



Ten Tips to a Terrific Taper

Marathon Training: The Art of The Final Weeks

You've poured yourself into training hard for the past few months. You've pushed through fatigue on your long runs, plummeted yourself into ice baths, forced yourself out the door early in the morning, sped through countless tempo runs... and now the hard work is over, right? Sort of.

While most of the grinding physical work is done, ensuring you reach your goal on race day requires special attention to the marathon taper. It is a delicate balance of maintaining fitness while promoting recovery, and it's been proven - your body absolutely needs this time. Let the following tips guide you in navigating the marathon taper.

1 Trust The Taper

Recall all the training you've put your body through over the past few months. Remember the 5:30 a.m. alarm clock, the Saturday morning long runs, the aching feet, knees, toenails... everything. Be aware that self-doubt can creep in and invade the mind of even the most perfectly trained individual. Three weeks from your marathon or half marathon, sit down and physically look at your training plan and remember all the miles you've logged. These were miles that you made happen in all conditions. They were miles that perhaps happened in heat, wind, rain, or cold - and whether you felt energized, tired, sad, angry, or on top of the world.

As you are one week out, and your mileage plummets, your worries can multiply. Take comfort that every other runner preparing for the race is going through similar thoughts. Remember the goal of the taper is to ensure your body is sufficiently rested, refreshed, recovered, refueled and hydrated for the task ahead. Trust that your work has paid off --there is no doubt it has.

2 Reduce The Mileage, Nice and Easy

The miles you've been running each week should slowly be reduced three weeks before race day. But remember, just because you're running less and are "tapering" doesn't mean you should turn into a slug.

Start by reducing weekly mileage by 20 percent three weeks out. It may not feel like much of a drop off, but it will pay dividends come race weekend. When you find yourself two weeks outside race day, reduce mileage by 40 percent. And finally, one week before, reduce your mileage by 60 percent.

Be intentionally smooth and comfortable in your runs, neither dragging nor pushing your limits - staying 1.5 - 2 minutes slower than marathon goal pace. At this point in your training, you should absolutely avoid running extremely hilly courses, hill repetitions, or speed workouts. This kind of error can lead to muscle tissue damage and fatigue which you absolutely need to minimize through the taper.

3 Refocus on Your Entire Body

In the midst of marathon training, we can often neglect our core and upper body strength training. Paying some attention to these areas three and two weeks out from your event is not a bad idea at all. This can not only keep you

from going nuts from the reduced activity, but it can help you maintain strength throughout your entire body. Remember to avoid anything too intense, or a movement you haven't done in the past two months. A taper is no time to qualify for CrossFit Regionals.

4 Carbo Load with Quality

During your training, you've probably been compelled to eat your house. And it's likely that will not necessarily change during your taper. The tapering zone is the time to begin fueling your body properly for the race.

As a general rule, eat when you are hungry. Don't shy away from eating a healthy meal or snack when you have hunger pains - your body is trying to recover and repair itself.

You do want to increase your carbohydrate intake during tapering. But remember, you can do this without extra, empty calories from chips, cookies, candy, and cakes.

Waiting until the night before will not cut it. Unfortunately, that last boost of carbohydrates doesn't actually get to the glycogen stores by the time the race starts and could leave you feeling bloated or "heavy" on race morning. Instead of eating ridiculous bowls of pasta, take in very small, quality high carbohydrate meals at least one week from your event. These should include vegetables, fruit, and a reasonable amount of protein. Some examples of the quality carb elements would be oatmeal, bananas, rice, and sweet potatoes.

It is important to emphasize these carbohydrates more than usual in the last three days before the race. Remember that approximately 70-75 percent of your calories should come from quality carbohydrate sources at that time.

5 Embrace The Clear Stuff

Being fully hydrated on race day will help prevent you from bonking halfway through the race. You should be drinking enough water that you are urinating every 2-3 hours. The color of your urine should be light yellow, similar to a weak lemonade.

But remember, there is no need to overhydrate. Your urine should not be completely clear, and you shouldn't be running to the restroom every hour. More is not necessarily better when it comes to hydrating - you can actually throw off your electrolyte balance.

And to the disappointment of many, pints of beer don't count as "quality carbs". During the tapering phase, reducing your consumption of alcoholic beverages will make it easier for your body to rehydrate.

6 Have a Vision

Take some time to completely study the course map. Figure out where you'll be grabbing water or sports drink, and where you'll be seeing your family and friends cheering you on. Most importantly, reestablish your goals for that day, whether you just want to cross the finish line or you want to break the four hour mark.

7 Enjoy Sleep

Getting adequate sleep days leading up to a marathon will work wonders. Try to spend a few extra hours in bed throughout the last week of the taper.

Many runners struggle with sleep the night before their event as a result of pre-race jitters. But there is good news! Good performance stems more from a good night's rest two nights before the race, not the night before.

8 Prepare Your Race Day Checklist

Sit down and physically write down everything you need for race morning. This includes, pre-race, race, and post-race time. It is also helpful to set everything out in advance, so you are sure not to forget anything. A typical race day checklist may look like this:

Pre Race

- Anti-Chafing Balm
- Lip Balm
- Race Bib on Shirt / Belt
- Timing Chip on Bib / Shoes
- Pre-Race Drinks
- Pre-Race Snack / Energy Supp.
- Sunscreen
- Hat or Visor

Race

- Shoes / Socks
- Racing Outfit
- Gloves / Arm Warmers
- Watch or GPS
- Fuel Belt
- Gels or Energy Supplements
- Band-Aids or Nip Guards
- Sunglasses

Post Race

- Gear Check Bag
- Towel
- Extra Socks
- Extra Shirt / Pants
- Waterproof Jacket
- Compression Apparel
- Recovery Snack
- Extra Water Bottle

Be sure to double-check parking information and directions to the start line, as well as race start times.

9 Run a Final Run

We encourage you to run the day before or two days before the marathon. Run anywhere from 2 to 3 miles at a very easy pace. This special run will help promote blood flow through your legs and will likely decrease your anxiety about the race. This run a day before your race also stimulates the central nervous system, and can enable your legs to respond optimally the following morning.

10 Feel Calm, Cool and in Control

The morning of the event should be a celebration of your hard work.

At least two hours before the start, eat a light, easily-digestible meal, such as oatmeal or white toast and a banana. Be sure you choose foods you have eaten before several of your training runs and had no previous negative effects. Ninety minutes before the race, begin sipping 12 to 16 ounces of sports drink.

Be sure to arrive at the start an hour early, so you won't be caught in a last minute rush. Listen to music, talk with friends, and enjoy the wait, being intentional about maintaining a relaxed and upbeat perspective. About twenty minutes before the start gun do some slow jogging, followed by a few 25 to 50 meter trots at race pace. Mentally review your race plan, and visit the bathroom one more time if you can.

Position yourself in the start corral according to your anticipated pace, and remind yourself again and again: "start easy!" This will pay off late in the race when you're able to pass everyone who chose to start too fast.

Tapering for a marathon or half marathon can sometimes be a difficult and confusing task. Whether you're an experienced veteran looking to set a new personal best or a first-time marathon runner, the taper can be filled with anxiety. During this time, remind yourself of the training you've put into this goal. Don't go overboard on the taper, but embrace the feeling of rejuvenation an effective taper can provide.