

## Ep #402: Why You're Drinking Past "Enough"



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Rachel Hart

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## **Ep #402: Why You're Drinking Past "Enough"**

How do you know when you've had enough to drink? I'm not talking about the fine line between being tipsy and being drunk. I'm talking about the feeling of being satisfied by what you're drinking.

This is Episode 402, and you're going to learn some surprising things about the real cause of drinking too much.

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.

We are officially in the season of overindulgence, and I decided to revisit an episode from back in 2017, where I talk about the concept of "enough" when it comes to alcohol.

This is not about how many servings you're allowed to have or counting drinks. It's about understanding the mental blocks that prevent you from tuning into the sensation of having had enough to drink. These mental blocks very easily lead to over drinking, and I encourage you to listen to this episode and see how you might apply these two concepts over the holiday season. Enjoy.

"Enough" is a subjective concept. You can certainly find people out in the world who are handing out guidelines on how much to drink, how much to eat, how much time you should spend on your devices, how much money to save and how much money to spend. But here's the thing, a guideline can't ever tell you what's right for you. A guideline can't tell you what works for you.

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There are seven billion people on the planet and guidelines can only give a set of parameters to work with. But you, my friend, are a unique individual so you need to explore and understand the concept of "enough" for yourself. Do that. Don't just rely on a guideline.

I have been mulling over this topic for a while, and truthfully, there is a lot in this episode for you to think about. I'm going to present you with a lot of information, but I've broken it down into two important factors that contribute to your own understanding of what is enough.

The first is the opposition to waste, and the second are objects that influence your perception. So we're going to talk about the two of these today. But before I unpack them for you, I want to back up a little.

So for a lot of my life, I had no interest in the concept of "enough". I was interested in something very different. I was interested in the concept of "more", and wanting more, seeking out more. And consuming more started at a pretty young age for me.

I'll tell you that one of my favorite snacks growing up was something that my family likes to call "chips and cheese". It's kind of a strange name for what is really just homemade nachos. You throw some tortilla chips on a plate, you add some shredded Monterey Jack, you pop it in the microwave, and boom! — chips and cheese. I loved it. We had this as a snack all the time in my family.

Now here's the thing. I have an older sister, and pretty early on I got it into my mind that I was in competition with her about a lot of different things. But one of the things that I felt like I was competing with her about was being obsessed that I got more chips and cheese than she did. I was not the least bit concerned about getting enough. I didn't care about enough, I only cared about getting more. That is what I focused on.

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And so, surprise, surprise, I turned out to become a pretty fast eater, because being fast helped ensure that I got to have more. As I got older, I discovered that the speed that I seemed to develop was not just confined to eating. I was a very fast drinker. And I'll tell you, it was not just alcohol, but any sugary drink; soda, juice, Frappuccino's. You name it, I drink it really, really quickly.

And not only that, I was a very fast smoker when I used to smoke. When I would take cigarette breaks at work, I remember that I would be lighting my second cigarette when the person I was standing outside with taking the break was still working on their first cigarette.

So I noticed this pattern, I noticed this pattern of speed. But I had no idea how to change it. I thought, "Okay, well I guess maybe the key is just to be slower. Maybe I just need to slow myself down and that will change it." But I would try that, and after a while of kind of forcing myself to be slow, I would get kind of annoyed that things were taking so long so I would speed up again.

What never occurred to me – well, for a very long time it didn't occur to me – was to explore the idea of "enough". So instead of focusing on speed, instead of focusing on how fast or how slow I was going, to focus on the idea of what is enough.

What is enough to drink? What is enough to eat? What is enough to smoke? To spend? Right? I was always finding myself operating from this position and feeling like, "I just need more. More is better. Things are going to run out, I have to get mine while I can. Give me more." That was the position I was operating from.

But once I decided to try to shift and think about the idea and the concept of "enough", I ran smack dab into my opposition to it. So here's the thing. If you look up "enough" in the dictionary, you're going to find this definition:

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The degree or quantity that satisfies or is sufficient for satisfaction. It makes sense, right? Enough is all about satisfaction. Enough is getting to that pleasantly satiated place where you haven't had too much. You're right in the sweet spot.

So understanding that, when I was a person who for a very long time just thought about more and how can I get more and I need more, that was a big shift in my thinking.

I want to first start unpacking these two factors that contribute to your own understanding of "enough" by talking about the opposition to waste. Because I will tell you that this was one of the very first hurdles that I had to cross. I watched so many of my clients have to cross this hurdle as well on their way to figuring out what "enough" means.

This is what happens. Essentially, when starting to figure out what does "enough" mean for you, what will happen, is people will think, "Okay, well if I stop once I've had enough, but I'm not finished, there's still something left over, then something will go to waste. I don't want to waste anything." Now, if you think this sounds silly, I want you to imagine this scenario.

Imagine that you're sitting around a table, sharing a bottle of wine with a couple of friends, you uncork the bottle, and you fill up everyone's glass. And once everyone's glass is full, you notice that there's still some more wine left in the bottle. It's not quite empty. So the question is, what do you do?

Now, I will tell you that 99% of people will automatically think, "Well, we have to finish the bottle. We can't let it go to waste." And it's not just that way with alcohol. I've watched this happen all the time with food as well. We have this kind of instinctual, "We can't waste it. We can't be wasteful. Let's just finish it."

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So here's what I want you to consider. Why do you have to finish something? Why are you so reluctant to let food or drink go to waste? Because if you've had enough of something, then if you drink more or you eat more, that's more than you actually need.

If you go past that feeling of satisfaction then what you consume beyond that point is going to waste in your body. Instead of pouring it down the drain or throwing it in the trash, it's going to waste in you, because it's not needed. That's a really important concept, right?

We're so afraid of wasting something, we're so afraid of throwing it away or pouring it down the drain, we don't really stop to think about how we're wasting it in ourselves. Because we're going past our point of enough.

Now, people will say, "Okay, I get what you mean, but alcohol is truly never needed by your body, so how can you be wasting it?" It's true. Alcohol is not needed. It's not like food. You can go your whole life and never have a drop of alcohol and be perfectly fine. In fact, your body actually deals with alcohol as it would any toxin. So as soon as you start ingesting it, your body really sets about trying to get rid of it as quickly as possible.

But I will tell you, even though alcohol is not needed, I believe it can still go to waste. Because when you have a drink, you do have a goal in mind. You're after a feeling. And for all of you out there who are like, "No, I'm not really after a feeling, I just really like the taste", I want you to ask yourself this: If it was possible for me to deliver the exact same taste of your favorite drink, minus any intoxicating effects, would you still be drawn to drinking it? Would you feel at all like you were missing out?

I think that's a really important thing. Because there are a lot of people out there that will say, "No, it's just the taste. I really like the taste." But if you strip away that intoxicating effect, does it really have that same draw? The

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truth is, when you pick up a glass of alcohol, you are looking to feel something. You are looking for a positive feeling.

But if you are disconnected from the concept of "enough", you will blow right past the feeling that you are seeking because your focus is elsewhere. Your focus is not on "enough". Your focus is on some other indication that tells you when you're done.

So let's say that you're focused on getting the feeling that you wanted. You are allowing that to be your guide for when you had enough. Let's say you finished your first glass of wine, you poured yourself another, and you noticed halfway through that second glass that you felt good. You had maybe reached that point of "enough". You didn't need anymore. You were at that pleasant state.

Well then, what would you do with the remaining wine in the glass? Would you throw it out? Or would you tell yourself you really shouldn't waste it and would you finish it, even though you had already gotten to that point of having enough? We just hate to waste when it comes to things that we consume.

And I think that so many of us who are members of "the clean plate club" are also members of "the clean glass club". When it comes to food and drink, we hold on so tightly to this idea that it is so wrong to let anything go to waste, so we eat and we drink well past the point of being satisfied.

Now, if you listen to the podcast, you know that I love history, and here is what I discovered. You know "the clean plate club"? This idea that it's really a good thing to finish everything on your plate? It was an actual thing. It really existed. During the First World War, the U.S. government had an agency called the U.S. Food Administration, and the whole job of this agency was to make sure that the United States and its allies had enough food during war time.

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So food stuffs like flour and sugar and meat, they were scarce because the war was going on. The U.S. Food Administration set out to encourage the public to make do with what they had and help with the process of rationing. So they introduced all these concepts to the general public like Meatless Mondays and Wheatless Wednesdays, and the idea of cleaning your plate, "the clean plate club".

So making do with what you had, eating all the food that was in front of you, eating all the food on your plate, it really makes a lot of sense when food is scarce, as it was back then during the First World War, because you don't know when your next meal is going to come.

And what I learned was that the Food Administration had a huge advertising budget. It's actually really interesting. They were one of the first governmental agencies to use advertising as a way to accomplish their mandate, and so they were able to spread their message everywhere. They had billboards and posters. They placed articles in newspapers. They had spots on the radio. And they even sent volunteers door to door and were able to get ten million women to sign up to their mandate.

And guess what else they did? They brought this message of cleaning your plate to the schools. They had children sign "clean plate pledges", promising to finish whatever was on their plate. Because, as their slogan said, "Food will win the war. Don't waste it."

This public education campaign, in different forms, resurfaced in the years following the First World War, while the country was in the midst of the Great Depression and World War Two and shortly thereafter.

And so here's the crazy thing. I grew up learning about "the clean plate club". I grew up learning that it was really good to finish everything in front of me, and bad to waste food and drink. Even though this public education campaign was started and really at its peak more than half a century before

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I was born... Also, even though I was not growing up in an environment of food scarcity. If anything, I was growing up, and many of us were growing up, in an environment of food abundance.

I think it's so important to really understand this kind of historical background. Because you can start to see that the message that so many of us got of finishing everything in front of you, it makes sense in an environment where food is scarce. When food is scarce, you don't know when your next meal is going to come, and so you should eat as much as you can. That makes a lot of sense.

But my guess is that you're not in that situation right now. So when you feel this tension between stopping at enough and potentially wasting what is left, you have to ask yourself, why is your brain clinging to this idea that wasting is so wrong? You have to ask yourself, is it clinging to a message that I got as a kid, that my parents got and their parents got, that has nothing to do with the time and place that we're in right now?

I will tell you that focusing on never wasting disconnects you from your ability to understand when you've had enough. It disconnects you from understanding what satisfied feels like. Because instead of listening to your internal signals about when you are satisfied, your brain is focused and making sure that nothing is wasted. Your brain is focused on making sure that nothing ends up down the drain or in the trashcan.

And so, all of a sudden, when you understand all of these pieces, you start to get a sense why finishing the wine bottle, what's left in the bottle, or finishing the glass that's in front of you, or finishing the beer bottle, all of a sudden, it is this important thing to your brain. When, really, it's not connected at all, and actually disconnects you from stopping when you've had enough.

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Since we're talking about bottles and glasses and plates, I want to talk about this second piece of the puzzle that I think is really important to understand when it comes to knowing what is enough for you. And that is, objects that influence your perception.

Visual cues play a huge role in signalling to your brain to stop consuming. There is this really fascinating experiment that demonstrates this phenomenon with food. Scientists wanted to see if visual cues like the size of a plate or the size of a bowl were really all that powerful when it comes to individual people deciding when they've had enough to eat.

So they devised this really ingenious experiment. What they did is they created these bottomless soup bowls. These bowls that they created were jerry-rigged so that they would automatically refill with more soup from the bottom of the bowl, without the person who is eating ever knowing that the bowl was being refilled. It was such a smart idea.

They jerry-rigged these bowls and then got a group of people and split them into two groups. Half of the group was eating from a normal soup bowl, no refilling from the bottom, and the other half was eating from these bottomless bowls. Unbeknownst to them, at the same time they were eating their soup, the soup was also being replenished from the bottom of the bowl.

Now, guess what happened? Everyone was told, "Just eat as much as you want." But the people who ate from the bottomless bowls ate 73% more soup than those who ate from the normal bowls. 73%. But here's the thing, it gets even crazier.

Because after they were done, the scientists surveyed all the people who took part, and the people who ate more, the people who were eating from the bottomless soup bowl ... so their bowls were refilling, they had no idea ... they didn't report feeling more full than the people who ate from the

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regular bowls. And I'll tell you why. Most of us have grown so accustomed to using our eyes to tell us when we've had enough, rather than listening to what our body has to say.

But humans don't start out this way. We don't start out using our eyes to determine when we've had enough. This is a behavior that we learn. All you have to do is watch a baby eat. Babies are totally fine pushing food away. They could not care less about how much is left on the plate or in a bowl.

But as we grow older, we start to rely less and less to listening to these cues that our body is giving us, telling us when we've had enough, and we start listening more and more to the messages we get from other people. And that goes back to the messages we get about "the clean plate club".

We also start to rely on visual cues, like the size of the bowl or the size of the plate. And so when bowls are bigger and plates are bigger, guess what? People are eating more. And here's the thing, here's the trend right now. Serving ware and the size of portions has grown and grown and grown in the United States. And so plates are getting bigger and bowls are getting bigger and portion sizes are getting bigger.

And guess what? When you're only relying on your eyes, and you're not listening to your body, you turn out to be eating more. So what does this have to do with drinking? It's not just the size of plates and bowls that are growing in the United States, it's also the size of your glasses.

If you're using objects as a cue to tell your brain when you are done consuming something, instead of paying attention to what it feels like, well then you are going to be drinking more. Because you live in a time when the things we eat and drink out of are growing bigger and bigger as well.

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So a standard serving size of wine is about five ounces. When you look at a wine glass from the 1970s and the 1980s, you will see that they were not much bigger than the standard serving. Those wine glasses back then, they held around six to seven ounces of liquid. Which meant when you put the standard serving of wine in one of those wine glasses from the 70s and the 80s, it filled up almost the entire way. There was a little bit of room left, but not that much.

But now, here's the thing, wine glasses have grown enormously in the last couple decades. The wine glasses you find nowadays are often around 15 ounces; more than double. That's a lot. But here's the thing, it's not hard to find wine glasses that are even bigger than that. Crate & Barrel sells a glass that holds 23 ounces of wine. That's almost an entire bottle. And I'll tell you, this is not a gag gift. This is sold as just another option in their line of stemware.

Now, look, there are a lot of reasons for this and people who are really into wine will tell you, "Bigger glasses allow wine to open up and it can breathe more". But here's the thing that you need to pay attention to. Remember, you taught your brain to use objects as a signal for when you've had enough.

You didn't always do this. You weren't always using your eyes to tell you when you were done. You weren't doing that when you were really little. But you do that now. And guess what? Five ounces of wine looks pretty paltry in a 15-ounce glass. I will tell you it looks like almost nothing in a 23-ounce wine glass. The wine barely comes up halfway. I mean, it looks like a really, really, tiny pour.

And so guess what most people do? They pour themselves more wine right out of the gate. So the bigger glass you're using, the more you're pouring for yourself in the beginning. The really interesting thing is that researchers

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have found that even if you aren't pouring your own glass of wine, serving alcohol out of bigger glasses is profitable for bars.

So there was a really interesting study that I came across, where a wine bar tested out selling wine in different sized wine glasses, and here's what happened. Overall sales rose by 14% when people drank out of the biggest wine glass.

I think part of this is that a pour in a wine glass that's really large looks so small, right? Even if it's your standard size, when you're shifting it from a glass that used to be seven ounces to one that's 15 ounces or even bigger, people will look and say, "I barely had anything". It's so easy to convince yourself to order another because, again, you're using these external cues rather than paying attention to when you've had enough.

So how can you change this? Listen, if you're at home, you could certainly measure out how much you're drinking, but honestly, I think it's much more effective to start tuning into what enough feels like, to start tuning into your body and how you feel rather than just letting your ideas about waste or the size of your glass determine when you're done.

And this will require slowing down, but remember the point is not just to be slow. That's what I tried at first and it was so frustrating. The point when you want to discover what enough is for you is to pay attention to how you are feeling. Pay attention to what is happening in your body. Pay attention to how you want to feel before you actually start to drink. Ask yourself when you notice that knee jerk reaction to finish the glass or finish what's left in the bottle, ask yourself why.

Notice what your brain is thinking when it sees alcohol served in a really large glass. Essentially what you want to do is start to practice mindfulness around your drinking and learn how to pay attention to the signals that your

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body is telling you. And reconnect once again with what enough is, what enough means for you.

But before you can do that, you have to start to untangle it from all these messages that we have adopted about what it means to waste, what it means not to finish something, and all these messages we have about using objects in our environment as the sign for when we are done, rather than listening to our body.

So I'm really curious to hear what you guys think about this one. I think this idea of "enough" is so fascinating. And there's a lot of crossover here between alcohol and food. You can think about this concept with food as well. I tell you that understanding what "enough" means for you will be a huge shift. So try it out. Let me know how it goes. You can always send me an email to [Podcast@rachelhart.com](mailto:Podcast@rachelhart.com).

Otherwise, I'll 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.

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