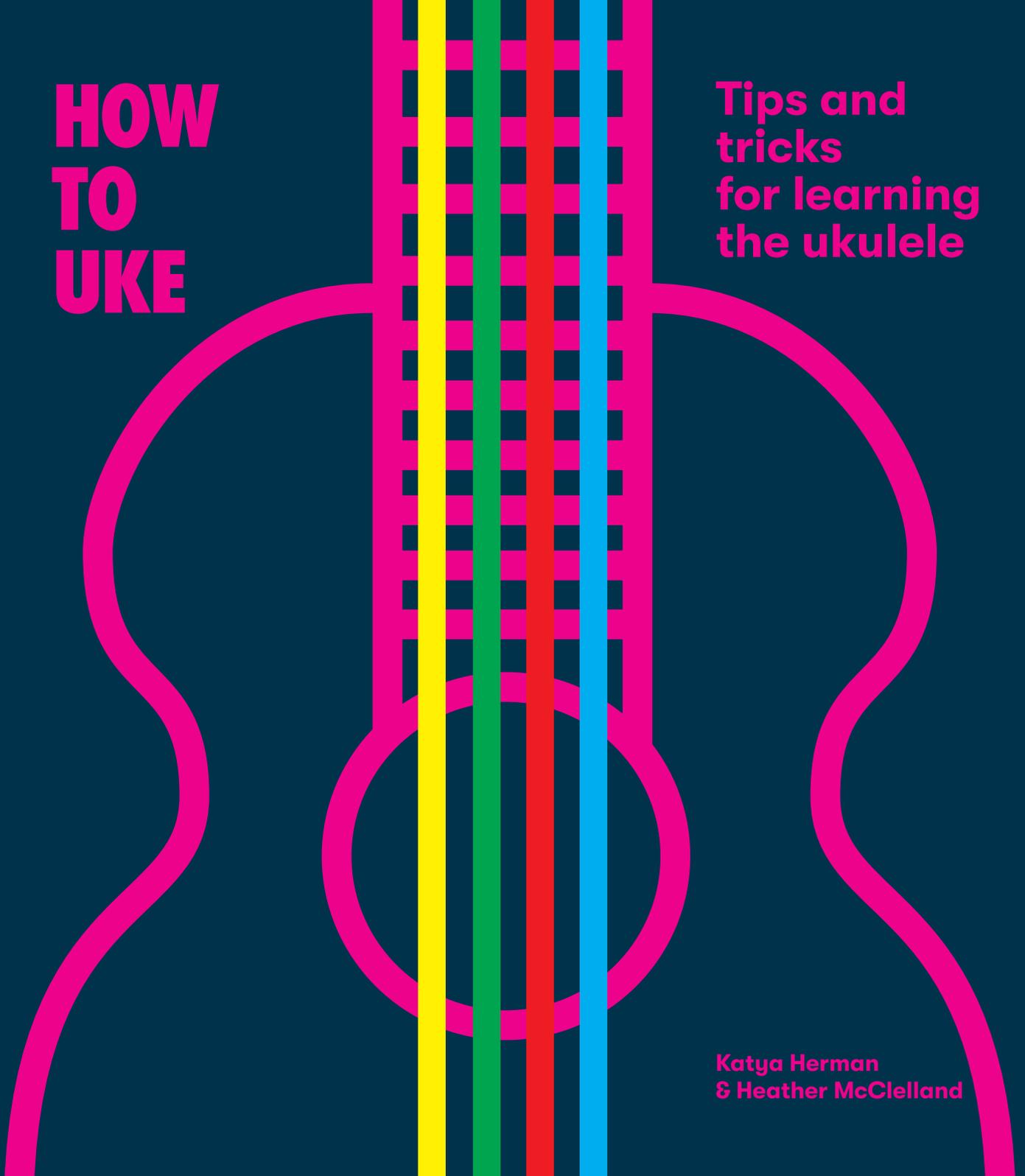


# HOW TO UKE

Tips and  
tricks  
for learning  
the ukulele



Katya Herman  
& Heather McClelland

This book was written because we believe that music can transform a young person's experience of being in hospital, and we're lucky enough to see this time and time again. It was created by GOSH Arts and rb&hArts (Royal Brompton and Harefield hospitals) to support patients' access to music, both in hospital and beyond.

Written by Katya Herman and Heather McClelland.

With thanks to Adam Wolters for sharing his A minor song! All other songs written by Heather McClelland.

Illustrations and design by Eleven Design.

If you want to experience some music in hospital look out for GOSH Arts musicians or email [GOSHArts@gosh.nhs.uk](mailto:GOSHArts@gosh.nhs.uk). To access music therapy while your child is at GOSH, you can ask any of the health professionals involved in your care to place a referral, or email: [music.therapy@gosh.nhs.uk](mailto:music.therapy@gosh.nhs.uk).

You can also reach the music therapy service through the play department (main office number: 020 7829 8849).

Vocal Beats is a participatory music-making programme for children and young people aged 0–25 at Royal Brompton and Harefield Hospitals supported by Youth Music, Coop Foundation and The Brompton Fountain.

If you would like to request a session you can contact rb&hArts, the arts team for Royal Brompton and Harefield Hospitals via email: [arts@rbht.nhs.uk](mailto:arts@rbht.nhs.uk) or 020 73528121 (extension 84087).

rb&hArts

VOCAL  
BEATS



GREAT  
ORMOND  
STREET  
HOSPITAL  
CHARITY

GOSH Arts

## WELCOME TO OUR UKULELE BOOK!

We are so happy that you've decided to check out this instrument we love so much.

### OUR FAVOURITE THINGS ABOUT THE UKULELE:

You can learn to play the ukulele in a flash. You'll be able to play THOUSANDS of songs in no time.

It's small enough that you can carry it with you wherever you go.

The skills you pick up learning ukulele can be helpful in other ways too! It can help increase finger strength and dexterity, and it gives the brain a good workout!

It's a fantastic boredom-buster, but playing the ukulele can also really help if you're feeling sad, anxious or stressed.

It's an instrument with a rich cultural history. The ukulele's name comes from Hawaii, and roughly translates as "jumping flea" because of the way the player's fingers jump from note to note!

### AS WE GO THROUGH THIS BOOK, HERE ARE A COUPLE OF THINGS TO REMEMBER:

It's really important to take regular breaks, especially if your hands get a bit tired or sore. That's totally normal, just make sure you shake 'em out, and give your wrists a nice stretch. Learning the ukulele – like any new skill – can be tricky at first, but keep going! Be patient with yourself. You can do it!

### WE'VE MADE A SERIES OF VIDEOS TO GO WITH THIS BOOK, ONE FOR EACH NEW SONG AND TECHNIQUE:

Every time you see this icon:



It means there's a video to go with that page. Search @vocalbeatsonline and head to the 'How To Uke' playlist on the Vocal Beats YouTube channel, or scan the QR code below to find the videos.





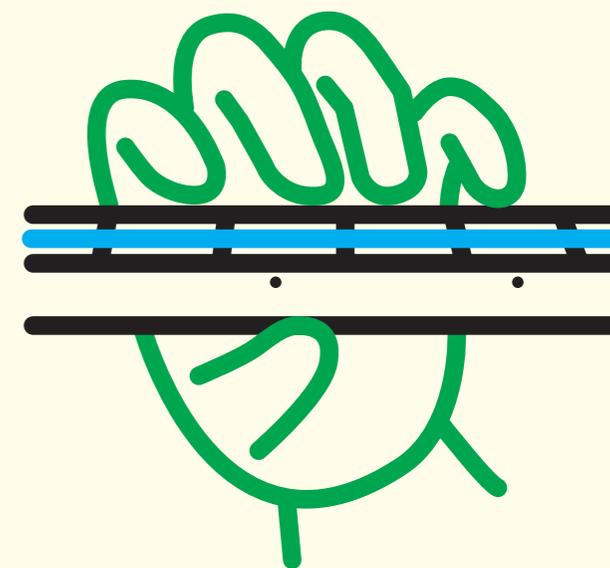
## HOW DO I HOLD MY UKULELE?

Your right hand will be the hand that you strum the strings with, whether you're left-handed or right-handed.

Use your left hand to lightly hold the neck of the ukulele, pointing the tuning pegs to the left.

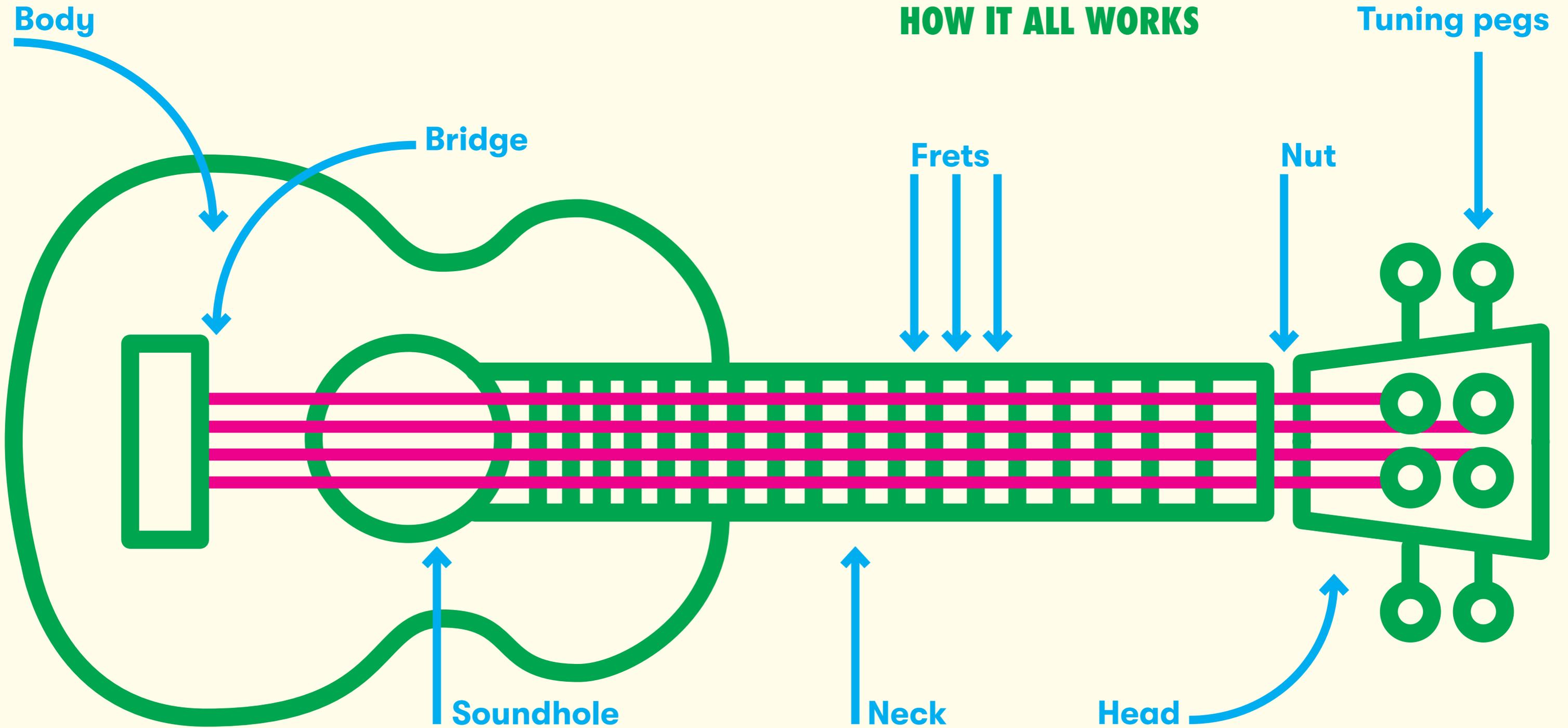
Hold the ukulele against your chest, with the sound hole facing forwards, and your right forearm resting against the body of the ukulele.

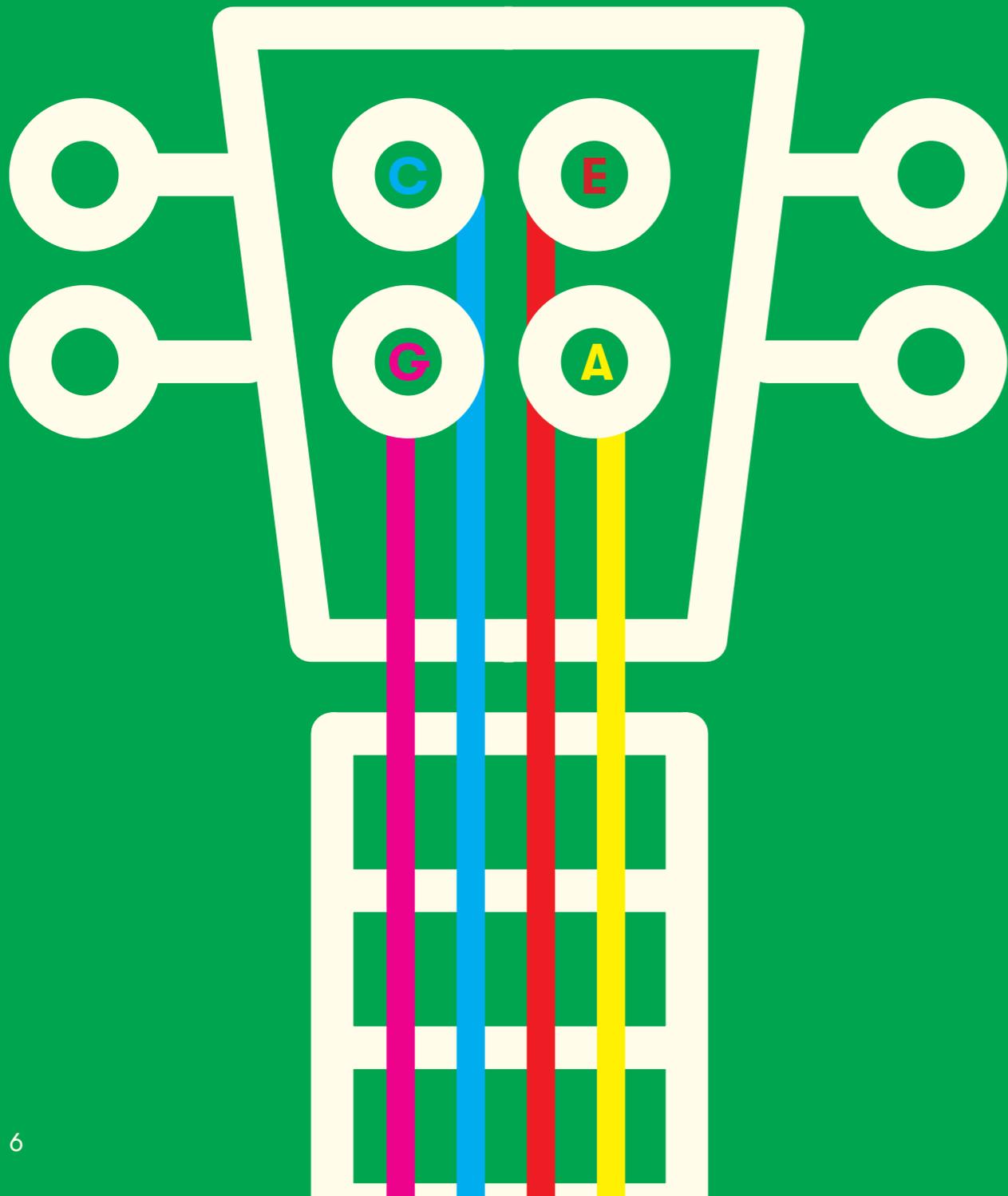
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Your left thumb goes on the neck of the ukulele, like it's making a fingerprint. The other fingers will press down on the strings, using the squidgy part between the fingerpad and the nail.

# HOW IT ALL WORKS





# KNOW YOUR STRINGS

When you're holding your ukulele in your left hand:

The string closest to your nose is the **G**

The string next to it is the **C**

The string next to C is **E**

And the string closest to the floor (or closest to your legs) is **A**

## AN EASY WAY TO REMEMBER THIS IS:

Groovy  
Cats  
Eat  
Apples

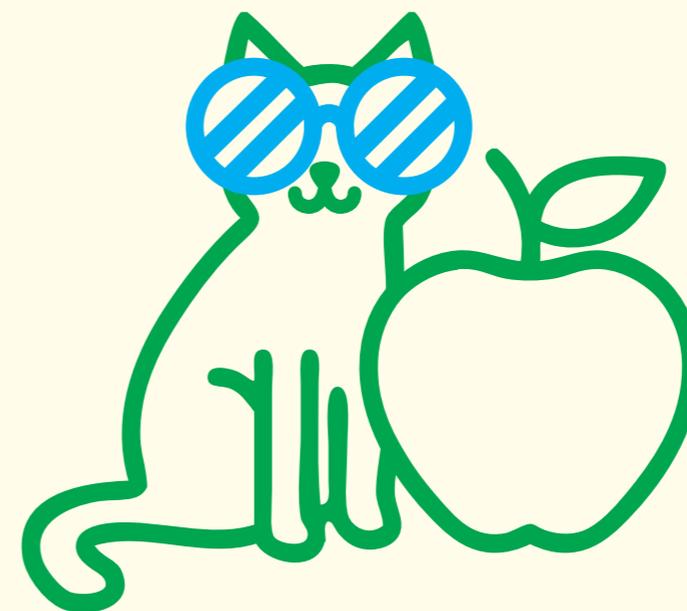
Try making up your own rhyme:

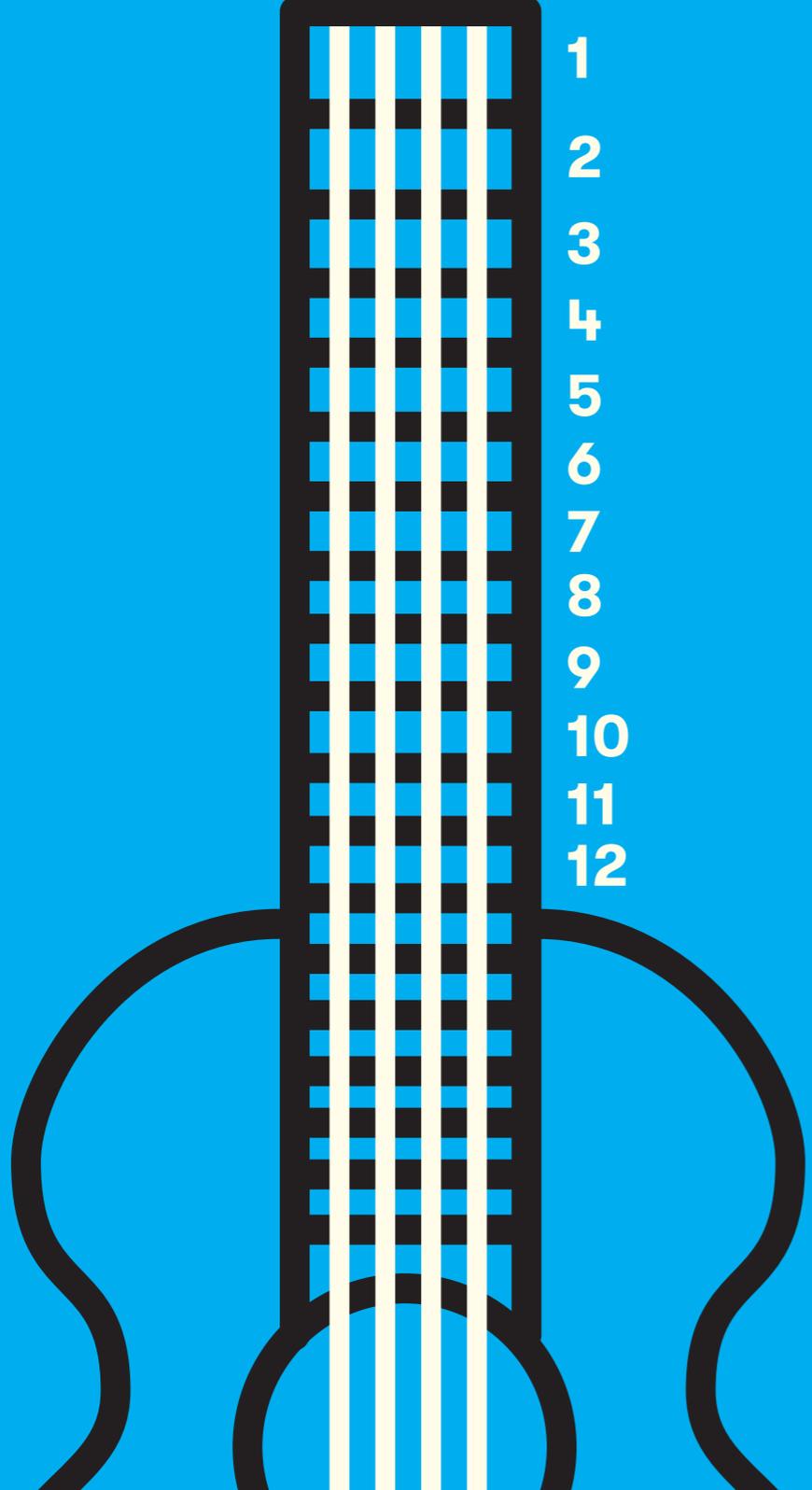
**G** .....

**C** .....

**E** .....

**A** .....





1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

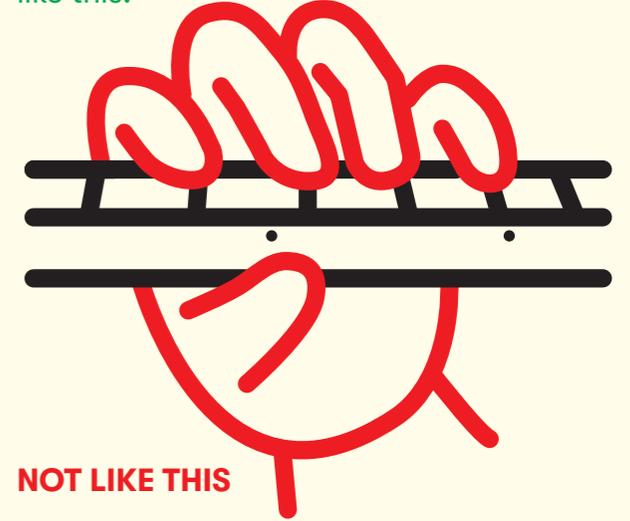
12

## FIND THE FRETS

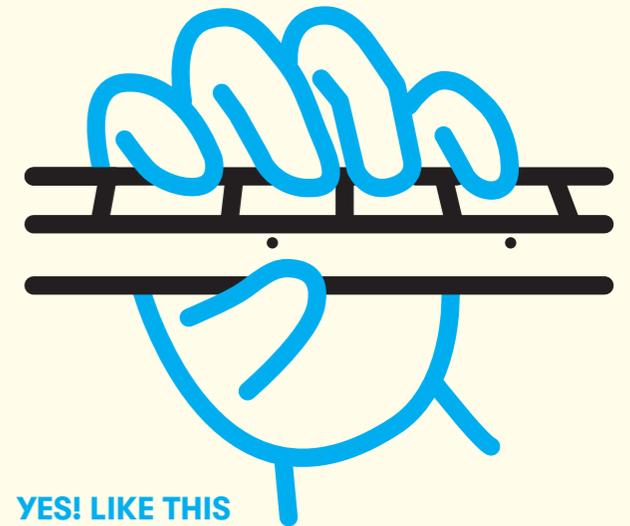
The strips of metal that go across the strings are called frets. The frets are like a map: they help us know where to put our fingers to make different notes and sounds. How many frets can you count on your ukulele?

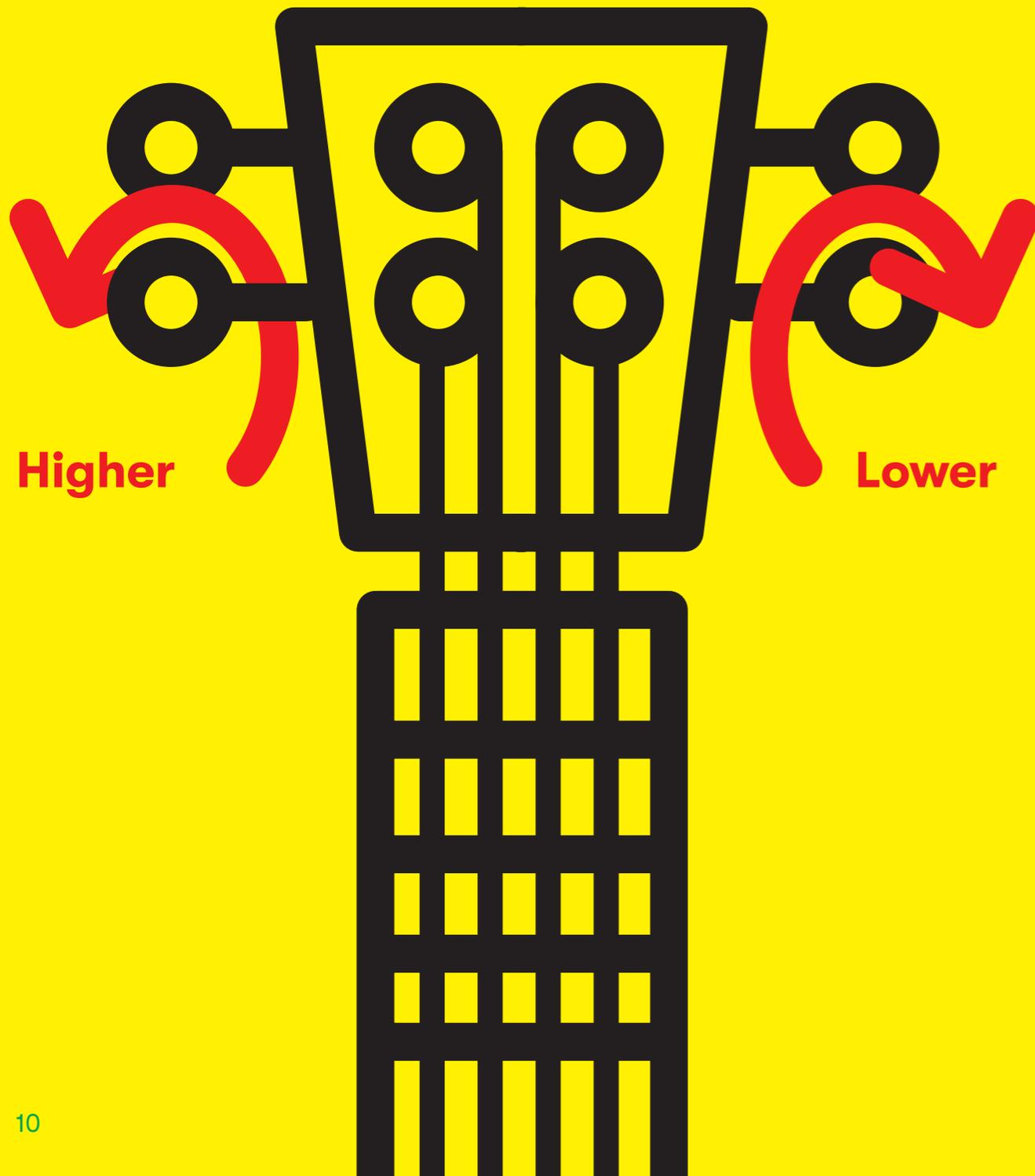
### THIS IS A BIT CONFUSING:

The fret numbers tell us where to put our fingers. BUT we don't put our fingers exactly on the metal line itself, like this:



We actually put our fingers in the spaces between the frets, like this:





Higher

Lower

## HOW DO I TUNE MY UKULELE?

Each string is connected to a tuning peg. If you pluck a string and twist the peg, you'll hear the note change.

Tightening the strings (twisting the peg away from you) makes them sound higher. Loosening the strings (twisting the peg towards you) makes them sound lower.

Experiment! Try giving one tuning peg a few big twists in either direction, and seeing what it sounds like! Does it sound higher or lower? What do you have to do to get it sounding like it did before?

If you have a smartphone or tablet, there are lots of apps that can help you tune your ukulele. (UkuleleTuna is our favourite.) If you don't have a smartphone or tablet, you can buy a tuner that clips onto your uke. (Korg makes a really great selection.) Using a tuner or a tuning app can really help, but don't forget to always use your ears as well!

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### TUNING TIPS CHECKLIST

Trace your finger up each string to check which peg it connects to.

Tune your ukulele nice and slowly. If you twist the pegs little by little – and keep checking your tuner – you can make sure that you're turning them the right way.

Make sure you play each string on its own – if you play more than one string at a time, the tuning app gets really confused!

It takes a while for a new ukulele to stay in tune. You will probably have to tune it at least 10 times (!) before it will stay in tune for longer than 10–15mins.



The **LEFT** hand is in charge of chords, and making different notes.

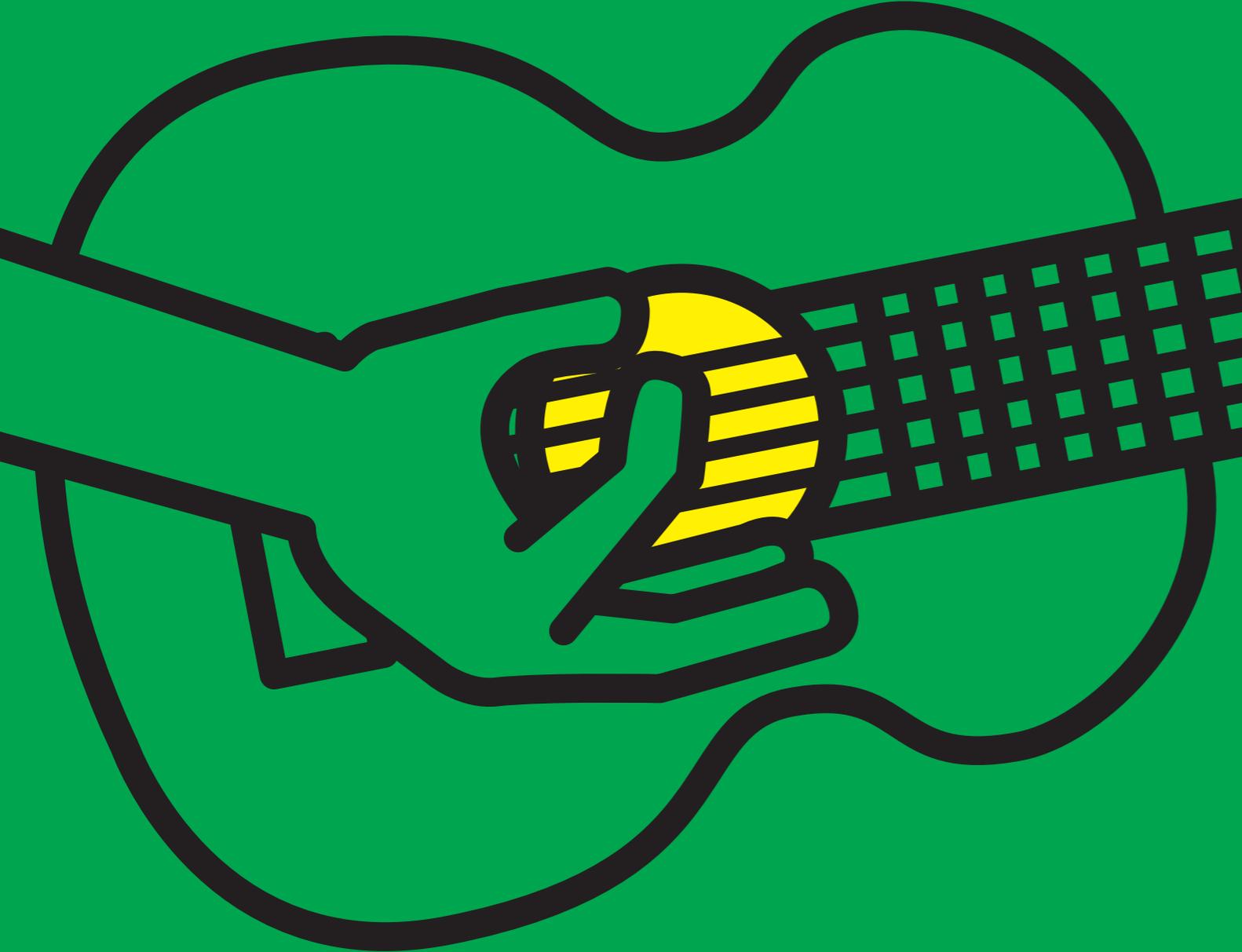
## TECHNIQUE

Now your ukulele is in tune, you're ready to play!

First of all we need to know about the different jobs our left and right hands do.



The **RIGHT** hand is in charge of rhythm. And for the ukulele, rhythm – for the most part – means strumming.



## HOW TO STRUM

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There are lots of different ways we can strum. Here are some options:

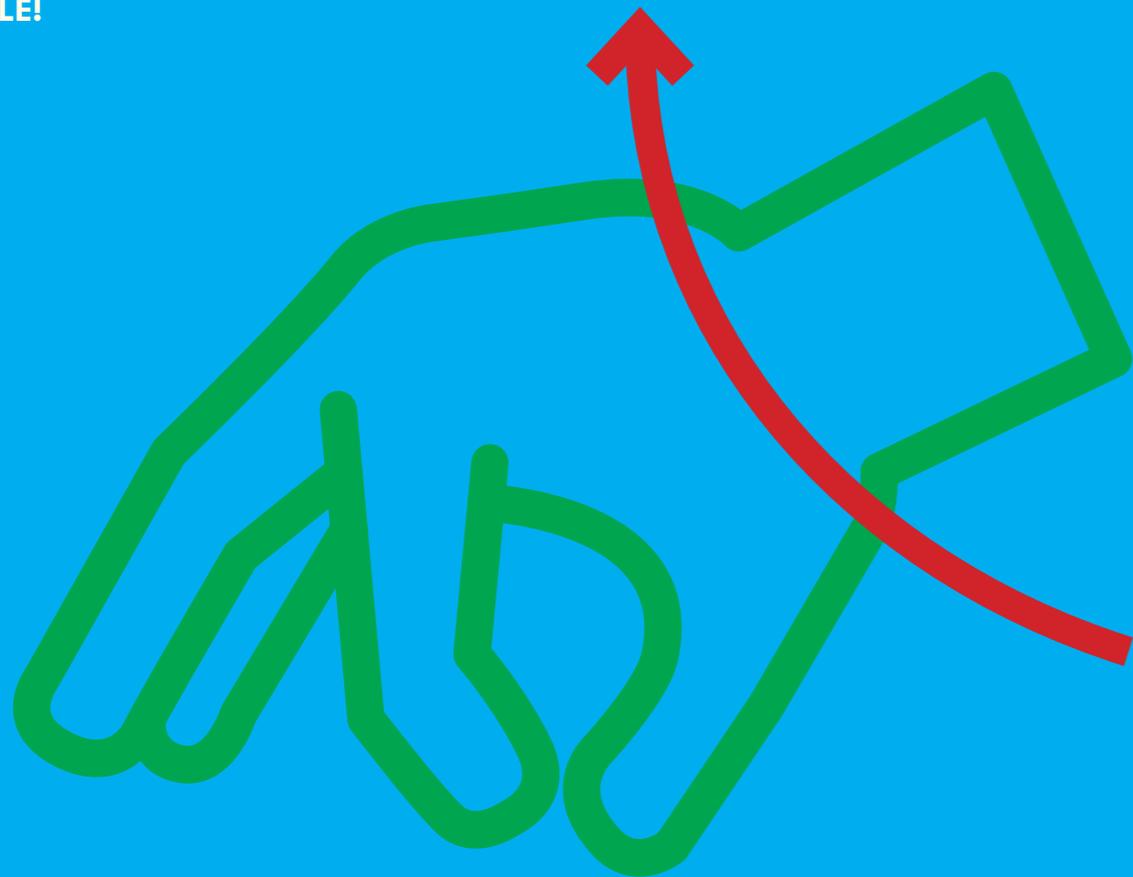
You can use your index finger (your pointing finger) and flick it up and down the strings. When it flicks **DOWN** your nail will be strumming the strings, and when it flicks **UP** the pad of your finger will strum the strings.

You can use your thumb. But this time, the pad will strum **DOWN**, and the nail will strum **UP**.

You can use your thumb and index finger together – imagine making an upside-down okay sign. This time, the nail of your index finger will strum **DOWN**, and the nail of the thumb strums **UP**.

This is a lot to remember, so just try it a few different ways, and see what feels comfortable for you. Maybe you'll even make up your own way of doing it!

KEEP YOUR WRIST NICE AND FLOPPY, MAKE SURE YOUR STRUMMING ARM ISN'T HAVING TO DO ANY OF THE WORK. IT'S ALL COMING FROM THE WRIST. LET YOUR ARMS BE AS LAZY AS POSSIBLE!



## STRUMMING PATTERNS

We can make different rhythms with what we call strumming patterns. Strumming patterns are made up of **DOWN** and **UP** strums, just like we did before.

From now on, we'll use a downwards arrow



to represent a **DOWN** strum,

and an upwards arrow



to represent an **UP** strum.

### HERE'S A SIMPLE STRUMMING PATTERN TO GET US STARTED:

Down Down Down Down -  
or as we'd write it now:



Try that a few times. No up strums, just down. And let your left hand take a holiday; let's just strum the open strings.

Once that starts to feel comfortable, let's take it UP a level, and add some up strums!

### TRY THIS:



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# C CHORD

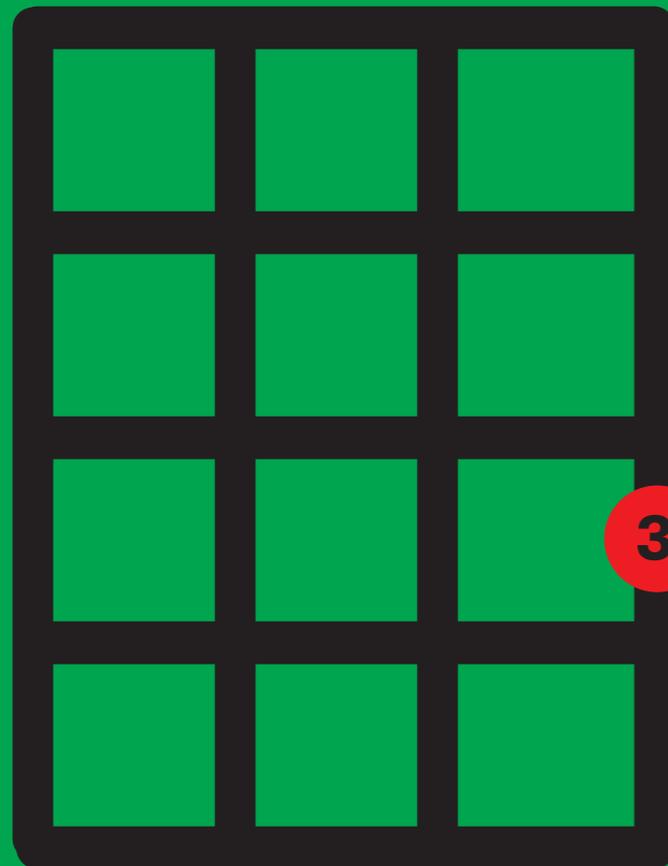
## The Nut

Fret 1

Fret 2

Fret 3

Fret 4



THE CIRCLED NUMBERS TELL YOU WHICH FINGER OF YOUR LEFT HAND TO USE AND WHICH FRET/STRING TO PLACE THAT FINGER ON

THE STRING CLOSEST TO YOUR CHIN

THE STRING CLOSEST TO YOUR FEET

# HOW TO READ CHORDS

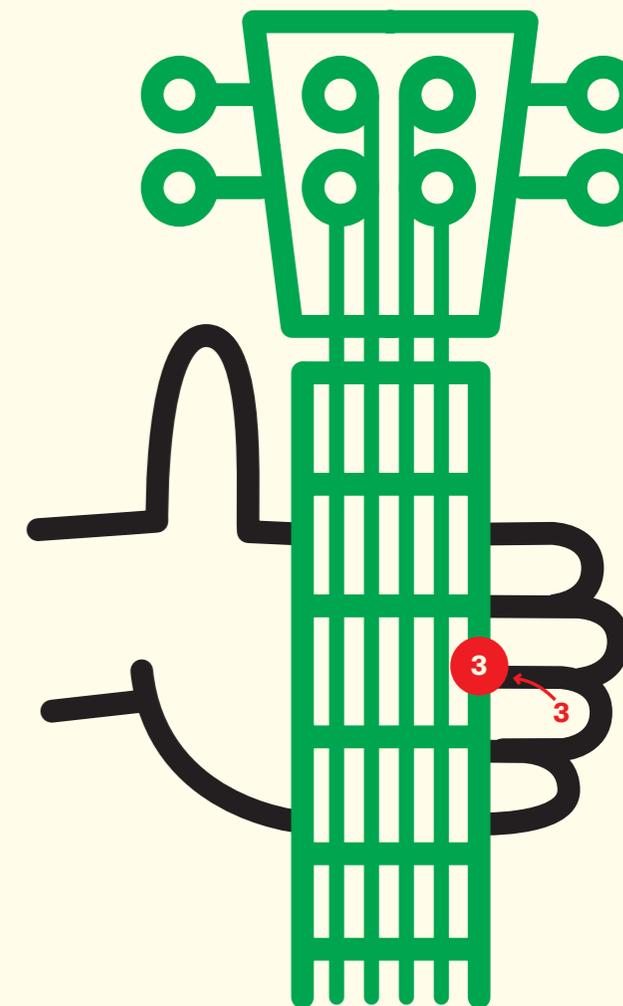
We can use little pictures called chord diagrams to tell us where to put our fingers.

The image on the opposite page represents what a chord diagram looks like.

The little box represents the strings and frets of the ukulele. Imagine that the vertical lines in the box are your strings, and the horizontal lines are your frets.

And this is what that looks like on your ukulele! (Imagine the ukulele is turned up on its side.)

Learning how to read these little boxes is a big step towards playing any song you like!



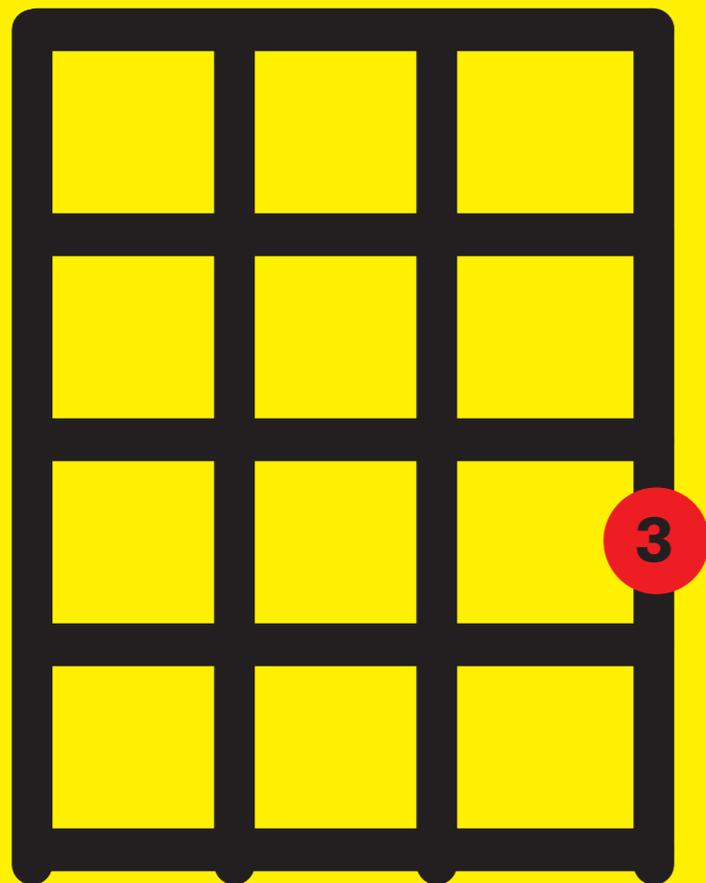
# LET'S LEARN OUR FIRST CHORD!

We'll start by giving each of our left hand fingers a number, so we know which ones to use.

**YOUR POINTING FINGER IS 1**  
**YOUR MIDDLE FINGER IS 2**  
**YOUR RING FINGER IS 3**  
**YOUR PINKIE IS 4**



# C CHORD

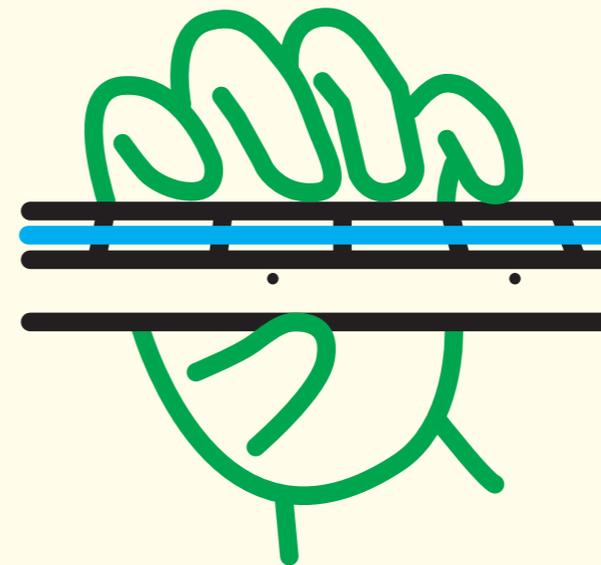


## CHORD NUMBER 1! THE C CHORD!

Take finger 3 and press down on the 3rd fret, on the A string. (That's the string closest to the floor.)

Now take your right hand and strum all four strings, from the top to the bottom. Nice! You just played a chord!

A reminder of what your left hand should look like:



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## HERE ARE SOME TOP TIPS TO MAKE YOUR CHORDS SOUND AMAZING:

Make sure you're touching the strings with the tips of your fingers, not the pads. (The pads are what you'd use to make a fingerprint.) To play the ukulele comfortably, it's helpful to keep the nails on your left hand nice and short.

We press our left hand fingers in between the frets. That means we want our fingers in the middle of the metal lines, not touching them.

EVERY TIME WE LEARN A NEW  
CHORD, LET'S ASK OURSELVES  
THESE QUESTIONS:

- How does it feel playing the C chord?
- Am I using the pads of my fingers? (The squidgy bits)
- Are my fingers between the frets, not on the lines themselves?
- Is my wrist relaxed?
- Can I hear each string ringing out when I strum? Play each string on its own to make sure. If there is no sound on a string you may need to press it harder.

# NICE! NOW YOU CAN PLAY A C MAJOR CHORD, IT'S TIME TO LEARN A SONG!

Here's how to play **A Song With Just 1 Chord:**

You know how to play a C chord, and you know how to strum, so all we need to do is put them together!

1. Let's start by practising some down strums using just the open strings (your left hand can take a holiday!)

2. Make the C chord

3. Add the lyrics:

**We are strumming on a C**  
**We're strumming on a C**  
**We're only going to be**  
**Strumming on a C**

**VIDEO DEMO AVAILABLE!**  
**SCAN THE QR CODE ON PAGE 1**



If you want to play a more familiar song, strum down on a C (just like before) to the French nursery rhyme, Frère Jacques:

**Frère Jacques, Frère Jacques**  
**Dormez-vous, dormez-vous?**  
**Sonnez les matines, sonnez les matines**  
**Ding dang dong, ding dang dong**

Start with 4 down strums, nice and easy. When that feels comfortable you could try playing the C chord with this strumming pattern:



## SOME TIPS FOR PRACTISING:

**I USE THE METRONOME APP ON MY PHONE TO HELP ME WITH MY RHYTHM.**

**If I ever feel tired when playing, I find it really helpful to shake out my wrists and take regular breaks.**

**I LIKE TO PRACTISE MY STRUMMING WHILE I'M WATCHING TV.**

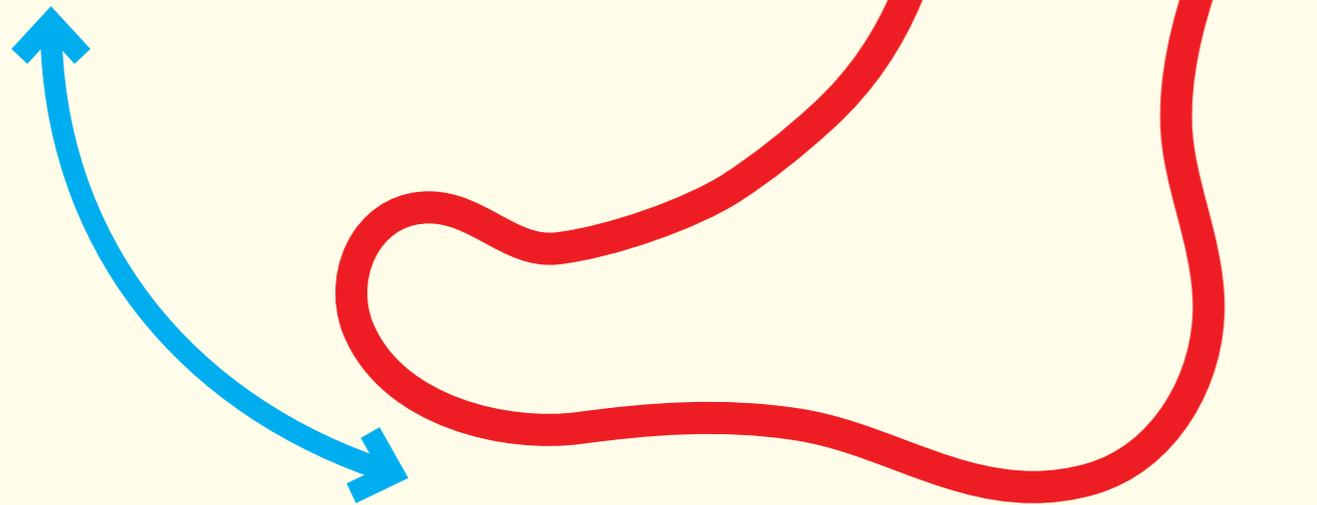
**If I get frustrated when I'm learning something new, I slow everything right down. Practising being patient is a big part of practising any instrument!**

**IF I FIND ANY PART OF A SONG REALLY TRICKY, I FIND IT REALLY HELPFUL TO PRACTISE JUST THAT SECTION MANY (MANY!) TIMES.**

# COUNTING TIME

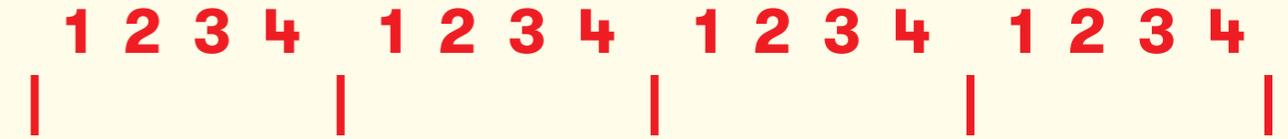
## HAVE YOU EVER LISTENED TO A SONG AND FOUND YOURSELF TAPPING OR NODDING ALONG?

When you tap along to any piece of music you can feel the constant heartbeat running through it, and you can count along. But in music we don't keep counting up forever or we would reach into the 100's and that would get confusing! Instead, songs are divided up into smaller chunks, called bars. Depending on the style of music there will be a different number of beats in the bar, but each new bar always starts with the number 1.



## SO HOW DO WE WRITE THAT IN MUSIC?

This is a sequence of 4 bars.



Each new bar is represented by these lines:

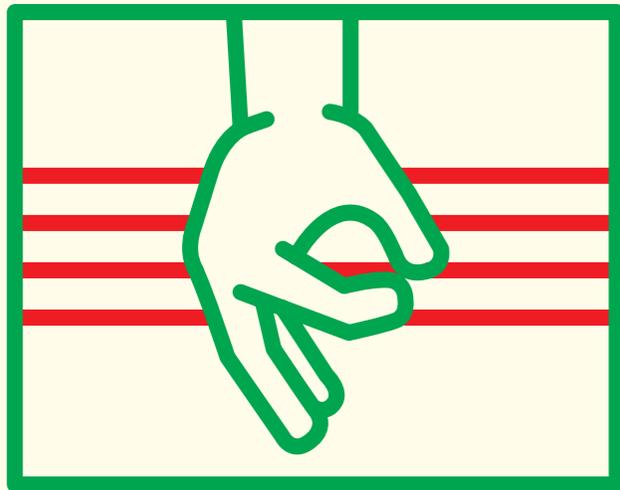
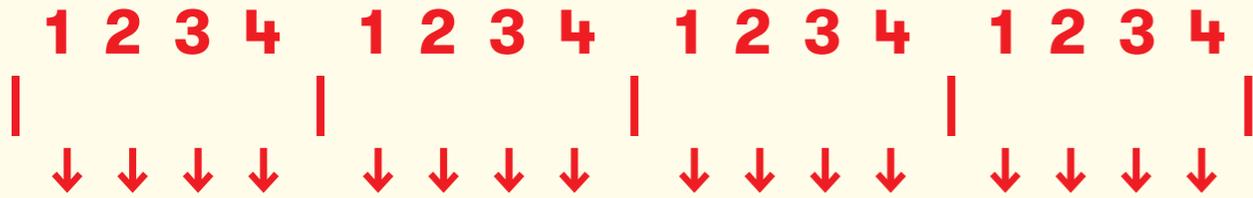
These lines tell us when a new bar starts, even when we don't have the numbers to guide us.

Think of bars like a musical map. Once we know how to read them, we can find our way through any piece of music – there's no limit to where we can go!

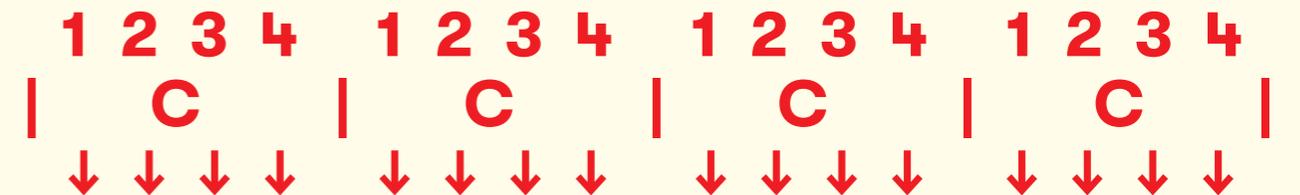
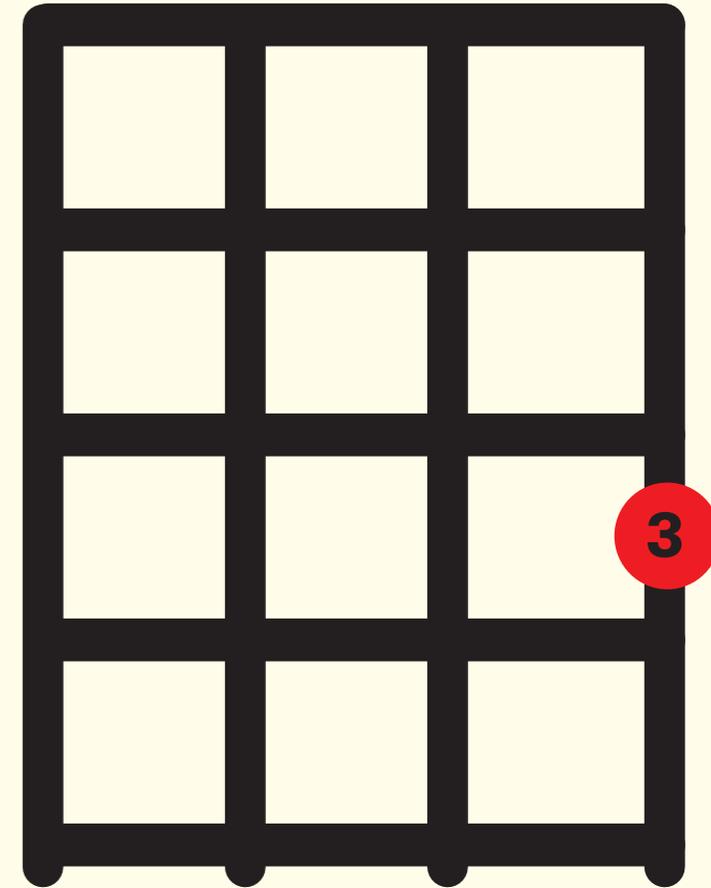
# LET'S ADD SOME STRUMMING!

Remember: ↓ = a downwards strum.

Let's do a downwards strum on every beat in these 4 bars.



# LET'S STRUM ON A C CHORD



# STRUMMING PATTERNS

## STRUM NUMBER 1

So far we've been working on a downward strumming pattern using each beat in the bar.

| 1 2 3 4 |  
↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

Now let's take it to the next level by adding our up strums as well!

Try counting 1-4 again, and this time add the word 'and' in between each number.

1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and (etc!).

## STRUM NUMBER 2

We can strum DOWN on the numbers, and UP on the 'ands'.

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +  
↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑

## STRUM NUMBER 3

If you want to get fancy, let's have a go at this very popular strumming pattern. It might be a little tricky at first, so be patient with yourself!

We're still going to keep that consistent up and down movement with our right hand: 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and. Down up down up down up down up.

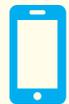
But this time, we're not going to strum the strings every time. Sometimes we'll move our hand up or down without strumming the strings. It looks like this:

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +  
↓ ↓ ↑ ↑ ↓ ↑

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +  
↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑

(The green arrows mean you DON'T strum here, you're just keep your hand moving up and down.)

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# SOME TIPS FOR PRACTISING

To learn this more complex pattern it might be helpful to break it into two sections:

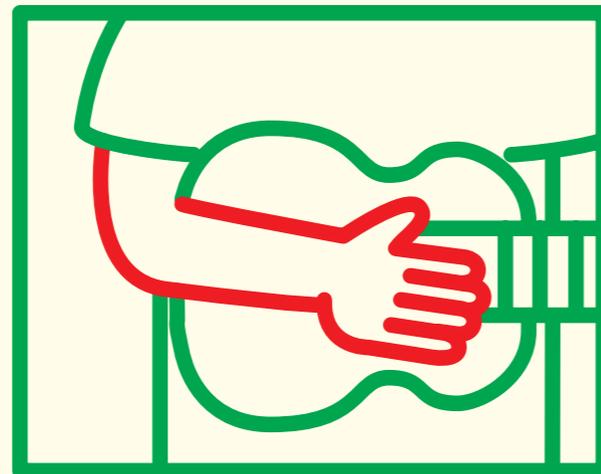
**1** + **2** +  
↓ ↑ ↓ ↑

**3** + **4** +  
↓ ↑ ↓ ↑

Then put them back together!

## KEEP A CONSTANT 'UP & DOWN' MOTION –

Even when you don't strike the strings (think circular movement). Remember to keep your wrist, arm and shoulder relaaaaaxed.

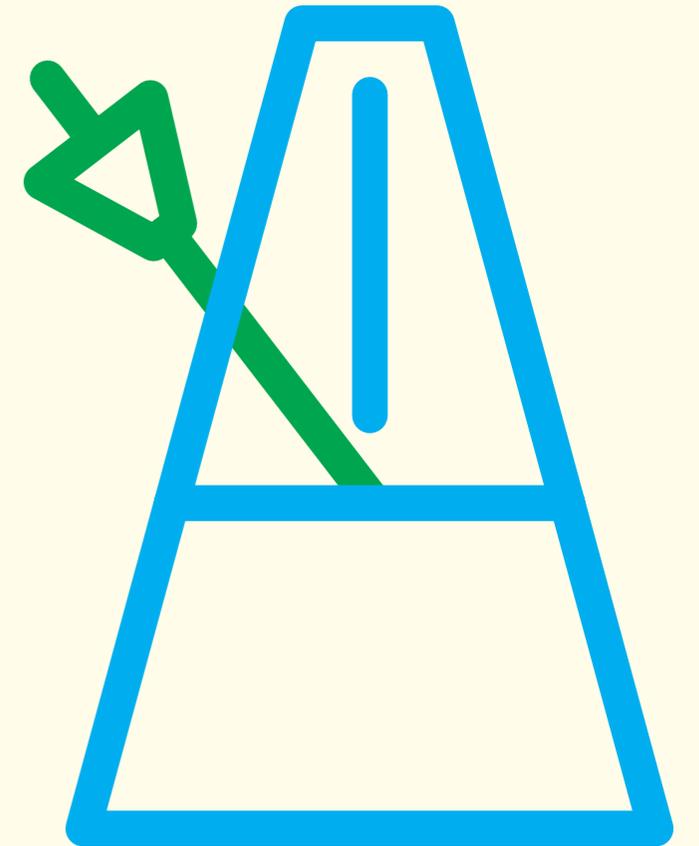


## USE A METRONOME

A metronome plays a steady beat, and helps us stay in time. There are many free metronome apps you can get on your phone, tablet or laptop.

You can also use this free website:  
[www.metronom.us/en](http://www.metronom.us/en)

A metronome is a GREAT tool to help us to practise. It can help us practise chord transitions, strumming patterns and any tricky sections of a song. Start by setting the tempo to 60 beats per minute (bpm). If you don't have a metronome app, you can use the second hand of a clock! That's what 60 beats per minute means! You can then speed it up as you get more confident.



**NOW LET'S LEARN  
SOME MORE CHORDS!**



# CHORD NUMBER 2! THE A MINOR CHORD!

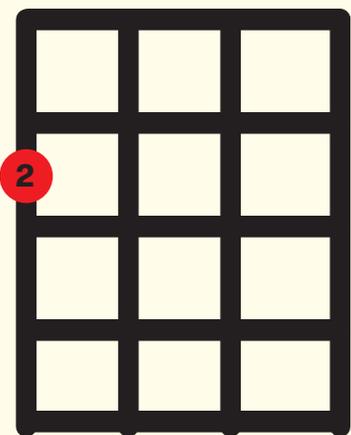
Take finger 2 (that's your middle finger) and press down on the 2nd fret, on the G string. (That's the string closest to your nose.)

Now take your right hand and strum all four strings, from the top to the bottom. There's your A minor chord!

Let's practise transitioning between the Am and C chords.

Now let's put Am into a song!

**'FUN FACT! A major chord sounds happy, and a minor chord sounds sad.' When you see a little 'm', it's short for 'minor'.**



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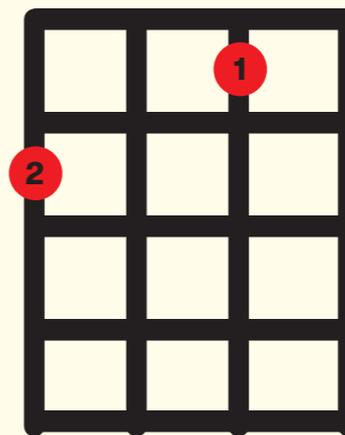


## A SONG WITH JUST 2 CHORDS

Am	Am
A minor	A minor,
Am	Am
A minor	A minor,
C	C
Seeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee	
C	C
Lovely	

Am	Am	
it's a minor	chord	
Am	Am	
no you won't get	bored, cause there's	
C	C	
	It's so	
C	C	

# CHORD NUMBER 3! THE F CHORD!



The F chord is exciting because we need to use two fingers now! But don't worry - you already know the first bit!

- Put your 2nd finger (middle finger) on the 2nd fret on the G string (the string closest to your nose) - just like you did with A minor. Now you're halfway there!
- Keep that finger pressing down, and press down your 1st finger (pointer finger) on the 1st fret on the E string. (Remember: GCEA. G is the closest to your nose, A is the closest to the floor. E is the third string down.)
- Now take your right thumb and strum all four strings, from the top to the bottom. There's your F chord!

(Remember to keep using the questions from the checklist to see how it's all feeling.)

**REMEMBER YOU CAN USE THIS CHECKLIST TO HELP YOU EVERY TIME YOU'RE PLAYING A CHORD:**

- Are you using the pads of your fingers? (The squidgy bits)
- Are your fingers between the frets, not on the lines themselves?
- Is your wrist relaxed?
- Can you hear each string ringing out when you strum? Play each string on its own to make sure!

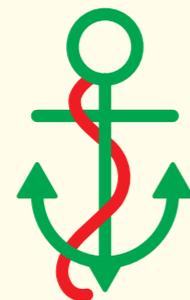
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# THE ANCHOR

When we change chords we want to move our fingers in the most economical way possible. Moving economically is a fancy way of saying we want to use as little effort as possible.

Rather than taking our whole hand off between A minor and F, we check to see if there are any fingers which stay in the same place in both chords. Aha! For F Major, our middle finger is in the same place as A minor. So now, that middle finger is our anchor. We keep it down.



Keep that middle finger right where it is, and then we can add our pointer finger really easily.

When playing a chord, it's important that you only press down on the strings you need. If a finger is slightly touching the string next to it, it will mute the other strings, and will sound a bit weird.

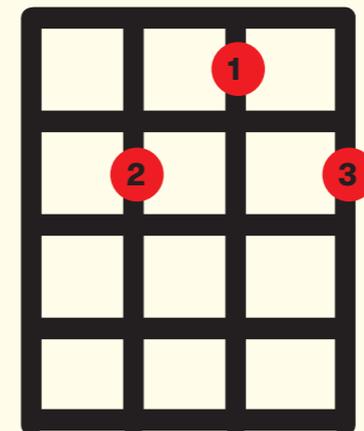
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# A SONG WITH JUST 3 CHORDS

C	Am	F	
All I need to	think about when	I'm playing this song	
C	Am	F	
C and then	A minor and the	F will lead us on	
C	Am	F	
All I need to	think about when	I'm playing this song	
C	Am	F	
C and then	A minor and the	F will lead us on	
C	Am	F	
C	A minor and the	F will lead us on	
C	Am	F	
C	A minor and the	F will lead us on	

# CHORD NUMBER 4! THE G7 CHORD!



Now that you've mastered 3 chords (!!!) we can move onto G7. This is the trickiest chord we've learnt so far, but it will get easier every time you practise.

As soon as you can play G7, you will be able to play thousands of songs. So many songs use just C, Am, F and G7.

- Step 1: Put your 1st finger (pointer) on the 1st fret on the E string - just like you did with F. The first finger is your anchor!
- Step 2: Add your 2nd finger (middle) on the 2nd fret on the C string
- Step 3: Add your 3rd finger (ring) on the 2nd fret on the A string.

Don't worry if this feels tricky at first. It takes time! Keeping your wrist loose and relaxed will help. Playing a chord with three fingers is a big step up. Be patient - you've got this!

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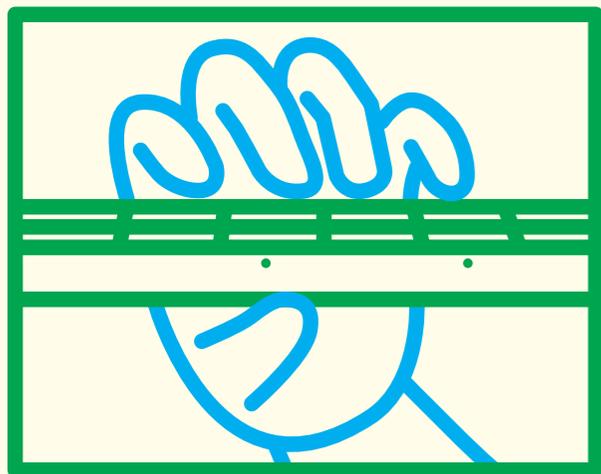


**LET'S GO OVER THE CHECKLIST:**

- How does it feel playing G7?
- Are you using the pads of your fingers? (The squidgy bits)
- Are your fingers between the frets, not on the lines themselves?
- Is your wrist relaxed?
- Can you hear each string ringing out when you strum? Play each string on its own to make sure!

# A SONG WITH JUST 4 CHORDS

C	Am	F	G7	
We	are	ready to move	on	
C	Am	F	G7	
We	can	finally play this	song	
C	Am	F	G7	
Starts on C	A minor then	F leads on to	G7	
C	Am	F	G7	
Starts on C	A minor then	F leads on to	G7	



VIDEO DEMO AVAILABLE!  
SCAN THE QR CODE ON PAGE 1



# MOVING BETWEEN CHORDS: HOW TO PRACTISE

WHEN WE'RE PLAYING A SONG, THE WAY WE MOVE FROM CHORD TO CHORD (LET'S CALL THESE 'TRANSITIONS') IS REALLY IMPORTANT.

Let's start with Am to F.

- 1) Put your 2nd finger down to make the Am and strum down 4 times.
- 2) Then add your 1st finger to make the F chord. Again strum 4 times.
- 3) Keep going between the Am and F – lifting up that 1st finger and putting it down – strum 4 times for Am, 4 times for F, and so on.
- 4) Play this sequence at a tempo (speed) which is comfortable, so you don't need to slow down to change to one of the chords. This might mean going reeeeeally slowly.
- 5) A metronome is a great tool to help you with this. You could put it on a nice slow speed (try 50 bpm) and keep practising 4 strums on each chord.
- 6) When you're comfortable with this speed, increase the tempo by a couple of numbers (if you started at 50, try going up to 54).
- 7) Practise at this new speed until you're comfortable enough to speed up again.
- 8) In no time at all you will be transitioning between the chords with a quick and steady tempo!

You can now do exactly the same thing for each transition.

**C → Am**

**Am → F**

**F → G7**

**G7 → C**

How many other chord transitions can you think of?

# CONCLUSION

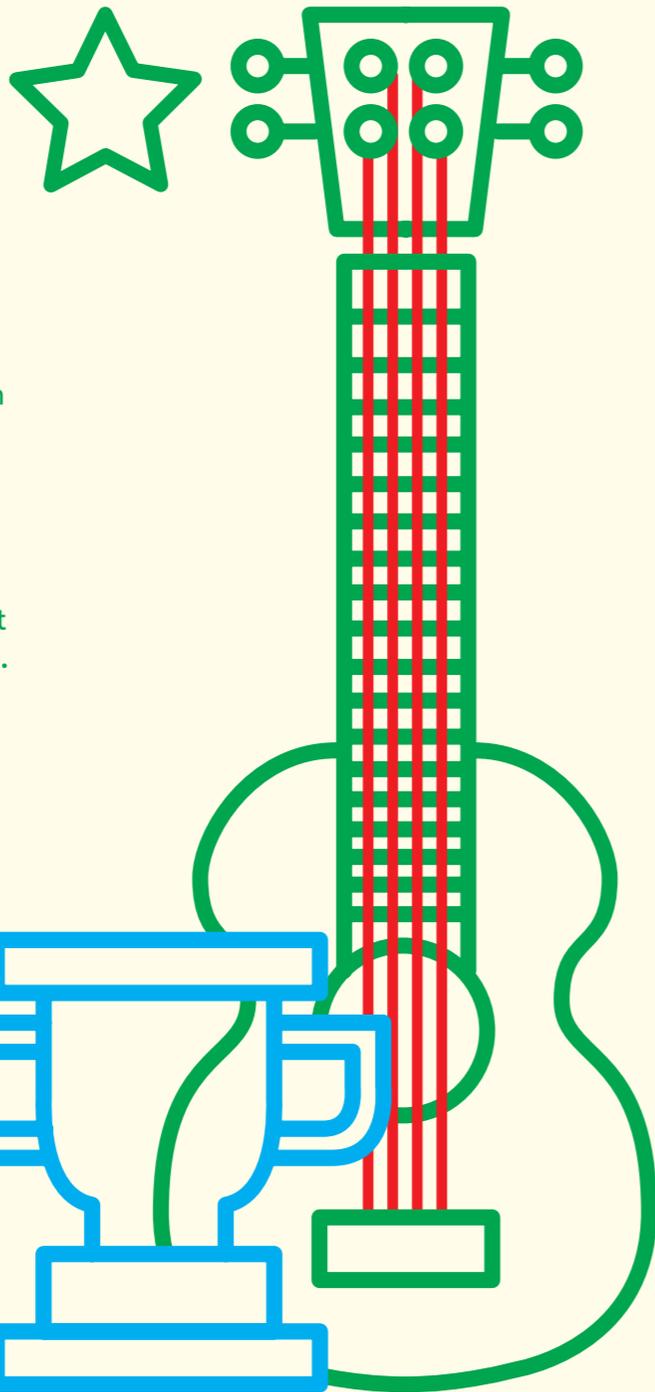
Congratulations on learning your first 4 chords on the ukulele!

There are THOUSANDS of songs you can now play with just these chords.

You've also learned the brilliant skill of reading chord charts. This means you can now learn how to play every chord out there! When you feel ready to try adding some new chords, we've written out some more chord shapes for you to dig into.

Every time you learn a new chord, it might take a little while for it to feel comfortable. Keep using the techniques you already know and you'll be flying in no time!

Copyright laws prohibit the use of popular songs in this book, but here are some songs that work brilliantly on the ukulele, that use only the chords we've learnt so far!



## SONG

Do You Wanna Build a Snowman? – from Frozen

Don't Stop Believin' – Journey

Don't Worry, Be Happy – Bobby McFerrin

Fight Song – Rachel Platten

I Feel Good – James Brown

I'm Yours – Jason Mraz

Lean on Me – Bill Withers

Let It Be – The Beatles

Riptide – Vance Joy

Shotgun – George Ezra

Stay With Me – Sam Smith

The Lion Sleeps Tonight – The Tokens

Three Little Birds – Bob Marley

Try Everything – Shakira

When I'm Gone (Cup Song) from Pitch Perfect

Yellow Submarine – The Beatles

## CHORDS

C, F, Am, G7

C, G7, Am, F

C, F, G7

C, G7, F, Am

C, F, G7

C, G7, Am, F

C, F, G7

C, G7, Am, F

Am, G7, C, F

C, F, Am, G7

Am, F, C, G7

C, F, G7

C, F, G7

C, G7, F, Am

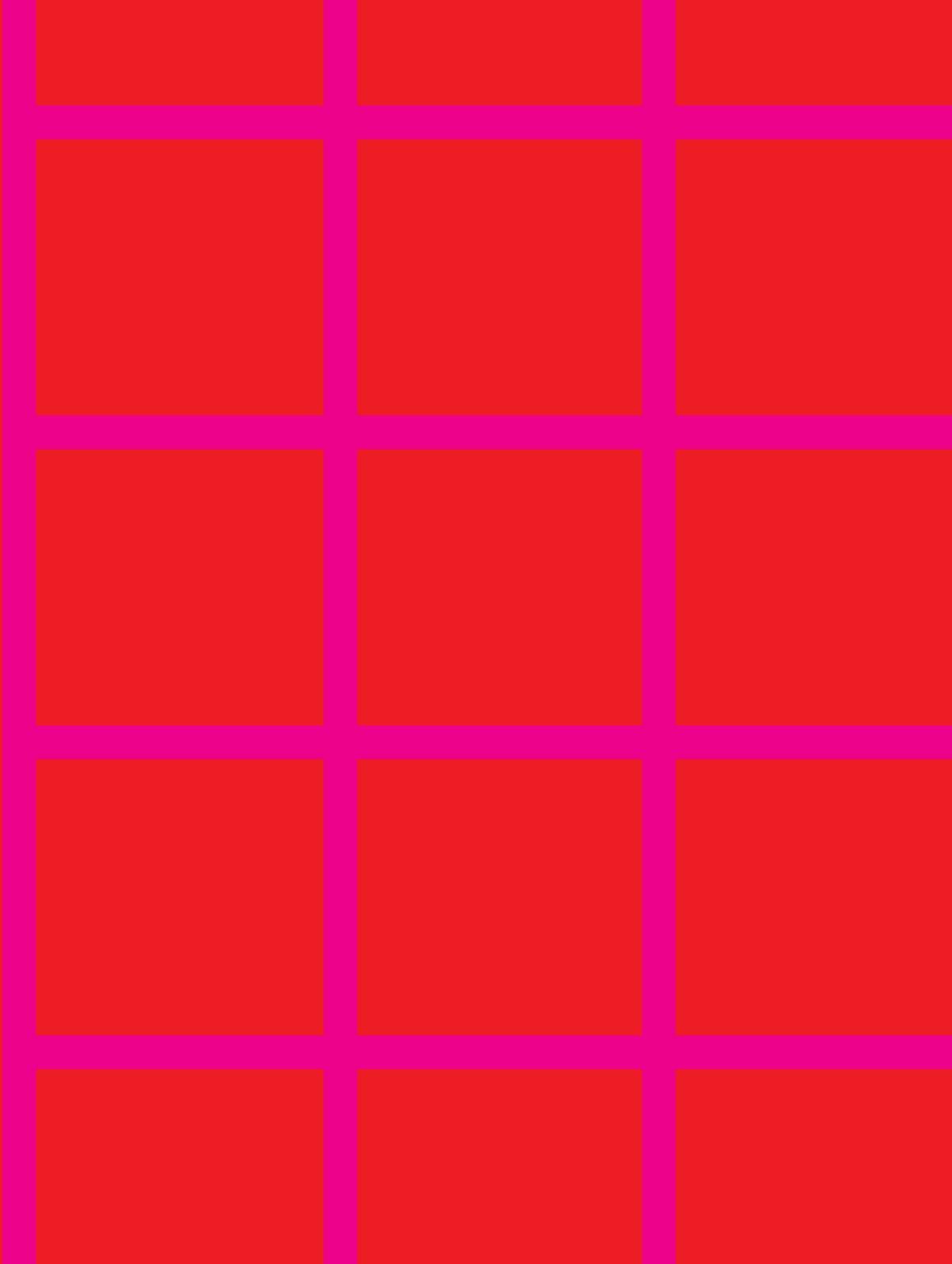
Am, F, C, G7

C, F, G7

You can find loads more songs on [ukutabs.com](http://ukutabs.com)

And when you're ready, here are some more chords to keep you going:

<b>C</b> 	<b>D</b> 	<b>E</b> 	<b>F</b> 	<b>G</b> 	<b>A</b> 	<b>B</b> 
<b>Cm</b> 	<b>Dm</b> 	<b>Em</b> 	<b>Fm</b> 	<b>Gm</b> 	<b>Am</b> 	<b>Bm</b> 
<b>C7</b> 	<b>D7</b> 	<b>E7</b> 	<b>F7</b> 	<b>G7</b> 	<b>A7</b> 	<b>B7</b> 
<b>Cmaj7</b> 	<b>Dmaj7</b> 	<b>Emaj7</b> 	<b>Fmaj7</b> 	<b>Gmaj7</b> 	<b>Amaj7</b> 	<b>Bmaj7</b> 
<b>Cm7</b> 	<b>Dm7</b> 	<b>Em7</b> 	<b>Fm7</b> 	<b>Gm7</b> 	<b>Am7</b> 	<b>Bm7</b> 



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