

## Foot Acupressure

Pressing into the soles of the feet with thumbs is one of the most ubiquitous opening moves in traditional Thai massage. It is also a technique that is regularly performed in a less-than-optimal way. Common problems include using arm muscles to apply pressure instead of leaning in with bodyweight, pressing at a downward angle toward the mat rather than pressing upward toward the center of the body, and using the tips of the thumbs instead of the rounded pads. There are two ways that this technique can be performed efficiently.



### Kneeling variation

For the kneeling variation, it's important to position your body far away from the receiver's feet so your arms can be fully extended. The pressure from your thumbs is applied with momentum that emanates from your *hara*, not from your arm muscles or shoulder muscles. Your thumbs should be flat against the soles of the feet, not at an angle. In order to work in this way, your upper body is bent fully downward and your arms and your chest remain quite close to the mat. Your arms are fully extended and locked (not bent) at the elbows, and your thumb pressure is directed upward toward the center of the receiver's body, not at a downward angle toward the mat. Remember to use the rounded pads of your thumbs to apply pressure, and to keep your other fingers open, touching each other lightly, and resting on the feet. Allow your hands to be as free of tension as possible.

Locate two corresponding points on both feet, and lean your bodyweight forward on your knees as you project energy through your straight arms and into your thumbs. Sense whether the points seem open or "full," and glance at your partner's face from time to time for any signs of discomfort. If you sense that a point on one foot feels harder than the same point on the other foot, you might lighten the pressure there. You can press both feet at the same time as you rock forward and back, and you can also rock from left to right to press only one foot at a time. Proceed around the feet in this way when using the kneeling position.

### Squatting variation

The squatting variation is a way to give more pressure while expending less energy. It's easy to do, and it doesn't stress the therapist's back as much as the previous posture. This variation works especially well when the therapist is smaller or lighter than the receiver, but it can be used with everyone, and it is an excellent way to give thumb pressure to the bottoms of the feet, and to work the feet in other ways.

Assume a squatting position while briefly holding the receiver's feet for balance. Open your legs to a comfortable distance, and bend your feet at the toes so you can rock forward

and backward. Your arms may have to be slightly bent at the elbows, but they should be locked in place by the constant inward pressure of your upper legs. Your thumbs apply pressure from the rounded pads, but instead of keeping your palms open, keep the four fingers of each hand bent inward toward the palms. Find the center of your balance, and begin to apply pressure by rocking your *hara* forward on the tips of your toes. Shift all your bodyweight as you fall forward, remain in that position for the duration of the thumb pressure, and then rock backward to release as you quickly move your thumbs to a new set of points. Repeat this forward and backward thumbing movement, and remember to exhale as you fall forward and press, and to inhale as you rock backward and release. Once you finish thumb-pressing the soles, you can remain in this position to use other techniques for the feet and legs such as palming, working the anterior lines of the feet, twisting and cracking the toes, or pulling back on the legs.

Before you begin a sequence of foot acupressure, quickly decide which of the two above variations might work best for both you and the client. Keep in mind the relative height and size of both people. If you are taller or shorter than him, lighter or heavier, or have small hands and he has big feet, then which position might work best? Stop your movement from time to time, and maintain continuous pressure when necessary, up to 10–15 seconds. Lighten your pressure slightly at painful or tight spots, and maintain constant pressure there to try to “melt” the tension before you move to another place. Remember to use your breath to reinforce your pressure and to aid in stability. Exhale as you press and rock forward, breathe normally when you hold a spot for a long time, and inhale when you release the pressure and rock backward.

Regardless of which variation you use at any given time, use sensing and intuition to decide how much pressure is needed for each point you find. Don't think about how many points there are, or where they are, or in which order they should be worked. In fact, don't think at all! Instead, rely on your innate sensing abilities to provide the most grounded, firm and sensitive acupressure that you can offer.

### Reminders

- Based on the relative size of both people, and the dimensions of the room, decide which variation might be better to use.
- Use your *hara* to press into the soles of the feet, whether with your arms extended and locked, or with them bent and braced between your upper legs and lateral abdomen.
- Exhale as you apply pressure and rock forward, and inhale when you release and rock backward.
- Work with simultaneous pressure at first, and regulate the required amount of thumb pressure for each foot accordingly.
- Sink in with incremental pressure, and hold for different lengths of time according to your intuition.



### Notes

1. See the “index finger rule” in the “Guidelines” chapter.
2. Remember the “Thai boy and girl” metaphor in the “Intention and Finesse” chapter.
3. See the “Guidelines” chapter to review the “knee-walking” concept.
4. For more about using feet to work the lateral legs and the “cobra” foot position, see the “Using Feet” chapter.
5. See note 4.