

spending a year overseas. By contrast, a traditional air ambulance can cost \$6,000 to \$25,000 out of pocket within the States, depending on the length of the flight and the care involved. A transport from overseas might top \$100,000.

The flights are typically on small jets equipped like mobile intensive care units, complete with IV pumps, intubation equipment, cardiac monitors, and oxygen. Escorts often include a registered nurse and an EMT, and a doctor might fly with critically ill patients. A service similar to MedjetAssist's, Air Ambulance Card (www.airambulancocard.com), starts at \$195 and runs \$495 for a year abroad. AIG Travel Guard's Annual MedEvac plan (www.travelguard.com), which costs \$185 for the year, is designed for travelers but works for students, too. It includes both medical transportation and secondary medical insurance that pays costs not covered by members' primary health policy.

Policies that bring sick college kids home aren't new. Many schools require students who spend a semester abroad to buy special health insurance, which

often includes emergency medical transportation. But students who simply travel away to college have been on their own. Most health policies hold the line at treatment; when medical transportation is allowed, it's usually for travel deemed medically necessary, to get services not offered wherever the student is. Even so, that would mean a move to the closest capable hospital—not a ticket home.

That difference can be a big one, as Eileen Shirk learned during her last year at Penn State in 2001. While on a spring break trip to Acapulco, she and some friends were badly injured in a

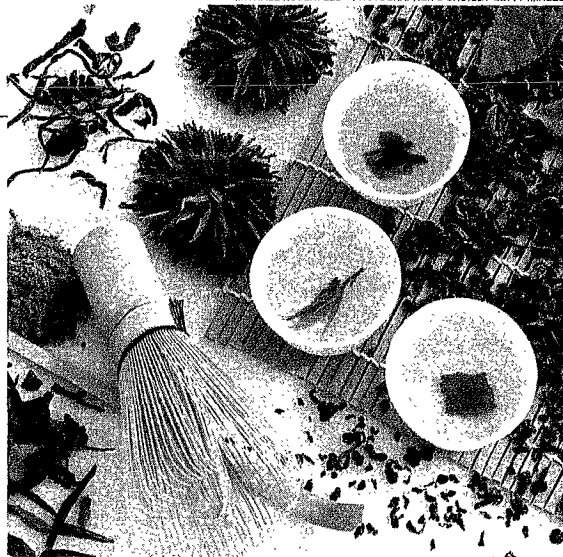
car accident. Shirk, whose family had a MedjetAssist membership, was on a private jet home to Toledo, Ohio, within two days. One of her friends landed in a hospital in Texas, 1,000 miles from his family in Chicago.

With Air Ambulance Card and MedjetAssist, parents can specify which hospital their child goes to, anywhere in the world, as long as a doctor at that hospital agrees to admit him. The AIG plan requires approval from a

doctor on AIG's medical staff as well as the patient's attending physician and a doctor at the destination hospital. In all three cases, it doesn't matter whether there's a terrific closer option. "I was very impressed that they'd move her here—they didn't ever ask if I wanted them to take her to Austin instead of Little Rock," says Jack Griebel, a Little Rock physician who called Air Ambulance Card last year about his daughter, who had suffered complications following an appendectomy while a sophomore at Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas. Ultimately, he decided his daughter didn't need to be moved.

Not all college health professionals are sold on the services, since the need for intensive care is rare—and most schools prefer to keep injured or ill students on campus and engaged in their studies. But Mason and Griebel both fully intend to continue their memberships. "It's hard when you can't do anything for yourself and you're at school. Your friends don't really understand," says Poda. There are times, even in college, when you just need Mom. ●

MICHAEL ROSENFELD—PHOTOGRAPHER'S CHOICE / GETTY IMAGES



NUTRITION

A Soothing Sip of Focus

The latest on tea: It might quiet distracted minds

By Matthew Shulman

Tea as a treatment for attention deficit disorder? If the beverage's other health creds aren't impressive enough—a host of studies have suggested it shields against heart attacks, stroke, diabetes, and possibly some cancers—now comes the news that it may also focus jumpy minds. "We have reports going back thousands of years that drinking tea makes people feel relaxed," says John Foxe, a professor of neuroscience and an expert on the mechanisms of attention at the City University of New York. "But it also seems to make them more alert."

The bulk of the research till now has focused on the antioxidants green and black teas contain—the flavonols, catechins, and lignans that appear to arm the body against disease. It's thought that they improve blood vessel dilation, for example, and lower the risk of aortic athero-

sclerosis. "We know that the more tea one consumes, the stronger the cardiovascular protection will be," says Lenore Arab, a nutritional epidemiologist at the University of California–Los Angeles David Geffen School of Medicine. By inhibiting damage to DNA, some researchers theorize, the antioxidants may also slow tumor growth.

Brain waves. Now neuroscientists are weighing in with evidence that components in the leaves of the *Camellia sinensis* plant may work wonders in the brain as well. According to Foxe's research, the amino acid theanine, which is found in green, black, and oolong teas, causes a decrease in the brain's "alpha rhythms" when people perform complex attention tasks, causing them to pay closer attention. His ongoing research, funded by the food and beverage conglomerate Unilever, suggests that theanine and

caffeine together improve performance more than either substance alone. The findings, described in September at a conference on tea and human health, argue for further studies specific to ADD, Foxe thinks.

Other brain studies are still in the very early stages but offer hope that green tea might battle degenerative diseases like Parkinson's and Alzheimer's, too. Silvia Mandel, vice director of the Eve Topf and the National Parkinson Foundation Centers in Israel, has found that—in mice, at least—green tea's main antioxidant shows an ability to curb brain cell death and encourage neurons to repair themselves. ●