

In Thai massage, we use a variety of specialized techniques. Many of these techniques are not commonly practiced in Western massage, so most people learning Thai massage for the first time will be on a fairly level field no matter what their prior training. Make sure to take the time to learn and practice each technique as it is presented in this lesson. We recommend watching both the tutorial and the live demonstrations in this lesson.

The techniques that we will be using fall into different levels of possible pressures that can be applied to the “Sen” lines or energy pathways in the body. We call this “The Pressure Spectrum”. The pressure spectrum starts with the lightest possible pressure and with each technique that we add it will get progressively deeper in pressure. You will also learn a few techniques that aren’t necessarily inside that spectrum and actually fall into a percussion technique category.

I will detail each of the techniques as well as proper areas to apply them to for safety and effectiveness. Please read over and understand each of the techniques as there will be a quiz at the end of this lesson on this written material.

## Thai Massage Techniques

### Finger Circle

The finger circle is the lightest technique used in Thai massage. It is performed by placing the fingertips onto the area that you are working. Making sure to keep the fingers fully extended (no bends in any of the finger joints) and in most cases the wrist and elbow fully extended as well. The fingers are then moved in a circle 3 times clockwise and then 3 times counter-clockwise. This technique is most often used over joints and delicate skin such as the top of the foot, around the ankles, knees, elbows, ribs, abdomen, neck and face.



## Thumb Circle

The thumb circle is slightly deeper and is applied in a similar fashion to the finger circle except with using a thumb. The thumb should be straight and it is often more comfortable and supportive to curl the fingers into a fist. It is then placed onto the area you are working and moved in a circle 3 times in both directions. This is light pressure technique and the same areas as the finger circle are recommended.



## Palm Circle

Palm circles can be deeper and are applied by placing the full palm into the area that you are working, applying gentle pressure throughout the entire hand including the fingers, and then rotating in a circle three times in both directions. This technique is ideal for mobilizing the “Lom” around the knees.



## Finger Press

Finger presses are applied by placing the pads of the fingers and with straight joints, applying firm, even pressure directly down into the tissue. The press techniques are used in areas of muscles and thicker tissue such as the soles of the feet, calves, quadriceps, hamstrings, gluteal, pectoral, shoulders, upper arms, and the muscular areas in the forearms and back.



## Thumb Press

Using a straight thumb it is placed on the work area and pressed in while angling the pressure into the center of the area. We will cover angling pressures for proper body mechanics in a later lesson. It is important to note that while thumb pressing the thumb joints should not bend or hyper-extend.



If you have difficulty with your thumb hyper-extending, I recommend using one of the variations.

### **Thumb Press Variations (Braced Thumbs)**

For weak and unstable thumbs using a braced thumb technique can be a better option. Placing one thumb onto the work area and the other thumb on top of the first thumb, you can have a better supported and more effective thumb press. There are two main positions to place braced thumbs. One is with the thumbs at a 90-degree angle to one another. The second is with the thumbs in a parallel line facing one another.





## **Palm Press**

A palm press is a very common technique used in Thai massage. The entire hand is placed and then pressed into the work area. Firm, even pressure through the entire hand including the fingers is vital. Also, don't allow the wrist to hyper-extend or the elbow to bend while pressing.



## **Palm Press Variation (Palm Over Palm)**

This variation is with one palm braced on top of the other for more stability and added pressure.



### **Palm Press Variation (Thumb Underneath Palm)**

A variation using a flat thumb underneath a palm can create a more stable and comfortable pressure technique.



### **Forearm Press**

With a bent elbow place the inside part of the forearm directly down into the tissue. Make sure the palm is facing down toward the massage mat. Lean your body weight into the forearm to create the press. This technique is especially effective in the bigger muscle groups (thicker areas) of the body.



## Elbow Press

Fully bending the elbow, the elbow point is placed and pressed into the area. To release this technique, the elbow is left in the area while the practitioner extends their lower arm gradually relieving the pressure. This allows for a smoother and less jarring technique. This technique is effective in the soles of the feet, hamstrings, gluteal area, and in the muscles in between the shoulder blade and the spine.



## Deeper Pressure Techniques

For beginning students, we will be using the next three techniques in the soles of the feet only. Please make sure that you are being safe and are in control when practicing these techniques. Ask for constant feedback from the recipient. The feet are generally ideal for these deepest pressure techniques since the soles of the feet bear a person's entire body weight when we walk around. Instances where this won't be the case is when the person you are working on has problems with their feet. Generally, the two most notable problems are;

**Inflexibility**, if the top of the receiver's foot doesn't lie flat on the mat when they are positioned prone (on their stomach) you won't be able to perform this technique on them.

**Inflammation problems**, most commonly people will refer to this as Plantar Fasciitis, in this case they will feel a lot of pain when you apply the pressure. You can still do the technique but make sure that you have constant feedback and don't apply deep pressure (i.e. don't put your full body weight into the press) instead add gradual pressure keeping within a range where it doesn't hurt them.

## Knee Press

In a kneeling position, place a bent knee in the arch of the receiver's foot and gradually press straight down. Make sure that you only press with one knee at a time while the knee that isn't working provides balance. Your hands can also be used as balance points by placing them on the mat or gripping the backs of the client's ankles.



## Foot Press

This technique requires the practitioner to be standing while applying pressure into the arch of the receiver's foot with the arch of their foot. It is very important to be in complete control and properly balanced. If you cannot balance with your weight on one foot, do not do this technique. Even so, learning to balance on the softness of the mat can be challenging. My best advice is to go very slow, be very mindful, and make sure you have control of the technique all the way through. If you trip and fall on the receiver, they might not want you to practice on them ever again!

You will start this technique standing between your client's feet facing away from them. Placing your full weight into the foot that is furthest away from the foot you will be pressing, lift your foot that is closest to their foot and place your arch across theirs with your toes pointing towards the side of the mat.

\*Please watch the video demonstration before you try this\*





## Heel Press

Staying in the same position as with the foot press, the heel is placed into the arch of the client's foot instead. This is the deepest technique that can be used by a practitioner because their full body weight can be applied into the point of their heel.



# Additional Techniques

## Forearm Roll

Similar to a forearm press, the forearm will be placed palm down in the hamstrings just above the back of the knee. The practitioner will lean their body weight forward and allow the forearm to roll until their palm is facing up. To continue this technique, the forearm is replaced in the starting position of palm down then rolling palm up with each pass.



Figure 1



**Figure 2**



**Figure 3**

## Thai Fist

A percussion technique, the Thai fist is used to break up stagnant “Lom”. It is only applied to large muscle areas and never on bones or joints. It is performed with the practitioner making a loose fist. With a relaxed wrist, the forearm is bent and then extended while allowing the fingers side of the fist to impact the tissue. A loose wrist is key to properly performing this technique. If you keep a stiff wrist, the client will feel like you are punching them rather than lightly percussing the area.



## Thai Chop

Probably one of the most stylized and well-known Thai massage techniques, the Thai Chop is another percussion technique. The Thai chop is performed with the practitioner's palms placed together with the fingers fully extended and spread apart. Elbows will be out at a 90-degree angle to the palms. The fingers are then shook forward toward the client's body causing the fingers to impact the work area and to "smack" into each other. This causes the signature sound of the Thai Chop a resounding smacking noise. Don't worry, this is not as painful as it sounds. The noise is mostly made from the sound of your fingers smacking into one another.



Figure 1





**Figure 2**