

# **Z-Ball Games!**

## **21 Fun Games to Improve Reactions and Reflexes**

**Joe Dinoffer**

Just say the words quick reflexes or quick reactions and it gets your adrenaline pumping. Every single movement sport requires them. Just where do quick reflexes come from? Studies show that reflexes and reactions are an acquired skill and can be improved even for the most successful athletes. Although there are many exercises that focus on quick reflexes, few work on catching reflexes, visual reactions, plus movement and balance, all at the same time. The new, redesigned Z-Ball meets this challenge and more!

The 21 games in this video can easily be adapted for all ages, skill levels, and different sized groups. You'll quickly see that the variety of exercises are nearly endless, but they all have one common purpose: to help both young and older athletes alike quickly build reflex and reaction skills while, at the same time, having fun!

1. **Partner Catch** – For this first game pair up the young athletes six to eight feet apart and place a hula hoop or draw a circle with chalk in the middle between them. Tosses must be underhand as well as soft and must bounce in the circle. Players alternate tossing to one another and points are scored for each player by catching the ball on one bounce and games can be played until one player reaches 11, or 21.
2. **Triple Catch** – A fun extension of the first game is for three instead of two. In this variation, one player tosses underhand into the circle, and the other two players try to catch it. The catcher receives a point and then tosses the next one. The ball must be caught on one bounce and if it isn't, the same tosser tosses again. Games can be played until one player reaches 11, or 21 points.
3. **Solo Wall Catch** – This skill-builder just needs a wall, a Z-Ball, and enthusiasm. Have the young athlete adjust their distance from the wall and the speed of the toss to their age and skill level. Then, simply toss the ball against the wall, and let it bounce before trying to catch it. For a challenge try to catch it five or even ten times in a row.
4. **Partner Wall Catch** – Now, with two young athletes tossing against a wall, you have to also add a target on the wall for the toss to hit. In this case we are taping a hula-hoop to the wall, but chalk or masking tape works just as well. Have the players alternate soft underhanded tosses from a designated starting line. Points are scored when the receiver catches the ball after one bounce and games can be played to 11 or 21 points.
5. **Triple Wall Catch** – A natural extension of the last game is with three athletes. One tosses to the other two with the same guidelines; namely, the toss must be underhand and hit the wall inside the target. The other two try to catch it after one bounce and the catcher receives a point and

- then tosses the next one. The ball must be caught on one bounce and if it isn't, the same tosser tosses again. Games can be played until one player reaches 11 or 21 points.
6. **Solo Wall Bounce** – In this wall game variation, the young athlete has to toss the ball against the ground first and then, after it bounces off the wall, has to catch it out of the air. For a challenge try to catch it five or even ten times in a row.
  7. **Partner Wall Bounce** – Now, with two players, have them alternate throws from a designated starting line. This time, place a hoop or mark an area on the ground where the first bounce must land. It will then bounce off the wall and the other player tries to score points by catching it out of the air after it bounces off the wall. Have the tossers alternate throws and play games until someone reaches 11 or 21 points.
  8. **Triple Wall Bounce** – The next logical extension is to have three players compete together. One tosses to the other two with the same guidelines; namely, from a designated starting line the toss must be controlled and bounce into the target on the ground before hitting the wall. The other two try to catch it out of the air and the catcher receives a point and then tosses the next one. The ball must be caught out of the air and if it isn't, the same tosser tosses again. Games can be played until one player reaches 11 or 21 points.
  9. **1, 2, 3 Catch** - Now let's move to a reaction catching game for two players. Players line up across from one another on opposite sides of a hoop or with two lines separating them. They simply take turns softly tossing underhand to the other player so that the first bounce is in the designated area. The receiver can choose to let the ball bounce 1, 2, or 3 times before catching it and is awarded that number of points if successful. If the player drops the ball, the same number attempted is given to the server. The serve changes after every point and games are played until one player reaches 21.
  10. **Funny Tennis** – This next exercise is both challenging and a lot of fun, requiring both fast hands and fast feet. Play a regular set of tennis without a racquet but use a Z-Ball. Both players must let the ball bounce only once and all tosses are underhand. A point is lost when a player fails to catch the ball or if it is tossed outside the boundary. And, of course, as an option to tennis scoring, you can score like ping pong or volleyball if desired. Any type of court can be used as long as there is a net in the middle.
  11. **Grounders** – This next skill-builder is perfect for baseball, but in many ways a lot more challenging. With anywhere from one to five athletes, have one assigned to throw or hit groundballs, and have them practice fielding. We recommend practicing this game both with baseball gloves (**cut**) and then without to develop all the right skills needed for developing quick hands. To create a simple competition, rotate the players and score one point for each ball that is caught.

12. **Seeing Double** – This next game is absolutely a challenge, even for world-class athletes. Pair up the athletes and have one hold two Z-Balls and toss them both at the same time. The goal of the partner is to catch both balls at the same time, one in each hand. Sound easy? Try it and find out.
13. **Seeing Triple** – This next game not only requires quick hands and reflexes, but also a lot of cooperation and teamwork. Each pair of athletes has three Z-Balls and tosses all three up at the same time. Their goal as a team is to catch all three balls after one bounce. And, it can be made competitive with a larger group by seeing how many three-ball catches each pair can cooperatively make in 60 seconds.
14. **Solo Jog and Catch** – Here's a solo skill builder that adds the dimension of jogging to building reflex and reaction skills. With a ball in hand, have an athlete jog around the play area and continuously toss and self-catch the Z-Ball. This exercise also works on quick direction changes. To challenge each player, see how many catches they can make in 60 seconds and have them compete against their own results.
15. **Team Jog and Catch** – A natural extension of this last exercise is to have the young athletes jog in pairs and cooperatively play bounce and catch with each other using one ball per team. Working on quick direction changes is also a benefit of this game and to create a competition, see how many catches each team can make in 60 seconds.
16. **Z-Ball Volleyball** - Now let's move to a variation of volleyball, except this game uses the Z-Ball. Set up an equal number of players on each team and play with the same rules as traditional volleyball, with only minor rule adjustments. The ball must bounce after going over the net and all tosses must be made underhanded. Also, on each side of the net, there are two mandatory bounce passes. If any ball is not caught after one bounce, the other team wins the point.
17. **Two-Ball Complexity** – This next game adds a new dimension to all of the previous exercises since it uses the unpredictable Z-Ball with a tennis ball at the same time. Pair up two young athletes and have each toss two balls, one Z-Ball and one tennis ball, to their partner at the same time. This is obviously a cooperative game, but to make it challenging, see how many two-ball catches each pair can successfully make in 60 seconds.
18. **180-Degree Spin and Catch** – Here's another cooperative game with the players organized into pairs with each team using one Z-Ball. Have them toss to each other with one unique feature. The catcher starts off turned away from the tosser and only turns when the tosser calls out their name. This game also doubles as a great way to get the participants in a group to learn each other's names quickly.
19. **360-Degree Spin and Catch** – Another exercise that helps develop agility as well as quick hands is this simple drill which any child or even older athlete can perform by themselves. Simply have them toss the ball up into the air and make a 360-degree spin before catching the ball after the first bounce.

20. **360's in Pairs** – A natural variation of the last game is to pair the young athletes and have one toss to the other. The tosser should call out “spin” as they toss the ball into the air. To make it competitive in a large group setting, simply have the players keep track of how many successful catches they can make in 60 seconds after making a full 360-degree turn.
21. **Dizzy Ball** – Let's finish with a solo skill-builder that will challenge even the most agile athletes. Have the athlete toss the Z-Ball up in the air and then immediately make a 720-degree spin. After completing the full double spin, they have to catch the ball after it's first bounce. And, again, to make it challenging in a group setting, have each player count how many times he or she can successfully accomplish this task in 60 seconds. Like all the other games in this video, this exercise is both fun and skill-building, all at the same time.