

9. Body positioning: prone, supine, lateral, and seated

Body Positioning in Kalari Uzhichil: Prone, Supine, Lateral, and Seated

This chapter delves into the four primary positions used in a traditional *Kalari Uzhichil* session: **prone** (face down), **supine** (face up), **lateral** (on the side), and **seated**. Understanding the biomechanical, energetic, and therapeutic rationale behind each position is fundamental for the student practitioner (*Abhyangi*) to deliver a safe, effective, and truly holistic treatment. Correct positioning ensures muscular relaxation, joint stability, and optimal exposure of the body's surfaces, allowing the practitioner to employ long, flowing strokes (*Kai Uzhichil*) and targeted pressure (*Marma Chikitsa*) without obstruction.

1. The Prone Position (Adhomukha Sthiti - अधोमुख स्थिति)

The prone position involves the recipient lying flat on their stomach, with the head turned to one side and arms resting alongside the body or extended forward. It is often the initial position in a full-body *Uzhichil*.

Therapeutic Significance

The prone position provides unparalleled access to the entire posterior aspect of the body, which houses critical structures and energy pathways.

- **Anatomical Access:** It exposes the entire length of the spine, from the cervical to the sacral region, the powerful posterior muscles of the legs (hamstrings, gluteals, gastrocnemius), the shoulder girdle (trapezius, rhomboids), and the soles of the feet.
- **Marma & Nadi Focus:** This position is crucial for stimulating key *Marmas* along the spinal column, such as the *Kukundara Marma* (on the sacroiliac joints) and the *Amsaphalaka Marma* (on the scapula). It allows the practitioner to work along the *Sushumna Nadi* (the central energy channel corresponding to the spine), promoting the upward flow of *Prana*.
- **Dosha Balancing:** The long, deep strokes applied in this position are particularly effective for pacifying *Vata Dosha*, which is associated with the nervous system and movement. The downward pressure helps to ground energy, alleviating anxiety, restlessness, and nervous tension.

Technique and Application

- **Recipient's Posture:** The recipient should lie flat, with a small pillow or folded towel under their ankles to prevent hyperextension of the lower back. The head is turned to one side, and it's important to switch the head's direction halfway through the work on the back to ensure even stretching of the neck muscles. Arms can be placed alongside the body with palms facing up or stretched comfortably overhead.
- **Practitioner's Stance:** The *Abhyangi* often stands at the head or the feet of the recipient to perform long, sweeping strokes along the entire length of the body. For more targeted work on the back or legs, the practitioner will kneel or stand alongside the recipient, using their body weight to apply consistent and deep pressure.
- **Common Techniques:** This is the primary position for applying long, rhythmic strokes from the heels up to the neck, warming up the muscles and preparing the body. Deep friction is applied to the gluteal and trapezius muscles, and specific thumb or finger pressure is used to stimulate the *Marmas* along the spine.

Precautions

- **Pregnancy:** The prone position is contraindicated for pregnant women beyond the first trimester.
- **Respiratory/Cardiac Issues:** Individuals with severe breathing difficulties or certain heart conditions may find this position uncomfortable.
- **Recent Abdominal Surgery:** Avoid this position to prevent pressure on the surgical site.

2. The Supine Position (Uttana Sthiti - उत्तान स्थिति)

The supine position, where the recipient lies on their back, is the counterpart to the prone position, allowing access to the entire anterior aspect of the body.

Therapeutic Significance

This position shifts the focus to the body's receptive and vital frontal structures.

- **Anatomical Access:** It provides complete access to the face, neck, chest (*Uras*), abdomen (*Udara*), and the anterior muscles of the limbs (quadriceps, tibialis anterior, biceps, pectorals).
- **Marma & Nadi Focus:** The supine position is essential for working on some of the most powerful *Marmas*, including the *Hridaya Marma* (heart center), *Nabhi Marma* (navel center), and *Basti Marma* (bladder region). It facilitates work on the *Ida* and *Pingala Nadis* as they ascend through the front of the body.
- **Abdominal Work:** A key element of *Kalari Uzhichil* is the abdominal massage, performed only in the supine position. This stimulates digestion (*Agni*), aids in detoxification, and releases emotional tension often stored in the gut. Clockwise circular strokes are used to follow the path of the large intestine.

Technique and Application

- **Recipient's Posture:** The recipient lies flat on their back. A small bolster or rolled towel placed under the knees can significantly relieve lower back tension and help relax the abdominal muscles. The arms rest comfortably at the sides, palms facing up, in a receptive posture.
- **Practitioner's Stance:** The *Abhyangi* will typically work from the side, kneeling or sitting to perform abdominal massage and chest work. For the limbs, the practitioner may stand at the recipient's feet or side to apply long strokes.
- **Common Techniques:** Gentle massage of the face and neck, deep circular massage of the abdomen, long strokes along the arms and legs, and specific pressure on the *Marmas* of the chest and pelvis. Joint mobilization techniques for the hips, knees, and shoulders are also effectively performed in this position.

Precautions

- **Late-Stage Pregnancy:** In late pregnancy, lying flat on the back can compress the vena cava, so this position should be modified with pillows to create a semi-reclined angle.
- **Acid Reflux (GERD):** Individuals with severe acid reflux may be uncomfortable lying flat; elevating the upper body is recommended.

3. The Lateral Position (Parsva Sthiti - पार्श्व स्थिति)

The lateral recumbent position, where the recipient lies on their right or left side, is a versatile and crucial component of a comprehensive *Uzhichil* treatment. The recipient lies on one side, typically with the bottom leg straight and the top leg bent at the knee and hip, supported by a bolster.

Therapeutic Significance

This position provides access to areas that are difficult to reach in prone or supine positions. A full treatment involves working on one side and then having the recipient turn over to repeat the sequence on the other side.

- **Anatomical Access:** It offers excellent access to the lateral aspect of the neck (scalenes, sternocleidomastoid), the outer shoulder (deltoid), the side of the torso (latissimus dorsi, obliques), and, most importantly, the entire outer leg and hip complex (tensor fasciae latae, IT band, gluteus medius).
- **Marma & Nadi Focus:** Key *Marmas* on the lateral side of the body, such as the *Kakshadhara Marma* (in the armpit) and the *Lohitaaksha Marma* (at the hip flexor), become accessible. It allows for comprehensive work on the



energy lines running along the sides of the limbs.

- **Therapeutic Application:** This position is particularly beneficial for treating sciatic pain, hip bursitis, and tension in the iliotibial (IT) band. It allows for safe and effective stretching and mobilization of the hip and shoulder joints.

Technique and Application

- **Recipient's Posture:** The recipient lies on one side. A pillow should support the head to keep the neck in a neutral position. A bolster is placed between the knees and ankles, which supports the top leg, prevents rotation of the lumbar spine, and keeps the pelvis stable.
- **Practitioner's Stance:** The practitioner works from behind or in front of the recipient, using their hands, forearms, and sometimes feet to apply pressure along the lateral line of the body. The stable base provided by this position allows the practitioner to apply significant, controlled pressure to the hip and thigh muscles.
- **Common Techniques:** Long, gliding strokes along the side of the body from the ankle to the armpit. Deep, focused pressure on the gluteal muscles and IT band. Gentle stretching of the quadratus lumborum (QL) muscle by stabilizing the pelvis and reaching for the arm.

Precautions

- **Shoulder Injuries:** Care must be taken with the bottom shoulder. Ensure it is positioned comfortably and not bearing excessive weight, especially in clients with rotator cuff issues.
- **Hip Replacements:** The practitioner must be aware of movement restrictions and avoid any deep pressure or stretching that could compromise the joint replacement.

4. The Seated Position (Upavistha Sthiti - उपविष्ट स्थिति)

The seated position is traditionally the final phase of a *Kalari Uzhichil*. The recipient sits on a low stool (*Peedam*) or on the floor, allowing the practitioner to work on the upper body from a different gravitational orientation.

Therapeutic Significance

This position focuses on the head, neck, shoulders, and upper back, providing a powerful conclusion to the treatment.

- **Anatomical Access:** It provides 360-degree access to the head, neck, and shoulder girdle. The downward pull of gravity on the arms and shoulders helps to open up the trapezius and cervical regions for deeper work.
- **Marma & Nadi Focus:** This is the primary position for stimulating the master *Marmas* of the head, including the *Adhipati Marma* (at the crown, the "soft spot" on a baby's head) and the *Sthapani Marma* (between the eyebrows). The application of herbal oils to the head (*Shiroabhyanga*) in this position is deeply calming and nourishes the sense organs.
- **Energetic & Neurological Impact:** Massaging the head and neck in an upright position has a profound effect on the central nervous system. It helps to clear mental fog, relieve headaches and migraines, and enhance sensory clarity. The session's concluding techniques in this position help to integrate the work done on the rest of the body and re-orient the recipient to a state of alert calmness.

Technique and Application

- **Recipient's Posture:** The recipient sits comfortably with a straight but relaxed spine. Their hands can rest on their thighs.
- **Practitioner's Stance:** The practitioner stands behind the recipient to work on the neck, shoulders, and upper back. They will move to the front to work on the face and certain neck muscles.
- **Common Techniques:** A combination of brisk, invigorating tapping (*Tadana*) and deep kneading of the trapezius muscles. Specific finger and thumb techniques are used to massage the scalp, temples, and neck. The session often concludes with gentle manipulation and stretching of the cervical spine.



Precautions

- **Vertigo or Dizziness:** Individuals prone to dizziness should be monitored carefully. The practitioner should use smooth, deliberate movements.
- **Cervical Spine Instability:** Extreme care must be taken with individuals who have cervical disc issues or instability. All neck movements should be gentle and within a comfortable range of motion.

Conclusion: The Symphony of Positions

A master practitioner of *Kalari Uzhichil* does not view these four positions in isolation. Rather, they are seen as sequential movements in a therapeutic dance. The transition from prone to supine, to lateral, and finally to seated is a flowing and logical progression. This sequence allows the body to be warmed, opened, stimulated, and finally integrated. Each position offers a unique therapeutic window, and by skillfully utilizing all four, the *Abhyangi* can address the recipient's physical and energetic being in its entirety. Mastering the art of positioning is, therefore, a foundational step in mastering the art of *Kalari Uzhichil* itself.