

Using your Elbows in Thai massage

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Thai massage therapists utilize many different parts of their body when giving treatments, and using the elbows as tools is very common. However, working with elbows can be performed on a much wider scale than it is usually presented in traditional Thai massage training programs. It has advantages and disadvantages as compared to using thumbs, palms, feet or knees.

Its main shortcoming - sensitivity, which is poorer than that of thumbs or feet, must be developed through constant practice. The best way is to practice awareness at the elbow joint. Try to place all your awareness at your elbow, leaving your forearm and hand totally relaxed and “dead.” In this way the energy will flow in both directions and it will be moderated from the elbow.

There are two main advantages of using elbows instead of thumbs. First, the elbow has a much wider surface - actually three different areas which may be used - central, inner, and outside areas. A wider surface is often more acceptable for the client, especially when working on the gluteus, the thigh or the back, where thumb pressure can sometimes be too sharp. Thumbs always have the same surface area - only the depth of pressure can be regulated. But with elbows, both the pressure and the surface area may be modified.

Secondly, the shoulder joint, which regulates the flexibility of the elbow, provides a much greater range of motion than the thumb joint. When using thumbs, our energy must pass through five different joints - (shoulder, elbow, wrist and two thumb joints) - and each of them must be properly aligned to allow maximum flow of energy. Effective elbow use, however, depends only on the relationship of the upper torso to the elbow.

Above all, what is important to remember when working with your elbows is to use your body weight, not your muscles, when you carry out all manipulations and techniques.

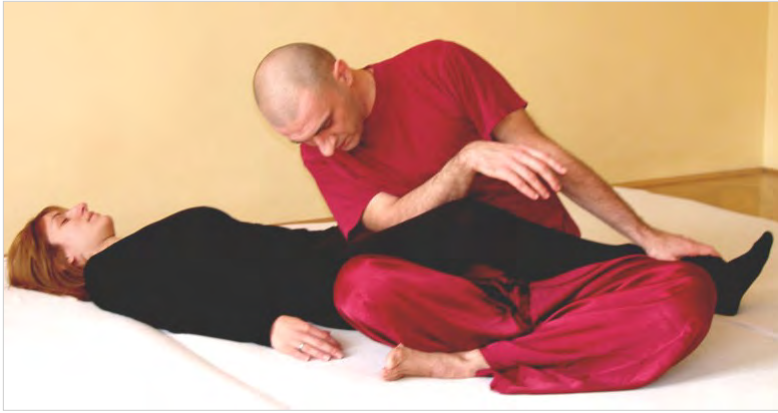
Supine position



Working on *sen sahasrangsi* on the inside leg (first inside line)

Sit cross-legged if you are taller than your client, (or on your knees if you are smaller), and place client's slightly bent leg in front of your stomach. Work on the 1st inside line on the calf with your elbow, point by point, from the ankle to the knee. When pressing, lean over her calf and gradually increase the pressure. Work along the tibia bone without pressing on the bone directly. Keep your forearm parallel with her calf.

Continue working the thigh line by leaning your torso and sinking in. It is usually better to press with the ulna bone (forearm) than with the elbow, but it depends on each client's sensitivity. When you get to the groin, work backwards to the ankle. While working on the 1st and 2nd inside lines, your *hara* should be doing the work, not your elbow, so be mindful.



Working on *sen kalatahari* on the inside leg (second inside line)

Lean into the 2nd inside line of the calf with the outside tip of your elbow. Lean in just a few inches, not directly over the calf. When pressing, lean your shoulder and torso towards the client's groin. Keep your forearm parallel with her thigh. When you get 2/3 up the thigh, begin to descend back to the ankle.

Side position

Working on *sen kalatahari* on the outside leg (second outside line)

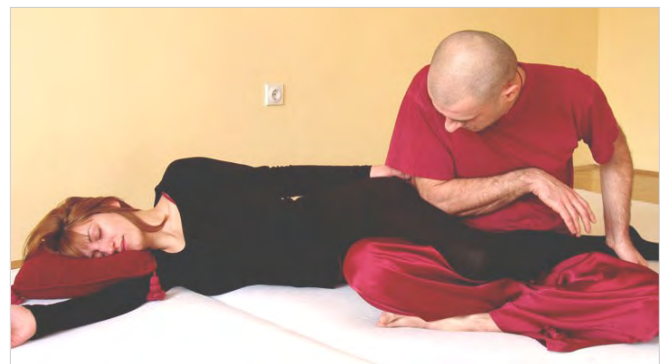
Lift client's bent leg and sit underneath it, cross-legged. Work the 2nd outside line on the calf, alongside the fibula. While pressing, lean in and concentrate on your *hara*. This is an excellent technique for treating the 2nd line of the calf, where strong energy blockages are often found.



Proceed and work the 2nd outside line on the thigh. Lean over the thigh and slightly increase the pressure. This part of the line is very sensitive, so use your forearm rather than the elbow itself. Work with your *hara*. When you reach the femoral tuberosity, go backward along the line and end at the ankle.

Working on *sen ittha/pingkhala* on the outside leg (third outside line)

Work the 3rd outside line of the calf, next to the fibula. Here we utilize "collapse mechanics." While pressing, your elbow and torso drift apart and your shoulder sinks inward. When you get close to the femoral tuberosity, go around it and then follow the line backward to the ankle.



Working on boomerang points

Sit on your knees over the client's extended leg. Place his bent leg around your waist and hold his foot with your hand behind the back. Press the boomerang points with your elbow while leaning the torso over the hip. Work with your hara.



Ittha/pingkhala on the lower back

This grip can be performed on the clients who are bigger than you. Sit on your knees 90 degrees opposite and right next to the client's stomach. Lean your body up and support the stomach with your thighs. Work the first line on the lower back with your elbow. Lean your body forward while pressing.

Working on the shoulder

Kneel behind client's back, take his arm and open it in frontal abduction. Depending of the size of his arm, support it at the upper arm or forearm. With caution, press with your elbow teres major, teres minor and part of the deltoid muscle. Lean your body slightly towards the client's arm when pressing.



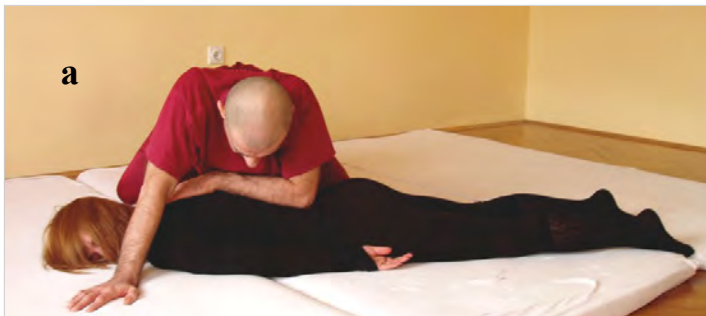
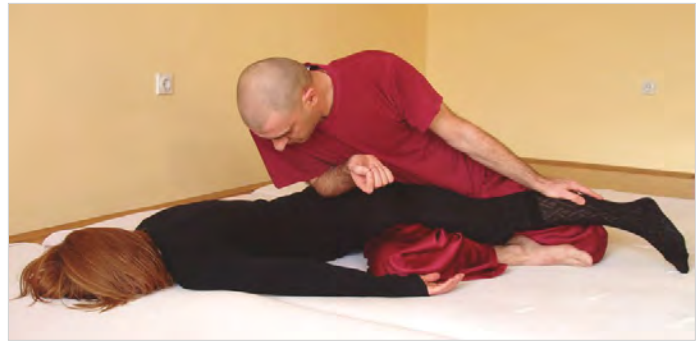
More shoulder work

From the same position, open the client's arm in lateral abduction and place it on your thighs if possible. If not, support it in the air with your arm. Lean towards the client's head and press the pectoralis muscle in a broad way using your elbow and ulna bone.

Prone position

Working the gluteus

Work the points in the hollow formed by the hip and sacrum bone. Slightly touch the bone with your elbow and then slide in and press towards the hip, leaning your torso towards the trunk. Never press directly on the bone, as nerve damage may result. This area is very sensitive, so use gradual, incremental pressure. Work on blockages in the entire gluteus area, when found.



Working on Sen Ittha/Pingkhala

Kneel with maximum leg spread, 90 degrees perpendicular to your client's trunk and lean over her back in the lowest position possible. Your back should be arched and fully relaxed. Support your upper body by placing one arm on the floor. Work the 1st line on the back with elbow all the way to the highest point on the back, and then again to the bottom.

Throughout the process, keep your forearm parallel to your spine. Always press at a 90 degree angle, never towards the spine. Use lighter pressure near kidneys.

To work on the first line on the upper back, shift your position by moving above your client's head. Use the "collapse" technique: while pressing, your shoulder sinks, your torso recedes and your elbow falls forward. Work the line from the highest point of the back to the neck and then backward.



Sitting position

Working the upper trapezius

Half-kneel behind your client, supporting her back with your thigh and trunk with her shoulder draped over your raised leg. Tell the client to relax her neck and support her head with your arm. Work the upper trapezius with the tip of your elbow from the neck to the shoulder and then backward. Stay completely relaxed as you work, and work with your client's breath.