



Shave & Taper, What can Age Group Parents do?

In the weeks leading up to the championship meet, the coaches will be covering shave and taper strategies with the swimmers. You may wonder what this crazy concept referred to in the swimming world as “Shave & Taper” is all about. In the most general sense, it’s when swimmers rest the body and mind and shaves down for the “big meet”. In the big kid world which includes HS and collegiate athletes – this is the biggest time of their lives and the taper may begin as long as a month before the meet. Athletes that prepare over a long period of time look forward to this phase because it’s when the body and mind are fully rested and prepared.

Although young swimmers have nowhere near the body mass and muscle development as senior athletes, when the young swimmer goes through the taper exercise, the pattern is set up to evolve for as long as they are competing. As many senior athletes will tell you, they aren’t able to fully understand their own taper until they go through it many, many years. So the earlier we begin the process of helping the young swimmer learn about tapering, the more successful they will become when they are big kids.

For the youngest age group swimmers, the taper phase really kicks in the week before the “big meet”. All swimmers behave differently during the taper and so will your child’s. For example, some swimmers go internal and become quite. Other swimmers display tremendous amounts of anxiety. Some swimmers become super-serious and write down goals, surf results on the internet, and peruse the upcoming heat sheet online. Some swimmers become very negative and make life miserable for those around them. Other swimmers are happy-go-lucky and go about their business as if there was no swim meet at all. None of these behaviors are abnormal and all are part of coping with the taper. How will your swimmer act? What can you do to foster the best environment for them? The remainder of this document lists some helpful, and maybe even amusing examples, for parents during the upcoming shave & taper. You know your swimmer best, but remember to maintain your role as a supportive parent. This will lay the foundation for your swimmer to learn all about the shave & taper experience going forward.

1. **Talk up the meet; your swimmer is going to hear the upcoming meet is BIG, and you will want to acknowledge this at home**

Example: Swimmer: “Coach says this meet is going to have some big teams attending and we are going to swim fast.” Parent (not-so-good) response: “Sounds like any other meet we go to. A meet is a meet and you can swim fast if you really want to any time you want.” Parent (good) response: “I heard that, too. I heard our team is regarded as one of the top teams in Ohio; are you ready to be part of the action?”

2. **Allow your swimmer to “drive” the discussion on their goals**

Example: Swimmer: “I am way off the cut in the 100 backstroke, there is no way I can drop that much time at the meet.” Parent (not-so-good) response: “Look over here, I wrote down your current time and the cut time. You see, it’s only 5 seconds difference. Last year, you swam the 200 IM at the Turkey Leg Invitational and you dropped 5 seconds. You can do it again. When you were 10, you already had three cuts at this point in the season, so you really need to get this one. Also, I was looking at the times from the other swimmers on the team and you will pass them up and be on the top relay. Parent (good) response: “You can achieve anything you believe in. What’s the cut?” <<Let them talk about it, sometimes, a swimmer talking is the best way to foster the goal setting process, regardless of what they are saying!>>



3. Setup the week to help prepare physically

Example: Swimmer: "Dad, Tyson invited me to a sleepover on Friday night before we go to the meet on Saturday. Can I go?" Parent (not-so-good) response: "Absolutely! I'll drop you off with some snacks and you ask Tyson's Mom what time I need to come pick you up in the morning so I can get you to the swim meet on time." Parent (good) response: "Are you sure that is a good idea? You have worked for months to rest and taper your body for the meet. You didn't eat any candy, junk food, or soda pop all week. You may want to ask your coach what he/she thinks about a sleepover the night before the biggest meet of the season."

4. Keep discussions on swimming simple and not coach related

Example: Swimmer: "Dad, My backstroke is one of the slowest on the team". Parent (not-so-good) response: "That's because you're not pulling your arm properly; and your head looks like it moves a lot, you have to keep your head straight; and you shouldn't be swimming in the same lane as Sally – she always stops and gets in everyone's way. Parent (good) response: "Keep working on it in practice and listening to your coaches. It will get better, I know it will."

5. Avoid go into fix it mode – let your swimmer figure it out! Even if they fail, they win. Often times, learning is accompanied by learning the hard way! Some swimmers actually become better athletes (and adults) when they are not prepared verses how they would do if everything worked out perfectly.

Example: Swimmer: "Mom, I feel awful in the water and the meet is two days away. What do I do?" Parent (not-so-good) response: "Oh no, I'll get online tomorrow and print off some stroke techniques that will help you improve your technique. Remember, your elbows have to be high on the recovery and you need to feel that water under your hands. I'll set up a meeting with the coach right away. I'll call Dad and have him attend practice tonight and video tape you so you can watch it at home. Then, we'll visit the family doctor in the morning to make sure all of your joints, bones, and muscles are OK. We can get a blood test done, too! Don't worry, I'll make sure you feel like a million bucks when you get to the meet." Parent (good) response: "I'm no swimmer, but I heard that athletes feel many good and bad things during a taper, both emotionally and physically, during a taper. Why don't you ask your coach about it tomorrow at practice?"

6. Provide encouragement, love, and all of the things that accompany being a parent

Example: Swimmer: "Mom, practice was pretty hard tonight and I thought we swim easy practices during the taper". Parent (good) response: "The coaches must be getting you prepared for the championship meet so you can reach your goals. I am very proud of you for taking on such a sport that requires dedication and commitment, and that must be very hard. I read somewhere that swimming is known as one of most difficult sports to be in – and you're testament to that!"

7. The day before

Example: Swimmer: Dad, the coaches said that all swimmers in the Bronze group are supposed to shave and it will make me faster." Parent (not-so-good) response: "Shaving down for swimming championships is a myth". Parent (good) response: "Is that so? Have you decided when you are going to shave? Tonight? In the morning? At the hotel? Let me know if I should get you a new razor. Oh by the way, don't forget to wear your best suit to the meet!"