

Tapering is the practice of lessening the work load for the athletes in the days just prior to a championship meet so that the swimmers are not as tired and their bodies will recover, causing them to have more energy for their races.

10 Tips On How To Get The Most Out Of Your Taper

TIP #1: MAINTAINING YOUR DIET

I'm not saying you should keep eating McDonalds, pizza, and ice cream every day if that's what you usually do, but you also don't want to drastically change your diet to a much healthier one only two weeks before the biggest meet of the season. Changing something in your routine – especially when it comes to nutrition – may actually *hurt* you, freaking your body out because of the sudden change. If you want to eat healthily and have a healthy body for your championship meet, you need to start your new diet plan many months in advance to keep your body on a normal routine.

You should try eating more vegetables and fruit during taper. This will only benefit you. Cut out late night snacks. And don't eat when you are bored since you will have extra time on your hands during taper.

TAPER TIP #2: CATCHING UP ON SLEEP

Catching up on sleep AKA everyone's favorite part of taper. Go to bed early and sleep in. Take naps throughout the day if you can't sleep in. I am a huge advocate of catching up on sleep during taper. I believe it is one of the most important aspects of taper. If you're tired – sleep! But don't sleep too much. Sleeping 12 or more hours a day for two weeks straight will not benefit you much. Stick to 8-10 hours a day. You don't want your body to get too lazy.

TAPER TIP #3: DON'T EXPEND TOO MUCH ENERGY, BUT DON'T BE TOO LAZY EITHER

Everyone knows that the whole point of taper is not to spend too much energy and catch up on your rest, but what some may not pay too much attention to is to not be too lazy during taper. Yes, this is a thing. Like I mentioned earlier, don't sleep all day. Your body is used to getting beaten up every day and not getting enough sleep. Taper is a time to catch up and get the right amount of sleep the average person your age needs, not to sleep 15 hours a day.

If your body spends too much time in bed, sleeping away, your body may not be “awake” when it comes time for your races, as most of your races will be in the morning. If you are feeling a little jittery during taper – which is normal – try going on a short walk. Do not run! Walking a couple of blocks is perfectly fine as long as you don't work your muscles too much and get out of breath and tired. It should not be another workout in your day, just to keep your muscles loose and nerves active.

TAPER TIP #4: STRETCH

Stretching is something a lot of swimmers take for granted. Stretching will help keep your muscles loose. The last thing you want is for your body to feel tight and sore during taper. Take care of your body, especially your muscles. Since you probably aren't doing dryland conditioning anymore, you should still stretch because our body will freak out since it is not in its normal routine of constant soreness and pain.

Stretch when you wake up, stretch right before practice, stretch right after practice, and stretch right before bed. Do this multiple times a day – your body will thank you.

TAPER TIP #5: GET AHEAD ON SCHOOL WORK

What should you do with that extra time? The smart thing would be to get ahead on your school work. You need to get ahead because you will be gone for three to four days depending on your meet and how far you must travel. Make sure you talk to all your teachers weeks in advance to set up an organized plan on when you need to turn in your assignments and if you have to make up any tests. And let's face it, when you come back to school the following week after your championship meet, you're not going to want to start doing your homework right away. I always do at least two days of

homework ahead of time so I can relax the first few days after championships since it is a very long and exhausting meet. Be prepared and think ahead of time!

TAPER TIP #6: HYDRATE

Drink plenty of water during taper. Water is the most important nutrient, so keep drinking and avoid other drinks that will only dehydrate you, such as soda and sugary drinks.

Drink at least eight cups of water each day. Keep some water next to your bed while you're sleeping so if you wake up in the middle of the night you can easily hydrate. Drink a cup of water right when you wake up in the morning before you eat breakfast. Drinking water right away wakes you up and replenishes your body after many hours without any sort of nutrients.

TAPER TIP #7: CARB-O-LOAD

Pasta. A swimmer's favorite food. We all know how easy it is to make pasta, and I'm sure every swimmer has it at least once a week. During taper try to have it every day, or at least every other day. It is important to get your other nutrients in, such as vegetables, fruit, and protein, but the most essential food group during taper is eating carbs, which pasta contains a lot of. Carbohydrates give you energy – which you need plenty of – especially if you are a distance swimmer.

Try making fun meals out of it instead of just having plain noodles with butter. Add protein! Protein is also very important during taper. Try making spaghetti and meatballs, chicken parmesan, and whatever else you can think of to be creative with your meals.

Also, after a workout, drink chocolate milk. Many sources say chocolate milk is the best thing you can consume after working out as it replenishes your body and gives you the right amount of nutrients that your body needs after a workout.

TAPER TIP #8: BE POSITIVE AND CONFIDENT

Be positive. Remind yourself every day that you are going to perform well at championships. You worked hard all year long, you deserve to have a great meet and get your best times. Don't ever doubt yourself, and if you do, immediately change your attitude and think of something positive.

Be confident. Confidence is key, especially right before you get on the blocks to swim your race. My coaches told us to stand tall and “look big” behind the blocks. If you look like you're confident on the outside just from your stance, then you will be confident on the inside too. They said to stand in your “confidence stance” for at least two minutes before your race as this will boost your self-esteem and prepare you for what's to come.

TAPER TIP #9: TRUST YOUR TAPER

Trust your coaches giving you the right taper. They know what type of swimmer you are and how much rest you need. They are trained to prepare their swimmers all season long for this particular meet and they want you to succeed as much as you want to.

Trust yourself. You've trained hard – countless hours – for six months, you deserve this rest. It is your time to shine. Do it for yourself, do it for your teammates. Well, now you're here and it's time to prove to everyone that you've made it this far and you can *still* get your best times.

TAPER TIP #10: HAVE FUN

Remember why you started swimming, it was fun. If you are having fun during the taper and at the meet, you will swim well. Positivity is contagious, encourage others around you to remain happy and positive. This will lead to success both in the pool and on deck.

Thank you for reading these tips on how to get the best out of your taper. Now it is your turn. Start preparing for your meet *now*, don't wait until the night before to do these important rituals.

Remember, you deserve to swim well after all the hard work you've put in. Your body and mind will thank you for following these tips during taper. Best of luck to all those with big meets coming up!

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