

THE TAPER: REST AND REFUEL!

It may be challenging to taper well because of the fear of losing all the training you've attained over the last 16 plus weeks. The experts have done the studies and assure you that your body will not lose the aerobic capacity and endurance gained over your weeks of training. A three-week taper allows your levels of muscle glycogen, enzymes, antioxidants and hormones to return to optimal levels. Bottom line: Give your muscles time to repair damage from all the high mileage. The taper is your best insurance against an injury or getting sick right before your marathon. By gradually diminishing mileage and intensity over the last 21 days before the marathon, you will not lose what you have gained during your high mileage weeks; on the other hand your body has a lot to gain. You've done the hard work. Now let your body repair and refuel. Learn to taper well so that your muscles are repaired and well rested. (More)

Mileage

During the first week of the taper, decrease your highest weekly mileage by 20%. Your longest run this week should be 12-14 miles. The second week mileage should be no more than half of your highest mileage week, typically somewhere around 20-25 miles. Your longest run should be 8-10 miles. Run at a relaxed pace. Only one of your short runs may be done at marathon pace. Refrain from speed work and hill training. The mantra of the final week of taper is to 'under-do' and certainly not 'overdo'. The longest run this week should not exceed 4 miles. Your final daily run should be just 2-3 miles at a slow pace. These short slow runs will keep you loose and help control anxiety. Benefit from these very slow runs by working on your mental preparation. Do not run the two days prior to marathon day. If necessary, go run a slow mile or two to expend some nervous energy the day before the marathon. The priority is to stay off your feet and take it easy.

Focus on your nutrients

During the first week of the taper, it is recommended to eat a bit more protein in order to enhance muscle tissue repair. During the first two weeks of the taper, intake of carbohydrates should be maintained and 30% of calories from good fat sources is recommended to provide back-up fuel for the muscles. The last week of the taper and particularly three days before the marathon, build extra carbohydrates into your diet; potatoes, rice, pasta, fresh fruit are all good choices. Hydration is equally important. Be aware that alcohol and caffeine can work against your hydration levels. Do not worry about any weight gain during these three weeks. Your goal is to store some extra fuel and be well hydrated.

Mental preparation

You have most likely been working on scenarios regarding race day and getting to the start line on time fully prepared. At the start of taper, it is time to make sure that you have your shoes for marathon day. If you have not yet gotten your new shoes with fresh cushioning, purchase them immediately and break them in. Since you are running during these weeks at a slower pace, think about how you will adjust pace during the marathon if you realize you're going too fast, or you're behind your goal pace. Envision the different weather scenarios and how you will adjust pace. Finding solutions and options will help you to avoid panic on marathon day. Establish three different time goals for your event such as 'awesome', 'strong', 'doable', – this gives you mental and physical space the day of the marathon.

Final preparation

By the last week, make sure you have all your pre-race logistics planned including adequate time to arrive at the marathon start. Visit the website to verify anything you may not clearly understand and keep up with any last minute information. You will want to keep current on the weather forecast and plan to wear running apparel that is compatible with your body thermostat and the air temperatures/humidity. You will receive your chip with your running packet. Attach it to your shoe the night before the marathon and have clothing, shoes, socks, and bib ready to go for marathon day. Accessories such as sunglasses, fuel belt, hat, and any gels or sports drink you are carrying should also be packed and ready to go out the door.

The final component of your training has now been completed. You are refueled, hydrated and recovered. You can be confident that the taper will do just as much to help you on race day as all the training miles. It's your final strategy to run well!