

GRANDMA, DON'T GO ANYWHERE

Makiko (85) from a provincial city in Japan, married, her husband was a fisherman, she used to work at the fish market

I NEVER WORE A MASK

I've heard that there had been a COVID case at the high school my grandson goes to. A teacher contracted the virus. I was worried that my grandson and others might also get infected, but thankfully no one else did. My son, the father of the grandson, took days off from work because he might get infected too if his son got it. I've also heard that there had been several COVID cases in other companies too, people around those big companies. But they haven't come all the way to this community, which's good. But I was a little worried. Also, we need to keep our hands clean and wear a mask, don't we? I used to work at a fish market, cleaning fish with three other women. But I never wore a mask there. Whenever I wear it, I feel like I'm suffocating.

AT HOME WITH MY HUSBAND

Someone from the neighborhood association asked me to go to an exercise class because they didn't have enough people. So, I've been there a few times. Other than that, I don't go out. My husband is over 90 already, and he needs some care. His cognitive function is, hmm, sometimes good, but not always. So, I do my best not to leave him alone. I usually stay at home with my husband.

GROWING VEGETABLES

There is a huge vacant house in the neighborhood. I used to be president of the neighborhood association there, so I checked the address and contacted the owner because the house was covered with weeds and dangerous and someone needed to take care of that. Over there, there's also a small farmland. So I asked the owner to let me use a part of the land, just a small area. Now I grow vegetables there for fun. Now I'm growing cucumbers, tomatoes, eggplants, taro, something like that. Also, since my family grave is close from here, I also grow chrysanthemums for that. Since I grow a lot of vegetables, I give them to my neighbors.

FOLLOW THE RULES

What are some things I used to do but I can't now because of the coronavirus? Nothing, really. The neighborhood association gives me all kinds of information and rules. So I just follow these rules, like, "Please wear a mask." Also, my husband goes to a day care center 3 times a week. The center also has its own rules, so I also make sure that my husband follows them.

I DON'T VISIT ANYONE

The day care center stayed open even after the state of emergency was issued in April. We were told to notify someone when we go to another prefecture. Although my husband is from Kyushu region, I can't take him there because he can't walk well. So we don't go anywhere. I do see some people, but I don't go out to visit anyone. I see them only when they come over. My grandchildren and daughter would say, "You shouldn't go anywhere. If you need to get anything, I'll go get it. So just let me know what you need." So I don't go too far.

GRANDCHILDREN

There's a supermarket near my house. My son takes me there on Saturday mornings.

I used to ride a bike, but I don't anymore since I fell off. They told me not to ride it. So now, I depend on my children. When I go shopping or when I take my husband to the hospital, my daughter and son will make arrangements and take turn to drive us to those places. With my grandchildren, I don't get to see them even though they live close by. They are not kids anymore. Some are in high school, or even working. So I don't see them too often. I hear their voices over the phone once in a while.

HOW TO OBTAIN INFORMATION

I leave the TV on, so I get all kinds of information there. Also, the president of our neighborhood association lives close by, so he keeps me posted too. We also have a board to circulate notices in the neighborhood. The president of the neighborhood association gives it to block leaders, who then circulate it.

ENOUGH MASKS

I was able to get masks from early on. I'd had them even before the COVID crisis. So I've never had a problem in terms of masks. Later on, several neighbors made masks and brought them to me, saying, "I want you to wear these." So, I'm fine. Also, a staff member from my husband's day care center also brought some too. So, we have enough masks. Oh, my grandchild also made one and brought it to me. And my daughter-in-law too, saying, "I found some and bought them for you." So, that should be enough. We'll need to keep wearing a mask for a while.

I DO NOTHING I'M NOT SUPPOSED TO DO

I just make sure to be careful and do nothing I'm not supposed to do. My husband goes to the day care center, so its staff will contact me immediately if there's any COVID case. But so far, we are both in good health without any problems. We don't even have a cold. I wash my hands, of course, as usual. I keep soap at home all the time. We've been using bar soap for a long time. Now, we also use hand sanitizer. We need to do this too, don't we? About a mask, my husband doesn't like it either, saying he feels like he's suffocating. But I make him wear it when he goes to the center, telling him that he should wear it because everyone else is doing it. Me? I wear it only when I go out, but not at home. It's hard to breath, you know.

SILVER CART

My house faces the ocean. There is a street in front of my house, and the other side of it is the ocean. There's a wall along the coast. I did go out often. But now, my legs and knees are hurting, so I don't take a walk that much. I always use a silver cart (note: a shopping cart for seniors) when I walk outside. I rarely meet with people outside. The post office and the bank are on the other side of the bridge, so they're too far for me. So instead, I go to a fishery coop, the closest place. I used to be its member, so I have some money there. Yes, I do use my silver cart when I go there.

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But since my grandchild says, "Grandma, don't go anywhere. If you need anything, I'll go get it. Just let me know." So, I don't go out much. The supermarket my son takes me to is pretty close from home. So, that's about it. Even for shopping, I don't go any further, like all the way to the station.

Makiko'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.