

## Helping Your Athlete during Taper

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 under swimmer is more a mental adjustment than physical. 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 an older swimmer that trains harder and may be using weights and or rigorous dry land to increase their strength.

Swimmers 13 and older go through a physical change and adaptation in their physiology. When Swimmers have been training hard for many weeks and they start their taper, they sometimes feel terrible. This feeling is natural. This can be best explained by this concept: your body must adapt to a new kind of stress-that is REST. With time and rest, this feeling will pass and you will be ready for your big race. Rest is the key and a positive mental outlook is essential.

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!