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FSM WORKS

Why Healing Is Not a Straight Line

By Sean Durkan, BSc (Hons) Osteopathy

In my clinical work, one pattern has become very clear over the years: recovery is rarely linear. Some injuries improve quickly, while others linger, fluctuate, or seem to stall completely. Many people find themselves doing the “right things”—seeking treatment, following advice, resting or exercising appropriately—yet progress remains inconsistent or short-lived.

What I have come to understand is that recovery is not simply about the injury itself. It is about the system the injury exists within.

Most approaches naturally focus on the local problem—the tissue, the joint, the area of pain or dysfunction. While this is important, it often overlooks a more significant factor. The body does not heal in isolation; it heals within an environment.

When that environment is not functioning well, healing becomes slower, less complete, and often unpredictable.

This internal environment is what I refer to as the *terrain*. It is simply the condition your body is in on a day-to-day basis, and it determines how effectively you can heal, recover, and respond to treatment.

We see this reflected in everyday experience. When you are tired, stressed, or run down, healing takes longer. When you are well-rested, energised, and balanced, recovery tends to be faster and more efficient. It is the same body, but a different environment—and therefore a different outcome.

To make this more practical, I consider five key systems that shape this internal terrain.

The first is oxygen and circulation. Every tissue in the body relies on adequate blood flow and oxygen delivery to repair itself.

If supply is limited, healing will inevitably slow, regardless of the treatment applied.

The second is energy, specifically mitochondrial function.
Healing is an energy-demanding process. Tissue repair, inflammation regulation, and cellular communication all require energy. If energy production is reduced, the body simply cannot carry out these processes efficiently.

The third is fluid movement, particularly the lymphatic system. This system is responsible for clearing waste products, inflammatory by-products, and excess fluid from tissues. When lymphatic flow becomes sluggish, these substances accumulate, and tissues remain irritated for longer than they should.

The fourth is the nervous system. When the body is in a state of ongoing stress—often described as "fight or flight"—it prioritises survival over healing. In this state, repair processes are downregulated. A body cannot heal efficiently if its nervous system is persistently dysregulated.

Finally, **there is the tissue environment itself—muscle, fascia, and joint mechanics.** Excess tension, restriction, or pressure within tissues can reduce circulation and limit movement, further slowing the healing process.

When these systems are not functioning well, the body's ability to recover is compromised, no matter how precisely the injury is treated.

At this point, there is a simple but important shift to make.

Most people ask, "What should I use for this injury?"

A better question is, **"What state is my body in that is preventing recovery?"**

That shift changes everything, because it moves the focus away from chasing symptoms and towards understanding the environment that is shaping the outcome.

This is where the concept of the Cell Danger Response, described by Robert Naviaux, provides a useful framework. It helps explain why the body can become "stuck" in a state where healing does not progress as expected.

In simple terms, the body moves through a protective process in response to perceived threat. Initially, it detects a stressor—this may be physical injury, inflammation, or even prolonged stress—and shifts into protection mode. It then enters a defensive phase, where energy production is reduced, inflammatory processes increase, and healing slows. Under normal circumstances, the body would then transition back into a state of repair.

However, this final step does not always occur. The body may remain in this protective state even after the original issue has improved. When this happens, the system continues to behave as though it is under threat. Clinically, this is when we see lingering symptoms, slow or incomplete recovery, and repeated flare-ups.

At the centre of this process are the mitochondria—the energy-producing components of our cells. When the body remains in protection mode, mitochondrial output is reduced. The system becomes more defensive, and healing is no longer prioritised. This helps explain a common clinical frustration: even when the correct treatment is applied to the right area, the body does not always respond as expected.

In many cases, the issue is not the treatment itself, but the state of the system receiving it.

This is why my approach focuses first on improving what I call the *Stable State* --the condition in which the body is ready and able to heal.
By supporting oxygen delivery, energy production, lymphatic movement, and nervous system regulation, we create an environment where recovery becomes more predictable.

Only once this foundation is in place do more targeted interventions tend to produce consistent and lasting results.

This shift in thinking is subtle but important. Rather than repeatedly trying to force change at the site of injury, we first improve the conditions that allow the body to respond.
When the environment changes, the response changes with it.

Ultimately, healing is not something we force. It is something the body allows when the conditions are right.

Recovery becomes inconsistent when the body remains in a protective state instead of returning fully to repair. When we improve the terrain, support the Stable State, and help the system move out of protection, the body becomes more responsive. Treatments begin to hold, recovery becomes steadier, and progress is no longer unpredictable.

For those exploring structured approaches to recovery—particularly with tools such as frequency-based therapies—this understanding can make a significant difference.
When applied within a stable and supportive environment, these tools tend to work more effectively and with greater consistency.

In this sense, improving recovery is less about doing more, and more about doing things in the right order.

And when that order is respected, healing becomes not only possible—but sustainable.

Thank you, Sean