What is anxiety?

What anxiety is, how it shows up and when it becomes a problem.

Anxiety is the body and mind getting ready to deal with a threat. It is normal and everybody has it. It sharpens attention before an exam and makes you jump back from a speeding car.

It becomes a problem when the alarm goes off too often, too loudly, or about things that are not really dangerous, and when it starts to get in the way of your life.

The three parts of anxiety

Thoughts
"What if something goes wrong?" The mind scans for danger and jumps to worst cases.

Body
Racing heart, tight chest, churning stomach, tense muscles, shaky, hot, dizzy.

Behaviour
Avoiding, escaping, checking, seeking reassurance, over-preparing.

Things worth knowing

- **Anxiety is not dangerous.** It is uncomfortable, sometimes very, but the sensations are your body doing its job. They cannot harm you and they always pass.
- **It works like an over-sensitive smoke alarm.** An alarm that goes off when you make toast is annoying, but it is not broken. The aim is to make it less sensitive.
- **Avoidance keeps it going.** The more you stay away from what you fear, the more dangerous it seems.
- **It is very common.** Around one person in four has a significant problem with anxiety at some point.

When to get support

- [ ] It is there most days and hard to switch off
- [ ] It stops you doing things you want or need to do
- [ ] You are relying on alcohol, avoidance or constant reassurance to get by
- [ ] It is affecting your sleep, work or relationships

Treatment
Anxiety responds well to therapy. The alarm does not disappear, but you learn what sets it off, how to stop making it worse, and how to carry on with what matters when it goes off.

My notes and questions

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