

How to Play Football

Football is a fun, competitive game and the most widely-played sport in the world. It's sometimes called "the beautiful game" because of its dazzling mixture of technical skill, team play, and individual contribution. If you're interested in playing football, take some time to learn about the basic rules and practice the most essential techniques. Train hard, have fun, and always keep a football on hand!

Part 1

Building

Essential Skills

1. Practice dribbling the ball



Dribbling is controlling the ball while running. If you want to keep the ball in your team's possession, you're going to need to dribble well. Dribbling is all about touching the ball strong enough to carry it forward, but light enough so that it stays by your side. You can dribble with the inside of your foot, above the toe (with the foot pointed down toward the ground), and even with the outside of your foot. The easiest way to dribble for beginners is probably with the inside of your foot. Learn to dribble at different speeds. When you're running down the sideline and you've beaten your defender, your dribbling will look a lot different from when you're taking on a defender head on.

2. Work on your passing skills



Passing is all about putting the ball exactly where you want it. In order to pass a football, kick the ball using the inside of your foot. This will give you less power but more accuracy. Once you master the basic pass, you can then try to slice and hook the ball in order to pass it to one of your teammates.

- Pass with your toes pointed upward and your heel on the ground.
- Anticipate where a player is going to be. If your teammate is running, always kick the ball ahead of them so that they can run to the ball.
- To hook the ball, use the inside of your foot but turn it more forward (a 45-degree angle toward your target instead of closer to 90) as you strike the ball.
- Slicing takes a bit more practice, since you need to strike the ball with the outside of your foot while your leg sweeps in a hooking motion.

3. Work on your shooting skills



If you're really close to the goal and all you need is accuracy, you can shoot using the sweet spot of the inside of your foot, like a pass. Normally, though, you're going to be farther away and will need power as well as accuracy. Hit the ball on the middle laces of your shoe, with your foot pointed down at the ground. Keep your foot pointed down at the ground as you follow through. Use your hips to swing through the ball. Bring your foot across your body if necessary to generate even more power. This should cause both feet to lift from the ground.

4. Build your skills as a defender



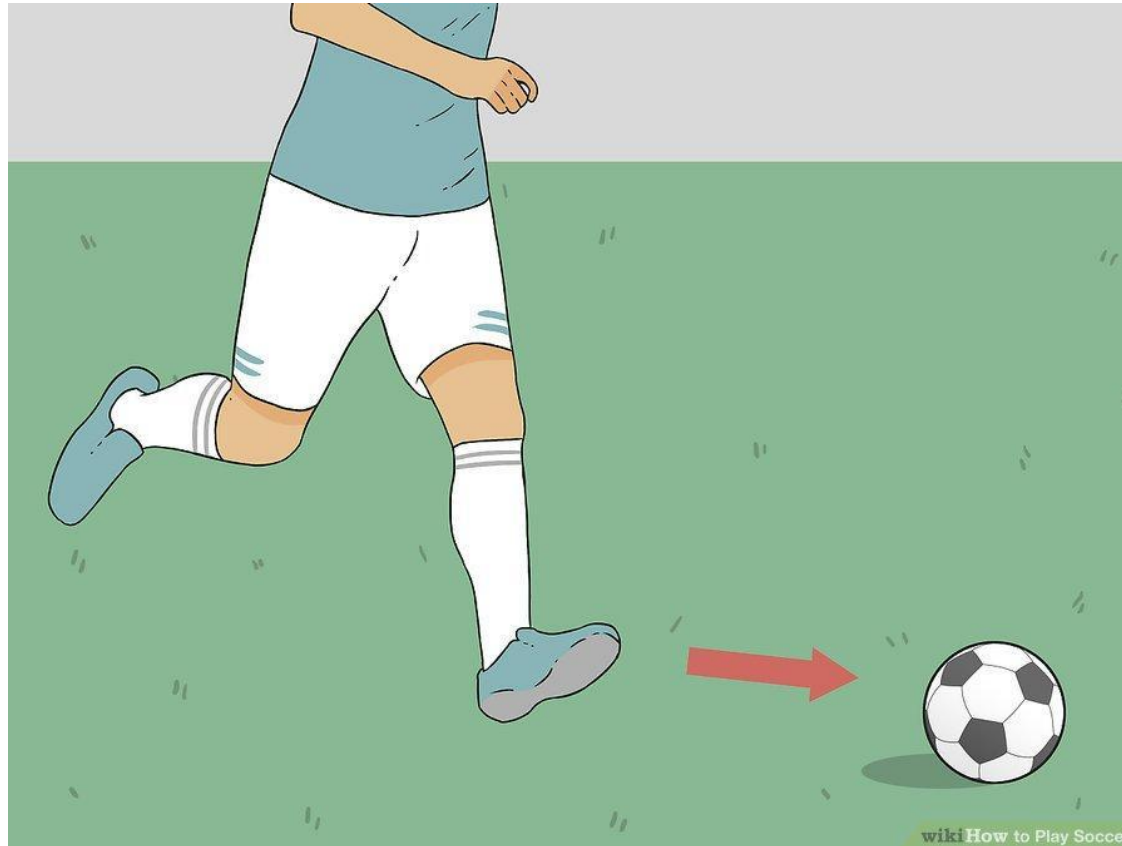
Defending the goal from an opposing attacker is an underrated achievement. There are three basic things that you need to remember when guarding a player in football:

- Don't be fooled if your opponent starts and stops with the ball, fakes one way before heading the other, or tries other feints, tricks, or jukes. Instead, keep your eye on the ball at all times.
- Stay in between the ball and the goal. In other words, don't let the ball get behind you.
- Right after an attacker hits the ball on the dribble—that's the time when you should try to hit the ball away. This is called anticipating the dribble, and it's essential for knocking the ball from an attacking player.

Part 2

Advancing Your Skills and Style

1. Think about moving off the ball



Some estimates say that professional football players run 6 to 8 miles (9.7 to 12.9 km) during a 90-minute game. That's a lot of running, and you'll do most of it when you don't have the ball. Learn how to get into open space, how to run to where to your teammate expects or wants you to be, and how to run past a defender who's guarding you.

2. Get comfortable heading the ball, if permitted or desired



Try hitting the ball with your head right where your hair meets your forehead. Do not use the top of your head! When getting ready to head the ball, don't lift your head back; move your upper torso back instead. This will give you more power and won't strain your neck as much. You have to hit the ball, not let the ball hit you. Many youth leagues ban heading the ball due to concerns over concussions and other head or neck injuries. If you're just playing for fun, consider whether heading the ball is a necessary component of your game.

3. Practice juggling the ball with your feet and body



Juggling involves receiving and controlling a ball from the air with some combination of your head, shoulders, chest, legs, and feet. You probably won't need to juggle frequently in a game, but it's a very important skill to develop. For instance, you might receive a pass from the air by redirecting it from your chest to one of your feet, so you can quickly establish control of the ball. Juggling helps improve your touch on the ball. If you know how to juggle, your touch on the ball becomes a lot more sensitive. Your first touch on the ball is extremely important in football.

4. Work on using your non-dominant foot well



It's really important to be able to dribble, pass, and shoot the ball with your non-dominant foot. Good defenders will take away your dominant foot and force you to play with your non-dominant foot. If you can't use your non-dominant foot, you'll be playing at a clear disadvantage. Practice only using your non-dominant foot during practice or when you shoot or juggle by yourself. Acclimating your body to this muscle memory is an important part of being skilled with your non-dominant foot.

5. Practice taking corner kicks and free kicks



You want to be able to send corner kicks right to the middle of the penalty area, usually up in the air so that a teammate can head or kick the ball in. Free kicks can either be taken quickly and simply passed to a nearby teammate, or you can organize a "set play" in which you kick the ball in a certain area while your teammates execute a play.

- Corner kicks are taken from one of the four corners of the field, depending on where the ball went out of bounds.
- Free kicks can occur anywhere within the field of play.
- Corner kicks are often struck with either a hook (from the inside of your foot) or a slice (from the outside of your foot) depending on which foot you're using and which side of the field you're on.
- A free kick can be hooked, sliced, or driven straight ahead, or simply tapped to a teammate, based on how you choose to play it.

6. Be original and spontaneous with your playing style



Try to develop your own playing style, one that suits you. Are you a tricky player who relies on juking out other players? Are you fast enough to beat everyone with sheer speed? Are you great at using your body and power to blast goals? Are you expert at keeping opponents from getting off shots? Find out what kind of player you are, set goals for yourself on how you can become a more rounded player, and remember to have fun!

Part 3

Playing

According to the

Rules

1. Understand the object of the game

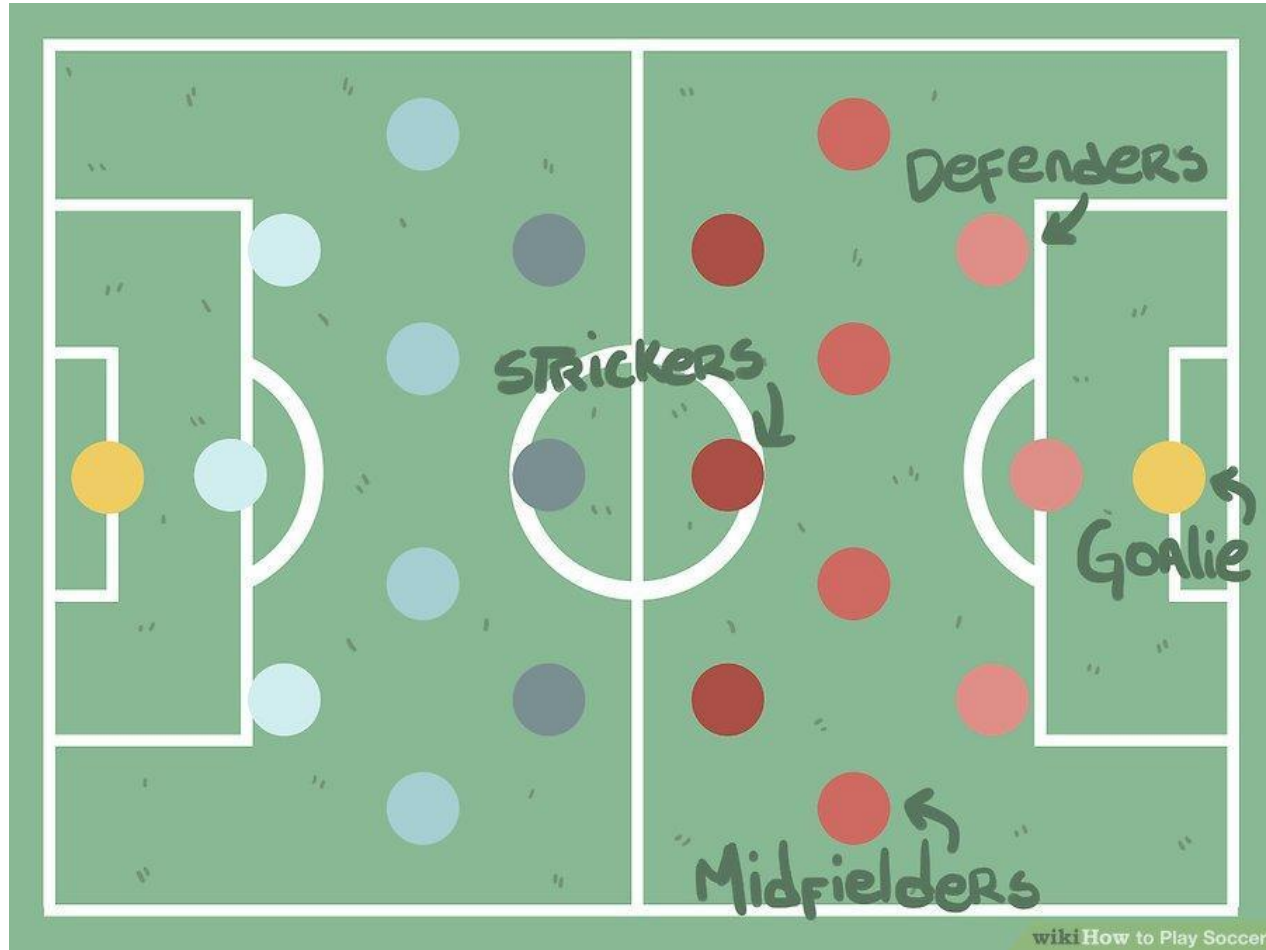


You win a football match by scoring more goals than the opponent scores. A goal is scored when the whole ball passes the opponent's goal line within the net area.

Goalies, when in their own penalty area, are the only players on the pitch who can use their arms or hands. All other players may use any part of their bodies except their hands.

A regulation game (match) is typically 90 minutes long, made up of 2 halves of 45 minutes each.

2. Recognize the positions in soccer



There are 11 total players (per team) on the pitch to start the game. Although the positions can be rearranged however the coach sees fit, there are usually 4 defenders, 4 midfielders, 2 strikers, and 1 goalie.

- Defenders usually stay behind the midfield line in an effort to help prevent the other team from scoring. They need to make good outlet (clearing) passes and are usually bigger physically than other players.
- Midfielders do the most running, as they play a combination of defense and offense. They usually orchestrate the attack, and need to be good at holding onto the ball and passing.
- Forwards/strikers get the most cracks at shooting the ball. They need to be quick, agile, and able to shoot with power and accuracy. They are often the fastest players on the field.
- The goalie protects the net and is the only player who can use their hands (but only in their own penalty area). The goalie has to be agile, flexible, quick to anticipate, and good at communication.

3. Note that kickoffs start the game and the beginning of the second half



At the time of kickoff, each team's players need to be entirely on their own half of the field. Once the whistle has blown and the ball is kicked, the players can move freely into both halves of play, provided they are not offside.

One team starts the game by kicking off. The opposite team gets to kick off after halftime.

4. Learn when and how to do throw-ins



Throw-ins happen when the ball fully travels outside the area of play. Possession goes to the team who wasn't the last to touch it. This team gets to throw the ball in from the place where it went out of bounds.

A player throwing can get a running start, but must stop near the area where the ball went out of bounds.

A player must bring the ball up with both hands behind their head, and release the ball over their head with both hands.

A player cannot lift either of their feet off the ground while they are throwing the ball.

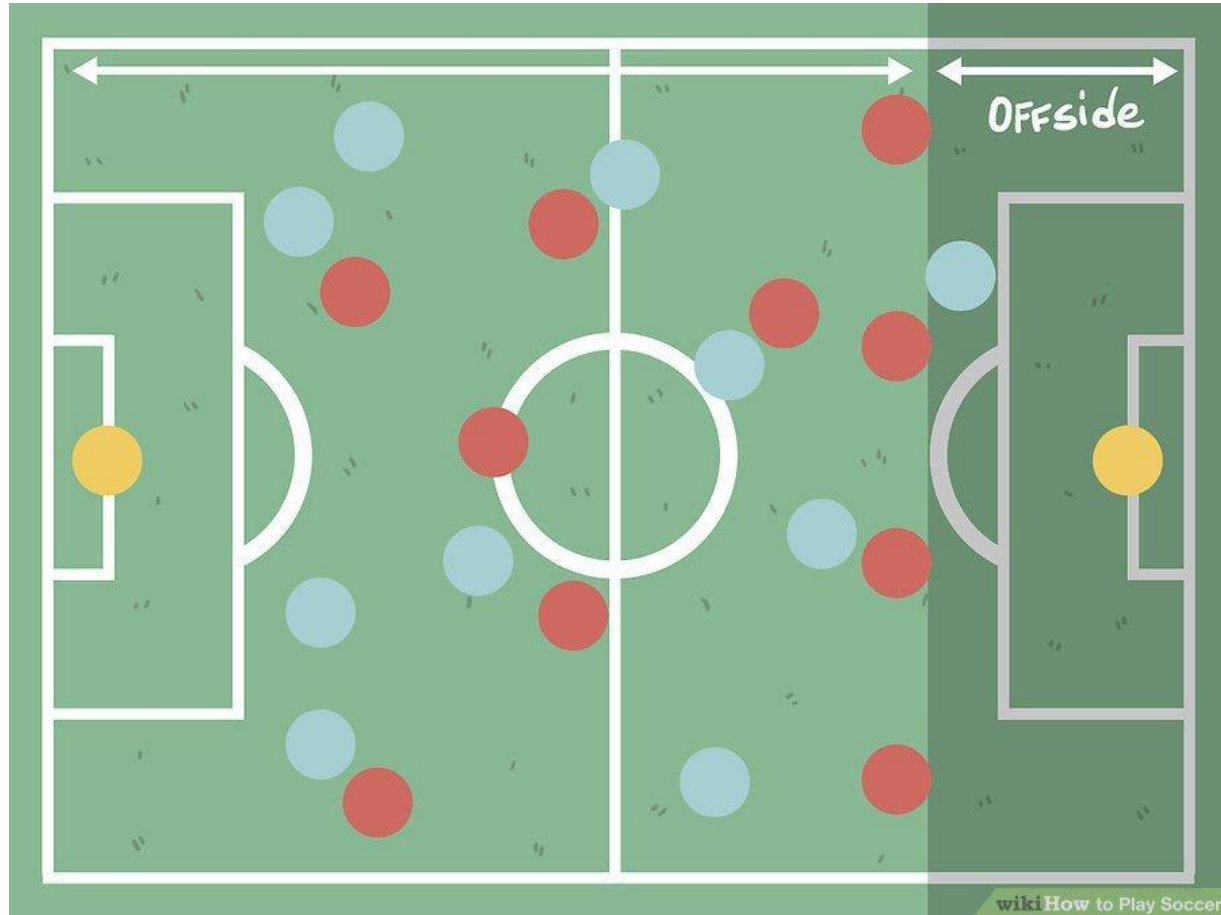
5. Recognize the difference between a corner kick and a goal kick



If the ball goes over the goal line (but not into the goal) and was last touched by the defending team, the ball goes to the closest goal line corner and becomes a corner kick, with possession going to the attacking team.

If the ball goes over the goal line (but not into the goal) and was last touched by the attacking team, the ball goes to the edge of the 6-yard box and becomes a goal kick, with possession going to the defending team. The goalie usually takes a goal kick.

6. Recognize when a player is offside



Offsides is one of the more crucial rules in football, and it's designed to keep football teams from cherry-picking, or bunching a lot of their players near the opponent's goal at all times. A player is offsides when all of the following are true: they are ahead of the ball, in the opponent's half, and behind the last defender (excluding the goalie) when the ball is passed to them.

However, offsides is negated on throw-ins, corner kicks, and goal kicks.

Possession is given to the other team if offsides is called.

7. Identify the difference between a direct free kick and an indirect free kick



A direct free kick is when you can kick the ball directly into the goal for a score without the ball touching another teammate first. An indirect free kick must be touched by another teammate before counting as a score.

Direct free kicks are generally granted due to a contact foul or hand ball by the other team.

Indirect free kicks are granted by the referee due to other types of infractions or game stoppages.

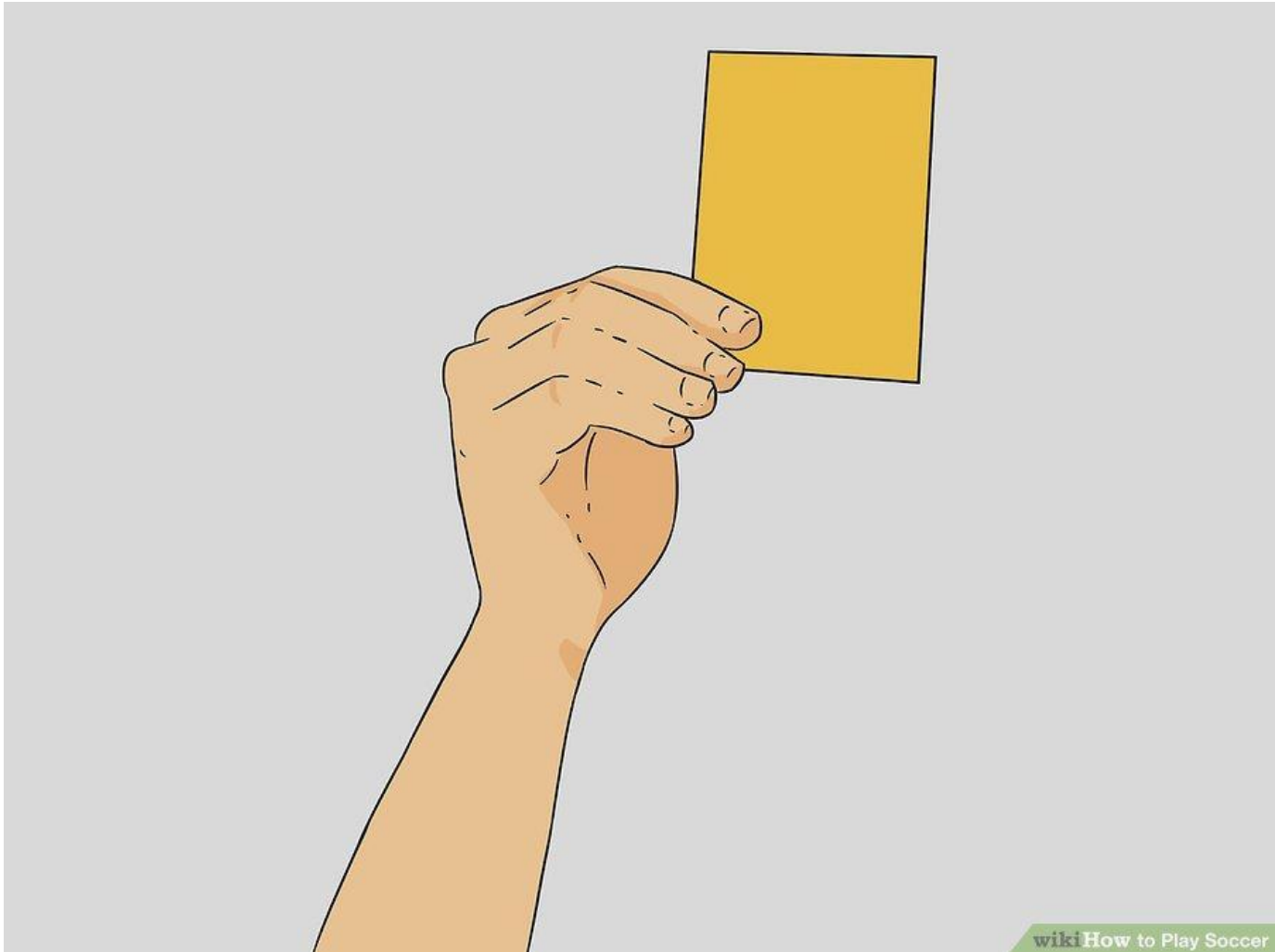
During an indirect free kick, the referee will keep one arm raised until the ball is touched by a second player.

8. Recognize that a foul inside the penalty box results in a penalty kick



A penalty kick happens when a defender fouls an opponent in his or her own penalty box. All other players except the goalie and the player taking the penalty kick line up outside the penalty area. The goalie must stand on the goal line and cannot move off of it before the ball is struck. The ball is placed on a designated area called the penalty spot. After the ball is hit, it is live, meaning that if it ricochets off the goalie or post, it can be played by either team. Any player can take the penalty kick, not just the player who was fouled.

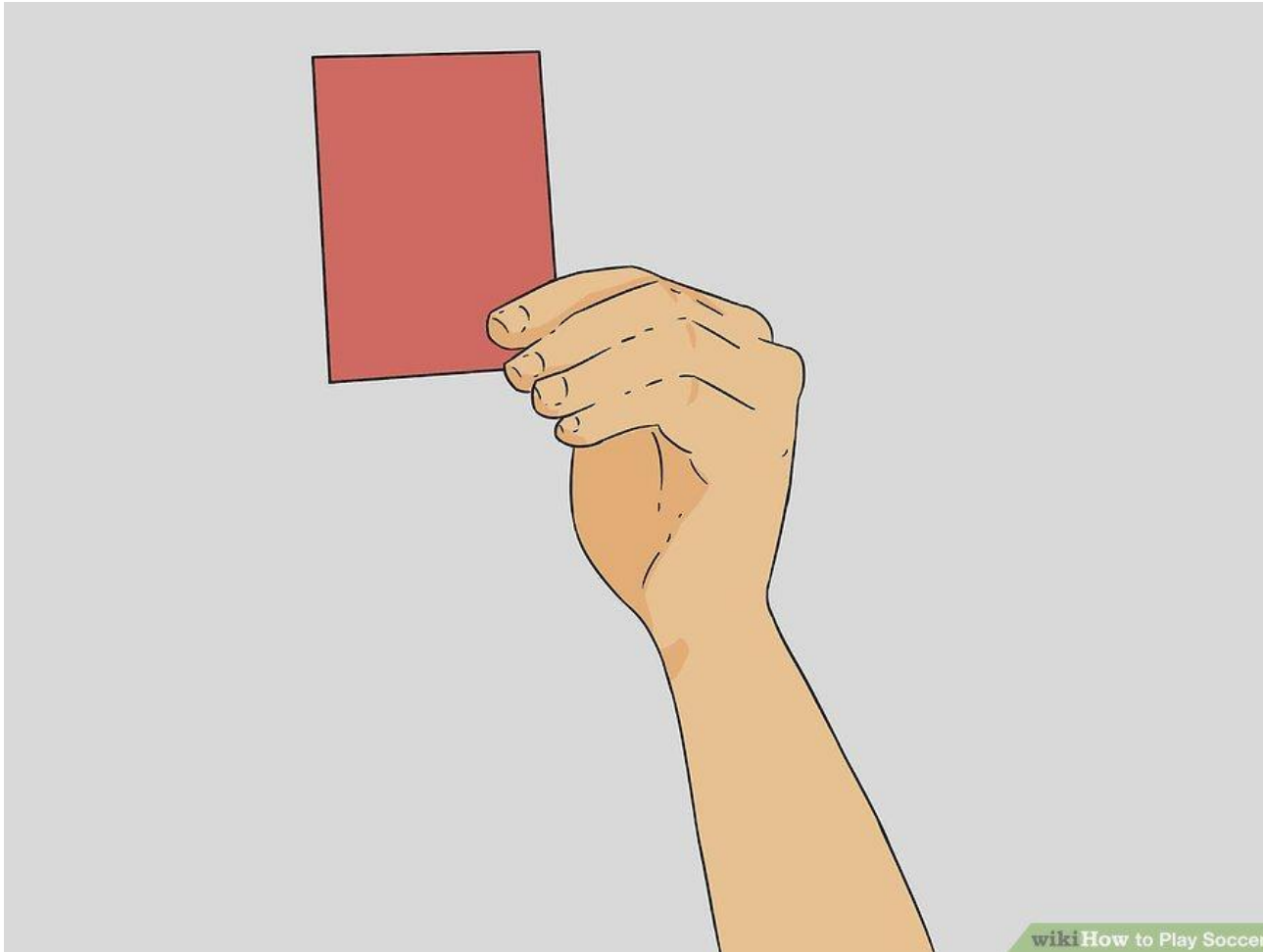
9. Know the grounds for a yellow card



A referee issues a yellow card as a warning to a player. Two yellow cards result in a red card, after which that player must leave the game permanently. Reasons for yellow cards include:

- Dangerous play, such as high kicking near a player's head.
- Illegal obstruction. This happens when a player intentionally takes a position between the ball and an opponent when that player isn't within playing distance of the ball.
- Charging the goalkeeper in the goal area.
- The goalkeeper playing the ball with their hands when the ball is kicked by a teammate.
- Goalkeeper infringements—unsafe play such as charging the goalie.
- The goalkeeper taking more than four steps while controlling the ball.
- Intentionally wasting time at the end of a game.

10. Know the grounds for a red card



A red card can be given out before a yellow card if especially dangerous play is involved, although a red card usually results from two yellow cards. Reasons for red cards include:

- Kicking a player intentionally.
- Jumping up at a player and making contact.
- Charging a player in a rough way, especially if hands are involved.
- Charging a player from behind.
- Tripping a player.
- Hitting, pushing, holding, or spitting at a player.
- Handling the ball by a non-goalie.

If a player must leave the game due to 2 yellow cards or a red card, they cannot be replaced, which leaves their team short a player (e.g., 10-on-11).