

What is Taper?

"When A Championship Meet Approaches, My Child's Workouts Get Easier And Shorter. Shouldn't He Be Working Harder Right Before A Meet? What Is Taper?"

Answered by: Marc Williams, Head Coach of the City of Richardson Swim Team, Richardson, Texas.

It shouldn't be surprising to see a team reducing the amount of work leading up to an important competition. Swimming is extremely demanding physically, and in order to produce top performances, the body needs rest.

Before an important meet, a swimmer will go through a training phase known as a taper. This means a reduction of work and an increase in the amount of rest. The length of a taper will vary. A short taper will consist of one to three days of reduced work and a full taper can last up to six weeks. In general, a young body can recuperate rapidly and does not require as much rest as a senior swimmer. In fact, sometimes the younger swimmer does not respond well to more than a few days rest. The age group swimmer is less developed physically and has undergone less intense training than the senior swimmers. Usually, the age group swimmer will need to reduce the workout load a few days before the meet or maybe take a day or two off.

During the course of the taper, all types of stress should be gradually reduced. As the taper progresses, the amount of high stress work is decreased and the quality of performance is gradually improved.

For optimum performance, it is suggested that the swimmers curtail their outside activities as much as possible. Most swim coaches realize it is not always possible to skip a little league baseball, softball or soccer game during a taper. However, the neighborhood football game and overnight slumber parties should be saved for another time. Ideally, you would like the swimmers to store up as much energy as possible for the swimming meet.

When the workload is reduced. There is a noticeable increase in the swimmer's energy level. Resting is an important part of the taper, and expending the energy will only defeat the purpose of the taper.

There are many factors a coach must consider when planning a taper: age, gender, body type, and the swimmer's primary event.

Age: Older swimmers require more rest than younger swimmers.

Sex: Men usually require more rest than women.

Body Type: Muscular swimmers need more rest.

Primary event: Peak performance in shorter events requires more rest than peak performances in longer events.

During the season, a coach will be very selective in deciding which meets to taper for. Normally, a coach will not rest or taper a swimmer more than two or three times during the short course season. Often times, a swimmer will only taper for the season-ending championship meet.

An effective taper varies greatly from swimmer to swimmer. Consequently, it is essential that there is close communication between the swimmer and coach.