

Anxiety Pocket Guide

*Understanding what anxiety is doing in your body and
your mind, and what you can do about it.*



What anxiety is

Anxiety is not a flaw in you. It is an alarm system, and it is working exactly as it was built to work.

Think about the smoke detector in your house. It is not there to detect fire. It is there to detect smoke, long before anything is burning properly, so that you have time to act. That early warning is the whole point of it.



It also means the thing goes off when you burn toast.

Your brain has a detector like this, and it is set to be sensitive on purpose. It does not wait until something is genuinely dangerous. It reacts to the first hint that something might go wrong, because reacting early is what kept our ancestors alive. Better to jump at a hundred sticks than to miss one snake.

So when your brain picks up smoke, whether that is a crowded room, a difficult conversation, an email, or just a thought about next month, it sets off the alarm. Adrenaline goes through you in seconds. Your heart speeds up, your breathing changes, your muscles tighten, your stomach drops.

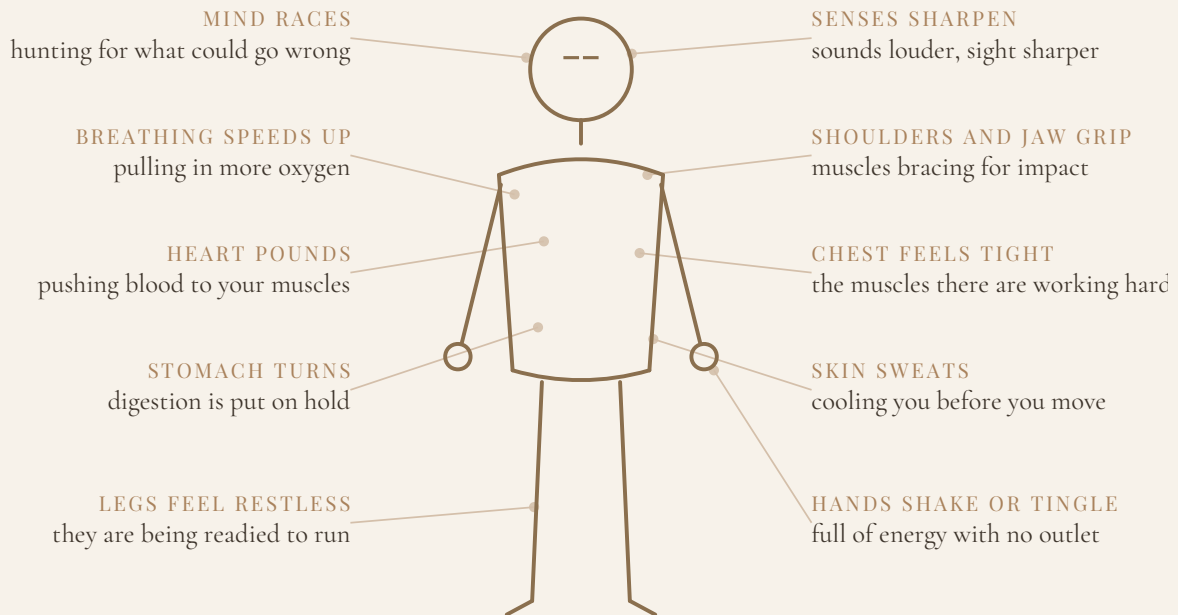
Those symptoms are the alarm, not the fire. They are loud and they are horrible, and they are also just your body preparing you for something physical at a moment when nothing physical is required.

A sensitive detector is not a broken detector. If yours goes off easily, it usually means it has had good reason to be sensitive at some point. Stress, exhaustion, a lot going on, or difficult experiences earlier in life will all turn the sensitivity up.

This changes what you are dealing with. When the alarm goes off, you do not have to run out of the house. You can learn to check the kitchen first. Most of the time you will find toast.

What the alarm does to your body

Every symptom below has a job. None of them is a sign that something is wrong with you.



THE SMOKE, NOT THE FIRE

All of this is designed for something physical. It is brilliant if you need to fight or run. It is simply the wrong set of tools for a meeting, an email or a thought at two in the morning. Nothing has gone wrong. The alarm has just picked up toast.

How does it show up in you?

Anxiety looks different in everybody. Tick whatever you recognise in yourself. There is no score at the end. The point is to see your own pattern clearly, and to know it by name the next time it shows up.

In your body

- ☐ Heart racing or pounding
- ☐ Tight or heavy chest
- ☐ Fast, shallow breathing
- ☐ Tension in shoulders, neck or jaw
- ☐ Stomach churning or nausea
- ☐ Dizzy or lightheaded
- ☐ Sweating or hot flushes
- ☐ Shaking hands or legs
- ☐ Dry mouth
- ☐ Headaches
- ☐ Tired but wired
- ☐ Trouble falling or staying asleep

In your thoughts

- ☐ Endless what if questions
- ☐ Expecting the worst outcome
- ☐ Replaying conversations afterwards
- ☐ Mind going blank under pressure
- ☐ Hard to concentrate or finish things
- ☐ Needing to be certain before acting
- ☐ Feeling like you might lose control
- ☐ Racing thoughts at night
- ☐ Being harsh with yourself

In your feelings

- ☐ On edge or unable to settle
- ☐ A sense of dread with no clear cause
- ☐ Irritable with people close to you
- ☐ Overwhelmed by small tasks
- ☐ Detached, foggy or far away
- ☐ Embarrassed about feeling this way
- ☐ Impatient and rushed

In what you do

- ☐ Avoiding places, people or tasks
- ☐ Cancelling at the last minute
- ☐ Asking others for reassurance
- ☐ Checking things again and again
- ☐ Over preparing for small events
- ☐ Putting things off
- ☐ Staying quiet in a group
- ☐ Keeping constantly busy
- ☐ Scrolling to numb the feeling
- ☐ Drinking, eating or smoking more

Now circle the three that trouble you most. Those are your early warning signs, and catching them early is what gives you a chance to act before the wave gets big.

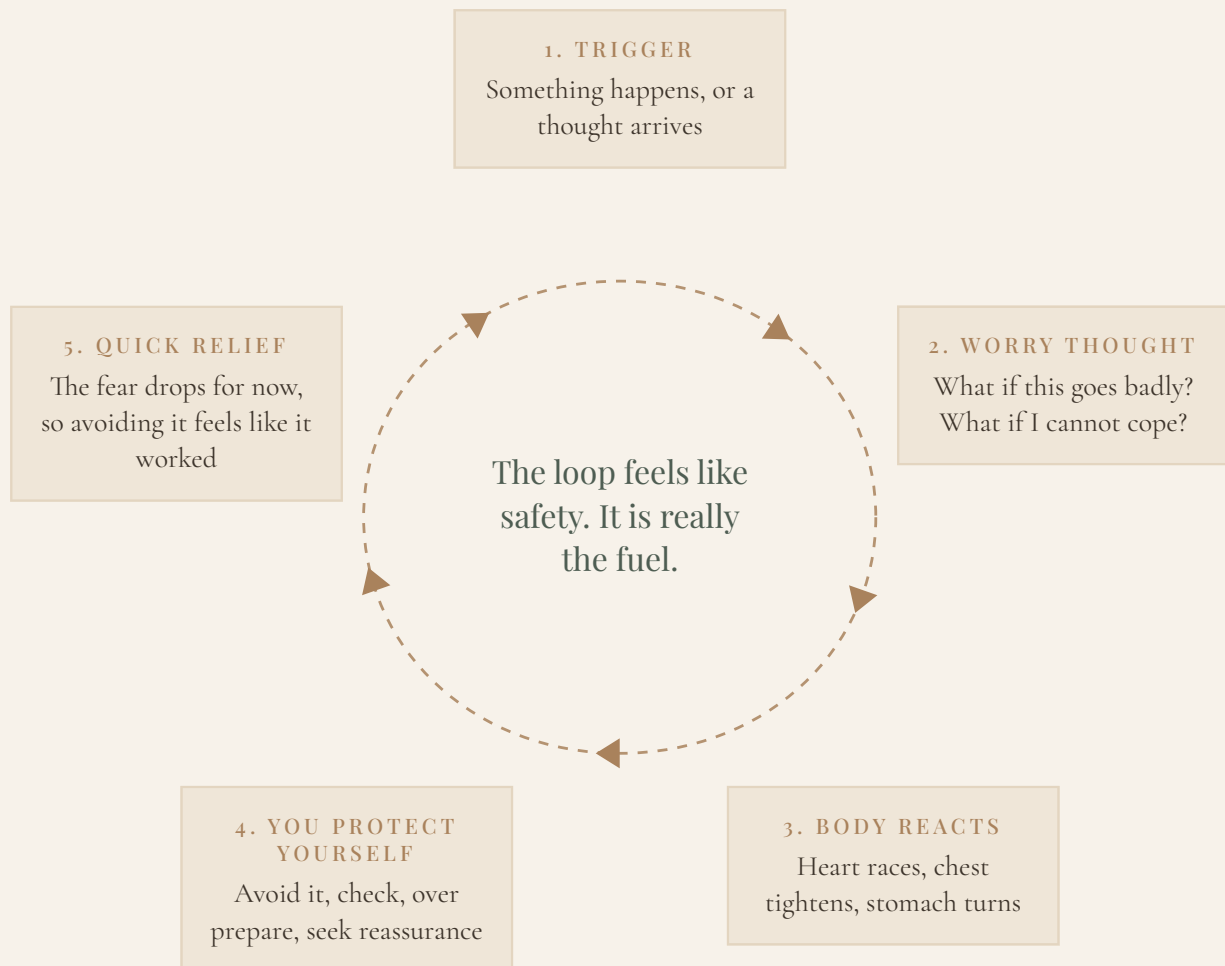
NOT SURE WHAT APPLIES TO YOU

It is not always obvious which of these belong to anxiety and which belong to something else, and that is a difficult thing to sort out on your own. If you would like to talk it through, we can work it out together.

[Book a free 20 minute call](#)

The worry loop

Anxiety keeps itself alive in a circle. Each part feeds the next, and the relief you get at the end is exactly what brings you back to the start.



Step five is the hook. Every time you avoid something, your brain records it as proof that there really was danger and that you only just escaped it. The fear grows a little. Next time the alarm is louder.

Two ways into the loop

You cannot argue a racing heart into calming down, and you cannot breathe away a thought that you believe is true. So you work on both, from two directions.

DOOR ONE

The thoughts

You question the prediction instead of obeying it. This lowers how threatening the situation feels, so the alarm has less reason to fire.

DOOR TWO

The body

You settle the physical response directly. A calmer body sends a signal back up to the brain that the danger has passed.

Working with the thoughts

Anxious thoughts are predictions, not facts. They arrive with such force and such certainty that questioning them feels almost rude. But a thought is something your mind produced, and you are allowed to check its work.

When a worry shows up, catch the actual sentence first. Write it down if you can. Then ask yourself five questions.

- 01 What is the evidence that this is true? And what is the evidence against it?
- 02 What would I say to a friend who told me they were thinking this?
- 03 What is the most likely thing to happen, rather than the worst thing?
- 04 If the worst did happen, how would I actually handle it?
- 05 Will this still matter in three years? What about in five?

You are not trying to talk yourself into thinking everything is wonderful. You are looking for something more accurate and more fair than the first thought that arrived.

What this looks like in practice

THE THOUGHT

"I am going to freeze in the meeting tomorrow and everyone will see that I do not know what I am doing."

EVIDENCE FOR

I lost my thread once in a presentation last year and it was uncomfortable.

EVIDENCE AGAINST

I have spoken in maybe forty meetings since then and it did not happen again. I know this material better than anyone else in the room. Nobody mentioned the presentation afterwards. When a colleague stumbles I think nothing of it.

MORE BALANCED

I will probably be nervous for the first few minutes and then settle, the way I usually do. If I lose my place I can pause and look at my notes. That is allowed.

THE THOUGHT

"My chest feels tight. Something is seriously wrong with my heart."

EVIDENCE FOR

My chest genuinely feels tight and it frightens me.

EVIDENCE AGAINST

This has happened many times over two years and nothing has ever come of it. It always passes within twenty minutes. It started right after I read that email. It eases when I go for a walk, which is not how a heart problem behaves.

MORE BALANCED

This is my body flooded with adrenaline, and it is horrible, but it has never once been dangerous. It will pass, the way it always does.

If you notice the same thought coming back week after week, it is usually pointing at something underneath that is worth bringing into a session.

Your turn

Pick one worry that has been circling this week and take it through the four steps. Writing it out matters more than you would think, because a thought on paper is far easier to examine than one in your head.

THE THOUGHT, WORD FOR WORD

EVIDENCE THAT IT IS TRUE

EVIDENCE THAT IT IS NOT, OR NOT ENTIRELY

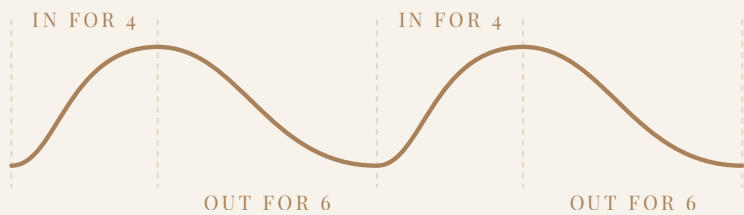
WHAT I WOULD SAY TO A FRIEND

A MORE BALANCED WAY TO SAY IT

Settling the body

Breathe out longer than you breathe in

When you are anxious you take in more air than you let out, and that keeps the alarm running. Lengthening the out breath does the opposite. It switches on the part of your nervous system whose whole job is to calm you down, and your heart rate follows within a minute or two. This is a physical lever, not a trick of the mind, and it works whether or not you believe in it.



HOW TO DO IT

- Sit with both feet on the floor and one hand on your stomach.
- Breathe in through your nose for a count of four. Your stomach should move out, not your shoulders up.
- Breathe out slowly through your mouth for a count of six, as if through a straw.
- Ten rounds, roughly two minutes.
- If four and six feel like a strain, use three and five. What matters is that the out breath is the longer one.

WHEN TO USE IT

- At the first signs, not at the peak. It is much easier to catch a wave early.
- Before something you have been dreading.
- At night, when your mind will not slow down.
- And for two minutes a day when you are calm, so your body already knows the way.

TWO MINUTES A DAY THIS WEEK

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun

Feeling slightly odd or overly aware of your breathing at first is normal, and it passes. This will not make anxiety vanish either. It takes the edge off enough that you can stay where you are instead of leaving, and staying is what breaks the loop.

Three important things I want you to remember

- 01 **It is smoke, not fire.** The symptoms are the alarm going off, not proof that something terrible is happening.
 - 02 **Question the thought before you obey it.** Anxious thoughts are predictions, not facts.
 - 03 **Try not to avoid it.** Every time you avoid something you teach your brain that it really was dangerous, and that is what keeps the worry loop turning.
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IF YOU WANT A HAND WITH IT

Plenty of people bring their anxiety down a long way using exactly what is in this guide. Others find it keeps coming back however carefully they work at it, and that is not a failure of effort. Anxiety that has been around for years usually has roots that are difficult to see from the inside.

That is the part I help with. If you would like to talk about what is going on for you and whether therapy would make a difference, you are welcome to book a call. There is no obligation in that first conversation. It is simply a chance to be heard properly and to work out what would help.

[Book your free 20 minute call](#)

Pick a time that suits you and we will take it from there.