



Dave Scott's Guide to Designing Your Ideal Pre-Race Taper





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Over the years I've seen many athletes fail to achieve their full potential in races because they failed to execute a proper pre-race taper.

I've witnessed triathletes who have not backed off enough and have arrived at the event tired and flat; I've also seen those who have dialed back their training way too much, and dulled the fitness that they invested months to build.

Follow my prescription as we countdown to race day. It blends the ideal mix of aerobic and high intensity training that will optimize your final 3 weeks and deliver you to your event sharp, fresh and ready to race!

22 Days to 10 Days Before Your Race

1. **Maintain your schedule.** Maintain your weekly training schedule, even as the duration of your workouts shorten. If you normally run on Tuesdays, then continue to do it! Your body is accustomed to your established training rhythm, so don't alter it.
2. **Long training days.** Your training is nearly complete, and so you should resist "cramming" your final long workouts too close to the event.

If you're planning a long run, schedule it no closer than 18-22 days before race day. Your last long bike should take place 14-21 days from race day. Your long swim no closer than 9-10 days prior.

3. **Maintain "like intensity" but reduce the segment length of the repeats.** There is a great physiological return on reducing your sub-threshold and threshold training to between 90 sec to 3.5 min per repeat.

These shorter segments — even with incomplete recovery — will not leave you whipped after the workout.



By resisting the temptation to lengthen the repeats, you'll maintain the adaptive stress of the session but enhance your day-to-day recovery.

4. **Notice improved performance.** One characteristic of a proper taper is that you'll begin to feel a bit fresher during and after the workouts, while experiencing a 2–5% increase in performance (either by comparing tangible measurements or Perceived Exertion).

For example, all of your training sessions might feel easier despite a concurrent increase in speed, watts or simultaneous reduction in heart rate. With this said, be careful that your fast sessions do not increase above 5% from your previous workouts and the easy sessions remain very easy!

Simply put, you should begin to feel like you're flowing at less effort. This sensation is a positive affirmation that your training has been effective and you're on track for a good race.

5. **Reduce overall training time.** A reduction in total training time should start during this taper block.

Here are my recommendations:

For those logging 11-14 hours per week or less, reduce your volume by about 15% per week during the 3 week taper.

If you're typically training 15-22 hours, bring the volume down by 20%

If you're at 23-30 hours, then reduce that volume by 25% in week 1, 20% in week 2 and an additional 15% during race week.

If you're training more than 30 hours, then reduce that by 30% in week 1, 20% in week 2 and 10% in race week.

Be especially deliberate in applying these percentage reductions to your runs, because the eccentric load and recovery from running are more substantial.



6. **Maintain your strength training.** Eliminate the heavy lifts or explosive plyometrics, and reduce the total weight and number of reps, but still maintain your training schedule.

Take the exercises to fatigue but never to failure.

If you're on a minimal strength-training program, continue it at least twice per week and emphasize core, gluteal, shoulder and back strength. Plus – for at least 15 minutes per day -- perform mobility and flexibility exercises for your thoracic spine, hips and shoulders.

7. **Watch your body weight.** As a general rule, you should *aim to reach your target race weight no later than 3 weeks before your event*. Try to avoid weight fluctuations during this block.

Eat nutrient dense foods with healthy fats and protein at all meals. Cut back on simple carbohydrates. If you're still driven to lose weight during this part of the taper, then keep your weight loss to no more 0.5% of your current body weight; any more than that and you risk compromising your immune system.

8. **Continue your bodywork.** Maintain treatments with your PT, massage therapist, acupuncturist or yoga. Be diligent with foam rolling and stretching. These are all good, but don't try something new during this period!

9 Days to 5 days Before Your Race

1. **Keep to your schedule.** Maintain the same familiar regimen and order of training, both in terms of days per week and disciplines per day.
2. **Reduce your "long" distances.** Your longest run should fall on Day 9 or Day 8 before the race, and it should be 35-50% shorter than the last long run at the start of your taper.

For example if you entered the taper with runs at 16 miles, then this run should be 8 to 10.5 miles. Your long bike should be similarly reduced, and



your long swim workout reduced by 15%.

3. **Maintain intensity.** Intensity should be maintained up to three days prior the race. However, the set length will be reduced.

Rather than looking at percentages, it's easier to maintain "like " intensities in all three. This includes muscular overload, recovery between sets and breathing rates during exertion and recovery.

The key is short sets of 4-12 min, and short segments of 30-90 sec.

The single most important factor in implementing a proper taper — and this includes for Kona — is not to perform only aerobic workouts; it's vital that you keep up your intensity but dramatically shorten the sets. The set length can range between 4 minutes to 16 minutes. By doing so you'll be "priming your engine".

Lastly, maintain the steady state aerobic work, particularly on the bike. This allows you to finish these sessions with elevated endorphins, which will help to maintain calmness during this period. I always had to feel my endorphin buzz or I'd go crazy leading up to the race! I'd workout just enough to take off the edge and allow myself to get a good night's sleep.

4. **Sleep.** Get more if you can and start shifting your bedtime a bit earlier so that the night before the race it's "lights out" at about 8:30 pm.
5. **Dinner.** Begin shifting your dinner by 30 minutes per night so the last two nights before the event you're comfortable with finishing dinner by 6pm. This will give you a 10-hour transit time and help to ensure an empty stomach before your early morning wakeup on race morning.
6. **Maintain strength training.** Right up through Wednesday of race week – 4 days before the start – maintain your strength training routines.

Reduce the weight and just do one or two sets of all exercises. Maintain your stretching and foam rolling routines.



7. **Dial down the alcohol.** Eat right and reduce your alcohol consumption. If you like a glass of wine or beer with the evening meal, have no more than 2 per day (but less is better).
8. **Watch your weight.** Don't overeat due to nervousness! Try to maintain your body weight.

Day 4 to Race Day

1. **Maintain intensity.** Hit the intensity at the same levels you've been training. Breathe hard, make your muscles work and remind yourself of the physical cues that allow you to flow.

A set of 6x 2.5 minutes on the bike at race pace would be perfect!

A run of 8x 30-45 seconds at your 70.3 pace would be just right.

For your swim, 12x 75m at race pace will feel great.

Add a steady state aerobic block onto the end of each session to complete the workouts.

2. **Strength training.** Conduct your final strength session on either day.
3. **Bodywork.** Relax with a gentle massage, PT or yoga.
4. **Race cues.** Write down the key phrases or picture in your mind's eye the best scenarios that will help you get into the focus and flow for racing in each discipline. Consider these to be your mantras or cues.

Suggested cues:

Swim: Relaxed arms, head down, wiggle your fingers in the recovery, firm catch.

Bike: Spin perfect circles with a soft yet solid stroke. Stay "long" through the



lower torso and draw the belly in to engage the core. Look at your leg muscles while they're pumping down the Queen K and envision yourself on your last best training ride.

Run: Light but firm hold on ground contact. No wobbling from side to side. Maintain a relaxed face, head, neck, etc.

5. **Race segments.** Visualize a mental roadmap of the course. For all 3 disciplines be sure to know the turns, the tough spots and how YOU are going to break-up the course.
6. **Intensity.** You can still work hard in your sessions, but keep them very short... leaving you a bit antsy to test yourself.
7. **Body weight.** A slight increase (i.e., 0.5%) in body weight due to water retention is normal. Don't panic! On the other hand, be vigilant to
8. **Be smart.** Get out of the midday sun. Exercise in the morning. Try to swim on the race course.
9. **Calm down.** Stay hydrated (but not overly so... you're not a camel!), keep your feet elevated, and minimize your time at the expo. Relax.
10. **Visualize your race strategy.** Anticipate the inevitable tough patches you'll experience during the race, and think about how you'll work through them. Accept that you must be spontaneous on the race course and adapt.

Day Before the Race

Perform all three disciplines and generate a light sweat on the bike. Mix up your strokes on the swim. It's okay to make a handful of efforts at *almost* race pace, but don't overdo it! Sting your legs for 30 sec on the run and know that tomorrow the snap will be there.



Race Day!

You're ready to go... confident in the knowledge that your training, bodywork, nutrition and race strategy have all been optimally dialed-in.

Questions for Dave?

If you have questions regarding your taper – or any other topic related to your training, racing or nutrition – please send them to AskTheMan@DaveScottTriClub.com or post them in the member forum.



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