



# Auth Method

A Guide to Forearm Massage

BY SHARI AUTH



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My first massage job was at a spa. An average shift was six one-hour, full-body massages. Doing six massages a day, I quickly learned the importance of proper body mechanics and using the forearms to do massage. I began to rely on my forearms to work the entire body, reserving my hands for my client's toes, fingers, and neck.

Fifteen years later, I am still seeing six clients a day (if not more), and I do not have—nor have I had—carpal tunnel, pain in my hands, lumbago, or any other massage-related injuries. I attribute this to using my forearms to perform the vast majority of massage work and practicing good body mechanics while giving a massage.

Forearm massage wasn't part of my massage curriculum in massage school and yet I use it more than the other methods I studied. I designed the Auth Method of Forearm Massage to help professional massage therapists enjoy longer, healthier careers. As MTs, it is imperative we keep work-related injuries to a minimum. The Auth Method is a massage technique that takes the practitioner's well-being into account, as well as that of the client. It feels effortless to perform and great to receive.

Below are a few key concepts about the Auth Method, including some forearm massage techniques and a qigong exercise for better body mechanics.

#### DURABILITY

The forearms are a bodyworker's most prized tool: they are more durable than the hands, fingers, or thumbs, so you can work longer on your clients with less wear and tear on your body. This means increased career productivity and longevity. Using the forearms as the primary tool in performing massage minimizes the risk of carpal tunnel, thenar problems, or pain anywhere in the hands, simply because you are asking less of your hands. Forearms are also less "pointy" than the elbows, so the massage work you do on your clients will be smoother and more relaxing.

#### SENSITIVITY

With practice, the forearms are just as sensitive and agile as the hands, fingers,



Photographs courtesy of Shari Auth.

or thumbs. In my own experience as a massage client, I've often been snapped out of a state of total relaxation when the therapist roughly introduces an elbow and pokes around with too much pressure, bumping up against my spine or some other bony prominence.

Many people immediately associate forearm massage with deep-tissue work. This is not a rule. Forearm massage is also good for light circulatory massage.

Students of forearm massage should begin by using the forearms to do light work until they learn the nuances of this new tool. This is a safer, more practical way to develop sensitivity in the forearms. I recommend using a bit more oil than usual to account for the broader area of contact. The increased amount of oil helps to develop a relaxing glide with the forearms. With practice, the forearms can be just as sensitive as the hands, and offer an equally relaxing experience. Start out light and take it slow.

#### LEVERAGE

The forearms naturally lend themselves to doing deep-tissue work and because the surface area of contact is larger

Because the forearm surface area of contact is larger than using your fingers or thumb, you can work more of your client in less time.



than using your fingers or thumb, you can work more of your client in less time. The forearms also provide more leverage for deep-tissue massage than the smaller, more fragile fingers, thumbs, and hands. When practicing the Auth Method, it is essential to lean into the tissue; it is not necessary to push, if you are using your body weight correctly. The forearms are perfect for leaning your body weight into your client. If the table is low enough, you can just drop your body weight down onto the tissue. Pushing is exhausting and you run the risk of applying too much pressure on your client. Instead, drop your body weight onto your client. Your body will naturally drop to the first layer of tight tissue; it's like floating. As that layer of tissue releases, you will drop into the next layer of tight tissue.

Practicing the Auth Method is effortless for the practitioner. The less energy you expend during a massage, the more massages you can do a day, and the more energy you have for your life. Just remember, when doing deep-tissue work use body weight, not force, and go slow. Feel for what your client is feeling; work the most superficial layer of tight tissue first. Your client will thank you for it.

### TABLE HEIGHT

For a medium-sized body, I recommend working with a table that comes to the height of the second or third metatarsal joint of the finger. If the client is overweight and tight, or excessively muscular, I might drop the table a little lower. If the client is petite, I might take the table a little higher. The table should be low enough that you can drop your body weight onto the client and high enough that your back is straight. It's worth it to spend the extra couple of minutes before a session to adjust the table height. Better to spend the time to adjust the

table height than spend the next hour uncomfortable or overexerting yourself.

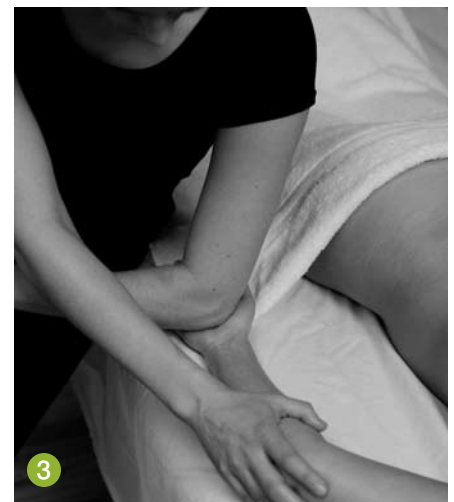
### ARM GLIDE TECHNIQUE

Position your prone client's arm to a 90-degree angle so the elbow is just below the corner of the table and the forearm is hanging off the table. Stand below the raised arm in a lunge stance parallel to the table, facing the arm. Place the upper third of your left forearm onto the top of the right tricep and glide down the tricep toward the elbow. Slow down over tight spots in the tricep. Keep most of your weight in your feet at first and gradually drop more body weight onto your client's tricep as you feel is needed. In general, the triceps do not need a lot of body weight to release when worked in this position. Your other hand is gently clapping the wrist (Image 1). Repeat this stroke as necessary on both sides.

Still clapping at the wrist or hand, pull the arm onto the table and use your forearm to glide down the inner forearm from the elbow to the wrist. As you glide down the forearm, move your other hand to the elbow. Use the other hand to traction a slight stretch on the inner forearm (Image 2). Lighten your pressure as you glide over your client's wrist and drop your elbow into the palm (Image 3). Make sure you are using enough oil to glide effortlessly. In my experience, the inner forearm and palm can withstand and enjoy a fair bit of pressure. Just be mindful to lighten your pressure over the wrist.

### QIGONG FOR BETTER BODY MECHANICS

Using my forearms has saved my hands, but what about the rest of me? Too many therapists quit the profession due to back pain. When I was getting my master's degree in Chinese medicine, I was introduced to qigong. Qigong is an ancient Chinese exercise system that couples movement with breath. The movements are slow and relaxed—the ideal pace for massage. The qigong



stance is grounded and strong in the lower body, like a tree trunk rooted to the earth, and relaxed and fluid in the upper body like tree branches flowing in the wind. The legs are spread wide with the knees bent. The back is straight and the shoulders relaxed. The arms are loose like wet spaghetti. The Auth Method teaches the following simple qigong exercise for developing good body mechanics while working.

### PRAYER WHEEL

One of the main stances in the Auth Method is the lunge stance. To learn the lunge stance and to encourage a straighter back, relaxed upper body, and



PLEASE VISIT THE DIGITAL EDITION OF THIS ISSUE ON [WWW.MASSAGEANDBODYWORK.COM](http://WWW.MASSAGEANDBODYWORK.COM) FOR VIDEO INSTRUCTION OF THE TECHNIQUES MENTIONED IN THIS ARTICLE.

grounded lower body while working, try the qigong exercise Prayer Wheel.

### Lower Body

Find some empty space outside or in your home and put on some comfortable clothing. Stand with your feet hips-width apart and slightly bend your knees. Shift your body weight into your right leg and turn your left foot out to a 45-degree angle. Shift your body weight back into your left leg (left knee is bent) and step your right foot comfortably forward. Your stance will be about 2.5-feet wide. Inhaling, bend the right knee, straighten the left knee, and shift your body weight into your right leg. Keep your back straight and your hips low. As you move forward, keep your hips on the same horizontal line, not moving up and down. Exhaling, straighten the right leg, bend the left, and shift your body weight back into your left leg. Continue this back-and-forth motion with the breath. Imagine growing roots out the bottom of your feet and inhaling up through the soles of your feet. This image will help keep you grounded in your lower body. When this motion feels comfortable, move on to incorporate the upper body.

### Upper Body

Inhaling forward, float the arms up with loose wrists until they are shoulder-height in front of you. Exhaling back, float the arms back toward your shoulders and down along your sides, keeping your shoulders relaxed through the entire movement. This makes a circular or wheel shape with the arms, hence the name Prayer Wheel. Keep your shoulders relaxed. Practice this exercise on both sides, making 10 or more Prayer Wheels. This exercise is great for teaching therapists to stay grounded in the legs and relaxed in the upper body. With time, it also slows the therapist down and reminds them to breathe.



### CHECKING IN


When it comes to good body mechanics, it's very important not to forget yourself and your needs while giving a massage. Check in with yourself while working. Are you breathing? Is your back straight? Are your shoulders relaxed? Could you be doing less and getting the same or better results? This is your time, too. At the end of the massage, if our clients are more relaxed but we are more tense, we have only succeeded in transferring tension rather than reducing it.

### BREATH HAPPENS

The same way you are conscious of your breath, remain conscious of your client's breath. Relaxation happens with the breath. The breath moves and circulates. If our clients are not breathing freely, they are like a stagnant swamp, instead of a flowing river. Your massage will be much more effective if your client is consciously breathing. I know right away if my client isn't breathing correctly because I start trying to breathe for them. This obviously doesn't work. We can't do it for our clients. Encourage your client to breathe—even if it means breaking a relaxing silence. It is essential. Encourage them to inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth. Ask your client to breathe under your hands or into an area that you are working on that is blocked. Use the client's breath as a helpful and internal tool for deeper release.

### ADVANTAGES

It takes time to develop sensitivity in your forearms, but once achieved, there are so many advantages, including more durability for increased career longevity and productivity, better leverage for leaning into the tissue and saving you energy, and increased area of contact so you can work more of your client in less time. **m&b**

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