

Preparing For Your Triathlon – A 2 Week Taper Plan

"Unless you test yourself, you stagnate. Unless you try to go way beyond what you've been able to do before, you won't develop and grow. When you go for it 100 percent, when you don't have that fear of 'what if I fail,' that's when you learn. That's when you're really living." Mark Allen

The quote above is from Mark Allen considered by most in the sport to be the greatest Triathlete of all time. It captures the beauty and the challenge of taking on a Triathlon. So as your race gets closer the first thing you should do is give yourself a massive pat on the back for having the courage to step out of your comfort zone and take on the awesome and daunting challenge of a Triathlon. You will find it exhilarating and you will feel like "you're really living".

In terms of more practical tips for preparing for your race the rest of this article will take you through the last 2 weeks prior to your race offering some practicable tips.

2 weeks out from your race

The main concept to start focusing on here is Tapering.

Tapering at its essence is simple: Reduce your overall training volume while maintaining the proportion of (or even slightly increasing) your intensity. To keep things simple for this article let's define intensity as training at or higher than your goal race pace.

The most common approach to tapering is this: over the past few weeks and months, you've consistently broken down (training overload) and then rebuilt your muscles (recovery periods). Now is your time to allow them to fully recover before you launch your final attack on your goal race. The entire rebuilding/healing process can take about two weeks, plus or minus a few days. The greater your overall training volume, the longer the entire process will take, and vice versa. So. If you have been training less than 8 hours per week then your need for recovery and tapering is much less and you can carry on with your normal training and just take things much easier during the last 2 to 3 days prior to the race.

If you have been training consistently and averaging over 8 hours per week of training, then a 2-week taper might better suit you. An example of what a 2-week taper might look like is as follows:

3 Weeks Out (normal training week)

| Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat | Sun |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|----------|------------------|-------------------|
| 1:00 Easy Run | 1:00 swim with 15x100m fast | 1:00 Run including 6x3minute fast intervals | 1:00 bike with 6 hill intervals | Rest Day | 1:30 easy run | 2:30 easy bike |
| | | | 1:00 easy swim | | | |

Total weekly hours: 9.

2 Weeks Out from Race (first taper week)

| Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat | Sun |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|-------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 0:30 Easy Run | 1:00 swim with 8x100m fast | 0:50 Run including 4x3minute fast intervals | 1:00 bike with 4 hill intervals | Rest Day | 1:00 easy run | 1:30 easy bike |
| | | | 0:45 easy swim | | | |

Total weekly hours: 6:35 (around 70% of previous week)

Race Week

| Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat | Sun |
|----------|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|----------|------------------|-------------|
| Rest Day | 1:00 swim with 4x100m fast | 0:40 Run including 1x3minute fast interval | 1:00 bike with 1 hill intervals | Rest Day | 0:30 easy run | Race Day |

Total weekly hours (excluding race): 3:10 (around 50% of previous week)

A key point to always have in your mind during this period is that well known expression "**less is more**".

Race Week

The week leading up to a major race, what we call "race week" in the sport, can cause even the most level headed individuals to melt down in pre-race stress and anxiety. These emotions can pile up and wreak havoc on an athlete's race experience and even results. So what's a high-strung athlete to do? The best chance for success on race week is to do your best to make it as much like any other week in training.

Below you'll find a few more handy tips to help keep the stress at bay and set you up for your best race.

Race Week Don'ts

Don't:

1. Leave your bike tune-up to the week before. Cables can stretch unevenly, worn chains and cassettes can cause problems, and your normally amazing mechanic can forget to tighten all bolts. Most of these issues can only be picked up with decent miles put in, and are not things you want to find out on race day or race week.
2. Go out and buy a bunch of new "go-faster" gear. Don't get me wrong, I love new gadgets as much as the next guy, but don't buy new race shoes the day before a race and expect it to go well. Stick with what you trained with and use the new gadgets in training before the next race.
3. Try any new-fangled wonder diets. Sure enough you'll hear someone or read about some elite athlete carbo-loading or supplementing with beetroot juice but please, don't try it. Stick with what has worked in training and try new theories out in training before you use them in any race.
4. Don't fill up your days doing other things just because your training has reduced. Rest means rest! And for goodness sake, don't help your friends move; take up rock climbing; or decide to build a shed. Every season someone finds a new way to wear themselves out or injure themselves prior to a race. Don't be that person.
5. Over rest. I love a taper as much as the next person, but taper doesn't mean crashing out in front of the T.V. or sleeping all day long. A common mistake in race week can be over resting and letting the system become stale. It's important to keep blood flowing around the body as it has become accustomed to through the training. Keep moving with shorter workouts and small amounts of intensity while not pushing too deep.
6. Go into race mode too early. As I said above, keep some intensity on, but do not race your race on your workouts the week of the race. Energy can be high and when the taper is settling in it always feels good to "open up the legs". Just don't let the ride back from the coffee shop with your pals turn into an all-out suffer fest because "your legs felt good" – save it for race day.
7. Don't over eat. While you don't want to be depleting your carbohydrate stores the week before a race, remember that you'll be exercising less, so you don't necessarily need to eat more than normal to carbo-load. Just eat normally throughout the week, favoring healthy, real foods.
8. Don't rush yourself on race morning. Get up with a reasonable amount of time to allow yourself to wake-up, eat, and get your pre-race bathroom trips out of the way.

Race Week Do's

1. Know your course. All three courses. If the swim course is open for pre-swims, go test out the wetsuit to make sure it's good to go. Find your sighting landmarks, the swim exit, and transition flow. Walk from the swim finish to the transition entrance to your bike. Walk from your bike to the bike transition exit. Walk from your bike to the run exit. Do it again – don't be the person during the race running around in transition desperately looking for their bike or the way out! Drive or cycle tricky sections of the bike course. And don't let it stress you—hills always seem bigger in a car! Do your easy pre-race spin around the run course a few days before the race. This is also the perfect time to visualize success.
2. Be prepared. Pack your gear up ahead of time. Athletes more organized than I will have a gear bag with most of their essentials already packed for the next race. This is a great way to keep the week before a little less stressful searching for equipment.
3. Suggested essential items for your race bag:
 - Wetsuit or swim suit
 - Swim goggles
 - Bike shoes
 - Socks
 - Helmet
 - Sunglasses
 - Run shoes
 - Hat
 - Towel to place running shoes and gels for run, stand on when you change
 - Bottles-High GI Carbs (freeze them, if you like), after race recovery bottles – High GI Carbs, protein, electrolytes
 - Energy gels/bars
 - Bananas
 - Toilet paper
 - Race clothes
 - Race numbers
 - Plastic bags to cover stuff in case of rain
 - Wetsuit friendly lubricant - to stop chaffing
4. Properly and effectively laying out your transition area. Lay out your transition area on your bed the night before to ensure you have everything. Bring a sports bag to pack gear into the triathlon venue.
5. An ideal transition set-up could look like this:
 - Rack and secure my bike
 - Place a bath towel on the ground parallel to my bike
 - Take race belt with number for run and place running shoes on top of number (some will safety pin their number on their shirt, but I find that flapping is very irritating)
 - Make sure that the tongue of my shoes and laces are open

- Place bike shoes on the towel directly behind running shoes
 - Loosen up the straps and ensure they're open and ready...place socks inside
 - Leave the portion of the towel to the rear of my bike open to stand on
 - Place a water bottle near this area to wash away any debris that I pick up.
 - Make sure I know where my hydration is located
 - If it is hot, bury running cap in the ice chest
 - Place helmet on aero bars or bike and put shades inside
 - Place shirt on top of bike seat, so it is just within my reach.
 - Run through everything mentally to double-check and make sure that I haven't forgotten anything, then place my hydration on my bike.
 - Reset my bike computer.
 - Double-check to make sure my bike is in the right gear (small chain ring in front and a gear that I can easily push coming out of Transition One).
6. Get more sleep. Adding an extra hour of sleep each day will help you rest up and get primed for the event. This is especially important, since you'll most likely be sleepless (or very restless) the night before the race.
 7. Eat plenty of healthy, real foods. As with drinking, you can only store away so many calories each day. Start increasing the quality of your meals at the beginning of the week.
 8. Avoid alcohol. In the days before the race, you should avoid drinking alcohol. (Sorry) It upsets sleep patterns and just gives your body one more thing to try and recover from. Besides, think how sweet that post race beer or glass of wine is going to taste!
 9. Be nice to your family/support crew. I know you are stressed, but try not to take it out on the ones who have helped you out along the way. Try not to make the week entirely about you—go ahead, treat them to a nutritious and healthy pre-race carbo-loading meal.
 9. Try to relax. Put pre-race anxiety aside by focusing on all of the preparations that you've made to get ready for your race.

As you can see the last 2 weeks before a race is actually quite an important time for you as an athlete. Try to stay focused on getting rested, hydrated, relaxed, and have all of your things prepared.

And good luck with your race!

Coach Musty has been helping triathletes of all standards to train and race to the best of their potential for over 26 years. If you have any questions or are interested in more tailored support for your next Triathlon please email: coachmusty@strive4fitnessuk.com