

MUSIC FOR GOOD HEALTH

UKULELE FOR THE YOUNG AT HEART



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Music for Good Health

Ukuleles for the young at Heart

Lessons for complete beginners

Dr John Heyworth

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PART1 Getting Started



Be your own guide – you know best!

This is a book for absolute beginners. We are going to take a friendly, no pressure approach to learning. Take your time, go at your own pace and above all have fun playing around with this wonderful instrument.



Believe in yourself. “Self-belief (self-efficacy) is one of the most important factors in learning new skills. Self-efficacy is the belief that a person can perform a behaviour to achieve a goal.” ¹



WELLBEING – A definition.

So, what exactly is well-being and how does the ukulele help. Let's look at a definition from NICE: National Institute for Health and Care Excellence.

Mental wellbeing is about life satisfaction, optimism, self-esteem, feeling in control, having a purpose and a sense of belonging and support. (NICE 2025. Website)⁴.

Let us break this down in relation to learning the uke.

1/- **Satisfaction.** Learning the Uke is satisfying if you take small steps and enjoy some daily *play time**.



2/- **Optimism.** You can do it – a small bite at a time remember repetition is great way to build those connections in our brains. Success breeds success, pat yourself on the back for having a go!



3/- **Self-esteem.** Self-belief - You're a worthwhile musician and person every step of the way.



4/- **Feeling in control.** Take your time, one step at a time. Enjoy making mistakes – it is how you learn.



5/- **Have a purpose.** Set a goal, don't try to learn too much at a time, enjoy the process and play around, experiment, have fun – it all helps.



6/- **A sense of belonging and support.** Find a friend/family member to learn with and/or to jam together. Consider joining a community group that welcomes and supports beginners.



**Play time is what this book is about, having fun.*

PLAY

I use the term *play time* and *repetition* instead of the words practise/practice.



FIRST OF ALL, PLAY IS IMPORTANT:

Practice sounds like a chore that has to be done. ***Play*** immediately sounds more enjoyable and fun, what's more it helps you learn in a positive way! Never hold back from experimenting and mucking around with the uke – it's the best way to discover and learn music.

Play, as quoted by HelpGuide.Org⁵ has all the following benefits:

“Play relieves stress. Play is fun and can trigger the release of endorphins, the body’s natural feel-good chemicals. Endorphins promote an overall sense of well-being and can even temporarily relieve pain.”

“Improves brain function. Playing chess, completing puzzles, or pursuing other fun activities that challenge the brain can help prevent memory problems and improve brain function. The social interaction of playing with family and friends can also help ward off stress and depression.”

“Stimulate the mind and boost creativity. Young children often learn best when they are playing—a principle that applies to adults, as well. You’ll learn a new task better when it’s fun and you’re in a relaxed and playful mood. Play can also stimulate your imagination, helping you adapt and solve problems.”

“Improve relationships and your connection to others. Sharing laughter and fun can foster empathy, compassion, trust, and intimacy with others. Play doesn’t have to include a specific activity; it can also be a state of mind. Developing a playful nature can help you loosen up in stressful situations, break the ice with strangers, make new friends, and form new business relationships.”

“Keep you feeling young and energetic. In the words of George Bernard Shaw, ‘We don’t stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing.’ Play can boost your energy and vitality and even improve your resistance to disease, helping you function at your best.”

Why repetition is important: Bigger, Better Brains (website 2025)⁶: “Mastering an instrument or vocal skills hinges on repetition. It's essential for improving memory and musical proficiency. A study highlighted in Neuroscience News shows repetition strengthens neuron connections, making recall easier. This mirrors music learning: practising scales, pieces, and techniques solidifies memory and skills.”

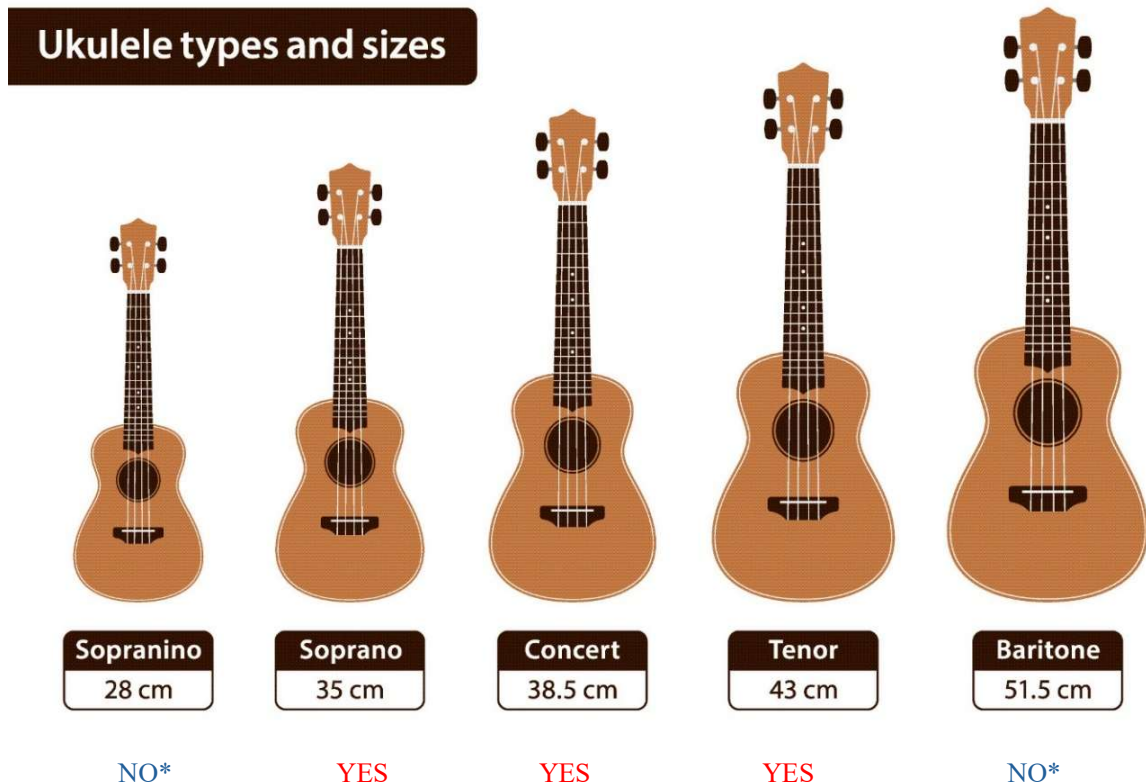
So, what are we waiting for, let's get into it!

Buying your first Ukulele.

Choose wisely! While ukuleles maybe inexpensive to buy, beware of cheap novelty ukuleles that most likely will be toys. They will sound thin and won't stay in tune. Find reputable instrument shops either online or in town. Compare prices and reviews. But first, decide which type to get!

For the purpose of this book, choose a uke that has standard tuning – string note names (G¹, C, E, A).

The Soprano, Concert and Tenor ukes have the same tuning. The Concert has a more mellow tone, but is a little more expensive to buy. For large hands and/or fingers the Tenor is a good choice – it also has the same notes, but be aware - *sometimes the 4th string G is tuned an octave lower in sound than a standard uke*).



**Not for this book – these ukes have a different tuning!*

Talking about tuning – buy a **clip-on tuner**! (Although you can also use your phone with a tuner app – some are free).



The most common way to tune a ukulele is with a clip-on electronic tuner. Just clip one of these to your uke head, turn it on and pluck the fourth string, **G** - the string closest to you as you hold the ukulele.

Tuning



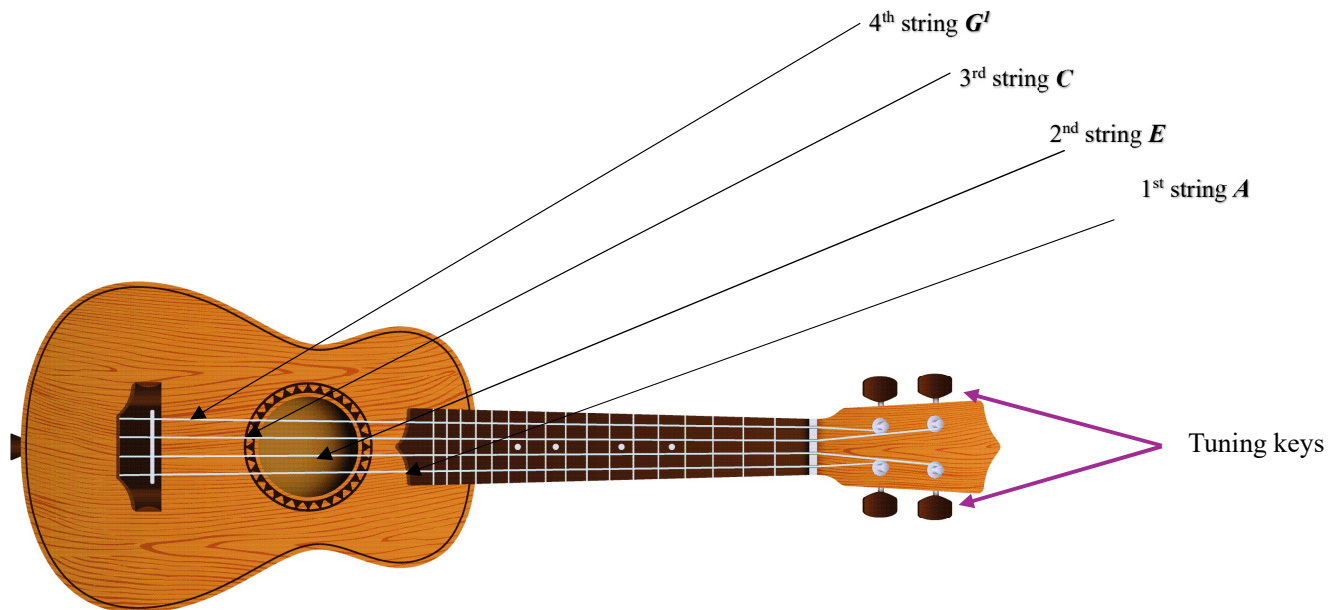
If the letter **G** on the tuner is followed by a hashtag or number sign, that means **G** is either sharp or flat.

In some tuners the colour will turn to green when you have the correct pitch (**G** = 392 hz).

Standard tuning:-

1st string A (440 hz) – **2nd string E** (330 hz) – **3rd string C** (262 hz) – **4th string G** (392 hz)

The uke, as you hold it, will have the **first string A** at the bottom of the uke.



Now let's tune the **A** string. Keep plucking the string with your thumb as you turn the tuning key so you can see and hear the changes you're making. In this case, we want the note **A** to show on the tuner. If the letter **A** is followed by a hashtag or number sign. That means **A** is either sharp or flat. Keep turning the peg. If it goes further through the alphabet (to **B** or **C**), you are going the wrong way! Turn the other way to arrive at **A** (440 hz).

Keep plucking as you tune so you can see and hear the changes you're making.

And that's it! I just repeat this process with the other strings. **E** is next (330 hz). Then **C** (262 hz). And finally, **G** – the 4th string (392hz) which is higher in pitch than the **C** you just tuned). To finish off, brush your thumb lightly across all the strings.

Holding the Ukulele

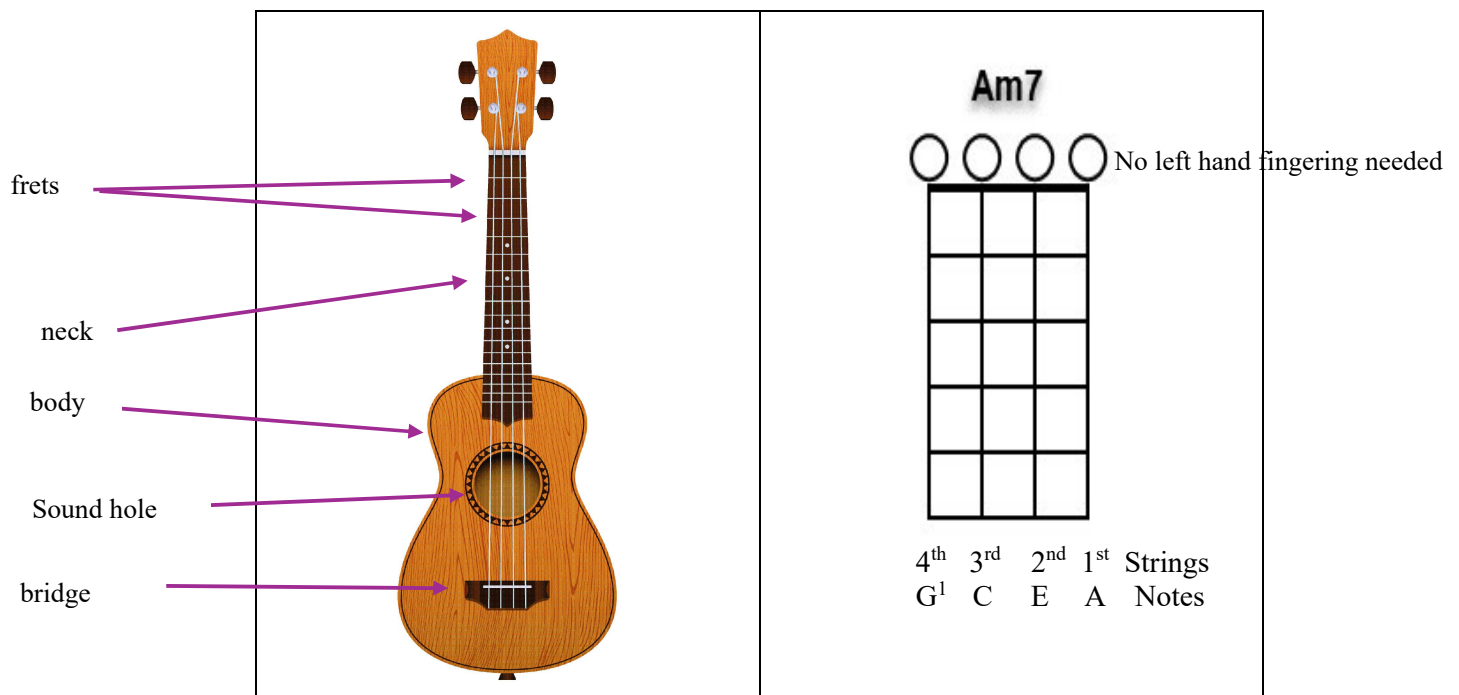
RIGHT HAND: We use the soft tissue below the elbow to hold the uke against our abdomen whether we are sitting down or standing up.

LEFT HAND: Gently supports the neck but needs to be free to move up and down the fingerboard. The thumb sits behind the neck but usually not bent.



You can relax the left hand as we are going to strum the open strings with our right-hand thumb. With your thumb sweep down across the strings. This is an Am7 chord!

Am7 – your first chord! (Am7 = *A minor 7*)



Let's play!

Now try sweeping all your fingers across the strings. Try all fingers, one finger, thumb followed by fingers. Experiment. Thumb and/or fingers: Loud, soft, fast, slow. Strum near the neck, strum near the end of the strings. Find the sound you like best! Near the neck is mellow. Near the bridge is sharper in sound. If you can walk (left right left right) - you have rhythm in your body. Clap 4 times and then you have rhythm in your fingers! That's it, you've got it.

Counting the Beat

Use the thumb or finger/s to sweep down across all four strings. This is a **D** (*down*) stroke. Keep an even time between each strum. Now let's strum and count in our heads:

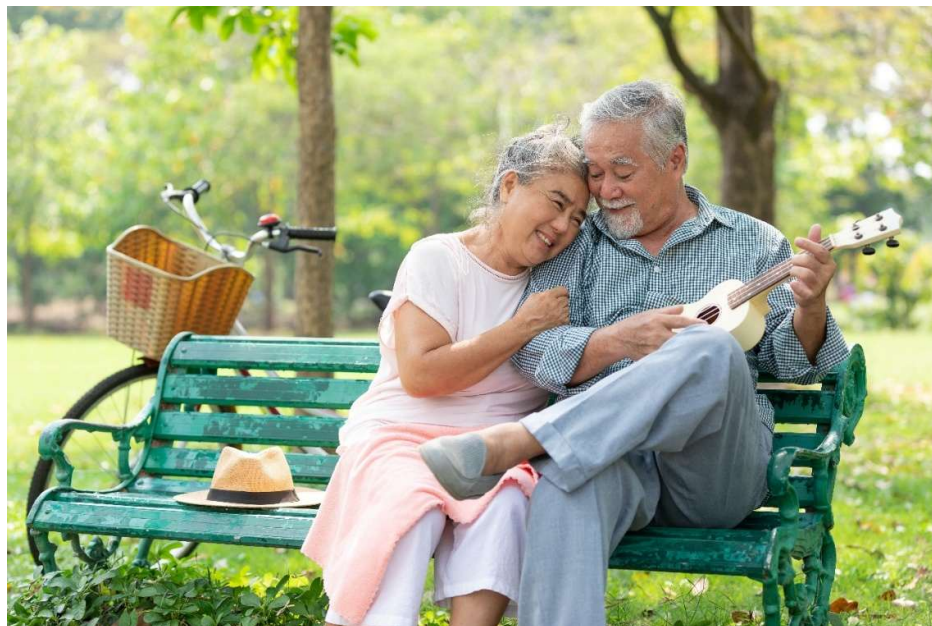
1 2 3 4 - 1 2 3 4 - and so on, slow but *even* time (don't pause at all).
/ / / / - / / / / -
D D D D - D D D D -

Now let's try doubling the time.

Sweep down and then flick back up across the strings. This is a **D** (*down*) **U** (*up*) strum. Play around for a while until you can do this smoothly – either with your fingers or thumb or both. Experiment!

Now let's strum and count in our heads:

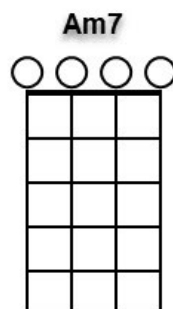
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & - 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & - and so on, even time all along.
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □
D U D U D U - D U D U D U D U



But, what is a chord? – for the moment, think of a chord as a group of notes (as in two or more strings) strummed together. When you play an Am7 chord (no left-hand fingers) you are strumming across 4 strings – G C E A – these notes played together make an Am7 chord. Chords are the harmony of these 4 notes as they are played together. For more information see the definition chords on Britannica⁷:

<https://www.britannica.com/art/chord-music>

The chord you have just learnt is the Am7 chord – (*A Minor 7th*) – it needs no left-hand fingers.



Acknowledgements

Website references:

¹ (Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191–215. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191>)

² Open University *OpenLearn* Website 2025 (<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/discovering-music-the-blues/content-section-4#:~:text=Alyn%20Shipton%2C%20a%20scholar%20of,of%20spiritual%20and%20gospel%20music%27>).

³ Cambridge University Website 2025
(<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/blues>)

⁴ NICE 2025. Website (<https://www.nice.org.uk/about/nice-communities/social-care/quick-guides/promoting-positive-mental-wellbeing-for-older-people#:~:text=A%20quick%20guide%20for%20registered,sense%20of%20belonging%20and%20support.>)

⁵ Lawrence Robinson, Melinda Smith, M.A., Jeanne Segal, Ph.D. and Jennifer Shubin, 2025). HelpGuide.Org. (<https://www.helpguide.org/mental-health/wellbeing/benefits-of-play-for-adults>)

⁶ Bigger, Better Brains: Why repetition is important (website 2025):
<https://www.biggerbetterbrains.com.au/research-updates/the-power-of-repetition#:~:text=Muscle%20Memory:%20Repeating%20movements%20help,Lea%20Faes>

⁷ Britannica: <https://www.britannica.com/art/chord-music>

Internet Sites for lyrics:

GetLyrics.com,
Chordie.com
ultimateguitar/ukulele.com

YouTube sites:

The Orchard Enterprises: Eric Clapton, Alberta (Acoustic Live).
https://youtu.be/6mR86U1_g3Y?si=BezworJEMv-ETQCe Retrieved 2025.

The Ukulele Fool: 10 Songs with only C Am F G7.
<https://images.app.goo.gl/T9rfcuNfXvYgzi6Z9> Retrieved 2025

Christopher Davis-Shannon. Forget Strumming Patterns- Build Your Ukulele Swing Strum from Scratch. <https://youtu.be/DSwbC1357JU?si=k3xTHNFlgfwqrN9> Retrieved 2025

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1. Stock Photo ID: 2109744443 Miguel G. Saavedra. Hands of musician playing ukulele on blue lights background.
2. Stock Photo ID: 187289915 Slava SelfStudio. Happy young man is playing ukulele guitar and singing on the sofa at home.
3. Stock Photo ID: 1699903171 ZoneCreative. Dad teaching guitar and ukulele to his daughter. Little girl learning guitar at home. Close up. Ukulele class at home. Child learning guitar from her father/
4. Stock Photo ID: 2144285757: Dragon Images. Happy Asian family of five laughing, playing ukulele and singing song into microphone.
5. Stock Vector ID: 2257124397 Kids and professional Ukulele sizes comparison in centimeters, flat diagram vector poster.
6. Stock Photo ID: 1589850895 OB production. Tuning ukulele tuner. Close up. Isolated on white background.
7. Stock Photo ID: 104314223 Trofimov Denis. tuning the first string of ukulele, human hands, closeup.
8. Stock Vector ID: 2259574495 Topuria Design. Ukulele in a top view, realistic vector illustration isolated on white background.
9. Stock Photo ID: 2163638903 Elena Tcykina. ukulele in women's hands, learning to play the ukulele close-up, Girl playing the ukulele, selective focus.
10. Stock Photo ID: 2202232381 Mangkorn Danggura. senior couple in love and playing ukulele in a park
11. Stock Vector ID: 2056409201 Artitok. ukulele chord C chord.musical symbol.Isolated vector illustration on a white background.
12. Stock Photo ID: 2236341743 jrpPhoto. Woman sitting singing and playing ukulele in the garden next to the house. The sun shines on the ukulele. Women are happy in music.
13. Stock Vector ID: 2061715589 Artitok. Ukulele chords, G7 chords.musical symbol.Isolated vector illustration on a white background.
14. Stock Photo ID: 763996024 Fernando Macias Romo. beautiful Hawaiian dancer with flowers and diverse outfit and playing ukulele, on black background.
15. Stock Vector ID: 2060515925 Artitok. Ukulele chords, F chords.musical symbol.Isolated vector illustration on a white background.
16. Stock Vector ID: 2058789641 Artitok. Ukulele chords Am chords.musical symbol.Isolated vector illustration on a white background.
17. Stock Vector ID: 2095806427 Artitok. The chart sheet shows the basic ukulele chords. There is a picture of a ukulele on the left side of the chart. Isolated vector illustration on a white background.

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