

## **IS PEAKING/TAPERING FOR MASTERS ATHLETES? – George White – Feb 2013**

The simple answer is yes! While normally associated with top class athletes, there is no reason the concepts shouldn't apply to masters athletes – the degree to which you apply them depends on how serious you are. At some stage most of us want to do well in a special race or championship; there may even be up to 3 or 4 important races to you in a year and your training should be geared to them. The main thing you are trying to avoid – is leaving your best race on the training track.

To peak correctly involves a series of phases that in simplest terms involves recovery, building a base, speed and then a taper before competition. The length of each phase will depend on whether you have an annual or more frequent target but they shouldn't be shorter than about 3 weeks each.

While each of these phases may contain all or most training elements, the emphasis will change. In each phase, give your body chance to adapt and only change one variable at a time i.e. if you increase distance, do not increase speed and vice versa. Also, remember, too rapid an increase in distance or intensity could result in injury.

### **Recovery**

The recovery phase would be dominated by rest, slow training and cross training. After an important race or season, rest is vital and may last from one to many weeks. Both your body and your mind need this rest! Remember the body repairs and strengthens itself in the time between training not in the training itself.

The objective in this phase is to gradually return to training with low-intensity and moderate-duration activities. Easy to moderate, comfortable sessions are a good way to prepare for the season. Cycling and swimming are good options for cross training.

### **Building A Base**

When you are refreshed, enter the base building phase which is dominated by steadily increasing longer distance.

About half of the time between your start and your first target event should be spent in this phase which concentrates on easy to moderate endurance training. These workouts may feel too easy but don't make the mistake of going to hard - focus on improving technique and endurance.

This phase is extremely important as it allows muscles, joints and tendons to get stronger slowly and adapt to increased loads and efforts. Use this time also to find shoes that suit, and food and drink that you can train with.

### **Building Speed**

The speed phase will obviously introduce more fast training. During this time you are becoming more "race-specific" and you should increase training intensity. You should add interval work of high-intensity, shorter duration efforts. Your training volume may in fact stay the same but speed and intensity should go up and as there is a danger of injuries in this phase, it may be necessary to include more rest days.

During this phase you may wish to bring in strength training to provide the extra power you need for a good result. Strength exercises up to three times a week will assist and need not take a lot of time.

Part of this phase could be simulating race conditions where you can focus on technique and strategy. If you are not already doing so, you may start competing in "lead-up" events to get used to actual competition and race-day conditions.

### **The Taper**

Weekly totals should drop by half or more, while still maintaining intensity and concentrating on technique. Believe in what you have done in the previous weeks or months and do not be tempted to do too much in the last week or so. If you continue with a high volume of training it will result in minimal or no further improvement and may well be counter-productive and entering a race tired, rather than fresh. If you want to stay active do more stretching.

Your objective is to be in top condition – physically, mentally and emotionally. Your high-intensity intervals should continue, but with fewer repeats. The final few days before the event can include some light aerobic exercise, but nothing too strenuous.

During the taper it is essential to get proper nutrition that will fuel your race. Complex carbohydrates should be your primary fuel and you should have already established what is your best pre-race meal. Don't worry too much about poor sleep the night before a race, it will have minimal impact on performance - it is the few nights before this that are more important.

The length of the taper will depend on the race with a rough guideline being one week for a race of one hour or less and two weeks for longer races.

Depending on your overall fitness, after the taper phase, your fitness could be maintained for one to several weeks, but at some stage it is important to return to the recovery phase.