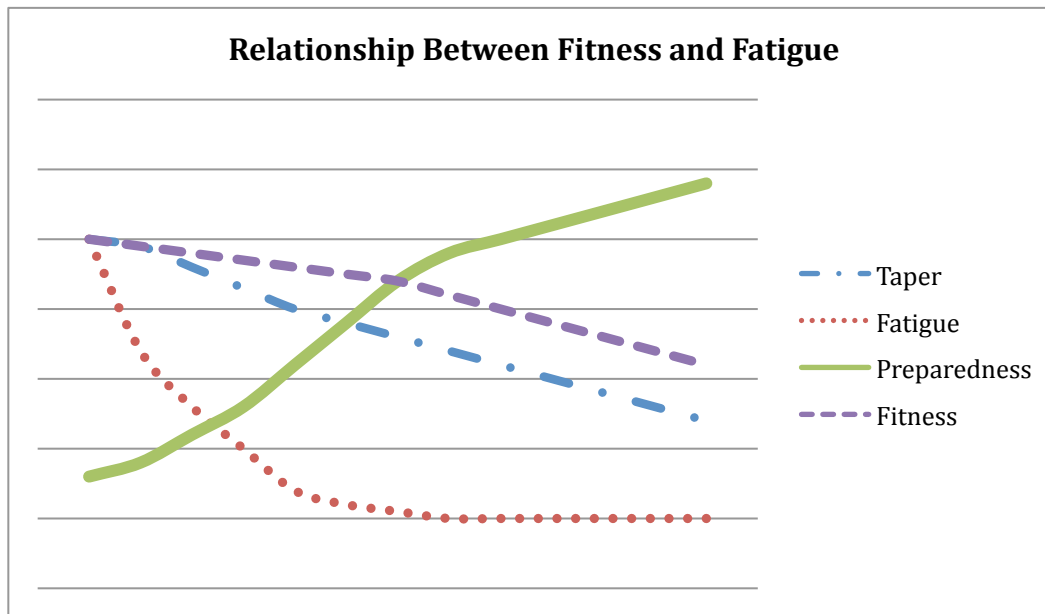


Taper Guidelines

How does taper work?

Your performance on a given day is a direct result of the relationship between fitness and fatigue. During consistent hard training, you begin to improve your fitness and accumulate fatigue. The relationship between fitness and fatigue is called “preparedness”. Preparedness is optimized by using training techniques that maximize the fitness response, while minimizing the development of fatigue.

A taper works by allowing you to dissipate accumulated fatigue while retaining fitness. Fitness levels are relatively stable over a period of weeks while fatigue is highly variable and directly affected by physical and psychological stresses. Therefore, when training load is decreased, fitness is maintained while built up fatigue is removed. The result is a dramatic improvement in competition performance.



What should I expect from a taper?

In general, during a taper you can expect performance improvement between 2%-4%. Athletes usually experience a feeling of sluggishness or tiredness during the first 7-9 days of a taper. This feeling is the result of increased water retention due to greater muscle carbohydrate storage and should begin to fade as the taper length approaches 12-14 days.

Based on research and experience, a gradual taper lasting between 14-21 days will maximize performance improvement. Remember that everyone is individual, some people will feel great and swim fast others may feel terrible and still swim fast.

What can I do to maximize my taper?

Training

In order to maximize your taper, it is important to keep training intensity high even though the volume of demanding training is reduced. In addition to maintaining training intensity, increasing focus on race execution (turns, streamlines, breathing patterns, stroke technique) will ensure that these essential details are automatic when the time comes to perform.

Rest/Relaxation

During the taper phase it is important to get additional rest and relaxation outside of the planned workout. Partaking in strenuous physical activity outside of the workout will negate the positive effects of reduced training volume on preparedness. Keeping stress levels low is also important; this can be achieved by using stress relief techniques (relaxation breathing, progressive muscular relaxation) as well as being proactive with schoolwork.

Nutrition

Going along with reducing stress, maintaining a healthy diet is essential. Don't make dramatic changes to your diet because this may put undue stress on your body. It is also not essential to take in as many calories as you were when training volume was at its peak. Try to ensure that you are adequately hydrated (10 cups of water/day).

Sleep

Sleep plays an obvious role in reducing fatigue levels. Try to get as much sleep as possible. 8-10 hours/day is recommended. Many athletes have trouble sleeping the night before big competitions. If you have experienced difficulty sleeping during big meets in the past, expect the same to occur for Sectionals and State. Get extra sleep in the preceding 3-4 nights.

Shaving Down

All athletes should shave down before their major competition. A shaved body produces significantly less drag. Shaving down has been shown to increase streamline distance and distance per stroke by up to 5%. It is generally advisable to use a set of hair clippers before using a safety razor to shave down. This can save you a great deal of time and energy.

Psychological Factors

Everyone on this Sectional/State team has done extensive preparation work. We have followed a training program which balanced training and recovery to maximize fitness adaptations and minimize fatigue. You have put in the work necessary to be a champion. The only thing you need to do now is rest and execute.