

## Pitching Grips - How To Grip And Throw Different Baseball Pitches

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Proper pitching starts with the right grip on the baseball. Here are some of the most common baseball pitching grips and how I threw them in college and professional baseball.

Use these pitching grip descriptions and pictures as a guide to getting a better grip on the baseball.

### How To Grip And Throw A Four Seam Fastball



#### Four-seam fastball

To grip the four seam fastball, place your index and middle fingertips directly on the perpendicular seam of the baseball. The "horseshoe seam" should face into your ring finger of your throwing hand (as shown in the picture on the left). I call it the horseshoe seam simply because the seam itself looks like the shape of a horseshoe.

Next, place your thumb directly beneath the baseball, resting on the smooth leather (as shown in the picture on the right). Ideally, you should rest your thumb in the center of the horseshoe seam on the bottom part of the baseball.

Grip this pitch softly, like an egg, in your fingertips. There should be a "gap" or space between the ball and your palm (as shown in the middle picture). This is the key to throwing a good, hard four-seam fastball with maximal backspin and velocity: A loose grip minimizes "friction" between your hand and the baseball. The less friction, of course, the quicker the baseball can leave your hand.

Does a four-seam fastball rise?

"No," says Bill James, author of the *The Neyer/James Guide to Pitchers*. "A fastball can't rise unless it's thrown underhand. But if you throw the fastball overhand with enough force, it will appear to rise because it's not dropping as much as the batter's brain thinks it should."

### **How To Grip And Throw A Two Seam Fastball**



#### **Two seam fastball**

A two seam fastball, much like a sinker or cutter (cut fastball), is gripped slightly tighter and deeper in the throwing-hand than the four-seam fastball. This pitch generally is thought of as a "movement pitch" (as opposed to the four-seam fastball, which is primarily thought of as a "straight pitch").

When throwing a two-seam fastball, your index and middle fingers are placed directly on top of the narrow seams of the baseball (as shown in the picture on the left).

Next, place your thumb directly on the bottom side of the baseball and on the smooth leather in between the narrow seams (as shown in the picture on the right).

Again, a two seamer is gripped a little firmer than the four seamer. A firm grip causes friction, which causes the baseball to change direction, usually "backing up" - or running in - to the throwing hand side of the plate. It also slightly reduces the speed of the pitch, which is why most two-seamers register about 1 to 3 mph slower than four-seam fastballs.

One thing I did with this pitch in college and in professional baseball was to always throw my two-seam fastball to the throwing-hand side of the plate and my four seam fastball to the glove-hand side of the plate. In other words, because I'm a righty, I'd throw two-seamers inside to right-handed batters and four-seamers away. I always liked how the feel of the grip of the two-seamer in my glove (when I was in my pre-pitch stance) let me know on a sub-conscious level that I was going inside on guy.

### **How To Grip And Throw A Three Finger Changeup**



### **Three finger changeup**

A three-finger changeup is a good off-speed pitch for younger baseball pitchers – and for those who do not have big hands.

To throw an effective three-finger changeup, center your ring, middle, and index fingers on top of the baseball (as shown in the third picture at right). Your thumb and pinky finger should be placed on the smooth leather directly underneath the baseball (as shown in the middle picture).

A lot of pitchers that I work with like to "touch" their pinky and thumb when gripping this pitch (as shown in the middle picture). It helps to develop a good "feel" for the pitch, which is important since the changeup is a finesse pitch.

OK, now that you've got your grip, hold the baseball deep in the palm of your hand to maximize friction and to "de-centralize" the force of the baseball when the pitch is released. This helps take speed off of the pitch. Throw it like you would a fastball: Same mechanics. Same arm speed. Same everything.

One way to develop "fastball mechanics" but changeup speed is to practice throwing your changeup as you long toss (throwing beyond 90 feet). Alternate fastballs and changeups at 90-or-more feet for about 20 throws a couple of times a week.

Note: Advanced pitchers can experiment with "turning the ball over" to create even more movement on the pitch. To do this, pronate your throwing hand (turn it over as if you were giving your catcher a "thumbs down" hand signal) as you throw the pitch.

### **How To Grip And Throw A Circle Changeup**





## Circle changeup

The circle changeup and the four-seam fastball are what got me to professional baseball. They're both great pitches.

To throw a circle changeup make - quite literally - a circle or an "OK" gesture with your throwing hand (using your thumb and index fingers). You then center the baseball between your three other fingers (as shown in the middle picture above right). The baseball should be tucked comfortably against the circle.

Throw this pitch with the same arm speed and body mechanics as a fastball, only slightly turn the ball over by throwing the circle to the target. This is called pronating your hand. (Think about this as giving someone standing directly in front of you a "thumbs down" sign with your throwing hand.) This reduces speed and gives you that nice, fading movement to your throwing-arm side of the plate.

A great way to develop the "fastball mechanics" but changeup speed is to practice throwing your changeup as you long toss (throwing beyond 90 feet). Alternate fastballs and changeups at 90-or-more feet for about 20 throws a couple of times a week.

## How To Grip And Throw A Palmball



## Palmball

The palmball (sometimes called a palm ball or four-finger changeup) is one of two or three variations of the changeup. It's an off-speed pitch.

A palmball is is gripped by essentially choking the baseball deep in your hand and wrapping all of your fingers around the baseball. It's essentially a four-fingered change-up where the baseball is centered in your hand between your middle and ring fingers.

The index and ring fingers are placed on either side of the baseball for balance, and the thumb is placed directly below the baseball. At its release point, try to turn the ball over a little to get more

movement. The deeper the grip, the more friction that is created on the ball, which takes off velocity.

However, as with all off-speed pitches, the arm speed and mechanics of your pitching delivery have to be the same as your fastball.

### **How To Grip And Throw A Beginner's Curveball**



#### **Beginner's curveball**

The beginners curveball is a great pitch for younger pitchers. In essence, this pitch does the exact opposite as a fastball. Where as a fastball spins from the bottom to top (which is known as "backspin"), a curveball spins from top to bottom. And instead of leverage coming from behind the top of the baseball (as a four-seam fastball), leverage on a curve comes from the front of the baseball.

I teach a beginners curveball grip to younger pitchers who are learning a curveball for the first time because I feel that it's the easiest way to correctly learn proper spin. (But I also think this is a great grip for more advanced pitchers to use in a practice setting if you're having trouble with your breaking ball.)

Here's how it works: Grip a baseball leaving the index finger off – like you were pointing at something. (Your index finger will be used to aim the baseball at your target.)

Next, place your middle finger along the bottom seam of the baseball and place your thumb on the back seam (as shown in the middle picture above). When this pitch is thrown, your thumb should rotate upward, and your middle finger should snap downward while your index finger points in the direction of your target. This, of course, is the reason this pitch is great for beginners: the ball goes where your index finger points. The beginners curveball helps to align your hand and ball to the target.

Note: Because hitters at the college and professional levels may be able to pick up on the "raised" finger during this pitch's delivery, a beginners curve shouldn't be used past high school ball.

### **How To Grip And Throw A Straight Curveball**



### **Straight curveball**

The straight curveball (or "overhand curveball") is one of the most common breaking ball grips. It's a variation of my beginners curveball and my knuckle curveball.

A straight curve requires mastery of my beginners curveball, because many of the same principles that apply to both grips. This doesn't mean that you have to throw a beginners curve (most pitchers actually start right out with this pitching grip). But the beginners curveball is a good place to start. Then, of course, this pitching grip is the next step. That's because there is essentially no significant difference between a straight curveball and a beginners curveball, except for the finger placement of your index finger. It should be placed *on* the baseball as opposed to pointed at a target.

The thumb action of the pitch is upward. The thumb rotates up while your middle and index fingers rotate down.

The arm action on this pitch is a little abbreviated at the end. Instead of getting a nice long arc of deceleration and finishing throwing elbow outside of your opposite knee (as with your fastball), you'll want to bring your throwing-hand elbow to the opposite hip. This, of course, shortens your follow through, but allows you to really snap off the pitch.

### **How To Grip And Throw A Knuckle Curveball**



### **Knuckle curveball**

Another more advanced variation of the curveball is the knuckle curveball (sometimes called a spike curve). This is the curveball grip that I used. Thrown the same way as my beginners curveball only you'll tuck your finger back into the seam of the ball. Your knuckle will now point to your target instead of your index finger (in the beginners curve).

The difficulty with this pitch isn't from the pitch itself. In fact, most pitchers feel this grip gives them the most rotation – and most movement – of any breaking pitch. However, many pitchers who are learning this pitch for the first time, aren't comfortable with the "tucking" part. It's not super comfortable at first to tuck your index finger into the baseball.

This is why I recommend that you spend a few weeks – preferably during the off-season – working on tucking your index finger into the baseball. Do it while you're watching TV or in study hall at school. Once your index finger is comfortable with the grip, you can progress into spinning a baseball to a partner without any trouble.

Note: You've got to maintain short and well-manicured nails – especially on your index finger of the throwing hand – for this pitch to be effective because long fingernails can get in the way of the grip.

One thing you can do is apply a thin coat of [nail polish](#) or [fingernail strengthener](#). It's in the women's section where fingernail polish is found, of course. It's shiny (even the matte finish is a bit shiny), but dries clear. And it helps to make fingernails a little tougher. (If you do use it, you really need just apply it to your index finger.)

### How To Grip And Throw A Slider



**Slider**

Ted Williams once said that a slider was "the best pitch in baseball." Whether or not that's true depends on a lot of things, of course, but the slider is certainly an effective pitch for those who can throw it correctly.

A slider is the third fastest pitch in baseball. (The No. 1 fastest is a four-seam fastball and No. 2 is a two-seam fastball.) It's important for pitchers, parents and coaches to learn a proper slider grip and to learn correct throwing technique of a slider to ensure and promote arm-health. A slider is gripped like a two-seam fastball, but held slightly off-center.

When thrown, try to manipulate the pitch to come off of the thumb-side of your index finger – NOT your index- and middle-fingers, as with a two-seam fastball – because a two-finger release will cause the pitch to balance out, which reduces the spin that you are looking for. Most good slider pitchers grip the outer-third of the baseball and cock their wrist slightly, but not stiffly, to their throwing hand's thumb-side upon release of the pitch. This enables a pitcher to apply pressure to the outer-half of the ball with the index finger. Avoid any twisting of the wrist upon release.

I have placed the long seam of the baseball in between my index- and middle-fingers, and I have put my thumb on the opposite seam underneath the baseball (as shown in the first picture above). Some baseball pitchers may find it more helpful to place their index finger along the seam of the baseball since the index finger is the one from which the slider is thrown.

The key with the slider is to hold the ball slightly off-center (on the outer third of the baseball). Remember to slightly cock your wrist, but don't stiffen it. That way, you can still get good wrist-snap upon release. If your wrist is slightly cocked to the throwing hand's thumb side, your wrist-snap will enable you to have the pitch come off of the thumb-side of your index finger, which, in turn, promotes good spin on the ball.

The rest is simple: This pitch should work for itself. The movement on this pitch comes from the baseball spinning off of the index finger from the outside of the baseball – NOT from twisting your hand underneath the ball. Slider arm speed should remain the same as fastball arm speed.

### How To Grip And Throw A Splitter



### Splitter

A split-finger fastball (sometimes called a splitter or splitty) is an advanced pitch.

Typically, it's only a good pitch if you've got bigger hands. That's because the pitch itself should be "choked" deep in the hand. This is how splitters get their downward movement. Your index and middle fingers should be placed on the outside of the horseshoe seam. The grip is firm. When throwing this pitch, throw the palm-side wrist of the throwing-hand directly at the target while keeping your index and middle fingers extended upward. Your wrist should remain stiff.

Bruce Sutter, one of the best splitter pitchers in the history of the game, says that it is very important to put your thumb on the back seam, not the front seam. This puts the ball out front just a bit more than a fork ball. Then, he says, you just throw a fastball. A very sophisticated and misunderstood point is that the split-fingered fastball should be thrown with back spin just like a two-seam fastball. But in a Roger Kahn / Bruce Sutter interview in Kahn's book, [\*The Head Game: Baseball Seen from the Pitcher's Mound\*](#), he points out that this is not the case.