# SCRIPT – PRINT - Sleep and COVID-19

## Getting Rest During a Pandemic is a Must

During a pandemic, there's certainly enough to worry about – your health, the wellbeing of loved ones, job loss – so it's no surprise that people would experience sleeping difficulties during this unprecedented time. That's why experts agree that consistent, high quality sleep improves virtually all aspects of health, which is important now more than ever.

"Sleep is always important," said Dr. Theodore Ingrassia, Medical Director, OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center Sleep Center. "It's a biological process. It help us. It empowers our immune system. Having sleep heightens our brain function. It enhances our mood and it improves our mental health."

According to Dr. Ingrassia, anxiety and worry tend to be the biggest problems. During the COVID pandemic, people are worried about getting the infection themselves, they worry about friends and family who may be ill, losses of loved ones, and economic concerns. Depression, stress and isolation can also become problematic – all which can cause fatigue, digestive problems, headaches and many sleepless nights.

"There are several reasons sleep will suffer during a pandemic," said Dr. Theodore Ingrassia, Medical Director, OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center Sleep Center. "Disruption of daily life. It can be difficult to adjust to a new daily schedule or the lack of a schedule. Keeping track of the time. People lose track of time. It can be difficult without typical time anchors such as a work schedule or a day time schedule. Not going to the gym or social events can screw up your circadian rhythms. Being stuck at home, especially if it has low levels of natural light, can affect your circadian rhythm. If people are not working they can tend to oversleep and too much sleep can affect the quality of your sleep and your daytime energy level."

There are many ways to improve our sleep habits during this critical time. For example, pick a consistent bed time, shower and get dressed every day even if you're not leaving the house. Eat meals at the same time every day, block off specific time for work and exercise. Turn your cellphones and TV off at least an hour before bedtime. The blue light in televisions impacts the melatonin cycle, and can suppress the secretion of melatonin which makes you sleepy and cycles your circadian rhythm, which is a natural, internal process that regulates the sleep-wake cycle.

Be careful with naps. If you sleep in the afternoon and have difficulty sleeping at night, naps may not be a good idea. If, however, if you can take a quick 20-minute nap during the day that does not impact your nightly sleep habits, then go for it. And pay particular attention to what you eat.

"Watch what you eat and drink," said Dr. Theodore Ingrassia, Medical Director, OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center. "Sleep Center. Many people tend to eat out of stress and that's unhealthy. Certainly, caffeinated beverages will impact your ability to sleep. It takes 12 hours to get caffeine out of your system. That means if you've had a cup of coffee in the

morning a quarter of that caffeine is going to be in your system at 4 a.m. So be conscious of that. Avoid eating fatty foods or large dinners if you have problems with indigestion or reflux that can affect your quality of sleep."

If, after trying many of these things you don't find your sleep habits improving, it might be time to seek medical help.

"And lastly, if you are really feeling put out by the COVID pandemic and are having a lot of difficulty with your sleep, you're going to want to contact your physician, who may prescribe medication or give you other recommendations that can help with your sleep," said Dr. Theodore Ingrassia, Medical Director, OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center.