

How to Adjust Food Intake When You Taper

By Katie Davis

Whether it is to prepare for an upcoming competition or readjusting nutrition after the season is over, tapering intake goes hand-in-hand with tapering training. So, here are a few tips to make the process slightly less confusing.

1. Calculate carbohydrate needs. Because carbohydrate needs increase as training increases, needs also decrease when training decreases. Therefore, it helps to calculate where your intake should actually be when tapering. To do this, first calculate your weight in kilograms by dividing your weight (in pounds) by 2.2. So, for example, $130 \text{ pounds} / 2.2 = 59.1 \text{ kilograms}$. Next, multiply by the correct factor based on how many training hours you are currently doing:

4 to 5 hours/day = 8-12

1 to 3 hours/day = 6-10

1 hour/day = 5-7

Low intensity or skill-based activities = 3-5

For example, during high-intensity training, our 130-pound athlete might be putting in two to three hours daily. So we take 59.1 kilograms and multiply it by 8 (based on the guidelines above), which equals 473 grams carbohydrate daily.

However, during tapering, the athlete reduces training hours to 45 minutes daily. So, we take 59.1 kilograms and multiple it by 6, which equals 355 grams carbohydrate, for a difference of 118 grams carbohydrate or 472 calories from carbohydrate (take the number of grams and multiply by 4). So that can help the athlete understand that he or she will be burning 472 fewer calories daily, so intake needs to reflect that. This calorie amount is equal to a large snack (say, a peanut butter and jelly sandwich) or a small meal.

ATHLETE'S PLATE

EASY TRAINING / WEIGHT MANAGEMENT:



The Athlete's Plates are a collaboration between the United States Olympic Committee Sport Dietitians and the University of Colorado (UCCS) Sport Nutrition Graduate Program.
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Illustration by: USOC Registered Dietitians.

2. Track your intake. Once you have a number to work with, tracking intake for two to three days can be helpful to show you where you are compared to where you should be. There are many apps out there that serve this purpose, but a couple of nice ones are [MyFitnessPal](#) and [Livestrong's MyPlate](#).

3. Trust your body. Once you have tracked a few days and know where you should be, back off from the numbers and just try trusting your body. Eat when you are hungry; stop when you are full. This is more difficult than it sounds if you truly do it right! Bottom line, you are not training as much as you used to so you need to be more aware of how much you are taking in. By eating with awareness and attention, you will often naturally land on where your intake should be.

4. Remember the entire plate. While carbohydrate intake is an important piece, don't forget the rest of the plate: lean protein, vegetables and fruit. Strive to make your tapering plate look the illustration to the right.

One-half of the plate should be fruits and vegetables, one-quarter lean protein and one-quarter whole grains. If losing weight is your goal, slightly increase protein and slightly decrease whole grain intake.

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