have this greater awareness of what happens." Because when you reach for a drink, because you're thinking it's just easier, there are a lot of things that are going to happen that you may not yet be aware of.

Your brain is going to start to believe that you need alcohol to handle stress. Now, it's so interesting that this is a piece that we so often miss, we don't really understand what the brain is learning. But your brain is always learning. And one of the things that it's going to start to learn is that, "Oh, alcohol is how I handle stress," whether it is emotional stress like anxiety, or is physical stress, maybe pain in your body.

I will tell you this, when I lay it out for people, like, "Okay, so let's just take a look at what your brain is learning right now," we can see, yeah, that's not a good thing. I don't want to teach my brain that lesson. Why? Because the more I rely on a drink to handle stress, the more I believe that I need a drink to handle stress, and the more I reduce my tolerance to stress.

What do I mean when I'm talking about reducing your tolerance to stress? What I'm talking about is how quickly you're in a place of 'I can't handle this.' So, stress is part of being human, right? There's no way around it. It's

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #343: When It's Easier To Drink

a normal part of human existence. But just because it's normal doesn't mean that it doesn't suck sometimes to be really stressed out. And it doesn't mean you can't desire to have less of it. I know that I do.

But think about what happens if your brain believes, incorrectly, that alcohol is required, right? That you need a drink, that's the solution. I say "incorrectly," because let's be honest here, humans have been around for hundreds of thousands of years. We were not out on the savanna drinking beer in order to deal with the stress of being alive. Right?

We've been around for hundreds of thousands of years before we figured out how to harness fermentation in order to make alcoholic drinks. That only happened in the last 5,000 years. So, our species existed for a long time without this idea that 'yeah, just pour a drink, that will help.' It's not built into our operating system that we need alcohol when we're stressed out. "Oh, yeah, that's stress, I better go find a drink."

No, that's something that humans only recently learned. It's a recent development in the course of human history. But when your brain incorrectly believes that you need a drink to deal with stress, guess what happens? You're reducing your tolerance to stress.

It's so wild because what ends up happening is you make your stress more stressful. I want you to hear that. You are making your stress more stressful. Because now you've got a belief, "Oh, God, I just need a drink." How many times have you thought that, "Oh, I need a drink?" But of course, you don't need it. You want it, you don't need it. Those are two very different things.

You might think, "Oh, God, that drink is the only solution," when it's not. It's definitely not the only solution. You might even be telling yourself, "This is the only thing that will help. This is the only thing that will make me feel better." When again, that isn't true either.

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #343: When It's Easier To Drink

I talk about this a lot when I'm coaching people. I talk a lot about understanding how we will have an emotional state and then we layer on these additional unnecessary negative emotions. I call it “pancaking” emotions when you're kind of stacking one negative emotion on top of another.

So, you start out feeling stressed, but then have this thought that you don't have the capability to handle it on your own, or it's too hard. What happens then, is you might add in this layer of anxiety, or you might add in this layer of almost feeling helpless. And the more and more you do this, the more your brain expects the reward of alcohol when you feel stressed. I want you to see what's going on.

Your brain has learned, hey, this is what we do when we're stressed out. So, your brain is expecting that reward. Here's the crazy thing. We're incentivizing that lower brain, that part of your brain that really focuses just on rewards. We're incentivizing it to be like, “I guess stress is kind of a good thing. The more stressed I feel, the more I drink.”

So, now you're in a situation where not only is your brain *expecting* the reward, not only are you kind of incentivizing your brain to want to feel more stressed, because hey, I've learned that that's what gets me a drink. But now you're also in a situation where if you decide not to drink, guess what? You're going to feel deprived or disappointed or annoyed or restless. And then your lower brain is like, “Wait a minute, this is what we do. Why am I not getting my reward? I'm stressed, it's time to drink.”

You're teaching your brain something that isn't true. It's not true that alcohol is the solution. Then you're adding in, unbeknownst to you, you're adding in more negative emotion. And you still haven't actually done anything to actually reduce the volume of stress in your life.

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #343: When It's Easier To Drink

This is a big thing that I talk about when it comes to thought work. Everything that I teach here, there's not some kind of magical thought out there that will make it so that we never again have a negative emotion. But we most definitely can turn down the volume and the negative emotions. We definitely can find the thoughts that are creating more intensity, more anxiety, more overwhelm, more feelings of hopelessness, or helplessness. We can start to turn down the volume by shifting them.

Here's the thing, when we tell ourselves it's just easier to have a drink, when we're stressed out, the stress is still there the next day, right? We haven't done anything to actually reduce it. Then you can start to see the pattern that you can fall into when we keep going, when we keep relying on this thought unconsciously, "It's just easier to have a drink. It's easier to have a drink."

What happens? Well, the more you drink, the more you need to drink in order to get the desired effect. You start developing a tolerance, so now you're drinking more, which guess what? Puts stress on your body. So, you might be starting to feel a little uncomfortable about the uptick in your drinking that you're noticing. So, now you might have worries about that, and anxiety and stress about that, about, oh god, why am I drinking more?

All of this, all of these repercussions, come from this initial belief, it's just easier to have a drink. Now, I'm going to tell you this, one of the most empowering things I think that we can all do is see what our thoughts create. Really understand, what is my brain learning from this thought?

But I will tell you, I will walk people through this, and I will show them what the brain is learning, and a lot of times they'll say, "Yeah, but I still think it's easier to drink." And I'm kind of like, "Yeah, of course you do. Because this is a long-held belief."

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #343: When It's Easier To Drink

Shifting it doesn't happen immediately. Your brain is going to have a lot of evidence that this is true. But it is worthwhile understanding, if you're so committed to believing it, is it a thought that you would use for other people? If this is really the truth... I'm just going to go to the extreme here because sometimes I really think it helps to do this; take a thought that we're kind of holding on to and bring it to the kind of the extreme place.

If this is really the truth, that it's just easier to have a drink, why isn't this what we're teaching our kids when they're stressed out? You know, "Have a drink. It's an easy solution to how you feel." Now, I know some of you are hearing me say this and you're like, "Okay," you're rolling your eyes, and you're like, "Rachel, okay that's ridiculous. They have developing brains and developing bodies, and no one's going to pour kid a glass of wine after they have a stressful day at school."

Okay, so why aren't we setting them up to this future that awaits them? Like, "Listen, kid, I know it's tough now. It is hard to deal with your emotions. It's hard to deal with stress. But you know what? There is this magical day coming when you turn 21, and just get ready. Because at that point, the only thing you have to do to manage stress is to have a drink. There's just nothing easier."

When you take it to the extreme place as a thought exercise, when you take it to that extreme place, and you see that thought through the lens of yeah, well, would I use it with other people, would I teach that to kids, you realize you would never set up anyone to have this kind of relationship with their stress. Which is like, "Oh, stress. Here, have a drink." But that's what we do to ourselves all the time with this thought.

Then we keep this thought, and we act like it's not a problem. This is just what I want you to consider. I want you to consider the thoughts that you have that might be fueling your relationship with alcohol, might be fueling the habit. To look at them and consider, "You know what? I know that I

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #343: When It's Easier To Drink

really believe this, and I've got a ton of evidence to support it. But is this thought, is it helping me? Is it working for me or is it working against me? What is my brain learning?

When you start to apply a little critical thinking, you start to see, 'I wouldn't offer this thought to anyone else in my life. I wouldn't teach it to my kids, or any kids. I wouldn't say it to anyone that I care about. I wouldn't be like, "Oh, you're really stressed here, just have a drink. It's just easier than dealing with how you feel. I say it to myself all the time.'

And so, as you're thinking about this, especially if you can relate to having that thought, it's just easier, just easier to pour a drink, I want you to consider some alternatives or alternative thoughts to have when this thought comes up, when you have this excuse. Because it will come up again. You might start saying to yourself,

"You know what? Believing that it's easier to drink, it's just the lie that my lower brain tells me because it wants a reward. Every time I listen to the thought, it's easier to have a drink, I've reduced my own capability, my own capacity to handle how I feel. Every time I listen to this thought it actually creates a little bit more anxiety and worry for myself. Because now I'm also worried a little bit about my drinking. And if I wouldn't teach my kids that one day they can manage their stress by having a drink, why am I believing it's true for me?"

If you want to change your drinking, you have to start by questioning these kinds of thoughts. We have to go beyond the place of just saying no, and willpower and actually understand, what is my brain learning? What are the repercussions of this thought? Would I use this thought for anyone in my life that I care about or just for me?

[Take a Break from Drinking](#) with Rachel Hart

Ep #343: When It's Easier To Drink

So, think about it. Start questioning it, and start using some of these alternatives if you notice this thought coming up in your own life on a bad day. 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.