

# CRAIG ALEXANDER'S GUIDE TO A FOOLPROOF PRE-RACE TAPER

***Stop the guesswork and arrive at your next IRONMAN Triathlon sharp, confident and ready to race!***



As an athlete preparing for a long-distance endurance event (like an IRONMAN triathlon), you're probably familiar with the concept of the taper.

The pre-race taper is a critical, yet often misunderstood, piece of your training plan.

The taper can make or break your race day performance. Unfortunately, I've seen athletes make countless errors during their taper that actually diminish their capacity to compete and

undermine their months of training and hard work.

In this guide I'll share my insights and knowledge -- collected during my years as a professional triathlete and coach -- on how you can implement the ideal pre-event taper and have the best race of your life!

I also provide a checklist for how to schedule your training during the last week before your race. I hope you find it useful!

**This eBook is made possible by the generous support of CURAD Performance Series:**





## WHY DO WE TAPER?

The taper is a reduction of training volume during the weeks prior to your competition, designed to ensure that you arrive at the start line sharp, refreshed and ready to race.

There are no meaningful fitness or strength gains to be made during your taper. As they say, “the hay is in the barn.” During this period your priority shifts to recovery without detraining.

Throughout my career, I developed 3 main goals for my taper. Keeping these objectives in the forefront of my mind during the final days before a race always helped keep me on track:

- 1 **FRESHEN UP:** Rid the body of accumulated physical and mental fatigue caused by weeks of high-volume training;
- 2 **REPLENISH:** Through adequate sleep, good nutrition and the right type of training, prepare yourself for the effort ahead; and
- 3 **SHARPEN UP:** Recapture that feeling of fast and fluid functional movements by priming the cardiovascular and neuromuscular systems for peak performance on race day.

To help achieve all these objectives, I find that **CURAD Performance Series** products are especially useful.

Light massage and **IRONMAN ActiVCE topical analgesic** help relieve any lingering muscle soreness. Applications of **IRONMAN Far-Infrared Kinesiology Tape** during the final weeks of my taper encourage blood flow and provide support in key areas like the lower leg, neck, lower back and shoulders.

When combined with the advice presented in this eBook, **CURAD Performance Series** products will help to ensure you arrive at the start line fresh, sharp and ready to race.

Your specific taper will be influenced by personal variables such as your normal training workload, base fitness, triathlon experience, age and the distance of your event. However, by following my proven guidelines, you'll be well-positioned to reap the rewards of your training.





## YOUR TAPER TIMELINE

For long distance triathlons like the IRONMAN, I discovered that a **2-week taper plan is optimal**.

Early in my career I experimented with 3- and 4-week tapers, but those made me feel sluggish, weak and anxious. My body was used to a relatively high volume of work and extending my taper beyond 2 weeks didn't work for me.

Don't risk undoing months of hard training by taking your foot off the gas too early!

## HOW SHOULD WE TAPER?

As with most things related to triathlon, I believe in keeping things simple. This means sticking with your familiar schedule and not trying anything new! Here are a few of my pointers:



### Training Schedule

During the taper I would keep my daily training plan generally the same as it had been throughout my last training block. By scheduling my swims, bikes, runs and strength training on their usual days, I maintained a comfortable and familiar schedule.



### Training Volume

Although my training *schedule* remained consistent, my training *volume* came down.

Starting two weeks out my overall mileage was reduced by about 30-40%. With one week to go, my swim and bike volume was down by 50% (and even more for my running). All the while, I did my best to maintain my usual daily training cadence to keep body and mind in balance.



### Training Intensity

It's my personal observation that most athletes (myself included, from time-to-time!) have gotten their taper wrong by doing too much higher intensity work during race week.

Too much intensity is more of a problem than too much volume.



During the last 10 days before a race, I would limit my training intensity to nothing higher than my target race pace. These abbreviated sessions allowed me to keep my neuromuscular system primed while reducing the risk of fatigue or injury. I certainly wasn't doing VO2 Max intervals!

## **What About Strength Training?**

As most of you know, I'm a huge proponent of year-round strength and mobility training. The trick is to modify your routine according to your objectives.

During the taper period, I maintained my normal strength training schedule for as long as possible. My body was accustomed to lifting weights so I usually performed strength training through Tuesday of race week.

I would reduce the load to 30% less weight and do just one set of each exercise; this maintained my strength training schedule while avoiding any muscle soreness. It was also an effective tool for managing pre-event stress. Of course, my focus was on maintenance and reinforcing proper movement patterns... NOT lifting heavy weights or training to exhaustion!

I would also include 2 to 3 core stability and activation routines during race week (including one session immediately after traveling to an event to get everything "switched back on").







## Taper Nutrition

Again, keep things simple! Be cognizant that pre-race nerves and the disruption caused by travel can promote poor eating, so avoid that as best as you can.


With lower training loads and less energy expended, oftentimes my appetite was slightly reduced during the taper. However I never counted calories or stressed over my weight; I was always guided by my hunger and would eat well. It's vital to arrive at the race replenished and full of energy.

A word about hydration: Many athletes over-hydrate before a race, thinking they can "top the tanks" for the big day. This risks upsetting their electrolyte balance and undermining their performance.

Even for events in hot, humid climates (like Hawaii!), I was careful not to overdo my pre-race hydration in the final days leading up to the competition. Besides, IRONMAN triathlons have incredibly well-stocked aid stations all along the course.

As always, balance and moderation are key.



A photograph of triathlete Craig Alexander running a triathlon. He is wearing a white singlet with red and yellow accents, featuring logos for Toyota, Shimano, and others. He is holding a small Australian flag in his left hand. The background is blurred, showing spectators and other runners.

My taper philosophy is simple and straightforward, designed to freshen, replenish and sharpen your body and mind.

Follow the principles that I've outlined above, and you can construct an effective pre-race taper that will unlock your best possible race day performance.

**See you at the races,**

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Craig Alexander".

To end your taper on a high note, check out my sample day-by-day training plan for the last 7 days before your event. It's designed to get you to the starting line fit, energized, confident and ready to rock!

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*Craig “Crowie” Alexander is the 3x winner and former course record holder of the Hawaii Ironman Triathlon World Championship. He is also a 2x winner of the Ironman 70.3 World Championship. Currently he oversees his global [Sansego Triathlon Club](#) and coaching business from Sydney, Australia.*

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CRAIG ALEXANDER'S  
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TRIATHLON CLUB



# CRAIG ALEXANDER'S TRAINING BLUEPRINT FOR YOUR LAST 7 DAYS BEFORE AN IRONMAN



***Complete your pre-race taper on a high note and be ready for a breakthrough performance!***

The week immediately prior to your IRONMAN can be hectic and stressful. It's usually packed with logistical tasks, last minute gear adjustments and travel.

How can you manage all of this, while ensuring you're mentally and physically ready to race on Saturday?

After years of trial and error, I've devised a simple training blueprint that optimally

completes my event taper. Despite the distractions of race week, I know that – by following this simple schedule – I'll arrive at the swim start in peak mental and physical form.

Consider using this as a guide for your final week of training before your big event, and I think you'll be pleased with the result!

Let me know how it goes...

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# My 7-Day Plan

## SATURDAY



### Run (1hr 10min).

After an easy warm-up I perform the following sequence 2x:

- 9min effort at race pace (approximately 75-80% of run threshold)
- 6min easy

Then I halve the intervals and again perform them 2x:

- 3min race pace effort
- 3min easy

Steady aerobic pace to finish.



### Gym (45min – 1 hr)

- Typically scheduled strength training routine, but RPE not to exceed 7
- Core strength and stability work

## SUNDAY



### Swim (3 – 4km)

This is my last big swim workout before the race, so typically focus on longer, aerobic intervals:

- 6 to 8 x 500m
- Mix up the intervals with paddles + pull buoy, fins, etc.



### Ride (1 - 2hr)

- Easy and aerobic; nothing intense



## MONDAY



### Ride (45min - 1hr 30min)

During an otherwise aerobic ride, I insert some short race pace efforts:

- 4 x 90sec at race power or pace; 3min Rest Interval (RI)

**Note:** These are NOT max efforts; maintain control and don't exceed race pace



### Gym (45min - 1 hr)

- Core strength and stability work

## TUESDAY



### Swim (1 - 2km)

- Warm Up:  
200Fr easy  
200Fr easy Paddles + Pull Buoy  
200Fr easy kick with fins
- Main Set:  
12 x 50Fr (1st 25m at race pace; 2nd 25m easy recovery); 20sec RI



### Run (30min)

In an otherwise easy run, I insert some short, faster efforts:

- 4-5 x 30sec at race pace

**Note:** These are NOT max efforts; maintain control and don't exceed race pace



## WEDNESDAY



### Travel Day

Optional swim, bike and/or run after you arrive.

- Very easy and very short.
- Light massage and/or gentle mobility work

## THURSDAY



### Swim (20min)

- Easy course reconnaissance



### Ride (45-60min)

- Easy course reconnaissance

## FRIDAY



### Pre-race Ride (30 - 45min)

In an otherwise aerobic ride, I inject some short race pace efforts:

- 3 or 4x 90sec surges that ramp up to my target IM race effort, with lots of easy riding between.

### Pre-race Run (15 - 20min)

In an otherwise easy run, I include some short race pace efforts:

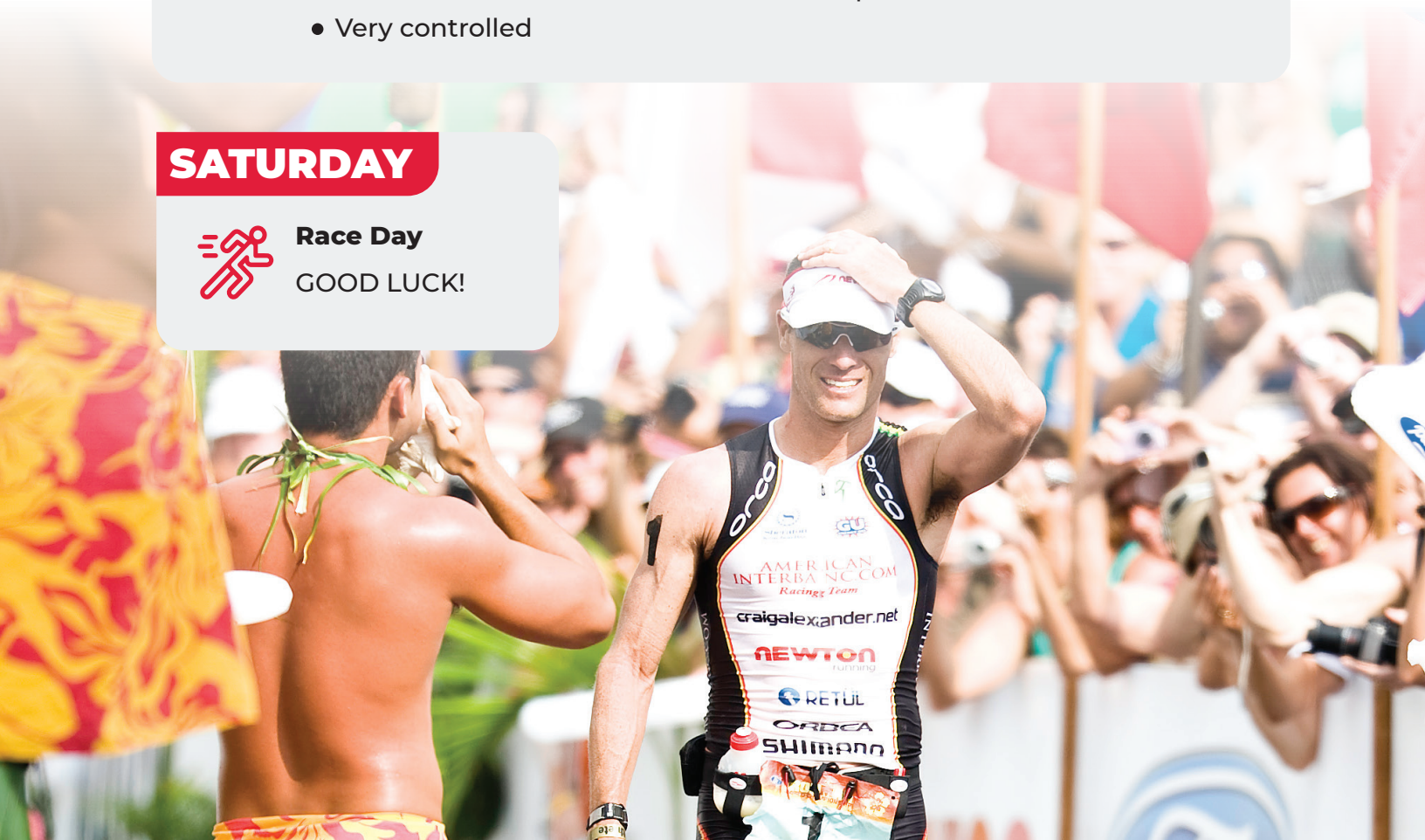
- 3 or 4x 45sec “strides” that build to race pace
- Very controlled

## SATURDAY



### Race Day

GOOD LUCK!





# YOUR NEXT STEP



If you'd like to learn about how you can train more effectively (and have more fun doing so), then be sure to check out my [Sansego Triathlon Club](#). Since 2014 we've guided over 7,100 triathletes to better performances. Whether you're looking for a coach or just need a training plan, then we're the perfect multisport community for you! I hope you check it out.



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