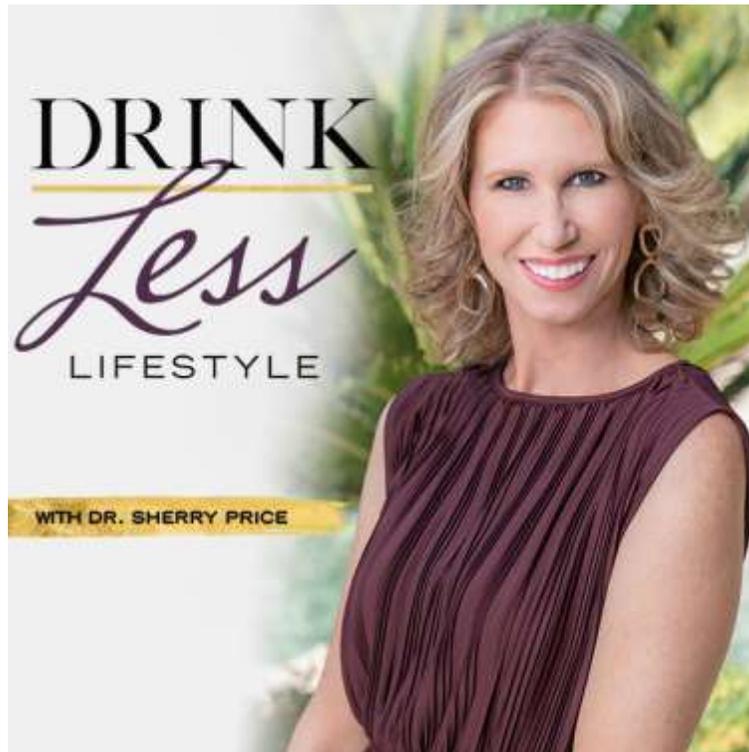


## Ep #3: How to Break the Overdrinking Habit



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Dr. Sherry Price**

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You are listening to the *Drink Less Lifestyle* podcast with Dr. Sherry Price, episode number 3.

Welcome to *Drink Less Lifestyle*, a podcast for successful women who want to change their relationship with alcohol. If you want to drink less, feel healthier and start loving life again you're in the right place. Please remember that the information in this podcast does not constitute medical advice. Now, here's your host, Dr. Sherry Price.

Hello, everyone. How are you today? I am doing great. In just a few weeks it will be Halloween and we are big Halloween people here in my house. So, we usually throw a huge Halloween bash every year. We've been doing that for about five or six years now, and of course, it'll be a little different this year. Because of COVID we won't be throwing the party, so we sent out an email to our 100+ partygoers and one of the responses was, "Oh, this is so sad. This is going to be a hard habit to break. We love your party."

So, I was thinking about that and that ties into today's podcast episode because we are going to be talking about how to break habits. So, to dive in on how to break a habit I must first go over how the brain works in this situation. Now, we discussed a little bit about it on the last episode, but I'm going to take a different approach on this one.

There are two parts of the brain that I want to dive into before we get into actually the steps needed to break the overdrinking habit. So, the first part of the brain is the primitive brain that I want to discuss. It's also called the limbic system, the reptilian brain, and also known as the lower brain. This part of our brain was meant to keep us alive. It was meant for survival. This part of the brain is motivated by three things, hence the name motivational triad.

So, the three parts to that triad that it loves to seek pleasure. Our primitive brain also loves to avoid pain. Our primitive brain loves to conserve energy. So, those three things make up the motivational triad. Again, it's that part of the brain that was developed to keep us alive, to keep our species surviving.

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If you think about those three areas, seeking pleasure, avoiding pain, and conserving energy you see that alcohol meets all three of that criteria. So, when we drink alcohol we learned in the last episode there is a flood of dopamine which gives the brain a huge sense of pleasure and reward. We know that alcohol numbs, so that's going to numb any physical pain that we're feeling, it's going to numb any emotional pain that we're feeling, and we know that alcohol also is a sedative, right? When we start drinking of course we're going to be conserving energy.

A lot of us get unmotivated when we drink and we sit around, we watch TV while we're drinking, so we really are conserving a lot of energy. Even if we're out with friends we're still pretty much sitting around talking and drinking which, again, is not expending that much energy. It's not like we're out running a marathon.

In the last episode we also talked about one way the brain conserves energy is by looking for patterns and making them into habits. So, actions that we take without much thinking we just do them. They're pretty much on autopilot. We don't really have to think about them. Those are considered habits. So, drinking commonly occurs at the same time every day, so it becomes, again, a habit for the brain.

Another thing about the primitive brain is that it loves instant gratification. So, if it could get immediate reward, avoid pain in the moment, and conserve energy or look for the easy way to do things the primitive brain is all on board with that. You can even see how this pertains to like eating dessert. So, your favorite dessert if that's chocolate cake or whether it's brownies, your primitive brain will get that immediate reward of dopamine flood because it'll get the sugar, the high, the concentrated sugar which will cause a dopamine flood in the brain, give us that sense of pleasure, that reward. It'll taste good, it'll feel like, "Ah, that's a treat." We will forget emotionally what we're experiencing because we will be riding that high of that reward and also, usually when we're having dessert we're sitting down, conserving energy.

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The same is true with that first glass of wine or whatever your adult beverage of choice is the brain feels immediate relief when it has that flood of dopamine. So, you can see why the primitive brain is always going to be looking for reasons why we should keep drinking.

Now, let's move to another part of the brain. So, the other part of the brain is the neocortex and I really want to focus on the prefrontal cortex. Oftentimes, this is referred to as our human brain or our higher brain. This is the part of the brain that contains those higher order brain functions. Things like executive functioning, planning, reasoning, and logic. It's the newest part of the brain to evolve.

It's these higher level brain functions that help us achieve and set out for our goals and our dreams in life. It's the prefrontal cortex that's able to plan out and obtain our goals that we have for ourselves in life. This prefrontal cortex will expend more energy to get our goals. It is willing to work hard. It doesn't necessarily care about the easy way out.

Think about going to college. You have to fill out application forms to apply, you're potentially going to want to visit the campus to see if you feel like it's a good fit and you can see yourself there. You're going to have to enroll in courses each quarter or each semester. You're actually going to have to get up and go to class or get online and take some classes. You're going to have to take some assessments and some tests. You're going to have to read along the way, study along the way. You're going to have to do all these things to get the goal of getting the degree at the end.

So, this is the prefrontal cortex at work. It's planning, it's organizing, and it's executing all the things it needs to to meet your goal or your dream of that college education. Same thing can be said for getting a driver's license. Again, it's a process. It takes time, there's multiple steps involved and this is the function of the prefrontal cortex is to make sure we stay on track and we achieve our goals.

The same thing about planning a wedding and getting married. The same thing with raising kids. All of this takes the human brain and the prefrontal

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cortex to strategize how to create the life that we want. Otherwise, if our primitive brain was always in charge, we would just look for the easy way out. We wouldn't want to expend energy. We would want to sit around, not feel pain, not want to do anything, and just be pleasure seeking or hedonistic.

Back in the day, the primitive brain helped us to survive because we didn't have the modern-day conveniences that we have now. Like, think about it in terms of food. When we eat because we're naturally hungry, yes, that's going to provide a dopamine release. That's going to feel good. Of course, the primitive brain wants to feel good and it's meant for our survival, but with modern-day conveniences we don't have to go out and hunt and kill and prepare our meals. We can just shop for them at the grocery store or some of us get them delivered straight to our house. We just have to walk a couple of feet to the refrigerator to grab something to eat.

So, we just have an overabundance of food and it's very convenient to make it compared to what it was like for our ancestors. We don't even have to expend that much energy to put a meal together. So, now, the primitive brain can keep us from actually achieving our goals because of these modern-day conveniences. It makes it so easy to overindulge in eating and overindulge in alcohol.

Not only that, these concentrated foods – as Mark Hyman would say, “These Frankenfoods,” these Frankenfoods are designed to be highly concentrated and highly stimulating and highly rewarding to the brain. So, when we have things like pre-fabricated foods and Cheez-Its and Oreos, of course, the dopamine flood is going to happen and we're going to experience greater reward. So, that's going to contribute to us wanting to keep doing that. The same thing goes with alcohol.

Okay, so now that we have a basic overview of the science down, we have the primitive brain we talked about, the instant gratification, wants the easy route and then we have the prefrontal cortex which is willing to work and willing to do and willing to plan and execute and do all the things to get to our long-term goal.

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So, I just want to say at this point this is exactly how the brains are supposed to work. It's actually how they were designed. So, when we overindulge or we overindulge in drinking it's not a personal flaw. It's not that we are flawed. It should not mean anything about us at all.

Overdrinking doesn't mean anything about your morals, your character, your worthiness as a human, your worthiness or lovability as a mom, your worthiness or dignity or lovability as a wife, none of that. Overdrinking doesn't make you less than. It doesn't make you bad. It doesn't mean anything about you unless you assign meaning to it.

Because it's really how our brains were designed. So, you just have a well-trained, well-ingrained feedback loop or habit when you're overdrinking. Now, that's different than when you get to the stage of addiction. All of this is just neutral. It's all just how your brain works and the best news, it's totally fixable and changeable.

Okay, so now let's look at how we can change the habit. I like to call this flipping the switch. When I say we're flipping the switch we're meaning that the habit is not controlling the brain. So, by flipping the switch we are basically overriding the habit with our prefrontal cortex. Oftentimes, when I work with my clients they will tell me, "I literally feel like a switch has been flipped in my mind." When they get to that place where the switch has been flipped, they feel so differently about alcohol. They think about it differently and their desire lessens for it.

That's exactly what happened to me as well. So, when you flip the switch your drinking is not automatic, it's not just something you do because it's that time of the day. And if and when you do decide to drink you're drinking because of intention not because of habit, not because of boredom, not because of loneliness. You're actually intentionally choosing to drink on purpose which is different than the habit which means we're not drinking on purpose, we're just drinking because it's what we do.

So, for that to occur we have to strengthen the prefrontal cortex in the area of drinking. Now, most of us have this strengthened in other parts of our lives. Maybe you've got the college degree, most of us can drive, right?

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We've done things in our life that require the prefrontal cortex and we've mastered it or we've achieved it. Now, we just need to apply the skill to the area of drinking and it could be easier than you're thinking.

In psychology it's called a top-down approach when you're using the prefrontal cortex to override the primitive brain. When you start doing this – right now if the habit is in charge the habit gets stronger every time you feed it. When you start to strengthen the prefrontal cortex you're starting to lay down the framework of a new neural pathway in the brain.

So, as the new neural pathway starts to get strengthened then your prefrontal cortex and what you want to do with your drinking starts to take over. You may have heard the term, "Neurons that fire together wire together." As you strengthen this part of your brain it becomes easier and easier for this part of the brain to be activated and your desire and the old habit starts to fade away.

Just like any other place in the body, if you're not using cells and if the body is cleaning up and always pruning things it's not using. It's always getting rid of waste, right? If cells become damaged the body cleans it up, we're always shedding skin cells that are dying off. The body gets rid of things that aren't being used. So, if that habit circuit pathway in the brain is not being used over time the brain will start to prune that neural pathway away. It gets weaker while the prefrontal cortex pathway gets stronger and stronger.

That's when you decide to drink with intention. You're not just doing it out of habit. You're not just doing it because it's that time of day, you're intentionally planning your drinks ahead of time. So, this is the process of neuroplasticity meaning the brain changes when we begin to change and do things differently. So, think about that, by changing the way we think and what we do we can actually change the patterns in our brain.

We literally have control over this process which I find totally fascinating. Thanks to neuroscience research in the past 30 years we now know how to reprogram our brain to get the life we want and the relationships that we

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want. Just like I mentioned in the last episode, our desire is learned and it can be unlearned or reprogrammed through using our human brain, that prefrontal cortex part of our brain.

How is our desire formed? It's by what we think about and how we think about things. How do new neural networks form in the brain? It's through our thoughts, it's through our emotions, and through new experiences that we undertake. This is what grows you and changes you.

So, it's new thoughts, new emotions and new experiences. That's how the brain changes. So, this is how coaching can change you because you have a coach that exposes you to new ways of thinking and new ways of being which fundamentally will start to change the way you see yourself and the way you see things in the world.

We can't just expect to have a new thought one time and that it would totally repattern our brain's connection. It just doesn't work that way. It's the thoughts that we repeat over and over that begin to change our neural networks. Those thoughts need to be repeated, and if you have an experience along with those change of thoughts you actually can change your mindset quicker.

Maybe you've attended something like a mastermind or retreat or maybe you've been coached yourself. You get exposed to seeing things in a different light and that creates new thoughts. It also can generate new emotions for something that you had different emotions for, and it's part of that experiential experience that really starts to pattern in the mind.

It's just like when you plant seeds in a garden. You lay them down, they begin to sprout, well, you got to keep watering them. You got to keep tending to the garden. You got to keep making sure that that plant has enough to take root, to grow, and it expand just like it is with the neuro pathway in our mind.

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We can't just have the thought one time, we have to keep repeating it and letting it grow and grow and keep expanding in our mind therefore that pathway gets stronger and, hence, the old habit pathway can be pruned.

Now, a lot of people, including myself, we look to books because we think, "Oh, if I just get more knowledge on the topic, I can change" I love books and I'm all for reading, but a lot of people don't get the change they want from just reading a book because they look at reading a book as just acquiring knowledge.

But when you read a book and you want transformation from a book you have to apply the knowledge from that book. You have to sit with information, you have to sit with that information. You have to sit with those new thoughts. You have to practice that new way of thinking, to that new way of being. That's really when a book can start to transform your life.

Change is always a process that starts from the inside and that's just focusing on, "Just saying 'No' to the drink" or just not allowing the drink that's on the external. That's really not going to change our habits long-term. It's not going to change our desire long-term and hence it's not going to change our relationship with alcohol long-term.

That has to start internally with our mind. We have to create new neural pathways where we think about alcohol differently so that we behave around it differently. So, this is the philosophy I use in my coaching practice, it's that top-down approach. It's by strengthening that prefrontal cortex to override the habit brain. This process is so effective because you get to intentionally create the relationship that you want with alcohol. It doesn't have to mean all or nothing, but it does mean getting specific about what you want and when.

I urge you all to spell it out on paper. This is one of the best exercises you can do to train your brain to get the relationship that you want with alcohol. So, ask yourself some questions. Ask yourself, "What kind of relationship do I want with alcohol?" If any. If you do want it and you say you want it socially, what does that really look like? Is that a certain amount of drinks

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per day? Is that a certain amount of drinks per week? Is that a certain amount of drinks per month?

Also, ask yourself, “In what scenarios do I want to allow drinking?” Equally important, what scenarios don’t you ever want to allow it? For me, I even pick emotional states. I don’t ever want to drink when I’m angry. I know nothing good comes of that. I’ve practiced that. I’ve seen the results and I’m not happy with myself if I drink due to anger.

Finally, you have to believe that changing your relationship with alcohol is possible. You have to believe that you can change and with that, knowing that you can change, you also have to let go of any past experiences and let that no mean anything about your present or your future. You have to really leave the past in the past.

So, all of this requires energy. It requires effort from the prefrontal cortex area of our brain. When we learn how to use it we begin to use our brains for us rather than against us, and the great news is this is a skill anyone can learn.

I’m glad you’re joining me on this podcast journey to learn more about the tools to improve this skill so you can drink less. Next week, I’ll be back with more on how to change your mindset around drinking so that you can live more joyfully and actually in alignment with you want to be around alcohol. Okay, my friends, that’s what I have for you today.

But before you go, I’m excited to celebrate the launch of this podcast by giving away 4 \$100 Amazon gift cards to lucky listeners who subscribe, rate, and review this show on Apple Podcasts. Of course, I do hope that you love the show, but it does not have to be a 5-star review. I want your honest feedback to make sure I continue to provide you tons of value. So, visit [sherryprice.com/podcastlaunch](https://sherryprice.com/podcastlaunch) to learn more about the contest and how to enter. I’ll be announcing the winners on the show in an upcoming episode. Bye for now.

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Thanks for listening to *Drink Less Lifestyle*. If you're ready to change your relationship with drinking now check out the free guide, *How to Effectively Break the Overdrinking Habit* at [sherryprice.com/startnow](http://sherryprice.com/startnow). See you next week.