

John F. Kennedy : Overcoming Asthma, Addison's Disease and More to Become One of the 20th Century's Greatest Men

John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the 35th President of the United States, led the country through some turbulent times during his tenure as Commander-in-Chief. Elected in November 1960, JFK steered the U.S. through the Bay of Pigs crisis in Cuba, supported the Civil Rights Movement and formed the Peace Corps and the President's Council on Physical Fitness before his assassination in Dallas, Texas on November 22, 1963. Throughout his life, JFK suffered from over a dozen different ailments, including asthma and allergies, but his ill health didn't stop him from becoming one of our most beloved and influential presidents.

Born into a wealthy Boston family on May 29, 1917, Jack and his siblings enjoyed a comfortable childhood, attending boarding schools and vacationing on the coast with parents Rose and Joe. Sr. The President's childhood was not without its problems. JFK suffered from many maladies as a child. At three, Jack was hospitalized for scarlet fever. After he recovered, he battled several other health problems throughout his childhood and adolescence, including pneumonia, whooping cough, jaundice and asthma.

Jack's asthma was particularly bad throughout high school and college, and he spent the 1935-36 school year in Arizona's dry climate to control his condition, and spent a summer being tested at the Mayo Clinic due to his health problems. Joe Sr. stood by his ailing son, but occasionally ridiculed him for it in subtle ways. Never known for his tact, Joe Sr. taunted Jack in front of a date, asking her "Why don't you get a live one?"

Jack, undaunted by his assorted illnesses, eventually prospered at Harvard after writing a well-received senior thesis on UK isolationist policies before World War II. This paper became *Why England Slept*, JFK's first best-selling book. He joined the military service and became a war hero, leading the men on the PT 109 to safety after a Japanese destroyer struck the ship. Despite sustaining a bad back injury, he led his crew to a small island, where they were rescued several days later. He received a Purple Heart for his bravery.

After military service, Jack set his sights on politics. He was elected to Congress at the age of 29 and served two terms in the House. In 1952, he won a Massachusetts Senate seat. With the help of his brother and campaign manager Bobby and Joe Sr., Jack realized his ultimate political aspiration in 1960 when he was elected President at the age of 43, the youngest man ever to hold the office.

Even as President, JFK suffered from asthma and allergies. His asthma triggers, dogs and horses. The family was always surrounded by pets and horseback riding was a family favorite. JFK, his wife Jackie and children Caroline and John Jr. were often photographed

with the family's dogs. Pushinka, a Welsh terrier, Clipper , a German Shepard and cocker spaniel Shannon were White House pets at various times during JFK's presidency. Caroline and John Jr. also rode ponies Macaroni and Tex during family outings. JFK's asthma didn't prevent him from playing with the family pets – shunning dogs and horses was out of the question in the Kennedy clan, so he continued to use medication and a bronchial dilator to combat asthma as an adult.

While in the White House, JFK suffered from Addison's Disease, a serious disorder in which the adrenal glands don't produce enough cortisol. This caused fatigue, weakness and nausea. Jack received shots and medication for Addison's daily during his presidency. The back injury he had sustained during the war worsened. Lengthy back surgery only gave him minor relief, but he continued to work on his goals- and the country's- without letting his physical pain deter him.

Despite the constant barrage of health problems, JFK was the epitome of the athletic, charismatic president. His public persona certainly gave no indication of the physical frailties he suffered in private. John F. Kennedy endured more medical problems during his childhood than most people experience in a lifetime, but he didn't let that – or the health problems that plagued him in adulthood - stop him from becoming one of the greatest men of the 20th Century.

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<http://www.rateadrug.com/Slide-Famous-People-with-asthma--John-Fitzgerald-Jack-Kennedy.aspx>.

<http://www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/Life-of-John-F-Kennedy.aspx>