

## The Swimming Taper

You can have one of your most extraordinary swims if you hit your taper right. But what does that mean?

To this day, scientists do not fully understand why a taper actually works. What scientists can measure is peak performance, particularly at the end of a taper. Specifically, the power of the swimmer, neuromuscular efficiency, anaerobic contribution, and fast-twitch muscle mechanical efficiency, are all elevated during a taper.

Swimming tapered (or rested) is an ambiguous topic, with no clear-cut formula that are applied to each and every swimmer. Generally, the taper is a linear reduction in the swimmer's workload preceding major swimming competitions. It is intended to maximize speed while at the same time never exhausting the body. It is a period of general rest and rebuilding. The end point is that you get back what you put in, like an investment account you have put your money into while you were training. The taper is the time you collect the yield on your hard-earned work during a particular season.

If you have not broken down your body (if you have not been a little sore for the training period), you have nothing to rest. Don't bother tapering if you have not broken yourself down. Simply continue your swimming until the major competition. The taper will not work unless you are vested into the entirety of your training program.

In order to fully recover the body's highest potential after a high-volume and high-intensity training period, the swimmer and coach need to keep the following in mind:

1. First, the frequency of practices remain at the same level for the taper. Most especially during the first week of the taper, keep the amount of yardage nearly at the same level, widening the intervals, and working on speed associated with the particular swimming events the swimmer has chosen to train for. The swimming yardage will fall more during the second and third weeks (if you taper that long), with the intervals continuing to widen. At the end of the taper, total yardage will decrease to 60% of what it was during the regular season.
2. Shaving down the last day before the first day of competition does help, a few tenths at most. The reason is that the hair grabs attaches itself to the air and drags on the body. First, use an electric/battery trimmer to cut your body hair, then shave down with a razor. You'll thank yourself later for this method. Otherwise, the shave down can take a couple of hours if you simply start to shave with a razor that will continually clog. Do not use Nair™ and no waxing. The swimmer will want to feel the new skin against the water - smooth baby!
3. Get your head in order! Keep negative language out of your vocabulary. Stop whining if you have been and start believing that you can do it. Own your swimming. Mentally, you should be imaging your races and your success according to your level. If you don't get your head in order, you will most certainly fail, and your taper will be in vain.
4. The taper is generally linear. For those who are older, it is longer than for those who are younger. But regardless of age, you will decrease the workload linearly, allowing the body to maximize speed and efficiency, but gradually, and mathematically set according to the duration of the rest period.
5. Keep in mind that your swimming experience will help you to understand the physical feeling of a taper. If it's your first time tapering, allow yourself to understand it beyond an intellectual exercise. It *feels* very specific and if done correctly, exhilarating. Your energy levels will generally increase resulting in feeling more confident, positive, and focused about your swimming.
6. Your body composition will effect your taper. In other words, who you are physically will effect the kind of taper you do. Your coach should be in tune with your tapering needs. Be in conversation and counsel with your coach.
7. Sleep and eat right. You will not be able to recover and rest without proper sleep and food. Put good fuel into your body. You wouldn't put regular unleaded into a BMW, so don't put cheap food from McDonald's into your body. In short, take pride in yourself.

OK, that should help. Now go out there and own your races! Believe you can do it! Own the investment you've made in yourself! Be confident, strong, and powerful; and celebrate with the rest of the community the wonder and joy of life and the potential of being human!