

What's Not A Fish, But Is Called A Fish?

By: Donna M. McDine

What's not a fish, but is called a fish?

Why, a jellyfish of course. Did you know jellyfish are 95% water and do not have ears, eyes, bones, a heart, or a brain? So how do they exist and function?

The jellyfish is not actually a fish but an invertebrate, belonging to the coral and sea anemones (uh-NEH-muh-nee-z) family. An invertebrate has no skeleton, and can move any part of its body in any direction. Jellyfish can move horizontally with the ocean's current. They move up and down by propelling themselves.

First the jellyfish takes in water with its jelly-like skin, then it pushes the water out, which pushes the jellyfish upward.

Jellyfish are made up of two layers: the stomach lining is the inner layer (gastrodermis), and the outer layer (epidermis) contains its stinging cells, which protects jellyfish from their enemies.

There is a squishy jelly-type material between these two layers, which is how it got its

name. Depending on the type, jellyfish vary in size, from as small as a pea, to as big as a bed.

Even though jellyfish cannot hear or see, they can smell, taste,

and detect light.

Nerve cells also help them respond to food, or danger, and to move. The sensors guide them in the direction in which they are moving, and if they are moving away from or towards light. These sea creatures breathe by absorbing oxygen through the surface of their outer layer.

To capture prey, such as shrimp or plankton, the jellyfish uses its net of tentacles that contain poisonous stinging cells called nematocysts (nem'e-te-sist'). By brushing their tentacles against prey, the jellyfish releases the stinging cells, pushing the poison into its victim.

The stung prey becomes motionless, giving the jellyfish the opportunity to use its tentacles to bring its catch up to its mouth and absorb it.

The mouth area is the only opening on a jellyfish, and leads directly to the stomach. This opening is also used for releasing waste. When humans get stung, the poison causes a sharp, burning feeling that may last minutes to hours.

Not all jellyfish are poisonous. There are over 2,000 different species of jellyfish, and only about 70 can harm humans.

Since you probably won't be able to tell the difference without studying the different species, avoid jellyfish in the ocean or washed up on shore. The tentacles can brush up against you in the water and sting you. Even if you find one on the sand, don't touch it! If the tentacles are still wet, you can get stung.

If you get stung, seek out first aid from a lifeguard (they are trained to help you) or from an adult. Do not flush the sting with water, this could release more poison. Instead, flush the wound with vinegar or rubbing alcohol, and then sprinkle the wound with meat tenderizer. This will break down the proteins that make up the jellyfish poisons, and you'll be feeling better in no time. If you have an allergic reaction, consult with a doctor.

Jellyfish appear harmless as they drift through the sea, but their sting can pack quite a punch. This is one "fish" it's best not to catch.



Photos by: VS Grenier



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DID YOU KNOW?

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1. Jellyfish live only about one year.
2. Over time, a jellyfish washed up on shore will melt, leaving only the surrounding skin.
3. Jellyfish have been around for over six hundred fifty million years, even before sharks and dinosaurs.
4. Jellyfish kill more people each year than Great White sharks.
5. Jellyfish has become a delicacy in China and Japan. Dried and de-salted, jellyfish is delicious! It's also low in fat, calories and salt but rich in nutrients.

WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT JELLIES?

Websites to visit for more interesting Jellyfish facts and information:

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources.

<http://www.dnr.sc.gov/marine/pub/seascience/jellyfi.html>

Enchanted Learning.

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/invertebrates/jellyfish/Jellyfishcoloring.shtml>

Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jellyfish>