

## Ep #371: Unconscious Drinking



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With Your Host

**Rachel Hart**

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## Ep #371: Unconscious Drinking

You are listening to the Take a Break Podcast with Rachel Hart, Episode 371.

All right, everybody. Welcome back. Today, we are going to be talking about checking out once the drink is poured. Now, this is something that I talk about all the time. It comes up all the time with people that I'm working with inside the membership. Are you checking out once that drink is poured? Are you even conscious of what is happening?

This is such an important question for you to really consider. You want to find out the answer. No matter what your goal is when it comes to drinking, maybe you want to drink less, maybe you want to stop. Right now, if you're thinking, "Yeah, I'm drinking more than I want to." You need to know the answer to this question, "What's happening? Why are you checking out?"

I will tell you this, there are a lot of people listening that might be on a break from alcohol. It's still a really powerful question to consider, "Was my pattern to check out once I started drinking and what was going on?" So much of the work that I want to help you do is "How do I bring my higher brain back online to support my goal?"

Let's be conscious of our cravings and let's be conscious of our excuses and conscious of all of the decisions that we make around alcohol. Let's not be on autopilot. Let's not wake up the next day and be like, "Oh God, how the heck did that happen?" Let's be a participant and be aware of what we're doing.

I think it's funny because I often talk to people who really, really want to change their drinking. They really, really, really are desperate to change their relationship with alcohol. And many of the people that I work with, they don't want to stop drinking forever. I don't think that needs to be everyone's goal. They say, "I just want to be drinking less. I just want to feel more in control."

I think one of the problems that we, society, has is the problem of believing that we know what is best and what is right for others and trying to tell

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people what to do, trying to give them their goals for them like, "This is what you should do. You should just never drink again."

I understand why we do this but I think it's a problem. Because I think what happens when we believe that we know what is best for others, when we tell them, "Hey, this is what your goal should be. I know what's best for you." We push a lot of people away from getting help.

Now you can decide you don't want alcohol in your life anymore and that can be an amazing goal. But it will be amazing when it feels like a choice. It will not be amazing when it feels like it's forced upon you. When it feels like it's forced upon you, that's when people end up rebelling and getting secretive and hiding and doubling down on their resistance.

I also just don't think it's the right goal for everyone. Some people want to just drink less and that can be amazing too. Some people say, "I want it to be a rare part of my life." That can be amazing too. Most people will change their goals over time.

At some point they may be like, "Right now, alcohol's not doing me any favors. I've got a lot going on. I see the ways that it's impacting me or impacting my relationships. I think I just need some time off. I need a break. I don't want to have all this chatter. I don't want to deal with it right now."

Things may change. You may get to a healthier space. You may have a better handle on your emotions. You may be noticing the ways that you use a drink to escape how you feel or to connect in social situations. You may have done the work and decide, "Maybe I'm at a point where I want to reintroduce alcohol." And I support that too.

That's where I think a lot of people are like, "Oh, I don't think we should support that. If somebody has cut it out, why on earth would we ever support them reintroducing it?" But I think we get in trouble offering only single minded cookie cutter approaches when it comes to drinking. "Everybody must stop and they got to stop forever, period."

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The fact of the matter is, is that humans rarely do anything forever, because we are always changing. We are always transitioning into new parts of our lives. I think we're always growing. I know a lot of people don't believe that, but I think that that's true as well. And doing things forever can be great but it's not the only way.

I think this freaks out a lot of people when I talk about this and people don't like hearing me talk about this because, for people, it seems like, "Rachel, you're giving people permission." I'm like, "I don't know. I think you already have permission. You're already in charge." I think people get very tense around this idea. This idea that your goals can change because, people are thinking like, "Listen, there are some people who really shouldn't drink. It was endangering their lives. This is not something that should come back into their life." And here I am saying, "Yeah, goals can change." And there's such a conflict there. There's such a sense of like, "You shouldn't be doing that. You shouldn't be saying this." But listen, I think we are doing people a disservice by pretending that not drinking is the be all and end all to figuring out your relationship with alcohol and why you drink more than you want to and why it's hard to say no. I think we're doing people a disservice that we're so fixated just on the substance. That to me is actually the real problem.

I think about this in my own journey. I've talked about this on the podcast before. I went a year in my early twenties not drinking. I got to the point. I had graduated from college. I'd moved to New York city. I was partying too much. It was not doing good things for me. I was doing stupid stuff. None of my attempts to cut back we're working, I should add. And I tried a lot. And I will tell you, there were parts of it that felt great. Amazing. So well rested, so much energy.

I loved waking up and not having to piece together the night before. I loved not wondering, "Oh God, what did I do? Did I do something stupid?" But here's the thing, I still really, really, really wanted to drink. I missed drinking. Eventually, my willpower crumbled and I gave in.

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Why did that happen? Because so much of our problem is that we focus on the key to all of this being, "Alcohol, you just say no, that's the key." No, that is not the key. Now I can look back and I can understand that the reason my desire was still so strong was because my Drink Archetypes, they were still running rampant. They were still there. They were still behind the scenes, even if I wasn't drinking.

Back then in my early twenties, my archetypes were The Mask and The Release. I talk a lot about how your archetypes can change over time, but those were the two prominent ones for me in my early twenties. I had removed alcohol from my life, but removing alcohol did squat for addressing these two archetypes.

My brain had learned, "Hey, Rachel, drinking is how you deal with your insecurities. When you're in social situations, this is how you feel good. This is how you feel confident. This is how you forget about your hangups. Drinking is how you blow off steam. It's how you give yourself a little freedom from always needing to do everything right and never make a mistake."

Those archetypes were still so strong and running so intensely for me in the background. It didn't matter that I wasn't drinking. Nothing about just say no to a drink helped me with these pieces of the puzzle. Those areas of my life needed attention, and not drinking was not the answer. It was not the solution.

Not drinking can create space to work on your archetypes. That's why I'm such a proponent of taking breaks from drinking. I think taking a break can be amazing, but you have to be doing the additional work as well. But we don't treat it like that. I think society has such a fixation on the substance and it's all about "Just say no and say no forever," and we think that is the cure. We think that's all people need to do, but it isn't.

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How does this all connect back to being conscious and really paying attention? Because a lot of people, a lot of you guys listening, a lot of the people that I work with, have the thought, "Once I start, I can't stop."

I had this thought too, and I had a lot of evidence that it was true. I had a lot of evidence that I, more often than not, would go overboard, and that my attempts to rein myself in, hit or miss. I really, truly believed once I start, I can't stop.

I remember believing like, "Saying no is a lot easier." Let's be real. There were times that saying no could be really hard. Just not drinking at all could be really hard. But in my mind, I was like, "Yeah, saying no is way easier than trying to moderate myself." That truly felt impossible. People come to me and say, okay, here's my goal. I want to drink less. I don't want to stop forever and I'm totally on board. Let's do that. But then they will follow up and say, "Yeah, but once I start, I can't stop." And I will tell them like, "Okay, we got to work on this belief." Because there is no way that you can learn how to drink less if you also carry the belief, "Once I start, I can't stop."

I think the problem here is that we want to approach it backwards. I wanted to approach this backwards too. It's like, "I got to prove that I can moderate, and then I will stop believing this thought." But that's not how the Think, Feel, Act Cycle works. Your actions, what you're doing, are a result of what you are thinking and feeling.

If you believe, "Once I start, I can't stop", why would your actions show anything different? You have to start poking holes in that thought now. That's where practicing being conscious comes in. This is also where I get a lot of pushback and frankly, I would have given a lot of pushback myself. And the pushback I get is actually from people who have this as a goal.

It's like, "Okay, so you want me to be conscious? You want me to be aware, but hello, alcohol, it intoxicates you. It impairs your judgment." We're in such a paradox so often. We're in this place of like, "Here I am, I

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have this goal, but then I'm also truly holding on to this belief, that once I start drinking, I cannot stop." And when I'm like, "Okay, let's poke holes." We get all this resistance. All the resistance. It's a drug. It impairs you. It impairs your thinking.

I think we almost do that as a protective measure because I will just tell you I did the exact same thing. I think it's this protective measure of like, "No, no, no. I can't actually be conscious. I can't be aware because the reason that I can't stop. Once I start is because of alcohol."

We cannot have these things both be true. It can't both be true that you're like, "Listen, my goal is to drink less, but I actually don't also believe that I can drink less because alcohol is a drug that impairs my thinking." Something's got to give here.

Of course, alcohol is a drug, and it does impair your judgment. When you're really drunk, your higher brain is pretty far offline. But what I'm simply talking about is a willingness to slow down. Because your higher brain is not just going offline, it is not completely impaired after sip number one, or sip number two, or even sip number 10.

It's not happening after one standard serving of alcohol. What's happening is that once you start drinking, you are used to checking out, especially if you believe you can't trust yourself. And this is the crazy paradox, because the more you believe that you can't trust yourself around alcohol, the less attention you give to your drinking, the more you will go on autopilot.

And the more you go on autopilot, the more you will drink. What I'm talking about is slowing down and bringing your full attention to what you're drinking. It's wild. Because a lot of people will say like, "When it comes to my favorite drink, I just love the taste." And I'm like, "Okay, great. Let's like really taste it."

Oh, do you feel the resistance coming up? Isn't it funny how when we love the taste of something, it doesn't have to be alcoholic and be food too,

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we're often like, "You want me to slow down? No, no, no. I want to rush right past it."

You're not savoring. We're thinking about the next bite or the next sip. What you're not doing? You're not enjoying it because you're not in your body. You're not in the very place where you feel pleasure. You are off in some future land where more is better. This moment that you're in right now, not good enough, but a future moment where I have more, that will be better. You're not even in the place of truly enjoying it. You have to slow down and really pay attention. And it will bring up a lot of resistance. It brought up a ton of resistance for me when I started doing this work.

We have a whole course inside the membership called The Mindful Drink that really walks people through how to do this. But one question that you can ask yourself is simply, "Am I still enjoying this?" You will not want to ask yourself this question because asking this question interrupts autopilot. But you will be amazed at what happens when you bring your full attention to the drink.

You will start to see like, "Is that first sip the same as the fifth sip? I don't think it is. Am I getting the same level of enjoyment? Are there diminishing returns after the 5th or the 10th or the 15th sip? Why? What's going on here?"

One of the things is that, that first sip is a novel sensation for the brain. It's that, new flavor, a new aroma, new stimulation for the brain, but as you keep drinking, the novelty wears off. Your taste buds tire quickly.

If you're enjoying the taste, you're probably not enjoying each sip equally and your goal is to slow down and notice the point at which you're like, "I'm not getting nearly the enjoyment that I think I'm getting." And all you have to do is ask yourself that question, "Am I still truly enjoying this?"

What so many people find is that they're drinking past the point of enjoyment. The enjoyment that they're getting actually has diminishing returns. When you slow down and you pay attention, you start to see the

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difference between, "Yes, here is me, fully in my body and fully present and enjoying and stopping once I stop enjoying what I'm doing" versus "I'm on autopilot, and I think I'm enjoying this, but I'm not really even all that present because I'm not even in my body. I'm off in the future place of more is better, more is better, more is better."

When you do this, it's so revealing because there can all of a sudden be all of these things that bubble to the surface of why it is that you are continuing to consume past the point of enjoyment. Maybe you're like, "I just always finish what's in my glass or what's on my plate." Or maybe you're like, "Well, I paid for the drinks. I want to get my money's worth." Maybe the drink was free and you like the idea of getting something for nothing. Maybe the drink was already poured you're like, "Not finishing it would be wasteful." Maybe what you're drinking is rare or expensive. And again, you're like, "Yeah, I don't want to waste that." Maybe if you stop drinking now, you'd be like, "Yeah then I'd have to go to bed or then I'd have to go home."

There are so many factors that can be influencing what's going on behind the scenes, why you are drinking past the point of enjoyment, but you're never going to find out what they are. If you never slow down and ask yourself, "Am I really enjoying this?" And if you never slow down, you're never actually going to be able to poke holes in this thought, Once I start, I can't stop. And if your goal truly is to drink less, then you cannot, you can't have both of these things be true. You can't say, I'm fully committed to drinking less, and I'm fully committed to this belief that once I start, I can't stop.

You can start to poke holes. You can start to get curious. You can do it with a simple question like, "Am I truly enjoying this still?" And the more you do this, the more you slow down, the more you notice what bubbles up, the more you'll be able to distinguish between actual enjoyment and autopilot. And when you can do that, it's a lot easier to say no.

All right, that's it for today. I will see you next week.

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