

## 12. Upper limb techniques: shoulders, arms, wrists, fingers

### Upper Limb Protocols: Shoulders, Arms, Wrists, and Fingers

#### Introduction: The Instruments of Action and Expression

In the philosophical framework of Ayurveda, the arms and hands are classified as *Karmendriyas*—the primary organs of action. They are the instruments through which we interact with the world, execute our intentions, and express our creativity. In Kalarippayattu, the upper limbs are the conduits for wielding weapons, for grappling, and for delivering precise strikes. Their health is, therefore, paramount.

The upper limbs, particularly the shoulder girdle, possess an extraordinary range of motion, but this mobility comes at the cost of stability, making the region highly susceptible to tension, injury, and the accumulation of stress. This chapter provides the systematic *Kalari Uzhichil* protocols for treating the entire upper limb chain: the complex shoulder girdle (*Amsa*), the powerful arms (*Bahu*), the intricate wrists (*Manibandha*), and the sensitive hands and fingers (*Hasta*). By releasing blockages in this chain, we not only restore physical function but also enhance our capacity for effective and heartfelt action in the world.

#### 1. The Shoulders (*Amsa*): Where Burden is Held

The shoulder girdle is a complex anatomical crossroads where the arm connects to the torso. It is a common repository for emotional and mental stress, which manifests as tightness in the large muscles of the upper back and chest, leading to restricted movement and pain.

[Image showing the anatomy of the shoulder girdle, including the scapula, clavicle, and humerus.]

##### Anatomical and Therapeutic Focus

- **Structures:** The glenohumeral (ball-and-socket) joint, scapula (shoulder blade), clavicle (collarbone), and the powerful surrounding muscles: trapezius, deltoids, rhomboids, rotator cuff group, and pectorals.
- **Goals:** To dissolve deep-seated tension in the neck and upper back, increase the shoulder's range of motion, alleviate conditions like frozen shoulder (*Apabahuka*), and open the chest to facilitate deeper breathing and better heart function (*Prana Vayu* circulation).

##### Protocols and Techniques

Work on the shoulders is meticulously performed in prone, supine, and seated positions.

1. **Prone Position:** This position offers unparalleled access to the posterior shoulder muscles.
  - Apply deep, downward strokes with the palm or forearm, moving from the base of the skull, along the upper trapezius fibers, and fanning out to the acromion (the bony tip of the shoulder).
  - Use reinforced thumbs or knuckles to “strip” the muscles running along the medial border of the scapula (the rhomboids and middle trapezius), releasing tension between the shoulder blades.
2. **Supine Position:** This allows for work on the anterior shoulder and chest.
  - Perform broad, sweeping strokes from the sternum outwards across the pectoral muscles and onto the anterior deltoid. This counteracts the tendency to slouch and opens the heart center (*Anahata Chakra*).
  - Gently perform passive range-of-motion exercises: stabilize the shoulder with one hand while moving the arm through flexion, abduction, and gentle internal/external rotation to lubricate the joint.
3. **Seated Position:** This is ideal for finishing the shoulder work with precision.
  - The practitioner stands behind the seated recipient and uses a deep kneading or C-clamp grip to squeeze and release the upper trapezius muscle, melting away the most common knots.

## Key Marma Points

- **Amsa Marma:** A 1-*angulam* point located at the midpoint of the trapezius, between the neck and the shoulder joint. It is a primary point for relieving neck and shoulder stiffness and headaches.
- **Amsaphalaka Marma:** A 1-*angulam* point situated on the mid-scapula. It governs the neuro-muscular control of the arm and has a reflex effect on the lungs.
- **Kakshadhara Marma:** A 1-*angulam* point located deep in the center of the armpit (*axilla*). As it protects a major neurovascular bundle and lymphatic nodes, it must be stimulated with extreme care and only gentle, pumping pressure. It is vital for lymphatic drainage of the arm and breast tissue.

## 2. The Arms (*Bahu*): The Conduits of Power

The upper arm and forearm act as levers, transmitting power and intention from the body's core to the hands. Repetitive motions, whether in daily work or athletic training, can lead to muscular fatigue and strain.

### Anatomical and Therapeutic Focus

- **Structures:** The humerus (upper arm bone), radius and ulna (forearm bones), and their corresponding muscle groups: biceps and triceps (upper arm), and the flexors and extensors (forearm).
- **Goals:** To relieve muscular fatigue, flush out metabolic waste, treat repetitive strain conditions like tennis elbow (lateral epicondylitis) and golfer's elbow (medial epicondylitis), and ensure the smooth flow of *Prana* through the arm's energy channels.

### Protocols and Techniques

1. **Long, Integrated Strokes:** The foundation of arm work is the continuous, flowing stroke (*Uzhichil*) that covers the entire length of the arm, from the wrist to the shoulder, and sometimes integrating into the neck. This is performed on all aspects of the arm (anterior, posterior, medial, lateral).
2. **Muscle Kneading (*Pindana*):** Use a firm, C-shaped grip to grasp, lift, and squeeze the biceps and triceps muscles. This technique effectively releases deep tension and enhances circulation within the muscle belly.
3. **Forearm Stripping:** This is crucial for addressing strain. With the recipient's palm facing up (supinated), use the thumb or a soft forearm to apply slow, deep stripping strokes from the wrist to the inner elbow, targeting the flexor muscles. Turn the palm down (pronated) to repeat the process on the extensor muscles.

## Key Marma Points

- **Kurpara Marma:** The elbow joint itself, classified as a 3-*angulam* point. It is a key articulation point (*Sandhi Marma*) that controls arm movement and has systemic links to the liver and spleen.
- **Ani Marma (of the arm):** A ½-*angulam* point located approximately four fingers' width above the elbow joint on the inner side of the arm. It controls the function of the elbow's tendons and ligaments.

## 3. The Wrists, Hands & Fingers (*Manibandha & Hasta*): The Tools of Creation

The hands and wrists are masterpieces of anatomical engineering, capable of both immense strength and delicate precision. As the primary point of contact with our environment, they are rich with nerve endings and reflex points. This concluding part of the upper limb protocol is known as *Hasta Abhyanga*.

### Anatomical and Therapeutic Focus

- **Structures:** The carpal bones of the wrist, the metacarpals of the palm, and the phalanges of the fingers.
- **Goals:** To enhance wrist flexibility, alleviate symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome and arthritis, stimulate nerve endings to benefit the entire body, and release tension accumulated from constant use (e.g., typing, manual labor).



## Protocols and Techniques

1. **Wrist Mobilization:** Use the thumb and fingers to apply deep circular friction all around the wrist joint. Follow this by holding the forearm stable and gently moving the hand through its full range of motion: flexion, extension, and circumduction.
2. **Palm Massage:** Use a strong thumb to “walk” across the entire surface of the palm, paying special attention to the fleshy mounds at the base of the thumb (thenar eminence) and pinky finger (hypothenar eminence). A knuckle can be used for deeper, broader pressure in the center of the palm.
3. **Finger and Webbing Detail:** Meticulously massage each finger from its base to the tip, applying a gentle traction-pull at the end to decompress the small joints. Use a pinching motion with the thumb and index finger to massage the webbing between each digit, stimulating the *Kshipra* marma points.

## Key Marma Points

- **Manibandha Marma:** A 2-*angulam* point corresponding to the wrist joint. It is vital for dexterity and governs the creative and functional power of the hands.
- **Talahridaya Marma:** A ½-*angulam* point in the geometric center of the palm. A powerful point for calming the mind and regulating the heart and lungs (*Prana Vayu*). It is the energetic “heart” of the hand.
- **Kshipra Marma:** A ½-*angulam* point located in the fleshy webbing between the thumb and index finger (and similarly between the other fingers). *Note: The name is the same as the point on the foot.* This is a “quick-acting” point used to relieve headaches, release jaw tension, and clear stagnation in the upper body.

## Conclusion: Liberating Action and Intention

The *Kalari Uzhichil* protocol for the upper limbs is a journey from the body’s core to its periphery. By systematically releasing tension from the burdened shoulders, down through the powerful arms, and out to the tips of the creative fingers, the practitioner does more than just alleviate physical aches. They liberate the recipient’s ability to act, create, and interact with the world with an open heart and unimpeded energy. A well-treated upper body leaves one feeling light, open, capable, and ready to extend their hands to the world with purpose and grace.