

Juggling for Beginners

Updated June 2024

Looking for your next new challenge? Juggling is the hybrid sport combining running and juggling at the same time: the rhythm of each running stride matches the rhythm of each throw.

But how to get started? We asked jugglers from around the world to share their tips and encouragement:

How do I get started?

When we say beginner, we assume you mean that you can already comfortably juggle a 3 ball cascade comfortably, but have never tried juggling. If you're not yet at this point, go and learn to juggle (standing still) first, and come back to this guide later!

Learned to juggle? Great! Time for some fun!

When you run, you'll notice that your arms swing back and forth naturally. More specifically, the right arm will automatically swing forward as you stride with your left leg. When we add the juggling, we want to try to maintain this exact positioning and rhythm, aiming to match your juggling throws with this natural arm swing. The height of your throws is determined by the speed of your running. The faster you run, the lower the toss. This is because as you run faster, your stride rate increases, your arms pump faster, and you need to juggle quicker too!

Make sure you have a clear and flat space ahead of you. From a standing start, begin to juggle and feel the rhythm of the throws. Then, whilst juggling, start jogging on the spot, aiming to match the rhythm of your steps to your throws. Once you've got these rhythms synchronised, try to jog forwards slowly. You're aiming for control and consistency, rather than wild throws! Take care not to toss the balls too far forward. Rinse, and repeat. Congratulations, you're a juggler!

Where should I practise?

We suggest starting out somewhere quiet away from the crowds, where any drops won't disturb other runners, or get picked up by dogs wanting to play fetch! Good spots might be at the park, or on the beach, close to the hard sand near the water's edge.

As you become more confident, then most of the places where you love to run will also be great places to juggle. Stay vigilant of traffic, or blind corners. You will find that to begin with, it requires more effort to navigate bends, steps, or curbs, but with practice your awareness will improve.

Within the community, juggling has happened in deserts, mountains, beaches, forests, and of course in plenty of urban environments. You might want to wear sunglasses to protect against wind, flies, and of course against UV. A bug in the eye or watery eyes can suddenly make juggling a magnitude more challenging. If you want to prepare for this scenario, you can also practise juggling with one eye closed.

What are the common mistakes and pitfalls for new jugglers?

Getting really comfortable with static juggling is the single-most important thing that will help beginner jugglers. It will strengthen your arms and it will cement the rhythm. Try juggling high and slow, then low and fast. Try to reach a point where you don't need to focus on the balls too much.

When you start out juggling, make a conscious effort to look ahead at what's in front of you. Try to anticipate what might become a potential obstacle, so you don't trip or drop a ball. Treat your balls like windshields in your car when it's raining. They're there and you know it, but they're just not your main point of focus.

"I tried a run using tennis balls in my early days of juggling. Not a great idea since every drop was an adventure to recover the ball as it bounced away. Now, I don't miss very often so it wouldn't be as much of a problem." More advice on prop choice later!

Pay attention to your juggling form. When you're juggling while standing still, your elbows are stable at your sides, but for juggling your elbows swing forward and back with the running motion. To accommodate this arm swing and increase running efficiency, you need to carry the ball back with you on the backswing, then release it as your arm moves forward.

"Because running causes a forward lean, the juggling pattern should be quite close to your face compared with juggling standing still. I made the mistake of extending my arms out too far when I first started juggling and my biceps and triceps got tired very quickly. If your biceps start to burn after a short juggle, you're probably throwing too far forward. The balls should only be about half a foot in front of your nose."

"Follow the rhythm of your feet. Run slow in the beginning. Relax your shoulders. Listen to instrumental classical music. Focus on the horizon with your eyes and just see the balls dancing in front of you."

What's the best weight and colours for the balls?

Much of prop choice is preference, but here are some general pointers.

- 1) Solid colours may be less distracting than balls with multiple colours (as long as you're not juggling behind someone with a t-shirt of the matching colour!)
- 2) Bright colours are good because they are clearer to focus on, have greater crowd appeal, and are easier to spot if dropped (in long grass for instance). Orange or Pink could be a good choice.
- 3) Waterproof balls are a great feature to consider. Machine washable means that it's always easy to have clean props, and you'll worry less about drops. Avoid seeded fillings that will grow if wet!
- 4) It's worth investing up front - a good set of juggling balls will make it easier to learn and can last for years. If you can afford to; why compromise? [Gballz](#), [Jugglequip Infinities](#), or Speevers are all popular choices in the juggling community.

Some recommendations from across the community:

- "Personally, I use Jugglequip infinities, medium, orange solid colour, 115g. These are probably on the heavy side, but I like the reassuring weight of each catch, and they are great in the wind/rain."
- "I use 85 - 100g Gballz bean bags. Any colour but right now blue/white & green/white."
- "I juggle with the most basic russian balls (not SRX, the plastic ones). They're super durable, normally they don't roll away too far once you drop them and also they stick very well to your hand. They're also pretty light but not too light, so the wind doesn't bother them too much. Getting the brighter colours for your balls might be an excellent idea, especially in the summer. A couple of days ago I lost a green ball in the grass during a race, so I learnt this lesson the hard way."
- "I use solid-coloured high-bounce rubber balls (approximate size of lacrosse balls) and mostly juggle on the beach by myself. I wouldn't risk bounce balls on the tarmac yet!"
- "I prefer heavier training softballs/baseballs that don't bounce out of the hands and feel substantial: solid in hand, bright, roll even less than beanbags. The weight could be less of an issue than you'd think, since your legs help propel them on every throw."
- "I juggle with home-made balls filled with cherry stones and they weigh 160 grams. Sounds heavy, but they are easy to catch and it helps me to keep the drops in a race on zero."

How long did it take for you to be able to juggle a 5km?

"When I started juggling, the hardest part for me was running. I eventually signed up for a beginner couch to 5k program, just to take care of the running aspect first. Once you can juggle a mile you probably can do a 5K."

“Didn't take too long to be able to juggle 5k (a couple of weeks) but a lot longer to be able to do it with no drops!”

“In my case the decision to become a juggler was completely spontaneous. One day I thought ‘I wanna try something new’ and the next day I juggled in a 5km parkrun in Cracow with more or less 200 participants, with no prior training whatsoever. If you're comfortable with 3 ball juggling, and running 5k is not a problem for you, it should be a perfectly doable thing to do with no previous training. But, I wouldn't recommend it! I had a thousand drops, my thighs hurt like hell after constantly picking the balls and I was exhausted afterwards. Here's what I suggest. Try some small segments first, just to get the gist of it. Once you're able to synchronise your arms and legs well and understand the basic idea of juggling, the distance shouldn't be a problem. I'm pretty sure that after 3/4 weeks of training on shorter distances, you'll nail 5k!”

“It was several months of practice across the sports hall my juggling club practised in before I felt ready for a 5km. My first event was a parkrun. It was very droppy. Yes, people stared and wondered what I was doing. Yes, I felt a little self-conscious at points. But I got a lot of encouragement from others - nearly all of whom had never seen a juggler before! Your first event will set a benchmark for you to improve upon - I'd recommend just getting out and doing it! Don't worry about being drop-free - that will come later. I'd say that if you can juggle a 3 ball cascade for 1 minute, and you can run a 5km (without juggling), then you're ready to juggle your first 5km”

Can you give me some advice on racing/event etiquette?

The important consideration here is being courteous to all other runners. Think how your juggling can add to the event and bring a smile to those around you. Some practical tips.

- 1) When juggling in an event stay off to one side. Then if you drop, you won't impede other runners & you can more easily recover your bean bag. You will find this more enjoyable than starting in the middle of a large bunch.
- 2) Why not take part in your first juggling event with a non-juggling friend? They'll give you extra encouragement, and help make you aware of upcoming trip hazards, and other runners.
- 3) I'd suggest starting right at the back. Then, the pressure is off, you're only going to finish in a higher position to where you started, and you don't have to worry about getting in anyone's way.
- 4) For your first race, start with a small one, under 500 participants, without many technical corners or off-road sections. Aim to get around safely and enjoy yourself, primed and motivated for future events.
- 5) If possible, juggle the race course before race day, so you know of any potholes etc.

I've learnt to juggle. What could I try next?

- Trail juggling. Most paths that you can run, you can juggle.
- Using different / more props. Why not try juggling with clubs, or try 4 balls?
- Get yourself on a running track. You could give sprinting, relays, or even hurdling a go!
- Meeting other jugglers. Try posting in [Jugglers United](#): There is likely another juggler in your state or country. You could arrange to meet up at a race, or at a local juggling convention.

Contributions from:

Chris Edwin, Scott Jenkins (UK), Kacper (Poland), Rik Konings (Netherlands), Michal Kapral (Canada), Perry Romanowski, Rhett Farber, Dean Radcliffe, Karly Swaim (USA), Attila Suszter (HUN)

We wish you all the best in your juggling adventures