

Name _____

What Does a Jellyfish Eat?



Jellyfish are carnivores, which means they eat other animals. They mainly feed on tiny sea creatures called plankton, small fish, shrimp, and even other jellyfish. Some larger jellyfish can capture bigger prey, but most stick to smaller meals.

A jellyfish uses its tentacles to catch food. The tentacles have special cells called nematocysts that work like tiny stingers. When a jellyfish's tentacles touch a fish or plankton, the nematocysts release venom that paralyzes the prey. Once the prey is unable to move, the jellyfish pulls it into its mouth, which is located underneath its bell-shaped body.

Jellyfish do not actively hunt. Instead, they drift with ocean currents and let their tentacles do the work. Since they cannot chase after prey, their stinging cells help them catch food that happens to float nearby.

Different types of jellyfish eat different kinds of prey. Some smaller jellyfish eat mostly plankton, while larger species can eat small fish or even crabs. The box jellyfish, for example, has a powerful sting and can catch larger prey.

Jellyfish play an important role in the ocean food chain. They help keep plankton populations balanced and serve as food for sea turtles and some fish. Even though they look delicate, jellyfish are skilled predators in their own way.