

# Isolation survival = Learn to Juggle!



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Welcome to your Learn to Juggle journey.

This activity booklet was the result of a project funded by the Devonshire West Big Local and Active Sussex during the 2020 Lockdown as a way to help people stay active and connected.

It is supported by both Juggling related and other activities on our YouTube channel which you can find here:

<https://www.youtube.com/c/sweetcircuseastbourne>

Demonstrations of the activities in this activity booklet are available in following playlist:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fRGLtQjNbl0&list=PLv\\_FH4HCRd8jcupebLyLZ43hWIEhVL\\_b4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fRGLtQjNbl0&list=PLv_FH4HCRd8jcupebLyLZ43hWIEhVL_b4)

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**OK, Let's get started 😊**

## Contents

### Page:

<b>2</b>	<b>How the booklet works</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Getting Started - 1 ball activities</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Playing with Scarves</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>1 ball 1 ring things</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Working with 2 balls</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>Into the threes - 3 scarves</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>3 balls</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>Next steps</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>Why Learn to Juggle?</b>
<b>18</b>	<b>Thank you &amp; stay in touch</b>

### How the booklet works

Each section builds on the last so activities should be accessible even if you have no experience at all. If you have already started your juggling journey, it is still a good idea to go through the earlier sections at some point but there is nothing wrong with skipping forward to a more challenging section should you wish too. We always recommend going back over your last few activities regularly as it will improve your progress in the next section.

Each section contains main activities which are directly geared towards learning to juggle. In addition, adaptations, games, and alternative activities are included as appropriate.

### Top Tips:

It is always a really good idea to go back over any new activities you did in your last section, before moving on to the next section. If you get stuck on a main activity, and start to become frustrated, try an alternative activity and / or go back a step or two and work back towards it. Try and practise regularly for a short amount of time rather than infrequently for longer periods.

Finally, always finish a session with an activity you usually achieve or one you particularly enjoy!

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## Starting from the beginning – One Ball!

That's right, we are going to spend the entire of the first section working with just one ball. Even if you are excellent at throwing and catching there is a lot to be said for getting some fundamentals in place with just one ball which will make your learning to juggle journey far easier!

### 1.1 Paint the Rainbow

With your hands at about waist height and shoulder width apart gently throw the ball from one hand to the other. You are trying to make an arch shape that goes just above your eyeline, a nice big rainbow shape.

Once this is starting to feel more natural try looking straight forwards rather than following the ball with your eyes. Try to develop a regular rhythm with the same amount of time between each throw and catch.

Now pay attention to your posture, your knees should be soft with a very slight bend. Many people find a very gentle bounce in the knees helps to keep the rhythm. Ensure your hands are low, your shoulders are down and back and your head is looking directly forwards.

If you drop the ball, don't worry, this is all part of the process, just pick it up and carry on, if you even manage to touch the ball before it drops, this is good, it means your body knew where the ball was.

Pay attention to your hands, are they reaching up to meet and grab the ball? You want to avoid this, aim to let the ball drop into your hand.

Try to get to the stage where you can paint the rainbow at least 10 times before moving on to head shoulders knees and toes.

**Adaptation:** If standing for long periods of time is difficult for you, you can do this sitting down. It is best, if possible, to sit on the edge of your chair sitting up straight in a good posture.

**Family Fun:** If you have younger children, bean bags work just as well, they are lighter which makes it harder for some, but smaller hands often prefer the size of these beanbags, also their shape makes them easier to catch, so let your little ones use the beanbags instead. Younger children can begin their learn to juggle journey by playing throw and catch with you. Encourage them to throw underarm first. Next work on catching with one hand. You can also give them targets to throw into, a bucket, or the ring for example. Demonstrate and remind them to throw underarm.

**Working as a group:** It is possible to paint the rainbow as a group. Stand in a circle and agree on a direction of travel, paint the rainbow to yourself and then to the person standing next to you and allow the ball to travel around the circle. Make sure you change direction.

**Game:** Once Paint the Rainbow feels natural and you rarely drop the ball, try this for fun. Start painting the rainbow and once you have a rhythm going close your eyes and see if you can continue. I generally only manage 3 or so catches at first but if you practise this regularly you can really build your numbers up. Keep a record of your high score and try and beat it each time!

## 1.2 Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes

I learnt many of my best juggling exercises whilst at the European Juggling Convention in 2019 from a fantastic social circus practitioner who runs an organisation called co-train. This is one of them!

Get a good rhythm going in 'paint the rainbow' (one ball throw and catch). In between the throw and catch try to tap your head. You can use either hand, the throwing or the catching (it is best to try both!), but the touch must be in between the throw and the catch. Try saying throw, tap, catch as you do it to keep the rhythm, or count 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, like a waltz.

Once the head tap appears to be working, try moving the tap to your shoulders. Try tapping the same shoulder as the hand that is tapping, and then try tapping the opposite shoulder.

Again, once this becomes more natural move the tap to your knees and eventually feet. There are a number of ways to do this, but most likely you will need to bring your knees up somewhat rather than reaching all the way down to your feet to achieve this.

Once you can reliably tap your head, shoulders knees and toes, feel free to sing the song and do the actions whilst you throw and catch (This is great for younger children!). Experiment with this activity, try tapping different body parts, doing it backwards, or mixing up the order!

**Adaptation:** If you are practising your juggling from a seated position this activity is still possible, although reaching down to your feet might not be possible there are plenty of other body parts. You could also place things around you that you can reach and try to touch those in between your throw and catches.

**Alternative:** Rather than tapping your head or another body part try clapping in between the throw and catches. Make sure you don't disrupt the throw catch rhythm. Once you can clap once in between, try two claps, then three, see how many claps you can get in before you drop or lose the rhythm.

**Family:** Younger children can join in by throwing and catching the bean bag straight up with both hands and trying to tap the same body parts as you in between. Tip: to encourage children who are struggling remind them that dropping is good – every time you drop the ball, that's one less time you're going to drop it. Plus you simply can not learn to juggle without dropping balls!

**Game:** If there is a group of you, you can take it in turn to be the 'caller'. Make sure your 'paint the rainbow' is pretty much in sync with each other. The caller names a body part just as the ball is about to be released and everyone has to try to tap it, catch the ball and carry on the rhythm.

## Playing With Scarves!

Scarves are a great addition to your learn to juggle journey they move slowly and unfurl in the air, and have a light silky feel. They are especially useful for those who seek sensory stimulus.

### 2.1 Drop & Catch

Screw up one of the scarves and hold it high above your head but slightly in front of you. Let go and allow it to fall, have your other hand ready for it to land in. Then, drawing a large circle with your arm bring the scarf back up again and let it fall. Repeat and try to create a rhythm with this movement.

### 2.2 Paint the Rainbow

This is exactly the same as the ball activity in section 1.1. Start by screwing the scarf up in your hand and allow it to uncurl slowly over a number of throws and catches. The scarf moves far slower than balls making it easier to catch but it requires more effort to get it up in the air. You can of course also attempt 'Head Shoulders Knees and Toes' with the Scarf!

### 2.3 Flick & Snatch (Clawing)

Clawing is a different way to throw and catch and can also be used later on with balls. Pinch the scarf in the middle and using a strong flick up from the wrist send it up into the air. Practice this several times on each hand. Then do the paint the rainbow activity throwing in this manner.

Try and get the scarf to follow the same arch shaped path you have become used to through painting the rainbow by bringing the flicking hand in towards the midline of the body a little.

Now rather than allowing the scarf to fall gently into your other hand, raise the catching hand slightly and with palm facing downwards snatch the scarf back out of the air, your hand is now in a good position to flick it back again to the other hand, you will need to do a bit of a wrist circle to bring the scarf back towards the midline of the body before flicking your wrist upwards and releasing the scarf again. Try to get a regular rhythm going whilst maintaining the arch shape.

#### Family:

Younger children will enjoy trying to catch a scarf that you have dropped from high above their heads. You can use this game to encourage them to catch with one hand. Build it up so that you are dropping two scarves one from each hand for them to catch in different hands. Try dropping them at the same time as well as one after the other. See if you can build a rhythm whereby you drop, they catch and pass it back to you while you drop the next one, thus creating a continuous rhythm of drop, catch, pass.

#### Play with a partner:

You can practise the clawing action with a partner. Stand facing each other about 1 – 2 foot apart. One person flicks the scarf up with their right hand, the second person snatches it out of the air with their right hand, circles it back towards the middle and flicks it back up. Person one now snatches it out of the air. Repeat until you have a regular rhythm going and then practise with the left hand.

## 2.4 Double Drop & Catch

You now need two scarves. It is better if they are different colours. Hold a scarf in each hand and as in the earlier drop and catch activity draw a large circle with one arm to bring the scarf it up above your head (well your shoulder in this case) and slightly forward. Let go of the scarf and bring this same hand down low to catch it again. Repeat with the other arm.

Once you have done this a few times on both sides we are going to try and get both arms working at the same time in what I would call a split time rhythm. Once you let go of a scarf, the other arm will start its circle to the top. So ... right arm circles up and drops scarf, left arm circles up, right arm catches scarf at the bottom, left arm drops scarf, right arm circles up .... And so on! Don't worry if you don't manage to catch the scarf, or the rhythm goes wrong, that is normal, just stop & start again!

Then we can try an 'off set' rhythm. In this version there is less time between the first and second arm ... Right arm circles up, a 'beat' or moment later the left arm starts circling up, right arm drops scarf, left arm drops scarf, right arm catches, left arm catches, right arm circles up again. I use words, or a chant in my head to help me, so "up, up, drop, drop, catch, catch", other people like to count, assign sound effects to the actions or even just say right, left, right, left. Experiment and see what works for you. Make sure you practise this rhythm with the left arm leading (going first) as well as the right!

## 2.5 Throw, Throw, Catch, Catch / Flick, Flick, Snatch, Snatch

OK now we are ready to start developing a juggling rhythm. You can do this from a normal throw and catch or from a clawing action.

Start with one scarf in each hand, throw one, in an arch shape as in paint the rainbow, then throw the other one, they should cross over in the air, catch scarf one first then scarf 2.

This is the same as the offset rhythm in the previous activity, but the scarves are crossing over to the other hand. Remember to practise this with the right hand leading (throwing first) and with the left hand leading.

### Get Creative:

It is possible to 'flow' or link together the different actions from the double drop and catch. This is a really good activity to help you gain full control of the scarves and improve your motor skills. If you enjoy movement, dance or music, why not select a tune and use the music to inform you what rhythm to do and when. If you combine this with simply making shapes with the scarves in the air and moving around it can become a real means of expression just like dance. You could even choreograph a whole sequence if that's your thing 😊

### Family:

Another scarf activity children love is blowing and chasing the scarves. Try dropping them from a height but instead of catching it your child tries to blow it away. You can also gently place the scarves over their face and have them blow the scarves forward, chasing them around and trying to stop them from dropping to the floor.

**Progression:** It is not necessary to be able to complete each activity to move on, rather move forwards and backwards through the activities, it is good to mix up your practise, and always start and finish with an activity you are quite successful with.

## One Ball, One Ring!

### 3.1 Cow Jumps over the Moon

This is another activity borrowed from Co-Train! Start by holding the ring out in front of you with both hands like a steering wheel. Holding the ring still, remove one hand, put it back and remove the other hand. Try this a few times to get used to the pattern of grab and release.

Now take a ball, or beanbag in one hand and hold it next to the ring. You need to throw the ball up and over the ring, change which hand is holding the ring and then catch it in your now free hand, (throw, change, catch). Then throw it back in the same way. This should be a little tricky at first but with a little practise become quite easy. Once this activity feels natural it is time to move on to a different one.

### 3.2 Down the Rabbit Hole

This one was invented by a friend of mine while she was learning to juggle and it has become a favourite of mine (thanks Chole!). This time hold the ring in front of you in a horizontal position. With one hand you are going to throw the ball in a slightly steeper arc shape so that it drops through the centre of the ring. Whilst the ball is in the air, swap which hand is holding the ring and catch the ball with the other hand. Now you are ready to do it again in the opposite direction. Try and get this action smooth so that it is a continuous rhythm.

### 3.3 Pop up

This pattern is essentially the opposite of down the rabbit hole. The ring is again in a horizontal position being held in front of you with one hand. Your other hand throws the ball up through the centre of the ring but still in an arch shape, swap which hand is holding the ring and catch the ball in the other hand.

This pattern is particularly important as it mimics the pattern used when we juggle. The hand catches the ball at the side of the body makes a small semicircle down and up, releasing the ball closer to the midline of the body. If you can imagine the path of the ball this will help to get the right shape. The ball should be drawing an infinity symbol or a figure eight laying on its side. As with all these activities, the aim is to get it to the point where it is almost happening naturally, and the ball is making a smooth continuous movement rather than stopping for any period of time. This takes practise!

#### Play with a partner:

One ball, one ring activities 3.1 – 3.2 are all fun (and challenging) to try with a partner. Stand facing each other and agree which hand you will use. You both need to use the same hand! Then you try recreating the pattern between you. Remember, to try on both the left and right hand ... you don't want to be a lopsided juggler!

#### Family:

For children who have not yet mastered catching, why not place a bucket or other target on the floor, have the child attempt to throw the ball through the ring into the bucket, ensuring you position the ring to create the arch shape whilst in the air. You can also adapt down the rabbit hole and pop up in this way, with either you or the child holding the ring, encourage them to throw in an arch shape through the ring, but rather than catch the ball have a target on the floor to aim for.

#### Alternative:

All these activities can be attempted with a scarf rather than a ball. Some find this easier, some find it harder, have a go and see what you think.

### 3.4 Barn door

This pattern involves you moving the ring. Hold the ring in front of you like a steering wheel, hold a ball in the other hand and place it through the ring out in front of you. The hand holding the ring needs to move at the wrist to move the ring to the other side of the hand. Imagine the ring is a door and your wrist is the hinge, open and close the door, as it closes your other hand goes back through the ring. Try not to move the hand holding the ball. Practise this a few times in each hand to get used to the movement.

#### **Family & Friends:**

Rings are great for co-ordination and balance activities, try standing on one leg with a ring over your foot and pass the ring to each other. Try passing it from hand to foot and foot to hand. Can you pass the ring person to person with your feet at the same time as throwing the ball to each other?

Once you have got the wrist action happening it is time to get the ball involved. The ball never goes through the ring! Start with the door closed, or your hand through the ring. Throw the ball straight up, to just above head height. While the ball is in the air, open the door, using your wrist to move the ring to the other side of your arm. Now you can catch the ball in the same hand that threw it, but this time your arm is not through the ring. To close the door again, first throw the ball straight up, then close the door using your wrist to move the ring back over the straight arm and catch the ball again in the same hand that threw it.

It is a little bit confusing, I find chanting the sequence out loud or in my head helps: Throw, open, catch, throw, close, catch.

Remember to use the hand holding the ring to move the ring, your body will be tempted to bring the arm holding the ball in and out of the ring instead. If this happens, just practice the open and close movement a few times without throwing the ball, then try again.

### 3.5 Barn door combination

Once you have the barn door sequence down you can combine it with the action of passing the ring from hand to hand as in cow jumps over the moon. Start the barn door sequence; throw, open ... then with the door in the open position and the ball still in the air take the ring with the hand that threw the ball and put the other hand through the ring to catch the ball.

#### **Get creative:**

Can you combine some of the one ball one ring activities into a sequence?

What other patterns can you come up with?

There are many other ways you can make the ball move around a ring, see what you can come up with.

There is quite a lot going on here whilst the ball is in the air, it might take you some time to get it. Try going through the movements without the ball to begin with to get used to the pattern and again using a chant may well help: Throw, open, change (hands), hand through, catch.



## Two Balls

### 4.1 Columns

Working with 2 balls is where juggling really begins. Hold a ball in each hand about shoulder width apart and at about waist height. Throw one ball straight up and catch it again in the same hand. Repeat with the other hand. Then do this in a continuous rhythm; throw, catch, throw, catch.

Imagine you have a square or box in front of your head, the sides are in line with your shoulders and the top is in line with the top of your head. These top corners are where you are aiming for your ball to reach, a little higher or lower is OK, it doesn't have to be perfect. Notice how high each ball goes, and adapt your throw if necessary to bring it lower or higher. Try and have your balls reach the same height. Make sure your hands are not reaching up to catch the balls, try to allow the ball to come to the hand rather than the hand come to the ball.

### 4.2 Column rhythms

Once you are able to confidently repeat columns on both the left and right we can try different rhythms, just as we did in the drop & catch activity in 2.1 with the scarves. Try all the different rhythms, and any others you can come up with, then see if you can change between them without stopping or pausing.

**Singles:** As in 4.1, right hand throws, right hand catches, left hand throws, left hand catches.

**Split time:** Right hand throws, right hand catches & left hand throws at the same time, right hand throws & left hand catches at the same time.

**Off set:** This is where one hand is doing the same actions just a moment or two behind the first one, so, right hand throws, left hand throws, right hand catches, left hand catches, right hand throws. Or throw, throw, catch, catch. Make sure you also try this with the left hand going first, or if you are left-handed, you may prefer to start with the left hand leading, then try the right.

#### Let's think about posture:

Pay attention to your posture when juggling, not only will this benefit you in everyday life it will make your juggling journey easier.

Stand with your feet hip distance apart with a slight bend in your knees. Hold your back in a neutral position, so your shoulders are directly above your hips and your spine is long rather than condensed or hunched.

Roll your shoulders forwards, up towards your ears, back and down and let them sit in a relaxed position but slightly back. Your head should be facing directly forwards with your jaw relaxed.

The idea is to be fluid and mobile, try to remove all tension from your body, particularly your neck and shoulders where many people tend to hold tension. Remaining relaxed whilst concentrating hard on throwing and catching flying projectiles is a challenge in itself, just stop and pay attention every few minutes or so, and correct your stance where required.

### 4.3 Throw Throw Catch Catch

This follows the same pattern as the scarf version in 2.5. You will be throwing the balls in the paint the rainbow shape, so it is a good idea to warm up by practicing that for a little while. When you are ready try doing this with two balls in an 'off set rhythm', this means you throw one ball, then the other, then catch the first ball, then catch the second. There should be four clear 'beats' or actions here: throw, throw, catch, catch.

For most people this is quite a challenging progression, so don't worry if you feel you just aren't getting it, instead notice what is going wrong and work out what you need to do to correct it:

**Timing:** It is not uncommon for people to throw or catch the balls at the same time rather than one after the other, if this is happening try chanting the rhythm or counting to four each time to help keep you on track.

**Passing the ball underneath:** This is very common and a tricky one to crack. If you find you are throwing one ball over the top and either passing the other ball, or throwing it directly at the other hand, you are essentially doing 2 ball, and always throwing up from the same hand. Probably this is in your muscle memory and your body will fight your brain to do this even when you are telling it not to! You can still learn to juggle, it might just take you a little while to move beyond this stage. Things you can try to correct this include, throwing the first ball from the other hand, going back to one ball for a little while, chanting UP UP as you throw, place an obstacle between your hands such as the back of a dining chair, practice with scarves, they move slower and give you longer to exercise your will over your body. In my experience, perseverance does pay off and you will get past the two ball phase simply with practice, it can just take a little bit of time.

**Misbehaving second ball:** If you find the second ball is just being dropped to the floor, or even thrown in an odd direction, this is because you are focussed more on catching the first one. In juggling the throw is more important than the catch. Try just throwing several times, don't bother catching them, let them drop to the floor. Also try starting from the other hand, we all tend to throw from our dominant hand first, which means the subordinate hand has the harder task of throwing and catching close together, you may find you go backwards a little at first but in time this will help correct the pattern.

**Running after the balls:** Sometimes, when we start this process, we find the balls are just going wherever they want and we are having to chase them around. Notice which direction you seem to be going in, and then position yourself in front of or next to a wall so that you can't go in that direction. This will encourage you to correct your throw rather than chase the balls around. You can also try sitting on the edge of a chair.

#### Play with a partner:

All the one ball activities in section 4 can be adapted to be practiced with two people. Stand side by side, I find it helps to place your arms around each other's waist, one person is the left arm while the other is the right.

If you are doing an activity that requires the ball to go from one hand to the other your rainbow shape will need to be wider than usual.

Remember to swap sides and try operating the other hand, otherwise .... 'Lopsided juggler!!'

#### 4.4 Alternating Hands

The throw, throw, catch, catch / offset rhythm with a paint the rainbow shape is a fundamental activity. I encourage you to practise this often, and later to use it as a warm up before you attempt three balls. If you are able, attempt doing this with a partner too, before moving on. (see p11)

Once you can do this with both the left hand leading and the right hand leading you can then try alternating which hand throws first. To do this you must throw the second ball immediately after you catch it. Remember to catch slightly to the outside and then circle your hand round to release the ball nearer the mid line of your body. It would go something like this:

Right hand throws, left hand throws, right hand catches, left hand catches, left hand throws, right hand throws .....

Remember the correction tips from 4.3 and try to get this going in a continuous rhythm.

#### Play with family & friends:

Group and partner juggling is a great team activity, start with just one ball and agree a path the ball will follow from person to person or hand to hand. Practise this a few times and then try doing it with two balls, then three and so on, in theory you should be able to use as many balls as hands eventually, and possibly even more as you become more competent jugglers.

Working with a partner in this way can be really beneficial to your juggling journey. Stand facing each other and have one ball each in the same hand. Paint the rainbow to yourself and then to your partner. Try this in both directions before adding a third ball, then a fourth and perhaps even a fifth. With two balls each try throw, throw, catch, catch, to yourself and then to your partner. Get creative, event new paths and new rhythms together.

#### Play with music:

Juggling relies on being able to keep a consistent rhythm so anything that gives you a sense of timing is helpful. Try playing music while you practise, try different tempo music to see which works for you.

Your knees should be soft, and body relaxed, so you should be able to bounce gently by bending a little at the knees, this can help to keep the beat.

#### Families:

Children usually develop the ability to throw before the ability to catch. If catching is a source of frustration for your little one have them work on the throws by giving them targets to aim for. Have them stand between two chairs for example, and throw, throw, trying to get the balls to land on or near the chairs next to them.

For catching practise, gather as many balls, small cuddly toys and balls of socks as you can. Throw them one at a time for your child to catch, gradually increase the speed at which you throw them. The aim is for your child to catch some, not all of the balls. They won't be able to keep hold of all the balls so they will all ultimately drop to the floor. In this way they won't notice as much how many they miss. All children I have played this with have loved it and the game usually ends in giggles 😊

## Into the threes!

### 5.1 Holding and throwing scarves

Ok, now we are into the threes! The first thing we need to get down is being able to hold and throw all three. It is a good idea to switch your practise between balls and scarves at this point, so don't feel you have to 'get it' with the scarves before you move onto balls. We are going to repeat a similar process with the balls, so feel free to switch between them at various stages.

Let's start with the scarves:

In your subordinate hand hold one scarf, pinched in the middle ready to flick it up. In the dominant hand you need to hold two scarves. You can either hold one between your thumb and first two fingers and close your fingers over the other one in your palm, or pinch one between your first and second fingers, and the other between your thumb and the other two fingers. Don't worry, this is a little fiddly at first but gets easy.

Look at the scarves in your hand and identify the order you are going to throw them in:

1. The one being held by your index finger
2. The one in the other hand
3. The last one, being held with your pinky finger

So, if you were to start with the right hand you would throw right, left, right. Give it a go, don't bother trying to catch them, or even worry about where they are going at first, just get rid of them all, up in the air in the right order. Try that a few times then swap over to starting with two in the other hand. Once you are managing to get them all up start paying attention to where they are going.

It is a really good idea at this point to practice 'flick, flick, snatch, snatch' from section 2.5 for a little while to remind your body how to maintain the right shape or path of your throw before attempting all three.

You will probably find that as you are practising getting all three up in the air you will naturally start catching or snatching one or more of them. Keep practicing this until you are catching the first scarf.

Once you catch a scarf, try to throw it again rather than keeping hold of it (even if it is not the first scarf you threw). Essentially, you are aiming to throw each scarf before you catch the next one. Try saying 'catch-throw, catch-throw' to yourself. This is a point at which many people get stuck for a while, learning to throw or flick the scarf before catching the next. Try counting out loud or calling the colour of the one you are throwing, as that will be the next one you are trying to catch.

### Play with family or friends:

If you or your children / juggle buddies enjoy a spot of competition here are a couple you can play to help you get them all up. You would need a set of scarves each, give a count down and see who can get them in the air the quickest. Standing in quite a tight circle, all get your scarves in the air after a count down and then snatch as many as you can out of the air. This is a really nice way to involve younger children in the juggling action, you do the flicking / throwing and they can do the snatching!

## 5.2 Holding and Throwing Balls

If you have very small hands you might prefer to use beanbags or smaller balls but 120g thuds are the the most popular balls to start juggling with.

One hand only has to hold one ball as it always has done, but the other needs to be able to hold and throw two balls. Place one ball in your palm and support it there with the pinky finger. Spread your thumb and first two fingers a little and sit the other ball in the cup shape your fingers have made.

The ball being held by thumb and fingers goes first, then the ball in the other hand and finally the ball in the palm of your hand. You want to throw the next ball as the one before it reaches its highest point.

Just practise getting them all out in the right order first, don't try to catch them. It is a good idea to attempt this with the two balls in the other hand too, but it often takes quite a while to be able to start juggling in your subordinate hand.

Once you have practiced a few times notice how far away the balls are, could you have caught them? If not go over two ball throw, throw, catch, catch a few times again to remind your body how to throw that ideal 'paint the rainbow' shape and try again.

Whilst practising this you will eventually find that your body naturally wants to catch one or more of the balls. If you catch a ball try to make sure you throw it again, this is how juggling works.

Once you are managing to catch (and hopefully re-throw) one or more balls consistently you are ready to start trying to juggle.

## 5.3 Juggling

Even if you have done every single one of the activities so far, it is unlikely you will now just pick up three balls or scarves and juggle. Instead you will probably work towards a series of milestones (explained below). The best way forward from this point is to practise often but for short amounts of time, 15 minutes a day is better than 1, 2 hour session in a week for example.

### Progress tip:

There is no way to learn to juggle without dropping a lot of balls! While chasing after and picking up dropped balls and scarves is good for you physically, it can become quite draining. If possible, practise over your bed or sofa so that the dropped balls / scarves are not so far away. This will also prevent you from chasing the balls / scarves forwards.

### Family:

The best way for younger children to practise catching is with someone else throwing or dropping the ball for them to catch. A great way to involve them in the juggling while they are still developing their catching technique is to have them stand inside a circle. A Hula hoop is ideal, but rope, string, tape or a circle of cuddly toys will work just fine. Have them start with one ball / bean bag / scarf in each hand and add the third when you feel they are ready. Encourage to throw in a rainbow shape and see if they can make them travel up and over their eyeline but still land in the circle.

In each practise session pick one activity from each of the sections of this booklet and work through them up until this point. Spend a few minutes trying to juggle and then go back to which ever activity you most enjoyed or you felt was helping you the most before you finish.

Regularly remind yourself of everything you have learned:

**The path of the ball** / scarf – an arch shape that peaks at the opposite shoulder

**The path of your hands** - catching to the outside and circling towards the midline of the body

**Timing** – throwing the next ball when the previous one reaches its highest point

**Throwing** is more important – when you catch a ball throw it again

**You will drop balls!**

### **Milestones:**

In my experience of learning to juggle and teaching others to juggle I have identified a number of milestones. They are the achievements that people often have to work a bit harder to achieve, or get stuck on.

You are unlikely to get stuck before all of these milestones, but you are also unlikely not to have a moment of feeling stuck and unable to progress. This is very normal, and as soon as you feel frustrated, take it back a stage, go back to two balls, or even one for a few minutes before trying again.

- **Getting three balls up** - this is the activity you have just done.
- **Catching one ball** - we covered this in 5.2, you will probably catch the last ball to start with and work your way towards the first one. Until you are throwing and catching all three in the right order.
- **The forth throw** - This is where people get stuck the most often. At first you're so focussed on catching the balls you forget you have to throw them again immediately after catching them.
- **4 catches** – Four catches means you have sent the first ball all the way back to where it started. From here on it is all about the numbers, make sure you count your catches so that you can track your progress.
- **7 catches** – This is another point where many people get stuck, often this is because they are chasing the balls around, focus on your subordinate hand and refer back to the corrections in section 4.3 and try the 'can't catch the balls' extra activities in the box.
- **12 catches** – This is great, you are juggling, you just need to keep going 😊
- **20 catches** – Reach this point and you can confidently say that you can juggle .... Well done!!

### **Can't catch the balls:**

One of the skills we need to master to become a juggler is controlling where the ball lands. The childrens' activity on P13 is a great way for you to identify where it is going wrong! If your balls are falling out of reach make a boundary on the floor around you. A hula hoop is ideal, but a ring of rope / sting / cushions is fine. Memorise which ball is ball 1, 2 and 3. Practise throwing the balls without catching them and notice where they land. Any balls outside the perimeter would have been hard to catch, you can now identify which balls are not making it and work out where they are going so you can correct it. Refer back to the corrections in throw, throw, catch, catch in section 4.3 to help you.

## Great, I can Juggle! ... Now what?

Once you can juggle it is a great calming activity. Try to keep up your practise, 10 minutes daily if you can. At Sweet Circus we strongly believe in Juggle Breaks and want to make it a culture of local business to encourage juggle breaks, especially for people who have sedentary occupations.

We would love to hear about your progress, send us your pictures & videos, and let us know when you have mastered the basic cascade (that is the juggling pattern you have learned here) we may even find you a small prize for doing so. We would also love feedback on this booklet which could be updated, with pictures or diagrams that you send us 😊.

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## But I want to learn more ... Where do I go from here?

Social media is a great resource, especially Instagram if you search or follow #juggle, #jugglersofinstagram #jugglingtutorial you will find many informative posts.

Personally I prefer YouTube for tutorials, obviously subscribe to our channel:  
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCumXttGUw5-kIHsIB4gayVQ>

Taylor tries is a personal favourite of mine and she regularly posts trick tutorials and slow motion examples: <https://www.youtube.com/user/TheOmnipotentJuggler>  
 She also uses other circus toys such as Kendama which we are particularly fond of.

Another really interesting channel to follow is Boon Tricks:  
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMBA3e6ZwD8YaIx52BlbzPA>

Through Lockdown he posted a series called one ball challenge, which I was totally hooked on and involves sequences and tricks using just one ball.

There are some great books available these would be top of my list:

- The Complete Juggler by Dave Finnigan
- Charlie Dancey's encyclopaedia of Ball Juggling

Both of these books are often available second hand from Amazon or Ebay and would be an excellent investment.

Find a local juggling club or circus club and meet other enthusiasts. We run one on a Wednesday evening through the autumn / winter called Strings and Balls. They have their own facebook page here: <https://www.facebook.com/StringsAndBallsEbo>

Finally, take your balls to work, down the park, or wherever you go. You'll find people are interested and want to learn. Soon you'll have your own Juggling social group 😊

## Why Learn to Juggle?

So, what have you done all this for? While learning to juggle might not be the first thing that comes to mind when you consider improving your overall health, the benefits reach far beyond having a good party trick, some of which you may already be beginning to experience.

Juggling is an ancient skill and generally considered a form of entertainment. According to 'Top End Sports' the earliest evidence of the art form are images found in an Egyptian tomb dating back to 1781BC but references to juggling are found across the globe. (<https://www.topendsports.com/juggling/history.htm>)

Clearly a skilled juggler is still able to thrill an audience, but the real magic of juggling is its ability to improve the physical, mental and social health of any individual who is prepared to learn.

### Physical health:

Juggling is active but gentle. It improves hand eye coordination, balance and the range of movement in arms and shoulders. You can vary pace and intensity to suit your level of fitness and increase it gently or more aggressively to suit your needs. You can begin to learn and practice at any age, and it is suitable for all abilities. Best of all it gives you a whole-body exercise without feeling like a workout.

### Brain Function:

Juggling makes you smarter and can future proof your brain. Over the last decade or so juggling has come to the attention of medical researchers fascinated by the ability of juggling to preserve and develop brain function. It has been found to increase both white and grey brain matter. "White matter consists of the bundles of long nerve fibres that conduct electrical signals between nerve cells and connect different parts of the brain together, while the grey matter consists of the nerve cell bodies where the processing and computation in the brain is done."

(<http://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2009-10-12-juggling-enhances-connections-brain>)

Two separate studies using a control group who did not practise learning to juggle and a group who practiced regularly for a few weeks found an increase in brain size and functionality. The really encouraging news is that this growth was



apparent regardless of whether the participant was still struggling to master a simple three ball pattern or had progressed on to five balls and complicated tricks.

(<http://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2009-10-12-juggling-enhances-connections-brain> & <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/Technology/juggling-improve-brain/story?id=116656>)

### Mental Health:

As with all forms of exercise endorphins are released in the body which promotes positivity and feeling good. The nature of juggling requires full focus and even when feeling extremely stressed,

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practising juggling for five minutes can clear your mind and make space for innovation, enabling you to see things from different perspectives. For this reason, juggling is used by many as a form of meditation and relaxation. Stress hormones are quickly reduced. The opportunity to work towards and achieve what to many may seem the impossible promotes self believe, self-value and a more positive outlook. Through practise, proprioception improves, this is really a physical benefit but proprioception improves body awareness and can encourage a positive body image.

### **Social Health:**

Juggling can be done virtually anywhere and requires close to no financial investment to get started. It is easiest with proper Juggling balls, approximately £2.50 each, but people have learned with apples or even rolled up socks. Another option is a set of juggling scarves which can be purchased for about £3. These items can fit in a handbag or even a pocket. So, it is financially accessible to virtually all.

Because everyone can work at their own pace and level it is really easy to juggle with others, having a 'study buddy' with whom you can take turns watching and advising each other is great. Families can juggle together, even the youngest children can join in picking up dropped balls or simply playing catch. And of course, there are plenty of patterns which can be practiced which require two, three or even more people. Language needn't be a barrier as juggling is a kinetic and visual skill which can be taught, learned and shared with very little verbal communication if required.

Because of the required full focus, people usually lose any self-consciousness very quickly, especially as the most accomplished jugglers will be dropping balls left and right as they try to acquire their next level of skill.



The best thing about learning to juggle in a group is that members will soon be laughing! I have been teaching people to learn juggling for 24 years and I can assure you, laughter is a massive part of it. This makes it a great team building activity.

**Juggling is contagious**, if you don't have anyone to juggle with when you start, you will quickly collect them. Take your balls to the park and people will want to join in, take them to work and use them as a stress buster during your screen break and pretty soon you'll be teaching a colleague what you have learned so far.

**At Sweet Circus we want to make juggling part of the culture of Eastbourne.**

We would like there to be juggling drop-ins across the town, juggle jams in shared spaces, learn to juggle lunch breaks for customers and staff in shops and juggling breaks as part of employee wellbeing. If you think your workplace or social scene would be up for a learn to juggle challenge, get in touch and we'll bring the Juggling fun to you!

## Thank you

It has been both a privilege and an honour to be part of your juggling journey, even if it happened under the most unusual of circumstances. I have said for years that I need to start getting all my activities out of my head and onto paper so that other Sweet Circus instructors can use it as a quick reference guide. Yet I have procrastinated on it. I thought it would be a boring and frustrating and generally an unpleasant experience. It has been tricky to put it all into the written word, and I am not yet sure how successful it has been, however, I have really enjoyed the process and feel like a weight has been lifted. Like some space has now been made in my brain that I can fill with new stuff!

I am encouraged now to keep going, write about poi, about diabolo, about stomp even!

As I have said previously I would love to hear about your progress, send your pictures & videos, and let me know when you have mastered the basic cascade (that is the juggling pattern you have learned here). We may even find you a small prize for doing so.

I would personally be really grateful of any feedback on this booklet which will be updated regularly.

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**Ta ta for now ... and Carry on Circussing!**