

How to avoid injury and fatigue in work with Thai Massage.

Aleksander Skwara

In beginner's mind we have many possibilities, but in expert mind there is not much possibility.

Shunriu Suzuki Roshi

If you wake up in the morning and you feel no pain in your body, call your clients and cancel all appointments, because you gonna have a great day! But otherwise, be grateful to your clients because thanks to them you will heal yourself!

As I heard from Chance Kanfush

During our work as Thai Massage therapists we may experience temporary pain and fatigue. By not respecting our own body mechanics and applying the techniques mechanically we literally expose ourselves to injuries, pain, inflammations, fatigue and growing frustration of losing own energy. Unfortunately, this happens too often... Many therapists, after some time of work feel "burned out".

Practice of Thai Massage gives us on the other hand opportunity to develop our body consciousness, to heal ourselves and feel better! Thai Massage should be not only "yoga for the lazy client", it can be excellent yoga or Tai Chi or therapy for ourselves, for the therapist! Then, we can bring more benefit for the client because, we feel more, as our energy flow is not obscured and naturally we want to share our good feelings! It depends very much on us, on our technique, our awareness and intention.

Pichest Bhoonthume used to say: "First heal yourself!", "Feel good yourself first!", "Not buffalo work!" ...and we can see how his techniques are accurate, powerful and yet performed effortlessly, with happy smile...!

Lets take another example, everybody who experienced small children casual touch or step, knows how enormously healing and yet spontaneous, innocent and not intentional it is. They have no idea of healing, they are just playing... can our work, our technique be like that of children playing? If we want too much, if we focus too much on "fixing" the client, and doing "the right technique", we may end up with our back pain and exhaustion.

So, practically the first important thing we should consider is our position. On it depends how we apply our body mechanics, its principles of body weight and leverage. On position depends also our health because, that's how we spend many hours, days and years of our life. Finally, on position depends effectiveness of our treatment, because it lets us to have access to and to feel different parts of clients body.

There are few basic positions to work in Thai Massage: kneeling (Japanese sitting), half kneeling (one knee up), step forward (with the other leg knee on the floor), squat sitting etc. each of them with variations.

Regardless of which position we are choosing at giving moment, let's try to make it:

- SAFE and COMFORTABLE for ourselves,
- possible TO STAY LONG TIME in it,
- giving us EASY ACCESS to client's body part we work on,
- giving possibility to apply PROPER AMOUNT OF FORCE through our body weight or leverage.

Finally, the technique we apply in such position should be EQUALLY THERAPEUTIC for us and the client.

The POSITION we work depends on several factors:

- what technique are we going to apply (pressing, pulling, squeezing, using palm, thumb, elbow, etc)
- how hard we need to press
- proportions of our body, versus client's body
- our physical abilities/disabilities
- the ankle we are applying technique

The effectiveness and safety of our work depends also on our sense of DISTANCE. If we are too far or too close, the technique might be ineffective and we might experience discomfort.

As a general rule of work in Thai Massage, especially for pressing techniques, we must keep ARMS STRAIGHT, BACK and SHOULDERS RELAXED and use our BODY WEIGHT instead of physical force. However in order to do that properly, certain degree of flexibility is required. It is difficult to keep arms straight and relaxed when we are too stiff. We can easily create tension which is not good neither for us nor for the client. Therefore, Yin Yoga style stretching for arms, wrists and shoulder can be very helpful for the therapist. Practicing it can prevent from strains as well as cure ones. Yin Yoga works mainly with connecting tissue, we stay long time (3 - 5 min.) in positions, relaxing and letting the gravity to do the work. It is therefore similar to Thai Massage principles and can be excellent preparation for work with the client.

It is COMMON MISTAKE to HOLD OUR BACK, BENDING over client. One cannot stay long time in position like this. It is better to drop our back in the easiest position, near the area we work.

Sometimes it is much easier to access some areas of client's body using ONE HAND instead of two. In this way we avoid struggling to adjust ourselves in uncomfortable position and we can generate much more power.

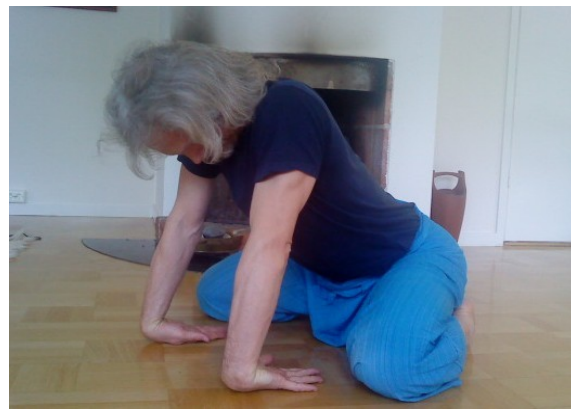
The TRANSITIONS from one position to the other are another important aspect of safety of our work. Whether performed as steps, half steps or rotations, transitions should be smooth and easy, giving us good access to work area. Positions can be connected like a chain, giving us feeling of flow like in a dance. To make transitions smooth, we must feel our center well. Then using client's body as support or our own gravity we make transition. It should be simple, logic and easy to perform.

The ANKLE and DISTANCE we work are changing from moment to moment and so, should our positions accordingly. We can take any position, whatever bizarre it might seem, as long as it suits the client and ourselves, our body safety and mechanics. Let's be creative and not stick to any stiff rules or patterns! EVERYBODY IS DIFFERENT, there are different needs and body types regarding size, flexibility, density etc. therefore we have to ADAPT our position and technique, all the time. In fact,

WE NEVER KNOW how our treatment will look like!

Because there are so many body types and conditions, our work and positions we apply can vary from person to person. Also, our own body condition and how we feel at the moment will affect our work. This NOT KNOWING and keeping an open mind will not only make it easier to feel the needs of the client, but also to heal ourselves. With a beginner's mind free of concepts we are more present in a moment, fresh and alive, more compassionate and creative.

The ENERGY LINES WORK on the legs in supine position is good training and a test for our body mechanics. The principles used there can be applied in almost all other parts and techniques of Thai Massage.



Yin Yoga for stiff wrists and arms. Adjust the distance accordingly to your possibilities. Be aware to not create tension!



There are countless variations of each position. Subtle modifications can change tremendously the effect.