

how to teach ball juggling

from <http://www.strongsoccer.com/Kingdrills/homeplay.htm>

Warning!! Learning to juggle is not easy!

There are not many "shortcuts". It can be very frustrating to new players and they just want to quit trying. Take it slow with lots of encouragement for everything. Many times they will begin to show significant gains but seem to lose all of those gains the following practice. Go slow. The time and effort it takes a player to progress from 2 touches to 4 touches may well be the same as from 20 to 40 juggles later on. Work in games like **soccer tennis** to keep it interesting.

- Start with a decent but expendable ball that you can use on pavement and not mind the scuffs. You may find that if you under-inflate it just a tiny bit, it will allow for more control. Repeat all the skills with both feet.
- Hold the ball out in front of you with both hands and drop it onto the pavement for a bounce. After the bounce, tap the ball back up to your hands with the shoelace or instep part your foot. Catch the ball and repeat several times with each foot. We need to learn how to describe these movements so the teacher can lead some beginning jugglers through these skills. (I would call this a "bounce-foot-catch".)
- Now, drop the ball for a bounce, tap it softly up towards your hands but let it fall back to the pavement for another bounce. Then tap it up to your hands for a catch. (I would call this a "bounce-foot-bounce-foot-catch".) Repeat this several times, again with both feet.
- Next we will drop the ball directly to the foot for a tap back to the hands for a catch. (This is a "foot-catch")
- Now drop the ball to the foot for a tap but let it bounce, then use the foot to tap it up to the hands for a catch. (This is a "foot-bounce-foot-catch".)
- Keep adding on touches and bounces alternating a foot touch with a bounce and ending with a catch. It's important to end with a catch to maintain control.
- Finally drop the ball for a bounce and tap it up with the foot but before it bounces try to tap it up again for a catch. (This is a "bounce-foot-foot-catch".) This is the beginning of "real" juggling! This is a big step. If it seems too difficult for the player, do not hesitate to back up and work on the 1 touch exercises again with bounces in between.
- Continue to try different variations of bouncing and 2 foot touches. Don't try to go to 3 consecutive foot juggles too soon. Getting from 2 juggles to 3 is a very big step as well. Instead try to link lots of 2 juggles together with bounces. Try a bounce-foot-foot-bounce-foot-foot-catch. Later on link together a several of these 2 touch juggles with a bounce between each one. In fact, see how long you can keep it going with 2 touches and then a bounce. Have a contest.
- It may not be the first day, but eventually you are ready to go for 3 juggles. Warm-up with single touches and work up to 2 touches linked together with bounces, just as I have described above. Then try a bounce followed by 3 foot juggles and a catch. (This is a bounce-foot-foot-foot-catch.) Encourage alternating feet during the 3 touch juggle. Once they get the hang of this, start using bounces to link together more 3 and 2 touch.
- You can drop the ball directly to the foot without a bounce, to start the juggle, once they begin to develop some control.

Approach thigh touches and head touches the same way, but wait until they have some control with their feet so they can "dig" it up for a catch at the end. Also they will often find the thigh touches easier and tend to overwork them thus neglecting the feet. Start with a **thigh-bounce-foot-catch** combo and then keep adding on. Try a **thigh-thigh-bounce-foot-catch** and **then a thigh-thigh-foot-foot-catch** and now now they are up to 4 legitimate juggles!

Once you have made it this far you should encourage less bounces between touches, but I still like to see players use the bounce to keep the ball moving. I think it is better that they keep touching it back up even with bounces, as opposed to getting frustrated and stopping.

Now it will take time and practice to learn how to keep the ball airborne. Once again, introduce games and contests to keep it interesting. A great game for juggling skills and improvement of all first touches is "soccer tennis"! I highly recommend it.

There will be breakthrough days when the player finally juggles 3 in a row or much later, gets to 10 for the first time. These are often followed by frustrating days where nothing seems to work. Then much later, when they finally get to about 20 juggles, the "lights" seem to come on. Juggling actually becomes a fun thing to do and they begin to attract attention and compliments from other players, coaches, and parents. Now if they keep at it, they can break 50 in "no time".

Younger players enjoy the challenge of "breaking their record". Give a juggling assignment to your players and take 10-15min after practice every two weeks or so for "juggling tests" where player count for others who are juggling. Encourage players to practice at home and to break their own personal best. Make it a game and keep it fun. This will ensure your players are gaining maximum touches, a skill critical to playing the game fully when they are older.

Good luck!