



THE BENEFITS OF STRENGTH WORK **DURING YOUR TAPER**

TEXT BY **KRISS HENDY**

Ask any athlete or coach and the recipe for their race taper will be different. And this is how it should be. We are built differently, respond differently to training and cope with race week nerves differently, so tapering will not be the same for everyone. In fact, your own 'perfect' taper may have changed from what it used to be. Ahh, the joys of fine-tuning!

Long gone (we're hoping) is the belief that strength work means just lifting heavy weights. When we talk about strength training, especially for the endurance athlete, it incorporates so much more than this. So during a taper, while we may reduce the intensity of any load that is being used, there are still many other ways we can incorporate 'strength training' in a way that will actually enhance our performance on race day.

THE TAPERING BALANCE

Tapering, as we all know is the period of time before a race where we reduce our training. Depending on the distance and importance of your race (whether it's an 'A race' or you are 'training through') will determine how you approach your taper.

If you already have a consistent strength program in place, the biggest concern most athletes have is how to maintain their strength and conditioning

can cope with your run, ride and swim; and it's translating across into your power on the bike, splits in the pool or on the track. But stop this completely in the lead up to a race, and you risk undoing all your hard work and having a disappointing performance.

Our goal in the lead up to a race is to maintain the physiological adaptations we have achieved during our training program while allowing the negative impact of training (such as fatigue or stress) to diminish. It's about reducing your training load to allow for a peak in performance.

SO HOW DO WE DO THIS?

Generally, a taper when it comes to our swim, bike and run will consist of reducing our volume while keeping some intensity in our sessions, to keep us "sharp". The same applies to the strength work we are doing.

Although the majority of endurance athletes are dominant in slow twitch muscle fibres, we still all possess fast twitch fibres, which we call upon at times such as the race start, during surges on the bike or that 'podium-deciding' finish line sprint. This is why we need to maintain intensity during our taper week. If we spend the two weeks leading into the race tentatively keeping things at a slow pace, by the time race day comes around your body won't be able to respond to your need for speed.

Strength training done well during this period provides us with a perfect training option. Activation being our primary focus. We want to reduce the load but still keep the neural activation going, and carefully selected strength exercises will allow this without risking any unwanted stress or fatigue leading into the race. Basically, we want our legs to be fresh, but we also want them to be switched on and ready.

A FEW RULES TO FOLLOW:

- We generally recommend a very light or no weight policy during race week.
- Stick to the same frequency that you are used to. If you do two strength sessions a week, stick to this - just alter the session accordingly.
- Look to focus on mobility and activation exercises achieved through the use of bodyweight, which reduces the load on joints.
- These strength sessions should produce no muscle soreness or muscle failure, but still include a sufficient amount of muscle stimulation.
- Practice. Similar to getting your nutrition nailed, your taper will take practice too. You need to know how your body will respond.
- If you don't currently strength train, don't start during taper week. Any new stimulus could bring about a little post session soreness, so get a routine going well ahead of your next race.

work while focusing on getting to the start line in peak condition and not being 'over-cooked'.

On the flip side, you may have heard the saying: "it's better to be 10% underdone than 2% over". However, this principle can also be taken too far where the athlete is actually doing too little training, or they taper for too long.

The problem with complete rest or starting your taper too early is you risk going into 'detraining.' You may have trained really consistently up until this point; improving the strength and stability of your joints, working on conditioning your muscles, ligaments and tendons so they

“ In short, activation is the key when it comes to strength sessions during the taper period. ”

— **Kriss Hendy**

Key Exercises for Taper Week:



**GLUTE
ACTIVATION**

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1

GLUTE ACTIVATION - SINGLE LEG CHAIR/BENCH SQUATS
3 sets x 8/10 repetitions, each side, 30s rest

This single leg exercise will switch on the key areas through the quads and glutes, making sure they are firing come race day. Remember to drive up through the heel to engage your posterior chain, avoid any weight through the toes. Note: at home just use a chair.



UPPER BODY

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2

UPPER BODY - RESISTANCE BAND LAT. PULL DOWNS
3 sets of 10 repetitions

Secure your resistance band overhead and take hold of either end. Start by standing tall with you arms outstretched above you, pull down on the band, retracting your elbows and squeezing your shoulder blades together, pause and then slowly releases back to original position. This is a fantastic exercise for 'priming' our posterior back muscles and activating all the key musculature ready for our swim stroke and run form.



MOBILITY



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3

MOBILITY - SQUAT MOBILITY
Work for 20sec - 1 minute at a time - 2/3 sets

Holding a fixed upright position, slowly walk your hands down as you lower your body into a squat position. Avoid 'collapsing' at the bottom, keeping engaged and working through your legs. Use the support as a guide rather than hanging yourself from it.

In the bottom position, work through some small rotations in your hips before shifting your bodyweight over to one side and rotating through you ankles (keeping your heels on the ground at all times). Work both sides and walk your hands back up to standing for a rest. Take your time with these and slowly increase your time and range, as you get more comfortable. **AT**

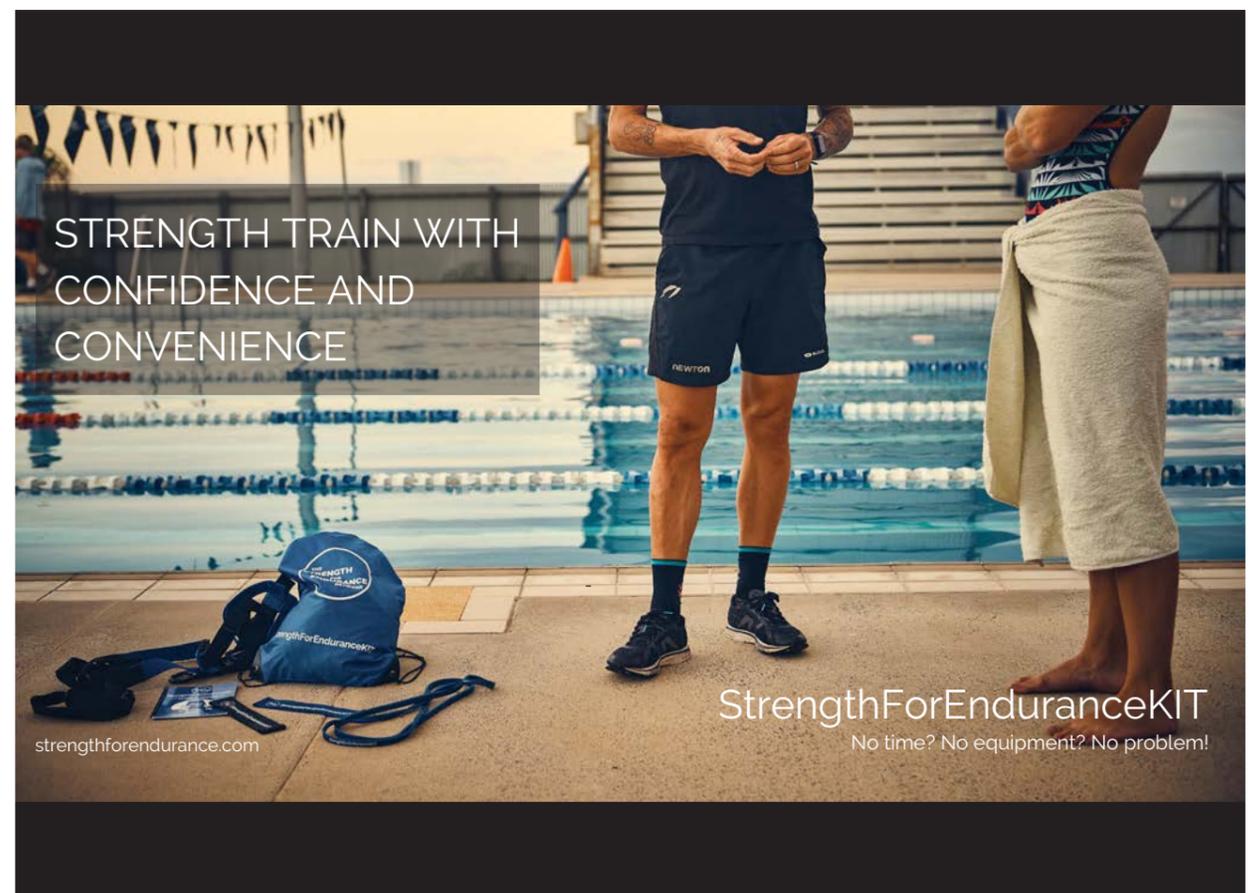
Kriss Hendy
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Seeing the need for better athlete education and understanding with regards to Strength & Conditioning for the Endurance

Athlete. Kriss works with a variety of athletes from Age Groupers to Professionals, developing programs that support and heighten their endurance performance. Kriss is based in Byron Bay with his wife (Professional Triathlete) Polly Hendy. He has both a local & international client base that use his Online Strength Training Packages.

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