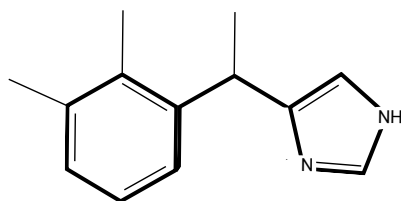


# Medetomidine FAQ



Additional Resources:  
**NMHARMREDUCTION.ORG**

## **WHAT IS MEDETOMIDINE?**

Medetomidine is an alpha-2-adrenergic agonist sedative that is used in veterinary medicine and NOT approved for use in humans. It was first detected in the eastern U.S. illicit opioid supply in late 2022 and has since appeared intermittently across the country. It was first detected by the Adulterant Checking Program in a powder fentanyl sample from Albuquerque in October of 2024 and has since then become increasingly common in fentanyl samples.

## **WHAT HAS MEDETOMIDINE BEEN DETECTED IN?**

Medetomidine is most often found in combination with illicit fentanyl pills and powders. In New Mexico, medetomidine has not been found in any other tested substance, including stimulants.

## **WHAT IS THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE TO A SUSPECTED OVERDOSE INVOLVING MEDETOMIDINE?**

First call 911 and tell them somebody is not breathing. Administer naloxone to respond to the opioid overdose. If the person begins breathing again, but is not conscious, this could be due to the sedative nature of medetomidine – put the person into recovery position. If the person does not regain consciousness and has not resumed breathing, begin rescue breathing. Naloxone should be used if someone is unresponsive and not breathing, but it should not be given in increasing amounts as too much can cause withdrawal symptoms.

## **ARE THERE EFFECTS FROM MEDETOMIDINE WITHDRAWAL?**

Yes, and repeated exposure to medetomidine can cause dependence. Withdrawal can be severe and life-threatening. The onset of withdrawal symptoms is rapid and include fast heartrate (>100 bpm), very high blood pressure, uncontrollable nausea and vomiting, restlessness and tremors.

## **HOW IS MEDETOMIDINE WITHDRAWAL TREATED?**

Medetomidine withdrawal should be treated in a medical setting as unassisted withdrawal can be life-threatening. There is a higher need for aggressive  $\alpha_2$ -agonist therapies, such as dexmedetomidine or clonidine<sup>1</sup>.

## **IS MEDETOMIDINE THE SAME AS XYLAZINE?**

No, medetomidine is more potent than xylazine, and its effects last longer. Withdrawal from medetomidine is also much more serious. Both medetomidine and xylazine are sedatives that can cause slow or shallow breathing, low blood pressure, slow heartrate, and sedation.

## **DOES MEDETOMIDINE CAUSE SKIN WOUNDS?**

So far, medetomidine does not appear to cause the same skin and soft tissue wounds that appear with xylazine. It is still encouraged to always use single use, sterile equipment.