California Poppy, *Eschscholzia californica*

**Family:** Papaveraceae

**Part used:** immature seed capsules, aerial portions, whole plant.

**Herbal action:** sedative, anodyne, anxiolytic, antidepressant

**Indications:** anxiety, nervousness, restless, agitation, insomnia, pain

**Contraindications and cautions:** fever, pregnancy; concurrently with prescription drugs and psychiatric medications. Orally, California poppy can cause muscular stiffness, “morning sluggishness,” and nausea, when used in combination with magnesium and hawthorn.

**Medicinal uses:**

*Eschscholzia* has three important uses in the herbalist's armamentarium: as a relaxing nerve in anxiety and nervousness; as a sedative in insomnia; and as an anodyne in pain. *Eschscholzia* tincture in anxiety and nervousness, where there are “…skin hypersensitivities and peripatetic movements”. As an anxiolytic, California Poppy should be taken in smaller doses, combined with herbs such as Pulsatilla (Anenome pulsatilla). When used in higher doses California Poppy acts as a sedative, inducing a pleasant drowsy feeling, not enough to promote marked sedation, but powerful enough that tasks such as driving or operating machinery are best avoided under its influence. In states of pain, such as intestinal colic, rheumatism, toothaches and earaches, California Poppy can be dosed in higher amounts.
A more recent usage for Eschscholzia is in the treatment of heroin addiction and withdrawal. Donna Odierna, herbalist and director of the H.E.A.L.T.H. Needle Exchange clinic in Oakland, California, uses Eschscholzia as the primary ingredient in her clinic’s “Kick Juice,” along with smaller amounts of Vitex agnus-castus, Avena sativa, Piper methysticum and Verbena officinalis. In her practice with heroin and methadone addicted patients, Odierna has found this formula helpful to both wean patients off of opioids, as well as to reduce the frequency and amount of heroin or methadone used.

Eschscholzia is certainly on the weaker end of the papaveraceous remedies, and while some people may experience very noticeable effects with California Poppy, a stronger sedative response can be expected with Papaver and Meconopsis species.

Despite the temptation to these potent sedating herbs in chronic states, when care is not taken it may mask or obscure the progression of a disease. Thus the Poppy is not a herb for chronic use, and although it is a better remedy than benzodiazepines, attention should always be directed to the cause of the condition.