

IT WAS March 1, 1945, during his fourth term, that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt [FDR] delivered a speech to inform Congress and the American people via national radio of the decisions made at the recent Yalta Conference with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin. His words had rallied the nation during the Great Depression and after Pearl Harbor. Now, America was eager to hear what had been negotiated that would greatly shape the postwar world. But many Americans, especially FDR's speechwriter, were disappointed. For instead of his usual eloquence, FDR stumbled over his words, made mistakes, and ad-libbed as he lost his place numerous times. Time magazine calculated that he'd departed from his text 49 times and added a total of 700 words. Yes, his

vision was failing, but in reality he was a dying man.

No autopsy was done after his death one month later. His medical records were destroyed or hidden. Though sickly, the nation had been assured that Ross McIntire, MD, FDR's physician, was "perfectly satisfied with FDR's health," and that it was "excellent in all respects." But FDR's health was far from excellent.

Two factors are thought to be paramount in contributing to the death of America's 32nd president. An enlarged pigmented lesion above his left eye was said to be a harmless mole, a blemish, which in reality was malignant melanoma. Severe cardiovascular disease also had taken its toll, specifically hypertension, atherosclerosis, and ultimately heart failure.

Hypertension is an all-American disease. More than 30 percent of the adult population has hypertension, persistent high blood pressure. More than half of those older than 65 years of age in any racial group have hypertension. Blood pressure is simply the force exerted on the walls of arteries. When high, blood is pushing against the walls of the arteries with chronically elevated force. Blood pressure readings are a measurement of the

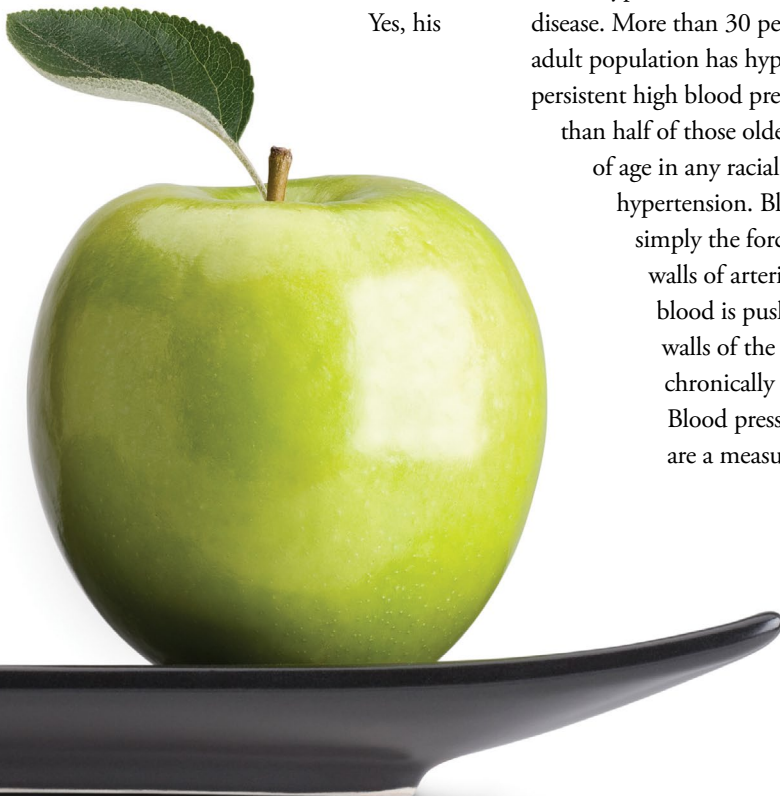
pressure during the contraction and relaxation phase of the cardiac cycle.

A normal level is <120/80. Pre-hypertension is between 120-139/80-89. Stage 1 hypertension is classified as a blood pressure reading of 140-159/90-99. Stage 2 hypertension is > 160/100.

MORE THAN 30 PERCENT OF THE ADULT POPULATION HAS HYPERTENSION

In 1931, during his first term as president, FDR's blood pressure was 140/100. In 1937, as Roosevelt began his second term, his blood pressure reading was 169/98. In 1941, the year the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, his reading rose to 188/105. Though we can compare these readings to our chart and know that FDR was severely hypertensive, the gravity of his disease was not recognized then. The general idea of the time, apparently embraced by his physician, was that blood pressure normally increased with age and there was not much that could be done about it. No outward symptoms that would cause alarm are typically manifested for 10-20 years, yet damage is silently occurring. The higher the blood pressure, the greater the likelihood of damage to the heart, blood vessels, kidneys, eyes, and the greater the risk of heart attack, stroke, and kidney disease.

In June 1944, when American soldiers landed in Normandy on D-Day, FDR's blood pressure was 226/118. Family members insisted that FDR be seen by another doctor. Dr. Howard



Bruenn, a young cardiologist at a naval hospital examined the President. Dr. Bruenn noticed that simply moving about caused breathlessness and puffing. “I suspected something was terribly wrong as soon as I looked at him. His face was pallid and there was a bluish

THE TRUE STATE OF THE PRESIDENT’S HEALTH WAS HIDDEN FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.

discoloration of his skin, lips and nail beds. When the hemoglobin is fully oxygenated, it is red. When it is impaired it has a bluish tint. The bluish color meant that the tissues were not being supplied with adequate oxygen.”¹

“Appalled at what I found I spoke to the surgeon general that the President was in left ventricular failure.”²

FDR had the classic symptoms of heart failure: fatigue, difficulty breathing, fluid accumulation in his lungs, and an enlarged heart. The heart has to work harder to push blood through the body when blood pressure is high. To compensate for this the heart muscles become thicker. An enlarged heart ultimately only worsens the condition. Involuntary weight loss is another symptom associated with heart failure that FDR experienced. A leading risk factor for heart failure is hypertension.

Dr. Bruenn recommended the medication digitalis, which reportedly improved the heart failure, but in the long run FDR’s severe hypertension was never controlled. The true state of the President’s health was hidden from the American people. Dr. Bruenn’s diagnosis was: acute congestive heart failure, suffering from an enlarged heart, hypertension, and hypertensive heart disease. In contrast, McIntire’s recital to the press of the President’s doctor’s visit was that it was

nothing more than an annual physical. “When we got through we decided that for a man of 62, we had very little to argue about, and that his health was satisfactory.”³ Roosevelt told the press that it was a mild case of bronchitis. People with high blood pressure and an enlarged left side of the heart have four times the risk of a heart attack than those with the same blood pressure but a normal-sized heart.

The risk of stroke is 12 times greater. FDR did have spells of unconsciousness and seizures, most probably due to effects of his hypertension.

In his treatment notes of April 1944, when the President’s blood pressure was 210/120, McIntire wrote, “A moderate degree of arteriosclerosis, although no more than normal for a man of his age.” High blood pressure is a major cause of arteriosclerosis. And arteriosclerosis is a cause of hypertension. Hand in hand they result in narrowing and loss of elasticity in the blood vessel wall. The amazing part of the story is that FDR ran for a 4th term in that state that very year and won the elections. January 20, 1945 he was inaugurated. And why not, according to McIntire, he was in splendid shape.

Roosevelt died less than three months later. He had a sharp and severe pain in the back of his head. Within two minutes he collapsed and became unconscious due to a massive cerebral hemorrhage with perhaps several mini strokes previous. His blood pressure that morning was in excess of 300/190. He was only 63 years old.

Even after his death the country was told that “It was just like a bolt of lightning or getting hit by a train. One minute he was alive and laughing. The next minute—wham!” Only the

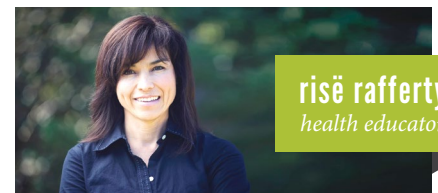
embalmers would see with absolute evidence that his death had been a long, protracted process. As they injected his arteries and veins with solution, the fluid kept getting blocked and caused swelling as a result of sclerotic arteries, hardened and filled with plaque.

Truth and reality, swept under the rug, still remain truth and reality. Like FDR, we fear that if others perceive our problems, the deep issues of our lives, they will see us as incompetent, weak, no good. That which is hidden becomes worse as it festers, cankers, and spreads. The Bible offers something better. In the context of 2 Corinthians we get a picture of veils being removed, the Spirit of the Lord setting us at liberty by His presence, of receiving mercy, and as a result having the courage “to renounce the hidden things of dishonesty . . . commending ourselves to every man’s conscience” (2 Corinthians 4:2, KJV). One of the definitions of “commending” in the concordance is *standing near*. Not only is renouncing hiding good for us, but it draws us closer together, enabling us to stand near to others, inviting them into the same experience.

¹ Doris Kearns Goodwin, “No Ordinary Time: Franklin & Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II,” Simon and Schuster, Jun 30, 2008, P. 494.

² Steven Lomazow, Eric Fettmann, “FDR’s Deadly Secret,” PublicAffairs, Jan 5, 2010, p. 102.

³ Ibid., p. 106.



Risë has been writing on various health subjects for over 20 years. She has inspired many through her research and down-to-earth writing and speaking style. She believes that healthy living is intimately tied to happiness and wholeness.