

Remodeling of Connective Tissue

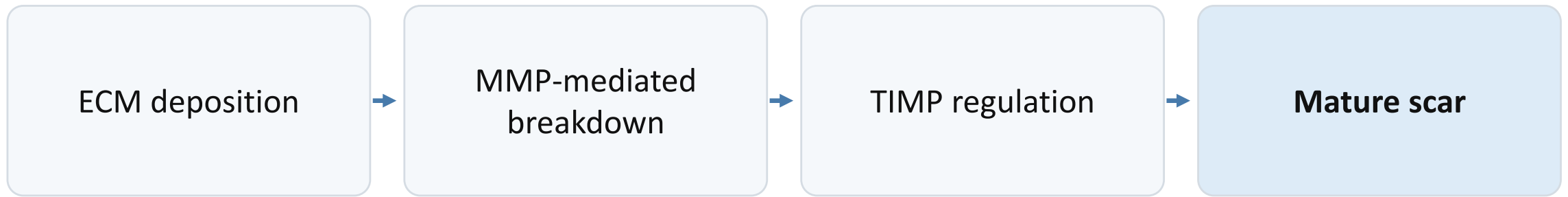
Extracellular matrix turnover, scar maturation, and wound healing

Dr Abu Suraih Sakhri

MBBS, MD (Pathology)

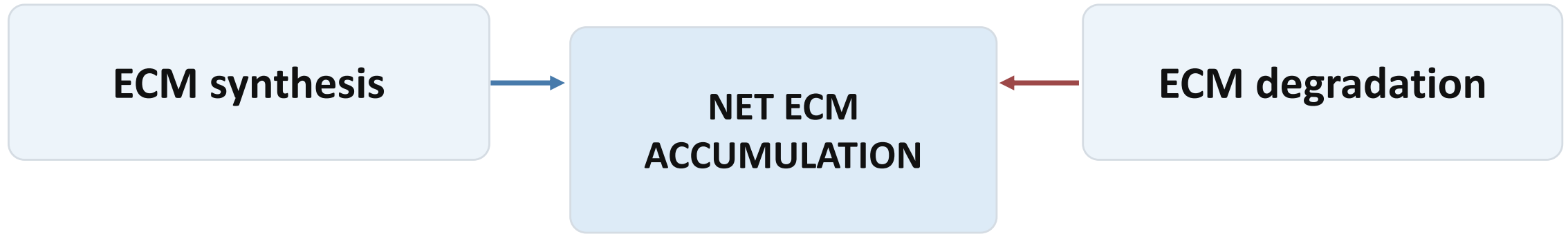
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Learning objectives



- Explain why scars continue to change after matrix deposition.
- Describe how MMP activation and TIMP inhibition regulate matrix removal.
- Apply remodeling mechanisms to scar maturation and skin-wound healing.

Connective tissue remodeling is ongoing matrix turnover



- Newly deposited scar matrix is not the final structure.
- Synthesis and degradation continue after deposition.

Remodeling is a balance—not simply continued collagen accumulation.

Regeneration restores tissue; Scarring replaces it

Regeneration

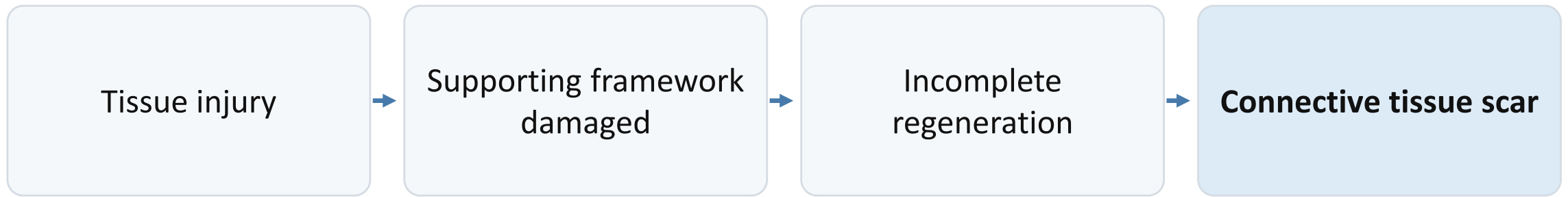
- Reconstitution of lost tissue components
- Requires viable proliferative cells
- Requires a supporting tissue scaffold

Scarring

- Replacement by connective tissue
- Prominent when regeneration is inadequate
- May preserve continuity without restoring original structure

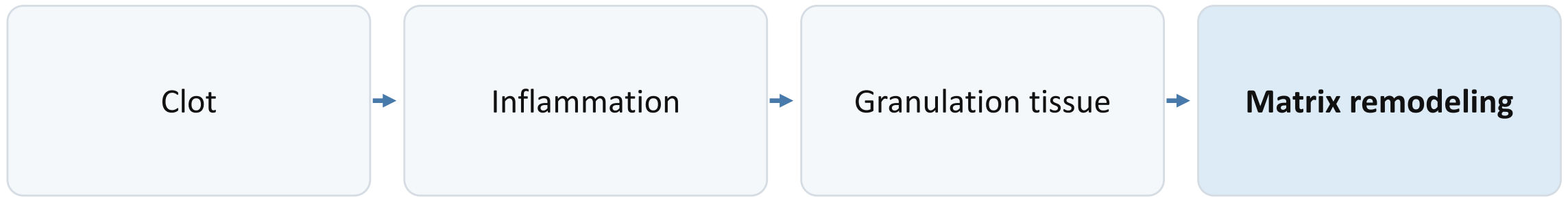
Scar formation patches tissue defects; It does not fully recreate the original architecture.

Damage to the framework redirects repair toward scarring



- An intact stromal scaffold permits orderly repopulation.
- Framework disruption impairs full architectural restoration.

Repair by scar formation has linked phases



- Processes overlap rather than functioning as isolated steps.
- Remodeling modifies the matrix generated during fibroplasia.

A hemostatic plug provides the initial scaffold

Initiation of repair

Injury



Platelet plug



Stable clot



Inflammatory recruitment

- Platelets form a hemostatic plug soon after injury.
- The plug stops bleeding and supports subsequent stable clot formation.
- It supplies the provisional setting for tissue repair.

Inflammation precedes organized matrix deposition

- Neutrophils and then monocytes enter the injured site.
- Their early role is eliminating offending agents.
- Macrophages subsequently help initiate tissue repair.

Transition from defense to repair

Neutrophils

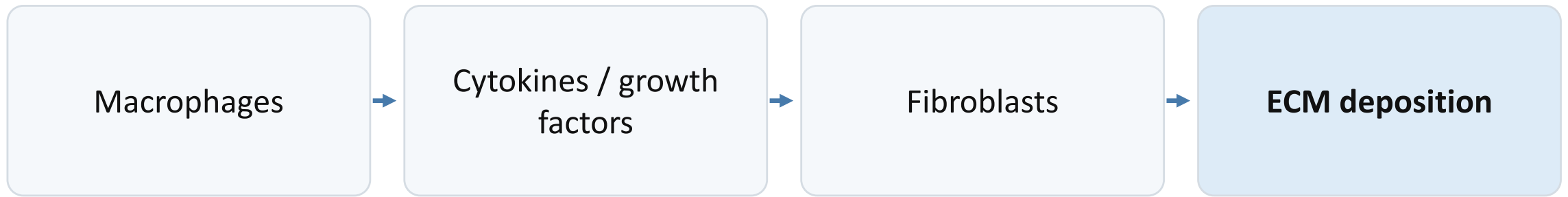


Monocytes / macrophages



Repair signals

Macrophages coordinate connective tissue repair



- Macrophages remove offending agents and release growth factors.
- Their signals recruit and activate cells that build the scar.

Granulation tissue is an intermediate repair tissue

- Contains newly formed vessels and proliferating fibroblasts.
- Has relatively loose extracellular matrix and inflammatory cells.
- Precedes a denser, less vascular scar.

Components of developing repair tissue

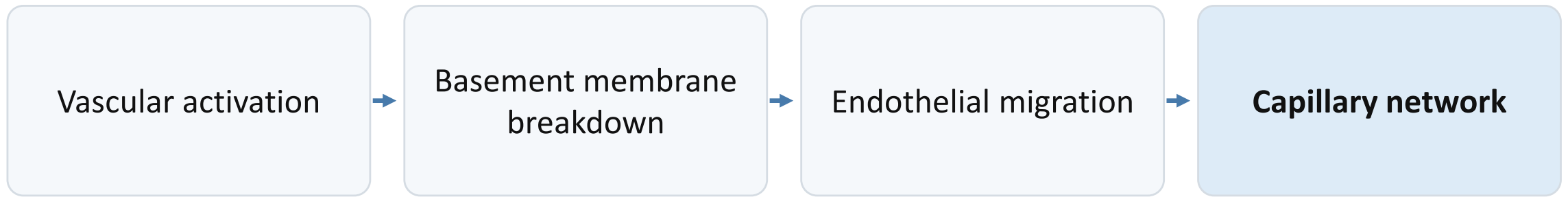
Capillary growth

Fibroblast proliferation

Loose provisional matrix

Early scar

Angiogenesis supports the evolving wound



- New vessels sprout from pre-existing vessels.
- ECM breakdown facilitates vascular sprouting.
- Maturing vessels acquire supporting periendothelial cells.

Granulation tissue gradually loses vascularity

Early granulation tissue

- Many capillary-sized vessels
- Loose matrix and edema
- Active fibroblast proliferation

Mature scar

- Progressive vascular regression
- Dense collagen-rich connective tissue
- Relatively few vascular channels

Vessel regression helps explain why a mature scar becomes paler.

Fibroblasts shift toward matrix synthesis as healing progresses

Maturation sequence

Cell-rich granulation tissue



Matrix-producing fibroblasts



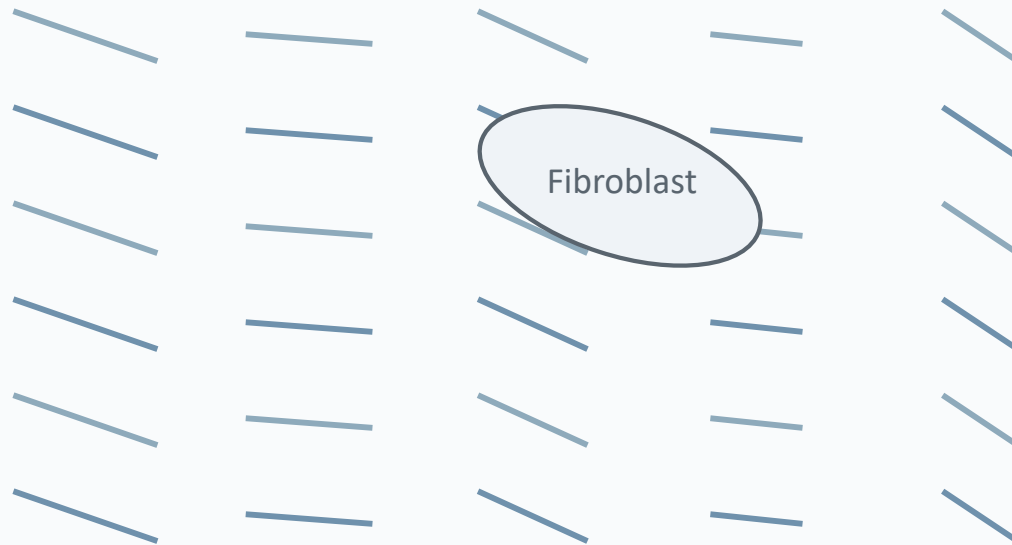
Progressive collagen deposition



Pale fibrous scar

- Proliferating fibroblasts become less numerous over time.
- Remaining fibroblasts assume a more synthetic phenotype.
- Extracellular matrix accumulates while new-vessel density falls.

Collagen deposition contributes to wound strength



- Collagen is a major structural component of the scar.
- Increasing collagen deposition supports developing strength.
- A collagen-rich scar differs from the original functional tissue.

Strength is gained by extracellular matrix deposition and maturation.

Extracellular matrix is more than collagen

Major ECM constituents discussed

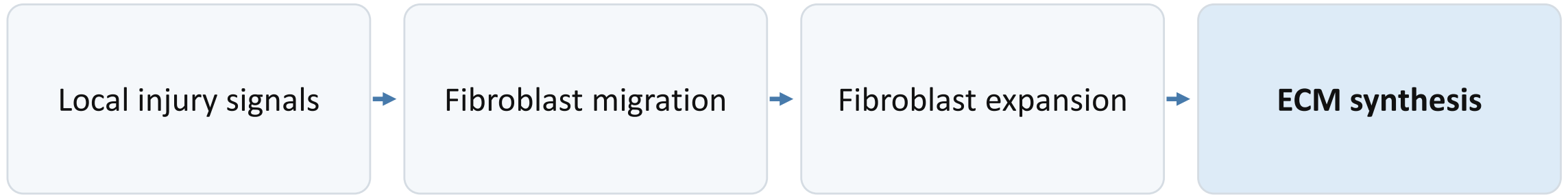
Collagen

Fibronectin

Laminin / proteoglycans

- Connective tissue contains collagen and noncollagenous proteins.
- Fibronectin, laminin, and proteoglycans are matrix constituents.
- Their turnover is part of connective tissue remodeling.

Scar formation first requires fibroblast recruitment



- Local signals draw fibroblasts to the area of injury.
- Fibroblast migration precedes substantial matrix accumulation.

Fibroblast proliferation expands matrix-producing capacity

Cellular response

Local growth factors



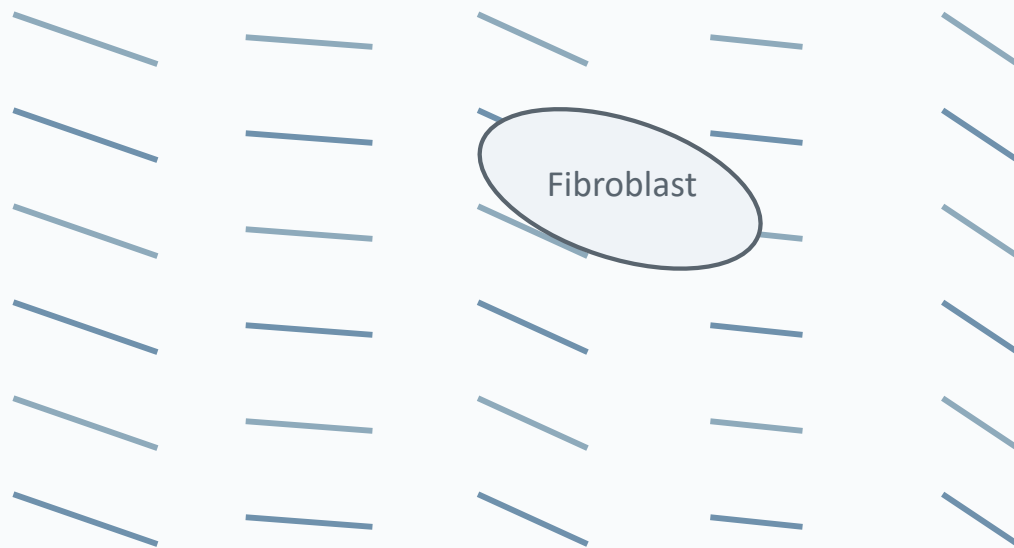
Fibroblast proliferation



Larger synthetic cell population

- PDGF, FGF-2, and TGF- β participate in fibroblast responses.
- Growth factors arise locally, especially from inflammatory cells.
- Proliferating fibroblasts supply the cells that synthesize ECM.

Fibroblasts assemble the developing scar matrix



- Fibroblasts deposit collagen and other ECM proteins.
- The initial matrix is subsequently remodeled and reorganized.
- Remodeling is therefore downstream of matrix synthesis.

Fibroblasts supply the substrate on which later remodeling acts.

Repair signals arise from multiple local cells

Paracrine control

Macrophages / mast cells



Local cytokines



Fibroblast activation



Matrix deposition

- Inflammatory cells, particularly macrophages, supply growth factors.
- Mast cells and lymphocytes can also contribute at inflamed sites.
- Their mediators shape the fibroblast response.

PDGF and FGF-2 participate in fibroblast responses

PDGF

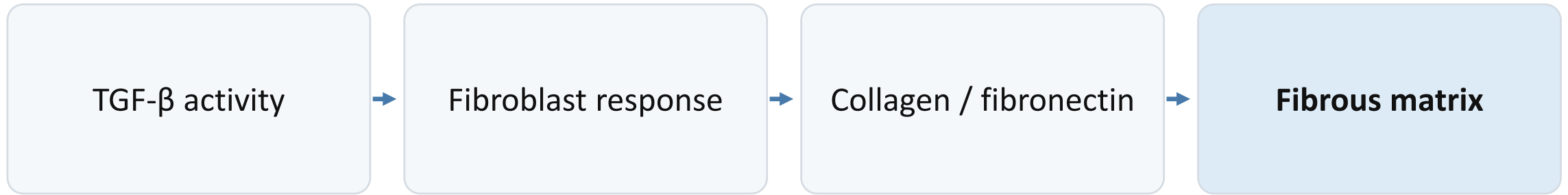
- Supports fibroblast recruitment / proliferation
- Also recruits vascular support cells during vessel maturation

FGF-2

- Promotes fibroblast responses at injury sites
- Also contributes to endothelial proliferation and repair

Several growth factors act together; Connective tissue deposition is not controlled by one signal.

TGF- β is a major fibrogenic regulator

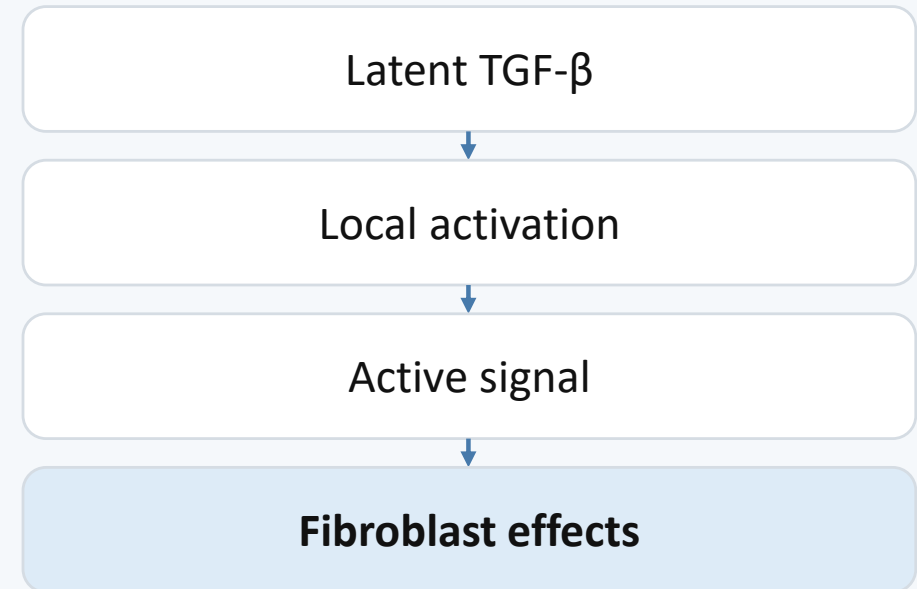


- TGF- β promotes connective tissue protein synthesis and deposition.
- It contributes to both normal scarring and chronic fibrotic responses.

TGF- β activity depends on activation of latent stores

- The source emphasizes post-transcriptional control of TGF- β activity.
- Activation of latent TGF- β is a key regulatory step.
- ECM interactions, including integrins and microfibrils, modify activity.

Control before downstream signaling



TGF- β promotes fibroblast recruitment and expansion

Fibroblast effects of TGF- β

TGF- β

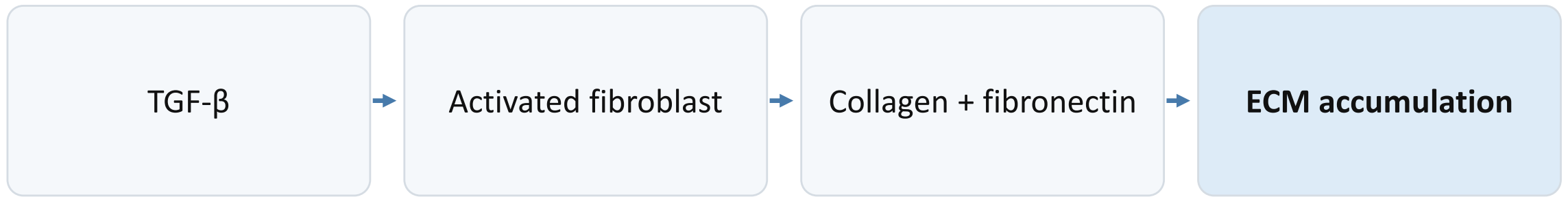
Migration

Proliferation

Increased ECM synthesis

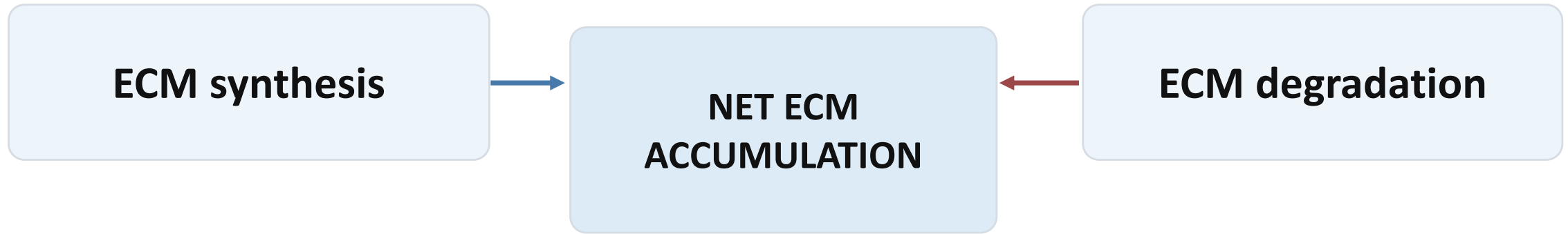
- TGF- β stimulates fibroblast migration.
- It also promotes fibroblast proliferation.
- These effects increase the matrix-producing cell population.

TGF- β increases collagen and fibronectin synthesis



- Enhanced collagen synthesis builds structural scar tissue.
- Fibronectin is another extracellular matrix product promoted by TGF- β .

TGF- β also limits extracellular matrix degradation



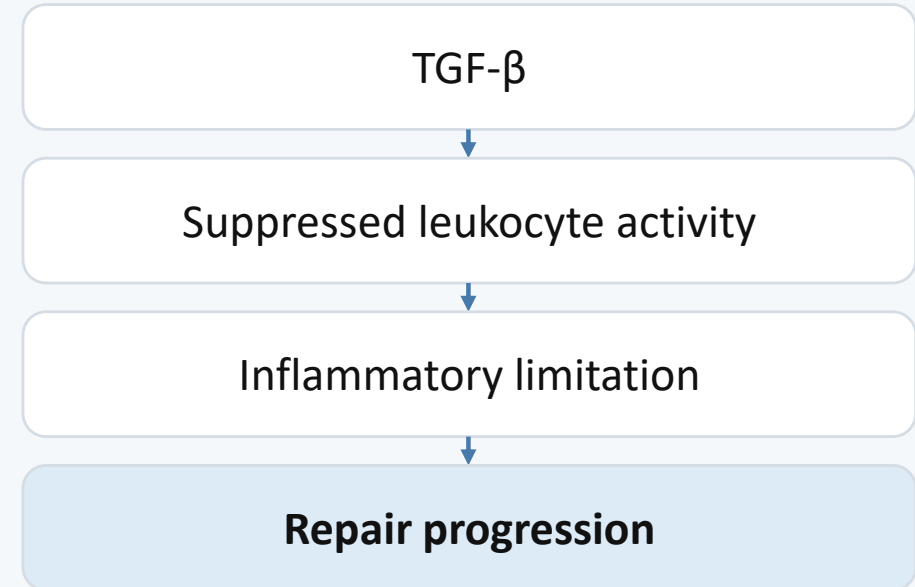
- The source describes inhibition of metalloproteinases by TGF- β .
- A reduced degradative influence favors net matrix accumulation.

Fibrogenesis reflects both greater deposition and lower matrix removal.

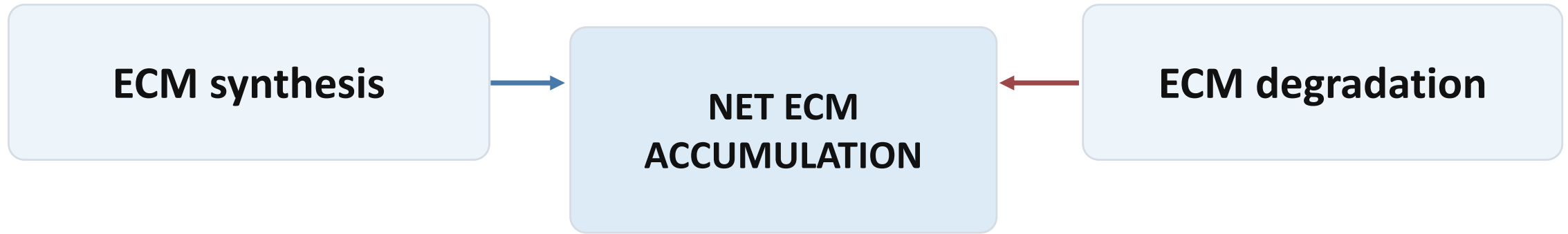
TGF- β has an anti-inflammatory role during repair

- TGF- β can limit lymphocyte proliferation.
- It also inhibits activities of other leukocytes.
- Inflammation resolution and matrix deposition are linked processes.

Additional biological effect



Fibrogenic signaling regulates net matrix deposition



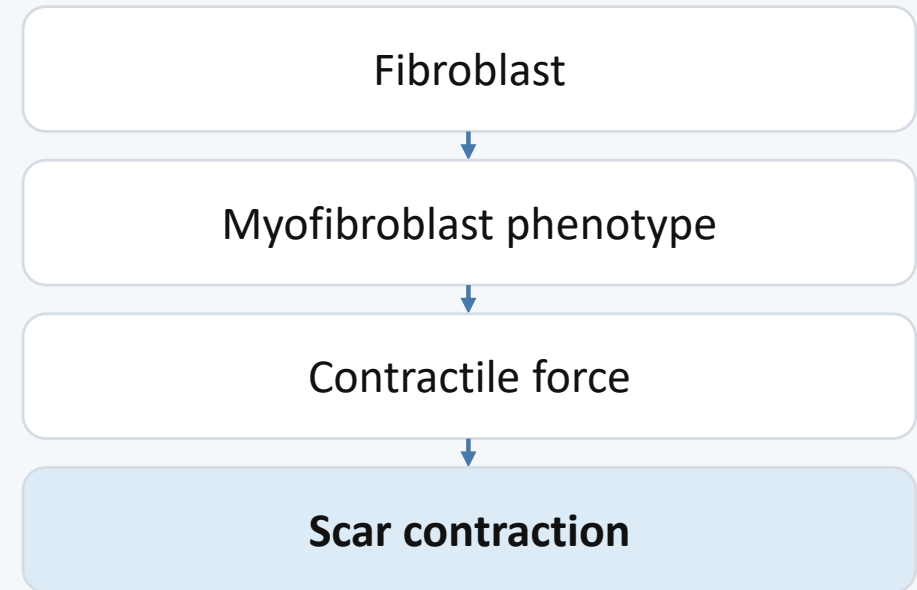
- Macrophage-derived and other cytokines stimulate matrix synthesis.
- MMPs digest deposited matrix.

Net ECM accumulation depends on synthesis, proteolysis, and protease inhibition.

Some fibroblasts differentiate into myofibroblasts

- Myofibroblasts have smooth-muscle-like features.
- They contain actin filaments.
- Their contribution is especially apparent during scar contraction.

Contractile cell specialization



Myofibroblasts contribute to wound contraction



- Contraction reduces the area of a healing tissue defect.
- The same repair process can reshape the final scar.

Scar maturation combines several simultaneous changes

Earlier repair

- More proliferating fibroblasts
- Abundant small vessels
- Loose provisional matrix

Later repair

- Greater dense ECM deposition
- Regression of capillary network
- More mature collagen-rich scar

Cellularity, vascularity, and matrix composition evolve in parallel.

Remodeling begins after extracellular matrix is deposited

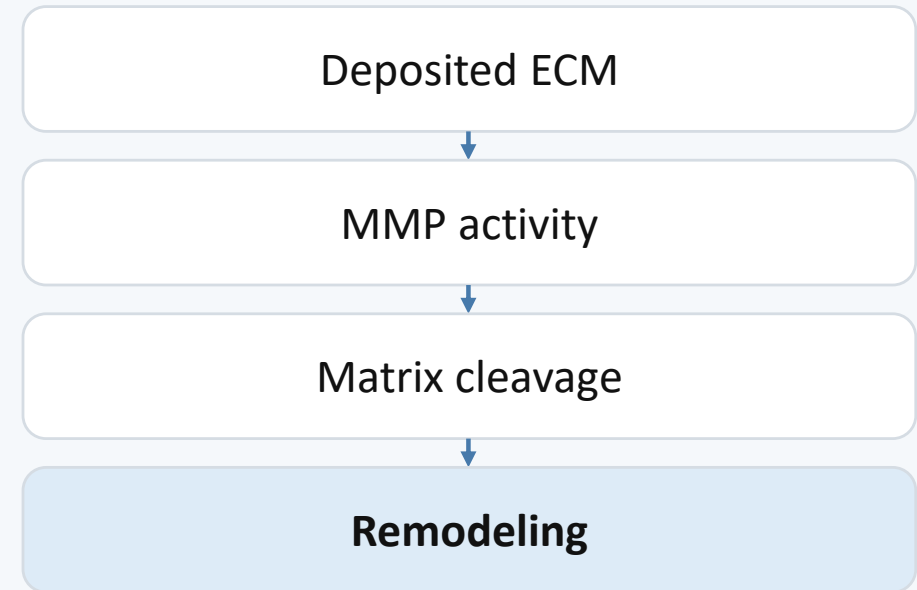


- Matrix deposition creates a substrate for enzymatic modification.
- Continued remodeling changes scar composition after the initial repair.

MMPs mediate breakdown of extracellular matrix proteins

- Matrix metalloproteinases (MMPs) are proteolytic enzymes.
- They degrade collagens and multiple noncollagenous ECM proteins.
- They participate in matrix remodeling at sites of injury.

Core degradative pathway



Metalloproteinase activity depends on metal ions

Enzymatic principle

MMP protease



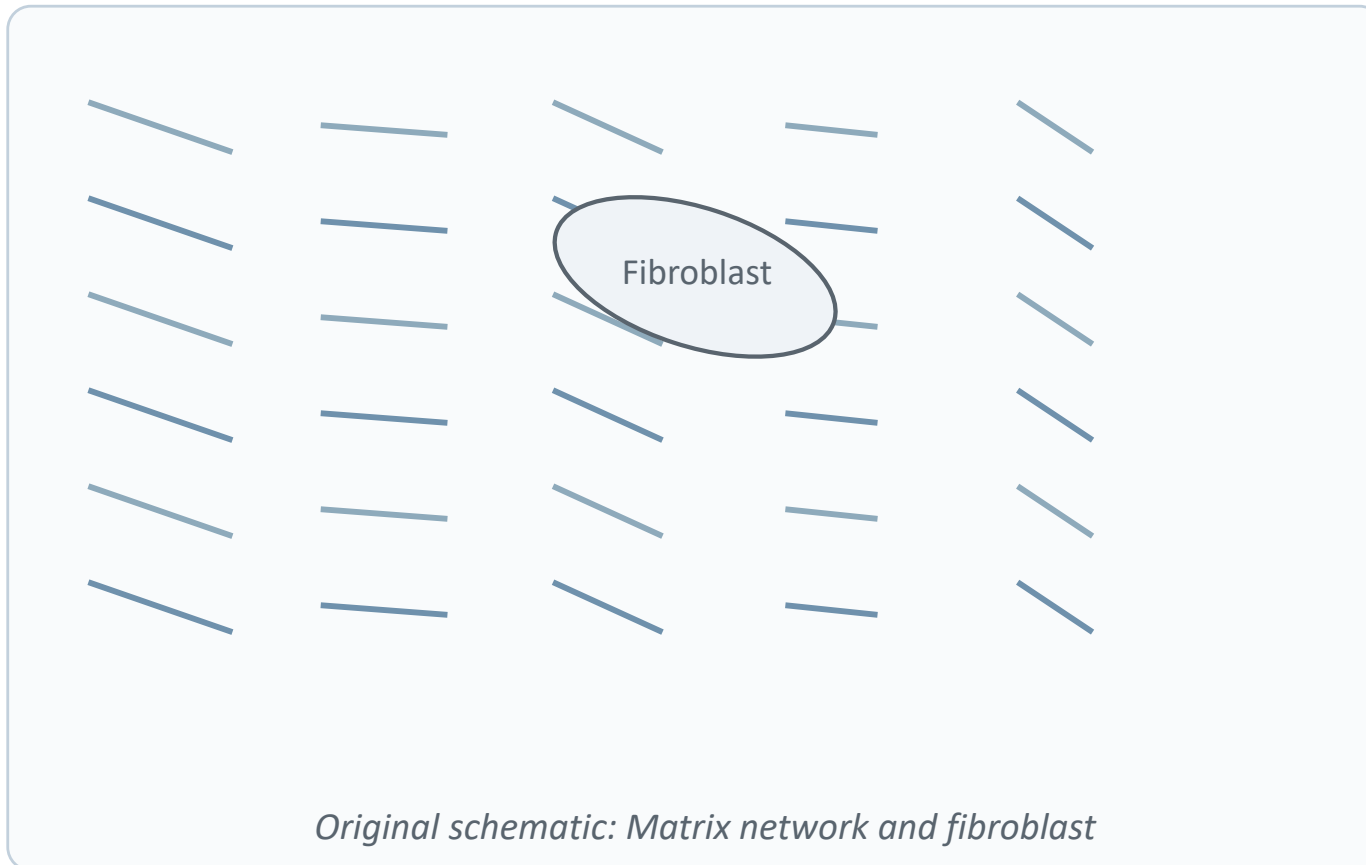
Metal-ion dependency



Substrate cleavage

- MMPs are termed metalloproteinases because they require metal ions.
- Zinc is an example of a required metal cofactor.
- Their activity is not constitutive at every location or time.

Matrix degradation extends beyond fibrillar collagen



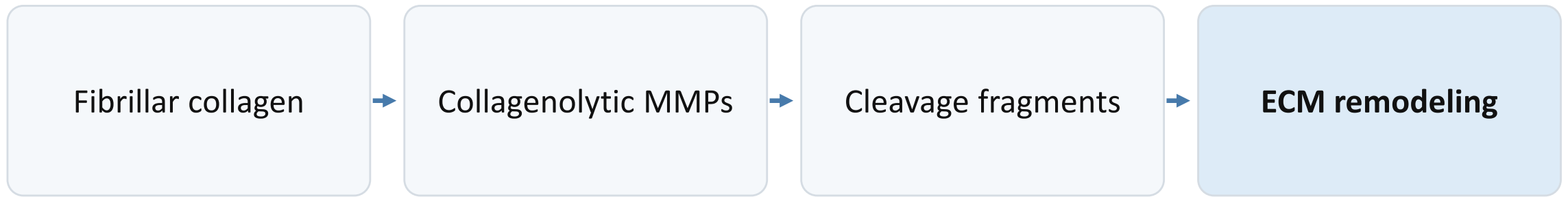
- The targeted material includes collagenous proteins.
- Fibronectin, laminin, and proteoglycans can also be degraded.
- The breadth of substrates permits extensive ECM remodeling.

MMP families differ in the matrix proteins they degrade

Functional class	Substrates emphasized in Robbins
Collagenases	Fibrillar collagen
Gelatinases	Denatured / amorphous collagen; fibronectin
Stromelysins	Proteoglycans, laminin, fibronectin; amorphous collagen

Substrate preference helps explain why several proteases participate in one repair site.

Collagenase activity remodels fibrillar collagen



- Fibrillar collagen is a major structural matrix constituent.
- Its enzymatic cleavage allows deposited fibers to be remodeled.

Gelatinases act on denatured or amorphous matrix

Gelatinase-related breakdown

Amorphous collagen



Gelatinase activity



Matrix digestion

- The source identifies gelatinase activity against amorphous collagen.
- Fibronectin is another target cited in the text.
- Different substrates require different proteolytic activities.

Stromelysins degrade several nonfibrillar ECM constituents

- Their substrate range includes proteoglycans.
- Laminin and fibronectin are additional cited targets.
- They also act on amorphous collagen.

Substrate classes and enzymatic effect

Proteoglycans

Laminin / fibronectin

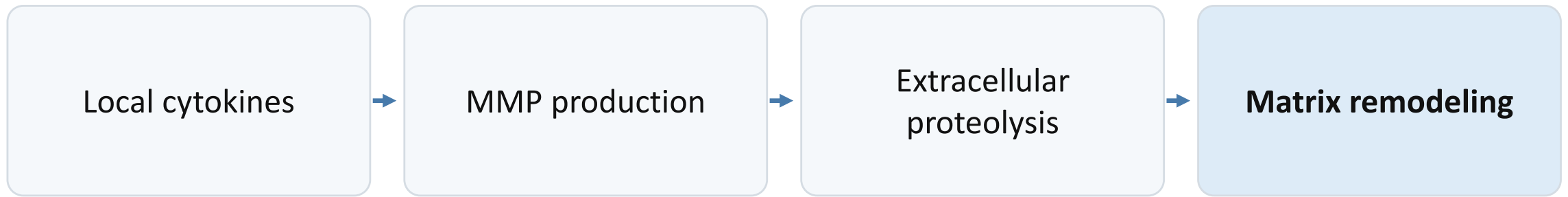
Stromelysin cleavage

MMPs are made by diverse injury-site cells

Cell population	Connection to remodeling
Fibroblasts	Matrix synthesis and MMP production
Macrophages	Inflammatory-reparative signaling; MMP production
Neutrophils	Protease-producing inflammatory leukocytes
Synovial cells / some epithelial cells	Additional MMP-producing populations

Both stromal and inflammatory cells can participate in extracellular-matrix degradation.

Inflammatory mediators regulate MMP production



- Growth factors and cytokines regulate MMP synthesis and secretion.
- This links local immune activity to the rate of matrix turnover.

MMPs are secreted as inactive zymogens

Zymogen control

Pro-MMP (inactive)



Proteolytic activation



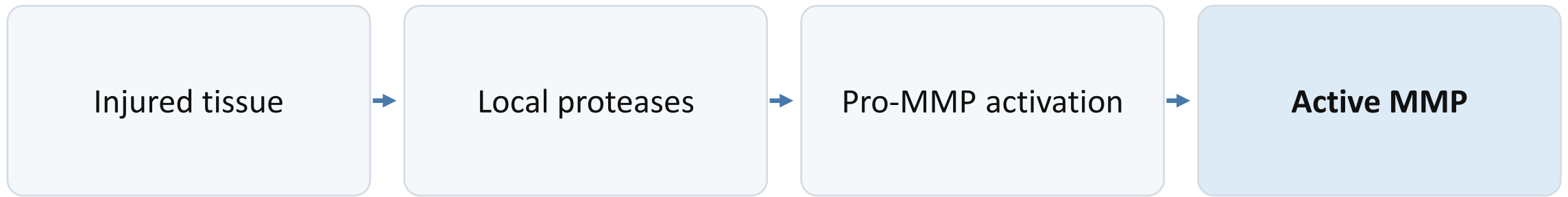
Active MMP



ECM cleavage

- MMPs are initially produced as inactive precursors.
- Proteolytic activation is needed before they cleave matrix.
- This provides an additional checkpoint beyond gene expression.

Local proteases activate latent metalloproteinases



- The source identifies plasmin as a possible activating protease.
- Such proteases are likely to be present at sites of tissue injury.

Zymogen activation localizes degradative activity

Inactive precursor

- Secreted pro-MMP
- No effective substrate degradation until activated
- Enzyme reservoir can be regulated

Active metalloproteinase

- Proteolytically activated form
- Can digest appropriate ECM substrates
- Requires rapid inhibitory control

Local activation helps prevent indiscriminate matrix breakdown.

TIMPs are specific endogenous inhibitors of MMPs

- Tissue inhibitors of metalloproteinases are termed TIMPs.
- They can rapidly inhibit activated metalloproteinases.
- Their action restrains degradation after remodeling has occurred.

Negative regulation

Active MMP



TIMP binding / inhibition



Reduced ECM proteolysis

Mesenchymal cells produce TIMPs

Source of inhibitors

Mesenchymal cells



TIMP production



MMP inhibition



Matrix preservation

- Most mesenchymal cells can produce TIMPs.
- Their presence helps regulate protease activity within repair tissue.
- Matrix remodeling depends on both enzyme and inhibitor availability.

TIMPs restrain activated rather than latent MMPs



- Production, activation, and inhibition are distinct checkpoints.
- TIMPs provide rapid control once MMPs are active.

MMP and TIMP activities change across scar formation

ECM deposition

Fibroblasts lay down connective tissue.

Remodeling

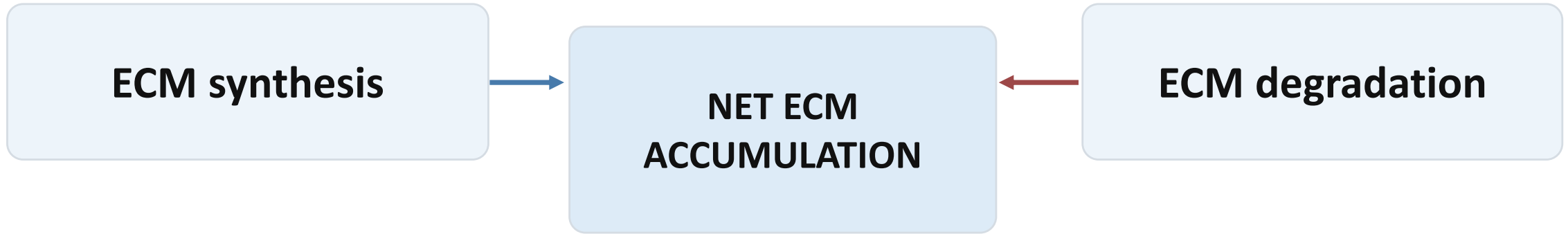
Locally activated MMPs digest parts of the matrix.

Inhibition

TIMPs turn down active MMP proteolysis.

The source describes temporally controlled matrix remodeling, not perpetual degradation.

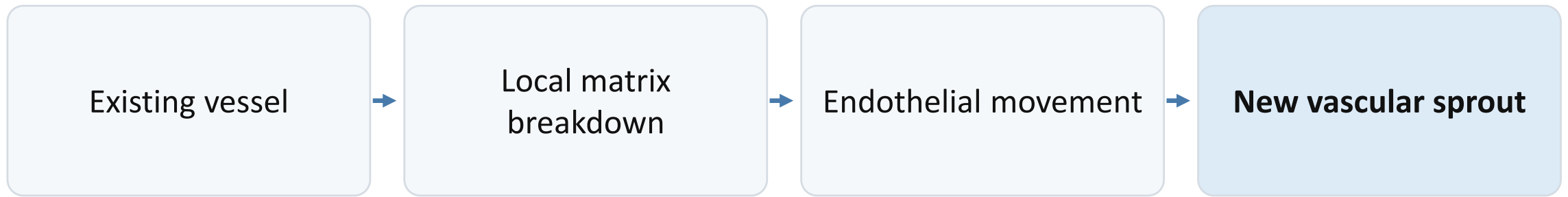
Synthesis and degradation both determine the scar



- Predominant deposition favors collagen-rich connective tissue.
- Proteolysis can remove or reshape deposited matrix.

The amount of matrix is determined by a balance of opposing processes.

MMP activity is also required during angiogenesis



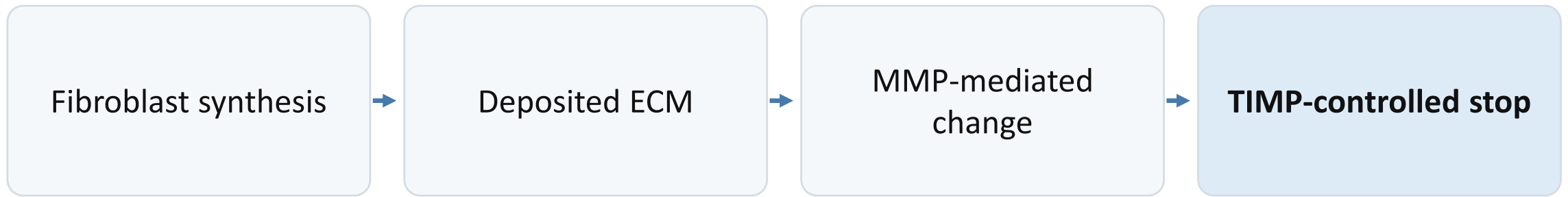
- Sprouting vessels must traverse the local extracellular matrix.
- Basement membrane breakdown permits the emerging endothelial sprout.

Regulation operates at more than one checkpoint

Checkpoint	Source-grounded control
MMP synthesis / secretion	Regulated by growth factors, cytokines, and other agents
Enzyme activation	Inactive precursor cleaved by local proteases
Active enzyme inhibition	TIMPs rapidly limit MMP activity

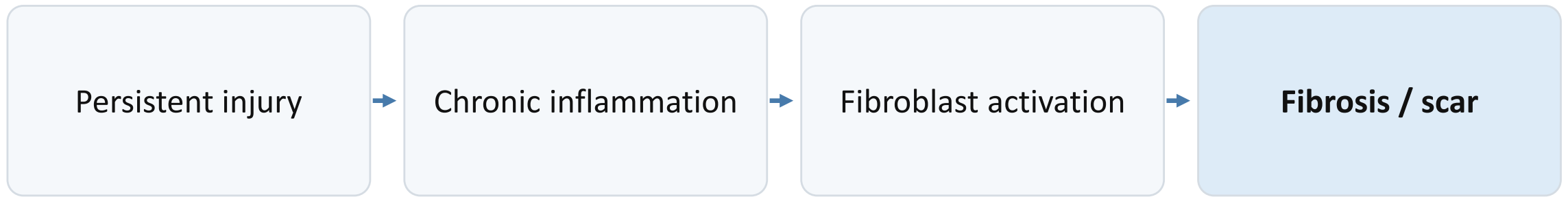
Control at multiple stages provides specificity to wound-associated proteolysis.

Connective tissue deposition and degradation are coupled



- Fibroblasts build the scar substrate.
- MMPs degrade selected components.
- TIMPs restrain further matrix removal.

Persisting injury sustains the fibrotic pathway



- Ongoing tissue damage maintains inflammatory-cell signaling.
- These signals continue to recruit and stimulate fibroblasts.

Macrophages and lymphoid cells influence fibrogenesis

Inflammatory–stromal axis

Macrophages / lymphoid cells



TGF- β and cytokines



Myofibroblast response



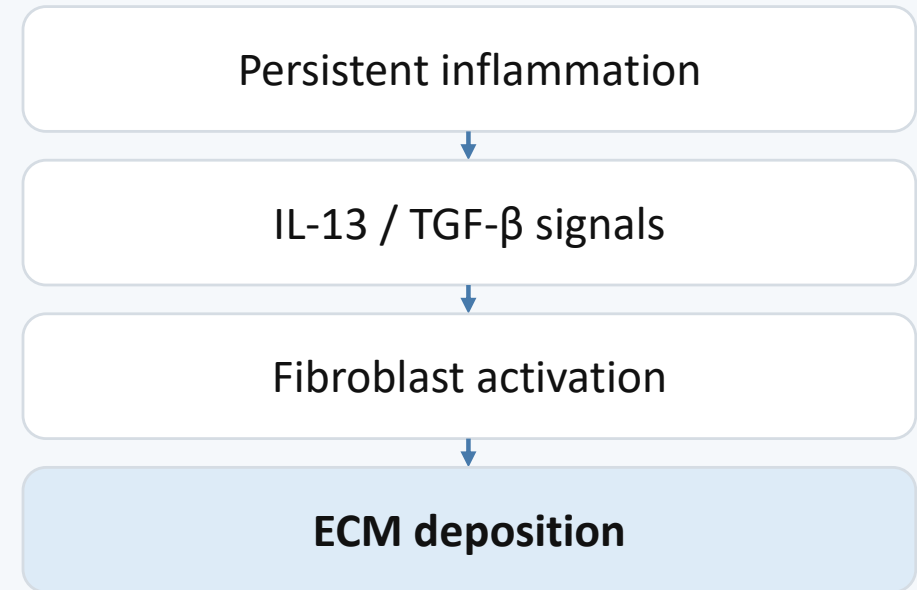
Connective tissue accumulation

- Macrophages release fibrogenic mediators, including TGF- β .
- Lymphoid-cell cytokines are also represented in the source fibrosis schematic.
- These mediators favor fibroblast recruitment and ECM deposition.

IL-13 and TGF- β appear in the fibrosis mechanism

- The source schematic includes IL-13 as an example of a cytokine.
- TGF- β is a central driver of fibroblast and matrix responses.
- These examples illustrate cytokine-mediated fibrosis.

Textbook fibrosis model



Fibrosis replaces normal architecture with connective tissue

Organized repair

- Injury is limited or resolves
- Matrix deposition later remodeled
- Scar seals a tissue defect

Pathologic fibrosis

- Persistent tissue injury and inflammation
- Sustained fibroblast stimulation
- Connective tissue replaces normal structure

Persistent pro-fibrotic signals can turn a reparative process into architectural distortion.

Skin wounds display remodeling in an observable setting

- The skin provides a well-defined model of scar formation.
- The balance of epithelial regeneration and scarring depends on injury extent.
- The two classical outcomes are healing by primary or secondary intention.

Application in skin

Skin injury

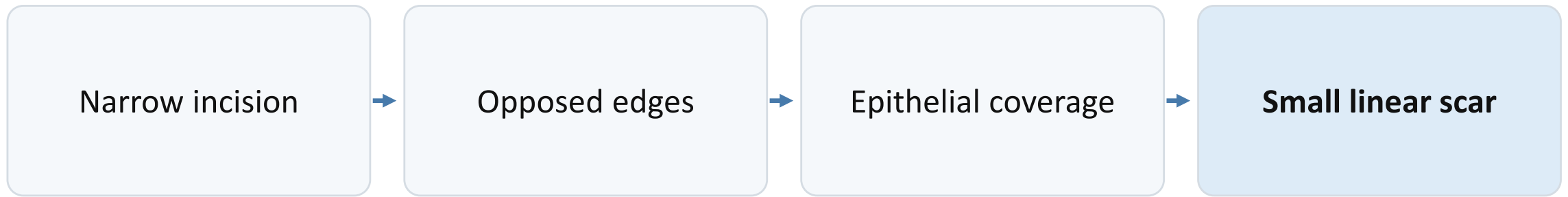


Regeneration + scarring



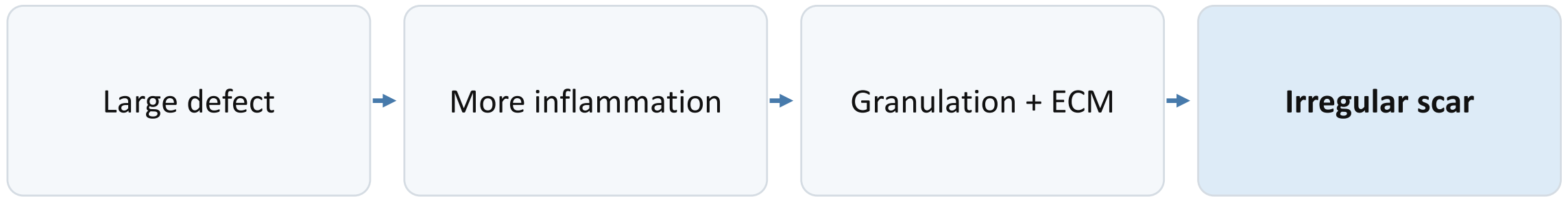
Primary / secondary intention

Primary intention: Clean, closely opposed wound edges



- Common example: Well-apposed surgical incision.
- Epithelial regeneration is prominent.
- Relatively little scarring is needed.

Secondary intention: A larger tissue defect



- A larger or irregular wound creates more tissue loss.
- Regeneration occurs together with substantial scarring.
- The healing period and final scar are generally more extensive.

Primary and secondary intention differ in wound demands

Feature	First intention	Second intention
Typical wound	Small, clean incision	Large or irregular defect
Inflammation	Limited	More marked
Granulation tissue	Less	More extensive
Contraction	Less	More prominent
Final appearance	Narrow linear scar	Contracted, irregular scar

Secondary-intention wounds require greater contraction

Small, apposed defect

- Shorter distance to bridge
- Less granulation tissue
- Less contraction

Large tissue gap

- Greater granulation tissue formation
- More myofibroblast-associated contraction
- Larger mature scar

The amount of tissue missing shapes how much connective tissue repair is required.

Skin repair proceeds from clot to granulation tissue

Immediate

Blood clot forms.

**About 24
hours**

Neutrophils appear at the incision margin.

24–48 hours

Epithelial cells proliferate and bridge the wound.

These are illustrative timings for cutaneous wound healing.

Macrophages and ECM deposition rise by day 3

Day 3

Macrophages replace neutrophils.

Day 3

Early granulation tissue becomes apparent.

Day 3

Angiogenesis and ECM deposition begin.

The inflammatory-to-reparative transition is visible in early skin healing.

Granulation tissue is prominent around day 5

Day 5

Neovascularization is maximal in the described sequence.

Day 5

Granulation tissue is prominent.

Day 5

Collagen and other ECM proteins accumulate.

Active vessel and fibroblast responses precede mature collagenous scar.

Later healing is dominated by collagen deposition

Day 14

Continued fibroblast proliferation and collagen deposition.

Day 30

Formation of a scar is complete timeline.

**Later
maturation**

Matrix remodeling continues after deposition.

Timing describes the example sequence, not a universal clinical deadline.

Maturation explains the change from granulation to scar

Granulation tissue

- Many new capillary channels
- Loose and edematous stroma
- Proliferating fibroblasts

Collagen-rich scar

- Few scattered vascular channels
- Densely deposited collagen
- Relatively pale appearance

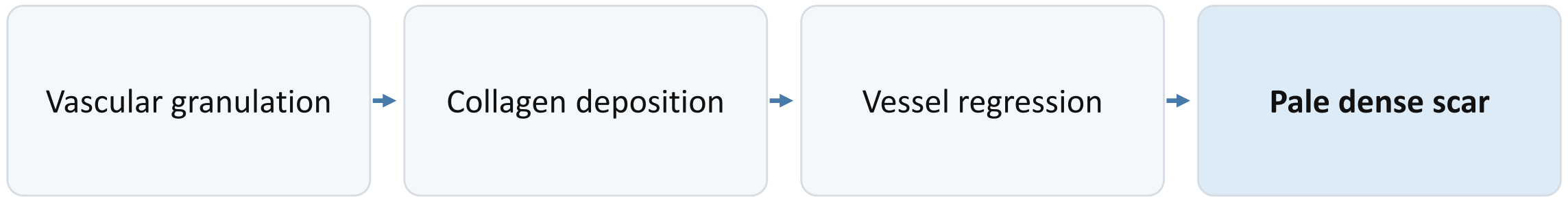
Morphologic changes follow the shift from cellular repair tissue to remodeled connective tissue.

Case: Why is a mature scar less vascular?

**A recent wound is red and granular. Months later, the site is pale and firm.
What tissue-level changes explain the transition?**

- Identify two changes that distinguish early granulation tissue from a mature scar.

Case answer: Vascular regression and collagen accumulation



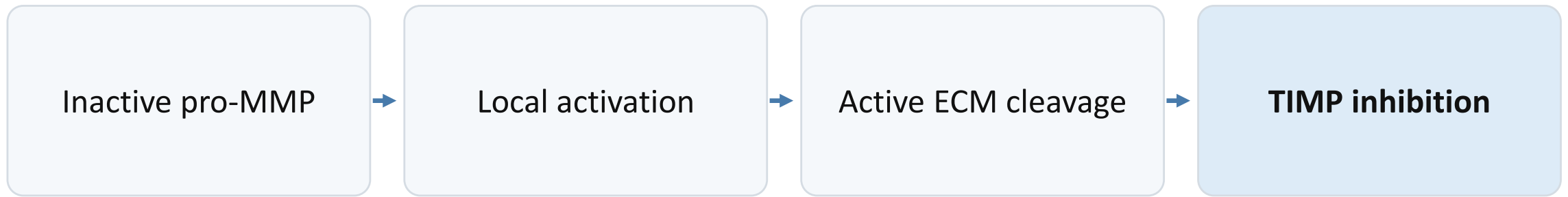
- New vessels regress as healing progresses.
- Fibroblast-derived ECM becomes denser and more prominent.
- Remodeling converts the initial reparative stroma into mature scar.

Case: What turns off matrix proteolysis?

A healing wound has accumulated collagen. Matrix degradation is needed for remodeling, but continued cleavage must be limited. Which mechanisms provide this control?

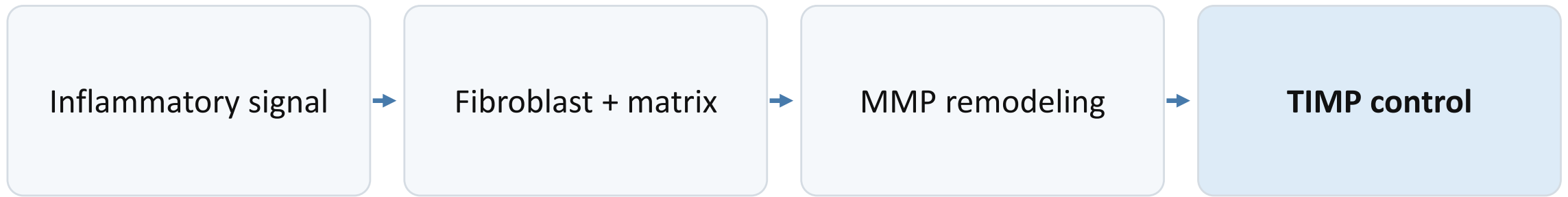
- Name the protease family involved in remodeling.
- Identify the inhibitor family that suppresses active proteases.

Case answer: Activation and TIMP-mediated inhibition



- MMPs are produced as inactive zymogens and activated locally.
- TIMPs rapidly inhibit active MMPs.
- The sequence constrains where and when matrix is digested.

Integrated model of connective tissue remodeling



- Inflammatory signals drive fibroblast recruitment and matrix deposition.
- MMP-mediated proteolysis modifies the deposited extracellular matrix.
- TIMP activity prevents continued unrestrained digestion.

Five mechanism-linked conclusions

High-yield synthesis

Deposition



Remodeling



Maturation

- Scarring replaces damaged tissue when regeneration is inadequate.
- Fibroblasts and TGF- β drive matrix deposition.
- MMPs digest collagens and other ECM components.
- MMP activation and TIMP inhibition regulate proteolysis.
- Scar maturation includes collagen accumulation and vascular regression.

Repair quality reflects an evolving balance among cells, signals, and matrix turnover.

Source and figure provenance

- Robbins, Cotran & Kumar: Pathologic Basis of Disease, 11th ed. (2026), Chapter 3.
- Sections used: Repair by Scarring; Deposition of Connective Tissue; Remodeling of Connective Tissue; Healing of Skin Wounds.
- All diagrams and comparative schematics are original editable PowerPoint artwork; no textbook figures or clinical images are reproduced.

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