

Patterns of Sleep and Sleepiness in Adolescents

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Abstract. Most studies of adolescent sleep habits show a pattern of decreasing total sleep time, a tendency to delay the timing of sleep, and an increased level of daytime sleepiness. Laboratory tests have shown that adolescents do not have a decreased need for sleep but probably need *more* sleep than prepubertally. A number of factors affect the development of adolescent sleep patterns. Puberty itself imposes a burden of increased daytime sleepiness with no change in nocturnal sleep. Parental involvement in setting bedtimes wanes, though they become increasingly involved in waking teenagers in the mornings. Curfews and school schedules also affect adolescent sleep patterns, seen most commonly as imposing earlier rise times as the school day begins earlier during the adolescent years. Part-time employment has a significant impact on the sleep patterns of teenagers: those who work more than 20 h each week sleep less, go to bed later, are more sleepy, and drink more caffeine and alcohol. Development of circadian rhythms may also play a role in the phase delay teenagers commonly experience. The primary conclusion is that many adolescents do not get enough sleep. The consequences of the chronic pattern of insufficient sleep are daytime sleepiness, vulnerability to catastrophic accidents, mood and behavior problems, increased vulnerability to drugs and alcohol, and development of major disorders of the sleep/wake cycle. Educational programs hold the promise of improving teenagers' sleep patterns through informing youngsters, parents, and pediatricians about proper sleep hygiene and the risks of poor sleep habits.

Introduction

Among the multiplicity of changes that accompany adolescence are alterations in sleeping and waking patterns [1]. These changes arise from a number of sources: changing academic demands, expanding social opportunities, altered parent-child relationships, involvement in part-time jobs, increased access to drugs and alcohol, etc. Also important among factors resulting in changing adolescent sleep patterns are physiological processes [2]. Very few studies have directly examined specific factors that might influence the development of adolescent sleep patterns. As will be shown below, empirical studies may call into question the conventional wisdom. For example, it is a common perception and also a societal expectation that adolescents do not really *need* as much sleep as preadolescents. Our sleep laboratory data, however,

suggest that older adolescents may actually have a physiological need for *more* sleep than preadolescents, not *less*. The cultural patterns in North America that promote shortened nocturnal sleep in teenagers conflict with the physiological imperatives requiring increased nocturnal sleep. Thus, adolescents may become increasingly at risk for excessive sleepiness, dysphoric mood, or even catastrophic accidents as a result of excessive daytime sleepiness [3].

Sleep/Wake Patterns in Adolescents

Let us begin by inspecting what adolescents say about their sleep. Self-reported sleep/wake patterns of adolescents have been investigated by a number of groups, primarily using cross-sectional sleep habits surveys [4-15].

Table 1. Self-reported sleep patterns in adolescents

	Age	Girls			Boys		
		bedtime	risetime	sleep time	bedtime	risetime	sleep time
<i>School nights</i>	10 ¹	9:30	7:15	9h 45m	9:09	7:00	9h 51m
	11 ¹	9:30	7:05	9h 35m	9:40	7:00	9h 20m
	12 ¹	9:45	6:55	9h 10m	9:50	7:05	9h 15m
	13 ¹	10:06	6:50	8h 44m	10:28	7:00	8h 32m
	14 ²	10:10	5:56	7h 46m	10:16	6:15	7h 59m
	15 ²	10:24	6:05	7h 41m	10:43	6:27	7h 44m
	16 ²	10:52	6:13	7h 21m	11:08	6:38	7h 30m
	17 ²	10:58	6:26	7h 28m	11:14	6:45	7h 31m
	18 ³	1:15 a.m.	8:18	7h 3m	1:30 a.m.	8:36	7h 6m
<i>Weekend nights</i>	10 ¹	10:25	8:10	9h 45m	10:22	7:45	9h 23m
	11 ¹	10:22	8:25	9h 3m	10:50	7:45	8h 55m
	12 ¹	10:55	8:35	9h 40m	11:05	8:35	9h 40m
	13 ¹	11:20	8:45	9h 25m	11:42	8:45	9h 3m
	14 ²	11:57	9:14	9h 17m	12:06 a.m.	9:12	9h 6m
	15 ²	12:11 a.m.	9:24	9h 13m	12:27 a.m.	9:25	8h 58m
	16 ²	12:28 a.m.	9:21	8h 53m	12:44 a.m.	9:37	8h 52m
	17 ²	12:39 a.m.	9:21	8h 42m	12:51 a.m.	9:29	8h 38m
	18 ³	2:48 a.m.	10:39	7h 51m	2:43 a.m.	10:40	7h 57m

^{1,2} From previous surveys [8, 12].

³ From college freshmen [18].

Two longitudinal survey studies [16, 17] have also been reported. The study of Strauch and Meier [17] is the most comprehensive longitudinal survey, covering a 10-year period (1975–1985) with surveys at 2-year intervals in a pool of 100–190 German (FRG) adolescents who were aged 10–14 years at the study inception. The cross-sectional surveys have focused primarily on somewhat narrow age ranges. Table 1 presents a representative sample of data about adolescent sleep by combining data from several of our surveys of youngsters attending public school [8, 12, 18]. As will become clear in subsequent sections, a number of factors influence such 'norms'.

Several major trends emerge from the various survey studies. First, self-reported nocturnal sleep time declines across the adolescent span. Second, bedtimes during high school grow later and rising times earlier. Furthermore, teenagers show increasingly large variations between weeknight and weekend sleep schedules. The Strauch and Meier [17] data, for example, showed that weekend sleep times averaged about 30 min less than weeknight sleep time in the 10- to 14-year-olds, and the difference increased to over 2 h by age 18 years. The timing of sleep on weekdays versus weekends also shows progressively greater variability across the second de-

cade. For example, our survey of young adolescents [8] showed about an hour's weekend-weeknight difference in 10-year-olds, increasing to about 90 min at age 13. More recently, we have found rise time reports in high school students to average approximately 3 h later on weekends than on weekdays. In college freshmen, bedtimes and rise times both slide to later times on weekdays as well as weekends [18]. Given this background, let us now examine what is known about a number of the factors that affect adolescent sleep/wake patterns.

Factors Affecting Adolescent Sleep/Wake Pattern Development

Puberty

The effects of pubertal maturation were examined in a longitudinal study that looked at sleeping patterns and daytime alertness using sleep laboratory measures [1, 2, 19]. For this study, 27 normal control children (12 girls and 15 boys) were studied on a total of 109 sessions over the course of 7 days. (Only a few returned for all 7 years; 21 were studied on at least three occasions.) During each session, the adolescent received a 72-hour (3 nights and 3

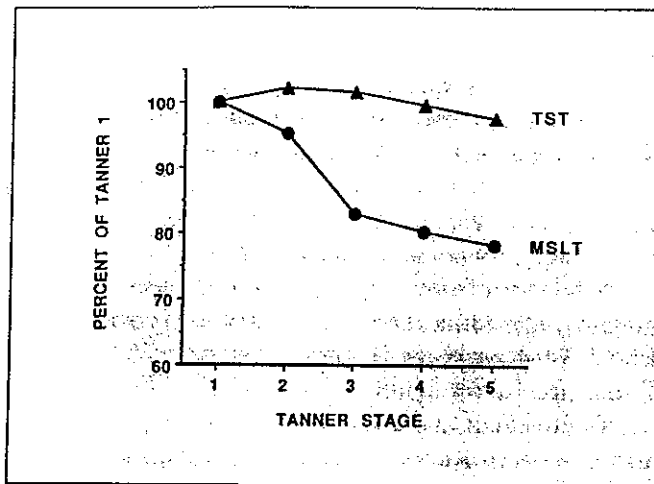


Fig. 1. This figure summarizes data from a 7-year longitudinal study of adolescent sleep and sleepiness, as described in the text. Data are grouped by Tanner stages and presented as a percentage of the Tanner stage 1 (prepubertal) average. Triangular symbols show the values for TST and round symbols show daily mean MSLT scores. TST showed no significant change from the Tanner 1 mean (about 9h 10m) across the Tanner stages, whereas MSLT declined significantly at Tanner stage 3 and remained low in Tanner stages 4 and 5. This finding suggests that older teens may have a physiological need for more sleep than younger adolescents.

days) evaluation at 'Sleep Camp'. The evaluation included overnight sleep recordings and daily measurements of daytime sleepiness using the Multiple Sleep Latency Test (MSLT) [20]. Maturation status was assessed using Tanner staging [21]. Overnight sleep recordings (with electroencephalogram, electro-oculogram, and electromyogram for analyzing sleep stages) were made on a constant schedule – 10:00 p.m. until 8:00 a.m. – across all years of the study. The MSLT measures daytime sleepiness as the speed of falling asleep based on physiological activity. Measures are taken at 2-hour intervals in a rigorous, standardized manner [20]. This test is now the most common measure for evaluating daytime sleepiness in experimental or clinical settings [22]. Tanner stages of maturation range from Tanner 1 – which reflects a prepubertal child – through intermediate pubertal development (Tanner stages 2, 3, and 4) to Tanner 5, the fully mature adolescent.

Figure 1 summarizes the relationships of nocturnal sleep patterns and daytime sleepiness to maturational level found in this longitudinal study. Two important findings stand out. First, the total amount of sleep (TST) at night remained constant across the developmental stages. Second, the MSLT showed a clear relationship to

maturational stage, with a significant increase in sleep tendency during the daytime (greater sleepiness) at Tanner stages 3, 4, and 5. The children at Tanner stages 1 and 2 rarely fell asleep on this test. These findings were consistent across gender. It is important to keep in mind that the average TST at night was virtually identical for subjects at each Tanner stage, as figure 1 shows. Thus, the change in daytime sleep tendency across maturational stage was *not* related to a change in the amount of sleep at night. The implication of this study is that older adolescents become sleepy in the daytime, *even* when sleeping as much as younger adolescents. Therefore, if anything, older teens may *require more* sleep to maintain alertness than do younger teens.

Parental Influence

Among environmental factors that appear to influence the development of sleep/wake patterns early during adolescence is a change in the way parents regulate a child's sleep. Figure 2 illustrates the trends obtained in our survey of a younger adolescent group [10]. First, over half of the 10-year-old children reported that their parents set their bedtimes on school nights; by age 13, only 19% of parents set school-night bedtimes. Second, 19% of parents of 10-year-olds set bedtimes weekend nights, declining to 4% of the parents of 13-year-olds. Finally, rising times on school mornings were initiated by a parent or alarm in fewer than half the 10-year-olds versus 70% of 13-year-olds. These data suggested to us that one major early change in the organization of sleep/wake behavior in adolescents is an alteration in the nature of parental influences: parents of children and younger adolescents direct their attention to bedtime; in older adolescents, parental influence diminishes at bedtime and becomes more important to waking up.

Curfews

A related issue was examined by evaluating sleep/wake patterns in 9th and 10th grade students attending boarding schools with and without set curfews [23]. An interesting pattern of findings arose from this evaluation. First, as one would expect, the students given a curfew reported going to bed about an hour earlier on average than those with no curfew. Second, regardless of whether or not a curfew was imposed, all students in this study slept about the same amount on school nights (average = 7 h 15 min). Thus, even though the regulatory influence was present only at bedtime, the students who had a curfew also tended to get up about an hour earlier

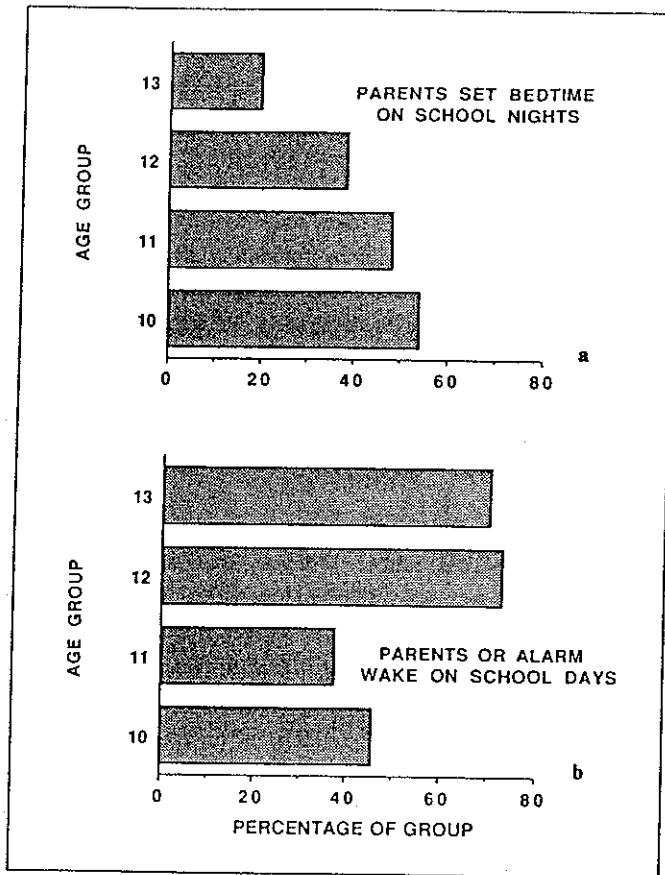


Fig. 2. This figure summarizes questionnaire response data from youngsters aged 10–13 years to questions asking what factor determines why they go to bed (a) and get up (b) on school mornings [10]. By age 13, less than 20% of the group reported that parents set their bedtimes. By age 12, over 70% of the group reported that they no longer wake spontaneously but required an alarm or parental awakening.

in the morning. Finally, the students with a curfew – those going to bed and getting up earlier – reported fewer symptoms of excessive sleepiness. Here again, it is clear that external agencies (or their absence) have a significant influence on adolescent sleep pattern.

School Schedules

The time that school begins in the morning has an obvious impact on setting sleep/wake schedules in adolescents, presumably strongest in its effect on the time youngsters arise in the morning. For example, the usual pattern in most public school districts call for earlier morning school sessions and consequently earlier rising times in older adolescents. Our data suggest that adolescents tend gradually to adjust to shifts in school start

time over a series of years by narrowing the interval between getting up and going to school (table 1). The pattern of later rising times on weekend mornings also suggests that the school schedule impinges on the regulation of sleep/wake patterns on school mornings. Of course, as noted below, the weekday/weekend patterns may also be a response to insufficient sleep.

Another indication of the importance of the school schedule arises from our comparison of sleep habits in students attending private residential versus public school. We have recently surveyed about 1,500 students at four private residential high schools in Massachusetts and Connecticut and about 3,100 students in six public high schools in Rhode Island. One quite notable difference between the sleep patterns of public and private school (noncurfew) students was that public school students consistently reported going to bed and rising earlier (approx. 1 h) than private school students. This difference appears to relate to the differential commute distances; the private school students could all walk to their first morning class, whereas many of the public school students commuted by car or bus.

Jobs

Within the public high school survey population, part-time jobs appear to have a very strong influence on the sleep/wake patterns of adolescents. The sleep patterns of students who report working 20 or more hours per week (high-work) differ greatly from those who report working fewer than 20 h or not at all (low-work) [3, 24]. Table 2 presents several of the variables on which these groups differed. To summarize, the high-work students stayed up later and slept less than the low-work group on school nights and weekend nights. The high-work group also reported more symptoms of daytime sleepiness, including a greater tendency to get to school late because of oversleeping and greater difficulty staying awake in school. The high-work group also reported greater use of caffeine, alcohol, and tobacco. The high-work group comprised over one-quarter of the public high school sample. Thus, a pattern of low sleeping times, excessive sleepiness, and increased substance use may affect large numbers of students. There is a smaller number (4%) in whom the pattern is even more extreme: this is the group of students who work 20 h or more every week and who also take part in extracurricular activities 20+ h each week [3]. These teenagers report a chronic pattern of extremely short sleep along with symptoms of daytime sleepiness and increased use of stimulants and alcohol.

Table 2. Percentage of 11th and 12th graders reporting responses as a function of time spent on jobs

Response	Girls		Boys	
	low-work	high-work	low-work	high-work
School-night bedtime after 11:00 p.m.	18.0	27.9	24.5	40.9
Weekend bedtime after 1:00 a.m.	27.6	37.6	32.9	50.0
School-day rising time after 6:00 a.m.	44.8	45.7	73.3	72.1
Weekend rising time after 10:00 a.m.	30.1	29.0	32.4	30.1
Stay up past 3:00 a.m. at least once a week	18.1	24.0	22.9	34.6
Oversleep and arrive late for school at least once a week	12.9	13.4	11.7	20.4
Fall asleep in the morning at school at least once a week	15.6	18.8	19.5	28.0
Fall asleep in the afternoon at school at least once a week	18.2	23.2	20.1	24.1
Struggle to stay awake or fall asleep doing homework	21.9	27.9	15.3	23.1
Drink coffee or tea every day	18.8	28.1	12.6	22.8
Drink caffeinated soda pop every day	55.8	55.7	52.8	60.4
Drink alcohol every week	15.5	18.4	16.7	25.5
Smoke cigarettes every day	24.4	33.9	14.0	26.4

Circadian Rhythms

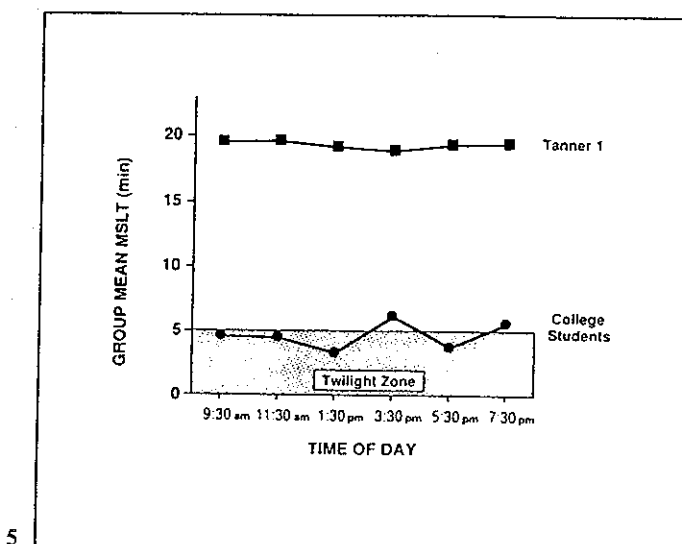
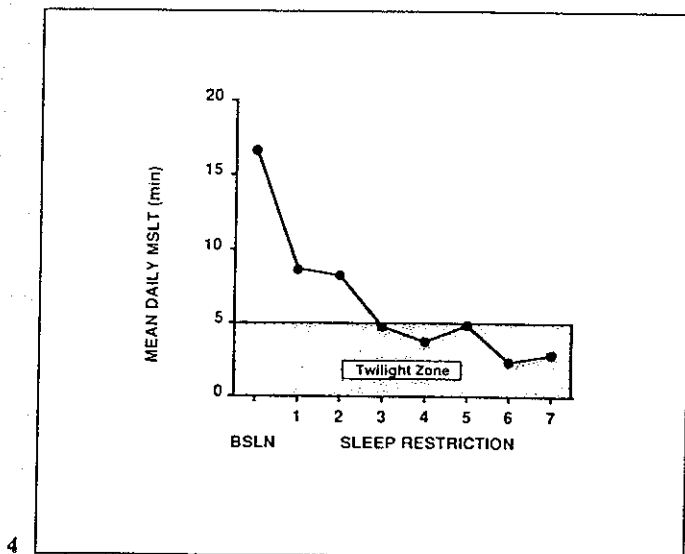
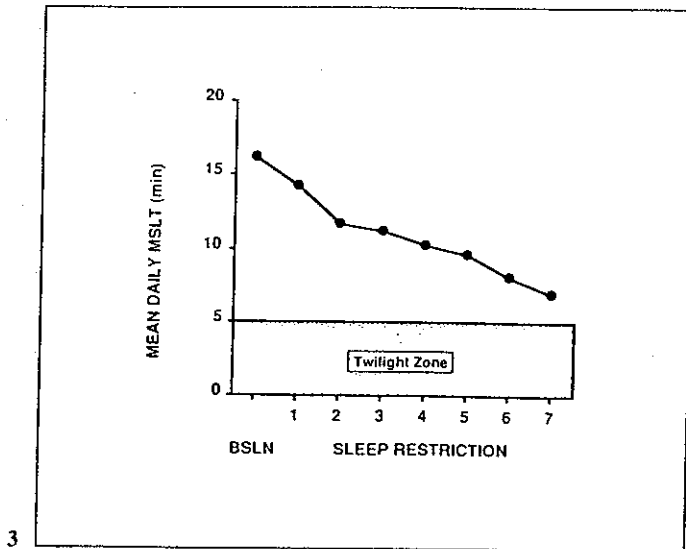
Another factor that emerges from currently available data – and may be related to a number of the factors above as well as to physiological processes involved in regulating and organizing circadian rhythms – is a tendency for older teens to delay sleep onset. In the first place, there seems to be a simple desire on the part of teenagers to stay up late. For example, Price et al. [9] noted that nearly two-thirds of 11th and 12th graders report that they ‘enjoy staying up at night’. This is supported by data from across our various surveys [8, 12, 18] in which we have found a migration of bedtime on school nights from an average of about 9:00–9:30 p.m. in 10-year-olds, to 10:00–10:30 p.m. in 13-year-olds, to 11:00 p.m.–midnight in 17-year-old high school seniors, to 1:00–2:00 a.m. in 18-year-old college freshmen. In the younger groups, the reduction of bedtime setting by parents probably influences the bedtime shift. Other data suggest that the delay may reflect additional environmental circumstance, as well as the adolescent’s freedom to self-select bedtime. Thus, as noted previously, when bedtime reports are compared between students who live at home or board at school [25], or between boarding students with and without a curfew [23], or in the high school-to-college transition [18], we find trends for bedtimes to be later in the ‘freer’ environment. Peer influences and socialization are also likely to be significant factors in this process.

Cross-sectional data from our high school survey, as well as longitudinal data from our high school-to-college transition study [18], also show a progressive change in

morningness/eveningness [26] scores, favoring greater numbers of ‘evening’ types in the older students. The morningness/eveningness or ‘lark/owl’ score is a measure of ‘circadian type’ that reflects the time of day at which an individual reports peak functioning. Such scores are related to sleep/wake patterns, as well as other daily rhythms, such as body temperature and food intake [27]. It is not clear, however, whether they measure a *response* to changing sleep/wake habits initiated by other factors or an alteration in the circadian rhythms driving the trend for delayed sleep/wake schedules in adolescence.

Insufficient Sleep and Daytime Sleepiness

By far the most striking conclusion from the available information about adolescent sleep is that many adolescents do not get enough sleep. School schedules require waking up earlier and earlier, while academic work loads, social obligations, and work patterns obligate staying up later and later. Compressed between these daily bookends is an increasingly narrow window for sleep. What happens when sleep is chronically below an optimal level? In one experiment, we looked at this issue in a group of 10 college students [28]. To study their response, we brought them into the sleep laboratory for 10 nights. On the first 3 nights, we allowed them to sleep 10 h; then we reduced their sleep window to 5 h a night for the next 7 nights. Figure 3 illustrates the impact of this sleep restriction pattern on sleepiness as measured using the MSLT. The effect across the 7 days following



short sleep was additive; that is, the students got progressively more sleepy every day. Figure 4 shows the example of 1 student who actually became very sleepy on the day after the first short night and was extremely sleepy for the final 5 days. The 'twilight zone' shown in this figure corresponds to a score of 5 min or less on the MSLT, which has been shown to be associated with impaired performance in a number of studies [28–32]. All but 1 of the subjects in this sleep restriction study [28] were in the 'twilight zone' at some point, most for significant portions of every day.

The pattern that we see emerging from all this information is a twofold process that results in a significant level of daytime sleepiness in adolescents. First – whatever combinations of factors may be involved – there is trend for shorter and shorter sleep times across the adolescent span. In addition, puberty produces daytime sleepiness, even when sleep time does not change. Insufficient sleep, therefore, exacts an extra penalty during adolescence. Figure 5 compares sleepiness levels of a group of prepubertal (Tanner stage 1) youngsters sleeping their usual schedule (about 9.5 h a night) and a group of typical college students sleeping their usual 7 h a night. The contrast is striking: the children are maximally alert throughout the day, whereas the combination of factors – pubertal changes plus chronic insufficient sleep – puts the college students in the 'twilight zone' nearly all day long.

Fig. 3. MSLT data from a week-long sleep restriction protocol are summarized in this figure, taken from a study of 10 young adult college students asked to sleep 10 h a night for 3 nights followed by 5 h a night for 7 nights [28]. Baseline results are collapsed into the first data point (BSLN), which shows a high level of alertness before the sleep restriction. As measured by MSLT, sleepiness increased linearly with successive days of sleep restriction. These data highlight the additive impact of chronic sleep restriction.

Fig. 4. MSLT data from an 18-year-old male subject from the study presented in figure 3 are shown in this figure. This young man was very alert during baseline but became very sleepy after 1 night of sleep restriction. After 3 nights, he was extremely sleepy throughout the day and susceptible to lapses and performance decrements, as indicated by the 'twilight zone'. As shown in the summary figure, the decline in alertness was progressive across the sleep restriction days. In this subject, chronic sleep restriction might result in severe impairment.

Fig. 5. This figure summarizes the dual impact of pubertal changes and chronic sleep restriction by juxtaposing average MSLT profiles of children (ages 10–14 years, mean = 11.6) versus college students (ages 18–21, mean = 19.2). The children slept a little more than 9 h a night, whereas the college students slept about 7 h.

Adolescents are clearly variously affected by these factors, but it is important to realize that excessive sleepiness is a potentially serious problem. The scope of the problem has been paradoxically unrecognized in part because adolescent sleepiness is so widespread and obvious (observe any high school or college classroom) that it almost seems to be normal. Yet its consequences, if often subtle, are very real. To the extent that a teenager is excessively sleepy, he or she has an increased vulnerability to a number of poor outcomes. Excessive sleepiness, as mentioned above, is associated with performance failures and lapses. Such lapses impact unfavorably on learning and potentially catastrophically on such activities as automobile driving. The sleepy teenager is also at potentially greater risk to abuse drugs in an attempt to increase alertness by self-medication with caffeine and more potent stimulants. We have also noted evidence that increased alcohol use is related to insufficient sleep in teens, at least in the context of our high-work group. An additional risk arises because of the recently described synergistic interaction of hypersomnolence and alcohol, potentiating the sedative effects of alcohol [33–35]. The relationship of alcohol and insufficient sleep may be particularly hazardous for teenagers, due to the well-known tendency for adolescents to engage in experimentation with alcohol and other risk-taking behaviors. In this context, sleepiness may reduce an adolescent's safety margin for such experimentation [3].

Other areas of a teenager's daily life may also be impaired by the consequences of insufficient sleep. We are just beginning to obtain evidence that moodiness in adolescents is related to sleep patterns. In a recent study of sleep restriction in high school students [36], we asked 13 boys in 9th through 12th grades to reduce their sleep by 2 h a night over 5 consecutive nights. Each evening, they completed a mood checklist (based on the scale of Lubin et al. [37]) as part of a daily sleep/wake/activity diary. The checklist included three scales (positive, negative, depressed). At the end of each week, the students also filled out the Adolescent Depressive Mood Scale of Kandel and Davies [38]. The positive and negative daily mood scales and the weekly Adolescent Depressive Mood Scale all showed significantly dysphoric changes during the period of reduced sleep. Although only a small preliminary study, this finding suggests that a portion of the moodiness of adolescents may be a consequence of insufficient sleep. To the extent that such mood changes interfere with the teenager's ability to cope with daily stresses, poor sleep/wake patterns may represent another serious threat to an adolescent's well-

being. Furthermore, chronic mood changes due to chronic insufficient sleep may impair the teenager's relationships with peers and with adults.

Another potentially serious complication of the typical trend for later bedtimes in older adolescents is development of the Delayed Sleep Phase Syndrome (DSPS), which appears to be caused by a defect in the brain's clock mechanism that sets the timing of virtually all of the body's biological functions [39]. In susceptible individuals, this clock can get set incorrectly at a position that causes biological functions (including sleep) to occur later than desired. Retiring and arising at late hours can initiate the appearance of this malfunction. The teenager with DSPS is not necessarily lazy or school phobic or acting out, but is utterly unable to fall asleep before 5:00 or 6:00 a.m. and impossible to wake up before 2:00 or 3:00 in the afternoon. Such a pattern is clearly untenable for a school-aged adolescent and requires special therapy through a sleep disorders center.

Conclusion: Prevention and Intervention

No studies have looked at the possibility that preventive measures can alter patterns of sleep and wakefulness during adolescence. In terms of intervention, there are a few clinical studies in adolescents with DSPS showing successful results of chronotherapy [40, 41]. In terms of insufficient sleep, it is clear that the excessive sleepiness related to insufficient sleep can be eliminated by extending sleep at night [10, 42, 43]. The latter experiments were all conducted in laboratory settings and showed improved physiological alertness and performance with extended sleep. Translation of this approach to the everyday lives of teenagers may be more problematic. Perhaps the most useful approach may be one that combines education of children, parents, teachers, and pediatricians about the fundamental principles of proper sleep hygiene. The first goal of such a program might be to disabuse people about the notion that teenagers need less sleep.

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