

Ep #354: I Don't Want to Miss Out



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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 354.

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, welcome back everyone. Today, we're going to talk about a trap that leads to not just breaking your commitment around whether or not to drink, and how much you're going to drink, but it often leads to drinking more than you want to.

That trap is a very simple thought that I know all of you have had. I have had it a lot. That thought is, "I don't want to miss out." I used to have this thought all the time. The fear of missing out was a driving force behind so much of my drinking. And also, you know what? My eating. It really was. It really drove so much of those decisions.

The reason why I want to talk about it now, is because we're headed into a part of the year where the fear of missing out can really be at an all-time high, the holiday season. Alright, so we're going into the holidays right now. It's that season of connection and togetherness and joy. It's also the season of parties, and lots of traditions that revolve around special drinks and food.

And so, if you're trying to change your drinking, whether or not you want to drink less, maybe you want to stop drinking, if that is your goal, then this time of year is when the fear of missing out can really kick into high gear and it can start to sabotage your goal.

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Today, I want to talk about how we make sure that that doesn't happen. The solution, by the way, and I think this is really important, the solution here is not just to stay home, it's not to be a hermit.

I was coaching someone on this recently, and they noticed that they were starting to withdraw from social situations. They kind of felt like it's just easier not to go, it's easier not to attend. Right? "I'll just do that instead. And then I don't have to deal with the fear of missing out, and watching other people drink while I'm not drinking."

But the goal is never to be a hermit, right? It's not to be a hermit during the holidays. It's not to be a hermit during any time of the year. The goal is to figure out how to disentangle alcohol from the ability to feel connected to friends and family and enjoy yourself, especially during the holiday season.

Because withdrawing socially, maybe it will help you say no, I certainly did that for a long time. And my sense was, it's just so hard for me not to drink in social situations. The only way that I can succeed is just not to put myself in social situations.

But the problem with that, it may get you periods of time under your belt where you're not drinking, but it's not actually going to help you change the habit in a lasting way. I would always get to a point where it's just like 'screw it,' because nobody really wants to be a hermit. We are a species that wants to form connections. We want to have bonds with other humans.

And telling ourselves that we can only be successful if we withdraw from society, that's not going to create lasting change. So, what you need to do then, is you need to figure out, well, how do I retrain my brain around what is actually required to have fun and connect when I'm with other people? Whether it's during the holidays, or really any time of the year.

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I will tell you this, there is some good news. The good news is that humans have known how to connect and how to have fun long before our species figured out how to ferment barley and grapes. We have known how to form bonds and connections with other humans for as long as our species has been around.

Because the ability to form a bond and nurture connections, it's essential for survival. Think about it. You're going to be a lot better off surviving when you're part of a group. It's going to be easier to find food, and to find clean water, and build a shelter, and defend against threats. So, the ability to connect with others is not something that the human brain only learned to do 5,000 years ago when we started fermenting barley and grapes.

We have always known how to do this, but it doesn't feel that way. Sometimes, it really doesn't. That's the power of alcohol. The power of alcohol is not so much that it intoxicates you, but the power is that it can make you forget.

You start wondering, when you are headed down the path of really feeling committed to changing your relationship and changing your drinking, you start wondering, how on earth am I going to figure out how to celebrate if I'm not drinking? How am I going to figure out how to socialize? How am I going to do all these things that I've always done with a drink in my hand?

Alcohol will put blinders on you. It will make you forget the fact that most of you have had at least a decade, if not more, of forming bonds and socializing, and celebrating and connecting without drinking. I mean, I think about it like, "I wasn't at my parents annual Christmas eve party as a kid not having fun or feeling disconnected because I wasn't drinking the spiked eggnog." Right? No, I knew how to do it.

We all have this practice connecting and creating bonds and having fun and enjoying ourselves without alcohol. But the temptation is to discount all

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of that experience, right? All the experience that you had before you ever started drinking, is it, just say, "Well, that doesn't really count." Or a lot of times, I'll hear people say, "But I wasn't even really that good at it back then."

I think it's really helpful to actually spend some time thinking about this. Spend some time really remembering that there was a time when you knew how to celebrate, you knew how to enjoy the holidays without alcohol.

I also find it helpful to watch kids. I watch them do things, that adults will say all the time, "I can't do that, if I'm not drinking. I'm not going to have a good time if I'm not drinking."

It's helpful to just have your brain watch kids and see that they're having an amazing birthday. They're enjoying Halloween. They're having fun at Christmas, or New Year's, or whatever the holiday is, whatever the celebration is. And they're doing it without a drop of alcohol. They can connect and have fun and celebrate. They can have emotional bonds. They can enjoy themselves and enjoy being with other people, and drinking is not part of it.

But it's so easy, it really is so easy to get into this place when you're trying to change your drinking, you're trying to change your relationship with alcohol, where it's like, "Hmm, no, this is going to be impossible." It really does feel like that.

I will tell you, the number of things that my brain told me would be impossible without a drink in my hand was basically endless. It was like, dating will be impossible, going to a baseball game will be impossible, networking will be impossible, toasting at a wedding and traveling to another country. I mean, the list just went on and on and on.

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Because my brain was like, “Nope, I'm pretty sure that these things are impossible to do. It's impossible to have a good time, certainly. Maybe, I can do them but I certainly want to join myself. It will just feel weird. I won't have any fun.”

I think that we fall into this trap simply because of how our brain works. Right? I talk a lot about the lower brain and the higher brain, and how these different parts of our brain are focused and concerned about different things.

That lower brain is very focused on rewards. And so, you can think about it in this very simple way, it just thinks rewards are good, period, full stop. And the bigger the reward, the better. It doesn't care about your dreams, or your goals, or what you want to do with your life, or how you're going to feel tomorrow. No, your lower brain is just, “Where is my reward. Rewards are good.”

You can think about it like your lower brain is just doing this very simple calculation, and frankly, it's not the math that you want to live your life by. So, the habit of drinking can easily make you forget that you already know how to connect. You already know how to enjoy yourself. You already know how to celebrate. You are designed to do these things.

That's what the lower brain is doing. It's just fixating on, “No, no, no. But where's my reward? I can't do this without a reward.” I think about this a lot. I look at my little boy, who is 16 months old right now, and he does not need instructions on how to have fun. He does not need instructions on how to have a good time, or how to laugh or how to connect with people. He just does it.

So, yes, when you're trying to change your relationship with alcohol, it's normal for your brain to forget that you already know how to do these things, because it's using faulty arithmetic. It's using the arithmetic that the

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only thing that matters is getting the reward. And so, you have to set your lower brain straight. You have to be prepared for the forgetting. You have to be prepared for the lower brain protesting.

And you also have to be prepared for there to be a learning curve at first. Because I'm not going to lie, there is going to be a learning curve. You do have to do some remembering here. But one of the things that I always talk about with my clients is, well, what if that learning curve, what if it's not a problem? What if you saw the learning curve of remembering how to do all these things, remembering how to connect, how to have a good time, how to enjoy yourself without a drink, what if you saw it as a workout?

I like the analogy of working out because we don't go to the gym and hope not to break a sweat. We don't get off the treadmill and get angry that we're out of breath. The whole point of going to the gym, of working out, is to challenge the body.

But what happens when it comes to habit changes? We don't want there to be any challenge at all. We just want it to be a breeze, but the same thing applies. If you want to change a habit, if you want to change a pattern that your brain is used to defaulting to over and over again, you have to expect that, at first, breaking out of this habit, changing the pattern, is going to feel a little challenging for your brain.

That doesn't mean you're doing something wrong; it means you're rebuilding a muscle. And here's the thing, it also doesn't mean that things are going to be challenging forever. I think that was a mistake that I made a lot. I would kind of dip my toe in the pool, so to speak, right? It's like, okay, I'll try.

But I definitely went into situations thinking that it shouldn't be challenging at all, and then I would try. I didn't understand any of this work. I didn't understand about the think-feel-act cycle. I wouldn't have a good time. And

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then I would basically decide, "Well, see? I knew it wasn't going to be fun. I knew it was going to be awful." And so, I would use that as an excuse to give up on the process.

I didn't realize that I was just remembering how to do something. I was just rebuilding a muscle that, frankly, had been atrophying. But this fear of missing out, this fear of feeling disconnected when people you are around are drinking and maybe you're not. Or they're having another and you're stopping.

I want you to really think about, that missing out and feeling disconnected is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Think about it. Those moments when you are feeling disconnected from the group, what is running through your brain? "This is boring. They're having more fun. I'd be having a better time if only... I'm just missing out."

When you're thinking these thoughts there is no way that you can feel connected. These thoughts generate disconnection. And, what do you do when you feel disconnected? It's no great surprise here.

When you're sitting there feeling disconnected, because you're thinking, "This is boring. They're having more fun. I'm missing out. I'd be having a better time if only..." When you're sitting there feeling that way, you will do things, you will take actions that will actually block you from connecting or having a good time.

This is how the think-feel-act cycle works. Your thoughts generate your feelings, these feelings drive your actions. If you're feeling disconnected, you are not going to be taking actions that create connection or enjoyment or having a good time.

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Because when you're feeling disconnected, what do you do? Well, this is what I would do, I would withdraw. I wouldn't be present with who I was with, because I was stuck in my head. I wouldn't be making a lot of eye contact. I wouldn't really be fully listening to people. I definitely wasn't smiling. Or if I was smiling, it was that kind of like a fake smile because I wasn't having a good time. I was not engaging.

And then, what I was doing was blaming how I wasn't enjoying myself, blaming the fact that I was disconnected, that things didn't feel celebratory. I was blaming it on the contents of what was in my glass, rather than all of the thoughts that were running through my mind.

This is how we ended up with blinders. Because then we start to think, "Oh, if only I was drinking. If only I was having another, then I'd be having a better time." No, that's not how it works. You'd be having a better time if you changed the sentences running through your head.

It's so simple, I know. It's so simple. It seems like that really cannot be all there is to it. But trust me, that really is all there is to it. You are creating an unenjoyable time. You are creating missing out and disconnection, because of your thoughts. Not because of what you are or aren't drinking.

When you're stuck in your head, when you aren't listening, when you're not fully present, when you're not smiling, when you stop making eye contact, you create the result of missing out. You make yourself miss out on what is happening because of these actions, alcohol has nothing to do with it.

And this is good news, because if I'm the one making me miss out because of my thoughts, it also means that I can reverse the situation. I can make it so that I can have a better time.

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I think one of the things that happens when I present this to people, the obvious question is, "Well, yeah, okay, but why not just drink? Why not just sidestep this whole issue of the think-feel-act cycle and paying attention to what's happening in my brain, and let's just forget about trying to change my mindset or change my thoughts. Let's just pour a drink. It's just easier, right?"

The truth is, most people do. I certainly tried, for a very long time, to just kind of drink over feelings of disconnection. To pour a drink, to make myself have more fun, or to make things feel more celebratory. You can, but the question to really ask yourself is simply, is drinking over your disconnection working for you?

If it is, great. Keep doing what you're doing. But if you're listening to this podcast, it's because you know that some part of this is not working. Some aspect of your relationship with alcohol just feels off, it doesn't feel right. You're not getting the results that you want.

Is your disconnection actually going away, or are you just continually trying to drink over it? Part of the problem when you think you need a drink to create an emotional bond to feel connected, is that it becomes very hard to keep your commitment, whatever your commitment may be.

Because all of a sudden, if alcohol is needed for an emotional bond, then guess what? When it becomes this kind of group activity, and it's necessary for the group to get along, and for you to have a good time, and everyone needs to be doing the same thing, then what will happen, other people's choices are going to sway your own.

Because you will believe that it's necessary to do what the group is doing. So, you may end up having more than you want. You may end up drinking when you told yourself that you wouldn't, simply because you don't want to disrupt the group dynamic.

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And then not drinking, I think that becomes even harder. Because then you fall into this trap of, "Well, why even bother going?" What I was talking about at the outset. This idea of, "I'll just stay home."

But the goal here is to realize and to remember that you know how to form and generate a connection, and an emotional bond, and how to have fun, and how to enjoy yourself, without alcohol. Because if you can do it without a drink, then the drink becomes incidental, right?

The decision about whether or not to say yes, whether or not to have more, it's not really that important. Because it's not necessary to connect or to have fun or to feel like you're part of the group. And then, when you know that it's really not that important, then it's easier to make choices with alcohol that feel truly aligned with whatever it is that you actually want.

Whether it's drinking less or not at all, or just deciding, "You know what? How I feel on any given night is going to dictate. So, maybe tonight I just don't feel like it." And that's not a problem, because drinking is not a foregone conclusion.

It's a lot easier to stick with your commitment, and to have the relationship that you want to have with alcohol, when you're not being driven by the lower brain's desire for all the rewards, all the time, the bigger, the better. But you have to be able to disentangle the idea that if you're not drinking, you're missing out.

And then, it's so much easier to see that missing out is not this thing that happens inside of your glass, it happens inside of your mind. Because if whether or not you're connecting with people is something that you control, then you're in such a more powerful place.

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But if you think that it's alcohol that leads to your ability to connect, your ability to have a good time, it's going to be hard for you to say no. Because you're not going to be, "At this point, okay, well I had my five ounces of wine. I had my 12 ounces of beer. So, now I'm fully connected." No, if alcohol is the thing creating it, then guess what? We have to keep going back for more and more.

If alcohol is the thing that generates connection, then we need it in order not to feel disconnected, in order not to miss out. So, we have to keep returning to it to generate the feeling that we want. That's a disempowered place that we can land. That's not where you want to be.

So, I want you to think about this as you're headed into the holidays. If you have struggled with this thought at all, feeling like you're missing out, how much credit are you giving what you're drinking for your ability to connect, to belong, to have fun, to enjoy yourself, to celebrate?

How much credit are you giving to the drink right now for all of these things? And then not only that, just ask yourself, do you want to keep giving alcohol all of that credit or do you want to realize that if you're in a moment where you feel disconnected, where you feel like you're missing out, that the only place that you need to pay attention to is not what you're drinking, but what's happening in your mind, the sentences that you're thinking?

We are going to be focused on this all throughout the month of November inside *Take a Break*. We're going to be doing a whole holiday workshop every week of the month of November, and really helping you understand how to navigate temptation. How to navigate all of the kinds of special events that happen around the holidays. How to navigate all of your excuses, so that the holidays don't become a free-for-all.

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So, if you're interested in that, make sure you go over to RachelHart.com and check out *Take a Break*. All right, everybody. 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.