

# WHAT IS A TAPER AND HOW DO I GET THE MOST OUT OF IT?

**What is Tapering?** All season long, your body's muscles are constantly being broken down and rebuilt during practices and meets. The main goal of a taper is to slow down and eventually stop the process of breaking down your muscles, giving your body a chance to rebuild, refuel and retool until you are at your "peek performance" stage. The end result of a proper taper is increased muscle strength while still being in top cardiovascular shape.

**Tapering: a balance of rest and conditioning-** Believe it or not, there is such a thing as getting too much rest during a taper. If you have too much rest (from swim practice that is) your body will start to get out of shape and you will miss your taper. That is why it is important to do every single lap and every specific instruction that your coaches give you. Every 25 build, every 100 DPS (distance per stroke), every 50 sprint off the blocks has been added to practice for a specific reason. Being in perfect shape at the perfect time, or "hitting your taper" is a result of backing off at just the right amount of training. Not backing off enough will result in a body that hasn't had time to fully repair itself from the muscle stresses of practicing, and backing off too much results in an out of shape swimmer.

## What you can do out of the water to make your Taper more effective:

**1. REST, REST AND REST!** Tapering in the pool and in dryland will be much less effective if you are putting stress on your body in other areas of your life. Exercising in any other way, playing with your friends, and even standing instead of sitting uses energy that your body needs to use on repairing muscles. And don't forget..... **BE HAPPY AND POSITIVE!** Being worried, stressed, scared or angry uses a lot of energy that you don't even realize you're using.

**2. EAT PROPERLY!** During the process of tapering, your body is healing itself from the stresses your season has put on it. What you have to provide your body is the best possible fuel to give your body the energy and nutrients it needs to rebuild effectively. Also, if you're eating fatty junk foods during a taper, you may build on fat instead of muscle during your recovery process. If you don't give your body enough calories and fat to burn, it will not have the strength or energy to rebuild muscles. Your body burns a lot less calories when you're swimming half the yardage in practice and swimmers have to be conscious of the amount of calories they consume when they go on a taper as a result. Stay away from unnecessary fat and calorie content as well as excess sodium and look for high protein, "good" sugars that occur naturally, and high-vitamin snacks. Protein is a great fuel for your body to build muscles, and too much sodium dehydrates your body. Good Snacks: unsalted nuts, rice cakes, multi-grain wheat thins, peanut butter, unbuttered and unsalted popcorn, Tostitos and salsa, and fruit.

Good Meals: Fish, skinless chicken, vegetables, pasta or rice.

**3. DRINK WATER!** Even if you aren't thirsty. Especially in the summer, your body can easily get dehydrated without you even realizing it. Always carry a water bottle with you during the day. Gatorade works when you use it properly, but what Gatorade does is maintain your current level of hydration, NOT rehydrate you. The best thing you can do during and after practice is mix two parts water with one part Gatorade. This way, your body can rehydrate without losing anything. Nutritionists suggest you drink 64 ounces of water every day, however that is meant for a regular person who isn't training in the midst of a swim season. Remember, you sweat even though you are in the water swimming. It is recommended you drink at least 90 ounces throughout the day. That's 4 ½ regular Gatorade containers, about 5 ½ regular sized bottles of spring water, or 11 small juice glasses EVERY DAY!

**4. SLEEP!** Your body is most efficiently rebuilding your muscles during your sleep. **THE BEST AMOUNT OF SLEEP IS 7-9 HOURS EVERY NIGHT.** Less than that and your body hasn't had the time to go through the five stages of sleep (which gives you energy for your day) or rebuild, and too much sleep leaves you feeling groggy and sluggish the next day.

**5. BE MENTALLY PREPARED!** Being physically ready to swim is rendered nearly useless if you aren't mentally ready. It is absolutely normal and a good thing for you to be excited for your races, but you must harness that excitement in the pool while focusing on your race. Something that will work wonders come race time is spending 10 minutes before bed each night visualizing your races. Close your eyes and mentally go to the meet. What do you see? What do you hear? What feelings do you have?

1. Put yourself behind the blocks, getting ready for the race
2. The starter asks swimmers to step up. Take your mark... BEEP!
3. What ever stroke errors you know you have in your races, visualize yourself correcting them and swimming perfectly.
4. You finish, look up at the clock and scream in excitement
5. Then look over to see your coaches jumping up and down and screaming like idiots ☹

By doing this mental training every night during your taper, you will be fully prepared come meet day. Behind the blocks before your race, instead of talking to the other swimmers or spacing out, close your eyes and go through the same routine – IT WORKS!

The most important thing to do and to never forget about your taper is to ENJOY IT! You've worked hard all season long in anticipation for this time, and it is here. Don't forget to enjoy every minute of the taper and then the meet itself, because otherwise it isn't even worth it and you've wasted your time working hard.

### THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF A TAPER:

- DON'T- waste your energy. After beginning your taper, you'll probably find yourself full of energy, don't go out and run 10 miles just because you feel like you can or stay up all night
- DO- go to bed at your normal time and try not to exert yourself.
- DO- eat healthy. (bagels, fruit, vegetables, peanut butter and crackers.) anything high in protein and a little bit of fat is good.
- DON'T- eat too much, since your practices will be getting easier, you won't burn calories as quickly.
- DON'T- eat candy, ice cream, donuts or muffins. Anything high in sugar and calories is a big NO.
- DO- DRINK PLENTY OF FLUIDS
- DON'T- drink SODA
- DO- stick to your routine. Eat at the same time; go to bed at the same time.
- DON'T- do anything drastically different from your normal daily life
- DO- stay in shape
- DON'T- lounge around all day watching TV
- DON'T- play computer or video games
- DO- mentally prepare. Take time each day to visualize your races.
- DO- relax and focus, see yourself in the water, your time, your coach's excitement