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Pregnancy begins when the developing embryo implants in the endometrial lining of a woman's uterus. Most pregnant women do not have any specific signs or symptoms after implantation, although it is not uncommon to experience minimal bleeding. After implantation, the uterine endometrium is called the decidua. The placenta, which is partly formed from the decidua and partly from outer layers of the embryo, connects the developing embryo to the uterine wall to allow nutrient uptake, waste elimination, and gas exchange via the mother's blood supply.

The umbilical cord connects the embryo or foetus to the placenta. The developing embryo undergoes tremendous growth and changes during the process of fetal development. Most pregnant women experience a number of symptoms that can signify pregnancy. The symptoms include nausea and vomiting, excessive tiredness and fatigue, cravings for certain foods that are not normally sought out, and frequent urination, particularly during the night.

A number of early medical signs are associated with pregnancy. These signs typically appear, if at all, within the first few weeks after conception. Not all of these signs are universally present, nor are all of them diagnostic by themselves; taken together, however, they may make a presumptive diagnosis of pregnancy.

These signs include:

- The presence of human chorionic gonadotropin (HCG) in the blood and urine.

- Missed menstrual period.
- Implantation bleeding (occurs at implantation of the embryo in the uterus during the third or fourth week after last menstrual period).
- Increased basal body temperature sustained for over 2 weeks after ovulation.
- Chadwick's sign (darkening of the cervix, vagina, and vulva).
- Goodell's sign (softening of the vaginal portion of the cervix).
- Hegar's sign (softening of the uterus isthmus).
- Pigmentation of the linear alba (called linear nigra), which is darkening of the skin in a midline of the abdomen. This darkening is caused by hyperpigmentation resulting from hormonal changes, usually appearing around the middle of pregnancy.

Breast tenderness is common during the first trimester. Shortly after conception, the nipples and areolas begin to darken due to a temporary increase in hormones. This process continues throughout the pregnancy.

Despite all the signs, some women may not realize they are pregnant until they are far along in pregnancy. In some cases, a few have not been aware of their pregnancy until they begin labour. This can be caused by many factors, including irregular periods (quite common in teenagers), certain medications (not related to conceiving children), and obese women who disregard the pregnancy-related weight gain. Others may be in denial of their situation.