

Me pēhea te tākarō kōruru

How to play Knucklebones



Kupu Māori: Pēhea: how, Tākarō: play, kōruru: knucklebones (ruru, tutukai, ruke and kaimakamaka are also kupu māori for knucklebones)

<https://teara.govt.nz/en/traditional-maori-games-nga-takaro/page-6>

Knucklebones is a game that has been played since ancient times. The name ‘knucklebones’ is derived from the Ancient Greek version of the game, which used the astragalus (a bone in the ankle) of a sheep. However, different variants of the game from various cultures use other objects, including stones, seashells, seeds, and cubes. The origin of knucklebones is closely connected with that of dice, of which knucklebones is probably a more primitive form. Early māori usually played knucklebones with five small, flat stones.

Aim of the game: The winner is the first player to successfully complete a prescribed series of throws

Recommended age for players : 5+

How many players? 2 - 4 players is best for knucklebones

What do you need? 5 knucklebones per player

How to play

1. The ‘Jockey’ : Hold all five knucklebones in one hand. Throw them up in the air and catch as many as you can on the (flat) back of your hand. (A little tip is to spread your fingers slightly when catching on the back of your hand).
2. Now push your hand into the air, so the stones fly up, and flip your hand back over, catching as many as you can.
3. Place your caught knucklebones (ruru) aside, keeping hold of just one, then use this knucklebone to play.

Who starts the game?

Each player has a turn at doing the ‘jockey’ above, The player who catches the most knucklebones gets to start the first round.

Start playing

Takitahi (Ones): Throw your stone in the air, and pick up one of the fallen stones at a time – putting each in the ruru pile, until all stones have been picked up.

Takirua (Two’s): Do steps 1-3 again, but this time, pick up two stones at a time to place in the ruru pile.

Takitoru (Three’s) and Takiwha (Four’s): Repeat steps 1-3, trying to pick up 3 and pick up 4

As you get more proficient at playing the above, you can add some more steps

- Scatter ones, twos, threes, fours—Scatter all five, select and pick up one, throw it up and without "sweeping" proceed as above.
- Dumps—hold five knucklebones in the palm, then dump them in a heap on the ground. Select one which you must take away without disturbing any others. Throw this one up, pick up other four, and catch the first one.
- Overhand scatter ones, twos, threes, fours—first "jockey" then proceed to scatter remaining knucklebones.
- Clicks—first "jockey" then proceeded as with over hand ones. When catching the one you threw up the knucklebones must click.
- No click—same as above but knucklebones must not click
- Little jingles—first "jockey", continue as over-hand ones, but keep all jacks caught in your hand at all times (including those caught while jockeying).
- Big jingles—same as above but all jacks must be thrown up each time.

Rules

- You're only allowed to use **one hand** to jockey, pick up and catch the knucklebones, and do sweeps
- After you complete one step, move on to the next and keep going until you drop a knucklebone or make a mistake
- When you jockey, some of the knucklebones will fall to the ground. Don't move them. You have to pick them up from where they fall, unless the step you're doing allows you to pick them up
- The more knucklebones you catch when jockeying, the better. If you don't catch any, it's the next player's turn. If you manage to catch all five knucklebones in your hand you get a bonus- you're allowed to skip the step you're doing and go straight on to the next one.
- In some steps you can do sweeps- this means brushing the knucklebones closer to each other with your fingers, to make them easier to pick up. Throw up your 'taw' or 'hai', sweep a knucklebone closer, catch your taw. You can sweep as many times as you like until the knucklebones are close enough to pick up, but you have to catch the taw everytime you sweep. If you drop the taw you lose your turn.

Knucklebones Vocabulary

- Hai- the principal knucklebone (also known as the 'taw')
- Kaimahi- the other knucklebones (the workers)
- Jockey- the first play in each round at the start of your turn