Answers for the Aging

Question: My 72-year-old next door neighbor recently suffered a severe stroke. He is currently undergoing rehabilitation in a skilled nursing care facility. His wife told me the doctor believes the stroke was caused by high blood pressure. His wife said her husband did not go to the doctor's office regularly. Although she encouraged him to at least go the doctor's office for a yearly check up, he refused. They had no idea he had high blood pressure. I feel badly for my neighbors. As I continue to hope that my neighbor will recover from his stroke, I can't help but think about how dangerous high blood pressure can be. I am a lot like my neighbor. I only go to the doctor's office when I am sick and fortunately that is very rare. Do you have information about high blood pressure?

Answer: The National Institute on Aging developed the brochure, "High Blood Pressure," which states that high blood pressure is sometimes called the "silent killer" because people can have high blood pressure and still feel fine. High blood pressure can lead to stroke, heart disease, eye problems or kidney failure. Normal blood pressure is a systolic pressure (pressure when your heart beats) of less than 120 and a diastolic pressure (pressure while your heart relaxes between beats) of less than 80. It is important to have your blood pressure checked regularly. If you have high blood pressure, your doctor may suggest medicine, changes in your diet, and exercise. The brochure lists suggestions regarding lifestyle changes you can make to lower your risk of high blood pressure. A few examples include keeping a healthy weight, exercising every day, and cutting down on salt. The brochure also describes risk factors that may cause people to have a greater chance of having high blood pressure and a list of organizations people can turn to for more information. If you would like a copy of this free publication, please call Catholic Charities' Answers for the Aging at 410-646-0100 or 1-888-502-7587 (toll-free in Maryland).