

# What can I do to prepare in the week before a race?

By Coach Joe English

There's a saying that I hear all the time in the days before a big race. It goes something like this: "There's nothing you can do in the week before a race to help yourself. You can only do things that hurt yourself."

There is some truth to this, but there's a big caveat that goes along with it.

Let's start with what the statement is really meant to mean. It's supposed to be a cautionary statement to keep people from working out too much in the week before a race. It's trying to tell you that your main job in the week before a race is to be resting and not working out, trying to attain new levels of fitness.

So the truth of the statement is that there ARE certainly things you can do to HURT yourself in the week before a big race. Trying to squeeze in one last long run; replacing your runs with other high-intensity workouts; or just filling up your pre-race week with things that tire you out – all of these will hurt your performance on race day.

But there are many things that you CAN do in the week before the race that will HELP you on race day.

Here are some suggestions of things that you can do to prepare without hurting yourself:

1. **Get more sleep** – adding an extra hour of sleep each day will help you rest up and get primed for the event. This is especially important, since you'll most likely be sleepless (or very restless) the night before the race.
2. **Drink plenty of fluids** – Start hydrating on Monday or Tuesday, rather than the day before a race. Your body is like a sponge and needs time to absorb the fluids that you're drinking. You don't need to overdo it, however. Keep water with you in a bottle and drink throughout the day, avoiding long periods when you stop drinking (such as while you're at work). Your urine should be light yellow in color. You're likely drinking too much if your pee is colorless. (For more on hydration, [click here](#).)
3. **Eat plenty of carbohydrate rich foods** – As with drinking, you can only sock away so many calories each day. Start increasing the amount of carbohydrates in your meals at the beginning of the week.
4. **Don't over eat** – While you want to be increasing the amount of carbohydrates in your diet the week before a race, remember that you'll be exercising less, so you don't necessarily need to eat more than normal to carbo-load. Just eat normally throughout the week, favoring starchy foods, and avoiding fatty and sugaring ones.
5. **Avoid alcohol** – In the days before the race, you should avoid drinking alcohol. (Sorry) It just dehydrates you.
6. **Take your rest days** – if your workout schedule calls for rest days, take them. You need to be resting. Don't fill up your days doing other things instead of your runs. Rest means rest! And for Heaven's sake, don't help your friends move; take up rock climbing; or decide to build a deck. Every season someone finds a new way to wear themselves out prior to a race. Don't do that.
7. **Get a massage** – a good massage on the Wednesday or Thursday prior to the race can relax you and loosen you up. Plus it just feels good.
8. **Try to relax** – Put pre-race anxiety aside by focusing on all of the preparations that you've made to get ready for your race. (For a whole article on this topic, [click here](#).)
9. **Focus on pace work and short speed** – Rather than going out logging big miles the week before the race, I always suggest short runs that focus on internalizing your race pace. I also like to see runners do short/fast speed work to keep their legs fresh, without tiring themselves out. A good example of a workout like this would be: 4x400M or 4-6 laps of 200M hard/200M easy. Keep the workouts short and sweet.
10. **Take a nap the day prior to the race** – You'll most likely have a difficult time sleeping the night before the race, so take a nap in the afternoon. Go to bed early the night before the race, but not more than an hour or two before your normal bedtime, so that you don't wake up at mid-night and lay awake all night.

11. **Have all of your gear prepared the day or two before the race** – Get this out of the way, so you know that you have everything and that you don't have to worry about it at the last minute.
12. **Don't rush yourself on race morning** – Get up with a reasonable amount of time to allow yourself to wake-up, eat, and get your pre-race bathroom trips (#2) out of the way.
13. **Relax** – The bottom-line is to relax both mentally and physically in the week before the race.

The last week before a race is actually quite an important time for you as an athlete. Try to stay focused on getting rested, hydrated, carbed up, and have all of your things prepared. And good luck!