

How tapering maximizes your potential on marathon day

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The taper is an essential aspect of training that many new runners need to remember to incorporate into their training program. Tapering means reducing your training load before a competition to optimize

performance on race day. It's the rest period before race day to reduce the effects of muscle fatigue brought on by months of rigorous training.

During marathon training, [muscle power](#) diminishes, stores of glycogen (a form of glucose) deplete and overall muscle fatigue accumulates. The tapering period minimizes the adverse effects of a long-distance training schedule, so your muscles will be fresh and fatigue-free on race day, significantly reducing your injury risk.

What are the benefits of tapering?

Adding tapering to your training can:

- Bolster your [immune system](#) to lower your risk of being sick on race day
- Improve your running economy, which is the oxygen your body needs to run at a given pace
- Replenish glycogen stores so that you have the necessary amount of fuel stored in your body on race day
- Repair damaged [muscle tissue](#), which restores [muscle fibers](#) and allows them to work their best when you need them the most.
- Reduce the psychological stresses of training, which will help you be mentally strong on race day
- Improve sleep quality so that you get the rest you need leading up to the race

What are the guidelines for tapering?

People often wonder how to define "rest" during tapering and how to make sure it's helping performance and not hurting it.

A [meta-analysis](#) of 27 studies published in the journal *Medicine &*

Science in Sports & Exercise showed that a tapering strategy most likely to give you significant performance improvements for two weeks, where the training volume is progressively decreased by 41–60% without modifying the training intensity or frequency.

This means altering your training volume by decreasing only the length of each training session. The most common way is to reduce the number of miles run per session in the two to three weeks leading up to race day, depending on the length of the race.

The taper lengths for the most popular race distances are:

- Marathon—19 to 22 days
- 15K race—11 to 14 days
- 5K or 10K race—seven to 10 days

Plan to taper only for your key or peak races. If you taper for every race, you'll miss the key physical conditioning needed to get into optimal shape.

Remember to also strive for quality sleep and good nutrition during the taper and the week of the race. Both are needed to promote physical recovery and allow your muscles to repair and rebuild.

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