

Ep #384: Is Overindulgence a Problem?



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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 384.

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, welcome back. We are talking today about whether or not overindulgence is a problem. Now, when I am coaching people, they often come to me from the perspective that drinking too much, eating too much, too much of anything, is obviously a problem. What will happen is they'll tell me the particulars of their story.

So, maybe, "I went out with friends last night, and I told myself I was going to only have three drinks, but then I had five. I wasn't even going to drink yesterday. I had my dinner all planned out, but then I had a crappy day and I decided to order Mexican food. And then because I was having a burrito, I decided to have a beer. And then one thing led to another and I had three."

I hear versions of this story all the time. No matter the particulars of the situation, the heart of the story is the same. At its heart, is this belief, "I had too much. I drink too much. I ate too much. I overdid it. I over indulged, and that is a bad thing." And so, that's what I want to talk with you about today. I want to talk to you about whether or not overindulgence really is a bad thing. And why, if you think this... which by the way, most people do... why you might want to consider that it's not.

Because we are so socialized to see overindulgence as something that is wrong and immoral. Gluttony is the first of the seven deadly sins. We have a lot of messaging and socialization, from a very young age, that how much

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we consume is a reflection of our goodness or our badness, as a person. And if we are consuming too much, it is a defect of our character.

So, when I coach people, and they tell me about how much they drank or how much they ate, I always start off by asking them, “Okay, well, why is this a problem?” And I will tell you, just that question can throw people off. They will look at me like, “What do you mean? What do you mean, why is it a problem? Of course, it's a problem, Rachel. That's why I'm here.”

But I think it's really important when you're trying to change your drinking, or any habit that feels compulsive, any moment where it feels like you can't but help have too much, I think it's really, really important for you to get clear on why exactly this is a problem, or if it's a problem. And then, decide why you want to change.

Now, for you listening, all of you listening, you might be hearing me say this, and you might be like, “It's a problem, Rachel. I already know that my drinking is a problem,” and you just want to skip over this step. But I encourage you to do this work and to stop and consider whether or not it's actually a problem. And if it is a problem, why exactly it's a problem.

Because when you are tempted to skip over this step, and many people are, you will be tempted because you will fall into the pattern of ‘of course, just of course, drinking too much is a problem. Everyone knows that.’ But when you are in this kind of ‘of course’ mindset... like, “We all agree that it's bad. Why are we even talking about this?... when you're in that mindset, you will bring a bunch of societal and moral messages along for the ride.

And I promise you this, when you bring those messages along for the ride, when you link up consumption with your worth, your value, your goodness, as a person, it is going to slow down your attempts to change.

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So, let's say you didn't want to drink, or you didn't want to drink as much as you did, whatever your particular situation is, I want you to pause and consider: Is that a problem? If you were to view how much you consumed, how much you drank, how much you ate, whatever it is, if you were to view this from a place of non-judgment...

And what I mean by that is, you're not telling yourself that it means you're a failure. You're not believing that it's a sign that you are a bad person, or stupid or you're someone who just can't learn their lesson. It's not an indication that something is wrong with you, or something is wrong with your brain. It's not a sign that you're broken.

If you could just totally view what happened, how much you consumed, from a place of non-judgment, why not just chalk it up to, "Yeah, sometimes I overindulge." I want you to think about that, "Sometimes I overindulge." Because you know what? You're human, not a robot.

Sometimes humans are able to control their cravings, sometimes less so. What if sometimes overindulging is just a fact of being alive? Now, listen, I get it. We may all overindulge in different things. But no one alive escapes having to wrestle with their cravings. And sometimes coming out on the other side, looking back, and thinking, "Oh, yeah, I did something that now I am like, I wish I hadn't done that."

So, if you are hearing me say this, if you're hearing me kind of posit what if we looked at this from a place of non-judgment, and you're noticing a lot of resistance coming up, a lot of resistance to that idea, that's okay. Just notice the resistance. I too, had a lot of resistance.

An earlier version of me, before I encountered all of this work and the think-feel-act cycle, I would have insisted, "Okay, fine. Yeah, everybody struggles. But I struggle more. I overindulge more. I always go overboard. I

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can't control myself around anything.” I mean, those were the thoughts that I had about myself. That is how deeply I held this identity.

Even though, and I think this is really important, even though it was painful for me to view myself in this way, I still held really, really tight to this idea that I was just someone who overdid everything. I held so tight to this idea that I would dismiss any evidence to the contrary.

So, you may find yourself in a similar situation. You might find yourself thinking like, “Okay, fine, it's human to sometimes go overboard. But this is more than normal, Rachel.” Or you may look and say, “Okay, fine, but I overdo it. I overindulge too frequently. It's a problem.”

And now, you may decide that the physical and emotional consequences are the kinds of consequences that you don't like, or they're severe enough that you do want to stop. I will say, though, on the flip side, there are plenty of people who decide that the physical and emotional discomfort that comes with over consumption is a price that they are willing to pay.

Not only that, not only is it a price that they're willing to pay, but there are also lots of people that will say, “I don't need to feel any shame about it. That's the price you pay for having a good time.” Now, I'm not saying that you have to get on board with this view, I just want you to see that it is possible to have a multitude of views about this.

You do not have to subscribe to the idea that how much you consume, and the consequences that of that consumption, you do not have to subscribe to the idea that this makes you a bad, messed-up person.

The point is, when you're caught up in the idea that how much you drink is bad, you will go about trying to fix your drinking so that you can believe that

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you are a good person. So that you can believe that there's nothing wrong with you. And that is a real problem.

I will just say, by the way, people do this with food too. We do this with all sorts of things. We do this with how we spend our money, how we spend our time, how productive we are. We use all of these things, the ways in which we consume things and how we spend things, we use us to kind of assess our worth.

Humans chase after the ability to control their impulses as a way to feel good about who they are as a person. The problem is that it doesn't work. Right? So, we have been taught to see this as a virtue. "It is a virtue if I can control all of my impulses." But there is also a very significant downside to linking your worth with how much of anything you consume, or how good you are at controlling your impulses.

Because when you do this, you will miss the big picture. Right? You will automatically decide, because you have been socialized to see overconsumption as sinful, you will automatically decide, "Oh, I consumed too much? That means I was bad." And here's the problem. We make the leap from 'that was bad' to 'I was bad' almost instantaneously, right? For most people, it's just totally unconscious. It's like, "Ooh, that was bad. I was bad."

And when you do this, when you make that leap, you will then approach trying to stop drinking or trying to drink less, you will approach this goal from a place of trying to prove that you are good or unbroken. Trying to prove that nothing is wrong with you. That you aren't a messed-up person or you don't have something wrong with your brain.

And when you do this, when you approach your goal, your attempts to change, with all of this baggage, a couple things are going to happen. First,

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you are not going to get curious about why you consumed as much as you did. You just simply will not.

You will not start asking questions about: Why was I even craving a drink in the first place? What does it represent? What does alcohol represent for my brain in this moment? You won't get curious about: Why is it that deprivation feels so intolerable for me? Why am I just always holding tight to this idea that "more is better"? Why do I hate being the odd man out and disappointing people by turning down a drink?

You won't get curious about these, and all sorts of questions that you need to get curious about, if you're going to figure out how to make a different choice next time. So, that's the first thing that happens.

Second, you will find yourself unconsciously chasing after this magical place. Right? In your mind, it's this magical place where you believe, "Oh, once I fix my drinking, then I'll finally stop feeling bad about myself." This is a magical place that I chased after for a long time too.

And I've watched so many of the people that I work with get caught in this trap as well. It's like, "Oh, this is a way. I'm going to fix this thing, and then I'm finally going to feel good about myself. I'm going to finally stop believing that something's wrong with me or that I'm broken."

But that's just not how the brain works. Right? If you practice making overindulgence, how much you consume, mean that you are bad or a sign that you are wrong, then here's the thing; your brain will just get very, very good at linking your worth to consumption.

And when you get very, very good at linking these two things, it will be almost impossible not to have thoughts like, "Oh God, why was I so stupid to drink that much? What is wrong with me? Why do I keep making the

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same mistake? Why am I so messed up? Why can't I learn my lesson?" Your brain just gets so good at linking how much you consume to your value, your worthiness as a person, right?

And when those two things are linked, what will happen is it you will get very, very efficient at finding evidence for these beliefs. The beliefs like, "Oh, I was stupid. What's wrong with me? Why can I learn my lesson?" You will get very, very good at finding evidence that these thoughts are true.

This is why your life doesn't just magically change when you stop drinking. Or even if you keep your commitment to overdrink. I mean, think about that. I had many times where I would say, "Okay, I'm only going to have this much," and then I would only drink that much. That would happen for me too, even though I had a very, very strong belief that "No, I always overdo it. I always go overboard. I always overconsume." But that was true for me.

And the reason why it didn't feel true, the reason why I immediately dismissed those moments where I did keep my commitment, was because I was always waiting for the other shoe to drop. To me, that was just a fluke. That's what happens for most people. It happens with alcohol, but it happens with so many other things.

So, whatever it is, you hit your goal. Whether it is around drinking, or food or money or relationship or work, you hit your goal whatever it is. And sure, you might get that kind of initial good feeling from you hit your goal. Maybe you think, "I finally did it." But then what happens? Your brain just goes back to what it is good at doing, to the thought patterns it has practiced over and over again. Right?

First, right out the gate, you may not even be able to enjoy it because you don't trust that this kind of good fortune is going to last. Because that's exactly what you think it is, you think it's fortune or luck. Second, your brain will just find some new problem to fixate on.

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It's like, "Okay, I fixed this thing, but now here's another problem that bubbles up to the surface." You find a new thing that is bad or wrong or broken or messed up about you that you need to work on. Not because you are a bad, broken messed-up person. But because you never bothered to unlink consumption from worthiness.

Finally, you will have a much higher likelihood of going back to the original habit. You will be more likely to just be like, "Well, you know what? Maybe I will just give in to my cravings." Why do we do this? It's not, again, because, "just see, you're never going to be able to change." It's because you never separated out consumption from worth. You never got curious about what was really going on the root cause of the habit.

You just decided that if you overconsumed that made you a bad person. So, even if you do change, you then keep this underlying belief, right? When you change your drinking, or your eating, or how much money you spend, or the relationship that you're in or whatever, it doesn't matter. When you change something and it doesn't fix your life, when you wake up and you're like, "Wait, but I still have problems." Because of course you do, because you're human.

But that's not what we think. Right? We don't look at it and be like, "Oh, this is normal. I'm struggling, that's part of the human experience." We're like, "No, no, no. This was supposed to fix everything."

So, when you wake up and you still have problems, and you haven't done the work to unlink consumption from your value, or your worthiness as a person, you will get to a point where you're just like, "Well, why am I denying myself? I did all this work. And still, here I am. I don't feel good. I don't feel happy. I still feel like something is wrong with me. So, I might as well drink. I might as well eat. I might as well spend. I might as well..." whatever.

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This is what I want for all of you listening to really consider the next time that you wake up after drinking too much, or eating too much, or overindulging or whatever. Instead of immediately jumping to believing that you were bad, I want you to ask yourself: Is this a problem? Is this a problem?

And by the way, the answer could be no. The answer could be, maybe it's not a problem. Right? But if you decide, "You know what? Yeah, there is something that I don't like about this." I want you to get curious and figure out, "Okay, so what do I actually need to work on?"

Maybe you want to get better at having fun and letting down your guard without needing a drink. Maybe you want to feel more resilient when life goes sideways. Without immediately thinking, "Oh, let's open up a bottle of wine." Maybe you want to get better at feeling secure and okay, if the people around you are disappointed when you say, "Oh, actually, I don't want another round. I don't really want to drink tonight."

Maybe you want to be able to shake off the stress from the day and relax, without immediately pouring yourself a drink. Maybe you want to be able to enjoy where you are, just like soak it all in without always in the back of your mind thinking, "Yeah, but a drink would make this better." I mean, the list can go on.

But notice, what you're hearing me talk about is skill building. None of this is about becoming a better person. None of this is about fixing yourself or becoming good. It has nothing to do with proving that nothing is wrong with you. It's about developing a set of skills.

So, that's a question for you to consider. If how much I consume means nothing about my worth, or my intelligence or my value as a person... which by the way, it just doesn't. But if you are to step into that place, and

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really embrace that all of that is true, then I want you to consider, “Okay, then is how much I drank yesterday, is it a problem?”

The answer could be no. It really could be no. If you decide, “Yeah, you know what? I do think it is a problem. But I'm still committed not making it mean something about me.” If you decide that it is something you want to change, then I want you to consider: What are the skills that I need to work on? Not, “How do I just stop messing up? How do I stop being a screw up?” What are the skills that I need to develop? Knowing always that you are a good person, regardless.

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