

## Ep #392: The Remedy: What the Brain Learns



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Rachel Hart**

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## Ep #392: The Remedy: What the Brain Learns

You are listening to the *Take a Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, Episode 392.

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.

Hello again, everybody. I am back. We are doing our final episode in this series all about the different Drink Archetypes™ and what your brain is learning from each of them. So if you haven't been following this series, you can go back and you can listen to each of the episodes that I do about these seven other archetypes.

There are eight archetypes in total. We are doing our eighth archetype today, The Remedy. That's all about using alcohol to help with insomnia or pain, injury, or other kind of chronic ailments.

But I've also talked about in this series, all of the other archetypes. So we've talked about The Upgrade, which is all about what your brain learns when you're using alcohol to elevate your experience. We've talked about The Connector, which is all about forming social bonds and what your brain learns around this when you use alcohol in this way.

We've talked about The Reward. It's all about using alcohol as a treat for hard work or a sign at the end of the day that you have permission to stop working. We covered The Escape, which is all about drinking to avoid certain big emotions that may feel very overwhelming.

The Mask, which is all about focusing on feeling more confident in social situations and using a drink to deal with social anxiety. We did The

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

## Ep #392: The Remedy: What the Brain Learns

Hourglass where we talked all about pouring a drink when you're bored or you dislike what you're doing. In essence, you're trying to use alcohol as a way to help pass the time.

And then last week, we talked about The Release. And The Release is all about associating drinking with a kind of freedom from having to act or speak or behave in a certain way. So you can go back and you can listen to all of those.

Today, again, we're going to be talking about The Remedy Archetype. I will say, if you have not taken The Drink Archetypes Quiz yet, it's totally free. It takes less than 10 minutes. You will get a personal report on your primary and secondary archetypes and where you fall with the other ones.

Keep in mind that your drink archetypes, they can change over time and in different situations, so they're not set in stone. But this is such a powerful, powerful starting point for you to have when you're doing the work to change your drinking and change your relationship with alcohol.

The one thing that I want to add before we dive into The Remedy today, and really understanding what your brain learns with this archetype, is that all of The Drink Archetypes, the whole purpose of them, why I created them, was to really help you move away from solely just looking at your drinking through the lens of how much you consume, through the lens of quantity.

How much did I drink yesterday? How much am I drinking in a sitting? I want you to get really curious and explore why saying no to the craving is hard. And you're not going to be able to explore this without kind of stepping back and looking beyond quantity.

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

## Ep #392: The Remedy: What the Brain Learns

I will promise you this, whatever reasons that you have right now... and I know you have a lot of them. I had a lot of them too, reasons that you have for why it's hard for you to say no... I promise you, when you do the work with The Drink Archetypes, you're not going to find that I'm pathologizing the brain, right?

I'm not making it mean that there's something wrong with your brain. You're not going to hear me moralizing and talking about how there's something wrong with you. The reason why it is challenging to say no has nothing to do with there being something wrong with you or something wrong with your brain.

The reason that you're giving in is because both the current relationship that you have with your cravings. That's something that I talk about all the time. I'm not going to go deep into that on today's podcast... but that's number one. And number two is you're giving in because of the different archetypes that are activated behind the scenes.

So you really need to understand what's happening there. You have to dig a little deeper than, "I just like to drink. I like the way it tastes. I like the way it makes me feel." All of that can be true. I'm not here to say that you're fooling yourself and none of that is true.

I just want you to say, "Yes, and what else? What else is the drink doing for me? How am I using alcohol?" If you can get curious with this piece of the puzzle, if you can start to recognize that there is more than just liking the taste or liking how it feels, when you have this piece, it will be so much easier for you to change.

And change will come so much faster because you'll be really working with the habit at its root cause essentially.

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

## Ep #392: The Remedy: What the Brain Learns

The other reason why The Drink Archetypes are so important is because so many of you, just like me, start out trying to change your drinking using willpower, trying to set rules, trying to avoid certain situations. And probably all of you are here because you've had the experience that that may work for a bit, but it tends to be very hit or miss.

These strategies are not going to help you create the kind of change, the kind of lasting change that you want, because none of them address what your brain learns from drinking. None of them will help you change the associations that your brain has made with alcohol.

That work happens on a different level. That's the work that we're doing at the level of The Drink Archetypes. This work cannot happen when you're just at the level of gritting your teeth and trying to follow rules and trying to avoid temptation. In order to do this, to do the deeper work, to untangle all of those unconscious associations that your brain has made with alcohol, you need to be doing the work that I talk about on the podcast with the think-feel-act cycle.

I have been teaching think-feel-act on the podcast for seven years. It really is the way for you to start to see that your drinking never just happens. It can feel like it just happens sometimes. You can feel like you weren't thinking, but I promise you there was a thought.

And to be able to start to see, "Hey, I stopped by the liquor store. I went to the kitchen to open a bottle of wine. I reached for that drink. I reached for another. Not because of alcohol, but because of what was unfolding inside of me." When you start to really focus there, you get this very, very powerful place where you can start to intervene with the habit.

Because you can start to actually watch the habit unfold with your thoughts and your feelings. So it no longer is just in the realm of, "I don't know, it just happened to me. I don't know, once I start, I can't stop."

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

## Ep #392: The Remedy: What the Brain Learns

So this think-feel-act cycle, when it comes to understanding what your brain is learning, is really, really important. And today, I'm going to walk you through an example of a think-feel-act cycle with The Remedy archetype. I'm going to help you understand what your brain learns when this archetype is activated.

And we're going to start to really unpack why it is that willpower and avoidance and setting rules are not going to be the solution if this archetype, or if any archetype, is activated for you. Okay? Again, The Remedy, it's all about the brain associating alcohol with relief from insomnia or chronic pain, injuries, or other kinds of ailments.

I've worked with so many people over the last decade or so, so many people with so many different kinds of ways in which The Remedy can manifest, but they always really boil down to relief for some sort of physical ailment.

I will tell you, each of the Archetypes has a mindset trap, and the mindset trap with The Remedy is this: It is the belief that a drink is the only thing that helps. The drink is the only thing that helps.

Now, again, you might have this thought, it may show up in other areas with other archetypes. But one place where I hear this come up so often is with The Remedy. The problem is that instead of offering relief, you are going to see that drinking ends up having a whole host of consequences that are actually causing more problems for you.

It may be increasing inflammation or disrupting your hormones. It may be disturbing your sleep cycle. And just in general, it's diverting energy away from healing. But I want you to really understand the ins and outs of the think-feel-act cycle to really understand what your brain is learning.

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

## Ep #392: The Remedy: What the Brain Learns

So the first thing, before we dive into an example, I just want to acknowledge that humans have a long history of using alcohol for medicinal purposes, right? We come by this honestly because of our history.

Now The Remedy, what it's doing though, it's teaching the brain that alcohol is the only way out of suffering. And when your brain learns that, that is going to be a problem. If you decide that you want to cut back, if you decide that you want to stop drinking, or you want to take a break, if your brain believes that alcohol is the only way out of the current suffering that you're in, that's going to make it really hard for you to say no, or to moderate or to abstain, right?

When you repeatedly turn to alcohol for help with what ails you, you're actually going to be creating more stress on your body. And not only will you have more stress on your body, you'll have less belief that you can actually see yourself through.

So let's go through an example here of a think-feel-act cycle. For this circumstance, I'm not going to get too specific here. I mean, you can just imagine a situation where you're in physical pain, right? Or you can imagine a situation in which you are having trouble falling asleep, and it's not just a one-time thing. It's a repeated thing that's coming up for you.

This mindset trap that I talked about, this thought, “The drink is the only thing that helps,” this is a thought that so often I will see appear when The Remedy is activated. Again, I'm using for this example the thought, “Drinking is the only thing that helps.”

This is not the only thought that is connected to The Remedy. And in fact, you may have this thought around other archetypes. We're just going to use it here as an example.

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

## Ep #392: The Remedy: What the Brain Learns

So your brain has that thought, right? You're in physical pain, you're suffering. Your brain has that thought, "Listen, a drink is the only thing that helps," and you have that feeling of desire, right? That's the feeling that is created.

And so when we look at think-feel-act, we're kind of always kind of backing up because we just want to put all our focus on the action. What am I doing? How do I change what I'm doing? When we're using the think-feel-act cycle, we want to back up and understand, "Okay, yeah, but what was I thinking and feeling before?"

So we have that feeling of desire. And when we feel desire, we will be motivated to do something. In this case, you may be drinking to numb the pain. You may be drinking to fall asleep. As I have talked about through this whole series, when we're looking at the Action line, when we're paying attention to this piece of think-feel-act, we have to focus not only on what we're doing but also what we're *not doing*.

Often, all our attention is like, "Yeah, then I said yes to the craving. I reached for the drink. I reached for another. I bought more." We're so focused on what we're doing, and we tend to not give any attention to what we're not doing. But this is often a really important piece of the puzzle.

So I'm going to run through three things here that you may not be doing when The Remedy archetype is activated. First, you're not distinguishing pain from suffering.

This is a huge thing that not only has transformed my life, but is so transformative when I work with people inside the membership when I teach this to people; the idea that there is a difference between pain and suffering. There's a difference between painful sensations in the body and the suffering created by fear or anger or despair or hopelessness.

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



## Ep #392: The Remedy: What the Brain Learns

Now, listen, it's important for you to know that when you separate out the two, you separate out the sensation that is happening from the negative emotional experience that then creates so much suffering, that's not going to magically erase all of your pain. Your ability to do this is not going to make it like, "Oh, okay, I'm not in pain anymore. I'm able to fall to sleep immediately."

It's not going to make it go away, but I promise you it will make it so much more manageable just knowing that you can separate out these two, right? Because a lot of times, especially if you're having chronic pain, a lot of times there's not a lot that you can necessarily do in the moment to make yourself feel physically better.

But there are things that you can do to turn down the volume on the fear, anxiety, anger, despair, hopelessness, grief. Turn down the volume on all of those emotions. And that can help make your situation more manageable. That's the first thing that you're not doing.

You're probably also not challenging any kind of catastrophizing, all-or-nothing, or black-and-white thinking, right? So much of our suffering is caused by unconscious thought patterns that tend towards extremes. And when I mean 'towards extremes,' it will sound like, "I can't take this. I'm falling apart. What if XYZ happens? I'm never going to feel better."

I mean, you get the gist, right? So much of these types of catastrophizing, all-or-nothing, black-and-white thinking, these thoughts that tend towards the extremes create a lot of our emotional suffering, so we don't even realize that we can be challenging these types of thinking.

Again, I'm not talking about going into, "La-la, positive thinking, everything's amazing, I should be grateful for my body." I'm just talking about what we can do to be a little less extreme when it comes to this type of thinking. Again, this is something that I think is so often overlooked because we are

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

## Ep #392: The Remedy: What the Brain Learns

often told that we should just be grateful or just be positive. So we think that we have to go all the way over to the other extreme of being so positive and so grateful, and then we'll feel better.

But in actuality, sometimes even very small, subtle shifts in your thinking, making a little less black and white, a little less extreme, a little less catastrophizing can actually give you a little relief. We underestimate the power of small shifts in our thinking.

Finally, another thing that you are probably not doing, you're probably not listening to your body's signals. I work with so many people on this who tell me that they are overriding their pain, right? They are pushing themselves too hard, they are overworking, they are ignoring signs that they need to sit down, they need to rest, because they simply don't want to be in pain.

But it is important for you to understand that if you want to change your relationship with drinking, regardless of what archetype may be activated, you've got to get really good at paying attention to the signals that your body is giving you. Your body is giving you so many signals. So often we don't pay attention to it once we start drinking. We're just on autopilot, right?

I remember getting a lot of signals, that I was just like, "Well, I'm not going to stop drinking now. I mean, I just got to the party. I'm not going to stop now. This is just my second glass." We're getting a lot of signals. So that is happening, but then with The Remedy Archetype, it's happening to another level, another degree.

Because not only will you be ignoring or overriding the signals that you're getting around drinking, but you may be doing that kind of all day long with your body. We get very, very skilled at not listening to the body. And that is something that you have to change if you want to change your drinking.

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

## Ep #392: The Remedy: What the Brain Learns

Think about that. Think about that think-feel-act cycle, right? We've got that thought, "Drinking is the only thing that helps." We've got the desire created from that thought. Yes, you drink to numb the pain, but then we talk about everything that you're not doing.

The question is: What is the result? I think this result piece is really important to understand. Because so often when I talk to people, when I'm teaching them this concept, they always want to kind of focus on the result being 'how much I drank. I feel crappy the next day.'

I think it's important to pull the result apart and look at both the short-term result and the long-term results. I think that can be really powerful. And when it comes to The Remedy, yeah, short-term, the alcohol may be helping you to numb the pain.

Long-term though, what is also happening? It increases inflammation in the body. It diverts energy away from healing. It also may be increasing your anxiety about your situation.

Let's just really understand, let's dig into this together and really understand what is going on with these results. Number one, numbing the pain is not the same thing as decreasing the pain. I think that that is a really important distinction.

Alcohol doesn't actually decrease your pain, rather it changes the way your brain processes information from your senses. Alcohol is a depressant on the central nervous system and it can blunt your senses so that you're experiencing painful sensations less sharply. But the pain is still there. In fact, if you have chronic pain, it's not actually decreasing the pain. That pain is still going to be showing up there once the alcohol wears off.

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

## Ep #392: The Remedy: What the Brain Learns

Now that said, yes, alcohol has the ability to change the way that your brain processes information from your senses. Yes, it can numb these sensations, but here's the thing. A single serving is usually not enough to create the relief that you're after. This is why The Remedy Archetype so often can turn very quickly into over-drinking because of the single serving, right?

When you look at the five ounces of wine that you have in a single serving, it's probably not enough to create the relief that you are seeking. So not only are you more likely to over-drink, but the more you drink to cope with pain, the more you start to believe, whether consciously or unconsciously, that alcohol is the only thing that helps.

Meanwhile, it's increasing inflammation in the body, right? Because the body must expend energy to process alcohol, it's diverting energy away from healing. And both of these things can worsen whatever is ailing you.

I know I'm talking about it right now through the lens of just being in pain. I mean, we could do a whole separate think-feel-act cycle when it comes to insomnia, because that is another way where The Remedy shows up. Just know this operates in very similar ways. You think that alcohol may be helping you to fall asleep, but there is a difference between naturally falling asleep and losing consciousness, right? These two are not the same thing. And it actually really disrupts your sleep cycle.

But back to this one. Over time, what your brain is going to learn is to expect a high-value reward when you experience pain. I want you to think about that for a second. I talk a lot on the podcast about how your brain, your lower brain is always trying to remember, "Hey, when am I going to get this reward? Is it five o'clock? Is it Saturday? Who am I with?" It's always kind of paying attention.

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

## Ep #392: The Remedy: What the Brain Learns

“When do I get the reward of a drink?” Well, with The Remedy Archetype, your brain's like, “Huh, I get this high-value reward when I experience pain,” wo what will happen? The brain is now incentivized to interpret sensations as painful or negative because doing so leads to a reward.

I'm not saying here that you're making up what ails you, or that you're making it up, you're not actually in pain. I just want you to consider that the brain, it's really trying to remember, “When am I going to get this reward?” And if it starts to associate it with the experience of being in pain, there is now an incentivization to interpret certain sensations as perhaps more painful or more negative.

Because “Hey, I'm going to get a drink.” And this happens not just with this archetype, but it happens with so many archetypes. Where we don't realize we are incentivizing our brain to interpret situations in emotionally stressful or emotionally negative way because, “Hey, then I get a drink.”

This is all happening on an unconscious level. And the more you drink, the more you increase the likelihood of developing a tolerance, which leads to drinking more in a sitting, right? When you have a tolerance, you're going to need more alcohol to achieve the same dulling effect. The more you consume, the greater the toll that alcohol takes on your body. And in addition to all of that, your suffering is also going to expand.

Remember I talked about the difference between pain and suffering, the sensation in your body from the emotional experience. Your suffering is going to expand because you aren't challenging the ‘what-ifs’. You're not challenging the all-or-nothing thinking. You're not challenging the catastrophizing or the black-and-white thought patterns.

All of which leads to fear and anger and despair and hopelessness and grief about what is ailing you. And the more that you aren't challenging it, guess what? The more intense these emotions become.

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

## Ep #392: The Remedy: What the Brain Learns

Meanwhile, you're not practicing healthy or sustainable coping mechanisms that can lead to you feeling better in the long run. And bringing this whole thing full circle, when we really unpack the short-term and long-term results, the whole thing full circle is, as a result, you keep believing the thought, "A drink is the only thing that helps," which reinforces The Remedy Archetype.

In reality, alcohol is making whatever you're ailing with, or whatever you're dealing, with worse. So I hope that you can listen to that example... And again, it's one example. It's not always going to be that thought. It's not always going to look exactly this way.

But I hope you can listen to it and really start to see, "Hey, if I want to drink less, if I want to stop drinking, if I want to change my relationship with alcohol, willpower and setting rules and avoidance isn't going to work very well with this archetype." Because willpower and rule setting and avoidance are not teaching you how to separate pain from suffering.

It's not helping you actually practice sustainable or healthy coping mechanisms. It's not going to show you how to challenge the thought patterns that are all about catastrophizing, or near the extreme black-and-white thinking, right? It's not going to help you with any of that.

And so you start to see that learning how to drink less with The Remedy Archetype is about so much more than saying no. It's about all of these pieces that I talked about.

It's about listening to your body signals, especially if you're ignoring them all day long, or you're overriding them, or you're overworking, or you're pushing yourself too hard. It's about challenging all of these extreme thought patterns that are creating more suffering for you. And it's the ability to start to distinguish pain from suffering. Not because it's going to

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

## Ep #392: The Remedy: What the Brain Learns

magically make your pain go away, but sometimes when we just create a little breathing room for ourselves, we create like a little bit of space.

Sometimes that's all we need to start to make a different decision and show up in a different way, right? But on the surface, all of these actions, they seem so unrelated to your drinking, but they're so incredibly important.

Yes, you still need to work with your cravings. You still need to learn how to manage them. You still need to learn how not to go to war with them, but you can't do that work in a vacuum. You have to look at the bigger associations, the ways in which you are using the drink, and what alcohol is doing for you, or what you think it's doing for you. All right?

So that was a little example today of how the think-feel-act cycle works with The Remedy. I really encourage you, if you haven't taken the quiz on The Drink Archetypes, to go to DrinkType.com. You can take the quiz there. It's free. You can start working with your archetypes. You can go back into the series and listen to your primary and secondary archetypes and really understand what your brain is learning.

And for those of you who know that you have The Remedy Archetype, that this one shows up for you, try seeing, try experimenting with what you think your think-feel-act cycle looks like. Maybe it sounds very similar to the thought that we used today, which is drinking is the only thing that helps. Maybe it's something different. But see if you can identify what that thought is, and what feeling bubbles up for you in that moment when you think it.

Most importantly, beyond just, 'yes, okay,' then you reach for a drink to maybe numb the pain or dull the pain, what actions *aren't* you taking? Can you get really curious on that piece? Spend some time considering this. If you do that, it will show you the best place to focus your energy if you want to unravel this archetype and create lasting change when it comes to your relationship with alcohol.

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

## Ep #392: The Remedy: What the Brain Learns

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

Hey guys, you already know that drinking less has plenty of health benefits. But did you know that the work you do to change your relationship with alcohol will help you become more of the person you want to be in every part of your life?

Learning how to manage your brain and your cravings is an investment in your physical, emotional and personal wellbeing. And that's exactly what's waiting for you when you join my membership *Take a Break*. Whether you want to drink less, drink rarely, or not at all, we'll help you figure out a relationship with alcohol that works for you. We'll show you why rules, drink plans, and Dry January so often fail, and give you the tools you need to feel in control and trust yourself.

So, head on over to [RachelHart.com](http://RachelHart.com) and sign up today, because changing the habit is so much easier when you stop trying to go it alone.