

IT'S NOT EASY TO OVERCOME, FACING THIS CORONAVIRUS IN MY OLD AGE

VOLUNTEERING

I used to do volunteer work, for 2 or 3 years, visiting older people with dementia and talking with them. Then, an exercise group was launched, so I started volunteering there, 2 or 3 times a month, from 10 am to noon on Saturdays. How can I put it, this feels natural to me, doing volunteering. I'm already 87, old enough to receive services. My mother lived in this apartment complex until her late 90s, and the community took good care of her. I really appreciate their support and would like to return a favor by doing what I can to contribute to the community. That's how I started volunteering.

REASSURING PLACE

Although the volunteer activity is now suspended, I'd like to stay involved once it restarts. Also, there is a place like an infirmary in the apartment complex. I often go there. That place stays open even during the COVID crisis. I would stop by and talk with people there and take lectures. The other day, they organized a program on heatstroke, and a TV station covered a story about that program. I will also stay involved in programs at the infirmary. That place is reassuring. I can also recommend that place to my neighbors. If they have any problems, there's someone there to talk with you.

LIVING WITH MY DAUGHTER

I've been living alone for 12 years since my husband passed away, but I have 3 daughters. I always thank them. They also cared for me and supported me during the COVID crisis. Thanks to them, I can stay well. Once the stay-at-home period started, my oldest daughter picked me up and drove me to her place. She was concerned about me. So, over a month, I stayed with her up in the mountains in a neighboring prefecture. It was so nice and peaceful that I almost forgot about COVID-19. But since I live in an apartment, mail would pile up and that would worry my neighbors. So I told her I'd like to go back to the apartment, although she said I should stay with her longer.

THE COVID DEPRESSION

What surprised me when I came back, was seeing people getting depressed, the COVID depression. When I called my neighbors, some of them told me that they had never gone

out at all for a month. I was like, that's terrible! Something I've never seen. So, I told myself to stay strong. I keep telling myself, never to give up the fight against COVID, while wearing a mask and keeping my hands clean. Even when I'm tired, I won't go to bed during the day. I'd rather sit, watching TV and reading a book.

FRESH POTATOES

In my apartment complex, there are around 35 households on each floor. So during the stay-at-home period, we would talk on the phone, and say hi when we run into each other. Yesterday, one of my neighbors brought me some potatoes, telling me that she had gone to a farm and dug those potatoes. They're all really nice people.

SWITCHING TO A SMARTPHONE

I also have some close friends, we're a group of 4, but they live far. We talk on the phone too. We would talk about the cherry blossom viewing we couldn't do and how we're stuck at home in this hot summer weather. Since we all have some health problems, things aren't that easy. Oh, I've been using a flip phone. But when a group of us, 5 or 6 people, got together, they told me about how we could have online meetings with smartphones. So I told them I would also switch to a smartphone, and they loved that idea. So, my daughter told me that she'd take me to a shop in July. I think I'll get one of those easy-to-use smartphones.

NOT TOO MUCH GREASY FOOD

For a long time, I've been watching what I eat, not too much greasy food or salt but a lot of vegetables, so my blood pressure and cholesterol wouldn't go up too high. I also watch my weight since I have been stuck at home because of the self-restraint. I took a blood test a week ago, and I went to the clinic today to get the results. The doctor said to me, "The results aren't too bad. You're working really hard, aren't you?" I also asked the doctor how many minutes I would need to walk for exercise, and he said, "Well, at least 30 minutes." I thought it would be too warm to walk that much, but maybe I can try in the late afternoon. Today, I washed all my stuff, two loads of laundry. That was exhausting.

KEEP OUR SPIRITS UP

Well, what can I say? This COVID crisis is something I've never experienced in my life, and it's not easy to overcome, facing this coronavirus in my old age. So, in order to avoid infection and overcome this crisis, I need to keep reminding myself to stay strong, mentally. I've realized the importance of that. I will lose if I get lazy and think, "When I get it, I get it." Instead, I should encourage people I care for. That encouragement will eventually come back to me, I think. So, rather than caring just about myself, we should encourage each other. Some of my friends call me all the time, and I think it's also important to keep having conversation with people on the same floor in the apartment complex, like, "Let's go out somewhere together soon," and "Let's do!" It doesn't need to be special conversation. What's important is to help each other to keep our spirits up.

Emi's story was shared with us by *International Longevity Center (ILC) Japan – 国際長寿センター*, member of the ILC Global Alliance, an international federation researching and advocating the vitality and the societal and economical position of older people. In the Netherlands, the ILC network is represented by Leyden Academy.