

Bowen is not designed simply to make you instantly ‘feel better’ but is designed to make you ‘heal better.’”

Article by Bowen Practitioner, ‘Lisa’ of Simply Bowen.

We often talk about the 3 W’s for after a Bowen treatment – water, walk, and wait a week – but it’s not often explained why following these are important to make the most of your Bowen treatment and feel the best results. Over the next few weeks I’ll talk about each of these, starting with “wait a week”

There was a picture with a quote going around facebook last week that said: “bowen is not designed to make you instantly **feel better**, it is designed to make you instantly **heal better**”

I wish I understood that better when I was a Bowen recipient years ago, as my injuries and posture problems probably would have resolved faster.

I’d treated so many of the Bowen treatments on me as “just the session”, expecting the session to be the resolution-time, not really understanding that the real impact on my body was going to happen in the days after the session.

I’d get off the table and expect to feel immediately different, and most times I would. But, I didn’t always give my body the time in the days after treatment to continue the adjustment process – I was training for a long hike, I wanted to do boot camp the next day – and while the practitioner said that it would be best not to, it wasn’t really with an explanation as to why... I was somehow expected to know...

Little by little my body and injuries sorted themselves, despite not giving my body the time.

It was only later, after I became a practitioner that I started to understand – and I could feel the difference with my body when giving it the time to “heal better” rather than just expecting it to immediately “feel better”

The body keeps adjusting for days following treatment, with Bowen moves giving the body the triggers for it to begin a healing process – not being the healing process itself.

Small studies have been done using blood tests and thermal imaging that show the body is still changing for about 4 days after treatment. A 2008 study (Ferguson) used medical infrared thermal imaging to monitor changes in the skin temperature of the body before Bowen treatment, and daily after – on day 4, the temperature chart had shown the body had almost returned to its pre-Bowen state. Further study (Stammers, 2012) on blood samples looking at microscopic analysis showed changes in bloodwork, with both clumping (cells sticking together) and ghosting (cell degeneration) of cells within the samples.

Net, the body experiences changes during treatment, and continues for days after.

I’ve seen many occasions where changes in the days after treatment has really shown true – many clients describing the changes over the days after treatment (including one who felt a distinct shift nearly 6 days later), but more clearly when I have been treated myself.

Last year, my body was long overdue for a Bowen session. I was busy and stressed, and hadn't looked after myself. One shoulder had dropped and fallen forward, my hip was high, caused by my body being a bit twisted thanks to a hip muscle (iliopsoas) being too tight (again – the part of my body needing regular attention), and giving my SI joint some grief with back pain – my posture wasn't good and walking wasn't comfortable, even short distances.

After my short evening Bowen session, I slept like a log. I felt (and noted) the changes happening day by day...

- The day after treatment, my shoulder was still dropped, but my back had a buzzing feeling on one side, from the shoulder blade down to the hip. It wasn't painful, but very noticeable (and a little annoying!). I went for a light walk and noticed that my feet were landing differently on each step.
- On the second day after treatment, the buzz was gone, but was replaced by a strong ache behind my shoulder blade, with my shoulders still uneven.
- On the morning of the third day, I looked in the bathroom mirror – my shoulders were level again ! That ache in my shoulder had gone, and my hip was feeling quite different as I went for a longer walk.
- On the fourth day, the front of my hips were achy. Something felt different, but not quite.
- Day 5 ? I questioned whether the planned 25km walk was wise, but I literally skipped to meet friends at the start point. For the whole day, my hip wasn't kicking out when I was walking, nothing hurt – I felt great ! (ok, except for being a bit achy after having walked that far !)

If I had done what I probably would have done in the past – gone to bootcamp or hit the gym hard within a day or 2 of treatment – then the changes that were needed wouldn't have been able to happen. I wouldn't have let them. I would have caused the continued healing and adjustment to stop at that unfinished point. My cycle of little-by-little improvement would have continued.

Why is this the case ?

Because “Bowen is not designed to make you instantly **feel better**, it is designed to make you instantly **heal better**”

Bowen moves give the body triggers to **begin** a healing process. Bowen moves influence the nervous system to relax. Bowen moves influence the muscles and fascia to bring the body into balance. And that healing process is not instantaneous... While many people don't feel those adjustments or sensations in the body, rest assured that they are still happening!

Giving the body new triggers or stimulus during that time can stop that healing process.

Having a massage or other manipulative treatment gives the body new triggers. The body will “forget” what the Bowen moves told it, taking on board the new triggers to adjust in a different direction.

Using heat pads or cold packs also gives the body new triggers. The heat pads tell the muscles to relax, the cold packs tell muscles to contract, again telling the body to ignore the triggers of the Bowen session and do something different.

Strenuous exercise, where the muscles are getting a good strong workout (and possibly ache after, or need a good stretch) will also distract the body away from the Bowen triggers. Bootcamp (as I used to do), running or contact sports will all prevent a Bowen treatment from continuing its healing process. A past client used to insist on his run and cross-fit class on the day after his Bowen treatment – and his lower back never really made much improvement.

Waiting about a week gives the body time to continue its work and settle, before giving it more stimulus.

This doesn't mean that you need to wrap yourself in cotton-wool or anything... gentle walks are great, keeping the muscles moving and active, and helping the healing process. In fact, light strengthening and stretching exercises are fantastic to reinforce the changes the body is experiencing – whether those are given by your Bowen practitioner, or done through a physio or similar. But, more on that in another post...

Of course, with all “rules” there are exceptions – and a key one is re-injury. If, on the road to recovery, something happens to cause the injury to re-occur or suddenly worsen, then don't wait until the week is up before getting help! Get help straight away!

(note – the studies mentioned above are accessible to Bowen practitioners on the BAA website)