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The pattern of sleep changes during puberty and adolescents usually prefer later bedtimes and later wake times. School obligations, however, impose early wake times and adolescents might not sleep enough. Although short sleep duration is very common it is problematic because sleep deprived adolescents do not function well during the day; they are more easily upset, feel irritated, and have difficulties focusing on a task.

These changes in sleep are due to both biological and psychosocial changes typical of this developmental period. For example, adolescents become better than children at enduring sleep pressure and they also have a variety of other activities to engage in at bedtime (e.g., socializing with friends) that compete with sleeping. In addition, the easy access to internet and social media amplifies the possibilities for entertainment and social interaction.

So, is it possible to help adolescents fulfil their need for sleep in a 24/7 society? Existing school-based programs have been effective in improving adolescents’ knowledge about sleep but not their actual sleep. To improve results, we need to assess the problem better and identify powerful targets for intervention. This dissertation provides some insights into the prevalence of poor sleep, risk and protective factors, and prevention of these sleep problems in adolescence. The results show that a significant portion of adolescents (age 12-16) sleep too little and this is worrisome because poor sleep was associated to worse school attendance and poor mental health. Adolescents who slept below the recommended eight hours also reported more daily stress, technology use at bedtime, and poor sleep hygiene. Targeting these factors in a novel preventive intervention showed promising results for the adolescents most at risk but the preventive effect over time remains to be seen. Perhaps asking adolescents to change their sleep behaviors is too much to ask without first creating an environment that promotes good sleep practices.