



3. Core principles: pressure, direction, and intention

Core Principles in Kalari Uzhichil

1) Pressure — dose, depth, and tempo

Definition - Pressure is not just “how hard.” It is **depth × rate × contact area × time** delivered through a chosen tool (thumb, palm, forearm, heel). Changing any variable changes physiology—lymph needs light skin-stretch; fascia needs sustained, moderate depth; joints prefer traction more than compression.

Rule of thirds - Maximum working depth should stay within **one-third of the tissue thickness** under your contact. This preserves vessels and nerves around marmas and prevents capsular irritation.

Pain scale & consent - Keep perceived intensity $\leq 5/10$; if pain rises, you are recruiting guarding reflexes (unhelpful). Stay conversational: “Tell me when this reaches 4 out of 10.”

Enter-hold-exit ladder -

- **Enter** slowly (1–2 seconds) so mechanoreceptors adapt without alarm.
- **Hold** through **one to three exhalations** to let tone melt (Golgi assistance).
- **Exit** slower than entry to avoid rebound tightening.

Tempo guide (surface speed) -

- Lymph/skin: **3–5 cm/s** light stretch.
- Myofascial warm-up: **2–3 cm/s** fluent glides.
- Focal release: **0.5–1 cm/s** with minimal drift.

Tool logic -

- **Thumb** for sūkṣma marmas and small borders (precise, short lever).
- **Palm/forearm** for sthūla regions and long fascial lines (broad, energy-saving).
- **Heel/foot** for large posterior chains and decompression (deep, evenly distributed).

Thermal assist - Warm oil **38–40 °C** lowers tissue viscosity, reducing the force needed to achieve the same therapeutic depth—safer for nerves and your own joints.

Safety flags - Sudden “electric” zing (nerve), sharp stab (periosteum), or client breath-hold = back off, broaden contact, and slow tempo.

2) Direction — where the force travels and why it matters

Venous & lymph return - Work **distal → proximal** along limbs, but **clear proximal basins first** (inguinal/axillary) with light skin-stretch; then move distal fluid toward the cleared “gates.”

Fibre orientation -

- **Along-fibre** glides lengthen and hydrate; safest entry for most tissues.
- **Cross-fibre** (short, precise) is for matured adhesions—never on acutely inflamed tissue or directly over varicosities.

Joint logic -



- **Traction** (away from the joint) soothes capsules and decompresses nerves.
- **Approximation** (toward the joint) is brief and only for proprioceptive wake-up in stable joints.

Nerve glide - Nerves prefer **longitudinal, oblique loading** with limb movement. Pair ankle dorsiflexion with **Gulpha** work; pair elbow extension with **Kūrpara** holds.

Spiral lines - The body loads in spirals (thoracolumbar fascia, obliques). Use **oblique strokes** across ribs and hips to free rotation for **Vatta** turns and weapon forms.

Energetic axes - Start midline (**Suṣumṇā** sweep heel→occiput), then balance left/right (**Idā-Piṅgalā** with mirrored paraspinal glides), then address local marmas. Direction here is **central → lateral → focal**.

3) Intention — the quiet variable that changes outcomes

Definition - Intention is the therapist's **aim + state + attention** embedded in touch. In Kalari, the ethical frame is **ahimsā** (non-harm) and **sattva** (clarity).

Breath coupling - Begin deeper phases **on the client's exhale**; it signals safety to the nervous system. Keep your own breath audible and even; clients entrain subconsciously.

Clarity of aim - Pick **2-6 marmas** only; name your priority (e.g., "calm chest," "free sciatic glide"). Fewer, clearer targets create stronger systemic change.

Language & feedback - Short cues ("slow exhale... stay with warmth") reduce cognitive load. Ask for **one-word check-ins** (warm/cool, heavy/light) to steer dose without breaking the parasympathetic flow.

Endings matter - A **quiet crown or Hṛidaya hold** for 2-3 breaths "seals" autonomic gains; rushing off the table invites rebound tension.

4) Putting it together — three common scenarios

A) Cold low back with tight hamstrings (Vāta pattern) -

- **Pressure** - moderate, sustained; warm oil.
- **Direction** - distal→proximal leg glides, heel traction at sacrum; finish with midline sweep.
- **Intention** - grounding; long exhales; *Talahridaya* → *Gulpha* → *Ūrvi* then brief *Nābhi* spiral.
- **Expected shift** - lumbar warmth, slower breath, easier forward fold.

B) Hot shoulder tendinopathy (Pitta pattern) -

- **Pressure** - light-moderate, even tempo; avoid friction.
- **Direction** - along-fibre cuff glides, scapular upward-rotation support; avoid anterior capsule jamming.
- **Intention** - cooling and space; *Sthapanī* feather circles at close; coconut-manjistha oil.
- **Expected shift** - heat disperses, smoother abduction, no post-session flare.

C) Heavy legs with desk edema (Kapha pattern) -

- **Pressure** - light but brisk; brief *podī-kizhi* before holds.
- **Direction** - clear inguinal basins → distal→proximal calf/ankle → ankle pumps.
- **Intention** - lighten and mobilise; finish seated to avoid drowsiness.
- **Expected shift** - reduced heaviness, livelier gait.



5) Calibration drills for therapists

Pressure ladder - On a sandbag, deliver levels **2, 4, 6/10** with thumb, palm, and forearm; partner identifies the level blind. Train until your self-rating matches their report.

Direction compass - Tape arrows on a practice limb (along-fibre, cross-fibre, oblique). Perform each and note tissue feel and client descriptors; this builds a felt vocabulary.

Intention minute - 60 seconds of nasal breathing before sessions; set one sentence of aim (“free left shoulder rotation”). Recheck after the session—did choices match aim?

Summary Tables

A) Pressure decision grid

Tissue/Target	Primary goal	Depth & tempo	Best tool	Stop sign
Skin/lymph	Drain & calm	Feather-light, 3-5 cm/s	Palm pads	Pink streaking, itch
Superficial fascia	Hydrate & slide	Light-moderate, 2-3 cm/s	Palm/forearm	Guarding, breath-hold
Muscle belly	Tone reset	Moderate, hold on exhale	Forearm/palm	Sharp local pain
Tendon edge	Remodel	Short cross-fibre, slow	Thumb	“Electric” zing
Joint capsule	Decompress	Gentle traction, no jab	Heel/forearm	Pinch, instability
Sūkṣma marma	Neurovascular ease	Light, oblique, brief	Thumb pad	Numbness/tingle ↑
Agni marma	Autonomic settle	Broad, indirect	Palm	Nausea, chest unease

B) Direction cheat-sheet

Goal	Direction choice	Why it works
Reduce swelling	Distal→proximal after proximal “clear”	Uses valves/lymphangions
Free rotation	Oblique spirals across trunk/hip	Matches fascial helices
Ease nerve drag	Longitudinal with limb motion	Encourages nerve glide
Calm chest	Midline sweep sacrum→crown	Organises axis & breath

C) Intention checklist

Moment	Therapist action	Client cue you want
Before depth	One minute breath, set aim	Shoulders drop, longer exhale
During hold	Quiet counting on exhale	Jaw softens, pulse eases under thumb
After work	Crown/heart seal, silence	Still gaze, warm hands/feet

D) Dosha-guided dosing at-a-glance

State	Temperature	Tempo	Point emphasis
Vāta ↑ (cold, erratic)	Warm	Slow	Talahridaya, Gulpha, Ūrvi, Nābhi
Pitta ↑ (hot, sharp)	Cool-neutral	Even	Sthapanī, Hṛidaya (broad), Ani (light)
Kapha ↑ (heavy, dull)	Warm-hot (brief)	Brisk	Gulpha, Jānu, Indrabasti



Key take-aways

1. **Pressure is dosage**—enter slow, hold on exhale, exit slower; never exceed the tissue's one-third depth.
2. **Direction is strategy**—clear proximals first; follow fibres for safety, use obliques for rotation, and traction for joints.
3. **Intention is the multiplier**—a calm, focused therapist with a clear aim turns the same strokes into reliable therapeutic change.

Use this triad—**pressure, direction, intention**—as your moment-to-moment compass, and every Uzhichil session becomes targeted, ethical, and reproducible.

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