

Presentation:

Ergonomics and Breathwork in Nuad Boran

A few guidelines for safe and effective practice

Bob Haddad

Proper body mechanics and breathing awareness are of utmost importance in a Thai therapy session, yet they are not taught on a wide scale. Whenever I see people giving Thai massage with a drooping back or bent arms, I know they have yet to develop good ergonomics. Bad habits can be hard to break, but continued practice using postures that are not ergonomically sound can lead to unnecessary strain and even permanent physical damage.

Calm and deep breathing can help bring about an effortless and relaxing session for both the recipient and practitioner. It is sometimes helpful to remind the receiver to breathe, especially before dramatic body movements and yoga positions such as plow, cobra and spinal twists. Generally, receivers should be exhaling as they are stretched, moved and released back to starting position, and practitioners should inhale as they lift or get a client into position. It is important that neither the client nor the practitioner hold their breath while stretching or dramatically moving the body. Ingestion of air empowers and stabilizes our bodies, and feeds us sustenance.

This presentation is designed to help you understand elements of body mechanics (ergonomics) and breathing techniques that you might refine in your own personal and professional practice.

Use your bodyweight, not muscle power

Nuad Boran is one of the few healing modalities that allows therapists to work at an appropriate level for each client. For the therapist, a Thai session can be relatively effortless when you learn to use your body weight and utilize gravity efficiently. Never rely on muscle power or arm strength. If at any point during a session you find yourself using your muscles, immediately stop, and try it a different way. Remember to keep your shoulders relaxed, your back straight, and to exhale as you apply pressure.



Move your body positioning often & work only within your reach

It's important to not remain in fixed positions for too long when you work. When thumbing, palming and compressing, move your body as you work, adjusting your legs and knees and alignment whenever necessary. Keep your bodyweight directly above the extensions of your arms, and stay focused in your *hara* (center). Don't overextend yourself by reaching far away to execute a movement. Instead, move your body to be closer or more in alignment with the client before beginning the move.



- Always ground yourself from the second chakra (*hara*) slightly below the navel, and let that area be the very center of all your movements.
- Keep your movement confined to what is within your reach, and take care to not hyper-extend your body (or your client's body) while executing postures and techniques.
- Always keep your spine straight and your head in straight-ahead alignment. Avoid curving your back forward while lifting. Keep your arms straight when pulling and compressing.
- Remember to inhale when exerting pressure or lifting. Never hold your breath. Always be aware of the receiver's breath patterns, and encourage their deep breathing when necessary. Try to time your moves in accordance with the receiver's inhalations and exhalations.
- Allow for short moments of rest when appropriate, and allow the client time to transition from one posture to the next, especially after the deeper ones.

Protect your wrists

When performing butterfly palm presses, whether on the shoulders, on the thighs or the back, try to keep the inner parts of your elbows facing each other, with the creases of your arms facing forward.

When you're palm pressing, direct your energy through your arms and into the heel of your hand, and then spread the pressure throughout your palm, to broaden the contact point. Failure to spread the pressure may create a sharp sensation to your client, and may also result in injury to your wrists.

Always keep your wrists at a comfortable angle, about 80 degrees, maybe a bit less. Working beyond that angle may pinch nerves or overstretch your ligaments. Maintain your body weight directly over your arms, as you lean in to apply pressure.



Keep your back straight

Keep your spine in proper alignment. By engaging your core muscles as you move, you can protect your lower back. This is especially true when you use your feet to work thighs or the lower back. Remember to keep your head up, and to keep your neck aligned with your spine. Eliminate or modify any moves that require you to bend over and to round your spine, whether from a standing or a sitting position.



Breathe ! (and be aware of your client's breathing patterns as you work)

In general, your clients should exhale when you apply pressure to them, or when you dramatically move their bodies from one position to another. They should inhale when you release the pressure, or return their bodies to the starting position. The therapist, however, should inhale as he lifts her into position, because the increased amount of oxygen to his body will give him more strength as he engages his core muscles. Both people should exhale when the client is lowered to the floor. Under no circumstances should you ever hold your breath when giving or receiving a Thai massage session.

Whenever you begin a session, take some time to focus on your client's breathing patterns, and regulate your own breathing so that you are in tune with her body. From time to time during the session, look at the rise and fall of your client's abdomen, so you know when to apply your movements.

