Start your day with good quality sleep

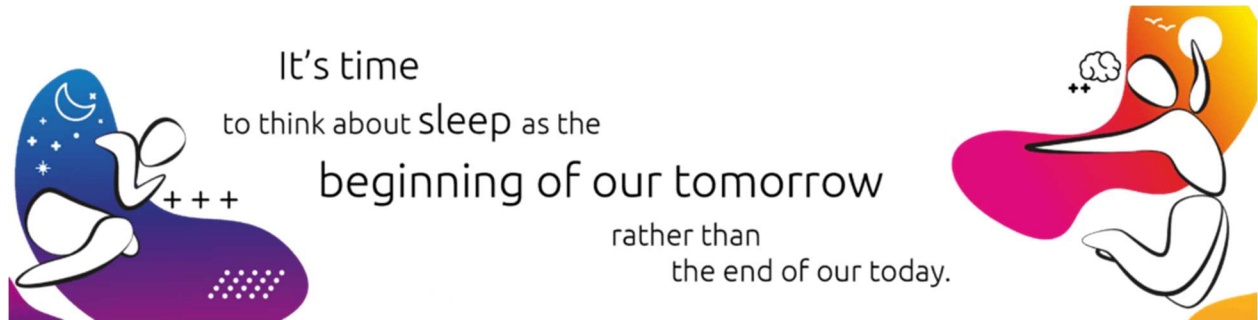It's time to think about **sleep** as the **beginning of our tomorrow** rather than the end of our today.

How disturbed nights can disrupt our daily life

As humans, we spend approximately a third of our lives asleep, but a lack of good quality sleep can negatively affect our daily lives and long-term health in many significant ways, such as:

- Limiting our ability to make decisions and halting our attention span
- Affecting our general wellbeing and ability to work productively
- Increasing our risk of developing conditions like heart disease, stroke, and diabetes
- Increase risk of cognitive impairment such as dementia and Alzheimer's disease

Sleep is one of the three key pillars of health, alongside healthy diet, and exercise, and is foundational to our physical, mental, and social well-being. People living with insomnia are awake when everyone else is asleep and exhausted when the rest of the world is energetic and active. The lack of sleep, or poor-quality sleep can make the activities of the following day more challenging as it could reduce reaction time, alertness, ability to solve problems or remember things.
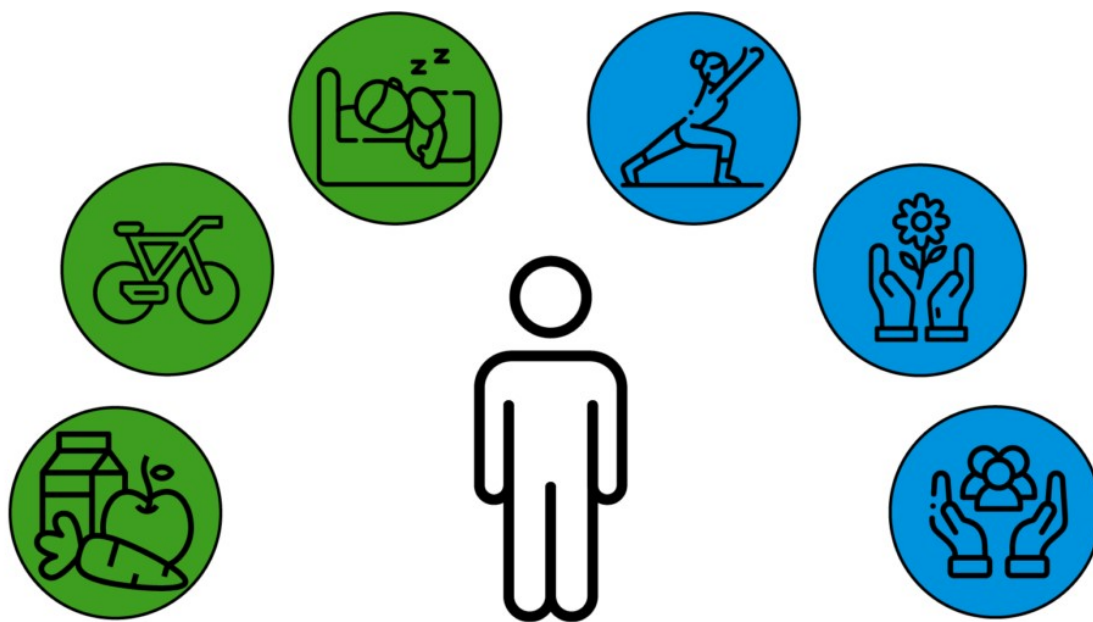
Healthy diet, exercise, and sleep are the foundation to our physical, mental, and social well-being

What does good quality sleep look like?

When it comes to measuring how well we sleep, it is common to focus on the number of hours spent asleep, but the quality of our sleep and the impact that our sleep has on how we both feel and function the next day are just as important. A lack of good quality sleep affects our ability to make decisions and limits our attention span, impacting both our professional and personal lives.
The next time you consider if you had a good night's sleep, it's worth asking yourself:

- How restorative did my sleep feel?
- Do I feel refreshed from my sleep?
- Do I feel rested and ready to handle the challenges of life until my next sleep?

While these measures offer good general guidance, it is also important to remember that "good quality sleep" varies from person to person. However, we all need sleep and scientists think that sleep is necessary for the brain to cleanse itself, consolidate memory, and is a physiological necessity equivalent to eating and drinking.

What causes disturbed sleep?

The lack of good quality sleep could be attributed to insomnia, the most common sleep-wake disorder. There are different categories of insomnia as the condition can be something that happens occasionally, during certain periods of time, or persistently. When it is persistent, it is known as chronic insomnia.

The latest scientific research has shown that healthy wake and sleep states are regulated by separate signaling systems in the brain. Chronic insomnia is believed to be the result of overactive wake signaling in the brain, also called 'hyperarousal'. Basically, think of this as a light switch – when the switch is turned on, your brain is being told to stay "active" and when the switch is off, your brain knows it can "rest." If you are unable to flip the switch to off, your brain stays active even when you are tired and trying to sleep.

What is chronic insomnia?

Chronic insomnia affects between 6-10% of adult population worldwide. According to the American Psychiatric Association, here are some questions to ask yourself to start understanding if you may suffer from chronic insomnia:

1. Do you experience one or more of the following symptoms?
   - Difficulties falling asleep?
   - Difficulties staying asleep (waking up frequently or can't fall asleep after waking up in the middle of the night)?
   - Waking up before the alarm or in the early mornings and can't fall back to sleep again?
2. If yes, do you experience one or more of these symptoms at least 3 nights a week?
3. If yes, have your symptoms lasted for at least 3 months?

If the above is true, you may want to visit a healthcare professional to see if you are suffering from chronic insomnia or another sleep disorder. Chronic insomnia is very different from a short-term period of poor sleep. It is a serious medical condition that can take its toll on an individual's physical and mental health.

People suffering from chronic insomnia may notice an increase in fatigue, reduced energy levels, mood changes, and cognitive difficulties after multiple nights of poor sleep. They are also twice as likely to develop depression compared to people with normal sleep patterns. In the long term, chronic insomnia is associated with lots of additional health complications, such as heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. Chronic insomnia also disrupts people's professional lives, leading them to be absent from work twice as much as people without the condition.

We need sleep to be able to function properly throughout the day, but, despite this, common sleep disorders like chronic insomnia are some of the most neglected medical conditions.

Following certain routines of good sleep hygiene can restore chronically disrupted sleep patterns and fight insomnia. Practice these eight tips and record your results.

1. Maintain a regular sleeping and waking schedule.
2. Avoid afternoon snoozes.
3. Work out earlier in the morning and not at night.
4. Refrain from drinking alcohol or caffeine at night.
5. Avoid heavy or spicy meals before you go to sleep.
6. Make time for relaxing before bed.
7. Assess your bedroom settings to optimize the environment for sleep.
8. Speak with medical provider to determine if certain medications are the cause.

Everyone deserves a good quality night's sleep, not only because your brain needs it, but because the lack of sleep can prove challenging for you during the day. It's time to change the way we look at sleep. It's not something that happens at the end of the day… Start your tomorrow with a good quality sleep.

Speak to your physician if you struggle with insomnia and together you can find a solution that will help you sleep well.