

'I don't drink!' How to quit alcohol - a drinker's tale

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September 2016

Welcome to the second of my newsletters. If you missed the previous one I will add a past newsletter page on my website.

Beautiful Isabella enters my life – as planned



In case you missed the post I put out, my eldest daughter Alexandra gave birth to her first child and my first granddaughter on September 19th. This is me proudly holding her two days later. What an asshole I was to think I could have missed out on such a wonderful part of my life in

preference to wine! Instead of dying a couple of years ago as previously anticipated, I now hope to watch Isabella grow into a beautiful young woman and share with her the new found wisdom of my years. I doubt there could possibly be a better incentive for changing your life or a greater reward for having done so!

But nothing else goes to plan!

We are now hoping to move into our new home in November although we will be vacating our current home in October, so things have slipped a month. As we will be effectively homeless and owing to the fact both my wife and I are a nightmare to live with, we have decided not to impose ourselves on family and friends in the interim but instead head off down to South Africa to hopefully see the whale migration. With all the confusion of moving, the house in total disarray, and nowhere sensible to base myself it means the quit drinking course I have been working on is taking longer than expected, and probably won't be released until mid-December.

I have completed many of the sections of the course however, and I thought a sample lecture about states of mind together with an accompanying article which covers 'the happiness chemicals' might be of interest to readers. That article forms the latter part of this newsletter. Please do let me know what you think.

The sample lecture itself can be found by following this link:
<https://youtu.be/EHX2bOtJggY>

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The noisy mind

- ▶ Conscious thoughts
- ▶ Running commentary
- ▶ Here and now
- ▶ **Voice in your head**
- ▶ Influenced by surroundings
- ▶ Does not plan for the future

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The slide features a profile of a human head with a brain containing tangled lines, symbolizing a 'noisy mind'. A mouse cursor points to the first bullet point. A video inset in the bottom right shows a man in a dark shirt speaking. Navigation arrows are visible on the left and right sides of the slide.

The Companion's companion

I met up with one of my reader's earlier in the year to help him celebrate his 12 month's alcohol free. A suggestion he made was for me to write a guide aimed at the partner of the person quitting alcohol, especially as he had received little or no support. He felt his other half didn't appreciate what he was going through or just how much he had achieved and this made quitting that more difficult. I tested the idea on some other readers and the result is a book I hope to launch in January. Here is an abridged extract from the introduction:

Just how big a thing is it to give up alcohol and is your partner deserving of your praise and support?

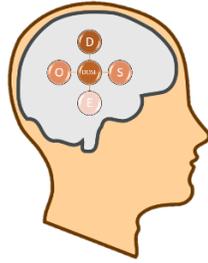
If you don't drink yourself, or you only drink on occasion and have never had a serious issue with your drinking, you won't understand just how big a decision it is for someone to decide they are never going to drink alcohol again. For the alcoholic, drink is part of their everyday existence. Even on days when they are unable to drink they will be thinking about that next drink or planning how they are going to make up for the fact they are unable to drink that day. The scaring thing is they will be totally unaware how much alcohol dictates their life and they will not begin to realise this fact until **after** they have quit alcohol forever. That means that deciding to never drink again is like deciding to quit something that your partner deems fundamental to their existence, a bit like the rich man giving away all his wealth in the old fable. So despite all the help, advice and encouragement they will be getting from my book and other sources, that commitment they have made or are about to make will be one of the biggest decisions in their life, and a major turning point.

...Whatever you decide, this book will at least tell you the following things:

- It will tell you what your partner is likely to be going through, especially mentally.
- It will tell you why so many people don't succeed so you can help your partner avoid the pitfalls.
- It will help you understand more about what alcoholism is, break some of the myths, and consequently realise how easily the alcohol habit **can** be broken.
- And it will tell you what your partner needs most – and that is **your** support, encouragement and praise.]

Once again, please let me know what you think of this idea.

The article from the forthcoming course:



The Happiness Chemicals

In this article I am going to get a little more scientific and try and explain what has been, and is going on in your head. This will help to master that voice in your head I mention throughout the course, especially if you understand the processes that stimulate it, and that will make replacing your drinking alcohol habit that much easier. The voice wants you to be comfortable and so it doesn't welcome change, and it will try and put up barriers even if that means wrecking your life in the process.

There are four chemicals our brain creates for itself and uses as a matter of course, and which are often collectively known as the **happiness chemicals**. They are Dopamine, Oxytocin, Serotonin, and Endorphins. To make life easier I will refer to them as **D, O, S** and **E** and collectively as **DOSE**.

It's important you understand a little about what roles the DOSE chemicals play in our lives, because you will then see how these chemicals are affected by alcohol and what we all need to do to counter those effects.

Each of these four chemicals plays a different role in our happiness as individuals.

D

The brain produces chemicals in reaction to internal and external stimuli. The simplest to experience is D. Think of your favourite meal for a moment, go on, close your eyes and really picture that meal on a plate in front of you in all its glory. List the components of that meal one by one and add any sauces or extra flavourings you would normally put on.

Your mouth should begin to moisten. Now think about it some more and try and imagine the smell and how that food is going to taste. Can you notice how much you enjoy the sensation and how your mouth positively salivates in anticipation. That is D kicking in.

D is triggered by your thoughts **anticipating** something positive in the future. D is similarly triggered when you walk into your favourite bar (you are anticipating enjoying a nice tasting drink and some good company), or when you see a person you fancy (say no more), or even when you buy a lottery ticket. Anticipate anything positive and D kicks into action.

To be clear, **anticipation** is a construction that happens in your mind based on memories. Low levels of D in your brain will affect the mind's ability to recall memories, and high levels of D will improve memory recall and your powers of concentration. Think of that favourite meal again. The more D available the more your brain will start to picture and sense every essence of that meal, heightening the anticipation and desire for that meal. We want D, D gives us a nice feeling!

D also delivers a sense of reward, the 'I got it' feeling that comes with achieving something: when you achieve a long-sought goal; when you take a positive step toward that goal; when your efforts are rewarded; when you invest effort and expect it to be rewarded; even when you see another person move toward a shared goal. So just working toward a goal with positive expectations stimulates D.

D is great, we love D. Take on a new challenge and you will fill your life with D. D gives you a sense of fulfilment. The challenge of quitting alcohol will stimulate D.

It therefore makes sense to recognise **addiction** to something as quite often being the result of having a low level of D. The addict strives to achieve a sense of fulfilment in their life that D would normally provide by seeking that fulfilment through substances, objects, or events that stimulate D. It should be no surprise that alcohol stimulates D production.

O

O is sometimes referred to as the cuddle chemical. The simplest way to produce it is to cuddle a person you care for or are in love with – sounds simple doesn't it. Another way of triggering the same chemical is to remember vividly cuddling somebody: the smells, the feel, the emotional sensation of being cared for and caring, loved and loving. Stroking a pet stimulates O.

O kicks in even stronger when affection and bodily contact come from a stranger or from somebody you previously imagined did not like or care about you. It can also be triggered by social bonding, good eye contact and empathic feelings.

At the heart of O is the need for trust and recognition between you and other people.

O improves your self-esteem, your sense of purpose, your feeling of belonging and your own personal value. Authors get a dose of O when they get a glowing review for their book or course – no really!

We love O. Once again it is no surprise that alcohol triggers O, it's why you get that nice easy feeling when you first have a drink.

S

Another chemical the brain produces is S, the feel good chemical, it is responsible for your **mood**.

Decreased levels of activity in your brain involving S can lead to an inability to create and act on well-formed plans. It can affect your attitude and focus, and that can mean having difficulty finishing things, or feeling a little down, or getting annoyed easily, or being unable to control your impulses. We can all relate to those type of feelings, what we probably didn't know is that it was due to a lack of S!

How many people do you know who say they have little or no will-power, perhaps you say this about yourself? All that comes from a lack of S activity in your brain – it would be nice to be able to stimulate that wouldn't it?

Improving S activity makes your mood and your attitude towards everything more 'Can Do' and positive. It provides the drive to finish and complete things by allowing the mind to stay focused and to concentrate.

We can stimulate the flow of S by making ourselves feel important. S naturally flows when we feel important, in fact sometimes people make bad choices just to give themselves a sense of self-importance and to get that nice S feeling inside.

Unfortunately, very few of us can control the world and the level of importance it gives us, but we can train our brains to feel confident in your **own** importance regardless of what others do. You can find many healthy ways to feel important, but an obvious one is to commit to quitting alcohol forever. If you make that commitment with a real strong sense of purpose you will soon feel a sense of importance, a sense of taking control of your own life and destiny and doing something most people thought you wouldn't be able to do. When you hear people say how proud of you they are, a huge dose of S will kick in. We love S and yes, alcohol triggers S production.

E

E is responsible for masking pain or discomfort - it produces a feeling of euphoria. When it comes to designing happiness, E helps you "power through." E allow you to push through pain barriers to achieve your goals. Pushing through pain barriers of exercise provides an E rush experienced by high performing athletes, it allows them to perform physical feats that seem impossible to the average person. But creating pain to stimulate E is a bad survival strategy. A simple exercise routine will stimulate E.

Note that laughing and crying also stimulate small bursts of E, this is perhaps why so many people find it hard not to laugh when at a funeral. If you spend your life laughing as do I, you must be producing masses of E!

So we also like the occasional dose of E. But if you have ever woken up battered and bruised and didn't remember hurting yourself when you were drunk, you were either too wrecked to know what you were doing or E had kicked in big time as a result of the alcohol and the E had numbed the pain.

Alcohol and the DOSE chemicals

I have summarised that all the DOSE chemicals are good for us, and it is no wonder they are called the happiness chemicals.

As with all things in life however, we need to keep things in **balance**. Too much D for example will lead to us being so excited about the future we don't actually get anything done. We spend all our time anticipating without fulfilling the need itself.

So now let's look at what happens when we introduce the chemical alcohol into the equation.

Alcohol creates a mood swing that **tricks** the brain into producing D, this leads to an anticipation of life being better as a result of its consumption.

It is this assumption that things will be better with alcohol that leads towards addiction.

Alcohol also **tricks** the brain into producing S. You must have noticed how you have far more of a 'can-do' attitude when you have an alcoholic drink or two. We also all know stories of people who have suffered injury by doing crazy stunts whilst drunk because they felt invincible. Too much S creates this 'high' and often leads to a craving for whatever source is stimulating it, in this case alcohol.

With both of these, D and S; alcohol is fooling Mother Nature. It is stimulating an overload of happiness chemicals we want, but we are not physically engineered to be able to cope with a chemical rush. This is why we get withdrawal symptoms when the chemical stimulus is taken away.

Can you see a pattern of highs and lows emerging? We have a rush of D and S and feel elated, then the balance swings and we feel deflated so we go for the rush again. This 'out of balance' situation is what leads to addiction and depression. We need to balance the DOSE chemicals within us.

O is similarly effected by alcohol. If you recall, O is the chemical that makes us feel loved. A sudden rush of O makes us feel loved by everyone and we often feel this when we

have that first drink. But then the O rapidly falls off and we start to feel down. Think of how many drunks you can recall sitting crying into their drink with the 'nobody loves me' label nailed to their head. Once again it is the DOSE balance that has been messed up. Listening to sad music when you have a few drinks is a sure fire recipe for depression.

And finally E. Alcohol promotes the release of E in areas of the brain that are known to produce feelings of pleasure and reward and can lead to that sense of euphoria. We all like that feeling on occasion although living in a permanent state of euphoria would probably lead to madness and certainly make your face ache. Once again balance is key.

To summarise, DOSE are the happiness chemicals and we like DOSE. Alcohol stimulates the production of DOSE but it upsets the balance of DOSE in our brains leading to 'ups and downs' and a consequent reliance on alcohol to try and maintain an 'up'. If drinking alcohol had no other implications, we could leave things as they are and accept alcohol as the one thing that provides an extra dose of DOSE when we feel like a lift. But we know that alcohol also destroys our liver, can lead to cancer, plays merry hell with our health, destroys relationships, wrecks lives and often leads to an early death. Fortunately, we also know that we can get the correct balance of DOSE chemicals by other means, and that those methods don't come with any negative side effects, and mostly introduce very welcome additional benefits into the bargain.

So to replace our drinking alcohol habit with a not drinking alcohol habit we need to stimulate the production of the DOSE chemicals alcohol has been triggering. Taking more exercise, finding new interests, achieving goals and feeling better about yourself will all provide the DOSE that you need, and these are all discussed in the latter part of this course.

It is well worth noting that the satisfaction of successfully quitting alcohol will stimulate a nice healthy balance of DOSE!

Until next month



That's all for this month. Please let me know what you think of the newsletter and what you have found useful, would find more useful etc. for next month. Have a great alcohol free October, I know I will, and that's despite all the temptation of those wonderful South African wines.

To think that's all I would drink once upon a time and now I'm not the slightest bit interested!

All the best,

Julian

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