

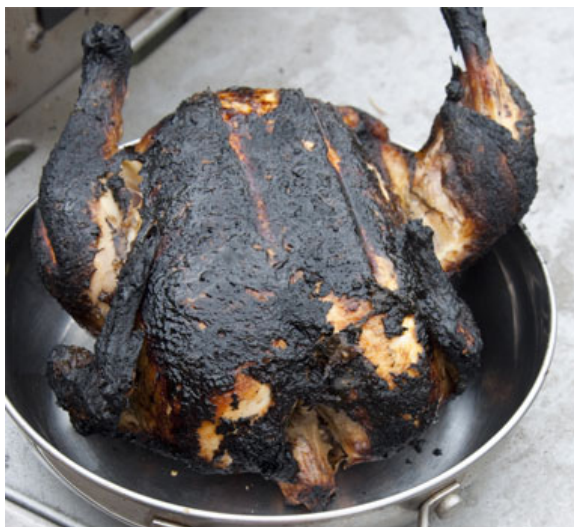
Do you want to be Overcooked or Undercooked on the start line of the UTA?



The UTA is a big event. Whether it is the 22, the 50 or the 100, you are going to be out there slogging your way up and down some very big hills and some long and steep staircases for many hours.

It doesn't matter whether you are at the front of the pack, the middle of the pack, or if you are one of the tail-enders, you **NEED** to start with fresh legs in order to have your best possible day.

Let me define the title of this article:



Overcooked = slightly overtrained and possibly even a little under your "ideal" race weight.



Undercooked = slightly undertrained and possibly a kilogram or two over your "ideal" race weight.

If you were to ask me whether or not you would be better to be overcooked or undercooked for the UTA, my answer (assuming this is an "A" race for you) would always be **undercooked**.

If you are using it as a build up race for an upcoming event like the Western States 100 miler, then it is possible that you might want to go into the UTA slightly tired (overcooked) so you can test your body and see how it copes operating in a state of fatigue.

(NB: For readers of this article I am assuming that the UTA is you're "A" race.)

Going into the UTA undercooked doesn't mean taking the soft/easy option and opting out of the long, hard training sessions you have planned. Nor does it mean sleeping through your alarm clock on a regular basis because you "didn't feel like training" on that particular morning.

The UTA events demand respect, and as such, if you go into them under-prepared, it is going to be a struggle to finish.

With this "Overcooked" Vs "Undercooked" argument I am mostly referring to what you do in the final 3 weeks to get your body in peak condition for race day.

An example of a common mistake runners make was evident at the Six Foot Track Marathon (a 45km hilly trail marathon in the Blue Mountains). I spoke to several runners at the finish line of the event who were disappointed with their performance on race day. A couple of them admitted it was due to generally poor training, but two seasoned athletes (who I thought would have known better) had run a 35km training run the weekend before the event as a "final hit-out". They

didn't suffer any injuries or niggles from the run, but they were also completely unaware that the fatigue caused by a long training run doesn't disappear in 2 - 3 days. Depending on the duration and intensity of the session it can take up to 2 -3 weeks for your body to fully recover. They had unknowingly gone into the event with "dead" legs and suffered the consequences by having a bad race.

If you are an experienced campaigner and have been racing trails for a long time, then you will probably feel that you know what works best for you in terms of a taper. If that is the case, and you are racing to a level you are happy with, then you should stick with what you know.

If you have done a few ultras and feel like you trained well but haven't yet had a race that you are completely happy with, then perhaps you got the taper wrong.

If you are fairly new to ultras and you are not sure what to do for these last few weeks, then avoid the temptation to squeeze in "one last hard session". It is more likely to be for mental reassurance than physical conditioning that you feel like you should do it. You are unlikely to get any fitter in the final 3 weeks, but you do have a high chance of becoming more fatigued, or worse still, injured, if you try and keep up the high volume work right through until race day.

The final 3 weeks should be about keeping your legs ticking over, keeping your brain happy that you still know how to run, and also keeping with the routine that your body has become accustomed to over the last few months of training.

If, for example, you are used to getting up at 5am most mornings to run, and with 3 weeks to go you suddenly change to "sleeping in" until 6:30am every morning, then your body is going to wonder what you have done to it. It will probably throw your digestive system, and possibly your general motivation out of kilter and by race day you may not feel like you are "ready" to race.

It is a better idea with 3 weeks to go to maintain your frequency of running, but back off the volume. If, for example, you usually run 5 days a week and you have been averaging 100km/week.

- With **3 weeks** to go it would be a good idea to still run the 5 days, but only run 60-70km
- With **2 weeks** to go, run 5 days but only 40-50km
- In the **final week**, 2 or 3 easy 5-6km runs is great for the brain and not taxing on the legs.

None of these runs should be faster (or slower) than usual either. There is a common mentality in runners that their short runs need to be faster. This is certainly not the case during your taper weeks. Keep to your normal training pace and try to enjoy the fact that you have more energy than you have had recently.

As for your **long runs** - your last really long and hard session should already be done (4 weeks out). For the next three weekends I would recommend:

- **3 weeks out** - no longer than 5hrs (3 hrs for the UTA50)
- **2 weeks out** - no longer than 3hrs (2hrs for the UTA50)
- **1 week out** - 60 minutes on the Saturday, and if you're feeling particularly energetic another 60 minutes on the Sunday (45mins and 45 mins for the UTA50)

Following these basic guidelines will go a long way towards ensuring you are not overcooked. Try and enjoy your taper. It is a time when a lot of people start second-guessing everything they have done:

"Should I just do one more long run?"

"I wish I'd done that 7 hour run my friends did a few weeks ago"

"Should I try out that different high-carb drink that John recommended yesterday?"

Will thicker socks be better for a long race?"

Without meaning to sound too harsh it is "**too late now**" to change anything. What is done is done, and more importantly, what is not done - you can't catch up on.

Enjoy your taper and give it everything you've got on a fresh set of pins on race day.

Marathon Taper Rules:

- 1. Trust your training.**
- 2. Prepare your mental game.**
- 3. Fuel up and hydrate!**
- 4. Go through your checklist.**
- 5. Rest. (It's okay!)**