IMPROVING SLEEP WILL IMPROVE OVERALL HEALTH

A lack of sleep may lead to an array of medical issues. It also can cause unnecessary stress and the inability to focus. Here's a look at ways to get a good night's sleep.

Not getting enough sleep is a common problem for close to one third of American adults. Sleep loss is linked to a number of chronic health problems, motor vehicle accidents and mistakes on the job according to the CDC. Andrew Renda, V.P of Population Health Strategy, Humana states "In the short-term, decreased energy, irritability, inability to focus and worsened mood are common. Longer term, sleep disturbances are associated with chronic health problems like diabetes and heart disease. They may also make existing mental health conditions, like anxiety and depression worse".

The recommended amount of sleep needed varies by age, according to the CDC, with adults needing less sleep than children and teens. Adults from 18 through 60 should have at least 7 hours of sleep with adults 61 to 64 needing 7-9 hours of sleep. The CDC recommendation for adults over age 65 is 7-6 hours.

The most common types of sleep disorders, according to Renda, include:
- ✓ Insomnia, an inability to initiate and maintain sleep
- ✓ Narcolepsy, defined as excessive daytime sleepiness combined with sudden muscle weakness
- ✓ Restless leg syndrome
- ✓ Sleep apnea, which includes abnormal breathing patterns during sleep.

Sleep disorders are defined by the American Psychiatric Association as problems with the quality, timing and amount of sleep, resulting in daytime distress and impairment in functioning.

To improve sleep, Renda emphasized positive habits and consistency. "Good habits include regular exercise, limiting caffeine and alcohol and creating a good sleep environment that is comfortable, quiet and dark. Also, establish a sleep schedule in which to go to sleep and wake up at similar times each day".

If you're still having problems after trying these ideas, it's time to consult your physician. Your doctor may refer you for a sleep study or other medical tests to confirm the correct diagnosis. After your assessment, your doctor will provide you some recommendations.

If you are interested in learning more about symptoms, health impacts and resources, Renda recommends the CDC sleep webpage at www.cdc.gov/sleep/index.html