What is the placenta?
A temporary organ linking mother and fetus—brings nutrients and oxygen to the fetus and moves harmful waste and materials away.

What does the placenta do?
- It performs multiple functions, acting as the lungs, kidneys, and liver, and the gastrointestinal, endocrine, and immune systems for the fetus.
- It produces hormones to help maintain pregnancy and support fetal development.
- It protects the fetus from the mother’s immune system.

Why is the placenta so important?
- Vital for pregnancy, it plays a big role in pregnancy outcomes. Problems with the placenta can result in conditions like preeclampsia, gestational diabetes, prematurity, and stillbirth.
- It can influence lifelong health. Problems with the placenta can be a marker, maybe even a cause, of later disease of mother and child.

What does science say?
Scientists are still learning what a “normal” placenta is and how it functions. Many past studies were limited to analyzing the placenta after delivery. New technologies may allow scientists to safely study the placenta during pregnancy. Learning more about the placenta could:
- Pave the way for new treatments to improve the health of mom and baby, during pregnancy and throughout their lives.
- Provide insights into other important health issues like organ transplantation and cancer treatment.

Human Placenta Project (HPP)
http://www.nichd.nih.gov/hpp