

HELPING YOUR ATHLETE DURING TAPER

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Every swimmer looks forward to the championship season, including that exciting and welcome relief called "taper." Swimmers adjust to reduced training volume and emphasis on meet performance at the end of a season. For most swimmers, this adjustment is both physical and mental.

This adjustment is not automatic and takes some time. Typical signs of this adjustment may include trouble falling asleep, reduced appetite and/or feeling nervous. This is normal and expected. Always encourage your swimmer to discuss any of these issues with their coach.

Tapering for 12 and unders is more a mental adjustment than physical. Hopefully, they are not training 20 hours per week, like a college swimmer. Their training load is just not high enough to warrant cutting their training yardage in half or more. Secondly, tapering involves resting the muscles. Most age group swimmers are fit, yet few have the muscle mass to warrant a taper like a mature college athlete or post graduate.

Moms and Dads can assist the process by avoiding placing undue pressure on the upcoming meet. Most young athletes are competitive enough to want to succeed and find it difficult to distinguish between judgment of abilities and judgment of self-worth.

Follow these guidelines:

- Ask yourself: Does my child have to excel to "feel loved?"
- Offer encouragement and support
- Praise for persistence and effort. Don't punish for failure
- Don't demand or expect certain performance levels. Avoid undue or harsh criticism.
- Teach them to enjoy and have fun regardless of the outcome.
- Be sensitive when talking with your child after a poor performance. Help the athletes realize that the consequences of failure are temporary.
- Take pictures of them and their friends. In the long run it will mean more than any medal or trophy.
- Keep things in perspective. The sun will be up tomorrow and life goes on!