

Leeches

Our habitat is...



We are a species of invertebrates that live mainly in freshwater lakes and ponds. About one fifth of all leech species live in oceans. The freshwater species, like us, are common in shallow, muddy waters with plenty of aquatic plants like algae and duckweed. We are common in many countries around the world, but most of us come from the continents of Europe, Asia and South America.

What we eat is...

We are carnivores, which means we feed on other creatures. We are also parasites, and love to attach ourselves to other animals and suck their blood for food. Our meals are the blood of frogs, birds, turtles, fish and mammals like horses and humans! Our jaws are like suction-cups, so we wait for animals to pass by and attach our mouths to their skin to draw blood. Other leeches are predators, and actually hunt, catch and eat worms, snails, insect larvae and small crustaceans like crayfish.



We look like...



We are usually black, brown, red or olive green in color with red, yellow or black colored markings down our backs. We don't have any bones, and our bodies are made up of tiny segments. We are annelids just like earthworms, so we're closely related to one another. Our bodies are different from earthworms because we are flat and they are

rounded. Also, we have body parts on both ends of our bodies called suckers. One sucker is used to keep us attached to our prey, and the other end is where our mouth is. When we are attached to an animal, we use our mouths to pierce the skin and draw blood. Guess what? You will not even feel the bite because when feeding, we have a chemical in our saliva that numbs the bite wound and keeps the blood flowing. One of us can drink up to 5 times our body weight in blood before becoming full. When fully grown, some leeches can measure up to 18 inches (almost 46 centimeters) long, which is almost as long as your arm!



Some interesting things about us are...

- We are used by doctors to break up blood clots in patients during surgery.
- We have been used for thousands of years as a "cure" for illness and disease.
- We are parasites. The animals we feed off of are called "hosts."
- The average leech can suck up to 15 grams of blood from a human, and then drop off.
- We don't have to eat for 6 months after feeding.
- The safest way to remove one of us is to use your fingernail to detach our sucker. Using salt or a flame or any other chemical only causes us to throw up everything we have eaten into the bite wound we caused.