

Upper Leg Stretch and Traction

When I first learned this technique in Thailand, it was called “1-2-3 Automatic.” The numbers refer to the places where you press your foot against the upper leg, and the word “automatic” implies that by pushing the leg forward, your foot is automatically guided to the next position upward on the thigh. I always remembered the name of the technique, but I didn’t learn how to do it very well until many years later.

To do this technique gracefully and effectively, it’s important to place your foot in the correct position on the center of the thigh, to support the leg properly with both hands, to traction the leg by using your *hara* to pull it backward, and to push the leg completely forward after each stretch.



Leg and foot position

While your partner rests on her back, sit on the floor facing her body and drape your outstretched leg over one of her legs. Bend her other leg at the knee and push it forward with both hands until it reaches a right angle and her knee faces upward. Hold her ankle so the leg remains in a straight position, and slide your foot forward with toes pointing upward until it makes medium-firm contact with her upper thigh. If you lift her leg with your hands to put it in position, then you have to re-adjust your body to sit down again. Instead, consider lifting her leg with your foot. Extend your foot, bend her leg forward with your hands, and allow her bent leg to open outward so it rests near the knee on top of the medial aspect of your foot. Now lift and bend her leg inward with the inside of your foot, and hold it in place with your hands. Finally, slide your foot down the back of her leg so your heel is flat on the floor and your foot is centered against her thigh.



Keep your entire foot flat against the thigh and your heel up against the buttocks, and allow your entire sole to cradle the back of your partner’s upper leg. Your foot should be soft and free of tension in the toes. Allow your toes to bend backward for each leg pull. If the person’s leg is unstable in your hands, it probably means that your foot position should

be adjusted. Remember to bend your knee when necessary in order to soften or strengthen the touch of your foot.

As your partner's leg becomes fully extended, you can also fully extend your own leg, and lock it at the knee for the duration of the traction in that spot. Check from time to time to make sure that you always begin the technique with your partner's leg bent at a 90-degree angle. Move your body closer (or farther away) in order to block the leg at this angle.

Hand position

Hold the receiver's heel and ankle with your outside hand so the sole of her foot points toward your chest. Hold the top of her foot with your inside hand, and press your thumb against the fleshy pad below the toes at the bottom of her foot. It's easy for the leg to fall out of position and splay outward when a client is relaxed, so it's helpful to support the lateral lower calf with an extended index finger. To do this, maintain firm inward pressure with your finger to keep the leg aligned as you work.



Execution

The starting point for the first traction is with the leg at a 90-degree angle, with the bottom of your foot touching the receiver's leg, your heel on the floor, and your leg slightly bent at the knee. When you're ready, hold the foot with both hands, straighten your back, and lean backward with your arms as straight as possible. Exhale as you lean backward with your *hara*, and don't use your arm muscles to pull her leg.

Pull the leg so it extends as much as possible over your backward bent toes. When you get to a natural stopping point, hold the pressure there for five seconds or more. When you're ready to release, push the leg and knee forward with both hands, maintain pressure with your index finger to keep the leg straight, and lunge your body forward to push the thigh slightly past the previous holding spot. Fix your foot at this new spot, get into position, straighten your back, and lean backward again to extend the leg. This time, your toes will be higher up the thigh and closer to the buttocks, and her leg should open more completely than before. Again, provide traction at that spot a few seconds, and then lunge forward again with the leg to an even higher spot with your foot and toes. Her body should roll slightly forward at the sacrum so you can position your toes in the hollow at the sit bones. At this point, only the top half of your foot will be braced against her leg. Lean back again, and this time you should be able to fully extend your partner's leg with your arms fully extended and with your back straight. Remain there for some time to traction the leg, and to suspend and open the hip.

If you remain in the final position for a slightly longer period of time, you can lightly jiggle the leg by applying quick bursts of forward pressure with your toes. You can also flex your toes forward and pull the client's leg back against your foot pressure. Whatever you

do, however, don't allow your toes to slip farther outward or inward on the leg. Keep them in the center of the upper thigh or the buttocks at all times. When you are ready to finish the technique, push the leg forward one final time, slide your foot and leg to the outside, and use both hands to lower her leg and foot to the mat.

Reminders

- Rest your static leg over the extended resting leg of the receiver.
- Make sure your partner's bent upper leg is at a 90-degree angle before you begin.
- Slide your "cobra" foot firmly against your partner's upper thigh so that the entire foot makes contact. Hold the lateral leg, and press toward the center with your index finger to keep the leg from opening outward.⁵
- Always keep a slight bend in your knee so you can regulate your foot pressure.
- After every backward pull, push the leg a bit more forward and lock your foot in a higher position on the receiver's upper leg. Always return your body to an erect position before you lean backward for the next pull.
- To finish, support the leg with one hand and the foot with your other hand, remove your own leg and foot, and gracefully unfold the leg into a resting position. You can move immediately to another posture or technique, or work on the other leg in the same way.

