Am I worried for no reason? Am I too anxious and is this normal?

We all know the feeling. Before an exam, a big presentation, even a first date: your heart beats faster, you're thirstier than usual, and the butterflies in your stomach won't settle down. Sometimes these sensations are great — after all, nervousness and excitement can be hard to tell apart — but it's when worry and anxiety begin to take over your life that you may need to pay closer attention, and even seek help.

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a healthy and necessary emotional response to stressful situations. It is widely defined, and can include nervousness, worry, and apprehension. It's normal to have these feelings, especially before a big, important event. It's the body's way of preparing: hormones such as adrenaline are released, which speeds up the pulse and shortens the breath. Though they may be uncomfortable, anxiety can actually help you perform better! That's why actors and athletes often say they like the nerves they get — they provide energy and alertness to help them do a good job.

In its most extreme form anxiety can become full blown panic and even terror. In our ancestors' times this was the fight-or-flight response that protected them from predators. But if you're not under any immediate bodily threat, feelings of panic may be a sign that you're experiencing more anxiety than you need to be.

When is anxiety too much?

Here are some signs that you may be suffering from more than a manageable amount of anxiety:

- Avoiding places, situations or tasks that you associate with fear
- Difficulty concentrating due to worries and preoccupations
- Feelings of panic that come on suddenly and out of the blue
- Repeatedly checking small details beyond what is necessary

If one or more of these behaviours sound familiar, you might consider seeking help. Left ignored, these feelings will only get worse, and can even begin to rule your life. The good news is, anxiety is extremely common, and easily treatable. Talk to a counsellor, and take the first step to feeling relaxed and confident!