Why Moderation Is a Myth: James Swanwick on Living Alcohol Free Transcript

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Intro and AA Stat Follow-Up

During this episode, our guest shares a statistic about Alcoholics Anonymous AA that didn't quite sit right with us. While we believe in open dialogue and giving our guests space to share their experience and perspectives, we also believe doing our due diligence, especially when it comes to data.

So here's what I'm asking. Listen to the full episode. Then stick around at the end for an important follow-up where we unpack that stat a little more and share what we found.

We're all about curiosity, not cancellation. And this is a great example of how we can hold space for nuance and accountability in the same conversation.

Now onto the conversation, the practice of alcohol consumption has been around for thousands of years. Archaeological evidence shows fermented residues in Neolithic China, Ancient Egypt, and Mesopotamia.

This is probably the first podcast that I've done where the ancestral practice is actually not better sales of alcohol going down that less and less people are choosing to drink alcohol.

And my next guest, James Swanwick, is part of that movement to get people to stop drinking alcohol. So how is it that this ancestral practice, something that's been around so long, can actually be so bad for us?

You have found the Everyday Ancestral Podcast. I am your host James Berry, and my guest James Swanwick is gonna enlighten us all about why alcohol has no place in anyone's diet.

There clearly was a difference between alcohol of the yesteryear and the alcohol today. Wouldn't you say? Well, alcohol's reputation is certainly crumbling.

That is true. I grew up in Australia in the 90s as a socially acceptable drinker, but now in 2025 heading into 2026, Generation Z have never drunk less.

They're drinking less than previous generations. People are increasingly aware about alcohols damaging effects.

Alcohol's History and Modern Drinking Culture

Most importantly, people are choosing an alcohol-free lifestyle versus thinking that they need to be sober or have to go to an AA meeting, for example.

And people increasingly feeling comfortable sharing with their friends and family that their being alcohol free. So there's less stigma around being, alcohol, free than there was in previous generations.

Certainly. What do you think is fueling that? Increased access to education, certainly social media, good and bad, but the good has definitely helped people understand that even one seemingly innocent drink per night is enough to cause some level of brain degeneration.

I think also the younger generation that's coming through are just naturally more health conscious. creating these morning exercise routines, these mourning parties, which are drug and alcohol free and just increased education and increased studies that come out now that have been debunking this idea that a glass of wine is good for your heart.

I mean, that study that came out in the eighties has been de-bunked so many times now. Um, and so I think it's a combination of just, you know, access to great updated medical information.

We've got AI now so we can really dig in and find out what the real effects of alcohol are. And then just with more people now feeling comfortable about loving an alcohol-free lifestyle without the stigma that just has this spin-off effect where people just and culture just shifts.

Yeah, it's interesting though, because in ancestral times, alcohol, at least our understanding of ancestral time in the relationship to alcohol was rare.

It was something seasonal, was communal and tied to ritual. And today, well, the years that we've grown up, cause I wanna acknowledge what you're saying that it is changing, but in our youth, It wasn't everyday habit for many.

I think that's what's carried us to this contrast we're starting to see. What do you think is that major driver in modern day society towards daily alcohol consumption?

Cultural conditioning is real. It started when we were a little boy or little girl when our parents said to us, oh no, no little James or Sally, you can't drink.

You can drink when you're older. And in that moment, our Cemented this idea that drinking was a rite of passage. That drinking with something we got to do when we were older.

And then of course, as we get older, there are smiling assassins everywhere and smiling. Assassins are our friends and family and the waiters and waitresses who are as smiling as they offer us a drink.

Hey James, can I get you a, drink? Hey Sally, Can I, get, you, a. Drink, Hey, let's catch up for some drinks. and we're all smiling, As we drink this attractively packaged poison, which is what alcohol is.

And we move into college, people have fun, they get drunk. They have parties. We watch these Hollywood movies like American Pie, which glorifies all of the fun shenanigans we get up to as we drink.

Then we moved into the workplace and the workplaces like let's catch up for some after work drinks. And, we use it as a way to bond and connect and get to know people.

And then we get invited over to backyard barbecues or to football games and everyone's smiling as they're drinking this poison and the conditioning continues.

And of course we normalize drinking poison because everywhere around us we're seeing people smiling at us and we are the ones who are these smiling assassins as well because when we invite people over our home, we want to be a very hospitable host, don't we?

Can I get you a drink? What would you like? I've got vodka, I got red wine. And then we watch these Super Bowl commercials, which are very funny, very well produced where celebrities are drinking beer.

And we've got Peyton Manning, the former NFL quarterback who's promoting calls or Budweiser as he was in the 2025 Superbowl commercial. They're funny and they're great.

We just think that this is normal, but it's not normal. This is not the way nature intended us to live, drinking poison. It's ridiculous. It's very hard to break that conditioning.

Very challenging because everywhere we look, people are smiling as they drink this poison. Yeah, yeah. Now, you know, I'm not aware that I actually know your story with why you came down this path.

I find it fascinating because, working with health practitioners, there's always that catalyst that got them to follow that diet that they're professing to people or that philosophy that their pushing.

So what is your, story without call?

James Swanwick's Drinking Story and Turning Point

How bad did it get for you to realize, hey, none is good. Don't do any of it. I was a socially acceptable drinker growing up in my native country of Australia in that I would have two or three drinks most nights of the week and I did that from age 17 right up until when I stopped at age 35. Now in 20s certainly I got drunk on weekends, had a lot of fun.

But I didn't get arrested for drinking, I did not get a DUI, wake up in a ditch, didn not have a rock bottom moment. It was just very consistent socially acceptable drinking habits.

But i identified in my early to mid thirties that those drinking habit, two or three drinks most nights of the week had caught up with me. I was about 35 pounds overweight, i wasn't sleeping great, irritable stressed, envious of other people.

My life was just blah, and by blah I mean six out of 10 in my finances, six outta 10 my happiness, 6 outta ten in relationship, Six outta Ten in overall happiness.

Mediocre, blah. And it all came to a head in Austin, Texas in March of 2010. I was at that year's South by Southwest Festival. And I went out to an industry party, it was an open bar, I had two free Bombay Sapphire gin and tonics, and I want back to my hotel about 20 minutes outside of downtown Austin and went to sleep.

And when I woke up in the morning, I just felt mediocre. I looked in the mirror, I had tired and weathered skin, bags under my eyes, and I could feel the fat rolls over my pajama bottoms.

And I walked next door to this hotel to an IHOP, an international house of pancakes, And sat down and looked around me and could see these very unhealthy looking people eating all-you-can-eat pancakes with maple syrup and whipped cream.

Not even real maple Syrup, yeah. Yeah. And I looked out the window and I just thought, oh, what am I doing in an IHOP? James, enough. And, I said to myself, James enough, take a break from alcohol for 30 days and just see if you can feel better because this is kind of like crap.

This is so average. You're just drifting in life. So, that's what I did. I committed to quitting drinking for what i thought would be 30-days. In those 30 day I lost 13 pounds.

It just fell off me. Because when we drink alcohol, we consume a lot of calories. And then when you drink, alcohol we also eat a of additional calories like burgers and fries, for example.

So in 30 days, I lost 13 pounds. Uh, had an opportunity to audition to become a television host on a TV show called sports center on ESPN. Because I was sleeping better and felt better, and looked better.

Had more confidence and strategy. I decided to go for it and I auditioned and got the job. And I was on television two weeks later and I thought, wow, this is crazy.

I'm like this clarity and focus and energy is helping me surge forward creatively and professionally. When I as a drinker, I noticed that when my parents would phone me from Australia just to catch in with their son, you know, catch up with his son who was living in California at the time, that being me.

I would often screen their calls and I'd go, my parents always call me at an inopportune time. But when I was alcohol free, I'm calmer and more open and agreeable.

When the phone call came in once a week, like, oh, hi mum, dad, how are you doing? I'll be open to taking their call even if I were busy with other people at that time And then I attracted a great romantic relationship and far from me

thinking that she would think that I was an alcoholic because I wasn't choosing not to drink.

She actually was very impressed with me living an alcohol-free lifestyle and thought, wow, finally a real man who's got his stuff together, who didn't invite me out just to a bar to have drinks.

Invited me on a Saturday morning hike. I'm like, oh, this is the kind of man I want to be with. And I went, well, This is pretty good. There's alcohol free living.

So I just kept going. And going and going, and I got to one year later at the next year's South by Southwest Festival in 2011, back in Austin, I walked into the Luster Pearl Bar in Rainey Street and ordered what I thought would be a celebratory beer.

And just as I put the beer to my mouth at that last moment, you know what, in one I've got this dream job hosting sports center on ESPN. I lost 35 pounds, I'm nicer, more agreeable, less stressed.

Got this great relationship. So I called the bartender over, handed him back the Budweiser that I'd ordered. Walked out of that luster pearl bar and I haven't so much as picked up an alcoholic drink since and that was all the way back in 2011. I've been 15 years alcohol free now and now I created this organization and this movement called alcohol-free lifestyle, which helps high achievers to re-explore their relationship to alcohol.

And many of them quit alcohol. They save marriages, they feel better, They look better. they surge in their wealth and their finance. And it's now this movement that's really caught on.

Do you label yourself an alcoholic though? No, never. I never have. Never have and in fact, I don't even believe in the term alcoholic. In fact the terms alcoholic doesn't exist in medical literature.

It's alcohol use disorder. Alcoholic and alcoholism is a made up societal word to kind of like generalize someone who's got a drinking problem. But someone, who has a, drinking, problem can have wide ranging degrees, right?

Like, but when you watch a Hollywood movie or television shows like, Oh, I'm an alcoholic. You see this person waking up in a ditch drinking out of a brown paper bag.

It's all ridiculous because someone can. be drinking too much and not be what society deems an alcoholic. So no, I never considered myself an alcoholic.

I don't believe in the term. People throw it around loosely to incorporate anyone who has a challenge with drinking. And I would just submit most people have an Alcohol Use Disorder, which is temporary and something that we can certainly fix or amend or improve upon as opposed to millions of people mistakenly labeling themselves as an alcoholic, which is an identity which very hard to shift.

I love that you're saying this because I have been thinking about that perspective for a long time. You know, I sometimes listen to Dak Shepard's armchair expert and he's always just focusing on that label.

I'm an alcoholic. And I felt very similarly to you that the label is not accurate because no one can be all just one thing. Always, right? We're not, humans are not consistent like that, first of all.

And secondly, that I've always wondered like, is the label that he's holding onto of what he is keeping him in it. So I have to wonder, you've started this program, and you probably get people that do label themselves alcoholics into the program.

How do you kind of help them de-emphasize that label? I say to them, you are not an alcoholic. That's the first thing I do. And it kind of like what, what are you talking about?

I'm like, You are an alcoholic. You're experiencing an Alcohol Use Disorder, but that's temporary.

Alcohol-Free Lifestyle and Identity Shift

and we're going to shift that. We're gonna rewire your mindset. When people are saying, I am an Alkoholic, that Labeling yourself. That's an identity.

It's so hard to shift that from people. And I see it all the time, especially celebrities like Duck Shepherd. I get it. If that works for someone, okay, great.

if that's effective as it seems to have been for people like Brad Pitt and Robert Downey Jr. and people who call themselves an alcohol. Look, if it works, for you, Who am I to challenge it?

Double down on that. But I would submit it's an ineffective strategy for millions of people around the world, because you're labeling yourself an identity, which is very hard to shift.

You are not an alcoholic, you are you. And it may be true that you'll finding it challenging with alcohol or you found it, challenging in the past. But using neuroscience as we do at our alcohol-free lifestyle organization, some mind rewiring techniques, getting in a like-minded community, focusing on health, Focusing on conscious communication and personal development.

We can get rid of this alcohol use disorder and you can love living alcohol free. And the reason I'm so confident with this is because I see people come to our organization all the time saying, I am an alcoholic and I go, you're not an And then they go through our 90 days stop drinking process and they start to have all of their pre-existing beliefs challenged.

And, then suddenly they're extinguished and then come out the other side going, yes, I love living an alcohol-free lifestyle. So, and really you're referring in many ways to people that have gone to AA because that is a program that absolutely focuses on that label, right?

So you potentially are getting people that are years of following some other philosophy, which is that's really what that is. And then they're experiencing yours and you're saying in 90 days, they are able to release that label?

Yes, I am saying that. In fact, the University of Washington did a scientific study on our 90-day stop drinking process back in 2023. Our 90 day stop-drinking process is called Project 90 and the result of that scientific study was a 98% reduction in drinking amongst the study participants.

Wow. Now that's pretty amazing. By comparison, AA has an actual success rate of about 7%, according to many studies. And yet it's been around as long, I mean, that almost makes it sound like it is a cult, opposed to an actually effective program.

It's effective for 7% of people who attempt it, it's ineffective for 93% percent of who attempted. Now AA as a brand is fantastic because everybody knows what AA stands for, Alcoholics Anonymous.

AA gets referenced in Hollywood movies, on TV shows. People talk about how they went to AA and it saved them. Hollywood celebrities like Brad Pitt, Duck Shepard.

12-step program. Everyone knows this, right? That organization's been around 85 years. So they own the branding. They own, hey, this is the way to do it.

This has worked. And it has work for millions of people. It's worked for million of peoples. If you're listening and it's work to you, keep doing it, but it been ineffective for most people who attempt it In fact, there was a book by Dr.

Lance Dodds out of Harvard University called The Sober Truth. And he reported these actual success rates of AA and he described AA's actual rate as one of the worst in modern medicine.

I have to like, why is it still around then? I feel like most practices, if you find something better, then something

takes over, but this sounds so antiquated and like I said, almost cult-like and that it's not as effective as it could be, given that its been around so long and yet it is still reliable or still relied on by people.

Well, it's still reliable for 7% of people who attempt it. I guess that just doesn't feel like enough. You know what I mean? Like 7%, for somebody who's been around so long, feels petty to me.

That sounds ineffective. It is ineffective and thankfully people are learning about it, but I don't want to demonize AA because its mission is great. Its virtuous, its fantastic, terrific, and it helps millions of And that's why I'm not here to bash AA.

I am just here, to offer the idea that there are more effective solutions out there. Now look, I have a process scientifically proven to reduce drinking by 98% according to the University of Washington.

But I would just invite your listener, do your own research, like go out and research AA's actual success rate. I'm telling you, it is one of the worst success rates in all of medicine.

The only thing worse than AA is actual successful rate is probably willpower and motivation and people trying to white knuckle it. That's the worse success right of all time.

And it doesn't matter how many times you and I have these types of conversations, your listener, there'll be many of your listeners who'll still try to use will power, motivation, white-knuckling it, moderation.

and they will be stuck on a stop-start cycle for years and possibly decades. Yeah. I was going to ask you about willpower. Now, why 90 days for your program?

I assume that's scientifically proven that you need that specific amount of time. Well, there's a lot of studies that suggest 66 or 67 days is how long it takes to break a habit.

However, as it relates to alcohol being so insidious, I can just share anecdotally, I've tested this cause I'd been coaching people for 10 years. 66 days is too short because people start to get this pink cloud effect where they think I got this, a broken end, no problems.

And then they say, Oh, you know what? I'll just have one. I'm just go back and just had one or I have a drink on a special occasion. Well, first of all, drinking is not a Special Occasion.

Every day you choose to be alcohol free is the Special occasion I would submit.

AA Success Rates and the 90-Day Program

So what we've found is also what is horrendously ineffective long-term are these 30-day challenges like dry January and sober October and dry July. They're great at getting millions of people to dip their toe in the water and actually experience what it's like to be alcohol-free.

However, most of the time people are going into it and experiencing it as deprivation because on day 30, what do people do? They celebrate with what? A drink.

And the challenge with that is that all during those 30 days, they're kind of like celebrating their willpower. Oh, I've got, oh, on day 27, three days to go on, day 30. Yeah.

Now I can celebrate with a drink. Well, what is the point of doing those thirty day challenges if you're going to celebrate it with the drink? Because you've just convinced yourself that drinking equals fun and pleasure and not drinking, equals pain and deprivation.

So to answer your question around why 90 days, 30 days is way too short because people are going into it just trying to get to 30. 66, 67 days which is when studies show is, when people effectively do break a habit, doesn't

appear to be effective enough as it relates to an insidious drug like alcohol, which it is.

90 days seems to be the sweet spot where people have had a few plateaus that kind of felt a little bit challenged, but they've been able to get in a like-minded community and feel really empowered and positive.

They lose weight, they feel better, their sleeping better. Their consciously communicating with their kids and their wives and husbands and they get to 90 and now it's like, Now I get to keep going.

You know what? I want to. Keep going, I desire to live an alcohol-free lifestyle as opposed to needing to be sober or needing. Like in AA. So 90 days, this seems to really like a, a terrific sweet spot where people then have shifted their identity from I can't break this stop start habit to I, get, to, be alcohol free.

What do you think about that concept that humans, that part of humanity is that we are going to find addiction somewhere. So let's just say you've founded an alcohol and then you do a program like yours and now you're not doing alcohol, but then do you just swing to something else?

Because typically that does happen, right? Particularly, I've seen it in AA where they go from drinking alcohol to then now smoking cigarettes like fricking chimney, So what do you see in your 10 years?

Like, do find that we, we just default to something excessive? If I've done my job properly, then the excessive thing, which isn't really excessive, but becoming obsessed, let's say with health, fitness, personal development, real human connection.

I can tell you anecdotally, a lot of folks, when they first quit drinking through our process, turned to sugar, chocolate. They crave sugary substances, but then we support them with that by steering them more towards dark chocolate, which is a little healthier for you with great, you know, like 85% dark-chocolate cacao.

We show them how to, instead of eating things like ice cream, we put them onto Greek yogurt, Instead of putting candy and sweets in their desserts, we have them put blueberries, which are very low glycemic index and delicious and raw honey.

So there are ways that we can re-educate or educate people on how they can have sugary sweets and kind of get that dopamine hit from what they were getting from alcohol.

The obsession, I think, and I, think that's an exaggeration for me. It's not really an obsession. But I. Think what I've found people turn to, uh, once they quit alcohol, if they're doing it effectively is.

Focusing on being a professional sleeper, they get an aura ring, track their sleep, start to modify, go for morning hikes on a Saturday, join a gym, understand the difference between Paleo style eating or Keto.

Grass-fed beef as opposed to farm or corn raised beef. They understand the difference between farm raised salmon and wild caught salmon. they understand about good fats, they.

Understand about the crap that a US diet mostly has. And then they become, I wouldn't say obsessed, but I would say like really enthusiastic about throwing themselves into that.

I have not experienced a lot of our clients turning now to cigarettes or to marijuana or ketamine or anything because they've now removed alcohol. But I do acknowledge that many people probably do do that Yeah, it's interesting.

But it sounds like what you're doing is you are infusing your program with functional health as well. It's not just about, hey, let's get you out of the habit of drinking alcohol, but let us actually reframe, reteach you how to live a healthy lifestyle.

Or choose a healthy lifestyle. Yeah. It's all functional health, James. Absolutely. I mean, I always say to people, this

isn't a stop drinking program.

This is just a life change program and we're going to show you how to do it through stopping drinking for 90 days. So people come to us with this challenge of alcohol, but they leave with how How to move, how to sleep well, How have conscious communication, What you do when you're irritated or frustrated, different than what you were doing.

And, you know, it becomes very much about the work that you, James, really supporting people. Good health, good nutrition, great sleep, conscious, communication personal development, growth mindset.

And you do that through a stop drinking container. Then by day 90, you come out the other end, your you're educated on health, fitness, communication, and you feel better.

And then you just rocking and rolling from there. I love that you kind of, uh, articulating that some of these ancestral practices, like your food, sleep, exercise, all these very foundational habits are.

are so much a part of getting better and how you're infusing that in the people that go through your programs. But I'm wondering is there for the person that's listening that hasn't started your program that maybe though is realizing, Hey, I do have a problem.

What is like the first of those foundational habits that you would recommend that they just start focusing on prior to joining a program like yours? Well, look, I would say stop trying to quit drinking and instead focus on what you will do.

Because there's a bundle of nerves in our brain called the reticular activating system and it focuses in on those things that we focus on. So if we're saying quit drinking, I can't drink, and need to quit, we are thinking about alcohol and so it's very easy to then drink alcohol.

Instead, tell your mind what you will do and in this example it is easily only drink soda, water, ice and a piece of lime.

Moderation, Drink Types, and Toxin Claims

When you walk into the bar, say to yourself, I'm going to go up to the Barman, and I'll order a soda water with some cranberry or a splash of pineapple or whatever.

Tell yourself what you will do, right? That mindset shift is powerful. Second thing would be get around a group of like-minded people who also want to love living alcohol-free.

Create some accountability because that camaraderie will generate accountability, but if you're friends and family and colleagues are all glorifying alcohol and have no interest in reducing or quitting alcohol, being in that environment is going to remain very challenging.

So getting into an environment of like-minded community of people who are health conscious, I would try to find some communities who were hiking on a Saturday morning doing group exercise because The fastest way to get a set of six pack abs if you're a man is to hang out with other men who've got six-pack abs.

Yeah, surround yourself. Yeah. I'm just using that as an example, right? Like, but for women get rid of, I am sorry, get out of this wine o'clock culture.

Get out this, hey, it's wine O'Clock. Come on girls, come on ladies, let's get together. Let's meet for cocktails on Sunday morning and have a boozy brunch.

And instead find health conscious communities. So I would definitely say that. More practically, if you did want to get coaching, again, I'm biased, but head over to alcohol-free lifestyle.

We have a podcast, which is called alcohol free lifestyle, Um, you know, I have a book which I wrote called clear. It's a neuroscience based approach to help people to rewire their mindset.

I would submit, listen to the audio book of clear or get, or, get the book, but do something that has your incoming information be all about healthy living.

You know? Keep listening to your podcast. To your listener as well around health, functional health. Good nutrition, health focus on. great sleep habits because all of those things combined are going to help you to reduce your craving.

Just one more thing, I will say this. There was an interesting study that came out that showed that you can reduce you craving for any drug by simply incorporating a daily gratitude practice.

That's fascinating to me. So if you live a life of appreciation instead of expectation, your craving for a drug reduces by up to 30%. That is bananas.

Like that to, me is just fascinating, which is why we have our Project 90 clients during their 90 days, write down 20 things they're grateful for every day, each day of the 90 that they are with us, because that rewires their mindset to live life appreciation.

instead of expectation, which has been scientifically proven to reduce cravings for any drug. I love that. Yeah, as Ben Azzotti says, get more vitamin G gratitude.

That's really, really great. Now, where does moderation fit for you? Does moderation even exist for with alcohol? Because that's one thing that you hear spouted all the time around, food around.

alcohol around anything is people are always like, well, you can have a cheat day or, as long as it's in moderation, so where does that philosophy fit for you?

Moderation is a myth. First of all, why are you saying to yourself, oh, I'll just have a drink on a special occasion. Oh, just drink one weekends. If you're saying that you'll still positioning alcohol as something worthy to be glorified.

You're still looking at attractively packaged poison is something that's fun, desirable, special. It's not, it's piss in a bottle. Its flavored piss and a bottom.

That's all it is. So clinging onto this idea, Oh, just drink on weekends. I'll just, I'm just drinking at a wedding. Or just doing kind of. Yeah. Just invite you to reframe your mindset on that.

Every day you choose not to drink is the gift is this special occasion. Certainly our clients tell us moderation is a myth. And candidly, people have been trying moderation for years and it's a very, very slippery slope.

You start off by saying, I'll just drink on weekends. Then suddenly someone offers you a drink of a Thursday and you go, well, it was close enough. And then all of the sudden it is like, ah, Wednesday I will have a drinking.

It's like Tuesday and then Monday and the next thing you know, you're drinking daily and experiencing all the negative consequences that come with that.

A lot of people do these 30-day challenges like we've referenced before. They then start drinking again on day 30 and they return to the same level of drinking that inspired them to do this 30 day challenges in the first place.

That's a form of moderation. You do these deals with yourself. I'll just have one drink a night that turns in one into one and a half. It turns into two, the slippery slope gets you all of a sudden, a few years go by.

Now you're drinking three. No, you drinking a bottle of night. now it just increases. Then you get into your fifties and sixties, and go, Oh, well, You know, whatever, I might as well just drink more.

And on and on, on it goes over weeks, months, years and decades. So. If you are the type of personality that can realistically have a drink on occasion.

And I'm not saying a special occasion, I just saying have it drink occasion and that quantity of drinking is controllable and it's not compromising your life in any meaningful way.

Okay. Sure. Go ahead. Drink like that. But for most people, for people if you're realistic with yourself, if your honest with. Moderation is a myth. Is there any distinction between what you're drinking, because for example, you know, anthropologists, for examples, say like ancestral alcohol was only about one to 4% alcohol by volume compared to today's spirits are like what 40% or more.

So do you, is there any like, cause I've heard in my circles as well, like oh, this is homemade mead. You know, with raw honey and da da, da and like that makes it better.

And then of course, even things like kombucha have alcohol in them. So, so is, is the, what you're drinking of factor or are we just specifically talking about?

No, no, I'm talking. Drinks that have, you know like wine, beers, liquor, like things that specific amounts of ABV. The two worst alcoholic drinks you can have from a toxins point of view are actually pretty surprising.

Do you want to have a bet, James? Or do you wanna have go at it? Try to figure out what are the two worse alcoholic drink for you from toxins' point-of-view.

Okay. I wanna try to guess before you say, but I probably won't figure it out. Well, my brain, even though everyone's always saying it's so healthy for you or healthier for your, I, uh, My brain.

My brains goes to vodka for some reason as one of them. Um, but you know, actually I'm not enough. I don't drink enough to even know what other things are really out there.

So I. You know margaritas. Sweet drinks, maybe sweet drinks. Would you be surprised to learn that the two worst alcoholic drinks for, you are actually beer and red wine.

Really the, the ones that are the soul, you know, or the highest volume of sales, basically. Beer and wine, toxins, all the toxins from it. It's, uh, it's crazy.

And people will go, what beer and why, and what are you talking about? How the hell can that be true?

Tracking Health, Genetics, and Habit Change

But from a toxins point of view, they're horrendous. The least bad is actually some form of tequila. Because some tequila coming from natural cane can actually be almost, you could argue like in very small amounts could almost be beneficial for you in a way.

Now I'm not talking about drinking lots of tequilla. I am just talking that I could drink a little bit of Tequila. That actually is the least bad because it's the cleanest.

But in terms of toxins, the way that they make beer, pesticides, Red wine, toxins, same thing, like the worst for you. Did you know also that you can take a strand of hair from someone who's had a drink and seven days later put that hair under a microscope and you see whether they drink or not?

That's how long the toxins stick around in the body. Crazy, isn't it? Ridiculous. So like you said I have to imagine like having these things like or rings having something to measure how these Things affect us has helped this this younger generation go.

Oh, I don't even need to go that route I Mean because we didn't have that data before right? Not even just the

younger Generation, but the older generation I've got a client or called Evan Melcher and he won't mind me referencing his name, but he came to us, I think four years ago and had been tracking his sleep as a drinker for one year.

And then he was broken, he any anxiety medication, he was on sleep medication. He was an acid reflux, high blood pressure medication he had a young son, had marital strain and he'd been pretty good at tracking his heart rate variability and his sleep for a year as a drinker.

We helped him rewire his mindset, helped them stop drinking, and he continued to track his heart rate and his sleep over the next year that he became a one-year alcohol-free man.

And he estimated that saved five million heartbeats in the year he was alcohol free. His heartrate as a drinker was kind of elevated, you know, because of the pressure and strain that was putting his hearts under as drinkers.

He's heart was going something like this. And then as a non-drinker, it came back to more natural levels like, you know, that might be an exaggeration slightly, but let's just like five million heartbeats.

Like he absolutely tracked through, through his aura. Five million heartbeat a year. Now he's been four years alcohol-free as we're recording this. So that's what, 20 million heartbeats he saved over four year.

He's lost 25 pounds. His marriage has been saved. Is present with his kid. I mean, he is really loving life here. Well, I'll show you a photo as well of a before and after of Evan.

And I know that your listener may not be able to see this, but there's a Before and After photo I want to show. Uh, here it is here. Look at the, the difference in Evan as a drinker to a non-drinker.

Oh yeah. He's got in, in the drinking, clearly the Drinking Society is pasty looking very, very got a lot of inflammation and inflammation going on. Yeah.

And he looks so much brighter and, uh, thinner, healthier in the other photo. Yeah, I know, like Eric Hinman, who's been on our podcast, he talked about the difference in his twenties between drinking and then getting fully off of it.

It is incredible. That's his resting heart rate. You can see how it's going down over time as a non-drinker. And then you can say here how his sleep scores have been improving as non drinker.

Wow. Amazing, huh? There's people though that talk about like the disposition DNA wise for, you know, gene wise, for alcoholism. Have you found that to be, have you debunked that?

Is there any truth to that. There are some studies that suggest that if a family member like a father or a mother or grandparent or uncle had an alcohol use disorder, Now note, I'm not saying was an alcoholic because alcoholic doesn't exist.

That term doesn' exist in modern medicine. But there is evidence to suggest that if you had a family member who had an alcohol use disorder, you have up to a 50% increased rate of also experiencing an.

Okay. So that is, that has been established. However, with what we now understand about epigenetics, we can actually control or eliminate an alcohol use disorder through lifestyle and environment and community.

So for example, if you take someone and you put them in a engaged group of healthy people, you get them walking 10,000 steps a day. You get the focused on sleep.

you Get them around a really positive mindset, a group people. We can change the expression of our genes. Now, we can't change our genetic code. That is set for life.

But we could change those genes through what we now understand with epigenetics, which can destroy an alcohol

use disorder. Yeah. So it's pretty amazing and pretty exciting that we can do that now.

Just because you have a predisposition to an alcohol use disorder doesn't mean that that is set in stone. Right. That's great. It is interesting though.

Well, first of all, I love that the guests come on here from so many different walks of life from so many different angles. And yet it all tends to boil back down to those very foundational ancestral practices that we talk about all the time.

Exercise, sleep, connection, stress levels, and basically being outside. All these very basic foundational health practices, they continually come up in discussions organically.

and they tend to be the solutions. Is there anything that you would add to what the person listening or watching could, should or could be thinking about to break free of habits and certain cycles that are not contributing to their health?

I had one of the world's leading addiction experts come and talk to our clients about two months ago. His name's Professor David Bellin from Cambridge University.

And we had him on a Zoom call. There were about 90 of our clients all there asking him questions and he was answering them. And one of my clients asked him a question.

What are the two best supplements that someone can take to overcome an alcohol use disorder or to over come any addiction? And his answer was profound.

He said two things, exercise and human connection. And I thought, wow, that seems too simple. And, I challenged him exercise and human connection. What are you talking about?

He said, exercise has been shown in just to release endorphins, oxytocin, serotonin makes us feel better. We get our heart rate going. we're doing breath work.

It's like meditation. Our metabolism is going helps us sleep better, helps this feel. And by feeling better, we get into a much more powerful mindset, which gives us the foundation to be able to make big habit changes.

And then the other thing was real human connection. Real human connections. The longest running study of all time is out of Harvard University. It went for about 90 years and they tracked men from the 1920s or 30s.

I think they're almost all dead now. They track these people over a lifetime. And what they found was that the biggest contributor to happiness was the quality of their relationships, real human connection.

So to make any habit change, it's not reading another book, going to YouTube video and trying to get a new secret formula and learning something new. What's the latest supplement and what's latest medical device?

You can really just bring it back to move your body and get exercising because it makes you feel good. And that will inspire you to change and that'll make change easier and get around a like-minded group of people and focus on the quality of your relationships because that supportive community likewise is going to create accountability for habit change.

Exercise, Connection, and Building New Habits

Really powerful themes. And like I said, they continually come up on this podcast. Before we go though, I do want to bring up what's fascinating to me about these younger generations is to your point, many of them are not drinking.

But what they're also doing though is they are isolating, at least that's what we're told, right? They're isolating. They

are on social media. There not interacting as much.

So is there a high potential for fallout because they aren't connecting the way that we are talking about. If anything, they isolating there, keeping their distance from people in person, but they doing it virtually.

And then is that setting them up for failure? Should they ever get a taste for a drug or alcohol, you know, something like alcohol? You know where I'm going with this?

Yeah, it's very possible. I do acknowledge that it is a problem that people are isolating a lot more, which is why you do great work and I. Great work.

And we need to get people out there really identifying that real human connection, not over a screen. Not on a Zoom call or a WhatsApp or on social media DMs, but real in-person human connection is the most profound way that people can positively impact their life.

So yeah, I can understand that. People isolate. I mean, we saw an example of that in the pandemic. We were all isolated and alcohol-related deaths increased 25% as a result of the Pandemic because of isolation.

They drank more. And the consequence of, that was still experiencing five years later. So it is a real concern. Um, however, the ones who are participating have never felt better apparently.

And, you know, there's lots of things back in my native country of Australia on Bondi beach. They have these morning sunrise parties now where they have a DJ come out and play and gone are the days where people would stay out all night and get drunk and do drugs and then come and go and pass out on the.

On the beach and watch the sunrise, and then have to sleep all day recovering from a drug and alcohol fueled evening. And they're being replaced now with people waking up at four 30 in the morning and going down to Bondi beach and welcoming the sun, dancing, partying, having fun, listening to a DJ, but no drugs, no alcohol, know nothing, just community.

Then after the sons come up, they all go for a walk or a hike or swim. It's great mating strategy. People used to go and like mate at nightclubs, meet people.

Now they're like meeting on the beach at sunrise. It's crazy. Yeah, more of that. And having concerts and things earlier rather than everything so late.

I mean, it would be more and more powerful as we start to see that, see more. matinee times for these typical, uh, you know events that we wait for in the evening that that as you said earlier like kind of You associate with oh, i'm gonna have a drink or i'M going to do this at that event but if they're they are more during the day we would probably uh Be more mindful of our health and our well-being so we can go get a good night's sleep Well james, it's been uh It's been a real pleasure hearing your thoughts on this.

I'm continually amazed at how the conversation does tend to come back to those foundational ancestral human practices. And I love that you organically shared that.

So can you share again how people can find your program and then also connect with you? Thank you, James. AlcoholFreeLifestyle.com is our website. If you want to dig into Project 90, AlcoholfreeLIFESTYLE. COM slash PROJECT 90. My book, CLEAR, a neuroscience-based approach to break free from alcohol without AA rehab or willpower is available on Amazon.

You can get the audio book. It's eight hours in duration listening to my incredible Australian accent, or four hours if you put me on double speed, as most people probably will.

But it is author narrated. And then my Instagram account is probably my most engaged social media and it's just my name at James Swanick. I do a lot of videos there about helping people rewire their mindset around alcohol.

Then our podcast is Alcohol-Free Lifestyle. You can find it on Spotify or Apple podcasts. Thank you. One last question I realized, for the person that's And maybe I already know this answer, but for the person that's not aware that the alcohol or these lifestyle choices are affecting them, how does one bring awareness to them?

Or is it simply like, hey, if you're drinking right now and you are doing it more than once a week or something, or more than once every two weeks, then you just stop and you will start to see changes.

Like how, because I find it's contrast that really helps someone with change. So how does the person that's not realizing that it is an issue find change?

Experiment. Run an experiment. 14 days, 21 days 30 days if you've never done that long of going alcohol free. Test it yourself. See what happens. What will probably happen is this.

You will lose weight, you will sleep better, You'll be less irritable, less stressed, and less anxious. You'd be calmer, more generous, happier. you won't understand why you're happier, they'll just go, oh, I just feel a bit nicer.

Your husband or your wife will say to you, i'm proud of you.

Closing Thoughts and Stat Correction

your kids will just say, Oh, let's go and play. If they're young kids or you adult kids, we'll start phoning you and wanting to have a conversation with you the definition of success is your adult children literally wanting spend time with.

And that will happen and will be a consequence of you being calmer and clearer and nicer and more agreeable from not drinking alcohol because alcohol makes us stressed and anxious and sleep poorly.

So just experiment, run an experiment. And once your eyes open, you can't close them again because you will feel it. It doesn't matter how much evidence I supply you with on a podcast like this.

I'll give you the data, give me the stats. in one ear out the other for most listeners. They go, oh, that was an interesting podcast. Wow. That was fascinating.

And then pour yourself a drink. But if you just reduce at the very least or stop, give yourself that gift of an experiment like I did all the way back in 2010, I thought it was going to be 30 days.

I'm 15 years alcohol-free. You will experience profound contrast. Your experience health, wealth, love, and happiness, And you will love living an alcohol free lifestyle.

Love it. Thank you, James. And thank you again for sharing this wisdom to for going on this path for helping so many people and for being a model of what's possible.

Really. It's it's we need more people doing the work that you're doing in all facets of life. So thank Make sure to share to tell us how it's going to like follow anything that will communicate to us that you are participating and enjoying what you're listening or watching.

Thank you again and everyone please stay curious. Hey friends, thanks for sticking around. In this episode, our guest James Swanwick referenced a statistic claiming Alcoholics Anonymous has a 7% success rate compared to 98% for his 90-day program.

Now while James clearly states that he is not bashing AA and that it works really well for people and has helped countless lives, no implications towards James.

He's a very upstanding person. I just want to clarify the numbers because you probably heard how shocked I was and I thought why does this even exist if it's only 7% that just seems so low.

It caused me to want dig a little deeper into the stats. The issue is really in the comparison. AA is a long term open ended program. while most 90-day programs report short-term success as completion or sobriety at discharge.

It's not really about sustained recovery, even though James has witnessed sustained recover. These stats, though, are measuring very different outcomes.

So in reality, AA, they do not publish official success rates, but research shows 20% to 30% of members achieve long- term sobiety, and 50%-70% percent of those who stay actively engaged maintain recovery.

And that's sourced from Stanford Med Recovery Research Institute and the NIH. So the takeaway is context matters. Without it, stats can be misleading.

Even well-intentioned comments can unintentionally shape unfair conclusions. Thank you so much for sticking with us through the end of the episode. Thank you so much for joining me on Everyday Ancestral.

If you enjoyed this episode, hit subscribe so you don't miss the next one. You can find the show notes, links and resources mentioned at eatpluck.com.

That's E-A-T-P-L-U-C-K dot com. And hey, if you know someone who gets something out of this, share it with them too. Stay curious, live well, and keep it ancestral.