Sleep Awareness Week
5 August - 11 August 2019

Why is sleep important?
Sleep is an important biological function essential for life. While we are asleep, many important functions are taking place:
• Physical recovery and repair
• Support brain development
• Support cardiac function
• Support metabolism
• Support learning
• Improving memory
• Improving mood

Without adequate sleep, we are more likely to have issues with our concentration, thinking, alertness, memory, mood and reaction times. All of those problems make it harder to perform our daily tasks, increase fatigue and therefore increase the risk of mistakes and accidents. Furthermore, regular lack of sleep can contribute to long-term health conditions including obesity, cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and poor mental health.

So, how much sleep do we need?
The amount of sleep we need varies from person to person and varies for each age group and activity level.
Most healthy adults need between 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night to function at their best. Children and teens need even more sleep. Babies need at least 14 to 17 hours, toddlers 11 to 14 hours, school aged children 9 to 11 hours and teenagers at least 8 to 10 hours. Older people aged over 65, need between 6 to 8 hours.

If we don’t get enough adequate sleep, fatigue can set in. This is dangerous at all levels of our day to day functioning, but it is particularly dangerous at an occupational level. Fatigue increases the chance of making mistakes at work and is therefore, a workplace health and safety risk. It is important to not only know the signs and symptoms of fatigue in yourself but also for your co-workers.

General tips for having healthy sleep hygiene:
• Go to bed and wake up at the same time
• Avoid caffeine consumption
• Expose yourself to bright light in the morning (helps reset your biological clock)
• Make sure your bedroom is conductive to sleep - it should be dark, quiet, comfortable and cool
• Sleep on a comfortable mattress and pillow
• Don’t go to be feeling hungry, but also don’t eat a big meal right before bed
• Develop a relaxing bedtime routine
• Reserve your bedroom for sleep and sex only
• Exercise regularly during the day
• Don’t have your pets in bed with you

What about naps?
Naps may improve alertness and help you to feel more energised and happier. Naps can prepare you for a future time when you may not get as much sleep. Furthermore, a nap may help if you are sleepy but you need to keep going, such as when you are driving.

Naps should only last for 15-30 minutes. If you nap for too long, you will start to enter into a deep sleep cycle, making you feel more drained and disorientated when you wake up. Additionally, a long nap late in the day can make it difficult to sleep at night.

The most important thing to remember is that a nap cannot replace a good quality sleep at night.