

# How to Taper for a Marathon



**The perfect marathon taper, or a taper for any race, leaves you refreshed and ready to run your best on race day. You will have slowly been building the volume of your training up for several weeks. Now is the time to start winding it down a little.**

The easy or rest days in your schedule help the body to recover before another hard day or days of training. The tapering phase before a big race allows your body to rest and recover, assimilating the hard work of the last few months, before that big effort on race day.

As with all training regimes it is very individual as to exact specifics but there are certain basic principles. Although the tips that follow are geared to the marathon, the principles apply just the same to an important half marathon or 10k, but over a shorter time frame.

### **1. Quality, not Quantity**

After your last long run, whether that is two or three weeks before race day, you start to reduce your volume but maintain your intensity, or as some coaches say "reduce the quantity but maintain some quality".

### **2. Feeling Sluggish?**

With all the hard training that you have been motivating yourself to do, you can sometimes feel a bit sluggish and jaded for a few days as you realise how tired all the training has made you. This is normal and with a few days easier running without the mental or emotional pressure of having to get out there and "train hard" this feeling should pass after a day or two.

### **3. Keeping Up Routine**

You DON'T have to decrease the number of days you run, or the speed you do them at, but DO decrease the length of most runs and the total weekly mileage.

### **4. Withdrawal Symptoms**

You don't want to feel you are stopping training, just easing back. If you experience withdrawal symptoms and feel you could train harder, it means the tapering is working, however resist the temptation to do one last big effort in the hope it will make you fitter, save that for race day!

### **5. Feeling Fresh?**

Avoid the temptation to run faster, just because you are feeling fresh. If your schedule includes some speed work, fine, but keep the intensity and volume sensible. Any speed work during the tapering phase should be seen as maintaining the fitness level you have reached, rather than increasing that fitness. If your schedule says "easy day" make sure it is, no matter how good you are feeling

### **6. Use Your Free Time**

Use any free time you now have to plan race pacing and drinking schedules and sort out race day kit rather than leaving all that to the last minute. If you haven't for whatever reason planned travel to and from the event, do so soon.

### **7. Positive Visualisation**

Many runners take this time to visualise themselves at various points of the course. At five, ten, twenty miles and so on. Positive visualisation - like a mental rehearsal - has been shown to improve performance

in sport, and is a technique used by many top athletes. As anyone who has run long distances will tell you, performance is as much in the mental approach as in the physical condition.

## **8. Sleep Well**

Sleep well, eat and drink well, relax well and have some other tasks planned. Fill the extra time on your hands with things you have not got around to during your intensified running schedule, like meeting old friends or family you have been ignoring through the weeks of training!

## **9. Less is More**

Cramming extra miles in, in the last two weeks usually tends to be counter-productive leaving you tired and jaded! Many coaches will say that you can't do much in the last two weeks before a marathon (or half marathon) to improve your fitness for the day, but by not cutting back training, or trying to cram in "one last good week" too close to race day, you can do a lot to stop you running your best.

## **10. Stay Grounded: Keep a Perspective**

You have trained hard for your special day, so enjoy it. Remember though, that while you should take the event seriously, for most of us it is only our play and recreation time, so don't get too stressed out about it as you taper. Prepare and plan race day well, but make sure you remember to smile and enjoy it.