

Name _____

What Do Whales Eat?



Whales are fascinating creatures with diverse diets that vary depending on their species. They are classified as either carnivores or omnivores, as they feed on different types of animals. Whales can be grouped into two main categories based on how they eat: baleen whales and toothed whales.

Baleen whales, such as blue whales, humpback whales, and gray whales, are filter feeders. They have baleen plates instead of teeth. These plates are made of keratin, the same material as human fingernails. Baleen whales feed primarily on tiny marine organisms like krill, plankton, and small fish. To eat, they open their mouths wide and take in a huge gulp of water. Then, they close their mouths and use their tongues to push the water out, leaving their food trapped in the baleen. This method allows them to eat thousands of small creatures in a single meal. A blue whale, the largest animal on Earth, can eat up to four tons of krill in a single day!

On the other hand, toothed whales, including orcas, sperm whales, and dolphins, hunt larger prey. These whales have teeth, which they use to catch and eat fish, squid, and sometimes even seals or penguins. Orcas, also known as killer whales, are apex predators, meaning they are at the top of the food chain. They hunt in groups called pods, working together to corner and capture their prey. Sperm whales are known for diving thousands of feet into the ocean to hunt for giant squid.

Whales play an important role in the ocean's food web. By consuming large amounts of prey, they help maintain the balance of marine ecosystems. Additionally, their waste releases nutrients into the water, which supports the growth of plankton, the foundation of the marine food chain.

While whales are incredibly skilled hunters, they face challenges in finding food due to pollution, overfishing, and climate change. Protecting their habitats is essential to ensure they can continue to thrive and fulfill their role in the ocean.