

Ep #415: Why You Go Back to Drinking After Long Breaks



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Rachel Hart

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Why do so many people have long periods away from alcohol and then they go back to drinking? This endless back and forth between drinking and not drinking, when you're stuck in it, it can feel really confusing and demoralizing. This is episode 415, and I'm explaining why this happens, how the health benefits from not drinking often conflict with the deeper desires represented in the eight drink archetypes and how to get off the seesaw.

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.

Rachel Hart: All right, everybody. Welcome back. I have yet again, a special guest, Adriana Cloud, who is one of my coaches inside of Take a Break. And we are gonna talk about something that has been coming up in the membership recently. So Adriana, take it away.

Adriana Cloud: Hey, Rachel. Yes, here's a question that comes up and I think it would be helpful for us to talk about it because I'm sure it's quite common. It was common for me, actually, when I was still drinking.

And it's basically this situation where I take long breaks, but inevitably I get to a point where I start to think, well, my drinking wasn't so bad, and so I go back to drinking. So what do I do?

Rachel Hart: Yeah, I mean, I think that this was, it really was the pattern that I was on for the longest time. I was actually just coaching, I was coaching someone yesterday. So if you guys haven't checked out The Ultimate Guide to Drinking Less, one of the great things about it is I do a free Q&A for anyone who has purchased the guide so that as people are working through it, you can ask me questions, you can get help on it.

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And that was actually one of the things that I talked about on one of those calls is that someone said, I think they had gone something like 100 plus days without drinking and they had all of these physical benefits, which I think a lot of people are often really surprised even to experience some of the benefits because a lot of times we don't even really have a good insight into how alcohol is affecting the body unless we kind of wake up and it's like, oh, I'm like really hungover. So that's for starters. Sometimes people are really shocked and amazed to be like, oh, like I feel a lot better. I didn't think that I was feeling this bad before.

But so this person was saying, you know, they've had all these amazing physical transformations and, you know, they've gone over 100 days and, you know, the cravings are starting to come back, right? And just like you said, that sense of like, well, maybe it wasn't that bad. And I know that I went through this cycle. It sounds like you went through this cycle too.

You know, what I did not understand back then is that, yeah, I would get benefits. Like I would feel physically better when I wasn't drinking, but my desire would keep popping up. I think of it a little bit like whack-a-mole, you know that game?

Adriana Cloud: Oh, yes.

Rachel Hart: It would start to feel like I was playing whack-a-mole with my desire because I wasn't addressing any of my archetypes. I wasn't doing the work because I didn't even know how to do the work. No one was really talking about this, but I wasn't doing the work of understanding, yeah, okay, but your brain has connected all of these stories to what alcohol does for you and how it helps you.

And so you may be feeling physically better, but you haven't done anything to either change the story or find new ways to give yourself the deeper desire, the thing that you are craving beyond the drink. So I talk about this

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a lot in the archetypes. If you've taken the free quiz, you get your full kind of blueprint of the archetypes that apply to you. And when I'm helping people understand the archetypes and their results, one of the things that I talk about is the deeper desire. There's a deeper desire connected to each of the archetypes.

And so it's like, you know, you're looking at a drink menu, maybe thinking like, oh, you know, like that cocktail sounds tasty, but there is a deeper desire connected to it. And each of the archetypes has a different one. And so that was the piece that, you know, I didn't understand. And then because I didn't understand it, I didn't know how to work on it.

And so, you know, you get to a point where it's like, okay, I feel physically better, but things don't feel as special or I don't feel as connected or I still have my social anxiety or I'm still in need of reward at the end of a long week or the end of a long day or I'm still bored sometimes or I'm still kind of don't like hanging out with these people and, you know, it's better if I have a couple beers. Like all of that is still happening.

And so I think that is what is so confusing for people because the message that we get from society is really just, oh, it's bad for your body and alcohol is poison and you're gonna feel so much better and then you feel better and you're kind of like, part of you is realizing like, that's not enough. It's not enough. It can be amazing at first, right? Like the physical transformations can be amazing at first, but then they become your new normal. Right? I don't know what your experience is like with...

Adriana Cloud: Yeah, well, to me what's really interesting is this question really reminds me of how important the work is around identifying your compelling reason for wanting to make a change. And this is where we so often hear people, yes, well, I just want to feel better. Like I know it's going to be better for my health, but that reason is rarely enough. And this is what

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this question illustrates because yes, we start to feel better, but then that's not enough.

And so that's why when people are thinking about why do I even want to make a change to this habit, they have to think beyond, not everyone, but most people have to think beyond physical benefits and mental health benefits and really think about who do I want to become, what kind of person do I want to be, and maybe I want to be the kind of person who can handle any kind of emotion without needing a drink, or I want to be able to create connection with my friends or going on dates without needing a drink.

And those kinds of reasons are going to be a lot more helpful when it is a week in or a month in or a couple of months in into sobriety and you realize, oh, I'm still having desire. And if you then reconnect to that reason that goes beyond the physical benefits, then it's much easier to remind yourself, oh, okay, the desire is still there, but this is the reason why I want to continue doing this work. To me, that's why that's so important to connect to the reason we're even doing this in the first place.

Rachel Hart: Yeah, and I mean, here's the thing is that I think that people also, even if their goal is not sobriety, I think that people go through a similar version of this when they're working on just drinking less because it's a little bit like, okay, so I'm following the drink plan, right? I'm limiting myself in this way. And people have a very similar kind of situation with food. So I'm following the diet, I'm following the diet, I'm following the diet, And you get to a point where you're just, it's not enough, right?

Because just focusing on, I'm going to focus on a number, whether that number is zero drinks or two drinks, whatever the number is, you'll get health benefits from both, right? You'll get health benefits from removing it. You will get health benefits from cutting back. When your focus is completely on the number, you're not connecting with, you know, there's

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something that this drink does for me beyond I like the way that it tastes and I like the way that it makes me feel.

I mean, that is just – that's kind of the surface level explanation where most people stop. That's where I stopped for a long time. It's just like I just like the way it tastes and I like how it makes me feel. The end. So we're not addressing the fact that your brain has this whole – it's created this whole story about how the drink is helping you and what it does for you and what is hard without the drink, right? Like what is hard if you remove it, right? What then becomes more difficult for you.

And so if you don't do that piece, then yes, you'll get to a point, for most people, where it's like, okay, now here are my cravings are again. So it kind of doesn't matter, you know, it doesn't matter kind of the health benefits, not only because they become your new normal, but also because you're not, I don't know. I don't think that we're put here on this planet to just become really healthy people. I don't think that's what it's for, right?

I don't think it's to be like, you know what, I looked at all my macros and they're great and the number on the scale is great and I got my blood work done. Like, I just don't think that is the point. Like, we're supposed to have a human experience and we're supposed to have these desires, right?

Desire is... I think this was actually very transformative for me to understand this. Desire is incredibly useful. We want to have desire. We need to have desire. It's just that so much of my desire for the longest time was really kind of hijacked by alcohol and hijacked by food and hijacked by what's gonna be the biggest reward that my brain can get and the easiest way to get it. But when you look at the deeper desires for all of the different archetypes, oh, it's not just about being healthy.

Adriana Cloud: There's more.

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Rachel Hart: There's more. There's more. We're supposed to be experiencing this world to feel more.

Adriana Cloud: And I love that exercise, I forget what number, but the purpose of desire, which I think is so great because the way you talk about it, yes, desire is there to show us something about what we want out of life. And so instead of trying to quash down desire, we should get curious and really see what is this trying to show me about the kind of life I want to have and who I want to be. I love that exercise.

Rachel Hart: So this is a, it's an exercise, it's in the Ultimate Guide to Drinking Less. And it's an exercise specifically under the hourglass archetype, which is the archetype about using alcohol as a way to help pass the time or a form of entertainment or when you're doing things or with people that you don't particularly enjoy or you don't particularly like.

But that is exercise that really applies to any archetype. That to me is one of the most transformative things that I was not expecting on my own journey with changing my relationship with alcohol and working with my archetypes and figuring this all out, I really spent so much of my life feeling like I was someone who just – my brain had too much desire and also desire for all the wrong things. And in my mind, I just wanted to get rid of it.

Right? Like, I just wanted to be someone that wanted things less because I felt like it's just that was the problem. I wanted to drink too much and I wanted to eat too much and I just had all of these wants and they were too much and that's what I thought I wanted.

And now I see, oh, no, like, it's good to have desire when you're not at the mercy or when you're not kind of following these desires that ultimately don't lead you to a place that feels good or feel insatiable, right? So I talk about this, I was talking about this on the call yesterday for people who have the guide, you know, you can never get enough of something that

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wears off, right? Like you can never get enough of alcohol because it just, the feeling that you get from it, it doesn't last, right? It doesn't last.

And so to see now, oh, my desire was never a problem. The problem is that it was just channeled into the wrong thing. Because now I've taken this desire and I've used it to create so many amazing things in my life and I use it to write books and I use it to coach people and I use it to start a business and I use it, you know, to do amazing things with my family.

So the desire wasn't the problem. The problem was that it was channeled in a place where I just felt, I felt kind of beholden to the substance and I didn't know how to redirect it. I didn't know how to take that desire and harness it towards something that was actually really useful and amazing. So yeah, I mean, that exercise, the purpose of desire, I think that was a big shift. That was a big kind of light bulb moment for me to see like, oh no, there's nothing wrong with how much desire you have, Rachel.

Adriana Cloud: Yeah, I wanna stay here because I think sometimes maybe people will hear this conversation and think, oh, I'm supposed to now figure out where to channel my desire, but I don't know, I don't know. And that's okay if you don't know, but just to notice that there is desire, and it doesn't automatically mean that you have to do something with it right this second. You can just sit with it and let it be there like any other emotion and just allow that to be where you are right now.

And if it keeps coming back, then you start questioning, okay, what is there for me to learn from this? And what else could this be trying to tell me? But I guess I just want to normalize that if you don't know, that's okay too. And that's a good place to begin with, just to notice that there is desire.

Rachel Hart: I love that you say that. It kind of gave me like little tingles up the back of my neck because I think where I was for a long time and where a lot of people that I work with are is just knowing that they want something

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more out of life or knowing that they want something different. That was some... I remember, oh, I can like so... I can so remember being in my studio apartment in New York City and outwardly feeling like I've really got it made. I mean, I've got the job, I'm flying around the world, I've got, you know, the handsome boyfriend. Like I got all these things. And some part of me that I really did not want to acknowledge, but some part of me really was just like, I just want something different.

Like, this isn't it. And to acknowledge that was there and to also not have the answer, to not, you know, it wasn't like, and I know that I'm, you know, going to start a coaching business. And, you know, that was like laughable for me. You know, if someone at that point had been like, you're gonna become a life coach, I'd be like, well, I mean, that's the most ridiculous thing anyone's ever suggested. Like, that's a no thank you.

But to be present with the fact that you want more and you don't know what that more is, or you want something different and you don't know what that different is, that can be really scary. It can be that sort of thing, you're like, I don't even want to open that door. Like, we don't want to look in that closet. No, thank you.

Adriana Cloud: No. The human brain does not like sitting with uncertainty and not having answers. And some questions do not have easy answers. And it's very uncomfortable to be in that place where you don't know the answer.

Rachel Hart: It's very uncomfortable. And I think that I was so, so scared of acknowledging that something about the path that I was wrong, and not even just the path of my drinking, just the path that I was on in general, just it didn't feel right somehow. It didn't, I don't know, it didn't feel like this was how I was supposed to be spending my time or what I was here for or what I was supposed to be doing.

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It was so uncomfortable and it was a lot easier to just be like, let's go to the bar. Like, let's get a bottle of wine. I don't want to be like, we do not want to even, I don't want to even acknowledge that. Yep. Like everything's great. I love my job. What an amazing job. Why would we even ever question it?" Right?

And everything's good about my life and everything's good about this relationship. I was just like, let's not even go there. And many times this is where we get hooked into these desires that then become insatiable because there's only so much that you can drink over that knowing, right? It just keeps popping back up. That is the bummer.

Adriana Cloud: This is the whack-a-mole, yes.

Rachel Hart: This is the whack-a-mole, right? It just keeps popping back up.

Adriana Cloud: Yeah. I want to go in a different direction slightly because I think for me at least, what this question brought up was also this memory of thinking of alcohol and my drinking as it was either good or it was bad. If I was drinking a lot, it was bad. And if I was drinking a little bit, it was good. And this idea of, is my drinking bad enough for me to have to stop? And for me it was definitely like, okay, is it bad enough that I absolutely must do something about it?

And the issue there is that I was measuring myself against this idea of rock bottom, what that looks like. And I wasn't there. And so I had the job, I was paying my bills, my life was mostly okay, at least on the surface, from the outside, I was managing things okay. And so because I was thinking, oh, is my drinking bad enough that I have to stop? And for a while I could answer that, well, no, obviously there are people who drink way more than me and people who are worse.

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And so I use that as an excuse to keep drinking. And I want to talk about that because it's so important this framework we have around drinking, oh, it's good or bad. And when we focused on, well, it's not bad enough, like I must be okay, versus is this the life I want to have? Or just should be the question.

Rachel Hart: Just something feel off to you? Right? And I think that's the thing. We so fixate on quantity, especially in the US recently. There's been all of this talk about what is the okay number and is there an okay amount? And we're so fixated on quantity.

And if we can just put quantity aside for a second and just ask yourself, just have an honest kind of Q&A with yourself. Does something about how I drink, my relationship with alcohol, my cravings, my desire, does something about it just not feel good to me? Does it feel off? Does something just feel not right?

And I think what I have discovered with so many people is they have that intuition way before they get to the point of deciding to do something. But because we're in this place of wanting to label it as good or bad or right or wrong or fixate on quantity, we kind of ignore that intuition, that like something about it doesn't feel right to them.

And again, something about it cannot feel right to you and you can just be having a beer when you get home and that's it. But every day, but there's something about you that's just like, I just don't wanna do that. I don't want alcohol to be a daily thing for me, even if you're like, but it's just a beer. Or it's just, you know, it doesn't have to be about quantity for some part of you to feel like something about your relationship, it doesn't sit right.

And that's not to say because the right thing is to have zero alcohol in your life. No, it's just to check in with what feels good and right and peaceful. I think that's the thing. My relationship with alcohol never felt peaceful until

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now. Right? It felt, I mean, the opposite. So much drama, so much worrying. And then also telling myself that I had nothing to worry about and it was totally normal and my drinking looked like everybody else's and I was just doing, you know, I mean, it was both of those things at the same time for me.

Adriana Cloud: Oh, God, yes. That is familiar. Yes. Because there was always someone who was drinking more or... it's just easy to make out...

Rachel Hart: There's always someone drinking more.

Adriana Cloud: Yes. Oh, well, actually, okay, I'm okay. But in the meantime, of course, the obsessive thinking about it and worrying about it and all that. Yeah, but I like what you said about does something about it feel off. And for me, one of the things I remember was noticing how alcohol started to feel like a necessity in certain situations.

And that's what alerted me to, okay, something is wrong if I feel like I need to have a drink in this situation or I must have a drink, otherwise, dot. And I didn't have the wherewithal at the time to dig deeper into that, but I knew that it was a bit strange that I felt like I needed a drink when clearly there were people who did not feel like they needed a drink in that situation, but I felt like I needed a drink and I was more concerned if I was going out with friends, oh, will there be alcohol? Will we be going to the bar? Will we order a bottle or are other people ordering maybe a non-alcoholic drink? In which case I would feel a bit judged if I got a glass of wine.

So there was this awareness that to me it felt like I needed it, like it was starting to become a necessity and that didn't sit right with me. And yeah, I don't know where I'm going with this, but this idea of your relationship with alcohol and what's, you know, when something starts to feel off. And as you said, sometimes we have that intuition months or years, in my case, it was years before I was ready to really look at it and do something about it. So

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we know something is off and yet we tamp it down and we carry on and go and have a drink to shut down that little voice. And it goes on and on until we are ready to look at that.

Rachel Hart: Yeah. I mean, I think to bring it back full circle, right, to the idea that, you know, you get to a point, someone will get to a point where, you know, they've removed alcohol and either they've started having cravings again or they're starting having this kind of conversation of like, well, maybe my drinking wasn't that bad.

I actually think that these moments, which can feel very frustrating and defeating to kind of look back and be like, oh, but I'm, you know, I've been like doing so "well," or just confusing. I actually think that these moments are incredibly powerful when you use them the right way, which is to start to have that conversation with yourself to understand, well, what in my life feels like isn't the way that I want it or I'm not having the experiences that I want or I'm not feeling as relaxed as I want or I'm not having the connection, like, what is the thing that I'm actually craving? Or what is the thing that feels as if it was a little bit better when I was drinking?

That is incredibly valuable data for you to have because that sends you right into the archetype. That sends you right into the story. And if you want to create change with your drinking and lasting change so it's not just like, okay, I can like grit my teeth and like follow this drink plan, right? Or for some people, it's like if you want to have a peaceful relationship and by the way, you can have a relationship with alcohol that is not peaceful at all even if you're not drinking for long periods of time, right? You can feel very afraid of it.

You can have a ton of kind of anger towards it and or shame around it. But if you want to really create lasting change, you're gonna have to look at the archetypes. You're gonna have to look in this place and understand, well, what actually am I missing right now? What actually am I craving? What

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maybe is underneath this desire that just seems like, ah, it's just like a nice, you know, glass of rosé?

Like what is it? And every time I have been willing to ask that question for myself, it has been so powerful for me. It has immediately kind of helped me understand what I was actually craving in that moment. And it's never about the drink.

Adriana Cloud: It's never the drink. Alcohol is never what we really need. No, so yeah, the work becomes, what is it that I really need right now? And again, that's a great exercise too. Well, what do I actually need right now?

And regardless of whether you're just starting to do this work or you have actually managed to take a break or drink less and you are noticing that something is missing or something is off, that is always a good question to ask. What do I actually need right now? What does the alcohol stand in for? Because always assume that it's standing in for something. It's never the thing you really need, but what does it represent to you? What does it symbolize? What have you taught your brain to believe that alcohol provides? That is always the question underneath.

Rachel Hart: Yeah. And again, it's not to say that, you know, I think sometimes I get this question of like, can't the drink just be a drink? Right? Like, can't I just like appreciate it? And I think yes, you can when you have, when you understand all of this story built up around it, right? All of that unconscious story and you see it and you know it and you've challenged it, like, yeah. But for a lot of us, right, we're not kind of going to that place.

So this is what I would say for people listening. If you have *The Ultimate Guide to Drinking Less*, which you should because it's amazing.

Adriana Cloud: Absolutely.

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Rachel Hart: It is a thing that I wish... I remember writing it being like, oh, God, I would have given anything to have someone explain it to me in this way. If you have that guide, you can go for each of your archetypes. You can go to the section where they explain the archetypes, and for all of them there is a section on the deeper desire. So you can really start to get curious and understand, hey, what's really going on here?

You don't have to have the guide for that. You can take the free quiz at drinktype.com. You can get your results. When you get your results, we explain it in full, right? You get the full explanation for each of the archetypes. And to just really to see, hey, there's something else going on here.

And for all of you out there, you know, if you're starting to have this conversation with yourself that sounds like, oh God, like I feel better not drinking, but, or you've gone some kind of time without alcohol and you're starting to have that conversation of like, maybe it wasn't really that bad. Maybe I was like, this was being, you know, I was being, making too big of a deal.

This is not to say, no, we need to go to the place of, yes, it really was that bad and remind yourself that it was a poison. I just want you to ask yourself, what else might be going on here? What else might I be craving? What do I feel like it feels harder to access without a drink? If you're willing to have that conversation with yourself and to be honest with yourself and to see that there is something beyond just, you know, having that favorite drink of yours. It will be so transformative and that will start the beginning of what you need to create lasting change, to have a peaceful relationship with alcohol.

Adriana Cloud: Yes, all of that. And I just want to say that I appreciate the guide so much. I don't drink anymore, so I'm not using it to challenge my relationship with alcohol or explore what's going on there. But those skills

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that you learn when you use the guide to really check in with, okay, what does this craving say? What is my brain telling me right now?

And how you engage with those thoughts and how you respond to your feelings and how you react to desire or frustration or annoyance. Those are the skills that really will come in handy in every other area of your life. So yes, it begins with drinking in this case, but it goes so much beyond that, so far beyond that. And I just want to say I really appreciate all of these exercises because I use some of them now myself.

Rachel Hart: As much as this is focused on drinking less and alcohol, it really just is to me, it's like the education that we don't receive on how our brain works and how habits form and how to deal with our emotions and how to challenge our thinking. So there's just so much there. But I will tell you, speaking of desire, this book, I had this desire to write it. And oh, man, there were some times that I definitely was like, I'm not sure this is gonna happen. I don't know that we were gonna be able to make it through this, right?

And I think I had the ability to do that. And all of you guys have the ability to create things that will seem incredibly challenging because I had the skills that I was writing about in here, because I had the ability to talk back to my excuses in believable ways and to understand the thoughts that were keeping me stuck and also not believe them and understand the think-feel-act cycle. It really, like, this is the education that we all need that we never get.

Adriana Cloud: And you had a compelling reason to write it too.

Rachel Hart: I did, it was all of you guys. It was all of you. All right, thanks so much for joining us, Adriana.

Adriana Cloud: Thanks Rachel.

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Rachel Hart: We'll see you all 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 and sign up today, because changing the habit is so much easier when you stop trying to go it alone.