

Peak Week...The WEEK Before The Show

By Hannah Hallman

The week of sheer panic, extra cardio, last couple of training sessions, loads of water, no water, loads of salt, no salt, carbs, no carbs ... How in the world are you going to keep your head in the game with all of this nonsense going on?

Peak week is the final 7-10 days leading up to a competition. The purpose of "peaking" is to show up on the day of your event conditioned and with full muscles that will reveal a specific level of muscle definition based on your specific class (bodybuilding, men's/women's physique, figure, fitness or bikini). If you find peak week to be miserable, most likely, it's because drastic measures have been used to try to "dial it in" the final weeks and/or extreme training measures during prep caused peak week to become the final straw! Doing anything drastic on the final week will lead to excess stress on your body and can even ruin the physique you've worked so hard to achieve. The most important thing to remember is that there is nothing you can do during the last week that is going to fix something you haven't already accomplished during your preparation. Technically, you should be ready to step on stage one week out. Here are three key techniques that have helped me during peak week.

First, I cannot stress the importance of sleep and relaxation the week before a show! The amount of sleep and rest you do/don't get determines the direction (either positive or negative) of your mental game and how you perceive your level of readiness. It's like have a little guy on each shoulder, one telling you, "you look great and you are ready" and the other saying, "what are you thinking - you still have a long way to go!" Stop the self-doubt. Stop self-destructing! Ask yourself, "Are you looking better each day?" The answer should be yes. Don't back off now; keep your training intensity exactly the same. If it's been working for you every day up until the current day, why change now? Are your muscles appearing more defined/separated and are you losing your excess subcutaneous water weight? This is achieved with the right macro and water manipulation. At this point, your body fat should be so reduced, so that the water under your skin is the only water that you have left to rid your body of. Everyone is different when it comes to high/low/zero carbs and high/low/tapering water the week before the show. The best way to determine what is best for YOU is just trial and error. "It took 8 shows before I determined that I cannot do low/zero carbs leading up into a show because my metabolism is so



high!" Sometimes it's smart to do a sample peak week so that you will have a pretty good idea of how your body will respond and what works best for you.

Next, stress on the body increases the hormone cortisol, which tells the body to make more fat cells. The final week can be stressful if you let it and this can cause you to look bloated and keep retaining water. So in addition to a solid training program, I perform mental dress rehearsals. Ever notice how top athletes never seem to be overwhelmed by the big moment? Usually, it's because they've been there before, either in real life or in their mind. I believe that the parts of the brain that are used when thinking about a task are the same ones used when actually doing that task. So visualizing a good performance can give you the same confidence that comes from having performed well in the past. Thoughts become reality! Where your energy

flows, your mind goes. What your mind believes, your body achieves! Close your eyes and imagine hitting all of your poses perfectly and the audience rewarding you with a big round of applause at the end. When it's time for the real deal, you'll be more relaxed. In fact, you'll feel as if you've done it before, because, in a way, you have.

Finally, know when to let go: Ultimately, this means knowing when you've done all you can to bring your best package to the stage. Overanalyzing what you're doing can lead to indecision and tightening up. The result? Costly mistakes. One way to calm an overactive mind is by using diversionary tactics. For example, before making a free throw, some basketball players will distract themselves by concentrating on the logo written on the ball. I count backward by threes (starting at 26) a few seconds before I go on stage to perform. I also always say a prayer and remind myself that everything I'm blessed to do in this life is "all of God and none of me."

If you think training for a competition is just all about weights, protein, tan and diet, you are very much mistaken! I would say a LARGE part of prepping is physiological. Anyone can go to the gym and train for an hour or two, that's the easy part; however, controlling what you think and eat the other 20+ hours in the day is the hard part. So when you're swallowed up by a wave of performance anxiety, try using these same techniques and don't lead yourself down a path of self-destruction by overthinking what should be the easy and most fun part of your contest prep. Relax, take a deep breath and be proud of your hard work!