

Nik's Healthbeat



By
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When employees are retired after a heart attack and when pilots are forced to hang their wings after age 55, 60 or if they have an irregular heart rhythm, should we be concerned about a President's age and/or health to decide whether that person can be the commander-in-chief of the United States of America. We do not have an age (unless you are <35 years) or health restriction for someone running for the office of the President of the United States.

Of course, it is a 24 hours, 7 days a week, and a year round job that demands leadership, courage, decisive action, vision, wisdom, charisma, an image of strength, and health. That person needs to have tremendous stamina, patience, and sound health in order to subject oneself to such rigorous schedule and still present a calm, cool, collected, intellectual, and healthy persona in public and on TV. Their vigor and vogue stands only second to their job.

Historically, past US Presidents have demonstrated tremendous stamina, strength, and ability to adapt to the most strenuous job. Yet, many Presidents had significant medical problems that did not deter them from getting their mission accomplished.

President's Job and its effects on health

It is a full time job that involves extensive travel times, long meetings, significant tension, putting up with the jet sound, lack of sleep, lack of

regularity, eating different foods, among others. It poses tremendous physical, emotional, and psychological challenges. Yet, presidents are expected to wake up the next morning and get ready to do it all over again, day after day for four or eight years. More rigorous routine is demanded during the campaign year. It is an awesome challenge, which only a few can endure and triumph over. If you add the challenges of aging diseases; it truly is reflected in their physical and mental expression.

Does President's age matter?

Presidents seem to age faster during their four or eight year term, than any part in their life.

A question of age was raised when Ronald Reagan ran for the office for the second time. Ronald Reagan said, "I was not going to bring up the question of age. I was not going to make age an issue in this campaign. But, since you mentioned it, let me tell, I not going to exploit the youth and inexperience of my opponent." That got the biggest applause from the audience. Historically, age has not been an issue from preventing one from seeking the office. President John F. Kennedy was much younger than Barack Obama when he was elected.

If elected, John McCain will be the oldest person to serve the first term in the office. So far he has withstood the most rigorous test of campaign. What is going to happen in the future is anyone's guess. I have seen people in their eighties with full faculties and people in their thirties who have had heart attack. Anyone can get a serious health problem in the future irrespective of their age.

Illnesses related to aging

The diseases related to advanced age are heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, arthritis,

mental illness, osteoporosis, and cancer. Aging is a natural wear and tear phenomenon. Their hectic schedule adds to that process. You may see presidents jogging with secret service agents, but what you cannot see is what is running through their minds and how their body feels the rest of the time.

Does Presidents' illness matter?

President George Washington, the first US president, suffered from multiple bouts of malaria and tuberculosis. Malaria was very prevalent in Virginia at that time.

President Abraham Lincoln suffered from several major depressions. His height (6.37") had raised concerns about Marfan's syndrome, though he was never diagnosed to have that condition. He had small pox. He was assassinated in 1865. He was a Victim of domestic violence from his wife, Mary.

President Theodor Roosevelt (1901-1908) suffered from myopia, asthma, blindness in one eye, and polo unconsciousness. He survived an assassination attempt.

President Herbert Hoover (1929-1933) had swollen hands from shaking hands with thousands of people. During his later years, he suffered from gall bladder disease, malignant intestinal tumor, and gastrointestinal hemorrhage.

President Franklin Roosevelt (1933-1945) had paralysis of both his legs after suffering from polio in 1921. He had hypertension, hypertensive cardiomyopathy, anemia from hemorrhoids, and angina during one of his speeches. He also had weight loss that was thought to be cardiac cachexia. He died unexpectedly on April 12, 1945, six months after being elected to the office for the fourth time.

President John F. Kennedy (JFK) was the youngest president (1961-1963). Yet he had the most medical problems compared to other presidents in office. JFK had ulcerative colitis for which he was on steroids.

He also suffered from Addison's disease where the adrenal gland fails to produce the steroids. He had secondary Cushing's syndrome from excess steroid used to treat his Addison's disease and ulcerative colitis.

He developed osteoporosis which left him with severe backache for which he wore a back brace. He was dependent on many medicines, including pain killers, sleeping pills and tranquilizers. In 1963 he was shot by Lee Harvey Oswald.

President Ronald Reagan was noted to have Alzheimer during the later years of life (1994 -2004) from which he suffered until his demise. He also survived an assassination attempt.

President William Jefferson Clinton underwent quadruple bypass three months after leaving the office.

President Richard Nixon suffered from phlebitis in 1965 during his trip to Japan. He also suffered from psychological problems during the Watergate investigation. He had a serious blinking problem during his resignation speech in 1974 which was termed the "Nixon effect." In 1974, he had blood clots in his legs and pulmonary embolus.

President Gerald Ford (1974-1977) was described as clumsy. He suffered a stroke in 2000, for which he was hospitalized in Philadelphia. In 2006, he had two-vessel coronary angioplasty along with a pacemaker insertion at Mayo Clinic. He was 93 when he died in December of 2006. In addition he had colon cancer, colon polyps, severe nearsightedness, skin

cancer, hip fracture, hearing aids, and pneumonia.

President Jimmy' Carter (1977-1981) suffered from painful hemorrhoids. Once he had to cancel his appointments for the day due to pain from his hemorrhoids.

President George H. W. Bush Senior (1989-1993), while at a formal dinner in Japan, in 1992, threw up in front of Japanese prime minister and passed out. He was also diagnosed to have hyperthyroidism and atrial fibrillation. He has mild arthritis. He is also diagnosed to have early stages of glaucoma. He underwent radiation treatment for his hyperthyroidism. Interestingly enough, Barbara Bush and their pet dog Millie also had developed Graves's disease or hyperthyroidism which prompted the secret service to investigate the White House water for any contamination with iodine or lithium.

President George W. Bush (2002-present) had dental work done and skin lesion treated. He passed out in 2002 while watching a football game and eating pretzels. The incidence was attributed to slowing of the heart rate (known as a vasovagal response).

These are examples of how the human body goes through the aging process and develops the usual age-related chronic ailments, irrespective of whether you are a president, presidential candidate, or Joe the American citizen.

In this country's brief history of 230 plus years of democracy, less than 50 Men (presidents) have triumphed despite many common human ailments and limitations ranging from polio to passing out in public. No one had to relinquish his job due to medical illness.

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