Ep #494: When you want to try everything, but also want to drink less



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Rachel Hart

Take a Break from Drinking with Rachel Hart

Ep #494: When you want to try everything, but also want to drink less

Does your love of trying new things to drink feel at odds with your goal of drinking less? Maybe you genuinely enjoy discovering new varieties, but somehow you always end up drinking more than you want. This is episode 494, and I'm going to show you a trap that's really easy to fall into when you love trying new things to drink, and how the explanation you're giving yourself for why you're drinking too much might be keeping you from seeing what's actually happening.

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.

I often hear from people who are trying to drink less about how this goal can feel at odds with their love of something like trying different wines and discovering new varieties. And this doesn't have to specifically be about wine. It can be about beer or scotch or craft cocktails. It's just the idea that wanting to appreciate, explore, taste, and discover new things, it just feels like how is that ever going to line up with my goal of drinking less?

I will say this comes up a lot with the upgrade archetype, right? The idea that drinking helps elevate a situation or makes things better. But I see it show up with other archetypes as well. I will also tell you that I can relate to this a lot. I was introduced to wine tastings in college. I've done whiskey tastings and brewery tours and visited lots of vineyards. And I am not someone who believes that we need to demonize alcohol or focus on its harms in order to change our relationship with it.

I think there's a tremendous amount of craftsmanship and subtlety and nuance that goes into producing different types of beer and wine and spirits. Just like there's a lot of craftsmanship that goes into making different types of cheese and cultivating coffee and producing really good chocolate. There's something genuinely enjoyable about learning to

appreciate these differences and the subtleties and discovering for yourself what you like.

I think the tension comes in when your love of tasting seems to always lead to overindulging, to drinking more than you want. And you may start to wonder, "Okay, so how do I reconcile the two? How am I supposed to drink less when there are so many things that I genuinely want to try and discover?"

But one thing that I had to notice in myself, and something I always want to help people notice too, is how sometimes the language we use to describe what we're doing can actually obscure what's happening. And I see this show up a lot around the word taste. The idea that you just love to taste new things. Because when we think about tasting something, whether it's alcohol or food, we're thinking about consuming something in a small amount, a small sample, a sip, a bite. It's not a full serving.

And I know that this might sound like semantics, but I think it's a really important distinction for you to make. Think about how different it sounds in your brain to say, "I just want to taste that" versus "I want to drink that." They probably don't feel the same to you. And that applies to food as well. There's a difference between "I just want to taste of that" and "I want to eat that." The former sounds like curiosity, like you're simply interested in discovering what something is going to be like. But the latter requires acknowledging that you want to have more than just one small sample.

And here's the funny thing. We often have a small sample and then tell ourselves, "Oh, I'll just have another taste." We keep using the language of tasting even after we've already tasted it. And sometimes we use that language to justify consuming more because it sounds small and insignificant.

I think this is particularly relevant around the holiday season when we're surrounded by so many different foods and drinks and treats. There's so

much available to try, and wanting to sample everything can easily lead to overindulging. But did that overindulging happen because there were so many things to taste? Or because you kept going back for more?

But here's the thing. Afterwards, the explanation that we have to ourselves often sounds like, "Well, I just had so much because there was so much to try and taste." But I want you to consider whether that's actually an accurate explanation of what happened. So, take this out of the context of alcohol for a second. Think about maybe when you're cooking dinner and you tell yourself you're just going to have a little taste of what you're making. But then that one taste leads to a couple more bites. Or maybe someone brings out a dessert and you think, "I'll just have a little taste." And then you have another taste, and another taste, and another taste.

And of course, this also shows up with drinking. Maybe you're trying a new wine, and after that initial taste, you keep going back for more. How many tastes are you actually having? We so often use the language of a small sip or a small bite to describe something much larger.

Now, I can imagine that some of you are thinking, "Okay, but what if I just really love the taste? What if I want to have more because it tastes so good? Why would I just stop at one sip or one bite?" And I'm not saying that you should stop after one sip or one bite. I'm not saying that there's anything wrong with wanting to indulge in something. I just want you to notice how you're justifying it to yourself internally and recognize that finding something delicious doesn't automatically explain why you keep consuming it.

And I will tell you just personally, this was really mind-boggling for me to understand because for a very long time, I operated on the assumption, if it's good, then I obviously want more. Just because I like it and I want more of what I like. My assumption was always, "Well, more of what I like is always better." But I want you to consider that this doesn't just automatically happen. I want you to notice how you can taste something.

Ep #494: When you want to try everything, but also want to drink less

You can discover in that moment whether or not you find it enjoyable. And if you do find it enjoyable, going back for more is a new, separate decision.

Now, I'm describing something that unfolds very fast and very quickly in the moment, but we can really slow it down to understand how these are separate decisions. In that moment, going back for more is no longer about curiosity or discovery, even though that's the language we often use to justify having more. Because we already know what it tastes like. Yet we keep telling ourselves we just want another taste.

You're deciding that you want to keep having it for a reason. And that's where I always want you to get curious about what that reason is, to peel back the layers beyond, "Well, it just tastes good, so I want more." Because there are two decisions. The first decision to try something that you're truly not sure what it's going to be like. And the second decision is to go back for more. But we don't notice that distinction often because we'll just say, "I'm just going to have another taste." But tasting something and deciding to continue to have more, it's not the same thing.

And if you are telling yourself, "Well, it's automatically going to be better to have more," you can ask yourself, "Why? Why is more better? Is that always true? Is that always the case?"

Are you telling yourself on the other hand that maybe one sip, one bite wasn't enough? And if so, why? Why wasn't it enough? Enough for what? This is where I think our language that we use internally becomes really, really important. Because when you tell yourself, "Well, I just want a taste," you're describing a relatively small decision. But how does that small decision turn into a much larger one? Do you notice the moment you've moved from tasting to deciding you're going to drink the entire glass? Or from tasting to deciding that you're going to eat a full serving?

Or do you keep using the original explanation and tell yourself, "I'm just going to have another taste. I'm just going to have another sip. I'm just

going to have another bite?" It's almost like we can use the language of tasting, of just having a little bit, to make a much larger decision feel smaller in the moment. And I don't necessarily think that we're doing this consciously. I don't think that we're all trying to deliberately deceive ourselves. But the language of doing something small can allow us to overlook decisions that are actually much bigger.

And there's another piece here that I think is really important. Sometimes we use the fact that something tastes good as a way to avoid getting curious about why we kept going back for more. We don't get curious about what we believe having more is going to do for us. Think about how easily we explain our behavior this way. You might say to yourself, "Oh, God. Well, why did I have another glass? Because it tasted good. Why did I keep going back for more? Because everything was delicious. Why did I drink more than I intended? Well, because there were so many things I wanted to try."

And these explanations sound so reasonable that we don't even think to question them. We just tell ourselves, "Yeah, of course I wanted more. It all tasted good." But what I want you to consider is, does enjoying the taste give you the full picture of everything that's actually happening inside of you? I would argue that it doesn't.

I talk about this a little bit in episode 471. This is one of my Thought Swap episodes. And in that episode, I explore the thought, "I just really love the taste of my favorite drink" and how that thought can really keep you stuck. Again, this is not about convincing yourself that you actually don't like what you're drinking. It's not about focusing on the harms and risks of drinking. It's just about getting curious about the assumptions that are behind this thought. And one of the things that I explain in that episode is how taste is not a fixed experience. Yet most of us operate as if taste is constant. So we kind of assume if something tastes good right now, it's going to be equally tasty the whole way through as we consume it bite after bite, sip after sip.

But that's not how the brain works, in part because novelty wears off and our sensory experience changes as we continue consuming something. And yet, we can still find ourselves wanting more. And that distinction between wanting and liking, I think it is so important. The idea that you can actually learn how to separate these two things out, to feel and understand the difference between wanting and liking inside of you, and start to also recognize that wanting can be a very poor indicator of what you actually like.

And yet, many people have the experience with both alcohol and food where you're drinking or eating beyond the point of enjoyment. So part of you may be consuming while recognizing in that moment that this isn't really entirely feeling good and you're not really even enjoying it as much, and yet you feel that pull to go back for more.

This is something that I'm really going to explore in Alcohol Relearned. I talked about this last week. I'm rolling out this new program in 2027, and I think that understanding this piece between wanting and liking and the difference is such an not only important but overlooked piece of the education that we need if we want to change our relationship with alcohol. And it's so transformative once you really understand it.

But for today, I really just want you to consider this. What if your love of tasting different wines or beer or spirits, what if it isn't actually explaining the decision to keep going back for more? What if you're so focused on the fact that you enjoy trying new things that you're overlooking all the moments when you're no longer trying something new? You're simply deciding to have more under the guise of continuing to taste.

And again, I'm not suggesting that everyone should limit themselves to a single sip or a single bite of something. I just want you to notice how you might be using your love of trying new things and tasting something new to explain why you're consuming more than you wanted to. And what if your love of tasting new things isn't actually the obstacle to drinking less that you

think it is? Maybe the real question isn't how to stop being curious and enjoying exploring and trying new things, but how to get better at understanding all the decisions that you're making after you've had that first taste. Because enjoying the experience of trying something new and wanting to continue to keep consuming it are not the same thing.

And when you start to recognize that distinction, you no longer have to treat your love of exploring and trying new things and tasting new things as something standing in the way of drinking less. All right, that's it for today. I will see you next week.

—

Something brand new is coming in 2027. Alcohol Relearned is everything you were never taught about drinking, desire, and how to make lasting change. Visit RachelHart.com/interest to be the first to know when enrollment opens.