Your Placenta is amazing!

While your baby grows and matures over nine months of pregnancy, there's something else growing in your uterus too — and it's responsible for keeping your baby alive. You've likely already heard of the placenta, but what does it do? And what do you need to know about it to have a healthy pregnancy?

The placenta is the lifeline between your baby and your own blood supply. Through all stages of pregnancy, it lets your baby eat and breathe — with your help, of course. The connection is also why consuming substances such as alcohol and caffeine can impact your baby. To grow, your baby needs nutrients, water, oxygen, antibodies against diseases, and a way to get rid of unneeded waste like carbon dioxide. The placenta provides all of these. As your own blood flows through your uterus, the placenta seeps up nutrients, immune molecules and oxygen molecules circulating through your system. It shuttles these across the amniotic sac — through the umbilical cord that connects the placenta to baby — and into your baby's blood vessels. Likewise, when your baby builds up carbon dioxide or other things he or she doesn't need such as waste products, the placenta passes these back to your blood. The placenta also acts as a barrier, since it's vital that germs in your body don't make your baby sick and also that your body doesn't reject your baby as foreign material. So at the same time the placenta allows blood cells and nutrients through, it keeps most (but not all) bacteria and viruses out of your uterus.

The placenta does not contain any nerve cells, so it cannot be under the direct control of the brain or spinal cord. The placenta develops and functions without being connected to your brain — how amazing!

The placenta Is the only disposable organ in our body. Sure, we have some organs that we can survive without, but the placenta is the only one created to be disposable. The placenta develops with your baby and is designed to naturally expel after your baby is born. It is created for a single purpose, so it serves its purpose and then leaves the body - amazing!

What affects placental health?
Various factors can affect the health of your placenta during pregnancy, with some under your control and some not. For example maternal age. Some placental problems are more common in older women, especially after age 40. A break in your water before labor. During pregnancy, your baby is surrounded and cushioned by a fluid-filled membrane called the amniotic sac. If the sac leaks or breaks before labor begins, also called your water breaking, the risk of certain placental problems increases. High blood pressure. High blood pressure can affect your placenta. Twin or other multiple pregnancies. If you're pregnant with more than one baby, you might be at increased risk of certain placental problems. Blood-clotting disorders. Any condition that either impairs your blood's ability to clot or increases its likelihood of clotting increases the risk of certain placental problems. Previous uterine surgery. If you've had previous surgery on your uterus, such as a C-section or surgery to remove fibroids, you're at increased risk of certain placental problems. Previous placental problems. If you've had a placental problem during a previous pregnancy, you might have a higher risk of experiencing it again. Substance use. Certain placental problems are more common in women who smoke or use cocaine during pregnancy. Abdominal trauma. Trauma to your abdomen — such as from a fall, auto accident or another type of blow — increases the risk of the placenta prematurely separating from the uterus (placenta abruption).

What are the most common placental problems?

Placental abruption.

If the placenta peels away from the inner wall of the uterus before delivery — either partially or completely — a condition known as placental abruption develops. This can deprive the baby of oxygen and nutrients and cause you to bleed heavily. Placenta abruption could result in an emergency situation requiring early delivery.

Placenta previa.

This condition occurs when the placenta partially or totally covers the cervix — the outlet for your uterus. Placenta previa is more common early in pregnancy and might resolve as the uterus grows. Placenta previa can cause severe vaginal bleeding during pregnancy or birth. The management of this condition depends on the amount of bleeding, whether the bleeding stops, how far along you are in your pregnancy, the position of the placenta, and you and your baby's health. If placenta previa persists late in the third trimester, your LMC will likely recommend a C-section.

Placenta accreta.

Typically, the placenta detaches from the uterine wall after childbirth. With placenta accreta, part or all of the placenta remains firmly attached to the uterus. This condition occurs when the blood vessels and other parts of the placenta grow too deeply into the uterine wall. This can cause severe blood loss during birth.

Retained placenta.

If the placenta isn't delivered within 50 minutes after childbirth, it's known as a retained placenta. A retained placenta might occur because the placenta becomes trapped behind a partially closed cervix or because the placenta is still attached to the uterine wall. Left untreated, a retained placenta can cause severe infection or life-threatening blood loss.

What happens after your baby is born?

If you deliver your baby vaginally, you'll also deliver the placenta vaginally — during what's known as the third stage of labour. After you give birth, you'll continue to have mild contractions. Your LMC might give you a medication called oxytocin (Pitocin) to continue uterine contractions and reduce postpartum bleeding. Your LMC might also massage your lower abdomen to encourage your uterus to contract and expel the placenta. You might be asked to push one more time to deliver the placenta. If you have a C-section, the obstetrician will remove the placenta from your uterus. Your LMC will examine your placenta later, to make sure it's intact and everything is ok.

Though not nearly as exciting as your newborn baby, your placenta is a pretty spectacular thing. Placentas were once routinely disposed of by hospitals, but nowadays more parents are embracing the uniqueness of this amazing organ.

What can you do with your placenta?

A practice known as placentophagy, some women choose to eat the placenta after birth. They usually either encapsulate it into pill form or add it to smoothies. While there isn't scientific proof that consuming your placenta has any health benefits, "Many mums report feeling a boost of energy after consuming their placenta, while others feel it helps them keep an 'even keel' through the postpartum hormonal ups and downs.

You could make it into jewelry. Whether you go with a delicate pendant, beaded bracelet, or tiny drop earrings, having your placenta made into jewelry will make for a beautiful and constant reminder of your pregnancy—and, of course, one heck of a conversation piece.

Don't have the desire to swallow your placenta via pills, smoothies, or other consumable ways, but feel it's too sacred to dispose of at the hospital? A great idea is burying your placenta, this is a beautiful worldwide tradition that many families in New Zealand are embracing. This symbolizes the baby's link to the earth in certain cultures, some families love the idea of planting their placenta under a tree in their yard that will grow as their baby does. It's a sweet visual reminder of how Mum and Baby were once physically connected to one another!

Check out Earth Friendly Cocoons - a NZ business creating bespoke biodegradable cocoons for burying your placenta. http://www.earthfriendlycocoons.com/

Crafty mummas can also try making placenta prints to frame and hang in your home. Consider going with the popular Tree of Life design to honour the beginning of your baby's life.

And some mums don't care two hoots about their placenta after it's on the outside. It's done its job. Bub is here. If you fall into this category and are not too keen on bringing your placenta home, the hospital will dispose of it for you.

Earth Friendly COCOONS