

The final 3 weeks before the marathon.

The taper I use with my athletes: what to cut, what to keep, what you'll feel, and how to reach the start line fresh without losing anything.

21

DAYS

-60%

FINAL VOLUME

100%

INTENSITY

2-3%

TYPICAL GAIN

The idea in one sentence

Fitness takes weeks to fade; fatigue clears in days. The taper exploits that difference: **you remove the fatigue before the fitness starts to leave.** Built for Chicago (Sunday October 11), it works for any Sunday marathon.

Three rules, and only one changes



Volume drops

The only thing you genuinely cut: around 20%, 40% and 60% below your peak week, in that order.



Intensity stays

You keep touching marathon pace and a bit faster. Fewer reps, **same pace**. Remove it and you arrive flat.

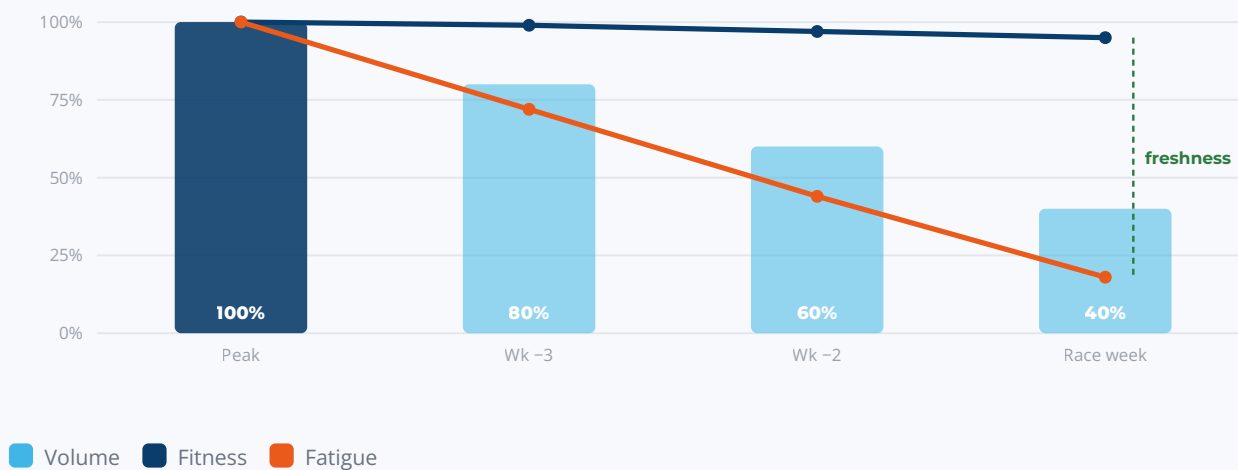


Frequency stays

You run nearly the same days. Sessions get shorter; they don't disappear. The body needs the rhythm, not the volume.

What happens inside while you cut back

Weekly volume (bars) · relative fitness and fatigue (lines) — conceptual model



What the evidence says

A landmark meta-analysis on tapering (Bosquet and colleagues, Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise, 2007) found the greatest benefit with about two weeks of reduction, a 41–60% cut in volume, and **no reduction in intensity or frequency**. This plan adds a gentler third week before that, at 80%, to land the block without a jolt.

Week by week

WEEK -3

Landing the block

~80% of peak volume

the last genuine long run

Key: Sunday's long run is the last with serious volume. Include the final 5 mi (8 km) at marathon pace, without forcing it.

Watch out: this is the week most people sneak in an extra workout "to be sure". Don't. Nothing you train from today turns into fitness in time for the race.

WEEK -2

The dress rehearsal

~60% of peak volume

everything from race day, scaled down

Key: on Sunday you run 11–13 mi (18–21 km) with 4–5 mi (6–8 km) at marathon pace, **as if it were the race:** same time, same breakfast, same shoes, same gels, same kit.

Why: anything that fails today has two weeks to be fixed. Anything that fails on race day doesn't.

RACE WEEK

Sharpen, don't build

~40% of peak volume

short runs, a touch of pace, lots of rest

Key: one touch of marathon pace on Tuesday so the legs remember the speed. After that, everything easy and short. Strides in the final days to keep the spark.

Day by day

Day	Training	Also
Monday	Rest	Sleep an extra hour. Check the forecast.
Tuesday	30 min with 3 × 5 min at MP	Last session with pace. Short and controlled.
Wednesday	Easy 30–35 min	Check logistics: transport, start, corral.
Thursday	Easy 25 min + 4 strides	Eat normally. Start hydrating on purpose.
Friday	Rest or 20 min · carb load day 1	Carb loading. Pick up your bib early.
Saturday	15–20 min + 4 strides · carb load day 2	Load day 2. Early dinner. Everything laid out the night before.
Sunday	RACE	Breakfast 3 h before: the one you rehearsed.

Carb loading, without the myths

8 to 10 g of carbohydrate per kilo of body weight per day during the final 36–48 hours — Friday and Saturday for a Sunday marathon. It doesn't mean eating more overall: it means the plate changes proportion. Less fibre, less fat, less protein; more rice, pasta, bread, potato, fruit. Nothing new, nothing you haven't tried before.

You'll weigh more on Sunday. That's the sign it worked.

Muscle stores glycogen together with water — around three grams of water for every gram of glycogen. A gain of two to four pounds during the load is stored fuel, not fat. Don't step on the scale that week expecting anything else.

THE HEAD

What you'll feel, and what it means

Almost every runner goes through a strange phase during the taper. The body, used to weeks of load, reads rest as an alarm. Knowing it's coming is half of handling it.

NORMAL • DO NOTHING

- ✓ Heavy or "flat" legs in the first days of the cutback.
- ✓ Aches that come and go, moving from place to place.
- ✓ Restlessness, urge to train more, feeling of losing fitness.
- ✓ Two to four extra pounds on the scale during the load.
- ✓ Nerves and irregular sleep the two nights before.

GET IT CHECKED • DON'T IGNORE IT

- × Localised pain on one spot of a bone that hurts to press.
- × Discomfort that worsens with every run instead of easing.
- × Limping, or changing how you land to avoid pain.
- × Fever, symptoms below the neck, or chest pain.

WHAT STAYS UNTOUCHED

Nothing new in the final three weeks

SHOES

Your race pair should already have 30–60 mi (50–100 km) on it. Neither new nor worn out.

FOOD

No gels, drinks or restaurant you haven't tested before a long run.

MASSAGE

Nothing deep in the final 48 hours. If you want one, gentle and early in the week.

EXPERIMENTS

No new gym work, no hills, no "one last test" to see where you are.

Your 21-day calendar

Write in the date, tick each completed session, and log hours of sleep and how you felt (1 to 5). **MP** = marathon pace. If your coach gave you a different plan, theirs wins.

Day	Date	Session	✓	Sleep	Feeling
WEEK -3 • VOLUME ~80%					
Mon D-20	_____	Rest · mobility	☐	_____	_____
Tue D-19	_____	Threshold 3 × 10 min · 2 min rec	☐	_____	_____
Wed D-18	_____	Easy 40-50 min	☐	_____	_____
Thu D-17	_____	Easy 40 min + 6 strides	☐	_____	_____
Fri D-16	_____	Rest or 30 min very easy	☐	_____	_____
Sat D-15	_____	Easy 30 min	☐	_____	_____
Sun D-14	_____	Long 15-17 mi (24-28 km) · last 5 mi (8 km) at MP	☐	_____	_____
WEEK -2 • VOLUME ~60%					
Mon D-13	_____	Rest	☐	_____	_____
Tue D-12	_____	5 × 4 min at 10K pace · 2 min rec	☐	_____	_____
Wed D-11	_____	Easy 35-40 min	☐	_____	_____
Thu D-10	_____	Easy 30 min + 6 strides	☐	_____	_____
Fri D-9	_____	Rest	☐	_____	_____
Sat D-8	_____	Easy 30 min	☐	_____	_____
Sun D-7	_____	Dress rehearsal 11-13 mi (18-21 km) · 4-5 mi (6-8 km) at MP	☐	_____	_____
RACE WEEK • VOLUME ~40%					
Mon D-6	_____	Rest	☐	_____	_____
Tue D-5	_____	30 min with 3 × 5 min at MP	☐	_____	_____
Wed D-4	_____	Easy 30-35 min	☐	_____	_____
Thu D-3	_____	Easy 25 min + 4 strides	☐	_____	_____
Fri D-2	_____	Rest or 20 min · carb load day 1	☐	_____	_____
Sat D-1	_____	15-20 min + 4 strides · carb load day 2	☐	_____	_____
Sun DAY 0	_____	RACE		_____	_____

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General guidance for an intermediate-level runner. They do not replace evaluation by a healthcare professional or an individualised plan.

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