What is Opioid Induced Hyperalgesia?
This is a condition where opioid pain medications create more pain rather than pain relief. Patients who have Opioid Induced Hyperalgesia may have:
- Increased sensitivity to painful and non-painful stimuli
- Worsening pain despite increasing doses of opioids
- Decreased pain threshold
- Pain that spreads out, extending beyond the area of usual pain
- Pain from ordinary non-painful stimuli like stroking skin with cotton or light pressure during exam

What Causes Opioid Induced Hyperalgesia?
It is a side effect of medication that causes the central nervous system to become overly sensitive. Opioid Induced Hyperalgesia can occur at any dose of opioid. It is more common with higher doses.

How is Opioid Induced Hyperalgesia Diagnosed?
Opioid Induced Hyperalgesia is difficult to diagnose because the sensitization involves several pain pathways in the brain. Your doctor will diagnose it based on your medication, your symptoms and a physical examination.

What Are the Symptoms?
Over time, taking opioids can lead to hypersensitivity. Patients with Opioid Induced Hyperalgesia experience more pain despite using more medication. Taking too much pain medication can lead to dependence (addiction). Also, increasing pain medications comes with the following risks:
- Potential overdose
- Hormonal changes
- Fractures from falls
- Chronic constipation
- Depressed immune system
- Sleep disturbances
- Chronic dry mouth (leads to tooth decay)

How is Opioid Induced Hyperalgesia Treated?
Patients with Opioid Induced Hyperalgesia benefit from reducing or discontinuing their opioid medication. It might also be beneficial to change to a non-opioid medicine.

How is Opioid Induced Hyperalgesia Different from Tolerance?
Increasing doses of opioids can be an effective way to overcome tolerance if pain is relieved with opioid medications. However, in Opioid Induced Hyperalgesia, increased medication makes the pain worse by causing hypersensitivity to pain and other sensations.
Coming soon, “Back Talk”—an informational show about North Fulton Pain & Spine Center and our physicians. “Back Talk” will showcase three of our patients as they tell their personal stories about pain management. Learn more from our experienced physicians about the ground-breaking procedures they are performing to help patients improve their quality of life and get back to day to day living.

“Back Talk” will be available online on our website, www.northfultonpainandspine.com, as well as on Comcast Cable networks in Pickens, Cherokee, Gilmer and Fannin Counties starting the first week of April. Stay tuned to see the show.

Here is a sneak peek of one of our featured patients, Jody Bowles…

Jody Bowles was an active woman who was diagnosed with a disease at a younger age. As a result, she was put on heavy steroids and chemotherapy. This treatment regimen lead her to develop severe osteoporosis, which caused compression fractures to her vertebrae as well as a broken pelvis, sacrum, feet and ribs. At this point, she was tired of the pain and injuries resulting from her health issues, and she came to North Fulton Pain & Spine Center where she was helped to lower her dosage of time-release morphine and other pain medications. According to Jody, “North Fulton Pain & Spine Center was the first place I went that helped me explore other options and didn’t just say that you are going to have to continue taking medications.” To learn more about Jody’s story, visit www.northfultonpainandspine.com; watch for her story and more on the new 30-minute program “Back Talk” coming soon.
We all love the beginning of spring. It is a time for renewal and rejuvenation. We yearn for change, both with ourselves and our environment. Plans for cleaning our homes, remodeling, gardening, painting and exercising start to become the main goal of spring. During the week, many of us are too busy with family, work, or errands to truly commit time to our new spring plans. We welcome the “Weekend Warrior” mentality where we all plan to conquer our whole spring to-do list over the weekends.

Although these plans may be beneficial to our mind and soul, we can easily injure our bodies by overexerting ourselves. Injuries can easily occur when we are performing high risk home maintenance activities or outdoor exercises. According to the Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery, “a recent study followed three hundred (300) weekend warriors of which one hundred twenty nine (129) were injured while remodeling their homes. Of those injured, forty eight percent (48%) sustained head injuries while twenty eight percent (28%) sustained thoracic, lumbar, or sacral fractures” (Psinoos, et al, 2012). Per the report, most of the injuries occurred due to improper body mechanics and neglecting safety protocols.

Proper body mechanics along with muscle stretching prior to weekend warrior activities can decrease the risk of injury.

Tips for Proper Body Mechanics

■ LIFTING—Lifting is the most common way to injure the back.
— Make sure to keep the load that you are carrying close to your body.
— Assess the weight and size of the load before lifting. Don’t try to lift too much.
— Keep your feet apart for good balance.
— Bend at the knees and hips, not at the waist.

■ TURNING—When turning, you may be tempted to twist, which can strain the back.
— Keep the load in front of you.
— Step with your feet in the direction of the turn.
— Shoulders and hips should turn at the same time.

■ BENDING—Bending can cause strain on the muscles and joints of the back.
— Bend at the knees and hips, never at the waist.
— Lean forward, move your whole body, not just your arms.

Tips for Stretching

Prior to any type of exercise or weekend warrior activity, it is always wise to stretch the necessary muscles to help prevent muscle injury or muscle spasms.

■ CERVICAL (NECK) STRETCHING—called the “Forward Bend”, sit or stand with shoulders relaxed, tuck chin in and slowly bend neck forwards. Hold providing a gentle stretch for 5 seconds and then slowly straighten up.

■ LUMBAR (LOW BACK) STRETCHING— called the “Spine Stretch”, sit on the floor with your feet wider than your hips, nod your head forward and slowly begin bending forward. Breathe slowly. As you are bending forward, tuck your chin into the neck.

■ LEGS—called the “Hamstring Stretch”, lie on your back and place a towel or your hands around your thigh, just above the knee. Tighten your abdominal muscles. Gently pull your leg to your chest until you feel a stretch. Gently straighten your leg as much as you can.

With spring coming soon, it is beneficial for our minds and bodies to partake in “Weekend Warrior” activities. Just always remember safety and proper body mechanics are imperative when tackling your to-do list!
reminders . . .

Please update your primary care physician and referring physician with our staff so that we may send office visit notes accordingly.

For your benefit, we work closely with your primary care physician to ensure that your medications are being prescribed responsibly. Please update your medication list with our staff at every visit.

All other medical issues, such as Diabetes Mellitus or Hypertension, must be monitored and regulated by your primary care physician or medical specialist.

We monitor liver and kidney functions through lab work. We require that all patients have complete blood panels (lab work) every 6 months.

All patients that require refills or rotation of their medication must be seen in the office.

Opiate medications cannot be called or faxed to any pharmacy.

Do not cut long-acting opiate medications in half.