

Poi for Seniors



The Complete Facilitator's Guide

For independently living to rest home/hospital



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Special thanks to

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**It's time for the world to follow
Aotearoa back to the practice
of poi, and forward to a
healthier future.**

**Ka mua,
ka muri.**



Introduction

Poi is a ball on a cord which is swung in circular patterns around the body. Poi originated with the Māori of Aotearoa (New Zealand), and it is believed to have originally been used as a form of training for battle as well as for entertainment. Today poi continues to play an important role in Māori culture, and can be seen as part of kapa haka (Māori performing arts). Poi is also enjoyed by people of all cultures, ages, and abilities across the globe as a form of play, performance, and exercise.

Learn more about the history of poi by clicking the video link.

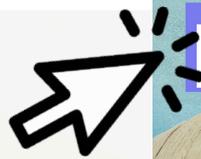


Image of early Māori poi made of harakeke (New Zealand flax)
Image courtesy of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

Health Benefits of Poi

SpinPoi Founder and CEO Dr. Kate Riegle van West conducted a scientific study at the University of Auckland to measure the effects of poi on health for older adults. The double-blind randomised controlled trial found that after just one month of poi practice, participants significantly improved their grip strength, balance, and attention.¹ These are exciting results, especially when thinking about maintaining good quality of life as we age, as they cover some of the hallmarks of frailty.



Grip strength

Hand strength is an important predictor of bone mineral density, likelihood of falls, general disability, and overall mortality for older adults.



Balance

For adults 65 years and older, 1 in 3 will experience a fall each year, with falls accounting for 10-15% of all emergency department visits.



Attention

Our ability to choose and concentrate on certain stimuli is necessary for every day functioning, from driving to holding a conversation.

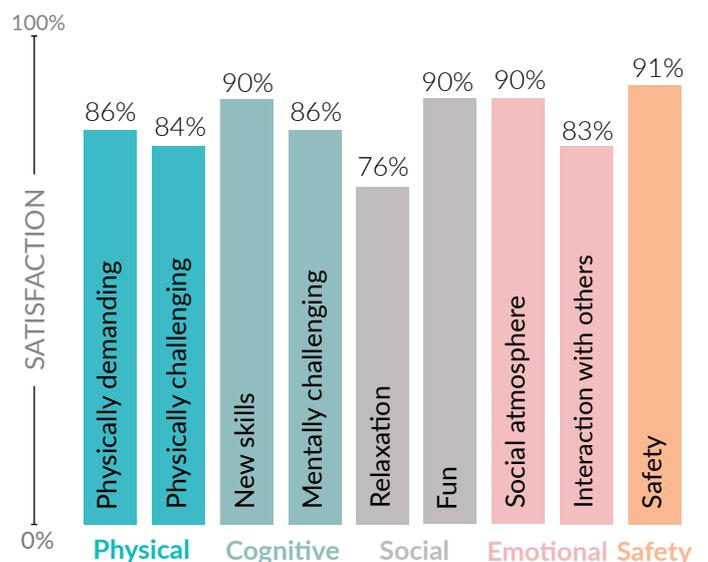
Dr. Riegle van West conducted subsequent trials at the Auckland City Hospital and New Zealand aged care facilities. Data from staff and participants across all levels of care were collected. 93% of aged care residents (73/75 people) and 90% of hospital patients and (18/20 people) reported wanting to continue their poi practice.

“ I had cramps in my hands so bad I couldn't do anything, and after loosening it up with the poi they're as good as gold. It's done me wonders.

*Independently living resident,
Ryman Retirement Village*

“ Poi could potentially be one of the most affordable and effective interventions globally to alleviate depression, loneliness and isolation in older adults. We have seen our older residents smile or laugh out loud, socialize and develop new friendships, and engage both their minds and their bodies despite their age and physical or cognitive abilities.

*Group Diversional Therapist,
Selwyn Retirement Village*



Satisfaction with Poi Sessions: Independently Living

n = 100

1. Riegle van West, K., Stinear, C., & Buck, R. (2019). The Effects of Poi on Physical and Cognitive Function in Healthy Older Adults. *Journal of aging and physical activity*, 27(1), 44-52.

In addition to the scientifically proven health benefits, poi has a myriad of qualities that make it an excellent tool for keeping the mind and body engaged as we age.



He Taonga Māori

As a Māori taonga (treasure), poi gives us an opportunity to engage with and share part of Te Ao Māori (The Māori world view) across the globe.



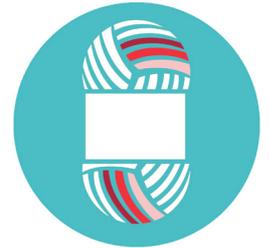
Adaptable

Poi is adaptable for all ages and abilities (e.g. poi can be heavy or light, done sitting or standing, with simple or complex movements).



Cost Effective

Poi doesn't require complex equipment or technology, making it a cost effective solution for individuals and organisations.



Creative

There are infinite possibilities for unleashing your creativity through making poi as a craft activity and exploring different poi movements.



Evidence Based

Poi has been scientifically proven to benefit physical and cognitive function for older adults, making it an excellent tool for improving quality of life.



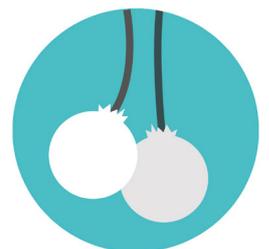
Social

Group poi classes provide social connections and camaraderie, which are especially important for combating loneliness as we age.



Integratable

Poi is easy to integrate into daily life and into existing exercise and wellbeing programs as it can be done anywhere, any time.



Fun

Fun is an important quality for a therapeutic tool: if something is fun, you just want to do it! Plus play has profound health benefits.

“ Practicing poi helps keep the brain alive. It’s stimulating. It’s fun. It requires complex actions that keep the body and mind engaged. Poi just might help delay the onset of diseases that strike in old age like dementia.

- Sir Richard Faull, KNZM FRSNZ, Neuroscientist, Distinguished Professor

Types of Poi

The first poi were made by wrapping the leaves of harakeke (New Zealand flax) around the soft down of raupō (a wetland plant also known as bullrush) to form the ball. Harakeke fibre was used to weave the cord.² Today there are many different types of poi, including poi that glow and poi you can light on fire! Although there is no “one size fits all”, two types of poi work particularly well for older adults: contemporary Māori poi (best suited for those who will stay seated during exercise) and sock poi (best suited for those who will primarily stand during exercise). The following section will discuss the characteristics of both types and provide a how-to guide for making them.

2. Huata, N. (2000). *The Rhythm and Life of Poi*. New Zealand: Harper Collins Publishers.



Sock poi

Sock poi, also known as practice poi, are the recommended type of poi for older adults who will primarily stand during exercise. They are simple to make, durable, easy to wash, and can be as heavy or light as you please. Sock poi can be made from any ordinary sock by simply adding weight (such as rice) to the bottom of the sock. A knot or loop can be tied at the top to provide additional grip options. You can also purchase sock poi online, such as the one pictured below.



Weight

Approx. 70g works well for most, but weight can be easily customised



Durability

Very durable, as long as a sturdy sock is used



Wash-ability

Remove the weight and socks can be easily washed



Time to make

Approx. 2 min per pair



Cost to make

Approx. \$9 per pair (depending on the price of the socks)

How to make sock poi

Materials

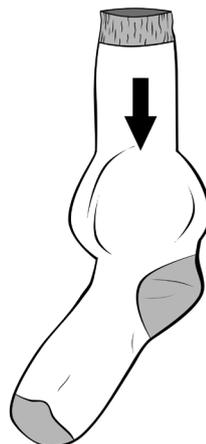
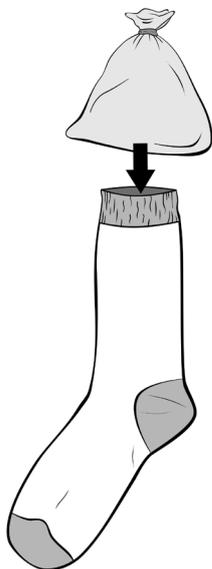


Sock poi can be weighted with a variety of things. If you want them a bit heavier, rice or plastic pellets work well. If you want them a bit lighter, a rolled up sock will do the trick. Whatever you choose, make sure it's soft (no hard rigid objects such as tennis balls!). If you are using something loose like rice, and are planning to wash the socks frequently, place it inside a pouch or bag. This will make it easily removable.



For the poi itself, ordinary knee-high socks work best. A shorter sock can be used, but the additional length allows participants to choose where they would like to hold the poi - hold more toward the foot and the poi will be shorter, hold more toward the ankle and the poi will be longer. Since there is no "one size fits all" poi, having these options is helpful. Make sure to use a regular sock and not tights or pantihose, as these are too thin and stretchy. And don't worry about the heel of the sock sticking out, once the poi is twirling the momentum will straighten it out and you won't even notice.

Assembly



Contemporary Māori poi

Māori poi are typically lighter and softer than sock poi, making them a good option for those who are more frail and/or those who will stay seated during exercise. That being said, Māori poi can be used by anyone and making them is a great arts and crafts activity. In addition, it provides an opportunity to connect with and learn about the origin of poi and te ao Māori (the Māori world view). The poi shown below are modelled after the poi used for kapa haka (Māori performing arts) in New Zealand today, which have evolved from the traditional poi used hundreds of years ago.



Weight

Typically very light, though weight can be added



Durability

If not made well the head can separate from the cord, otherwise very durable



Wash-ability

Plastic head is easy to wipe down. Yarn cord can be difficult



Time to make

Approx. 20 min per pair

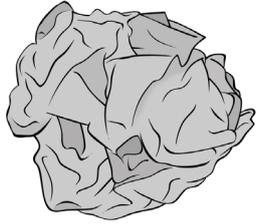


Cost to make

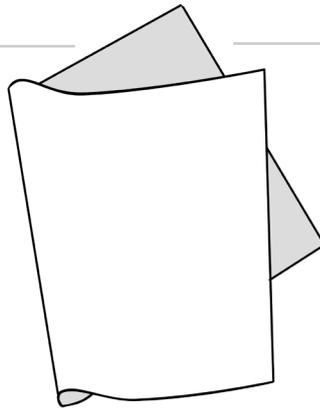
Less than \$5 per pair (head can be made of all recycled materials)

How to make contemporary Māori poi

Materials



To stuff the head of the poi, use crumpled newspaper, plastic bags, or stuffing/foam from a pillow or the craft store. For additional weight a pinch of rice can be added.

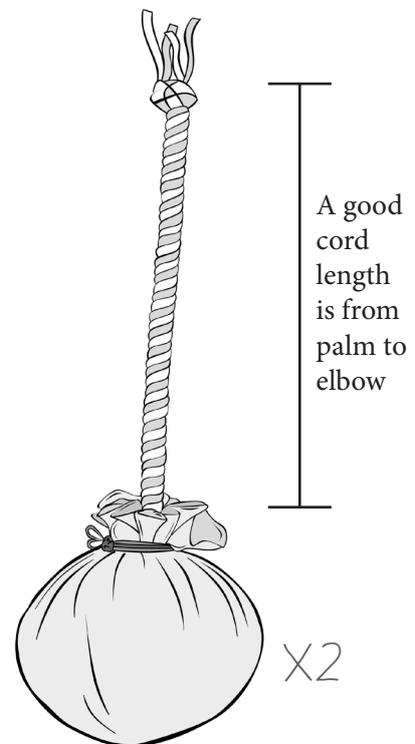
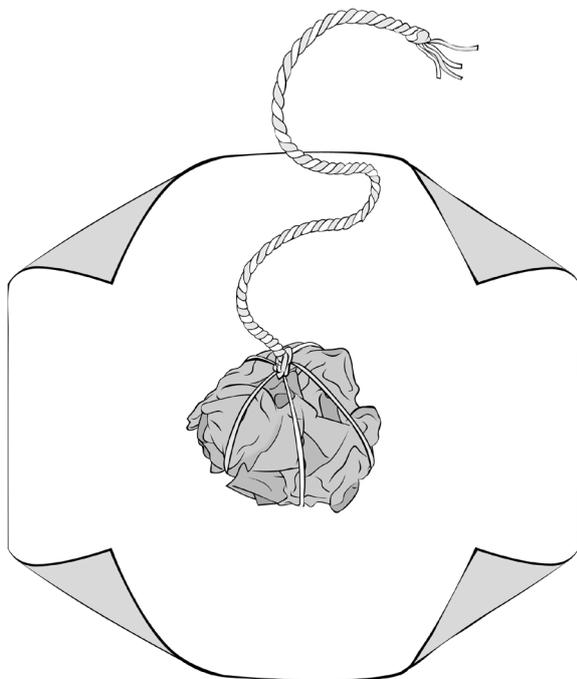


Plastic will be wrapped around the stuffing to hold it in place. Ordinary plastic bags, trash bags, or a plastic table cloth will work well.



Use yarn to braid a cord however you please, such as a simple 3 strand braid. Tie both ends off with a knot, but leave long tails at one end; these will be tied around the stuffing to keep the head of the poi and the cord connected.

Assembly



Tie the long tails on one end of your cord around the stuffing to connect the two. Wrap your plastic tight around the stuffing to form a ball. Tie the plastic off at the top with yarn or tape. This is easiest with two people, one person pulling the plastic tight and the other tying or taping the plastic off. Cut off excess plastic, leaving a little sticking out at the top for decoration if desired.

Creating poi is a great arts and crafts activity, and an opportunity to express your personal style through different colors, materials, shapes, and sizes. What will your poi say about you?

Golden boutique poi (left) and SpinPoi sock poi (center) by Certified SpinPoi Instructor Janine Warne and available on spinpoi.com/shop, creature poi (right) by Hitra Poi in Russia, various Māori poi by the residents and staff of Selwyn Village in New Zealand (bottom).



Preparing for a Session

Before diving into the components of a poi session, it's important to discuss best practices around preparing the space and preparing yourself as a facilitator to ensure your sessions get off to a happy and safe start.

Prepare the space. Twirling poi takes more room than most people anticipate, and sometimes the poi do accidentally go flying! Therefore, it's important to have a wide open space that is clear of breakable items. If you're indoors, make sure the ceiling is high enough to twirl poi with your arms stretched above your head.

Prepare your playlist. Music plays an important role in setting the tone of your session, so give some thought to your playlist ahead of time. It's always nice to choose songs your participants know and love, and to match the music to the mood you'd like to set (e.g. upbeat music for a high energy session, calming music for a more relaxing session).



Spread out. Make sure there is enough room for participants to spread out. Each participant should be able to stretch their arms out wide without bumping into their neighbor. If your participants are sitting down, a good rule of thumb is to leave enough space for a chair in between each chair. If possible, try arranging your session in a circle. This helps foster a fun atmosphere and unity within the group, and also ensures everyone will be able to see the instructor.

Say a Karakia. Before beginning your session, it can be nice to say a few words of welcome. In Māoridom a karakia, or an incantation/prayer, is often said before or after undertakings to help ensure good fortune, spiritual guidance, and protection. You can try saying this karakia before your session to acknowledge the origins of poi and your respect for this Māori taonga (treasure). The last word in the line, “Haumi E, Hui E, Taiki E” should be said together by everyone present.

Karakia Timatanga

Mā ngā Atua Māori, e tiakina, e arohaina i ahau,
ma rere tōtika a te mahi pai.

Mā te rere a te poi, ka tau ai, te mauri ki roto i a tātou.
Haumi E, Hui E, Taiki E.

May the Māori Gods protect us, love us,
and guide us in doing good work.
Let the flow of the poi give us energy and life.
Join, Gather, Unite.

Visit the website for a recording of this karakia that you can play to begin your sessions.

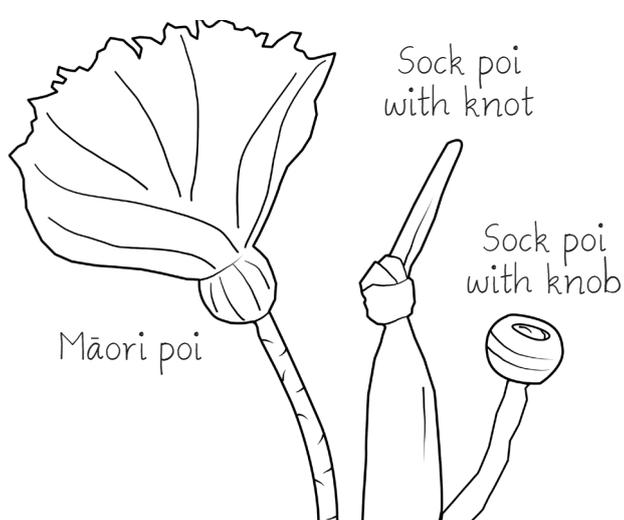


www.spinpoi.com/karakia



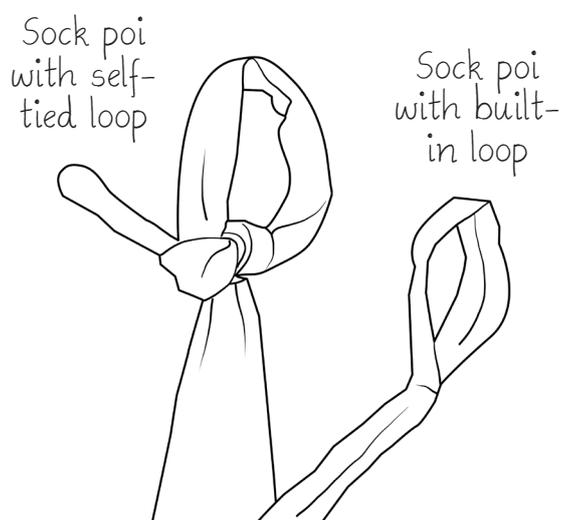
Holding Your Poi

How you hold your poi can really affect how comfortable you feel while playing poi and your ability to achieve certain poi movements. Just like the poi themselves, there is no “one size fits all” poi grip, but this section aims to give you a starting place with two common poi grip styles: handle and loop. You and your students should play around to figure out what’s comfortable, considering factors such as wrist and finger mobility, grip strength, tolerance for friction against the skin, and ability to feel in the fingers/palms. Keep in mind certain grips might work well on certain planes or for certain movements, and not as well for others, so don’t be afraid to change grips throughout each lesson.



Handle

This includes any poi that has a gathering of material at the top which forms a handle you can grip. This could be sock poi with a knot you tie yourself, a silicon handle, or the gathering of yarn just below the tassel of Māori style poi.



Loop

This style is comprised of a loop of fabric at the top of the poi. You can create a single loop yourself on any sock poi by making a loop of fabric and tying it off at the bottom with a couple knots.

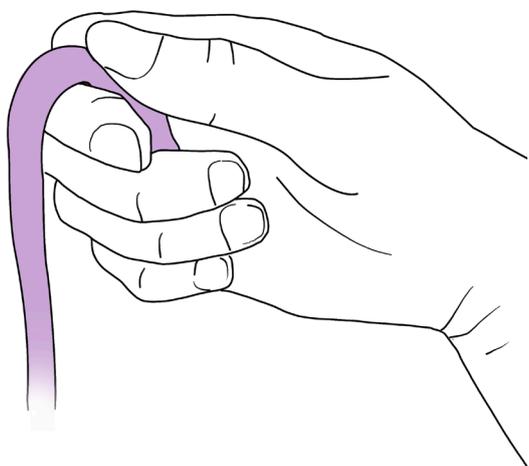
Handle

Pinch Grip

Who: Anyone with no known grip strength issues. This grip is a great starting place for most ages/abilities.

How: Pinch the handle between your thumb and index finger. The poi cord will drape over your knuckles.

Benefits/Limitations: The pinching action can make it easier to have fine control over poi movements, however, some students may find pinching to be tiring. The poi can also rub on the knuckles with this grip, which can sometimes be solved by having the student move their wrist in a more pronounced circular motion when spinning the poi.

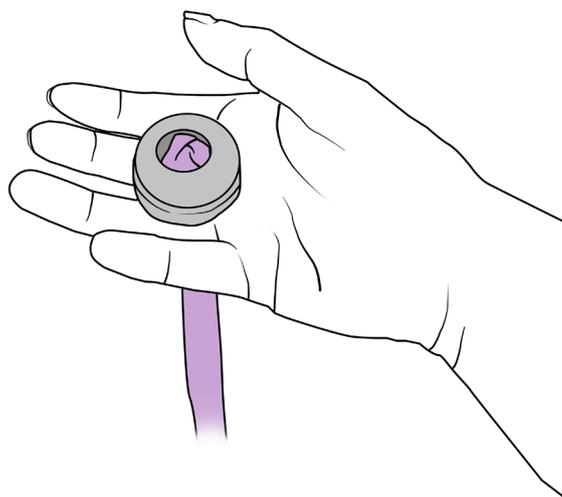


Open Grip

Who: Those with weaker grip strength or anyone who would like to relax their hand while moving the poi.

How: Turn your hand palm up. Slide the poi cord between your ring and middle finger, or your middle and index finger, depending on personal preference. Rest the handle close to your palm. The poi cord will hang down from the knuckle side of your hand.

Benefits/Limitations: Easy on the hand as it requires less active effort to hold than pinch grip. Because of the relaxed hand position, the poi can easily fly off of the hand if a student gets too relaxed or doesn't have enough grip strength to keep it in place.



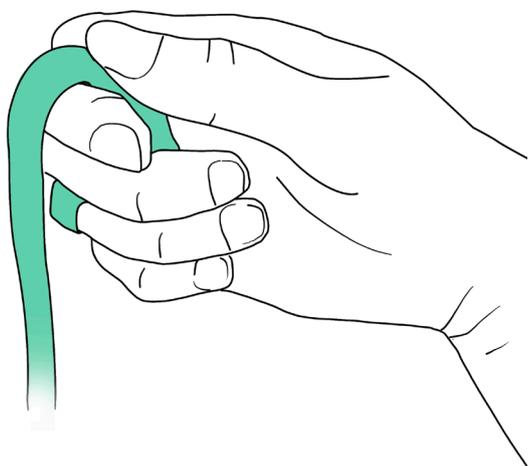
Loop

Pinch Grip

Who: Anyone who likes pinch grip with handle style poi, but wants an additional level of support.

How: With your hand palm down, slide the loop over your ring finger. Pinch the cord between your thumb and index finger. The poi cord will drape over your knuckles.

Benefits/Limitations: Pinch grip with a loop has all the same properties as with a handle, but with an additional level of grip support provided by the loop around the ring finger. The loop can create a more supported feel, and can be good for students who are working on strengthening their grip or need assistance maintaining a consistent grip over a period of time.

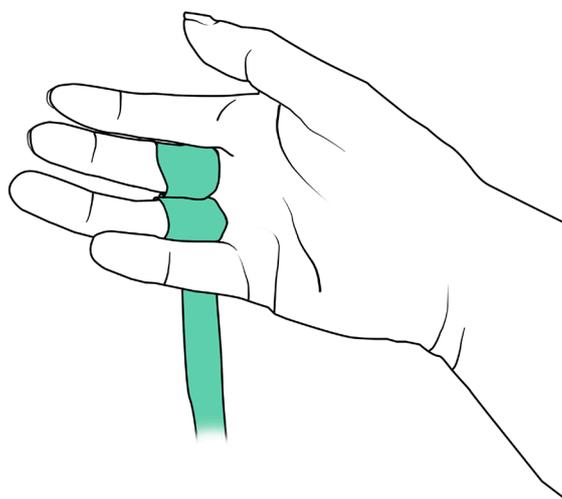


Open Grip

Who: Anyone with very limited grip strength.

How: With your hand palm down, slide the loop over your ring and middle finger, snug to where your fingers meet your palm. Grab the cord with your other hand. Keeping tension on the poi cord, rotate the poi and your hand together until your palm is facing up. Drop the poi cord between your ring and middle finger, so the cord now hangs down from the knuckle side of your hand and you have created two loops around your fingers.

Benefits/Limitations: When the poi spins, gravity will cause the loops to tighten, making it very secure and requiring little holding on. Not ideal for movements that requires letting go of the poi (e.g. passing it hand to hand), as it can be cumbersome to get the poi on/off the hand.



Warm Up Exercises

Although poi is relatively gentle, it is still important to warm up and increase blood flow to the exercising muscles and joints. The following section will outline warm ups that can be done with and without poi, from a seated or standing position. Incorporating poi into the exercises will not only aid stretching but help participants become familiar with the poi and get used to holding and manipulating them. The exercises primarily target the muscles that practicing poi engages, such as the upper limb, back, and core. While warming up, you can help participants stay safe by reminding them not to push past a comfortable or pain free range of motion at any time. You can say phrases like “only move as far as you can comfortably go”, and keep an eye on anyone with known conditions.



Warm up exercises with poi

Holding one poi taut, end to end

Ceiling to toes

Core, back, shoulders, biceps

Raise arms overhead, keeping the poi taut. Keeping arms straight, bend forward from the waist and attempt to lower the poi all the way to your toes. Roll up through spine and raise arms overhead again, returning to the starting position.

x4 reps

Side bend

Core, lower back

Raise arms overhead, keeping the poi taut. Bend from the waist toward one side, moving your torso, shoulders, arms and head together as one. Keep movement slow and controlled. Return to center and repeat on opposite side.

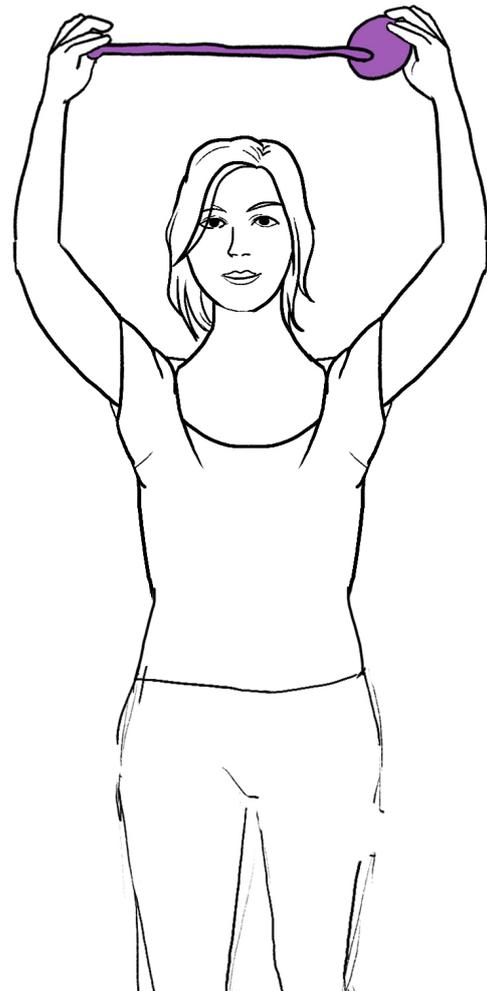
x4 reps

Torso twist

Core, upper back

Hold the poi taut comfortably in front of you, waist height. Twist your torso to one side as far as you can go. Allow the head to follow, as though attempting to look over your shoulder. Return to center, and repeat on the opposite side.

x4 reps



Warm up exercises with poi

Holding one or two poi normally

Rainbow pass (one poi)

Upper limb

Start with your arms by your sides, letting one poi hang down from one hand. Trace half a circle with your hands, starting by your sides and raising your arms up until they meet in the middle above your head. Pass the poi from one hand to the other. Lower both arms back down, and repeat.

x8 reps

Marionette (two poi)

Hips, thighs, gluts

Hold the head of the poi over your knee (right poi over right knee, left poi over left knee). One side at a time, raise the poi and your knee at the same time, as if there is a string connecting them. If standing, pause when the leg is in the air to work on balance. Alternate sides, so legs will end up slowly marching.

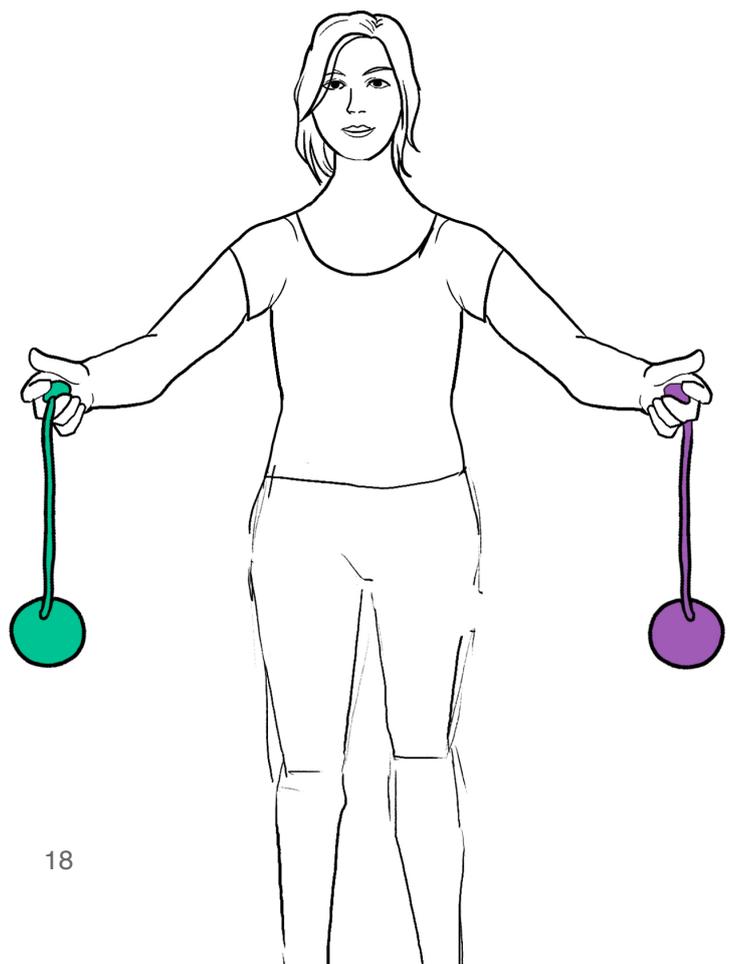
x10 reps

Arm circle (two poi)

Shoulder, upper back

Hold your arms out to the side, palm down. Start making small circles with your arms forward, gradually getting bigger and bigger. Repeat going backward. The poi should not spin, but simply hang down while the arms circle.

x4 reps



Warm up exercises without poi

Neck

Slowly tilt your ear toward one shoulder, being careful not to raise the shoulder. Return to center and repeat on other side (x4). Slowly turn your neck to one side as far as it will comfortably go and hold the position for five seconds. Return to center and repeat on other side (x4).

Wrists

Make circles with your wrists outwards (x8) and inwards (x8). Then stretch your fingers up toward the ceiling, and down toward the floor (x4).

Hands

Hold arms out in front of you, palms down. Open and close your hands, spreading the fingers apart (x8).

Ankles

Point and flex your toes, one foot at a time (x8). Make circles with your ankles, inward (x8) and outward (x8).

Shake it out

Wiggle your toes, ankles, legs, torso, arms, hands, and head. Get silly and shake it all out!



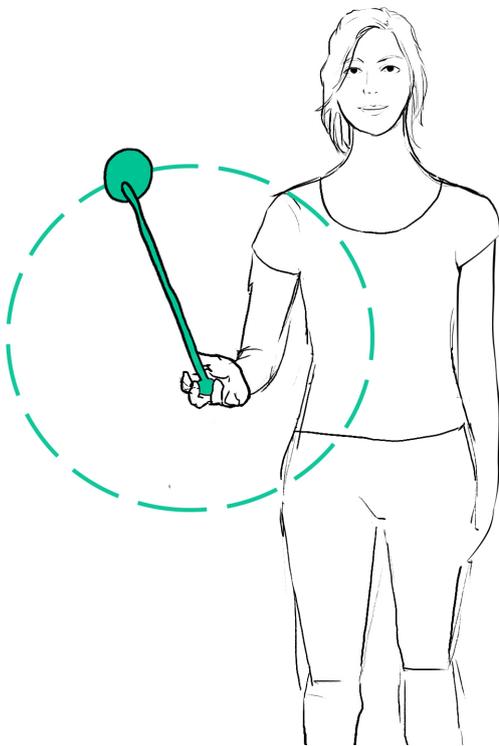
Poi Fundamentals

It is now time to dive into the fundamentals of poi movement. The following section will explain the two modes of poi movement (swinging and spinning), along with plane, timing, and direction. Once you have mastered the fundamentals of poi, you will be able to create infinite combinations of poi movements. This will provide endless challenge and fun for you and your participants. Therefore, it is important that you study the information in this section carefully, and take your time learning the different concepts, terminology, and movements.



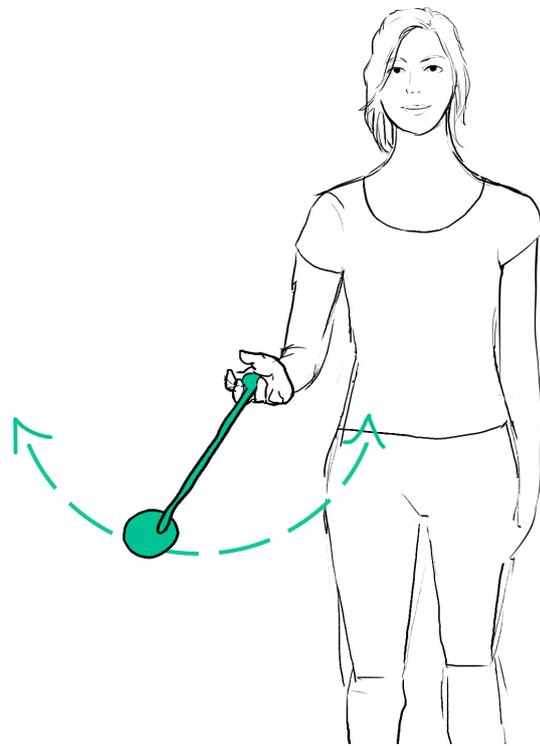
Modes of movement

There are two main modes of poi movement: spinning (the poi travel in a full circle) and swinging (the poi move back and forth like a pendulum).



spinning

Spinning the poi in a full circle is the basis for most poi movements. Sustaining the orbit of the poi can feel like hard work at first, but once coordination is mastered the movement becomes quite gentle. When spinning the poi, focus on making small circles with your wrists and relaxing the elbow and shoulder.

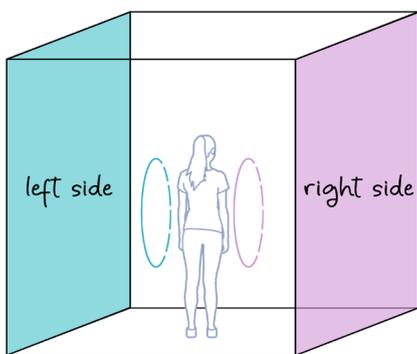


swinging

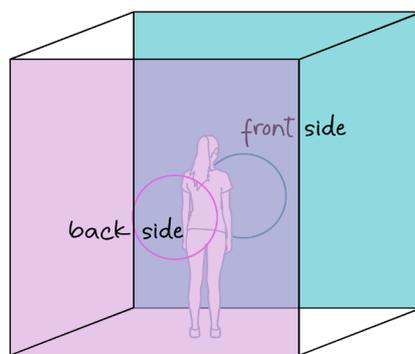
Swinging the poi back and forth, also called a pendulum, is a less vigorous motion than spinning. Swinging can range from a very small pendulum using fine motor control, to a large pendulum using your whole arm. Swinging is a nice way to begin and end a session, as well as a good way to provide a mid-session break. It is also very useful for participants who may have difficulty in sustaining spinning.

Planes

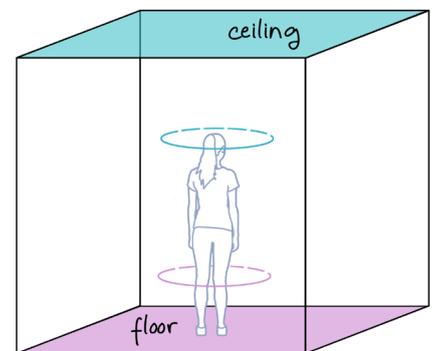
Planes describe where the poi are in space. Some common planes are right/left side, front/back side, and ceiling/floor. You can imagine these planes as the 6 different sides of a cube.



left/right side



front/back side



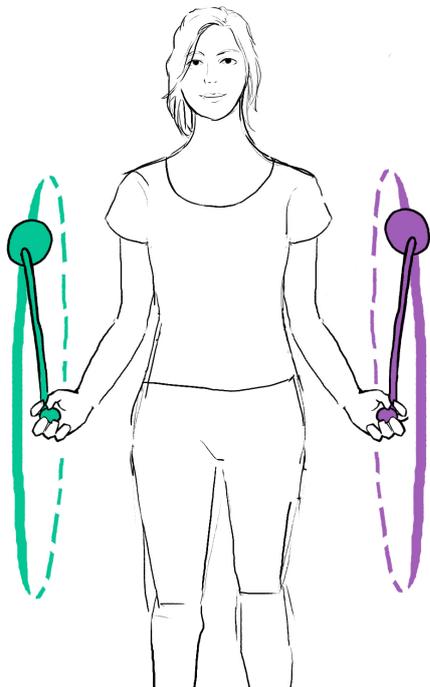
ceiling/floor

Incorporating planes into your teaching will provide structure and challenge, as well as help build awareness and control of the poi. For example, saying “let’s spin both of our poi” is a fun way to play. But saying “let’s spin both of our poi flat in front of us” provides a more specific physical and cognitive challenge. In addition, planes are an integral part of mastering more advanced poi movements. If someone is having a difficult time with a move, it is often because they are on the wrong plane. Therefore, it is beneficial to incorporate the concept of planes and the appropriate terminology into your teaching from day one.

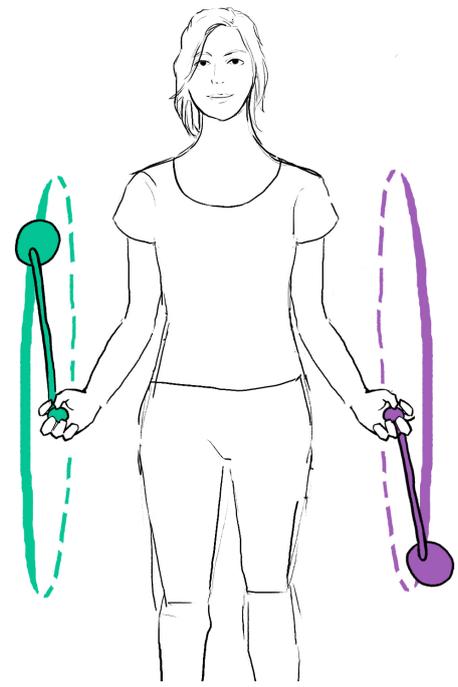
Getting the poi to stay on the right plane is not easy at first, but with practice it will come. If working with participants who are quite old/frail, staying on a certain plane might be too much, and that’s ok! Sometimes it’s best to just let them do their thing. They may get it eventually, or they may not, but just keep encouraging them and focus on having fun and enjoying the feeling of moving.

Timing

Timing describes how the poi are moving in relation to each other. The two main timings are “together” (poi moving together) and “split” (poi are alternating).



together time

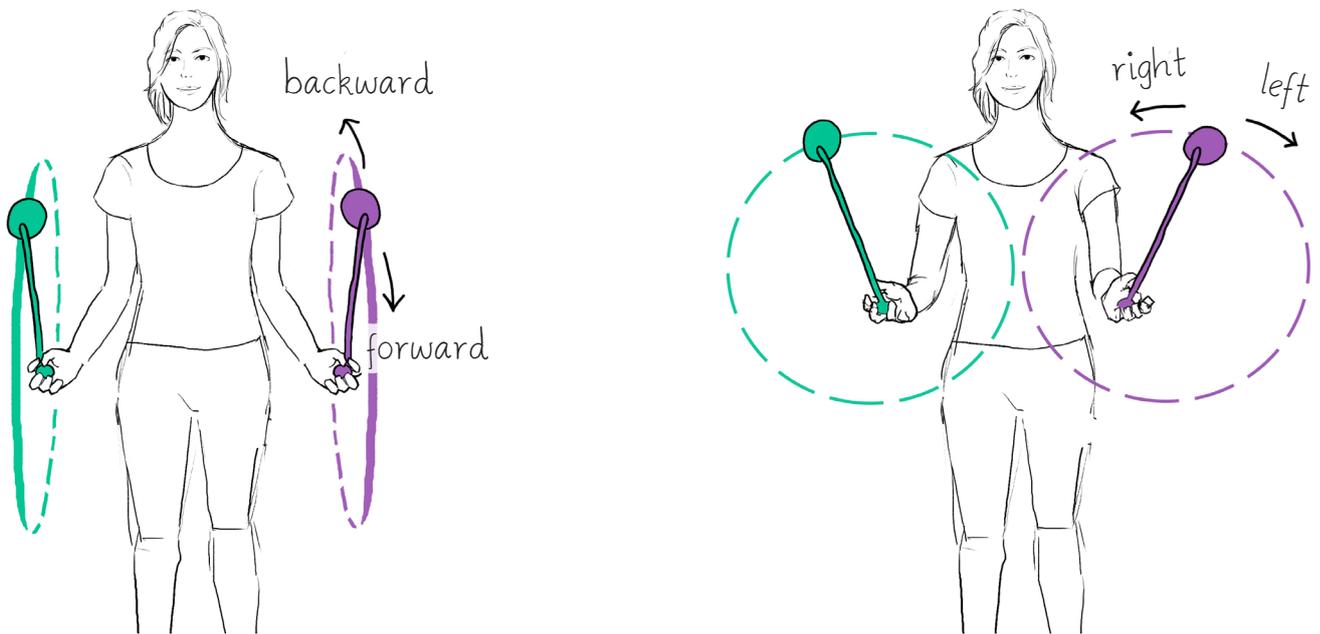


split time

Getting two poi spinning in general can be challenging for some participants. Trying to control the timing is even more of a challenge, specifically split timing or getting the poi to alternate (which feels kind of like twirling double dutch jump ropes). For participants that have trouble spinning two poi in general, don't worry so much about the timing. For participants that are able to spin two poi, have a play with together and split time. To get into split time, it can help to first try it with just your hands. It should feel like you are pedalling a bicycle. It may be tough at first, but don't give up! Split timing, like all poi movements, can be achieved with practice.

Direction

Direction describes which way the poi are moving in relation to you. In right/left plane this is forward or backward, and in front/back and ceiling/floor plane this is right and left, or in and out.



In right/left side plane, the poi can either be traveling away from you at the top of their orbit (forward), or traveling toward you at the top of their orbit (backward). An easy way to check if the poi are traveling forward or backward is to imagine them hitting you (or actually hit yourself, gently!). If the poi are traveling forward, they will hit you in the leg. If the poi are traveling backward, they will hit you in the shoulder. When spinning two poi in side plane, there are 4 direction combinations: both poi forward, both poi backward, right poi forward left poi backward, and left poi forward right poi backward.

In front/back plane or in horizontal plane, the poi can either be moving to your right or to your left. When spinning two poi, there are 4 direction combinations: both poi right, both poi left, right poi moving right and left poi moving left (you can also think of this as both poi traveling outward), and right poi moving left while left poi is moving right (you can also think of this as both poi traveling inward). Floor/ceiling plane has the same combinations as front/back plane (right, left, inward, outward).

In summary

Every poi movement is a combination of plane, timing, and direction. Add the two modes of movement (swinging and spinning), and you have infinite possibilities for poi play.



Where the poi are in space
(i.e. left/right side, front/
back side, ceiling/floor)



How the poi are moving in
relation to each other (i.e.
together or split time)



Which way the poi are moving
in relation to you (i.e. forward,
backward, right, left)

Below is a quick reference for the different combinations of timing and direction. Try all 4 of these combinations while spinning two poi in right/left side plane, front/back plane, and ceiling/floor plane. This will help you gain a better understanding of how the building blocks can be combined to create exercises that will keep participants engaged, challenged, and having a good time.



Together Same

poi moving in the
same direction at
the same time



Together Opposite

poi moving in op-
posite directions
at the same time



Split Same

poi moving in the
same direction
with split timing



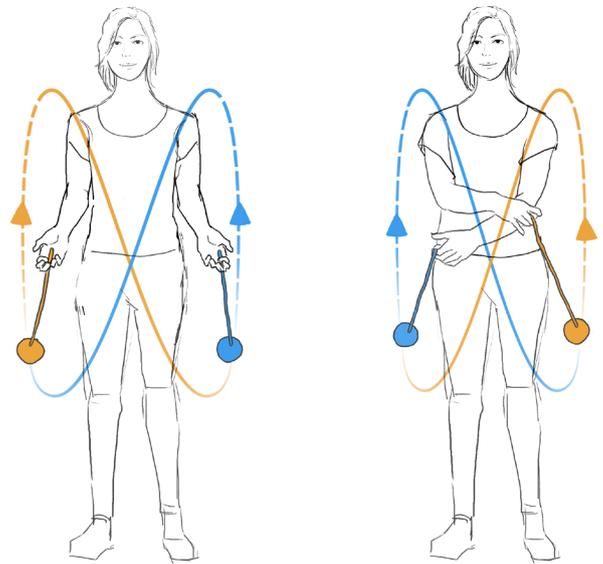
Split Opposite

poi moving in op-
posite directions
with split timing

Advanced Movements

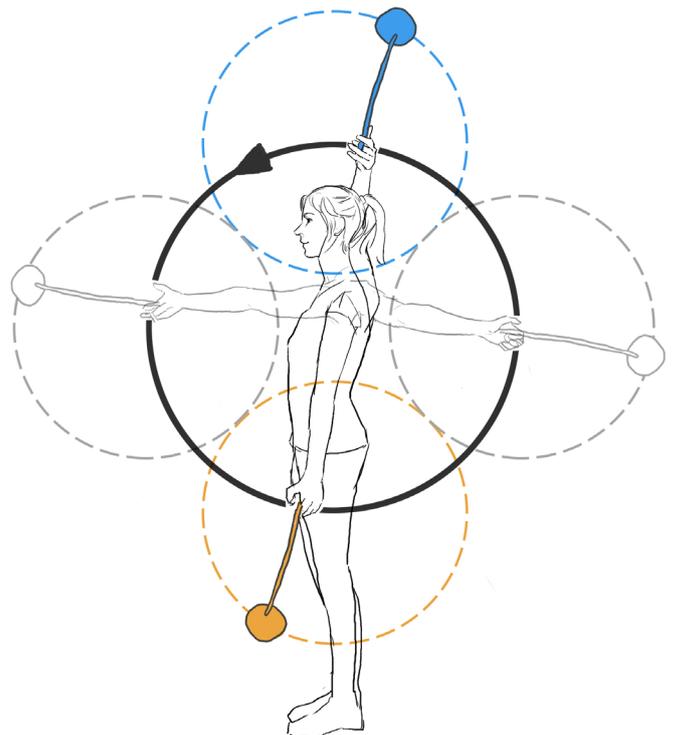
Figure 8

A figure 8 is a circle on either side of your body. Imagine you are standing in the middle of an infinity sign, which you are drawing with your poi. Most people find it easiest to learn the figure 8 with the poi spinning forward. So, start with one hand spinning forward (poi moving away from you) in right/left side plane. Just before the poi reaches the top of its orbit, cross your arm to the other side. Spin one circle on your other side, and as the poi is traveling toward the top of its orbit again, cross it back. Voilà! Try this with your left and right hand, and then try both hands together as shown in the diagram.



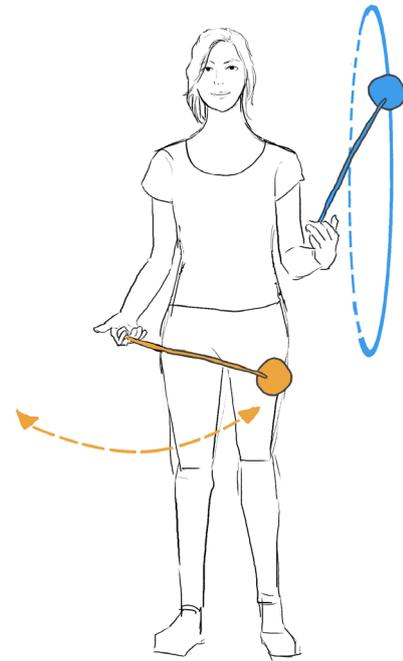
Flower

A flower is a circle of circles; your arm is moving in a circle while your poi is twirling in a circle. Flowers can have different numbers of “petals” or circles. For example, the flower in the diagram has 4 petals. If you made more circles with your poi, the flower would have more petals. To learn flowers, practice one hand at a time with your arm and your poi moving in the same direction, i.e. forward circle with your arm and poi twirling forward, backward circle with your arm and poi twirling backward. You can practice flowers in front plane or right/left side plane. It can be hard to control the poi when it is above your head or behind you, so just go slow and pause in any problem areas to straighten out your planes. You will gain control with practice.



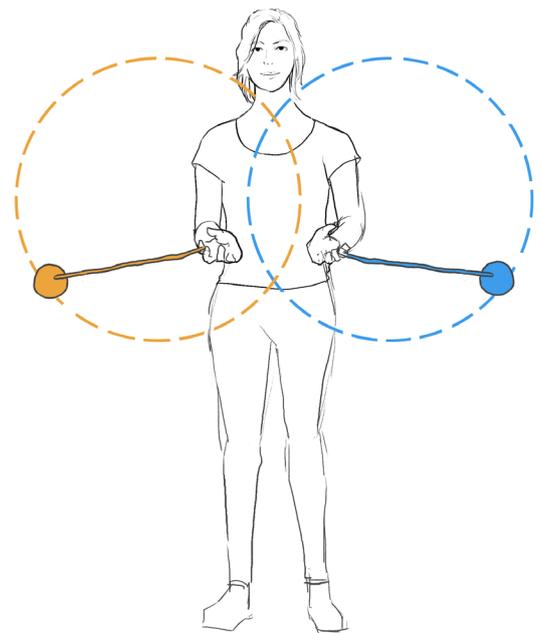
Swing one, spin one

Swinging one poi while spinning the other is a great exercise to gain limb independence. Much like patting your head and rubbing your tummy, it is quite challenging to do different tasks with your right and left side. But like all poi moves, it can be mastered with practice. Make sure to practice with the right hand swinging and the left hand spinning, and vice versa with the left hand swinging and the right hand spinning.



Butterfly

A butterfly is done with both poi on front/back plane, spinning in opposite directions (either in toward each other, or out away from each other). Start with your hands wide. If you have good timing, and keep one hand slightly higher than the other, you should be able to move your hands in closer to each other without the poi colliding. Butterfly is also a good place to practice your split timing; instead of the poi moving together, try to get them to alternate. It'll feel a bit like turning double dutch with jump ropes.



Need more support learning poi movements?

Check out the SpinPoi beginner poi resources including the comprehensive Poi Fundamentals Course and video tutorials on more advanced moves.



Routines

Routines are a great way to bring everyone together as a group. Even if participants aren't necessarily following all the moves, grooving together to the music can instil camaraderie and confidence, as well as prompt lots of smiles and laughter. The following section will outline some tips for creating good routines. A routine chart for the Māori song E Rere Taku Poi is also included at the end of this guide. For more examples of routines, check out the Poi Routines: Aged Care Series at www.spinpoi.com/shop, which comes with videos of 4 different poi routines demonstrated from a seated position.



Choose a tune

Though a poi routine can be done to any song, choosing a song your participants know and love is a good place to start. This provides a familiar base and also gives participants the opportunity to participate musically by singing or stomping (or clapping if they are taking a break from doing poi). Experiment with playing pre-recorded music and also making the music yourself.

Keep it simple

Routines are a time for everyone to participate and move together as a group. Therefore, it's important to keep it simple and accessible. In order to not cram too much in, limit each song to a few different poi movements. Don't worry about matching them exactly to the music, but instead loosely correlate them (i.e. every verse is one movement, and every chorus is another). If some participants want to get more advanced, you can always build in extra challenges for them (i.e. try a movement with two poi instead of one, or try it with split timing instead of same timing).

Repeat, repeat, repeat

Leave plenty of space in the routine for movements to repeat, both in terms of how long you do a movement, and also how many times throughout the song you return to that movement. Repetition enables participants who are behind to catch up, and the others will be happy getting into the groove. It can also be a good idea to repeat the entire song once you've finished. Routines tend to fly by, and it can take a few tries before things sink in.

Make it a collaboration

Participants can often be found spontaneously singing or humming while doing poi, so why not encourage them to make some routines! Picking out the song, figuring out the movements, and even giving the routine a name is a great opportunity for participants to collaborate with each other and with their instructor. Different participants will gravitate toward different ways of moving with the poi, and routines are a great way to highlight someone's signature moves.

Cool Down Exercises

After all that play, it's time to cool down. Take a few minutes to let the upper body relax by shaking out hands and arms, gently stretching the arm across the body, and rolling shoulders forward and backward. Taking some deep breaths in and out is also a great way to relax and ground. To build upon the breath work, incorporate a few simple Qigong movements (an ancient Chinese technique to balance the body's energy through meditation, breath work and movement). Try the movements listed below from the Tai Chi Qigong Shibashi Series, Part 1. Practice the movements slowly, gently, and deliberately, repeating each movement at least four times. After cooling down, encourage a round of applause to bring everyone together and end on a high note.

Commencing Form

Stand or sit with your feet shoulder width apart, toes pointing forward, arms by your sides if standing or resting on lap if sitting. As you breathe in, slowly raise your arms in front of you to shoulder height and width. Palms should face down, with elbows and wrists slightly bent. As you breathe out slowly lower them back down.

Broadening One's Chest

As you breathe in, raise your arms to shoulder height and width as in "Commencing Form." Then, turn palms to face each other and open arms out to the side, fully extending them. As you breathe out, bring hands back to shoulder width apart with palms facing in. Turn palms down and slowly lower arms back to your sides.

Scooping from the Sea

Bend forward from the waist and make a scooping motion with your arms as if gathering sand from the floor, finishing with your hands crossed. Straighten your back and raise crossed hands over head. Separate hands and turn palms out. Let your arms float back down by your sides.

Putting it all Together

When planning your poi sessions, a nice structure to follow is beginning with warm up exercises, progressing into structured and free play, doing a few routines together as a group, and finishing with cool down exercises.



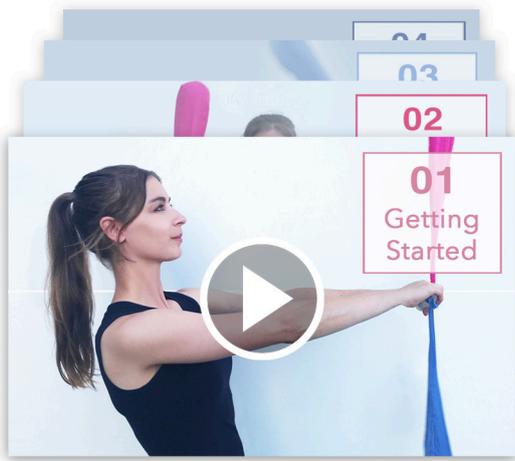
The duration and structure of each session of course depends on how poi fits into your schedule. You might do 10 minutes of poi every morning before tea, or perhaps you have a 40 minute lesson twice a week in the afternoon. Whatever you choose, try to incorporate a gentle entry and exit with warm up and cool down exercises.

When facilitating structured and free play, try picking a movement and progressing through different variations of timing, direction, and plane. For example, if you choose a figure 8, practice with one hand at a time going forward, then one hand at a time going backwards. Then try two hands. How fast can you do the figure 8? How slow? How high? How low? It is also advised to build in time for participants to play freely, so they can try any movement they please or stick to their favorites. To ease the nerves of participants who prefer structure, you can suggest some things to work on during free play.

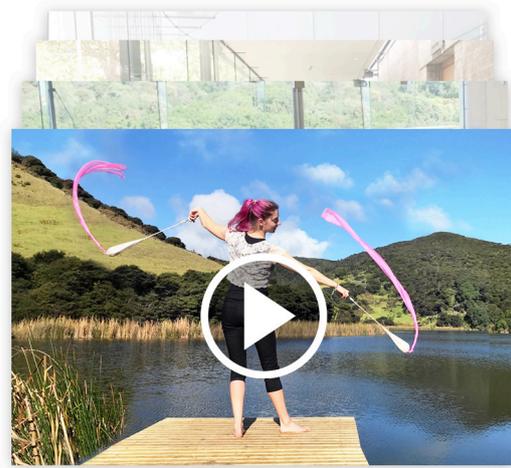
As a good facilitator it's important to have a plan for the session, but it's also important to be able to go with the flow. Poi is playful by nature, and participants will often come up with new moves and variations (sometimes intentionally and sometimes accidentally!). Keep looking around the room and don't be afraid to follow their lead.

Additional Resources

To follow are additional resources including lesson plans and easy to print quick guides. For companion videos and other poi/health resources, please visit www.spinpoi.com



SpinPoi Fundamentals Course



Seed Moves Series

About the Author

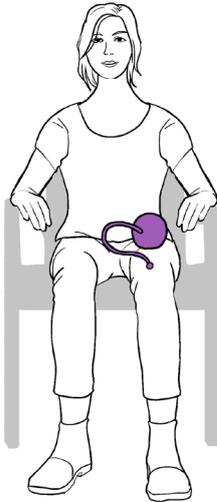
Dr. Kate Riegler van West, Founder of SpinPoi, is an interdisciplinary artist and scientist with a passion for play and wellbeing. She has been practicing, researching, and teaching poi for over a decade, and conducted the first rigorous scientific research on the health benefits of poi for older adults. For more information about SpinPoi or how poi might benefit your organization, please get in touch. We are available for virtual and in-person consultations, presentations, training, and workshops.

info@spinpoi.com



Warm Up Quick Guide

Remind participants to be safe, and not move past a comfortable range of motion.



Neck

Tilt ear to shoulder. Turn neck side to side.

Wrists

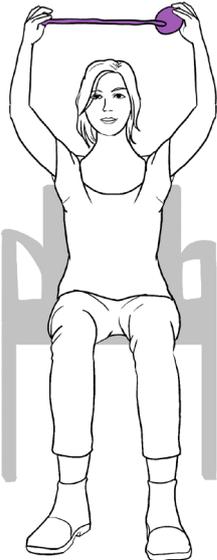
Circles in and out. Stretch up and down.

Hands

Open and close hands, spreading fingers apart.

Ankles

Circles in and out. Point and flex toes.



Torso twist

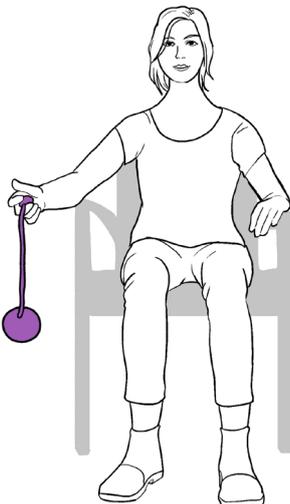
Rotate torso side to side with poi over lap.

Ceiling to toes

Reach up to the ceiling and down to your toes.

Side Bend

Lean side to side from the waist with poi over head.



Rainbow pass

Pass one poi from hand to hand over head.

Marionette

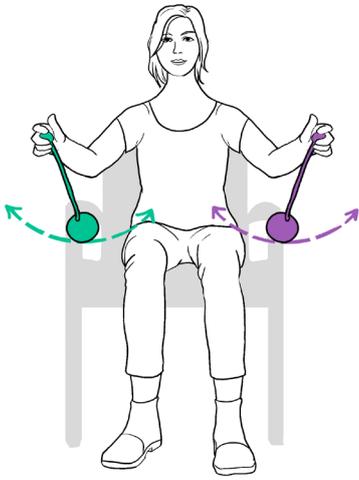
Lift poi and knee together.

Arm circles

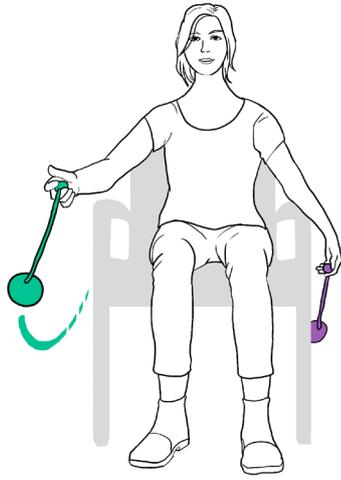
Forward and backward arm circles, starting small and getting bigger.

Structured Play Quick Guide

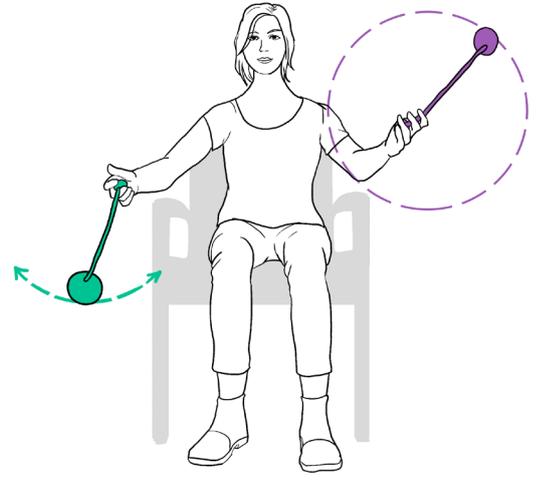
Some movements to get you started. How many other variations can you create?
Remind participants to be safe, and not move past a comfortable range of motion.



swinging front plane



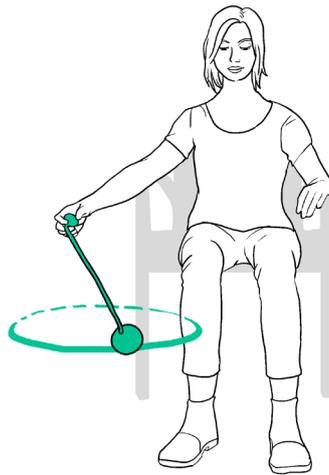
swinging right/left plane



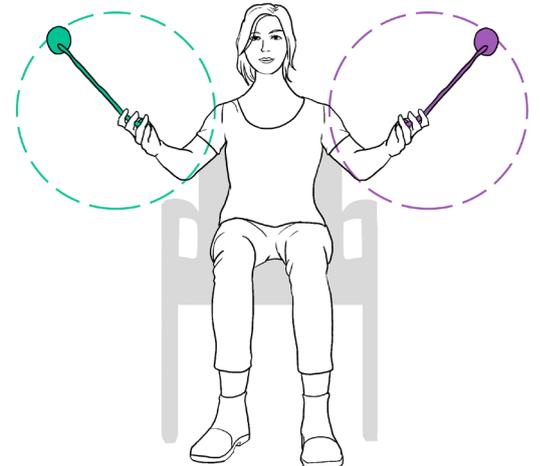
swing one, spin one



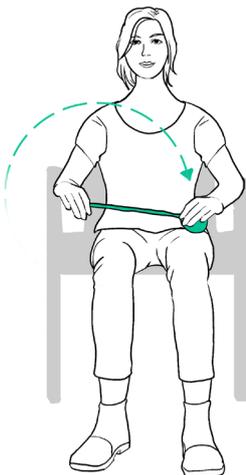
ceiling plane spin



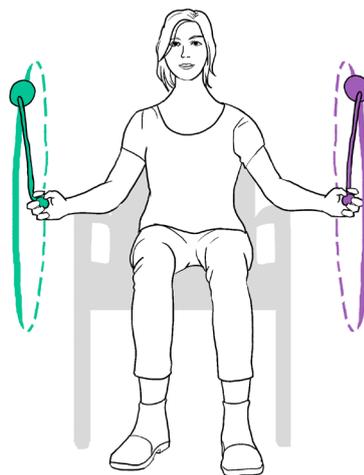
floor plane spin



front plane spin



catch



right/left plane spin

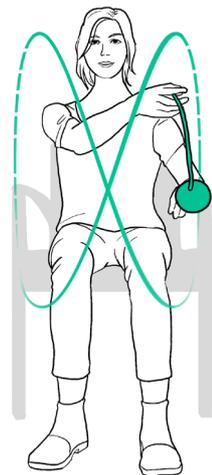
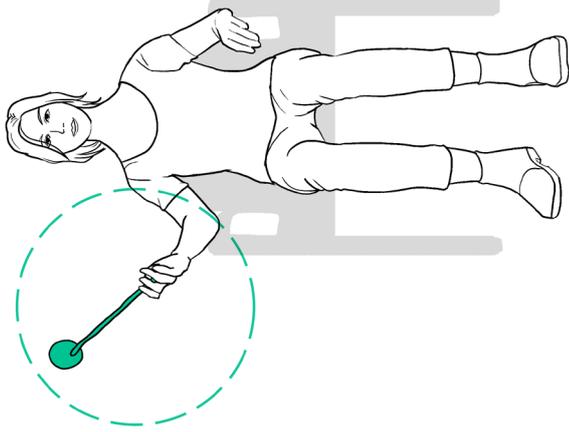


figure 8

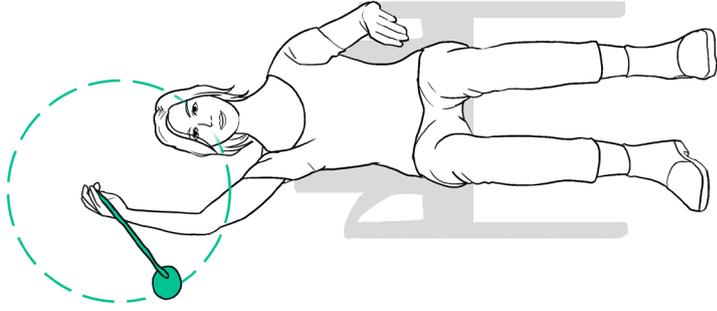
Routine for E Rere Taku Poi

Actions



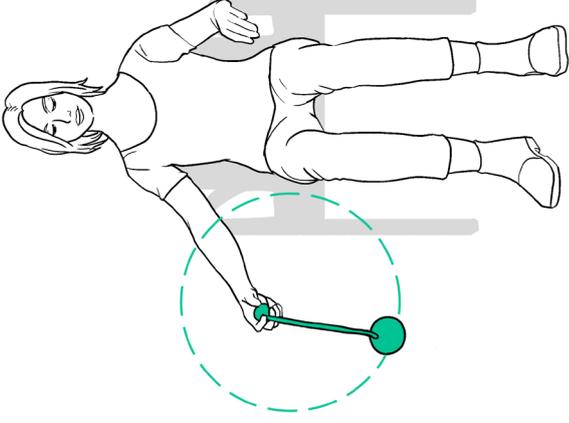
Spin

spin comfortably in front of you



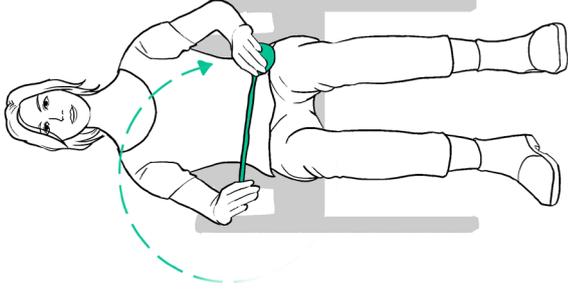
High spin

reach for the sky



Low spin

reach for the floor



Catch

catch the poi as it's coming down toward your lap

Words

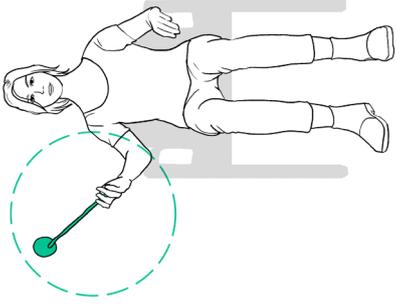
E rere taku poi, e rere taku poi
 Ki ruka, ki ruka
 E rere taku poi, e rere taku poi
 Ki raro, ki raro
 E rere ruka, e rere raro
 E rere roto, e rere waho
 E rere taku poi, e rere taku poi
 Ki ruka, ki raro

Oh fly my poi, fly
 Upwards, upwards
 Oh fly my poi, fly
 Downwards, downwards
 Fly upwards and then downwards
 Fly inwards and then outwards
 Fly my poi, oh fly
 Fly upwards and then downwards

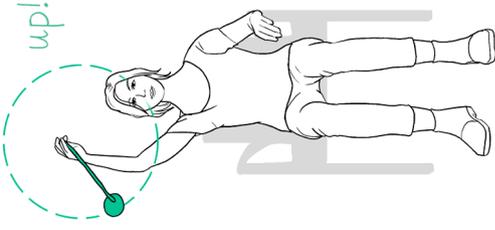
Notes

The song can be repeated 3 times – once with the right hand, once with the left hand, and once with both hands. If you are playing with both hands, replace the catch with simply letting the poi fall into your lap.

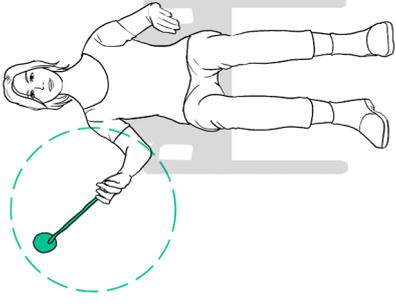
Routine for E Rere Taku Poi



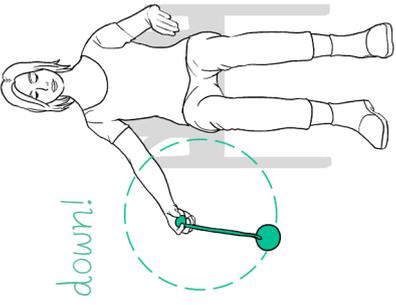
E rere taku poi, e rere taku poi



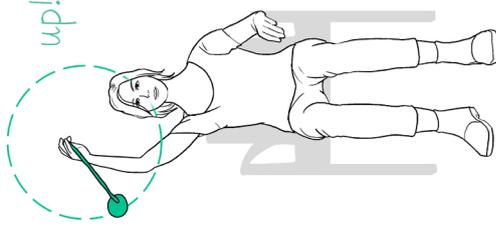
Ki runga, ki runga



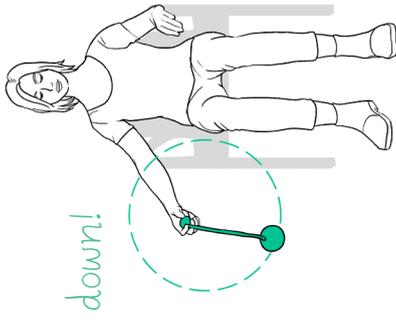
E rere taku poi, e rere taku poi



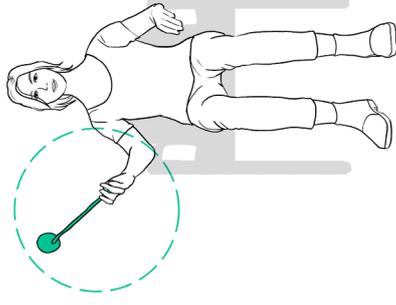
Ki raro, ki raro



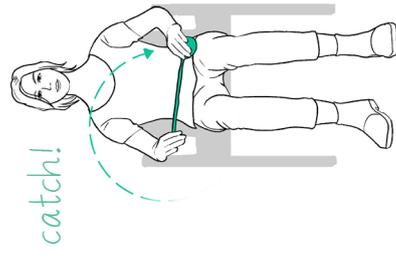
E rere runga



e rere raro



E rere roto



e rere waho

E rere taku poi, e rere taku poi, ki ruka, ki raro.

switch poi to other hand and repeat

Sample Lesson Plan: 30 minutes, sitting

Remind participants to be safe, and not move past a comfortable range of motion.

Warm up (5 min)

- Neck, wrists, hands, ankles (no poi)
- Ceiling to toes, torso twist, side bend (holding one poi end to end)
- Rainbow pass (letting one poi hang down)
- Marionette, arm circles (letting two poi hang down)
- Shake it all out

Structured play (10 min)

- Front/back plane swinging with two poi: work on same time pendulums moving in the same direction (poi swinging left and right together) and opposite direction (poi moving in and out). Concentrate on controlling the timing. When the poi are moving right and left, are they staying parallel and together? When the poi are moving in and out, are they meeting in the middle at the same time?
- Floor plane spinning with one poi: work on making circles parallel to the floor. How small can you make the circle? How big? Can you make the circle over your knee? Can you extend your leg and make the circle over your toe? Try with each hand.
- Ceiling plane spinning with one poi: twirl the poi above your head, parallel to the ceiling. Try with each hand.
- Right/left side plane spinning with one poi: spin the poi forward, or away from you. Spin the poi backward, or toward you. Can you control the plane of the poi, so it's flat by your side? Try with each hand.
- Front/back plane spinning with two poi: can you get both poi spinning in front plane? At first let participants try this in whatever direction they choose. Then, try spinning both in the same direction (either left or right) and in opposite directions (either inward or outward).

Free play (5 min)

Open time to explore new movements or return to movements covered previously

Routines (10 min)

- Practice a routine a few times through. Before beginning, review the movements that will be in the routine.

Cool down (5 min)

- Shake out arms, wrists, and hands
- Deep breaths in and out
- Qigong Shibashi "Commencing Form"
- Qigong Shibashi "Broadening One's Chest"
- Qigong Shibashi "Scooping from the Sea"
- Round of applause!

*Qigong Shibashi movements are from Set One of the 18 movement Qigong Shibashi form

Sample Lesson Plan: 45 minutes, standing

Remind participants to be safe, and not move past a comfortable range of motion.

Warm up (5 min)

- Swing arms forward and back loosely by sides
- Neck (look left, right, high, low, and ear to shoulder)
- Side bends
- Torso twists
- Rainbow pass
- Arm circles
- Wrist (circles, stretch up and down)
- Ankles (point, flex, circles)
- Swing poi right/left side plane, arms together and one arm forward/one arm back

Structured play (20 min)

- Both poi in right/left side plane together time, forward and backward
- Both poi in right/left side plane split time, forward and backward
- Forward figure 8 one hand at a time
- Forward figure 8 two hands
- Backward figure 8 one hand at a time
- Swing one poi and pendulum the other
- Same time same direction flowers, one hand at a time
- Butterfly, inwards and outwards

Free play (5 min)

Open time to explore new movements or return to movements covered previously

Routines (10 min)

Practice a routine to music, utilizing the moves covered in the structured learning

Cool down (5 min)

- Swing arms forward and back loosely by sides
- Qigong Shibashi “Commencing Form”*
- Qigong Shibashi “Broadening One’s Chest”
- Qigong Shibashi “Spinning Wheels”
- Reach down for toes and let arms hang, roll up slowly

*Qigong Shibashi movements are from Set One of the 18 movement Qigong Shibashi form

POI

A guide to
getting started

TIMING AND DIRECTION



timing: together
direction: same



split
same

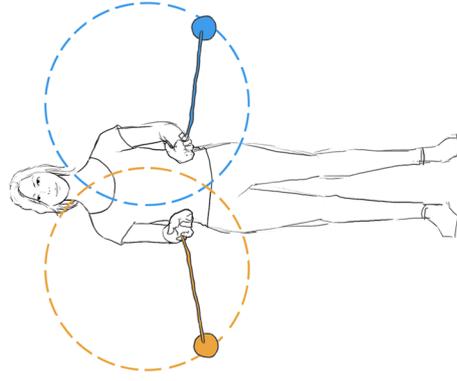
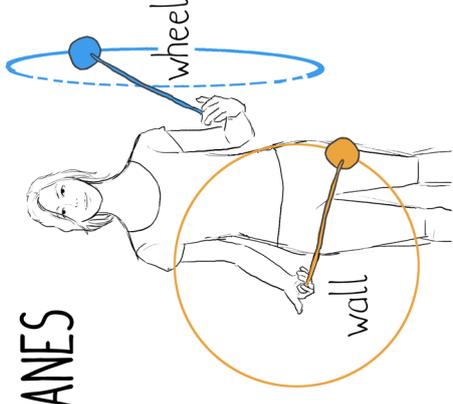


together
opposite

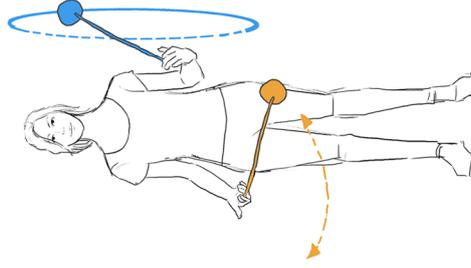


split
opposite

PLANES



Butterfly



Pendulum

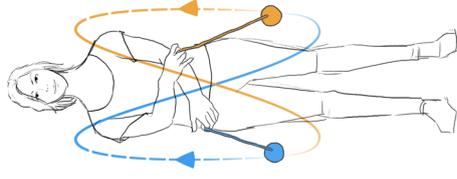
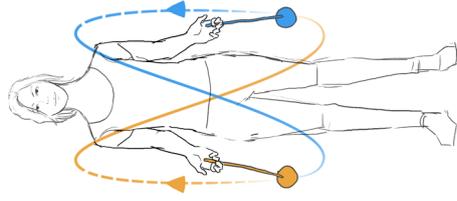
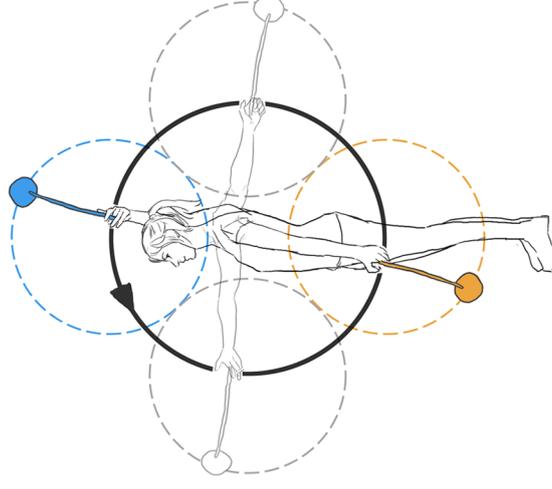


Figure 8



Flower