

Tapering

Ideally your preparation period will involve "months" rather than weeks. As much of a cliché as it sounds, the truth is if you're not ready to achieve your set goal 2-3 weeks out from an event, you never will be.

Your main objective throughout the closing weeks is to ensure your final preparation does not leave you fatigued. Having a tough final preparation/playing catch up will be of minimal benefit. You may improve your fitness level slightly but walking to the start line sore and tired "from cramming" is not a sensible trade-off.

You have made a number of sacrifices to reach your current level of fitness, and owe it to yourself to feel as fresh as possible on race day. Your objective is to arrive at the start feeling like a caged lion eagerly waiting to be set free. Tapering will allow your body an opportunity to repair and rejuvenate.

Gradually reducing the duration of your long run will be crucial. You will be decreasing total running volume by 10% each week over the final 3 weeks. Marathoners will be running no further than 90min the weekend prior and Half Marathoners will cut back closer to the hour mark. Speed work can be maintained however overall duration of repetitions will become less and rest between repetitions will be increased, eg; 8 x 500m with a 1min SR rather than 5 x 1k with a 45sec SR. Slotting in an additional REST day each week is acceptable.

Runners often complain of a "lethargic" feeling whilst in taper mode. I believe this is more to do with the fact we're not getting our usual quota of "endorphin hits". I mean let's face it – one of the main reasons we run is because of how it makes us feel "when we run", and also how we feel "post run". Reduce this "hit" and we're left wanting.

To prevent such a feeling you could plan ahead and lock in a movie or 2 at a cinema. This will serve as a pleasant relaxing outing without using up your energy reserves and also an opportunity to help keep your mind off the actual race.

This brings up to the importance being in control psychologically during your final week, and on the morning of the race, will play in achieving your goal. For a majority of runners, preparation is filled with determination to achieve a goal and confidence grows with each run. But others, once confronted with the event "head on", may suffer from pre-race anxiety.

I could often feel myself start to crumble as an event drew closer. To combat this I eventually adopted, in the final week, a simplistic approach to races where I would not entertain any thoughts about what I was about to enter into. I imagined there was a gate in my mind which I would shut as soon as any thoughts about the race entered. I found that even if I entertained positive thoughts about what may happen, negative thoughts would manage to creep in.

Combining a physical taper and a plan to stay in control psychologically will allow you to fully tap into the months of banked training.

Tip: Don't try anything new on race day. This applies to diet/apparel/shoes and anything else that someone may try to talk you into. If it ain't broke don't try and fix it!