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Kennedy lived on cocktail of drugs

Oliver Burkeman in New York
 Monday November 18, 2002
 The Guardian

John F Kennedy, celebrated for bringing youthful vigour to the White House, spent his presidency in constant pain, relying on a daily cocktail of painkillers, anti-anxiety drugs and other treatments to combat a life-threatening hormonal condition, back problems and intestinal trouble, newly released medical information shows.

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The files, shown exclusively by Kennedy's "friends and associates" to the American historian Robert Dallek, reveal how far he went to cover up his problems. He always publicly denied his ill-health. When his medical supplies went missing during his 1960 presidential campaign, he ordered an emergency search.

"You have to find that bag," he told one state governor, adding that if it fell into the hands of political opponents "it would be murder".

That Kennedy suffered from Addison's disease, a life-threatening adrenal deficiency, was known, and his back pain was evident during his presidency: in 1961 he had to be lifted in a cherry-picker on to his plane because he could not climb the stairs. But Professor Dallek's study, in the latest edition of *the Atlantic Monthly*, reveals for the first time that Kennedy was taking up to eight medications a day.

During the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, he was on anti-spasmodic drugs to treat his colitis, on hydrocortisone and testosterone supplements, and antibiotics to treat a urinary tract infection, the files show.

Stimulants, barbiturates, methadone and thyroid hormones also helped Kennedy to maintain an energetic exterior, despite being in so much pain that he could not put a sock on to his left foot by himself.

His previously known ailments have often been attributed to his naval service in the second world war, but Prof Dallek

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believes the root of his problems was the steroids prescribed in his youth for intestinal ailments.

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