The Six Essential Cogwheels of Brain Health

**Physical Movement** - Movement and exercise produces more blood flow and thereby promote cardiovascular health. It also can trigger the production of BDNF, a neurochemical that stimulates growth and repair of brain cells and is called a “Miracle Gro” for the brain. Sitting for extended periods results in minimal blood flow throughout the body. So, find a way to remember to take a “brain break” and then get more blood to your brain when you stretch, stand up, bend or move something.

**Mental Stimulation** - Mental challenge builds healthy brain structures that can become a form of “Brain Reserve” and later could help compensate for natural wear & tear of the brain and thereby protect against decline. Engage in lifelong learning and creativity which can provide the requisite new challenges.

**Social Connections** - Human beings thrive when engaged with other living things and suffer when isolated and/or feeling lonely. Stay engaged with family and friends. Volunteer. Be with animals. Tend a plant, yard or garden. Connect with new people. Engage in group activities. Volunteer and look for the release of a Canadian Volunteer & Aging study in early 2014.

**Stress Management** - Chronic, unrelieved stress is toxic to your brain (and body). It lowers our ability to fight illness and compromises our ability to repair brain damage. Avoid it. Or create a plan when faced with stressful situations. Change what you can control; adjust to what you cannot control and always consider asking for help.

**Diet & Nutrition** - Mindfully inhale a healthful lungful of fresh air. Eat a largely plant-based diet with daily fruits and vegetables. Limit or even avoid fried foods. Stop or take a long break when you feel 80% full, even if it does taste soooo good. Consider one glass of red or purple juice every day. Slow down by taking an extra, mindful moment to think about, even savor your food. Sip water, often.

**Sleep, Naps and Mental Rest** - Brain and body are restored and repaired during sleep. Memory is enhanced by mental rest, naps and sleep. Get a sound sleep in a range from 6 to 8 hours a night and take “mindful” naps.