

CYCLE TO ZERO

A LEGACY EVENT OF AIDS/LIFECYCLE

PRODUCED BY
& BENEFITING



CYCLIST GUIDE



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Getting Started

Whether you are joining us as a 3-Day Cyclist or a 1-Day Cyclist, we are here to support your training efforts and engagement to the cycling community!

Preparing for a multi-day cycling event like Cycle to Zero is a significant commitment—but also an incredible opportunity to push your limits, connect with San Francisco AIDS Foundation community, and experience beautiful Northern California from the saddle in a whole new, intimate way. Before you dive into a training program or start stocking up on gear, it's critical to get clear on your **why**, assess your **current fitness level**, and set **realistic expectations**. SFAF Event staff are here to help you build a solid foundation that sustains motivation and supports consistent progress, every step of the way.

→ Need training and gear support?

Reach out to your staff rep or cycle@sfaf.org

Define Your Why

The first and most powerful motivator in any endurance challenge is your reason for doing it. Think back to why you signed up to participate in Cycle to Zero. Maybe you're riding in memory of someone lost to HIV or AIDS. Maybe you've positively benefited from one of SFAF's programs and services and want to give back. Maybe it's a bucket-list goal to participate in a big fitness challenge. Maybe it's about reclaiming your health, exploring nature, or just testing your own grit.

Write your reason down. Keep it visible—on your bike, your bathroom mirror, or your phone's lock screen. When training gets tough (and it will), your “why” becomes your anchor. The more emotionally connected you are to your goal, the more likely you'll stay the course.

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Assess Your Starting Point

You don't need to be a pro-athlete to participate in Cycle to Zero; in fact, anyone can do it with the right amount of training, we promise! But you do need a realistic understanding of where you're starting from.

Ask yourself:

- Has it been years since I've ridden a bike?
- Can I currently ride 10–20 miles comfortably?
- How many days per week can I realistically train?
- Have I done back-to-back rides before?
- Do I have any physical limitations or injuries?

If you're new to cycling, the time to begin is now—not next week. Depending on your current fitness level and comfortability on a bike, we recommend anywhere from 2-6 months to train for Cycle to Zero. The more prepared you are mentally and physically, the more enjoyable your experience will be and the less likely you are to get injured.

First things first, you'll need a proper bike to train on.



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Bikes and Gear

When it comes to cycling long distances—especially over multiple days—your gear isn't just about comfort or style. It's about **performance, safety, and endurance**. The right equipment can make the difference between a ride that feels like a personal triumph and one that turns into a painful slog.

Having confidence in your cycling setup is a huge part of staying focused and motivated.

The Right Bike: Your New Best Friend

Let's start with the obvious: your bike. For Cycle to Zero, you want a **reliable, comfortable, and well-fitted** road or endurance bike. You don't need to break the bank on purchasing an expensive new bike. Reach out to SFAF Events Staff for recommendations on where to get discounted or even free cycling gear in the Bay Area.

BIKE TYPE: We recommend road bikes as they combine efficiency, comfort, versatility, and speed—letting you ride farther, faster, and with less fatigue. They also have the proper shifting gears needed to climb hills with less effort and keep a steady cadence on flats or descents. Road bikes are also better for paved surfaces, as their tires grip well on pavement. But ultimately, whatever bike you are most comfortable with and have been training with consistently would be appropriate to bring. Keep in mind **e-bikes are not allowed**.

FRAME MATERIAL: Bikes are made of a variety of materials, but the most common are aluminum and carbon. Carbon is lighter and absorbs more road vibration but is pricier.

FIT MATTERS: Visit a local bike shop and get a **professional bike fit**. A proper fit minimizes fatigue, reduces the risk of injury, and enhances power output over long distances. When biking over multiple days and long distances, a bike fit is **highly recommended**. Get your bike fit done soon after you start your training, not right before the event. You want time to adjust to your new fitting and have an opportunity to make further adjustments if you need to.

→ Want to learn more about bike fittings?

See what to expect at one [in this video](#)

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Maintenance and Bike Tools

If you already own a bike, make sure it's in excellent working condition—no skipping gears, worn brakes, or noisy drivetrains. **A full tune-up** before your training begins (and a second just before the event) is a wise investment.

Volunteer Bike Techs will be stationed at rest stops and in Camp on Cycle to Zero to help you fix most bike issues you may encounter. But learning how to do some basic bike maintenance during the training season will bring you peace of mind and empower you to get back on the road sooner!

SOME BASIC SKILLS TO LEARN:

- Fix a flat tire
- Check and inflate tires
- Clean and lubricate the chain
- Check for chain wear
- Adjust saddle height and angle

Many local bike shops and coalitions offer free bike skills and maintenance classes. YouTube is also a great resource!



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On-the-Bike Essentials

These tools and accessories are critical for a successful training season and event. Some are non-negotiable on Cycle to Zero.

HELMET: Absolutely non-negotiable; always wear a helmet made for cycling when on your bike.

- Make sure it is snug but comfortable
- Straps must adjust securely and be tight enough that only one or two fingers fit under the chin
- Look for an official safety certification
- Do not buy used, and check expiration dates— a helmet should be replaced every 5 years, and anytime it is involved in a crash or shows sign of wear and tear
- Choosing a bright color helps cars see you

FLAT REPAIR KIT: Spare tubes, tire levers, mini air pump or CO₂ inflator, patch kit.

MULTITOOL: Includes Allen keys, screwdrivers, and sometimes a chain tool. Great for mid-ride adjustments.

SADDLEBAG: Compact under-seat storage for repair tools and spares, and other items like sunscreen, wallet, and snacks.

WATER BOTTLES + CAGES: Stay hydrated. Plan to carry at least two bottles on your frame. We recommend one for water and one for an electrolyte solution like Gatorade or your favorite.

BIKE COMPUTER OR GPS DEVICE: Optional. To track distance, speed, elevation, and route navigation. Apps like Strava or RideWithGPS are useful too.

LIGHTS: Even if you don't plan to ride at night, front and rear lights improve visibility and safety.

PHONE MOUNT FOR HANDLEBAR: For easy navigation and emergency calls. But remember, if you need to use your phone, always safely pull over to the side of the road to use it.

Gear won't carry you to the finish line—but it will **empower** you to get there with less pain, more confidence, and greater joy. Invest in what matters most: comfort, durability, and efficiency. Test all gear **during your training**, not right before the event starts. No surprises = smoother rides.

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Other Cycling Gear:

JERSEYS AND BIBS OR CYCLING SHORTS: Cycling jerseys are made from materials to help you with temperature regulation, reduce friction, and usually have pockets for extra supplies in the back. Padded shorts and bibs are essential for keeping your butt comfortable on long rides!

GLOVES: Consider getting cycling gloves as they're padded—great for keeping your hands comfortable when the road gets bumpy, and they help you grip the handlebars when your hands sweat.

CYCLING SHOES: Most cyclists use special cycling shoes and pedals for long endurance rides. They make your pedal strokes more efficient and prevent your feet from slipping in wet weather. But using regular sneakers and flat pedals are fine too! Whatever you are more comfortable and have trained with.

ARM AND LEG WARMERS: These optional items are handy for cold mornings and afternoon sun protection. They can easily be taken off mid-ride and put in your jersey pockets when you don't need them anymore.

SUNGLASSES: Not only for sun protection but also helps prevent dust and small pebbles from getting in your eyes.



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Safety and Rules of the Road

RULES OF THE ROAD: These are the basic rules that all Cyclists must follow on Cycle to Zero:

- Obey all traffic signals!
- Make a full stop at stop signs and appropriate traffic signals
- Always wear a properly-fit helmet, and check its expiration date (they do have them!)
- Do not ride while under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- No electronics while riding. Bike computers and phones mounted to the handlebars are OK—but you must stop and pull over safely if you need to use them.

INDIVIDUAL SAFETY: These practices will keep you safe while riding:

- Ride predictably
- Ride with at least one hand on the handle bars at all times
- Stay aware of your surroundings and assume cars cannot see you
- Stay hydrated and fueled
- Using earphones while biking is not allowed, nor is playing music through a speaker

GROUP SAFETY: Help protect those around you with these guidelines:

- Pass safely [on left/call out/look over shoulder]
- Ride single file leaving one bike length in between you and the cyclist in front of you
- Use hand signals [turning/slowing/stopping]
- Call and point out hazards like broken glass and debris
- Take care of one another!

HOW TO RESPOND TO AN INCIDENT: In the event of a serious accident, follow these steps:

- If an accident occurs that needs medical attention, call 911 immediately
- Do not move an injured person
- Direct traffic around the scene
- Stay until help arrives and call the dispatch number on your wristband to notify an SFAF Events Staff Member

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How to Train: Building Endurance and Strength

Training for a multi-day cycling event is like preparing for a mini Tour-de-You. You don't need to be a pro, but you do need a smart, structured plan that gradually builds endurance, strengthens key muscle groups, and prepares you to recover quickly between consecutive days in the saddle. And remember, you never have to train alone—continue reading for group training ride information.

Training Philosophy: Build, Don't Burn

The number one rule for endurance training: **build slowly and consistently**. Don't try a 100-mile ride right off the bat. That's a recipe for burnout or injury. As said previously, depending on your current fitness level and comfortability on a bike, we recommend dedicating anywhere from 2-6 months to train for Cycle to Zero.

Start by building your **base level** of foundational mileage; slow and steady is the way to go if you're new to cycling. In this beginning phase you will also be learning safe riding practices and how to ride amongst traffic. Find some bike trails near you where you can avoid cars and crossing intersections as you build up your confidence. During this phase get in the habit of stretching and mobilizing before each ride. Spend 5-10 minutes warming up.

Once you have your base level of riding under your belt, begin the **endurance phase** of your training by adding a small amount of miles to each consecutive training ride. Don't forget to add elevation gains too! Cycle to Zero will not be a flat ride.

You'll want to add **consecutive riding** when you are about half way through your training program. Practicing back-to-back riding helps your body adjust to being on the saddle multiple days in a row. Your body needs to learn how to ride tired, but not broken.

Immediately before Cycle to Zero begins, enter the **taper phase** of your training. Reduce the volume of riding in the week or two before we ride out; this is the time to rest physically and mentally and take a break from the saddle. Prioritize sleep and recovery!

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Establish Your Schedule, Setting Milestones Along the Way

Setting a training schedule and goals will help keep you accountable and on track for success. Consider writing a training journal and keep track of how you're feeling after training rides. Your goals should be specific, measurable, and time-bound.

Where you start from and how quickly you progress will be different for every person. But the end result will be the same.

BY 2 WEEKS BEFORE THE EVENT, AIM TO HAVE COMFORTABLY HIT:

- Two 75-85 mile rides
- Six or more 50-60 mile rides
- A ride of 3,000 feet elevation gain
- At least (3) back-to-back ride days
- They both don't have to be long rides, but at least one day of a 60-70 mile ride and the next 30-40 miles
- 150+ miles in a single week at least once

Remember, there will be rest stops every 15-20 miles on Cycle to Zero, so think of riding in small sections at a time, not 80 miles straight. When you are training on your own, always incorporate stops every 90 minutes or 15-20 miles to hydrate, eat, and rest a few minutes or for lunch.



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Our Official Training Ride Partner: Different Spokes San Francisco

Cycle to Zero is excited to be partnering with Different Spokes San Francisco (DSSF), a cycling club founded in 1982 and dedicated to fostering inclusivity and diversity within the cycling community. The club offers a variety of cycling events, training rides, and socials throughout the year and across the Bay Area. DSSF is partnering with a variety of AIDS/LifeCycle legacy training ride groups to expand its ride offerings even further. So if you're a former ALCer you can expect to see many familiar faces and routes.

→ Want to find a ride near you?

Check out the [Different Spokes ride calendar](#)

WITH DSSF YOU NEVER HAVE TO TRAIN ALONE!

Different Spokes SF is offering limited time discounted membership to all Cycle to Zero participants. This includes those on the cyclist waiting list and our 1-Day Cyclists to save \$5 on membership. Use coupon code **SFAF25** when signing up.

[Become a Member!](#)



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Community Resources

Riding can be surprisingly social and more fun with a buddy. Use the cycling resources in your area to keep you motivated and accountable:

→ Looking to connect with other riders in your area?

Contact cycle@sfaf.org for a list of Facebook groups & bike shops

BIKE SHOPS may offer weekly rides of varying lengths and difficulties.

LOCAL BICYCLE COALITIONS offer safer riding workshops, bike maintenance classes, and group rides.



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BAY AREA BICYCLE COALITIONS:



SAN FRANCISCO BICYCLE COALITION

Location: San Francisco

Website: sfbike.org

The **San Francisco Bicycle Coalition** is one of the largest and most effective bicycle advocacy groups in the country. They have been transforming San Francisco streets and neighborhoods into more livable and safe places for over 50 years by promoting the bicycle for everyday transportation.



SILICON VALLEY BICYCLE COALITION

Location: South Bay

Website: bikesiliconvalley.org

Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition's mission is to build healthier and more just communities by making bicycling safe and accessible for everyone. They envision a community that values, includes, and encourages bicycling for all purposes for all people. Their overarching goal is to increase the number and diversity of people using bicycles for everyday transportation.



BIKE EAST BAY

Location: East Bay

Website: bikeeastbay.org

Bike East Bay mobilizes by bike to build thriving communities that are joyful, safe, and inclusive.



MARIN COUNTY BICYCLE COALITION

Location: Marin County

Website: marinbike.org

Marin County Bicycle Coalition believes every new cyclist is a power for good, and provide the opportunities and environment to support Marin's diverse cycling community. Their network of events is a central hub for cyclists of all ages and skill levels to connect, learn, ride, and have fun.



SACRAMENTO AREA BICYCLE ADVOCATES

Location: Sacramento

Website: sacbike.org

Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates (SABA) is a non-profit organization dedicated to making our region a safer, healthier, and friendlier place to ride a bike, whether for commuting, recreation, or exercise, for all people, regardless of race, income, or ability.

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Cross Training

Cycling is low impact, but repetitive. Supporting muscles need attention. Also, it's OK to take a break from the saddle and do other physical activities that you enjoy! Cycling is a full body experience, so all physical activity helps—walking, running, swimming, weight lifting, and yoga are all great ways to switch it up.

THINK ABOUT YOUR:

- Core Strength
- Leg Strength
- Upper Body Strength
- Flexibility & Mobility
- Posture

Additional Training Tips

LISTEN TO YOUR BODY: Overtraining can set you back. Watch for signs of persistent fatigue, poor sleep, decreased motivation and adjust your training accordingly

TRAIN IN DIFFERENT WEATHER: Don't go out riding in poor or dangerous conditions but be prepared to expect possible wind, heat, or rain during the event

TRACK YOUR PROGRESS: Apps like Strava and RideWithGPS can help you with your goals, connect with other riders, and find routes in your area

CELEBRATE SMALL WINS: Completing your longest ride yet is a big deal—treat it like one. And post about it on social media with your Fundraising Page link

MENTAL TRICK: Think of riding in 15-20 mile segments, the distance between each rest stop, not a full 80 miles straight

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA IS HILLY! Don't neglect those hills trainings and if you are coming from a flat area, have a plan for hills

TRUST YOUR PREPARATION: Don't overtrain too close to the event start

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Nutrition: Eat Before You're Hungry, Drink Before You're Thirsty

Imagine driving across the country without stopping for gas. That's essentially what you'd be doing if you attempted a training ride or Cycle to Zero without proper nutrition. Whether you're riding 30 or 70 miles a day, your body will demand energy—and lots of it. The trick is **fueling early, often, and smartly**. Training puts stress on your body, so your everyday eating habits should support performance and recovery.

During endurance events, waiting until you're hungry or thirsty is too late. Your body's energy and hydration levels start dropping long before you feel the effects. And once you “bonk” (hit the wall from glycogen depletion), recovery is slow and painful. We also call this “having bike brain”. It's an unpleasant state to be in and can be dangerous to you and those around you. Proper nutrition and hydration helps keep your mind sharp and aware of your surroundings.

We'll say the golden rule again and again:

Eat before you're hungry, drink before you're thirsty!

When training, focus on **complex carbohydrates**—think brown rice, whole grain bread, and sweet potatoes. **Lean proteins** such as chicken fish, legumes and Greek yogurt. **Healthy fats** like avocado, nuts, and seeds. **Fruits and veggies**, and more fruits and veggies! Avoid ultra-processed junk foods, excess sugar, and low-carb fad diets while in training—they'll sabotage your energy, muscle recovery, and immune system.

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Pre-Ride Fueling

Eat a balanced meal ~2 hours before a ride. It should be high in carbs, moderate in protein, and low in fat and fiber to avoid digestive issues.

Good options:

- Oatmeal with banana and honey
- Toast with peanut butter and sliced fruit
- Rice with eggs and avocado
- Smoothie with Greek yogurt, berries, oats, and almond milk

30–60 minutes before your ride, a small snack can help top off glycogen stores:

- Energy bar
- Banana
- Rice cake with jam
- A handful of dates or raisins

Also, start drinking water early—don't wait until you're already riding.

During A Ride

You need consistent energy intake about every 60-90 minutes when on a long endurance ride. Don't forget to hydrate, hydrate, and hydrate some more. Alternating between water and an electrolyte solution is recommended.

- Energy gels or chews
- Sports drinks
- Bananas or dried fruit
- Trail mix or nut butter packets
- Rice cakes or mini sandwiches
- Energy bars (choose ones with simple ingredients and fast-digesting carbs)

Our Rest Stops will be well stocked with all sorts of yummy snacks.

Post-Ride Recovery / On Event Food

After each ride, especially during multi-day events, recovery starts with refueling. Ideally you should be eating within 60 minutes of finishing your ride. Replenish your carbs, eat protein to repair muscles, and hydrate some more.

Remember, on long rides of 80 miles or more you will be burning many, many more calories than you do on a rest day, so don't be afraid to eat! We will have full, delicious and nutritious meals at Camp waiting for you on event days.

→ Curious about the meals on Cycle to Zero?

Contact cycle@sfaf.org closer to the event for sample menus

PRO TIP: Plan your post-training ride meal before you leave the house, so when you get home you have something nutritious ready to go and aren't reaching for the junk food.

When it comes to long-distance cycling, nutrition is performance.

Practice during training: what works for others might upset your stomach. Use your long training rides to figure out your go-to fuel sources and timing. You can have the best bike, strongest legs, and most perfect weather—but if your fueling strategy is off, the ride will be harder than it needs to be. Use your training rides to experiment and fine-tune. Know your needs, trust your plan, and fuel with confidence.



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Recovery: Train Hard, Recover Harder

Recovery isn't downtime—it's **growth time**. Every mile you ride breaks your body down just a little; it's in recovery that you build it back stronger. If you train hard but don't recover properly, you're only doing half the work. Treat your recovery with as much care and intention as your long rides. Having a strong recovery plan in place as you begin your training will pay off greatly when you're on Cycle to Zero. Think of training and recovery as two sides of the same coin. Training stresses your body; recovery allows it to adapt and get stronger. There will be days when your body says, "not today." And that's OK!

IMMEDIATE POST-RIDE RECOVERY: Stretch and foam roll for at least 15 minutes—don't skip it! Refuel and rehydrate. Relax and get off your feet.

PRIORITIZING SLEEP: Nothing beats high-quality sleep for muscle repair and mental clarity. Aim for 7-9 hours per night and keep a regular sleep schedule. During Cycle to Zero get to bed early, as we will be riding out early every morning!

REST DAYS: Don't be afraid to take days off to rest, relax, and do something other than biking! And you can always take Day 2 off from biking on Cycle to Zero to enjoy Guerneville.

PRO TIP: Mental fatigue is real too! Resetting your headspace allows you to return to the bike more focused and joyful. Take a cycling break to do other activities you enjoy—or nothing at all and rest! Training for a multi-day cycling event means you'll face early mornings, sore muscles, rough weather, missed social events, and maybe even some self-doubt. So make sure you are taking care of yourself along the way and join our training community to keep you motivated throughout. When you look back and see how far you've come—even on a bad day—you'll find proof that you're capable.

Remember to celebrate:

- Every early alarm you didn't snooze
- Every training ride milestone you completed
- Every hill you used to dread but now welcome
- Crossing the Cycle to Zero Finish Line!

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Final Thoughts

Success in endurance cycling isn't just about quads and watt output—it's about mindset. Expect discomfort. Expect self-doubt. Prepare mentally by visualizing yourself completing the ride, training in bad weather, pushing through a tough climb, and most importantly—**enjoying the journey**. You'll go from “Can I really do this?” to “I've got this!” Remember, Cycle to Zero is not a race!

The hardest part is often just getting started. But once you do, momentum builds. Preparing for Cycle to Zero isn't just a test of endurance—it's transformational. You're going to become stronger, more disciplined, and more connected to yourself and your community. The new friends you will meet on and off the saddle will be lifelong. You'll realize that you're not just someone who did a 3-Day cycling event—you're someone who trained for, committed to, and conquered something impactful and that you'll never forget.

So take the first step. Commit to your goal. Know that it's possible. And always, **have fun!**



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