Foundational to good health is sleep. The pillars of good health which consist of a nutritious diet, exercise and good mental health rest on this foundation. Poor sleep makes these pillars much harder to achieve. The majority of people in the world need at least 7 hours of sleep and up to 9.  Less than 6 hours of sleep results in a number of of detrmental processes that contribute to chronic disease and mental illness.

These processes include but are not limited to;

* The brain is not washed clean of the metabolic waste built up from processes that occurred during the day leading to a build-up of waste proteins in the brain.
* Memories are not transferred from short term memory storage to long term storage leading to memory, concentration and focusing problems.
* Appetite hormones become disrupted including an increase in ghrelin which is an appetite stimulant leading up to eat more and over time gain weight. Obesity is a risk factor for chronic disease including cancer. Leptin the appetite suppressant hormone is lower in sleep deprivation.
* Our immune system works at its peak during deep sleep, sleep deficiency leads to immunodeficiency and a greater risk of precancerous cells taking holding as an immune system that is working well will remove these cells (as well as infected cells).
* Sleep deficiency causes a stress like response in our bodies which sets up chronic inflammation. Normally acute inflammation is responsible for healing damaged tissue, releasing chemical messengers that increase blood vessels and nutrient supply to an area. In chronic inflammation these changes stimulate cancer growth, helping feed it and stimulating it to grow blood vessels by which it can grow even more and even break off and spread to other parts of the body.
* Sleep deprivation has a negative impact on our mental health causing decreased motivation, increased negative and even suicidal thoughts. This make it hard to stick to a healthy diet and exercise program.

Achieving a good night sleep is reward for good choices made throughout the day. Some self-discipline is required but the rewards are second to none. Here are some of the things you can do to improve your chances of getting a good night’s sleep;

* You need a routine. Same time to bed at night (that time is when you start feeling sleepy), don’t fall asleep on the chair but go to bed and fall asleep in bed. This way you will learn to associate falling asleep with your bed. Don’t use your bed for anything but sleep and sex, again this increases the association you make with falling asleep. Get up at the same time every morning (that time when you naturally start to wake up) don’t stay in bed and fall back to sleep. When you get up, open your curtains and gets some natural light as this helps set your biological clock and you benefit at the end of the day.
* Fast (go without food) for 12 hours over night. If you go to bed at 10 then stop eating at about 8, don’t eat again till 8 in the morning. This increases the health impact of your sleep and further strengthens your biological clock.
* Eat a nutritious diet during the day and try and eat most of your meals with friends and family. Try not to snack too much. Cut down on sugar, especially sugary drinks.
* Avoid caffeine after midday. Caffeine has a long half life of 6 hours so its stimulating effects hang around for a long time. Even if you think it doesn’t stop you sleeping, sleep studies have shown that sleep quality is poorer with caffeine in your system.
* Avoid alcohol especially in the last few hours before bed. Alcohol has a number of negative effects, in this case disrupting sleep and causing you to wake up frequently. If you have to drink, try and limit it to one glass at dinner time and only 2 or 3 nights a week.
* Exercise every day, move as much as you can but don’t do any strenuous exercise in the 2 hours before bedtime.
* In the hour before bedtime, start winding down, dim the lights and put away electronic devices (the white light disrupts your biological clock and may delay the onset of sleep).
* Try not to drink too much fluid so you don’t have to get up at night to go to the toilet. If you do need to get up then use a red light which doesn’t disrupt your sleep as much (by confusing your biological clock)
* A warm bath, shower or spa before bed can help drop your core body temperature which can help prepare you to sleep. Keep your room cool and don’t over heat in bed.
* Learn to meditate to reduce stress before bed so you are not ruminating on the days events. If you have a lot on your mind make a list of your thoughts so you can deal with them the next day. Try not to overstimulate your mind with TV and Gaming.