Approximately one-third of our life is spent sleeping. Thus, the average American man, expected to live 73 years, spends 24.3 years of his life sleeping. Makes a nice mattress seem like a cheap investment doesn't it?

Given that so much of our existence is spent "not being awake," it's important we give merit to the incredible influence that this third of our life has on the remaining two-thirds of our time.

We all know what it feels like to go without a good night's rest; the following day seems to drag on, we find ourselves irritable, yawning, watching the clock for quitting time and eager to stumble to bed right after dinner. Repeated nights of sleep disruption can lead to mood changes, relationship problems, health concerns, loss of problem solving abilities and mental illness such as depression or anxiety.

Good sleep hygiene is important for all of us. Some basic practices can have a significant impact on our ability to fall and stay asleep, as well as improving the rejuvenating quality of the sleep that we do get.

1. It's important to avoid caffeine and nicotine in the evening hours. Both are central nervous system stimulants, causing body temperature, heart rate and cognitive processing to increase.

2. Avoid alcohol consumption prior to bedtime. Though the depressing effect of the drug can initiate sleep, alcohol interferes with REM and deep wave sleep, thus preventing the type of sleep that leaves us feeling rested and ready for the day.

3. Engaging in regular aerobic exercise or activity improves both sleep onset and quality of sleep.

4. The bedroom should be used for sleeping and sex; avoid using it as a substitute living room. You want your brain to associate this room with winding down, resting and sleeping.

5. Avoid distractions such as TV, radio, computers and books while in bed. Such activities are best engaged in elsewhere and prior to bedtime.

6. Practice relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation and guided imagery prior to bedtime. Such practices tend to reduce anxiety and racing thoughts.

7. Avoid the use of sleep aids; most are short term solutions that often result in longer term problems.

8. Most importantly, challenge your beliefs around sleep. Having sleep problems one night does not increase the risk of having another sleepless night the next time you go to bed. Usually it is our fear that drives the insomnia.

Also, there is no magical number of hours one must sleep in order to be productive. For some, six is enough; others, eight. Your expectations for duration of sleep often is the greatest contributor to negative symptoms the following day.