

Obama's Struggle With Smoking

By Mike Bederka Posted on March 8, 2010

Barack Obama underwent his first physical exam as president late last month. The doctor declared him "fit for duty," with a few recommendations: Modify diet to lower cholesterol; follow a daily exercise program; and, of most interest to me, continue smoking cessation efforts.

We cannot glean much about his smoking habits from the public medical report. It states Obama uses nicotine replacement therapy, and fortunately, "lungs were clear to auscultation." During his signing of the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act in June, he discussed how he smoked early in life but remained fairly mum on the current state of his habit. Obama's press secretary later cryptically elaborated it's "something that he continues to struggle with."

With the latest info, we can assume he still struggles. How much does the president smoke now? We will probably never know that answer - or at least we have to wait for his memoir. Of course I want my president to be smoke-free, but I am conflicted by his approach. Should he be more forthcoming in his successes and slip-ups? Perhaps other smokers could gain strength from his attempts. Or should he continue to keep this a fairly private matter? I asked smoking cessation experts for their thoughts.

"Perhaps personal, quiet self-reflection may be the very catalyst that finally helps him to 'just say no' and mean it," says Lawrence Bryant, PhD, of the division of respiratory therapy, Georgia State University, Atlanta. Other says that the decision to quit smoking should not be forced, but the process of quitting is truly a team effort, says Lauren Mahoney, program manager of the SEPA Tobacco Control Project, Philadelphia. "The more people you have in your corner, the better off you are. If he has decided to quit smoking, then I believe it would be beneficial and timely for him to publicly address his decision."



"Everyone is different. For some, sharing this information can be helpful and motivate change, and for others, it may not be helpful. Each person should decide for him or herself the best course of action with the help of a health care provider", says Andrea King, Ph.D., Director, Clinical Addictions Research Laboratory, Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Neuroscience at the University of Chicago.